# South Africa in the context of curriculum transition in an emerging democracy within a global world
## (A study of mentoring history educators in the WCED: EMDC metropole east, 2005 – 2007)

*Geraldine Kirchner*
*Western Cape Education Department*
*Cape Town*

## Abstract

South Africa is currently undergoing a transformation of the education system as the last vestiges of the apartheid curriculum are being phased out and a new curriculum introduced. This paper presents findings from a 2005 to 2007 study of the processes of the implementation of the new History curriculum by History education at various Further Education and Training (FET) public schools in very diverse contexts. It follows an action research approach. This paper is primarily concerned with outlining possible solutions to the diverse needs and practical challenges faced by History educators with regard to implementing the new History curriculum.

This discussion is based on an analysis of interviews, written reports and observation data drawn from multi-site studies in an urban nodal context. The contexts of the schools that I work with as a History Curriculum Adviser are very diverse. The first phase of orientation to the new curriculum suggested that a 'one size fits all' approach to educator support would not be appropriate. The contexts that needed to be taken into consideration were big classes, the unequal distribution of resources ranging from well-resourced to under-resourced schools, inexperienced Heads of Departments, the deployment of General Education and Training (GET) educators (Grades 1 – 9) to the Further Education and Training (FET) band (Grades 10 – 12) and the language of teaching and learning.

Intervention in the form of a mentoring programme developed as a response to the period of consolidation after the initial orientation of FET educators to the demands of the new History curriculum. School visits in the education districts of the Western Cape Education Department

(WCED) take place in a multi-functional team context, placing time-constraints on the possibilities of in-depth subject support to educators within a school context. Individual needs identified during these visits necessitated a rethinking of educator support for more effective curriculum implementation. In setting up a system of mentoring I aimed not only at setting up a differentiated and more effective support system, but also at nurturing a reciprocal, professional relationship with History educators.

One of the major aspects of the mentoring programme is language support. Many educators are teaching and learners learning in a second or third language. Language therefore becomes a major barrier to teaching and learning. This is particularly acute in a subject such as History which is language-based, making a significant contribution to failure rates in the Grade 12 exit examination. An ultimate goal in my mentorship programme is to improve the language proficiency and conceptual understanding of educators that will ultimately, it is hoped, result in raised levels of learner achievement.

## Introduction

This paper presents findings from a 2005 to 2007 study on the processes of schooling, managed by History educators at different FET public schools with diverse contexts. It follows an action research approach. This paper is primarily concerned with outlining possible solutions to the diverse needs and practical problems faced by History educators with regard to a changing curriculum in the transformation period of education.

This discussion is based on an analysis of interviews, written reports and observation data drawn from multi-site studies in an urban nodal context. This paper starts with a brief reference to the formal curriculum and proceeds to a deeper consideration of the practical implications in the management of the curriculum. The focus is on a few selected prominent aspects, as well as the variables encompassed in the practical implementation challenges that the History educators encounter.

The changing curriculum calls on a reflection of one's own practices and experiences gained in the educational field. The implementation stage of the NCS curriculum clearly showed that the teaching approach was not a case of *one size fits all*. Schools have diverse contexts that, in certain instances, impact negatively on curriculum delivery and affect the levels of learner achievement. Contexts that were taken into

consideration were big classes, the distribution of resources, which ranges from well-resourced to poorly- resourced schools, inexperienced HODs, the upward mobility of certain GET educators into the FET band, the language of teaching and learning. The majority of educators are home language speakers and the mastery level of English in certain sub-districts is unlikely to be perfect – a factor that impedes on the learner's ability to express them and also acts as a barrier to acquisition of problem-solving and research skills. The South African constitutional ideal of holistically grooming learners through education to become responsible citizens and critical thinkers in a democratic society in an interrelated world, become less tenable due to the aforementioned.

Intervention in the form of mentorship initially originated from a crisis management mode, in the period after NCS orientation for FET educators. It evolved from a response to interchangeable, identified needs during school visitations that required a multi-faceted approach from the Curriculum Advisor Service (CAS). Due to time constraints at such visits, facilitation of a continuing process of intervention, on an individual basis, became paramount to support qualitative educational input and output that ensured effective curriculum delivery. Negotiations on the availability of personal-time, to draw up short and long term action plans detailing a capacity approach, necessitated the nurturing of a reciprocal, professional relationship with the History educator.

## The History Curriculum Adviser as mentor

### *An overview of how mentorship happened*

Relevant role players in the educational field strive to ensure that the school is a dynamic environment where policies, the curriculum and school-based activities are integrated and translated into the processes of training/orientation, planning, support, development and monitoring that are outcomes driven. In the designing of an appropriate action work plan, factors of realism and a pragmatic approach play a profound role in the mentoring process.  A prerequisite for the establishment of an integrated and effective support system is commitment from the educator, designated member(s) of the school's senior management team and higher level authorities to embrace the *Batho Pele* principles which ascribe to excellence in service delivery.

In the spirit of the latter, one needs to foreground an acceptance that educators, especially in the nodal urban areas of the East-Metropole - after a brief week long orientation program - are failing to cope with the combined teaching of the NCS (new) and Report 550 (old) curricula. The next step is to motivate and support educators in remaining confident and prevent them from viewing the new curriculum negatively and shirk their responsibilities, by capacitating educators in simple ways to manage the increased administrative load and be more effective in their classroom practice.

A collaborative willingness to participate in the structuring of a supportive framework for the educator and actively assist in the maintenance of a consistent chain of support is of paramount importance to ensure improved final examination performance (Caldwell and Carter 1993, p.218).

In the quest to bring about change in the professional development of educators as well as envisaging a positive outcome in the identified area which requires improvement, an activity-based approach is adhered to. The scaffolding of targets in a battery of short-term action work plans formed the basis of my strategy to elicit a response to bring about improvement in identified areas of concern. To act as a change catalyst requires thorough knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of educators, their aptitude levels and attitude, along with an understanding of the challenges they face.

Analysis of final examination results, detailed school visitation reports, peer review moderation reports and consultation with circuit managers of the particular geographic area in which the school is situated, contributed to an emerging professional profile of the educator. Knowledge regarding the educator's social cultural context, the particular school context and its organisational priorities, as well as "...volatile dynamic influences of factors outside the classroom...", for example, absenteeism in lieu of industrial action taken by educators and the temporary exodus to other provinces of educators on bereavement leave, are some of the deciding factors to consider in arriving at causal explanations to account for poor classroom practices and decreased output in the final results (Barry et al. 1998, p.631; Allan Walker and Kenneth Stott in Caldwell et al. 1993, p. 78).

Astute insight into the former becomes crucial in the designing of an

action work plan with a problem solving approach which is "custom made" for the educator to strengthen his/her self managing skills and classroom practice (Caldwell and Carter 1993, p.218; Husbands in Brooks and Sikes 1997, p. 14).

The emerging educator profile allows the curriculum adviser to define the focus area for professional development, and thus contribute to creating an enabling environment to make the self-improvement plan workable when implemented and more tenable to comply within the range of the educator's ability levels (Carruthers in Caldwell et al. 1993, p. 11).

### *Professional and personal qualities*

Salient points to consider for successful mentoring that will add value to quality education in the History classroom, firstly requires recognition of what particular stage the educators find themselves at in their teaching career. These stages are loosely benchmarked into phases that evolve from an induction period of 'idealism' which cascades into phases of 'survival', 'mastery', 'coasting' and culminates in a 'pre-retirement' phase (Bullough et al. Brooks et al, p.68; 1991; Furlongh and Maynard in Brooks et al, p.69.1995). It is important for the educator to concede - based on evidence - that certain areas at a professional level need development in a structured way and the CA is there to provide developmental support. Whilst exhibiting a positive attitude, the curriculum adviser needs to impress on educators the need to be accountable, encourage them to follow through on recommendations and show visible progress when tackling the action work plan tailored to their specific needs (Brooks and Sikes 1997, p. 51; Carruthers in Caldwell et al. 1993, p. 22).

To encourage attainment of good education at the highest level, curriculum advisers and educators should remain lifelong learners to retain their professional credibility by paying attention to developments in their specialist field and stay abreast with educational policies and procedures (Brooks and Sikes 1997, pp. 47, 51). The curriculum adviser should be organised and use the existing knowledge and skills of the educator as a resource to which new curricula knowledge and appropriate teaching methods could be added to. (McCann and Radford in Caldwell et al. 1993, p.43).

To assist in the professional growth of the educator, the curriculum adviser should have an accomplished sense of maturity in order to demonstrate the required skill of flexibility that will facilitate a process of consensus for the way ahead after a fact finding mission and the rendering of constructive criticism (Brooks and Sikes 1997, pp. 33, 34, 47). The curriculum adviser mediates time- frames with the educator and principal, honour pre-arranged meetings, evaluate and discuss progress or lack of it with the educator and interact with the principal or higher level authorities only when serious concerns arise about lack of progress or non-compliance.

The value of praise should never be underestimated. Brophy (in Barry et al. 1982, pp. 440,441) advocates that praise serves as positive encouragement to educators who show progress, especially those who slowly overcame the barriers that necessitated an onset of targets in the action plan. When the action plan expires, the educator and the principal receive a report that encapsulates an overview of the educator's progress.

## A multi-site case study

### *Evolving practices and procedures*

To ensure the broadening of subject knowledge and improvement of classroom competence, mentoring strategies conform to the identified curriculum needs of the educators. These strategies are reviewed and reflected on Friday afternoon sessions with either individual educators or a cluster of educators who teach in close geographical proximity. Such educators share the same areas that require curriculum development and by correlating the evidence of their undertakings to the structured work plan that has been tailored to their needs, the curriculum adviser is able to ascertain whether such needs have declined or accumulated. Such strategies aim at progress that should be reflected in the educators' professional preparation and training through their attendance of workshops with different foci at heart, the teaching of Saturday classes followed by peer review sessions.

Mentoring strategies evolve from school visitations that are organized in a term schedule.  During such visits, the curriculum adviser takes along a school file that contains the educator's profile, peer reviews,

moderation reports, Grade12 results of the past three years or request to see the NCS results of the previous year. An interview follows and the educator completes a questionnaire that focusses on the availability of LTSM, challenges that the educator face, his/her strengths are highlighted and should be reflected in examples of good practice or good administrative management. The next step is an assessment of the completion of the curriculum and the pacing of CASS (Senior Certificate Continuous Assessment) which is made in relation to the following documents: December 2002 Senior Certificate Continuous Assessment, NPA (The National Protocol on Assessment for schools in the GET and FET Band: Grades R – 12), the SAG (January 2007 Subject Assessment Guidelines), the NCS Grade 10 – 12 (General) History document; January 2007 Learning Programme Guidelines, assessment practices and activities contained in the educator's portfolio that are correlated to content in the learner notebook/file or class work book.

Recommendations that are decided on evolve from the findings made after scrutinizing and assessing all relevant material. The findings, in the form of constructive criticism, is signed by the educator, the curriculum adviser and are communicated in a detailed report to the educator, the HOD and the principal. For areas that require development, an action plan is construed around school obligations and the availability of time of all role players involved, in order to monitor, support and advise the implementation stage and consolidation phase of such recommendations. In cases where an educator faces a wide range of challenges, a cascading model to address identified challenges within an allotted timeframe, is designed and closely monitored in the form of two weekly visits followed by regular feedback to relevant role players. This is followed by telephonic follow-ups to ensure improvement and compliance.

### *The medium of History education*

The foci are on practicality and achievement by following tenable steps. To improve the language proficiency and conceptual understanding of educators, the focus is on teaching strategies to question analysis and concept clarification in the classroom at schools where the Home language is Xhosa and the LoLt is Additional Language (Report 550) and First Additional Language (NCS). Educators receive a History

manual that details a comprehensive and practical approach to question analysis, concept analysis, practical steps to essay writing and matrix interpretation in order to arrive at a common understanding of how to prepare learners for their final examination.

To create a supportive environment and in attempt to control the extent of code switching, educators meet weekly on Friday afternoons to revisit mentoring issues. In groups they share knowledge and engage with problem-solving strategies that are theme-based for example, educators adhere to the wheel invention strategy as they prepare bookmarks where difficult concepts or paragraphs per essay question are broken down into bar graphs and pie graphs to form a theme wheel. In this manner, avoidance of rote learning of model answers is instilled.

As a point of departure, concepts are clarified in Xhosa amongst peer teachers to over bridge gaps in their understanding. Their understanding of concepts is translated and communicated on a rotation basis to the other groups through the medium of English. Implementation of concepts are done in the classroom in the selfsame manner before learners proceed to essay writing. Educators practice this strategy at the beginning of a lesson in Saturday classes where learners from different schools who speak different languages are being taught History through the medium of English. This method enables the educator and learner to avoid confusion and gain confidence in moving from the spoken language i. e., Home Language into the LoLT and the written language (Cunningham et al. 1999, p. 5).

Educators, therefore arrive at an understanding that instructions should be clear, in written form and in simple language (Barry et al. 1998, p. 587). The educator has to make a teaching moment of ascertaining whether learners understood instructions, types and level of questions as well as sequential processes – especially in the case of a heritage investigation that entails scaffolding processes and time allotments. Creative ways for educators to practice their language skills and bind interesting ways to explore the interest of learners, is to ensure that ideas for heritage investigation, for example, tie in with relevant articles in contemporary newspapers and print. The improvement of both the oral and reading vocabulary can be ensured by reading such articles aloud and by listening to cds - simultaneously the discovery of new words and its meaning is facilitated.

Educators and learners are encouraged to network with various stakeholders in their endeavour to become more language proficient, through participation in provincial 'English Festivals' (Circular 014/2007), attendance of Language Ace courses, liaison with the WCED Edulis library, liaison with the Khanya computer laboratory that facilitates E-learning for learners and through their participation in provincial, national and international essay writing and oral tradition competitions.

Much of my research is still an ongoing process. Reflection can only be done when the old curriculum is phased out in its entirety and the Grade 12s write their first NCS exit examination in 2008. However, already certain similar trends emerge in schools with diverse contexts, but has as common denominator, the teaching of History through the medium of English. Differences in resource allocation as well as differences in the range of teaching experience of educators would seem not to impact on a positive outcome in the final Matric results, despite the difference in the number of learners taking History on Standard Grade and Higher Grade per school and not having English as Home Language (School 1). One thus arrives at the conclusion that despite the diverse contexts and the code switching of educators, it would appear that learners are not adversely affected by the latter practice.

This can possibly be ascribed to the fact that the educators know how to teach the old curriculum and it is hoped that they will transfer such acquired skills in teaching and confidently engage with the new curriculum with which they are currently struggling.

*Managing big History classes*

The new curriculum demands of the teacher to become a lifelong learner. Educators are facing new challenges. They are overwhelmed with new policy documents with which they quickly need to come to grips. They are confronted with unfamiliar terminology and content, a plethora of textbooks that they have to use as sources to facilitate cross – referencing in theme work and activities; teaching approaches have changed; learners' attitudes have changed; classes have increased in size; E-learning is rapidly advancing at schools and much of the personal time of educators is sacrificed in the attendance of workshops to stay abreast

with new developments. A great deal of classroom time is spent on either teaching, the marking of activities and most important, planning i.e., the designing of learning programmes, work schedules, lesson plans or activity templates in an attempt to ensure correct pacing of CASS and the completion of the curriculum.

Educators should attempt to stay abreast with the pace setter to curb boredom amongst learners and ensure that learners are exposed to the different forms of assessment activities. The success rate for managing big classes can easily be assessed in scrutinising the lesson plan of the educator. Learners should be constructively busy at all times with a correct timing for field trips, tests, etc. Resource - rich schools (School 3) have no problem with the planning of outings or field trips, since it is not subjected to a non-payment of school fees. At School 2 and School 3 where there is regular to acute non-payment of school fees, but are fortunate enough to have a computer laboratory, activities are planned around accessing information from the computer. Clusters formed by teachers in geographical areas can decide on the teaching of the same themes, the planning of such activities and the selection of the same textbooks to facilitate an improved moderation process.

This will enable educators to design work schedules, summary recording Excel templates and the setting of assessment activities with provision for higher cognitive skills beforehand and lessen the administrative workload - thus tapping into each other's field of expertise. The educator should have his checks and balances in place when issuing research assignments or heritage investigations. He/she should plan controlling measures to ensure the execution of such activities. This can be done by using a checklist as well as a class list for the second term to daily target five learners to ascertain progress before the advent of every lesson. This process ensure that learners show progress at compulsory monitoring dates which should be communicated beforehand, along with the accompanying listed expectations. This method also contribute to the fact that qualitative remedial feedback is given to learners and useful communication is engaged in.

The passion and enthusiasm of educators need to be revived. The educator needs to know that there are ways and means that guide one to successful management of big classes by following a few basic rules. Firstly, careful consideration needs to be given to the organization of the

classroom to promote a proper learning environment. Promote order through innovative furniture arrangement that will enable the free flow of movement and prevent learners from seizing an opportunity to cause disciplinary problems. Secondly, create a classroom atmosphere that is in line with contemporary developments in History, for example, updated displays of new archaeological findings, the commemoration of the SS Mendi etc., - such displays enable natural links for research assignments etc. Thirdly, it is important that learners are informed about the regulations for classroom activities in written form, which should be visibly displayed in one space until the next activity is on its way (Kruger et al. 1997, pp. 32,50). Allow learners to the interrogate the school's disciplinary policy and use this as a teaching opportunity to latch onto the country's constitutional values, symbols etc.

## Conclusion

On policy level, an obvious turning point will be a reassessment of the language policy for the teaching of History in the FET band to ensure sustainable, raised levels of academic achievement, as well as a re-assessment of whether the subject should be included as a compulsory subject or not. Presently, the subject is battling for legitimacy as a choice subject against the government's call for greater prominence to be given to subjects such as Mathematics, Science, etc. which gave impetus to the emergence of focus schools that are fast out-phasing the subject. On a more pragmatic level, the ultimate goal of mentorship is to improve the language proficiency and administrative efficiency of educators; to improve their teaching methodology that will ultimately culminate in raised levels of academic achievement.

## References

K Barry and L King, *Beginning teaching and beyond, 3rd edn.* (Katoomba: Social Sciences Press, 1998).

R Bullough, J Knowls and N Crow, "Emerging as a teacher", V Brooks and P Sikes (eds), *The good mentor guide: Initial teacher education in secondary schools* (*Buckingham, Open University Press,* 1991*)*

J Brophy, "On praising effectively", W Doyle and T Good (Eds), *Focus on teaching.* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press), in K Barry and L King (eds), *Beginning*

*Teaching and Beyond, 3ʳᵈ edn.,* (1982 *Katoomba: Social Sciences Press)* pp. 440 –441.

BJ Caldwell and Earl MA Carter, *The return of the mentor: Strategies for workplace learning.* (London:  The Falmer  Press, 1993).

J Carruthers, The principles and practices of mentoring, in BJ Caldwell and Earl MA Carter, (eds),  *The return of the mentor: Strategies for workplace learning,* (London:  The Falmer Press, 1993).

U Cunningham-Andersson and S Andersson, *Growing up with two languages.* (London, Routledge, 1999).

J Furlongh and T Maynard, "Mentoring student teachers: The growth of professional knowledge", V Brooks and P Sikes (eds), *The good mentor guide: Initial teacher education in Secondary Schools,* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995) p.69.

C Husbands, "The context of mentoring", V Brooks and P Sikes (eds), *The good mentor guide: Initial teacher education in Secondary Schools,*  (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997) p.14.

AG Kruger and OJ van Schalkwyk, *Classroom management.* (Pretoria,  J.L. van Schaik Publishers, 1997).

I McCann and R Radford, "Mentoring for teachers: The Collaborative Approach", Caldwell BJ and Carter Earl MA (eds), *The return of the mentor: Strategies for workplace learning.* (London: The Falmer Press, 1993).