



Teaching democratic values through history in South African primary schools

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Abstract

South African schools are governed by the South African Constitution of 1996 which prescribes the promotion of democratic values. This prescription cascades down to inform the Curriculum and Policy Statement (CAPS) that provides a curriculum policy framework for implementation. Schools are not only centring of learning that provide the rudiments and foundations of future learning, but indispensable centres for socialisation and transmission of social norms, values, and appropriate social behaviours. South African teachers have the mammoth task of being both the transmitters, role models, and teachers of democratic values as enshrined in the South African Constitution. The main question this study seeks to answer is: how can primary school history lessons be utilised to inculcate democratic values? Teaching democratic values through history lessons in primary schools remains a paradox, in the sense that, as a teacher you have to teach what is in the textbook, without being bias even though as a teacher you might you might have a different opinion on. Moreover, the inconsistencies in the era of fake news, conspiracy theories within the South African context, as well as challenges of racial polarisation, economic deprivation, unemployment, and heightened social inequality have exacerbated the inconsistencies in history teaching. Thus, teaching democratic values in South African primary schools has become more important than ever before to mitigate the plethora of these challenges. The present study engages the Qualitative Content Analysis method to analyse qualitative data from documented information in texts, media, and academic articles. It is underpinned by the Ubuntu African Philosophy and it concludes that there is an alignment between the democratic values and the CAPS Policy document. Findings also point to the critical role of history teachers to inculcate democratic values, and use appropriate knowledge that

must be based on facts and evidence.

Keywords: Democratic values; Equality; Human Rights; Freedoms; History teaching

Introduction

The South African Constitution of 1996 (hereafter referred to as the Constitution), is globally hailed as the most ground-breaking from Africa (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa [The Constitution], 1996). The document's preamble sets the legislative framework and guiding principles for South Africa as a democratic state and acknowledges past injustices, however, more importantly, it is the supreme law of the country, with specific responsibilities to:

- Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental human rights; and
- Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law; improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person (The Constitution, 1996: p. 2).

Democratic values such as human dignity, equality, and freedom of choice and association are enshrined as the cornerstone and pillars of a democratic state. Section 9(1) of the Constitution states that everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law. Section 9(2) states that equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. Based on these constitutional premises, this study seeks to investigate the teaching of democratic values through history in South African primary schools as a way of promoting democratic values as well as transforming society. In terms of Section 1 (a-d) of the Constitution, South Africa's democratic values are:

- Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms;
- Non-racialism and non-sexism;
- Supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law; and
- Universal adult suffrage, a national common voter roll, regular elections, and a multi-party system of democratic government, to ensure accountability, responsiveness, and openness.

In terms of Article 1 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

This implies that human rights are universal since all human beings are holders of human rights and need to be protected from vulnerability and humiliation (Kirchsclaeger,

2020). This means that, regardless of one's social standing, all human beings need, and must be treated with respect while being protected from degradation and humiliation. Section 1(b) of the Constitution talks about non-racialism and non-sexism. This is supported by the Freedom Charter of 1955, which states that, South Africa belongs to all who live in it, either black or white. Thus, both section 1(b) and the Freedom Charter set the tone of an envisaged non-racial South Africa, a society that has more than one race. Anciano (2016) argues that the concept of non-racialism has no fixed meaning and can be defined within the South African context aimed at accepting and embracing multiple identities. The non-sexism provision protects citizens from discrimination based on sexual orientation and affords equal treatment regardless of gender and sexual orientation. Section 1(c) of the Constitution declares the supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law. It also reaffirms the supremacy of the constitution over the state of any law or conduct inconsistent with it, AS invalid (The Constitution, 1996). According to Stevick (2019), the rule of law has a set of underlying norms, such as fairness, transparency, responsibility, democracy, and accountability.

According to Valck (2012), the rule of law has three meanings. Firstly, the rule of law is regarded as the absolute supremacy or predominance of regular law as opposed to the influence of arbitrary power. The second meaning of the rule of law, suggests the principle of equality before the law in the sense that everyone, regardless of rank or condition, is subject to the ordinary law. Lastly, the rule of law means that the laws of the constitution are results of the rights of individuals. Valck (2012) argues that, the rule of law is the supreme authority of the law over governmental action and individual behaviour and therefore, human rights are inseparable from the rule of law. Cordenillo and Sample (2014) view the rule of law as fundamental for any functioning democracy and includes adherence and accountability of governments and citizens equality under the law.

Section 1(d) of the Constitution focuses on the universal adult suffrage, a national common voter roll, regular elections, and a multi-party system of democratic government, to ensure accountability, responsiveness, and openness.

What is primary school history?

While it is important to understand the role of teaching history, it is equally important to conceptualise history. History is the study of social changes and developments over time (DBE, 2011). Nuttall (2021) states that history illuminates and adds meaning to concepts such as democracy for learners' better understanding of their immediate environment.

Barton and Levstik (2004) contend that history prepares learners for a pluralist democracy and provides them with skills for active citizenship in a democratic society. Berg (2019) is of the view that the study of history does not only act as a change agent in learners' lives, it also encourages active citizenship and in learning about their past. In the South African school curriculum within the CAPS Policy document, history is a component of Social Sciences for Grades 4–6. For example, in Grade 4, learners are taught life stories of great leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi who both displayed selflessness and a quest for a democratic South Africa free from race, class, and gender discrimination. The attributes and contributions of these icons in the fight against apartheid lay a foundation for democratic values which learners will encounter in Grade 6, where they learn about the birth of a democratic South Africa after the years of struggle against apartheid.

Teaching and learning focus on the meaning of democracy, good citizenship, formation of a democratic government and the purpose of the constitution with all its democratic values. Primary school history teaches democratic values underpinned by principles of social transformation, redressing educational imbalances of the past, providing equal educational opportunities for all citizens in the country, including social justice based on human rights. Teaching democratic values through history in primary schools is critical as it sets a solid foundation for learners to understand not only the painful apartheid history of South Africa, but also to inculcate democratic values as a means of social transformation. This will promote patriotism, social cohesion, and racial tolerance.

Literature review

This study focuses on the key concepts that define not only the democracy as a phenomenon, but also South Africa as a democratic state. In this section, the theoretical frame that anchored the study is discussed. Thereafter, a review of related literature is given starting with the conceptualisation of democracy, democratic values, democracy and its relationship to education, history teaching approaches, and the role of the history teacher in teaching democratic values.

Theoretical framework

Teaching democratic values in primary schools must be informed by, and aligned to contextual theoretical framework. Post-apartheid South Africa is on a journey to redress past social injustices that continue to breed socio-economic inequality, poverty, and

racism. It is for these reasons that Ubuntu African Philosophy is considered appropriate for the purposes of this study. Ubuntu African Philosophy is a subset of African Philosophy. Mathebula (2019) regards African philosophy as written texts of African philosophers' experiences. African philosophy might be understood essentially as a social practice (Horsthemke, 2017). This means that African societies, like their Western counterparts, engaged in questioning their being and their world view. Waghid (2013) argues that African philosophy is communitarian and culture-dependent underpinned by Ubuntu. In pre-democratic era, Young (1990) argued that Ubuntu values espouse social justices, promote diversity amongst races, and that Ubuntu is a weapon used by schools or society to challenge inequality and injustices. Practising the Ubuntu philosophy unlocks the capacity of an African culture in which individuals' express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and communalities (Poovan, Du Toit & Engelbrecht, 2006).

The global icon, cleric and Noble peace Laureate, Desmond Tutu, defines Ubuntu as:

A person is a person through other persons. None of us comes into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human (Tutu, 2004: 25).

Letseka (2012) defines Ubuntu as a form of human engagement that allows for critical thinking, non-domination, and the optimal development of human relationships. Ubuntu means that everyone's humanity is ideally expressed in relationships with others. Ubuntu also means being aware of one's own being, but also of one's obligations to one's neighbour. Ubuntu, in South African, is a culture that expresses compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining a community with justice and mutual caring (Lefa, 2015). These Ubuntu values, are aligned to the constitutional democratic values provided in section 1 (a) and (b) of the Constitution, since they are focused on the respect of individual rights and dignity and emphasises inter-dependability for harmonious co-existence. According to Lefa (2015), Ubuntu lies at the heart of the African way of life and impacts on every aspect of people's well-being. Ubuntu is regarded as the soul force that drives almost every facet of societal life in African societies and builds and maintains relationships within an African community. Similarly, Koster, (1996) and Nussbaum (2003) view Ubuntu as the basis of African communal cultural life that expresses the interconnectedness, common humanity, and the responsibility of individuals to each other. The Ubuntu African Philosophy believes in group solidarity, which is central to the survival of African communities. Broodryk (2006) states that

Ubuntu is about the communities that fully embrace and value humanism, treating each other with fairness.

Democracy conceptualised

The term democracy derives from two Greek words *demo* meaning the people and *kratos* meaning power. The literal meaning of democracy is power of the people and a government by many (eGyanKosh, 2017). Democracy is a form of governance and a mode of coexistence in which the public participates in decision making, distributing resources, resolving conflicts, and planning (Sezer & Can, 2018). In most countries, like South Africa, democracy upholds and protects the human rights of its citizens. Stevick (2019) describes democracy as a system of self-government in which all persons, including the government, are accountable under the law; a system based on fair, publicised, broadly understood, and stable laws; a fair, robust, and accessible legal process in which rights and responsibilities based on law are evenly enforced. As a form of government in South Africa, it is important that the foundations and values of the country's system of government are taught to the learners at an early stage.

Democracy and its relationship to education

Democracy is a society's means to engage critically with itself. Education is indispensable in equipping citizens with the abilities and skills to engage critically and act responsibly (Department of Higher Education, 2001). Democracy is practiced in various places, at homes, schools, and various institutions. For democracy and democratic values to thrive, education is indispensable. The school as a social institution and extension of the state, should promote and reinforce the democratic way of life and democratic values (Sezer & Can, 2018). The relationship between democracy and education is imperative, since the principles of democracy, such as liberty, equality, fraternity, dignity of the individual, co-operation, and sharing responsibility are the dimensions which deeply influence education (eGyanKosh, 2017). Sezer and Can (2018) argue that each individual in a democratic state must have some specific knowledge, skills, and values that will allow them to participate to the best of their ability in the activities of the state; these skills and values are transmitted through education. Primary school History teachers have a mammoth task in not only in teaching these democratic values, but in modelling and inculcating such values to the learners.

Education empowers citizens to exercise their democratic rights and shape their destiny by giving citizens the tools to participate in public life (Department of Higher Education, 2001). It is evident that there is a correlation between democracy and education; a symbiotic relationship between democracy and education. eGyanKosh (2017) voices, without education, democracy has limited relevance and effectiveness, and without democracy, education loses its meaning. Democracy and education enjoy a reciprocal relationship where one cannot thrive without the other (eGyanKosh, 2017). According to Subba (2014), for democracy to thrive children must be taught to value it as a way of life, since the necessary skills for building democracy do not develop automatically. Hence, teaching democracy means preparing children to become citizens who will preserve and shape democracy in the future (Subba, 2014). Democracy and democratic values are historical themes that find their meaning in historical narratives.

Multi-narrative and multi-perspective history teaching approaches

History teaching has several approaches, such as multi-narrative and multi-perspective. The Department of Education (DBE) (2011) stipulates a multi-perspective approach to history teaching since it focuses on the different points of view of people in the past according to their position in society; ways in which historians have written about them; and the different ways in which people today see the actions and behaviour of people from the past. This approach is underpinned by three principles: cause and effect; change and continuity; and time and chronology (Bertram, 2020). On the other hand, McCully (2012) asserts that multi-narrative and multi-perspective approaches are the most effective approaches in teaching history to promote post-conflict understanding as it is based on interpretive and evidence-based processes of historical enquiry. In teaching democratic values to Grade 6 learners, a multi-perspective approach will engage their personal experiences of a historical event and develop individual opinions on whether an incident violated democratic values or not. Wendell (2018) describes multi-perspectivity as the presence of at least two different interpretations of the same historical event. In the presence of these opposing interpretations, learners engage and challenge the presented historical evidence. Yilmaz (2014) argues that historical knowledge needs to be explained through a multi-perspective approach not as a single approach of the past, since the past is open to multiple interpretations and subjectivity. Wansink, Akkerman, Zuiker, and Wubbels (2018) put the term multi-perspectivity into perspective, which means to view, look through and perceive a historical event in many or multiple views or interpretation. They further argue that a

multi-perspectivity approach is interpretational and subjective, with multiple coexisting narratives about a single historical event. This means that the interpretation of a historical event is dependent on the willingness of the viewer to put themselves in someone else's shoes (Wansink, et al., 2018). This willingness reduces the viewer's emotional attachment to the historical event (Goldberg, Schwarz, & Porat, 2011).

Hence, multi-perspectivity gives an extra dimension to historical narratives based on sequence and is followed by a linear sequence of 'meanwhiles' which convey the reactions and subsequent actions of significant others. These sequences produce interlocking narratives which show how the perspectives of the various parties not only changed or crystallised in response to circumstances, but were shaped by lack of information of where the others stood (Stradling, 2003).

The role of the History teacher

Yilmaz (2014) refers to the role of the teacher as a multi-layered and multi-faceted human experience across time and space accounting for past events, experiences, and processes. Suba (2014) holds that teaching History can be a challenging experience due to the abstract nature of the subject. The abstractness lies in the fact that events in the past cannot be reproduced. This means that the teacher is expected to be factual, well informed, and unbiased or risk propagating the master narrative. According to Carretero (2011), the master narrative is a dominant view and may not necessarily be factual and correct. McLean and Syed (2012), on the other hand, view the master narrative as culturally shared culture that embraces and influences thoughts, beliefs, values and behaviour of a particular group of people. Yilmaz (2014) asserts that Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) can mitigate history-teaching challenges and develop the learners holistically. PCK is the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organised, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners. Bentrovato, Korostelina, and Schulze (2016) believe that certain groups in society can use historical events and history teaching as weapons for their own political gain. History teachers must assume a role of lay historians to mediate between historiographical traditions and public history (Klein, 2013). Yilmaz (2014) and Bilali and Mahmoud (2017) further assert that teachers have the role of combating misinformation surrounding history and should dispel myths about the past that perpetuate violence and community divisions.

Yilmaz (2014) shares the view that the history teacher must recognise and address learners' misconceptions regarding the subject, the shortcomings in their understanding

of the past, and the concepts that students find difficult to learn. A history teacher must possess three essential characteristics if effective teaching of history is to take place, they are: knowing History; doing History; and scaffold learning as supported by the Zone of Proximal Development by Vygotsky (1978). This means that the teacher must understand the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the subject, the processes of historical reconstruction, as well as projecting the discipline in a context and manner that facilitates subsequent learning. These are at the core of historical pedagogy. Subba (2014) argues that both teachers and schools should play a major role in preparing citizens to play their democratic roles in adult life and that teachers must be transformed from a traditional didactic, authoritarian role to facilitating dialogues and debates regarding historical events. A history teacher needs not only be transformed, but also adopt a constructive perspective. Yilmaz (2014) contends from a constructivist perspective, that learning is an active process of constructing understanding and meaning by linking new information about a topic with pre-knowledge and previously acquired experiences, --thus allowing learners to construct their own knowledge.

History teachers must have an adequate understanding of the conceptual foundations of the subject they teach or they are likely to misrepresent the content by simplifying it (Wineburg & Wilson, 1991). History teachers must assist learners to overcome negative views of the past and should make learners see the relevance of the past and the present in a pedagogically meaningful manner (Yilmaz, 2014).

A history teacher, in line with the Preamble of the Constitution, must use the classroom and the history lessons to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights. The then Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, argued that a critical knowledge of history is essential in building the dignity of human values within an informed awareness of the past, preventing amnesia, checking triumphalism, opposing a manipulative or instrumental use of the past (DBE, 2001). Therefore, The National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12 envisages active and critical learners rather than those who engage in rote and uncritical learning of given truths (DBE, 2011). The aim of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 is to produce learners that can:

- identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking;
- speculate, to debate, to make connections, to select, to prioritise, and to persist in tackling real issues and important questions (DBE, 2011).

Similarly, Kallaway (2012) postulates that critical understanding and learning in

history is derived from an interrogation of the narrative, the events, or the evidence related to various interpretations of events. The habits of critical thinking come through an understanding of the interaction between that narrative or the understanding of events and the ability to pose the right question when engaging in historical explanation (Kallaway, 2012).

History has both moral and democratic values for learners. By engaging and interrogating oral, written, and historical relics and artefacts, learners can speculate/interpret the impact of evidence in historical events. Such engagement and interrogation of historical evidence develops learners' skills and dispositions that promote critical analysis (McCully, 2012). For example, with the democracy theme in Grade 6 in the South African curriculum, analytical and interpretation skills are essential for learners to compare individual behaviour and actions against the prescripts of the law and make an inference whether or not such behaviour or actions violate the constitution's precepts. The opportunity for learners to engage with evidence to determine contradictions to the laws enshrined in the constitution is the first step in inculcating democratic values from a deductive paradigm and development of moral judgement.

Teaching history can potentially develop open-minded citizens. Open-mindedness is critical in history teaching, as it offers learners an opportunity not to become fixated on one dominant view, but to look, listen, and engage other historical evidence at their disposal. The open-mindedness, according to McCully (2012), allows learners to engage controversial and complex topics. It also assists learners in adjudicating the merit of each historical event they encounter. According to Ulusoy (2017), history teaching provides an opportunity for national awareness. The learners' engagement with democratic values, using the 2021 July riots as an example, will undoubtedly not only provide national awareness, but historical consciousness, a sense of justice, fairness, and equality. Fitzgerald (1983) as cited in Ulusoy (2017), contends that the importance of historical consciousness in learners is to offer opportunities to research current social issues. Historical consciousness is not only important in making learners aware of their past, it will curb teachers from imposing their views and convictions on learners.

Methodology

Almalki (2016) posits that methodology refers to the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining, and predicting phenomena as well as the standards that will be used to interpret information and draw to conclusions. Hence,

this paper adopted a qualitative phenomenological research methodology. A Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) was used as a tool to analyse various types of documents, such as newspaper articles, academic journal articles, and legal national reports. QCA analyses and interpret data in a systematic and objective manner (Morgan, 2022; Mayring, 2019). The collected data was both inductively and deductively analysed and results were documented (Schreier, 2012). A document refers to several pieces of material, such as visual sources, photographs, video, and film (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). According to Patton (2014) and Flick (2018), documents consisting of texts and visual material can be a source for qualitative analysis.

In analysing the policy documents, this study has found an inextricable alignment between the democratic values as enshrined in the constitution with the CAPS Policy document, as the latter is invalid if it contradicts the former. The core democratic values highlighted in these documents include among others: human dignity; non-racialism; non-sexism; supremacy of the constitution; and rule of law. The CAPS policy document, explicitly highlight the critical role of the history teacher in inculcating democratic values in history lessons through applying both multi-narrative and multi-perspective teaching approaches to engage the learner from their personal experiences of the historical event and enable the learner to willingly to put themselves in someone else's shoes. Finally, I would argue that, whilst the CAPS policy document is prescriptive in terms of teacher's appropriate pedagogic content knowledge; I does not safeguard learners from teacher bias. This view is shared by Lee and Shemilt (2007) that history teachers have a multiple and conflicting role based on their own history and experiences, which are likely to influence them in teaching certain historical events with(out) bias.

Conclusion

The democratic values as enshrined in the Constitution of 1996 of the Republic of South Africa should be central in the history curriculum, particularly in primary schools. The crystal-clear alignment of the CAPS Policy document to the prescripts of the Constitution makes it imperative to promote the democratic values and to achieve social cohesion and social transformation. At the primary school level, democratic values should not only be taught to satisfy the curriculum stipulations, however, should be seen as a solid foundation for learners to take their rightful place to promote and sustain democratic values. History teachers are afforded an opportunity to guide and support learners to engage with the content to critically evaluate the historical events and draw their own conclusions.

However, teachers need sufficient PCK based on facts and evidence not influence learners. Whilst democratic values are desirable in primary schools, however, prevalent political dictatorship found in some African countries, may make this goal impossible for future generations.

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