

YESTERDAY & TODAY

No. 36
July 2026

Published by



Editorial Policy: Yesterday & Today

1. Overview

Yesterday & Today is a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal focusing on History Education, History in Education, and the History of Education. The journal welcomes research contributions that advance understanding in these fields through empirical, theoretical, and pedagogical perspectives. The journal has been accredited since 2012 and is committed to academic excellence, scholarly integrity, and educational impact.

2. Submission Guidelines

- Contributions may be submitted by individuals or collaboratively authored.
- Manuscripts must be submitted electronically to the Editor-in-Chief, Professor Johan Wassermann, at: johan.wassermann@up.ac.za. Confirmation of receipt will be issued within 72 hours.
- All manuscripts are subject to a double-anonymized peer review process to ensure scholarly rigor.

3. Language Policy

The official language of the journal is English. However, abstracts may be submitted in any of South Africa's 11 official languages. The English used must be accessible to the journal's readership.

4. Formatting Requirements

- Manuscripts must be submitted in Microsoft Word format using Times New Roman, 12-point font, 1.5 spacing.
- Articles should preferably not exceed 8,000 words, including references, tables, and figures.
- A structured abstract of no more than 250 words must accompany all submissions.
- Article titles should preferably not exceed 15 words.
- Each submission must include the full name(s) of the author(s), institutional affiliation(s), city, country, ORCID iD, and email address(es).

5. Referencing Style

- Authors may choose between the Harvard and Footnote method of referencing. The preferred style must be applied consistently.
- Reference formatting must be clear and comprehensible to a general academic audience.
- Authors must follow the chosen method's *Yesterday & Today* referencing guidelines.

6. Visual Material

- High-resolution editorial materials such as illustrations, photographs, tables, and graphs are encouraged.
- Images must be at a minimum resolution of 200dpi with sources indicated.
- Large media files should be submitted as separate, clearly numbered attachments.

7. Declaration and Fees

- All authors must submit a signed author declaration form upon submission.
- A publication fee of R300.00 per page is applicable for South African authors and payable by their institution. Authors are responsible for ensuring payment.

8. AI Use Policy

To promote transparency and academic integrity in history education, the journal applies the following AI policy:

- **Accountability:** Only human authors bear full responsibility for the integrity, accuracy, and ethical compliance of the published work, including any AI-assisted content.
- **Transparency:** The use of AI tools must be mandatorily disclosed by authors.
- **Integrity:** Authors must critically review and verify all AI-generated information, references, data, and conclusions. Concealment or misuse of AI tools constitutes a breach of scholarly integrity.
- **Confidentiality:** Manuscripts must not be uploaded to external AI tools (especially public-facing, third-party platforms) if those tools lack a secure, closed system that guarantees privacy and prevents the content from being used to train the AI/LLM.

Permitted Uses of AI

Authors can use AI and AI-assisted technologies for the following tasks, provided that human oversight is maintained:

- **Language and Readability:** Improving spelling, grammar, and general language clarity.
- **Administrative Tasks:** Minor language editing or grammar correction that does not alter the intellectual content or conclusions.

Prohibited Uses and Human Responsibility

AI tools must not replace essential authoring tasks, which require uniquely human intellectual input:

- **Intellectual Input:** AI cannot be used to fabricate data, generate conclusions, or substitute for the author's original legal insights or historical conclusions/recommendations.
- **Authorship Eligibility:** AI cannot be listed as an author or co-author. Only humans who meet the journal's full authorship criteria may be credited.

Disclosure Requirements

Authors are obligated to disclose the use of AI/AI-assisted technologies in their manuscripts.

- **What to Disclose:** The declaration must specify the tool name/version, how it was used, and where in the manuscript it was used (e.g., text, images, data).
- **Exception:** If a tool is used only for correcting language and grammar (e.g., Grammarly) and not for generating content, disclosure is not required.
- **Citation:** Authors are encouraged to cite or acknowledge AI tools when they contribute substantively to the work.

Policy Development and Updates

Yesterday & Today acknowledges the dynamic nature of AI technology. This policy will be continuously monitored and reviewed periodically to remain current with advancements in AI/AI-assisted technologies.

9. Open Access and Archiving

- *Yesterday & Today* is an Open Access journal under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License (CC BY-SA 4.0).
- The journal is preserved through the Portico digital preservation system.
- It is registered with SHERPA RoMEO for Green Open Access.

10. Data Availability Statement

Authors should provide links to relevant datasets and cite data sources where applicable.

11. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Authors are encouraged to indicate relevant SDGs in their article keywords.

12. Copyright and Licensing

Copyright remains with the authors. All articles are published under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License.

13. Social Media and Outreach

Yesterday & Today can be followed on its LinkedIn handle.

YESTERDAY & TODAY EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor-in-Chief

Prof Johan Wassermann (University of Pretoria, South Africa)

Book Review Editor

Mr Bafana Mpanza (University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa)

Editorial Advisory Board

Prof Terry Haydn (University of East Anglia, United Kingdom)

Prof Seema Goburdhun (Mauritius Institute of Education, Mauritius)

Prof Neo Ramoupi (University of the Free State, South Africa)

Prof Charles Oppong (University of Cape Coast, Ghana)

Prof Joanna Wojdon (Uniwersytet Wrocławski, Poland)

Prof Elize van Eeden (North-West University, South Africa)

Prof Paul Maluleka (UNISA, South Africa)

Dr Denise Bentrovato (University of Pretoria, South Africa & Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo)

Dr Byron Bunt (North West University, South Africa)

Dr Annie Chiponda (Chancellor College, Malawi)

Dr Joshua Chakawa (National University of Lesotho, Lesotho)

Dr Laura Efron (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina)

Dr Mary Nasibi (Kenyatta University, Kenya)

Dr Natasha Robinson (University of Oxford, United Kingdom)

Dr Nkwenti Fru (Sol Plaatje University, South Africa)

Dr Sarah Godsell (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa)

Dr Dorothy Sebbowa Kyagaba (University of Makerere University, Uganda)

Dr Mahunele Thotse (University of Limpopo, South Africa)

Dr Kate Angier (University of Cape Town, South Africa)

Dr Marshall Maposa (University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa)

Contact Details: Editor-in-Chief

Prof Johan Wassermann, Department of Humanities, Education Faculty of Education

Groenkloof Campus, University of Pretoria Private Bag X20, Hatfield, 0028

Telephone: (012) 420 4447 | Email: johan.wassermann@up.ac.za

Submissions accepted electronically via the UPJournals site -

https://upjournals.up.ac.za/index.php/yesterday_and_today/about/submissions

ISSN 2223-0386 (Print version) | ISSN 2309-9003 (Online version)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Yesterday & Today</i> Editorial Policy	2
<i>Yesterday & Today</i> Editorial Board	6
<i>Yesterday & Today</i> Contact Details	6
Editorial	9
Johan Wassermann (Editor-in-Chief)	

ARTICLES

Festschrift for Peter Kallaway	13
Sue Krige	
For Peter Kallaway	15
Dr Rebecca Swartz	
Peter Kallaway, History Educator	17
Rob Siebörger	
Peter Kallaway, Encyclopaedist and Bibliographer	20
Linda Chisholm	
Peter Kallaway: Shaping South African Education History	22
Clive Glaser	
Peter Kallaway, Teacher Educator	24
Pam Christie	
The Search for Educational Utopia: Part I The Rhetoric and Reality of Educational Reform In Times of Social Change: France 1789-1804 and South Africa 1985-2000	26
Peter Kallaway	
Part II: South Africa and the “Rainbow Nation”: Popular Education and the Utopian Dream	49
Peter Kallaway	
From Turning Point to Footnote: The 1976 Soweto Uprising in the CAPS History Curriculum	72
Bongumenzi Mthethwa	
Exploring Anti-Bantu Education Protests in Grahamstown/Makhanda Through Drama-in-Education Techniques with Grade 9 Learners	91
Phemelo C. Hellemann & Thembele Madliki	
Controversial Memory and Digital Mediation: Preservice Teachers’ Approaches to the Soweto Uprising	129
P Bharath	
Linking liberation legacies: How the 1976 Soweto Uprising and 2015-2016	

#MustFall Uprising inform and shape the pursuit of an LGBTQIA+ inclusive school history curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa	153
Paul Maluleka	
When History Education and English Literature Merge: Teaching the 1976 Soweto Uprising through Athol Fugard's "My Children! My Africa!"	181
PraysGod Siphehile Mhlongo	
From Soweto Protest Chants to Setswana Motswako Hip-Hop: Youth Agency, Language Reclamation and Cultural Resistance	204
Bodibadi Dorothy Modungwa & Kehumile Molotsane	
Decolonising the Curriculum Through Language: Lessons from the Soweto Uprising for Contemporary South African Distance Teacher Education	223
Raudina Madina Simelane	
Women in Protest: Indian Activism in the Wake of Soweto, 1970s-1980s	248
Kalpana Hiralal	
Silencing Struggles through Colonial-Apartheid Amnesia in Planning Education: Lessons from the 1976 Soweto Uprising	272
KJP Sebola-Samanyanga	
Land Cover Change, Historical Memory and Resistance: GIS-Integrated Climate Adaptation Pedagogy from the 1976 Soweto Uprising	296
Tolulope Ayodeji Olatoye, Raymond Nkwenti Fru & Anathi Magadlela	
BOOK REVIEWS	
The land is sung: Zulu performances and the politics of place	333
Derrick Myeni	
From education crisis to organisation: Reflections on the National Education Co-ordinating/Crisis Committee (NECC) (1985-1995)	337
D Mncube	
From education crisis to organisation: Reflections on the National Education Co-ordinating/Crisis Committee (NECC) (1985-1995)	340
Sue Krige	
University of Durban-Westville, 1961-2003 – Undoing Apartheid, Building a Non-Racial Culture	348
Paballo Moerane	
Nontsizi Mqgqwetho: The poet of the people (1919-1929)	351
Celani Zwane	
A new history of formal schooling in South Africa, 1658-1910: An education in contradictions	354
Bronwyn Strydom	

EDITORIAL

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a1>

The year 2026 marks fifty years since the Soweto Uprising of 16 June 1976, a watershed in South Africa's struggle against apartheid and more specifically, against an education system designed to reproduce racial domination. This commemorative issue of *Yesterday & Today* revisits the Uprising not as a closed historical episode, but as a living educational, political, and cultural legacy. Read in sequence, the contributions move from broad historical reflections on educational reform to close examinations of curriculum, pedagogy, memory, identity, language, activism, professional education, and environmental justice. Together, they demonstrate the Uprising's enduring capacity to generate new questions about whose knowledge matters, how the past should be taught, and what education can realistically achieve in transforming society. At the same time, *Yesterday & Today*, No. 35, July 2026, is also a *Festschrift* for Peter Kallaway. Peter is a distinguished South African historian of education, teacher educator, and comparative education scholar. He is Professor Emeritus at the University of the Western Cape and a Research Associate in the School of Education at the University of Cape Town. Peter's scholarship focuses on the history of education in South Africa and colonial Africa, apartheid education, missionary and vocational education, teacher education, educational policy, and democratic transformation. His influential publications include *Apartheid and Education; The History of Education under Apartheid, 1948–1994*; *Empire and Education in Africa*; and *The Changing Landscape of Colonial Education in Africa*. Peter's work has made a significant contribution to understanding the relationship between education, colonialism, inequality, and social change. Many of his colleagues have contributed to the *Festschrift* section, which opens this issue of *Yesterday & Today*.

In terms of academic contributions, the issue opens with Peter Kallaway's two-part contribution, "The Search for Educational Utopia" Part I, "The Rhetoric and Reality of Educational Reform in Times of Social Change: France 1789–1804 and South Africa 1985–2000", places South Africa's educational transition in comparative historical perspective. By juxtaposing revolutionary France with late-apartheid and democratic South Africa, Kallaway interrogates the persistent gap between egalitarian educational rhetoric and unequal provision. Part II, "South Africa and the 'Rainbow Nation': Popular Education and the Utopian Dream", turns more directly to People's Education, liberation-era aspirations and post-1994 policy. The analysis cautions against assuming that political democratisation

automatically produces educational or economic equality, while inviting renewed debate about education's possibilities and limits as an instrument of social transformation.

Bongumenzi Mthethwa next asks why an event widely regarded as a turning point has become little more than a curricular footnote. Through an examination of CAPS and prescribed textbooks, "From Turning Point to Footnote: The 1976 Soweto Uprising in the CAPS History Curriculum" shows that the Uprising receives limited exposure in Grades 9 and 12. Mthethwa argues for its development as a stand-alone topic, greater attention to Black youth agency and African epistemologies, and the inclusion of participants' oral histories.

The focus then shifts from curricular marginalisation to the recovery of local memory. In "Exploring Anti-Bantu Education Protests in Grahamstown/Makhandla Through Drama-in-Education Techniques with Grade 9 Learners", Phemelo C. Hellemann and Thembele Madliki use *A Childhood in Chalk* to reconnect learners with largely neglected local protests between 1975 and 1985. Their participatory case study demonstrates how embodied drama, role play, and reflection can deepen historical understanding, empathy, and emotional engagement while repositioning community histories within national narratives.

Pranitha Bharath's "Controversial Memory and Digital Mediation: Preservice Teachers' Approaches to the Soweto Uprising" examines how future History teachers use digital tools to mediate the difficult past of the Soweto Uprising. Analysis of selected student ICT projects reveals uneven source selection, positionality and historical reasoning, but also the potential of carefully guided digital inquiry to cultivate multiperspectivity, evidence-based judgement and civic consciousness. The article underscores that technology becomes educationally meaningful only when joined to sound historical and pedagogical knowledge.

Paul Maluleka subsequently connects the Uprising to the 2015–2016 #MustFall movements. "Linking Liberation Legacies" argues that these youth struggles share demands for visibility, rehumanisation and epistemic justice. Through decolonial, intersectional queer and social-movement perspectives, Maluleka maintains that honouring these legacies requires confronting the continued erasure of LGBTQIA+ histories and developing a school History curriculum that represents the full diversity of South African experience.

In "When History Education and English Literature Merge", PraysGod Siphesihle Mhlongo turns to Athol Fugard's *My Children! My Africa!* as a means of teaching the Uprising and facilitating difficult conversations about race, racism, and social cohesion.

Drawing on reflective practitioner experience, the article illustrates how literature can create an empathetic, but critically demanding space in which students move beyond textual interpretation to engage South Africa's violent past and contested present.

Bodibadi Dorothy Modungwa and Kehumile Molotsane extend the discussion into contemporary cultural production. "From Soweto Protest Chants to Setswana Motswako Hip-Hop" traces continuities between the chants, struggle songs, and embodied performances of 1976 and present-day Motswako, Amapiano, and spoken-word poetry. Their analysis shows how Setswana functions as cultural capital and as a vehicle for youth agency, identity formation, language reclamation and resistance to linguistic marginalisation.

Language remains central in Raudina Madina Simelane's "Decolonising the Curriculum Through Language". Based on interviews with preservice History teachers in an open and distance learning institution, the study finds strong recognition of indigenous languages as essential to epistemic justice, alongside significant institutional constraints on multilingual practice. The Uprising, thus, becomes a pedagogical lens through which to reconsider language hierarchies, historical consciousness, and the preparation of teachers for decolonial education.

Kalpna Hiralal's "Women in Protest: Indian Activism in the Wake of Soweto, 1970s–1980s" broadens the liberation narrative by foregrounding South African women of Indian origin. Using archival materials, newspapers, interviews, and secondary sources, Hiralal shows how the Uprising intensified political consciousness and encouraged more visible, assertive participation in student, civic, and national organisations. The article recovers minority women's contributions to non-racial resistance while demonstrating shifts in political identity and gendered leadership.

The penultimate article moves beyond school History into professional education. Sebola-Samanyanga's "Silencing Struggles through Colonial-Apartheid Amnesia in Planning Education" identifies five systemic silences in planning curriculum standards, including the profession's colonial origins and complicity in racialised spatial violence. The resulting "ahistorical planner" may be technically competent, yet historically unconscious. The article consequently calls for historical consciousness to become a foundational requirement of planning education.

The issue concludes with Tolulope Ayodeji Olatoye, Raymond Nkweni Fru, and Anathi Magadlela's "Land Cover Change, Historical Memory and Resistance". The authors' systematic review brings the Uprising into conversation with climate adaptation, spatial inequality, and GIS-supported pedagogy. By digitally mapping protest geographies alongside present-day environmental vulnerability, learners can connect historical resistance to contemporary resilience, develop spatial literacy and imagine more just and sustainable futures.

Collectively, these articles refuse to memorialise 1976 as a static anniversary. They recover marginalised actors and places, test innovative pedagogies, expose curricular silences, and carry the Uprising's questions into new domains. In doing so, 'No. 35' affirms that the history of Soweto remains indispensable not only to understanding South Africa's past, but also to reimagining its educational future.

The issue concludes with six reviews of five recent books that extend its engagement with history, education, culture, and resistance. Derrick Myeni reviews Thomas Pooley's *The Land Is Sung*, highlighting how Zulu song, dance, and praise poetry connect identity, land, spirituality, and environmental justice. Mncube and Krige offer complementary assessments of *From Education Crisis to Organisation*, recovering the National Education Co-ordinating Committee's pivotal contribution to resistance against apartheid education and the imagining of a democratic system. Paballo Moerane examines Saleem Badat and Goolam Vahed's history of the University of Durban-Westville, foregrounding its contested transformation and non-racial legacy. Celani Zwane considers Thulani Mkhize's study of Nontsizi Mqgqwetho, emphasising its contribution to African literary, feminist and intellectual scholarship. Finally, Bronwyn Strydom reviews *A New History of Formal Schooling in South Africa, 1658–1910*, commending its nuanced account of schooling as an institution shaped by contradiction, domination, and the potential for disruption.

Johan Wassermann

Editor-in-Chief

Festschrift for Peter Kallaway

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a2>

Sue Krige

Retired teacher and teacher educator

Johannesburg, South Africa

suek@global.co.za

While the focus of this Festschrift is Peter Kallaway's work on the history of education in South Africa and beyond, I want to highlight his pioneering career as a history educator. From 1974 to 1981, Pete trained cadres of history teachers at Wits, known affectionately by some as the 'Kallaway Kids'.

In 1976, I enrolled for a Higher Education Diploma (Post-Graduate) and for Pete's history education elective. I was emerging from a traumatic year in which I battled my way through courses and a dissertation for a BA Honours Degree. It was the most difficult study I have ever undertaken. (My work for my MA, 12 years later, was not as demanding or alienating).

Pete turned that experience into a source of inspiration. History students were required to participate in Advanced Studies of various topics. As I had an Honours degree, I was exempt from this requirement. Pete immediately had me researching an original history of Sophiatown, which I thoroughly enjoyed. It was particularly relevant as I knew my grandmother had worked with Father Huddleston there in the 1950s.

Pete's elective on history teaching concentrated on the development sets of historical material (such as documents) for topics both in the existing History curriculum and, importantly, outside it. Pete expected us to know the most up-to-date debates about South African history by such luminaries as Phil Bonner, Peter Delius, and Jeff Peires. Most of it was Marxist in approach, and Pete encouraged us to debate the main ideas underpinning this work. How to integrate such 'revolutionary' material into the school curriculum was a question that occupied all our minds.

My Honours dissertation focused on the wars of the Eastern Cape Frontier and on the Cattle Killing episode in particular. I now developed a brace of documents about these events for Standard 8 pupils, as well as a new narrative, based on Peires's research. I put together a soundtrack to accompany the material. The following year, Pete asked me to

improve what I had done. He was able to get my work published.

During the year, student teachers had to spend six weeks in a (white) high school. This was known as 'teaching practice'. This was a test of all we had learned. Pete had very high standards and expected the same from us. But he was always encouraging and spent much time thinking through solutions to problems with his students. Many of these problems were not only about history, but also about the school milieu at a time when Christian National Education and programmes such as the proto-military Youth Preparedness informed all aspects of schooling.

My political education took place in this context. Pete had novel ways of exposing us to the political realities. My first field trip involved a trip to the Magistrate's Court in Johannesburg to support four National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) leaders and a Sociology lecturer accused of conspiring to promote the aims of two banned groups, the Communist Party and the African National Congress. We arrived at the Court and were handed posters which we dutifully held while the security police filmed us.

On June 16, 1976, I was on teaching practice at St John's College, a prestigious private boys' school, when I received a phone call. On the other end of the line was Pete. In a voice full of emotion, he almost shouted, "Come quickly they're killing kids in Soweto". I joined him on Jan Smuts (Avenue), holding posters and banners to let the world know what was happening.

Pete kept in touch with his students long after they had graduated. On a number of occasions, he roped them in to teach the history elective with him. When I was on maternity leave, he asked me to do so. I was rather depressed at that time, and this was a godsend.

In 1981, he left Wits to take up a position at UWC. We were heartbroken

But Pete's influence remained. Once a month on a Friday night, four of us, now history teachers in state schools, would meet to discuss both the latest research and our experiences in the classroom. The discussion grew more animated as the red wine flowed. We ended the evening with a toast to Pete.

I have known Pete for nearly 50 years. I am proud to call him my friend and mentor.

For Peter Kallaway

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a3>

Dr Rebecca Swartz

Senior Lecturer in History

University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

SwartzR@ufs.ac.za

I first ‘met’ Peter when, during my doctoral research, I hit a wall finding primary documents relating to ‘native education’ in Natal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Having come across Peter’s name on various publications relating to the history of Black people’s education in South Africa, I decided to email him to ask if he knew where the relevant materials were. What I received in response was an extremely enthusiastic reply about the nature of my project, a bibliography that he had been in the process of compiling for several years, published in the *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* in 2012, and a sad confirmation that he did not know where the sources I was hoping to find were, either. We then met face-to-face at a workshop on colonial education in Africa that he hosted at UCT in July 2013. After this, once I returned to South Africa for a postdoc at the same institution, Peter and I met often and collaborated, co-editing the volume *Empire and Education in Africa: The Shaping of a Comparative Perspective* in 2016, and then hosting a workshop on comparative histories of colonial education in 2016. Papers from that workshop were ultimately published in 2016 in *History of Education*. Peter took me under his wing at a momentous historical moment in South African higher education, shaped by widespread student protests, providing me with sage advice and a collegial ear when necessary. As historians of education, we were both aware that we were witnessing a watershed moment, and Peter’s long-term perspective, shaped by his years of teaching at various South African institutions, was a helpful reminder of the nature of educational change across the decades.

What struck me about working with Peter was his genuine curiosity about the complex and varied nature of the histories of education in South Africa and globally. He is motivated not by ego, but by a real desire to see educational change in the present. At the heart of his scholarly work is a strong empirical basis and a love for the archives and reading. Peter’s research addresses big questions. While increased specialisation within the fields of history and of education has led to scholars studying narrower topics, Peter’s more recent work, the culmination of years of thought and collaboration on the topic, boldly connects educational

thinking across Empires, over centuries and between disciplines. Placing the South African case into its continental context, and including reference to broader scientific, governmental and religious organisations that shaped the emergence of ‘modern’ education systems, is crucial, Peter points out, to producing histories of education that challenge South African exceptionalism. At the same time, Peter’s recent work, including on school texts written in isiXhosa, does not shy away from a close and detailed engagement with very particular local contexts and periods of time.

Peter has had a strong commitment to developing the history of education as a field on the continent. I remember talking with Peter at an international conference, and later, when he was on the editorial board of *History of Education*, he was truly concerned about the lack of representation in these spaces by scholars based in Africa. Peter has aimed to foster these forms of scholarly networks between researchers in the region, although in the context of a lack of funding for historical research, this has not always been straightforward.

Over the years, we have had many discussions about new publications in the history of education, a field that, since the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall protests in 2015-2016, has received increased scholarly attention. As we grapple with the ongoing legacies of unequal education during colonialism and apartheid, Peter’s research spanning almost half a century reminds us that these are complex issues that cannot be resolved without an in-depth examination of the path that led us here.

Peter Kallaway, History Educator

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a4>

Rob Siebörger

Former professor in History Education

University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

rob.sieborger@uct.ac.za

Unlike mathematics and science education, where there is a relatively established and fixed body of knowledge that informs classroom teaching, history has neither a particular body of knowledge nor always established practices to draw upon. Thus, it is true to state that, to a certain extent, history education is what you make of it. Peter Kallaway understands that and has always gone out of his way to make of it as much as he can.

For Peter Kallaway, the chief distinction between the History of Education and History Education is that the former involves much work and study, often in libraries and archives, on one's own. At the same time, the latter is always a shared activity based on practice and trial and error. The quality of History Education is completely determined by the quality of the practitioner. This he would have experienced from the start when sharing intensively with a small group of students in Professor Winnie Maxwell's history Honours degree at Rhodes University in 1964, but it was equally what he contributed to his own history method students at Wits in the '70s. They had the privilege of a teacher who believed in his students, trusted and challenged and kept faith in them.

Beginning as a high school history teacher, what could he bring to history education? The answers are pretty self-evident, the results far better than that. Peter focused on textbooks, assessment, examinations and curriculum change, always gathering around him groups of people with whom to work. He made his mark with the publication of the Shuter and Shooter *History Alive 9 and 10 books* (1987). Taking the gap left by the fact that MS Green's *The Making of South Africa*, first published in 1947, was, despite revisions, overdue for replacement as the go-to textbook for schools writing the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB) examination. Peter Kallaway assembled a team of writers who were committed to both a new historiography and a new pedagogy – the first glimpse of what history might look like in a post-apartheid South Africa. It was highly annoying, on the one hand, that the Afrikaans translation of the books was rejected for prescription because 'dis Marxsisties', but also satisfying that it should have earned this sobriquet. It is distressing that by the time there was a common Senior Certificate examination in 2003, History Alive had been

arbitrarily replaced by more conventional texts and history in the 'new South Africa' lost the jewel in the crown of the old South Africa.

Probably unknown to many except the dozen or so members of what was called the 'history education group', in the early 1990s, it was that Peter Kallaway had arranged with the publishers of *History Alive* that the royalties from the books would be paid into a fund for promoting history education. This move, especially when seen against the typical behaviour of textbook writers of the time, who were seemingly always prepared to gouge the prices of textbooks, is typical of his altruism and determination that he would not enrich himself at the expense of others. The chief beneficiary of this money was a series of history curriculum conferences in 1993 in Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town, bringing together history teachers of all persuasions to plot the way forward for history in the country as a whole (as opposed to the myriad of departments of education at the time). These activities absorbed much attention and effort and, unfortunately, diverted attention from the task of creating a revised and expanded *History Alive* series.

History textbooks for the future was also the theme of three conferences, which became known as "Sparking Waters" (the resort where they were held). The conferences took place under the auspices of the Georg Eckert Institute for Textbook Research (GEI) in Braunschweig, represented by Dr Falk Pingel and Professor Jorn Rüsen. It was the first time that the institute had sponsored a programme which was within one country rather than between countries. Neville Alexander was the local link to them. However, Peter Kallway played a very prominent role in the deliberations, given his experience with the *History Alive* series, and it should be added, his ability to work alongside and facilitate contact between the varied writers and groupings.

There are some notable occasions when Peter Kallaway has simultaneously been both a history of educationist and a history educator. A favourite of mine is the publication of the book *Johannesburg: Images and Continuities: A History of Working Class Life Through Pictures, 1885-1935*, co-authored with Patrick Pearson (Ravan Press, 1986). It celebrates the power of visual history in teaching in the time before there were no online videos, while giving access and a proper place to working class/peoples' history.

Peter Kallaway agreed (with much soul searching) to take part in the Human and Social Sciences Council's investigation into History Education in South Africa in the late 1980s and accepted responsibility for a research project on the assessment of history in the Senior Secondary phase (the Senior Certificate examinations). Those who did not know him might have been surprised by this choice of project, but it reflected his strong previous interest in the matric history exam, as an examiner with the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB). As with the textbooks, Peter involved a group of people in this research, making it possible to do a

comprehensive survey across all the various history senior certificate examinations (the first and only one of this kind?). This experience went beyond examinations, however, touching many aspects of the history curriculum and complementing his textbook contributions. It has been a source of ongoing concern and disappointment to him and others that the kinds of changes and improvements which this study foresaw in the future Senior Certificate history examination did not eventuate.

To return to Peter Kallaway's contributions to curriculum change in history, it is notable that he has produced the most in-depth and critical analysis available of the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) History curriculum (History in Senior Secondary School CAPS 2012 and beyond: A comment. *Yesterday & Today*, No. 7, July 2012). While it appeared that everyone else was prepared to accept the CAPS curriculum because it was an improvement on the previous National Curriculum Statement (NCS), nothing but a thorough breakdown and criticism of the CAPS was permitted by him. For the sake of future curriculum development in history, it is worth drawing attention to some of the key issues that Peter Kallaway identifies. He asks the following questions:

What are the educational objectives of this document? What assumptions were made with regard to the selection of knowledge (content)? Why these topics rather than others? Why has there been continuity with previous practices in some areas and rupture in others? What meaningful educational objectives can be attached to the teaching of the discipline of history for 15-17-year-olds? What resources are needed to make these objectives attainable? Are the teachers capable of making educational sense of the CAPS prescribed curriculum and translating it into viable pedagogical strategies?

These are surely the most important questions with which to confront any history curriculum. The conclusions are typical of Peter Kallaway's sympathy for classroom teachers and their students, that "the CAPS... is far too ambitious in terms of the factual content to be covered, the conceptual targets for the students, and the demands on the teachers". This has been the main shortcoming of all post-apartheid curricula. It needed someone with the experience, discernment, and confidence of Peter Kallaway to point it out. May he long continue to be the history educator to history education in South Africa.

Peter Kallaway, Encyclopaedist and Bibliographer

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a5>

Linda Chisholm

Professor in Education

University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

Ichisholm@uj.ac.za

One of the things that marks Peter's work for me have been his attempts at encyclopaedism. It is evident not only in his conceptual approach, of trying to look at society and education in its full interrelationship, but also in his efforts to develop bibliographies. Political economy was Peter's approach to the history of education. It was a method and perspective that enabled him to situate education within its broader context of political, economic, and social relations. Over time, I am of the opinion that his work moved towards intellectual history. In the early period, the 1980s and 1990s, when he was trying to shape a way of understanding the place of Black education in South African educational history, he used a political economy rooted in historical materialism.

The Annales school was likely also influential in Peter's efforts to achieve a 'total history' of education in his bibliographies. These were part of his belief that it is important to be as comprehensive as possible, not only in the histories one tells, but also in the sources one uses to tell them. I want to highlight two. There may be more, and the two I have selected here differ in that the one is national in scope, the other regional. Each in its own way exemplifies Peter's striving for wholeness, for showing the complete picture.

When I first met Peter at Wits in the early 1980s, I vividly recall a conversation with him on the streets of Braamfontein about a comprehensive bibliography that he was trying to develop of everything that had ever been written on Black education in South Africa. It was a bold and ambitious goal and, to my mind, also a bit quixotic. But that was Peter. He dreamed big and tried to achieve big things, and in the process, achieved something. Maybe not exactly what he dreamed of, but something that nonetheless left a mark.

His bibliography was conceived just as the transition from paper to the internet was occurring. At first, it was literally a doorstopper of a book. Over time, as its description on the UCT website indicates, “it migrated formats several times, from floppy disks to stiffy disks, then to CD-ROMS, a flash drive, and finally to cloud-based storage provided [here – at UCT] on the ZivaHub. The School of Education at UCT kindly allocated space for the project up to 1992, and the physical collection now resides at UCT Libraries Special Collections, as the ‘BC1584 Edubase Collection’. Various people worked with Peter on the bibliography over the years, including Jackie Kallaway, Debbie Sheward, David Hiscock, Vera Hulley, and Deidre Birch.

The EDUBASE collection includes nearly 9000 publications on the topic of education for Black South Africans.¹ This collection might by now have been overtaken by the resources made available on the Internet, but it not only provides an invaluable resource for scholars on education, it is also a testament to Peter’s lifelong commitment to the history of Black education in South Africa his way of righting the wrongs of colonial history.

Another example of Peter’s interest in comprehensive history is his *Bibliography of Materials Relevant to the Study of Education in the Colony of Natal, the Province of Natal and KwaZulu—Natal, 1839–1994: Selected with Special Attention to “Native Education* published in the *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* (2012).² Published in a journal devoted to regional scholarship, it provides a meticulously organised bibliography of finding aids and tools, archival and secondary sources, including newspapers, that tell the history of Black education in colonial Natal simply in their presentation as sources. It is an example of a scholarship that aims at leaving no stone unturned in trying to tell the whole story.

These are two not very well-known examples of Peter’s scholarship, however, they say everything about his approach to all his work and what he was trying to achieve: a comprehensive overview that uses all the sources possible available on the topic. Peter Kallaway has acted as a cartographer of the intellectual landscape, mapping the vast, often neglected territory of Black educational history to ensure that no vital perspective is lost to the erasures of time.

¹ P Kallaway, J Kallaway, D Sheward, D Hiscock, V Hulley, & D Birch, *EDUBASE – A bibliography of education for Black South Africans*. University of Cape Town. Dataset. 2018. (available at https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/EDUBASE_-_A_bibliography_of_education_for_Black_South_Africans/6993917/1)

² P Kallaway, “Bibliography of materials relevant to the study of education in the colony of Natal, the province of Natal and KwaZulu—Natal, 1839–1994: Selected with special attention to “Native education”, *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 30(1), 2012, pp. 107–138. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02590123.2012.11964181>

Peter Kallaway: Shaping South African Education History

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a6>

Clive Glaser

Professor of History

University of the Witwatersrand

Johannesburg, South Africa

Clive.Glaser@wits.ac.za

The 1976-1977 uprising brought a new awareness to the importance of school education in South Africa. During the 1970s, the state, conscious of the growing skills shortage in the country, started to invest more substantially in Black secondary education. This led to a sudden expansion of the urban secondary school population. However, very few (whether within the state or within the liberation movements) expected the revival of intense resistance to come from school students. Researchers (sociologists, political analysts, historians) scrambled to make sense of it during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Throughout the 1980s, the school crisis only deepened. In this context, the history of education emerged as a noteworthy sub-discipline, and Peter Kallaway was at the heart of it.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Kallaway, who began his career as a school teacher in the late 1960s before switching to academia, established himself as the go-to person on education history. He argued that education was a crucial site of political struggle in South Africa, and in order to transform it, it was essential to understand it as thoroughly as possible.

Most revisionist Marxists were interested in Black schooling only insofar as it was functional to capitalist development. They had a top-down approach, concentrating on state policy and the influence of various sectors of capital. Kallaway, while influenced by some of the Marxist arguments, insisted that it was impossible to make sense of the education crisis without placing it in a broader historical context. He was probably the leading figure among a new cohort of historians of education, often linked to the History Workshop movement, who were interested in complicating and humanising the picture. New studies emerged in the 1980s and 1990s on the long history of mission education in the region, including subtle examinations of the complicated relationship between missions and the various

regional colonial/settler states. The mission-educated Black elite, with all its complexity and contradictions, became an important focus of study. Writers also pointed to a long history of resistance by students. Bantu Education, which replaced the missionary system from the mid-1950s, came under careful scholarly scrutiny. In line with the emerging social history of the time, much more attention was given to the experience 'on the ground' of school students and teachers.

Aside from numerous scholarly articles and books, Kallaway edited two crucial volumes on the history of education, which, to my mind, shaped the sub-discipline. In 1984, Kallaway edited *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans*. The volume included chapters by well-established historians such as Tom Lodge, Robert Edgar, and Deborah Gaitskell, as well as education specialists who would later become leaders in their field, such as Penny Enslin, Pam Christie, and Linda Chisholm. The volume combined deep history on the origins of Black education with a careful examination of Bantu Education. It was concerned to draw on these historical insights to shed light on the 'current crisis.' Among other issues, contributors critiqued the recently published report of the reformist De Lange Commission of 1981. As a history student in the 1980s, *Apartheid and Education* was one of those seminal Ravan Press publications that shaped my intellectual development. It drew education firmly into the orbit of social history. In 2002, Kallaway brought out his second major edited volume, *The History of Education Under Apartheid, 1948-1994* (published by Pearson Education/Maskew Miller Longman). In post-apartheid South Africa, education issues were as urgent as ever. This volume drew together a wide range of established and new writers in the field. The volume dissected education under apartheid in terms of material/structural issues, state policy, popular resistance and ordinary human experience. While apartheid was technically over by 2002, it was more important than ever to review its legacy and impact on education.

Kallaway had a longstanding interest in comparative colonial education. This was given full expression in his co-edited volume with Rebecca Swartz, *Empire and Education in Africa: The Shaping of a Comparative Perspective* (UKZN Press, 2012). In this collection, the authors attempt to assess broad common themes in international colonial education policy and practice, while also drawing attention to local particularity. Once again, Kallaway took the role of facilitator, drawing together diverse writers in the field and bringing them into a dialogue.

From as early as the 1970s until the 2020s, Kallaway supervised, worked with, and influenced numerous scholars working in the field of South African education history. As a remarkably energetic scholar-activist, Kallaway has continued to be an important voice addressing the dysfunction and structural inequality in post-apartheid education.

Peter Kallaway, Teacher Educator

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a7>

Pam Christie

Emeritus Professor of Education

University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Pam.Christie@uct.ac.za

History is above all ‘a discipline of context’, wrote EP Thompson, and in this short piece, I focus on the context in which I first met Peter Kallaway in the History Department at Wits University (University of Witwatersrand) in the early 1970s. Wits at that time was home to significant critical scholarship. In 1971, the History Department had appointed Philip Bonner as its first African History scholar, and other significant scholars in the 1970s included Charles van Onselen, Belinda Bozzoli, and Eddie Webster. Postgraduate History students regularly attended African Studies seminars where papers by revisionist scholars such as Martin Legassick and Stanley Trapido provided critical alternatives to what was termed ‘liberal’ analysis. Shula Marks had iconic status, and ‘history from below’ featured alongside political economy analyses. In the 1970s, the photocopied writings of the banned Harold Wolpe were secretly circulated, and the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) was active in student protests. It was in this formative context of rigorous social and historical analysis and political pushback against apartheid that I first met Peter Kallaway. I always associate him with this context.

At the time, having recently returned from a spell at SOAS University of London, Peter was appointed to the Wits History Department to teach History Methodology in the newly established Higher Diploma in Education (Postgraduate). I was one of his first students. Peter was a confident classroom History teacher and a strong proponent of discovery methods in History teaching, and significantly, he was also closely linked to the network of critical scholarship and contributed to it. Peter always stood for the signal importance of History as a discipline, as well as its place in classroom teaching, and he conveyed this to his students with humour and a genuine sense of care. Peter was socially engaged: he promoted the local History Teachers Association and, later, the History Workshop. In the Higher Diploma, Wally Morrow taught Philosophy of Education alongside Peter’s History. Needless to say, both have been enormously influential in the field of teacher education in South Africa, and I was privileged to have been taught by them.

I completed my Master’s in Education and later my PhD in Australia, broadening my theoretical interests away from History, but still anchored in the rigour of the discipline.

Peter had no time for ‘theory’, and we had many humorous exchanges about this. My contention was that although historians might abjure formal theory, they nonetheless use it. Peter remained unconvinced to the last.

Yet, some of Peter Kallaway’s most influential work was in drawing together the work of the broader field of teacher education scholarship, most notably in *Apartheid and Education* (which included a co-authored article of mine), and *Education After Apartheid*. Expanding his interests to the fields of History of Education and Comparative Education, Peter has nonetheless remained anchored in History as a discipline of context, impatient of those who venture into the field without the required rigour.

For me, Peter Kallaway stands as one of the custodians of the field of History in and of Education in South Africa, and he will always be my History Methodology teacher.

The Search for Educational Utopia: Part 1

The Rhetoric and Reality of Educational Reform In Times of Social Change: France 1789-1804 and South Africa 1985-2000

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a8>

Peter Kallaway

School of Education
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch, South Africa
peter.kallaway@uct.ac.za

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2738-7482>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a8>

Paris: Constitution of 1791

There shall be erected and organised a public instruction common to all citizens, free with respect to the parts of education indispensable for all men.

J H Stewart, *A documentary survey of the French Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1951): p. 232, cited by Robert M. Stamp, "Educational thought and educational practice during the years of the French Revolution," *History of Education Quarterly*, 6(3). Autumn 1966, pp. 38-39.

The Freedom Charter of 1955

Congress of the People, Kliptown, Johannesburg – June 1955

The Doors of Learning and of Culture Shall Be Opened!

Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children

(online: [google hppt://ANC](http://google.hppt://ANC))

Regimes that arise in the wake of dictatorships and repression ... tend to be highly unstable. Their emergence, the culmination of one period of struggle is usually but the initiation of a new round of political conflict. In this new conflict, a significant part of

the battle is ideological and centres on how to interpret the process by which the new "democratic" regime came into being. The way the story gets told sets the terms for the new round of struggle.

Arthur MacEwan of "Transitions for authoritarian rule" by GO Donnell, PC Schmitter & L Whitehead (eds.), *Latin American Perspectives*, 15(3), Summer 1988, pp115-130.

While it is commonplace to recognise that the (French) Revolution gave birth to a new kind of political world, it is less often understood that that world was the product of two irreconcilable interests – the creation of a potent state and the creation of a community of free citizens. The fiction of the Revolution was to imagine that each might be served without damaging the other and its history amounts to the realization of that impossibility.

Simon Schama, *Citizens: A chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), p. 15.

Schools continued "to identify, segregate and socialise the elite of the next generation with few exceptions they have not created the new person, the visionaries and architects and carpenters and masons of social transformation nor have they become the foundation of a new order.

J Samoff, "Socialist education?", *Comparative Education Review*, 35(1), Feb 1991, pp. 1-22

Foreword

One morning when I was visiting student teachers at a Belgravia High School in Cape Town in the early 1980s, at the height of the student revolt against apartheid education, I witnessed a remarkable scene. The students had taken over! The headmaster and the teachers were all confined to the staffroom, and the student council was conducting an assembly in the school hall, where they were debating how to proceed. What were they to do? How were they to arrange the curriculum? Who was to 'teach' and what were they to teach?

Those issues were to dominate the discourse of 'People's Education' in the years that followed. Looking back, I am struck by the complexity of these issues and the history of education that lies behind such moments, which one can only assume are familiar elsewhere in contested political contexts. This exploration is a modest attempt to address that issue through a comparative exercise in the history of education in times of radical change from authoritarian regimes by comparing events in France during the dramatic years between 1789 and 1804 and the South African liberation years at the end of the twentieth century.

Having lived through a period of romantic idealism regarding the capacity of education to change society in the context of the transition from apartheid to 'democracy' in South Africa since the 1980s, I have recently begun to wonder why, in the context of over two hundred years of educational change since the French Revolution, we seem to remain rather naïve about the limits of education as a mechanism of social change. None of the policy deliberations over education in South Africa from the 1980s to 1990 thought to examine these issues relating to other periods of dramatic and revolutionary change since 1789, or to give serious consideration to comparative historical examples of educational transition in modern states.

The process of preparing this paper has made me acutely aware of the complexities of these issues and helped me to confront many of my own questions about why so little was achieved in relation to the promise of "People's Education" in this particular context where we imagined we had a clean sheet for a radical educational transformation, one that would ensure that everyone would be provided with an education to empower citizens in a democratic order characterised by *liberty, equality, and fraternity*. The difficulty of reconciling individual freedom of thought and actions with nationalist requirements prescribed by the State, or the economic 'needs' of society, is one which remains to confront all would-be reformers. Barnard has noted that "a policy of education based exclusively on the idea of patriotism and utility was bound to destroy the very premise of liberal education – freedom to think without concern for immediate practical results".¹ This caution would seem to apply to both the context being engaged with here.

Recent research has demonstrated that educational transition in France between 1789 and 1804 was characterised by continued *inequalities* of access and provision to quality education despite the dominant rhetoric of equity. "The apparent tension between *progress*, which is understood to require focussing limited resources on an educated elite, and an *egalitarian society* with an ethos of collective social responsibility, remain unresolved."² In South Africa, despite an end to the racial divisions in education, there is little dispute today that the benefits of the change need to be understood in terms of class rather than race. South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies on earth, thirty years after 'the transition to democracy'. The majority of the school-going population is poor, rural and black, and their schooling is, by any measure, of inferior quality to that of their fellow students drawn from the middle class or urban (black or white) contexts.³ Margaret Archer argues that in such contexts it is important to understand "why educational goals change,

¹ H C Barnard, *Education and the French Revolution* (1969), pp. 214-217.

² J Samoff, "Socialist education?" *Comparative Education Review*, 35(1), 1991, pp. 1-22.

³ S van der Berg, "Apartheid's enduring legacy: Inequality in Education", *Journal of African Economics*, 16(5), 2007, pp. 849-880.

who does the changing, and how they impose (*or fail to impose* pk) the changes they profess.”⁴ Was it a utopian dream to imagine that it could be otherwise? Was Tony Morphet correct to assert that “the freedom of blacks in South Africa from white rule was conflated with a classless Utopia”⁵ The desire for utopia has often indicated a dream of an ideal world of harmony and peace, but in the case of Robespierre, Hitler, and Stalin, it heralded the Terror, the Death Camps, and the Gulag, respectively.

I offer this paper in the hope that others will be able to promote further debate on these fundamental issues.

Introduction

The search for the dynamics of revolutions as an aspect of social change has been a key feature of modern historiography. Historians and social scientists of all stripes have been challenged to interpret the meaning of the terms used and the implications of such events for political economy. As far back as 1920, Bury explored *The Idea of Progress* in Western political thought.⁶ Crane Brinton’s *The Anatomy of Revolution*⁷ and Eric Hobsbawm’s *The Age of Revolution:1789-1848*⁸ were milestones in that search. O’Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead’s work on *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*⁹ in Latin America also highlights the importance of understanding political change and the process of democratisation within the context of national and international political and economic forces during the late twentieth century. I attempt to address this issue, with specific regard to the provision of education, in the context of the French Revolution (1789-1804) and the South African ‘transition to democracy’ (circa 1985 -2000).

Within that literature, the role of education in the broader sweep of social policy has been an issue of fundamental concern to many historians, as the provision of education has been widely regarded as a key marker of political and social well-being and has been a universal feature of the discourse about progress and development in the modern world. Education, in whatever form or however vaguely defined, has almost universally been seen as the key to a democratic order and to social and economic well-being. The sources of that faith, in all their ambiguity, can be traced back to the eighteenth-century enlightenment and

⁴ MS Archer. *The social origins of educational systems* (London: SAGE,1984), pp. 1-4.

⁵ T Morphet, “Brushing history against the grain”, *Theoria*, 76, 1990, p. 9.

⁶ JB Bury, *The idea of progress: An inquiry into its origins and growth* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1920).

⁷ Crane Brinton’s *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books,1938/1952).

⁸ Eric Hobsbawm’s *The Age of Revolution:1789-1848* (New York: Vintage,1996).

⁹ G O’Donnell, PC Schmitter & L Whitehead (eds.), *Transitions from authoritarian rule* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). Review by A MacEwan, *Latin American Perspectives*, 58(3), 1988, pp. 115-130.

to the political and economic forces unleashed by the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the forces of nationalism and socialism, the secular-scientific Revolution, and the social-democratic ethos of the politics of the Third World in the post- World War II era. As Hobsbawm notes, throughout the nineteenth century, for those who wanted to transform society, the French Revolution provided “an inspiration, a rhetoric and a standard of comparison”,¹⁰ and the field of education was usually assumed to be a key aspect of those changes.

The social transformation that marked the French Revolution was based on “the idea of progress”.¹¹ It emphasised notions of the perfectibility of human nature without regard for the political and social implications of such changes.¹² “Enlightenment rationalism supposed that conflicts between values were a heritage of miseducation or injustice, and could be swept away by rational reforms, by indoctrinating individuals into believing that their individual interests could be fully realised by working exclusively for the common good.”¹³ The arrival of the millennium depended only on the adoption of the correct set of principles. These included the notion that the new social machinery could alter human nature and create a heaven upon earth. And the role of education was central to that image of progress. The Jacobins in and out of the Convention genuinely cared about education, both in schools and in their clubs. It is, of course, a sad irony to us with hindsight that ‘The Republic of Virtue’ turned out to be ‘the Reign of Terror’ in the fateful years of 1793-1794, with few immediate advances in the field of educational provision.

During the years of the Revolution, there was a lot of talk about education, but relatively little institutional action. Many reports were compiled and some changes were made, however, internal turmoil and external conflict made domestic reform difficult. There were various attempts to formulate and codify educational goals in the policy documents that emerged over the decade. In mapping that process, I draw particularly on the extensive work of Emile Durkheim, HC Barnard, and RR Palmer. In this process, I draw on an extraordinary archive of French educational history and research.

Despite the intense debate among historians over two centuries relating to the merits of the Revolution itself, it is difficult to deny that the early years of the Revolution saw the old

¹⁰ Hobsbawm (1996): 36.

¹¹ RR Palmer, *The improvement of humanity: Education and the French Revolution* (Princeton NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

¹² J Sworowski, “Condorcet’s education: Haunted by the ghost of Rousseau”, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 14(4), 1995, pp. 320-330.

¹³ M Ignatieff, *A life: Isaiah Berlin* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp. 201-202.

system of education virtually dismantled, but the implementation of a new system had to await the period of comparative peace and security following the overthrow of Robespierre and the advent of Thermidor in 1795.¹⁴ The monumental contribution of Condorcet to the theory and practice of education in France during these times and for the future of educational policy is indicated below. Few of these policy reforms were to survive into the Napoleonic era in France, even if the overall influence of the ideas generated was to remain with us to the present day.

Since the Revolution, the educational debate associated with these events has embraced issues relating to aims, access, form, finances, content (curriculum), pedagogy, and bureaucracy. It is, therefore, of the greatest importance to take cognisance of Archer's cautionary remarks relating to idealised visions of educational change:

*To confront these problems is to recognise that their solution depends upon analysing complex forms of social interaction, for education is rarely if ever, the practical realization of an ideal form of instruction envisaged by a particular group. Instead most of the forms that education takes are the political products of power struggles. ...The overall aim of policy research should therefore be to provide an explanation of how social interaction produces specific kinds of state educational systems in different countries.*¹⁵

A key element in understanding the dynamics of such situations is the ability of the observer/historian to balance structural explanations with the role of individuals in shaping the nature of an educational system within the constraints of current economic, political, and social forces. Despite all the rhetoric about equality and redress that was characteristic of the period, Simon Schama's judgement is that the rural poor gained very little from the Revolution. "It was those sections of the population who had been gaining economically under the old regime that profited most from the sale of noble and church lands", and the increasing industrialisation of France in the context of a war economy meant that "the fat cats got fatter".¹⁶ Such issues need to inform our understanding of the educational history of the period.

Despite numerous studies relating to the disjunction between the rhetoric and the reality of modern educational discourse and systems, there is amongst policy-makers and politicians, a tenacious belief in the merits of education as a panacea for social transformation

¹⁴ M Stamp, "Educational thought and educational practice during the years of the French Revolution", *History of Education Quarterly*, 6(3), 1966, pp. 37-38.

¹⁵ MS Archer, *The social origins ...*, pp. 1-4.

¹⁶ S Schama, *Citizens: A chronicle ...*, pp. 854-855.

even when there is abundant evidence that many of the prescriptions for educational policy as a mechanism of implementing social equity are flawed, in 2026, as they were in the 1790s. There is no place here for a comprehensive exploration of this weighty issue, however, it should be noted that even in the USA, the much-celebrated home of Progressive Education as the mirror of a democratic order, educational reform over two centuries—as Tyack and Cuban term it, *Tinkering towards Utopia*—has been demonstrated to be a weak instrument for bringing about societal change and the advancement of equality.¹⁷

Although the processes of educational transformation under review reflect epochal shifts in the political/ideological landscape, there appears to be a striking similarity between the issues that confronted educators and educational policy-makers over the span of the two centuries between the French Revolution and the South African transition to democracy from 1985 to 2000. In both cases, while the struggle was in progress, a degree of consensus existed amongst those opposed to the old regime regarding the faults of the existing educational system and in the idealistic (utopian) statements regarding the goals of education for the future society. In both cases, the old order was itself engaged in attempts to reform education. However, once the old order was removed and the ground cleared for new policies to be adopted, the consensus evaporated, and conflict ensued about the nature of the new educational order to be established and the relationship of those reforms to what had gone before. As Archer indicates above, there develops an almost inevitable standoff relating to the aims, means, content, finances, etc. of the new educational order.

Hindsight indicates that such standoffs tend to proceed on predictable lines—although these insights were not always obvious to the French revolutionaries or to the South African reformers of a later time. These amounted to conflict between:

- a. those who regarded education or schooling in terms of the responsibility of the state to secure the rights of all individuals to obtain the kind of education best suited to their needs and abilities, without restrictions on what they were to learn or how it was to be taught, drawing on the traditions of reason promoted by the Enlightenment and the secular/scientific traditions, and what later came to be termed Progressive Education. This approach focuses on the importance of individual autonomy in the provision, formulation, and conduct of education. In the early days of the struggle, this conception of education often lacked a vision of education beyond the call for a universal elementary phase in keeping with the ideals of *liberty, equality, and fraternity* (Fr Rev) or ‘People’s Education’ (SA). Here, the goals were self-fulfilment and the development

¹⁷ D Tyack & L Cuban, *Tinkering towards Utopia: A century of public school reforms* (Harvard University Press, 1995);
D Labaree, “What schools can’t do”, *ZPH Journal*, 15, 2009.

of the capacity for independent rational thinking. The major contributor to educational thinking during the revolutionary years, Condorcet, was in favour of a policy which placed education in the hands of a professional body that was independent of state control, the aim being to protect it from control by factions. In South Africa, Rick Turner's radical educational ideas challenged both state education and the workerist ideology.¹⁸

- b. those who defended the right of the people in a democracy to an 'equal education'—the same level and quality of education for everyone—as an intrinsic 'right' and the need to cultivate 'good citizens' who were loyal to the new order/ 'the Nation' with an emphasis on patriotism, nationalism, civic education or vocational education, and saw that education in utilitarian terms of *usefulness* to the State, the cultivation of patriotism, citizenship, nationalism and in terms of economic utility. Young citizens were to be *moulded/ indoctrinated* into the values of the new order and shaped as 'useful' citizens and workers.

How are we to balance the calls for the education of 'critical democratic citizens' for the forging of patriotic citizens or skilled workers? What—if anything—have the examples of the French Revolution and the South African transition demonstrated about the significance of education for the process of social change and the building of democracy over the two centuries since 1789?

A 'comparison' of this kind is, of course, a very risky undertaking for a historian, as the nature of the events and the context in which they took place are hardly directly comparable. Yet there is a striking similarity between the *issues* confronted by educational thinkers and policymakers in both contexts. Ultimately, the question posed relates to the nature and status of claims relating to desirable educational policy when considered as an oppositional discourse (a critique of the former educational order) and a policy discourse that takes account of the necessary trade-offs in the political, social, and economic circumstances in which the new policies are to be introduced. These issues are the main focus of this paper.

The narrowing of the policy agenda

By the time of the establishment of the Napoleonic Empire in 1804, the call for education reform came to be defined by the demands of an emergent modern nationalist state. Instead of confirming the educational ideals of revolution—*liberty, equality, and fraternity*—as expounded by Condorcet and the *Philosophes*, the transformation of educational policy was

¹⁸ Both Condorcet and Turner were victims of the revolutionary strife.

marked by the promotion of nationalism, the return to private education, which secured educational advancement for the new middle class, utilitarian demands of the economy, as well as vocational and military training. An uneasy balance between the democratic rhetoric of revolutionary education and the messy realities of politics in the new Empire led to the decline of the Central Schools, which had represented the major initiative for educational reform since Thermidor. There was, as a result, a narrowing of the agenda for educational reform from the sometimes utopian ideas for universal education expounded by Condorcet in 1792,¹⁹ to a more limited vision of a controlled system which emphasised the creation of a new elite in the context of a modern nation state. This elite would equip the army, the bureaucracy, and the economy for a new era of social and economic growth in the context of the Napoleonic Empire.

In the South African case, Aslam Fataar and Linda Chisholm²⁰ also identify what they call the “narrowing of the agenda of education policy” during the period of transition. The wide-ranging call for the democratisation of education associated with the opposition to apartheid education, and People’s Education, came to be blunted once the new government came to power and redefined its policy agenda in terms of globally defined neo-liberal policies and agendas. Debates on education policy came to be defined not by post-War social democratic traditions, public democratic debate or professional participation, or by educational traditions which had characterised the struggle against apartheid education, but by top-down policies determined by globally-defined goals for economic growth such as qualifications frameworks, skills targets and market goals framed in consultation with international advisers who were influenced by World Bank and International Monetary Fund macro-economic policies.

Ultimately, I seek to pose the question about the relevance of such an enquiry. Is it possible to learn ‘lessons’ about educational thinking and policy formulation through a comparative examination of the rhetoric and reality of educational policy in highly contested zones of political conflict? In essence, I seek to unpack the rhetoric of education as espoused by those who challenged the old order at the end of the eighteenth century or in the 1990s, and how it is translated (or fails to be translated) into practice in real, lived historical/social/political contexts of change? Or, to put it another way, what is it that

¹⁹ The term Utopia has usually been associated with the work of Thomas More (1516). Also see Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: RKP, 1966).

²⁰ A Fataar, Education policy development in South Africa’s democratic transition, 1994-1997 (Stellenbosch: Sun Media, 2010); L Chisholm, & B Fuller, “Remember people’s education? Shifting alliances, state-building and South Africa’s narrowing policy agenda”, *Journal of Education Policy*, 11(6), 1996, pp. 693-716.

happens to the educational principles of the new movement once it comes to power? Why does a failure to implement the educational principle espoused in the revolutionary phase seem to be inevitable? How should educationalists balance utopian imaginings with the realpolitik?

Popular education and the French Revolution

From the convening of the Constituent Assembly in Paris in June 1789 until the establishment of the Consulate at the end of 1799, there was a lively debate about education in France, though it was often submerged under the welter of other pressing political, social, military, and economic issues to hand.

In Durkheim's words: "the Revolution proclaimed theoretical principles far more than it created realities".²¹ Five years after the start of the French Revolution in 1789, the first Central Schools were established, and a secular state education sector came into being in keeping with the political context of the Thermidor settlement.

In 1792, the Convention committed itself to creating "a system of public instruction, common for all citizens, and for those subjects of knowledge that are indispensable for all men (sic)".²² The principal goal of this initiative was to replace the church-controlled philanthropic educational system, which had been a feature of the *ancien régime* since the Middle Ages, with a secular, state-controlled system which promoted the goals of the new 'democratic' political order.

The key issues for educational thinkers were how to deal with the feudal and ecclesiastical legacy of the past and how to transform the influences of the Enlightenment radical philosophical proposals of La Chalotais (1763), Rolland (1768), Diderot (1769), Turgot (1775), Voltaire, Rousseau, and the *Encyclopaedists*, into public policy. In one way or another they all addressed the complex, interrelated issues to do with the framing of practical policy proposals, including how to plan and organise the new state system, what kinds of access to provide to whom and at what level, how to transform the classic curriculum to one defined by the National Assembly in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (August 1789), and how promote the role of science in education, how to fund the ambitious changes proposed, how to allow for popular participation in plans for change, where to find the teachers to implement all these ambitious innovations and so on!

²¹ E Durkheim, *The evolution of educational thought* (London: RKP, 1969), p. 305.

²² RR Palmer, *The improvement of humanity...*, p. 81.

It is difficult today to recapture the ‘policy world’ that the revolutionaries attempted to negotiate. It is, however, significant to note that even Rousseau and Voltaire were not in favour of mass education, as they saw little use for it. In general, the grand philosophical debates of the eighteenth century regarding the nature of education had little direct impact on the schools. Many of the changes merely “confirmed the poor in their pre-ordained status”.²³

During the early days of the Republican Revolution, Mirabeau and Talleyrand contributed to the debate over how to proceed with education. They were followed by a variety of other contributors to these debates during the tumultuous years of the Revolution, including those by Condorcet, Romme, Sieyès, Daunou, Lakanal, Lepelletier, Robespierre, Lanthenas, Bouquier, Roger, Marti, and Fourcroy. These are all summarised by Barnard and Palmer and a host of other historians.²⁴

The old system of education prior to 1789 comprised an extensive system of institutions with three ‘degrees of instruction’ which included the *petites écoles* (primary), *collèges* (secondary) and the *Université* (higher). It was the quality and the subject matter of education, rather than the degree of provision, that came under criticism. As Stamp and Palmer demonstrate, there were far more children at school in 1789 than there were in 1799, however, during those years “an entirely new direction had been given to the school system”.²⁵ Durkheim notes that, “from the beginning (the reformers) proclaimed the necessity of wiping the slate clean, of abolishing (the old system) completely, and starting out from basics to build an entirely new system which would accord with the needs of the time”.²⁶

Talleyrand presented an extensive *Report on Public Instruction* to the Constituent Assembly.²⁷ This provided the platform for the establishment of a Committee of Public Instruction and was followed by Condorcet’s impressive report on a national plan for education in 1792.

Bernard Condorcet (1743-94) was the leading rationalist and educational thinker of the

²³ F de la Fontainerie, *French liberalism and education in the Eighteenth Century: The writings of La Chalotais, Turgot, Diderot and Condorcet on national education* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1932), pp. 16, 38-9; H Chisick, *The limits of reform in the enlightenment: Attitudes towards the education of the lower classes in Eighteenth Century France* (Princeton: 1981); HC Barnard, *Education...*, p. 56.

²⁴ HC Barnard, *Education...*; RRPalmer, *The improvement of humanity...*

²⁵ M Stamp, “Education thought and educational practice...”, *History of Education Quarterly*, 1966, p. 47.

²⁶ E Durkheim, 1969, p. 294.

²⁷ HC Barnard, *Education...*, pp. 68-79; RRPalmer, *The improvement of humanity...*, pp. 94-101.

French Revolutionary period.²⁸ He attempted to shape new proposals for education which were to have a remarkable influence on educational thinking throughout the nineteenth century. Condorcet was converted, by the taking of the Bastille, from the belief in limited suffrage to one of democracy, though with strong safeguards for individuals and minorities, including rights for Protestants, Jews and women.²⁹ As a key member of the Committee of Public Instruction in the National Assembly, he drafted proposals for educational reform, but was caught in the crossfire between the Girondins and the Mountains during the stormy years of 1792-1793.

Although Condorcet was to be a victim of the Terror, he is considered by many to have been the most significant educationalist of the Revolutionary period. He has often been regarded as a “major Revolutionary formulator of the idea of progress or the indefinite perfectibility of humankind”.³⁰ David Williams, Condorcet’s most recent biographer, sees him as the last of the *philosophes* and “belonging to a new breed of social planners and political scientists, of policy – makers conscious of the potential power of political arithmetic as an instrument of efficient and enlightened governmental administration and rational forward planning, and for whom the sole purpose of the pact of association was the advancement of public happiness”. To this end, Williams argued that “nations which are truly free are governed by reason alone” and addresses these issues in his report where he argued that a national system of public education would provide the lifeblood for the new nation and the basis for his view of “human perfectibility”.³¹

Condorcet was an enthusiastic supporter of the Revolution and was elected to represent the City of Paris in the National Assembly. He was also a member of the Committee of Public Instruction. His famous *Report on the General Organisation of Public Education* was placed before the National Assembly on 20-21 April 1792.³² In this report, many of Condorcet’s main proposals come together, reflecting the ambitions of eighteenth-century romanticism. These included the utopian notion that “universal education, science,

²⁸ S Schama, *Citizens: A chronicle...*, 291; D Williams, *Condorcet and Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁹ It is also important to note that he was unique among the Encyclopaedists in condemning slavery, thus demonstrating his commitment to the universal definition of human rights, and not confining his concerns to French or European citizens.

³⁰ On Condorcet also see: B Jolibert, “Condorcet 1743-94”, *Prospects*, 23, 1993, pp. 197-209; F De la Fontainerie, *French liberalism and education...*; D Williams, *Condorcet and modernity*.

³¹ D Williams, *Condorcet and modernity*, p. 277-280.

³² N de Condorcet, *Rapport et projet de décret sur l’organisation générale de l’instruction publique en France pendant la Révolution* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1792[1989]); see F de la Fontainerie, *French liberalism and education...*, pp. 323-378; H.C.Barnard, *Education*, pp. 80-96.

enlightenment, moral renewal, freedom, equality and happiness, interlock”. Once universal education of ‘the whole mass of the people’ had been achieved, enabling men to govern themselves “by their own enlightenment, natural inequalities between individuals would be compensated by a revolution in social arrangements in which knowledge would no longer be a divisive prerogative of the few, facilitating the oppression of the many”.³³

As Bury has demonstrated, Condorcet’s views, which reflected the *Encyclopaedist* tradition, were based on the idea of human progress, which assumed the movement of human science towards truth and happiness and that a new social machinery could alter human nature—an ideal that was swiftly and terribly refuted during the last decade of the eighteenth century in France. According to Bury, the revolutionaries imagined that they could break with the past and that the new methods of government constructed along mathematical lines, in the form of the new constitution, would herald the arrival of the millennium. Such a utopian approach ignored the historical legacy, social tradition and economic interests which Archer points to above.

During the Revolution, new educational ideas, which were ahead in time of the ideas of the eighteenth-century *philosophes* were considered, and sometimes adopted, and although few of these policies were to survive the *Consulate*, they left an important legacy which would influence education in later periods. In retrospect, the Jacobean dictatorship has been judged to be “at once necessary, flawed, creative, successful and disastrous”.³⁴ As Durkheim noted, “never has there been such a striking discordance between the concerns of public opinion, its hopes and tendencies, and the state of education”.³⁵ However, Brinton pointed out that, though “universal education”, as visualised by Condorcet, had not lived up to its paper promises by 1799, by this stage, the youth of France inhabited a very different educational environment to that of 1789, and the work of Condorcet was a major contribution to that transformation.

Condorcet’s report to the National Assembly had a remarkably modern tone, one that could almost reflect classic UNESCO policy.

To afford all members of the human race the means of providing for their needs, of securing their welfare, of recognising and exercising their rights, of understanding and fulfilling their duties; to assure for everyone opportunities for perfecting their skill and rendering themselves capable of the social duties to which they have a right to be called; to develop to the utmost

³³ D Williams, *Condorcet and modernity*, pp. 284, citing Condorcet.

³⁴ see Google post on RR Palmer by Isser Woloch.

³⁵ E Durkheim (1969), p. 293.

*the talents with which nature has endowed them and, in doing so, to establish among all citizens a true equality and thus make real the political equality realized by the law – this should be the primary aim of a national system of education, and from this point of view its establishment is for the public authority an obligation of justice.*³⁶

The idea contained in the report, that education was free of charge, compulsory, non-religious, and universal, was not to become a reality in France until a century later.

Condorcet argued that public authority cannot establish a body of doctrine which is to be exclusively taught in schools. In his view, no public power ought to have authority to prevent the quest for new truths or the teaching of theories contrary to a particular policy or to its temporary interests. This system of education was equal for all citizens, irrespective of creed or origin, and for both sexes. Women should have an education identical to that of men. Such an education should be free of any dogma or religious or political persuasion and must be secular. Condorcet emphasised scientific and mathematical subjects and especially the applied sciences. “His most important innovation was the independence of education from Government and he thought that the whole system should be controlled and administered by educationalists and scientists organised in a *Société Nationale* based on free elections.” He also proclaimed religious toleration and allowed for independent schools; he opposed the use of schools as a means of spreading nationalist propaganda. For Condorcet the Rights of Man were “to be explained and to be based on reason and not taught as dogma”.³⁷

According to Barnard, only Condorcet, among the revolutionary educators of note, asserted that education should be a means of training and not merely imparting information, encouraging nationalism or preparing students for vocational roles. In effect, “patriotic incantations and the comforting companionship of the crowd” replaced education in Robespierre’s *Cult of the Supreme Being* during the Terror.³⁸ As Condorcet had warned, this meant that schools no longer served to educate but to indoctrinate, betraying their primary function, which was to impart basic knowledge (*and encourage critical thinking: PK*), enabling all to pursue their own education”.³⁹

³⁶ N de Condorcet, *Rapport et projet de decret...*, pp. 105-52, F de la Fontainerie, *French liberalism and education...*, p. 323. It might be important to trace the development of these themes in relation to initiatives like EDUCATION FOR ALL. See SP Heynemann, “The failure of Education for All as political strategy”, *Prospects*, 39, 2009, pp. 5-10.

³⁷ N Hans, *Comparative education* (London: RKP, 1958), 188-189.

³⁸ S. Sharma, *Citizens: a chronicle of the French Revolution* (Madison: State Historical Society, 1965), pp. 822-847.

³⁹ HC Barnard, *Education...*, pp. 213-214.

Condorcet argued that his plan provided the prerequisites for the intellectual, and especially the moral progress of humankind as a whole. In that context, no public body should have authority to prevent the teaching of theories contrary to its own political views.⁴⁰ As Robert Ulich has pointed out: “A policy of education based exclusively on the idea of patriotism and utility was bound to destroy the very premise of liberal education – freedom to think without concern for immediate practical results.”⁴¹ It is to the credit of Condorcet that he understood this issue, even if he failed to understand that the advance of human science towards truth and happiness cannot ignore the role of institutions and history in social development. The assumption that the new social machinery could alter human nature and create a utopia was swiftly and terribly refuted by events of the Revolution. Condorcet himself was a victim on that chaotic state of affairs.

His recommendations proved to be a dead letter as the Convention replaced the Assembly soon after his plans were presented in April 1792, however, they were to be revived, and at least partially implemented, after Thermidor during the time of the Directory (Oct 1794 – Nov 1799), which saw the beginning of a more stable regime characterised by “the recapture of political control by middle class notables”⁴² who were intent on avoiding the excesses of the previous few years.

During the time of the Jacobin dictatorship, a statist view came to dominate the educational policy debate. This emphasised a programme of radical education where children would be conditioned according to the prescribed pattern of revolutionary politics. This development was seen in its most acute form in Lepelletier and Saint Just's scheme of 1793, aimed at conditioning children in compulsory state boarding schools where they would be removed from the influence of parents, families, and communities, and live in Spartan conditions from five to twelve years of age. They would all be treated the same and no concessions made for ability, physique or dispositions. Although these recommendations were read to the Convention by Robespierre at the height of the Terror in July 1793, they were essentially a dead letter.⁴³

These issues marked a test of the radical turn in educational politics. The contradictions embraced by these trends have provided a recurring theme in transition education discourse ever since. The policies framed by Condorcet were partially trialled in the Central Schools during the time of the Directory (1795-1799), but were never taken up systematically in

⁴⁰ HC Barnard, *Education...*, p. 212.

⁴¹ R Ulich, *The education of nations* (New York: CUP, 1961), p. 151.

⁴² A. Goodwin, *The French Revolution* (London: Arrow, 1959, p. 181.

⁴³ HC Barnard, *Education...*, pp. 118-223.

post-Revolutionary France. They were, however, to remain central to educational policy debates in France and elsewhere throughout the nineteenth century.

Without any blueprint for a 'modern' system of education that matched the calls for liberty, equality, and fraternity, there were heated debates about how to proceed and what role to allocate to the Central Schools, which emerged as one key aspect of the Thermidorian convalescence in 1795.

At the end of 1794, new plans by Lakanal, Daunou, and Sieyes were put forward by the Committee of Public Instruction, which incorporated some of Condorcet's earlier recommendations. In the *Law of the Third Brumaire* (1795), France possessed (on paper at least) a complete system of public instruction. Founded on the authority of the state rather than that of the Church, guided by reason and analysis rather than by religious considerations, it was a radical departure from the education of 1789.⁴⁴ A key element of these revised plans was the establishment of new schools to replace the clerical control of *middle schools* with *écoles centrales*. They represented the shift of politics towards the more moderate middle-class control of the Thermidor regime.

The Central Schools / *écoles centrales*

The *écoles centrales* represented one of the main educational innovations of the Revolution between 1795 and 1802. They were based on Condorcet's earlier proposals. Looking back, scholars have often remarked that Central Schools heralded a new ethos for education in France.⁴⁵

After the promulgation of the Law of 3 Brumaire An. IV (5 October 1795), the Central Schools were opened. They were controversial in their own time and have been subject to a great deal of subsequent debate. The Central Schools were first mooted as part of the Lakanal Law in December 1794⁴⁶ and passed by the National Convention on the last day of its existence on 25 October 1795 in the form of Daunou's Law, "the only piece of legislation enacted during the French Revolution that applied to all levels of education".⁴⁷ As noted above, this legislation reflected the strong influence of Condorcet's thinking⁴⁸

⁴⁴ M Stamp, "Education thought and educational practice ...", *History of Education Quarterly*, 1966, p. 44.

⁴⁵ C. Brinton, *A Decade of Revolution: 1789-1799* (Westport, Conn. 1934[1983]), 278.

⁴⁶ Lakanal was the acting president of the Committee of Public Instruction

⁴⁷ RR Palmer, *The improvement of humanity ...*, p. 230.

⁴⁸ HC Barnard, *Education ...*, p. 174.

The title of *Central Schools* was to be given to Lakanak's schools because each would be the centre of a group of contributory primary schools and thus, theoretically accessible to those qualified to attend them.⁴⁹ The old *Colleges* came under state control and were replaced by Central Schools. They were to be established in each *department*, with an *Ecole normal* in Paris. The plan provided for local government to take up the role of educational provision.

Although the plan was aimed at universal education, it paid little attention to primary schools despite the chaotic state of affairs in that sector since 1789. There was no specific provision for secondary schools to bridge the gap between primary education and the Central Schools. One Central School was to be provided for every 300,000 inhabitants, catering for students aged between 12 and 16 years, though the students appear to have been much older, many of them 'auditors' rather than full-time students, in accordance with Condorcet's emphasis on the importance of adult education.

The new scheme assumed that most pupils would go to primary schools and this would prepare them for work in agriculture or industry, however, the Central Schools were designed for a select group who, in Condorcet's words, "have been excepted by nature from the ordinary class and should find a sphere in which their talents can be given scope".⁵⁰

The candidates from primary schools were selected by local committees, but there does not seem to have been any systematic attention to grading and selection.⁵¹ Primary school students who are 'most distinguished' would be granted by popular vote and at the *fete de jeunesse* (youth festival) an annual bursary which would enable them to take a place at the Central School. The overall outcome was that the schools served the middle class rather than the upper class or the poor, which was in keeping with the general political tone of the era of the Directorate. By 1799, there were approximately 20,000 course enrolments, with probably 12,000 students (compared with 50,000 students of the pre-revolutionary colleges, and 30,000 in the Napoleonic *lycées* of 1810).⁵² There is repeated reference in the literature to poor attendance.

A key aspect of the reform was that *classes*, organised by age and relating to previous study, were replaced by *courses* which focussed on subject matter to be taught, in keeping with Condorcet recommendations. There was no restriction on admission to *courses* either

⁴⁹ HC Barnard, *Education...*, p. 170.

⁵⁰ HC Barnard, *Education...*, p. 170.

⁵¹ HC Barnard, *Education...*, p. 172.

⁵² RR Palmer, *The improvement of humanity...*, pp. 223-247.

in terms of student background and previous study, or in terms of age. There was no system for course selection or requirements for attendance. Each course was isolated and lacking in linkages to others. There was no systematic process of progression. Palmer has provided a statistical survey of these schools.⁵³

An *école centrale* would enrol students from age twelve upwards and would provide a combination of high school and college training with the emphasis on arts and science. Their curriculum was to give full attention to the physical and social sciences as well as the older philosophic and rhetorical subjects. There was an emphasis on the “moral education in order to promote the young republican conscience in the practice of good public and private virtues”.⁵⁴ Other key subjects were mathematics; experimental physics and chemistry; natural history; scientific method and psychology; political economy and legislation; the philosophic history of peoples; hygiene; arts and crafts; general grammar; *belles lettres* (fine letters); ancient languages; modern languages most appropriate to the locality of the school; legislation.⁵⁵ *General grammar* seems to have been the equivalent of what we would today term civic education. It was, according to Palmer, the subject much favoured by the *idéologues* (ideologists), and was intended to replace the *philosophy* of the old curriculum. Science and Mathematics were seen as central to the new curriculum, however, the evidence indicates that the classes were not well subscribed. The most popular subject was *Drawing*, which offered a training in design and elementary engineering as well and the arts. It seems to have been perceived as the subject with most practical value in relation to future employment.⁵⁶ Yet there was little uniformity in what was taught and it seemed the *professors* were in large part, left to their own devices. Each school was to establish a public library, a botanical garden, a laboratory of experimental physics and a technical museum. It was intended that each *école centrale* play an important part in the life of the community”.⁵⁷

The supply of teachers is identified by Barnard as a critical area. He noted reports that “people of ability have almost all perished and we have fallen into a state of dreadful barbarism.”⁵⁸ There does not seem to have been any significant infusion of new personnel. Each of the Central Schools had one *professor* for each subject /field. Salaries were to be

⁵³ RR Palmer, *The improvement of humanity ...*, pp. 223-247.

⁵⁴ M Stamp, “Education thought and educational practice ...”, *History of Education Quarterly*, 1966, p. 44.

⁵⁵ HC Barnard, *Education ...*, p. 171

⁵⁶ HC Barnard, *Education ...*, p. 171.

⁵⁷ M Stamp, “Education thought and educational practice ...”, *History of Education Quarterly*, 1966, pp 43-44.

⁵⁸ HC Barnard, *Education ...*, p. 171.

uniform throughout the country—1200 livres for masters and 1000 livres for mistresses. The teachers were appointed and supervised by a ‘*jury central d’instruction*’ nominated by the Committee of Public Instruction, which was responsible for seeing that the instructions were carried out. “The school itself will be run by a committee of teachers, meeting every *decade*, and its finances will be the concern of the departmental administration.”⁵⁹

New textbooks were to be “composed and published by order of the Convention”, but little is said of this in the literature I have been able to access. Given the chaotic state of thinking about education, it is difficult to believe that adequate provision could have been made for the extremely ambitious goals articulated in curriculum statements, such as they were. What evidence there is seems to indicate that individual teachers just made it up as they went along and that there were, therefore, wide discrepancies between different schools depending on the availability of talented and motivated teachers.⁶⁰ School inspections were formally required, however, there does not seem to have been much capacity to implement this.

The Roger-Martin’s proposals of 1797 pointed to the weakness of Central Schools and proposed reforms in relation to bridging the gap between primary schools and Central Schools.⁶¹ By this time, there were only 42 such schools. “It can be safely said that, with the exception of the three Parisian schools and those of a few provincial towns, the *coles centrales* were only a limited success.”⁶² As Durkheim notes, “unfortunately, all the fruitful ideas which were contained in revolutionary educational theory were tainted by the way they were put into practice by grave organisational flaws. The higher education which the Central Schools gave the children from the moment they entered presupposed that they had already received a preliminary training of considerable breadth.”⁶³ This precondition had not been met.

Napoleon’s *coup d’état* in November 1799, and the subsequent establishment of the Empire in 1804, meant that the experiment came to an end with the establishment of a centralised bureaucracy and centralised education system tailored to entrenching a national ethos and promoting national loyalty and good citizenship. The new Fourcroy’s Law (30 April 1802) was passed by the *Corps Legislatif* by 251 to 27 votes. It meant the ‘suppression’ of the Central Schools. This may be regarded as the last act in the educational history of the Revolution.

⁵⁹ HC Barnard, *Education ...*, pp. 171-173.

⁶⁰ HC Barnard, *Education ...*, p. 167.

⁶¹ HC Barnard, *Education ...*, p. 195.

⁶² HC Barnard, *Education ...*, p. 188.

⁶³ E Durkheim (1969), p. 305.

The new policy was a compromise between the fundamental reforms for a complete democratic state system, which earlier revolutionary educationalists had put forward, and the reaction to a despotic system, which did eventually, in the Napoleonic 'University', present an organised and highly centralised system of public instruction.⁶⁴ From this time, the rhetoric relating to the need for state primary education remained—but in reality, that was largely left to private initiative while elaborate arrangements were made for technical and professional education in keeping with the 'economic needs' of the emergent modern state and the war economy. *Lycées* were established for secondary education, and private benefactors were encouraged in the light of previous chaos. Independent schools were allowed, and many students or parents who could afford the fees opted for these.⁶⁵ As a result of Napoleon's Concordat with the Papacy, there was a revival of Roman Catholic Church schools.

After Napoleon's *coup d'état* and the establishment of the Consulate in November 1799, a stable system was re-established, but at the cost of sacrificing many of the educational innovations of the Revolution. These reforms were increasingly tilted toward a centralisation model which stressed conformity and efficiency, a pattern that may be seen, not only in education, but also in other matters affecting the Revolution, such as law, taxation, civil administration, and the army. Centralisation of control, though often warned against, always prevailed because it followed from the demand for 'unity and uniformity' to be achieved not at the lowest common denominator of education for all but as a means of high-level standardisation and ostensibly for equity between the regions of France. The essential educational reforms of the Revolutionary period did not survive the advent of the Napoleon era. From this time, central government control was reasserted through a Director of Public Instruction under the Ministry of the Interior.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ HC Barnard, *Education...*, p. 209.

⁶⁵ HC Barnard, *Education...*, p. 181.

⁶⁶ RR Palmer, *The improvement of humanity...*, pp. 331; JD Markham, *The revolution, Napoleon, and education* (Napoleon Series Archive [online] (1959), p. 100.

Summary

In a world prior to a formal understanding of the nature and dynamics of mass state educational policy and practice, now difficult to imagine, how did the French politicians and ‘educationalists’ engage with the challenges of reconstructing French education in the context of the social chaos of the last decade of the eighteenth century?

The most immediate achievement of the French Revolution was the destruction of the feudal basis of the *ancien regime* (old regime), and a paving of the way for the development of new social and economic relations. This allowed space for a debate about the practical formulation of policies based on the educational initiatives indicated by the Enlightenment philosophers. My immediate concern, following Andy Green, is to “consider not only the Revolution’s immediate outcome and the arrangements it ushered in with (regard to education) from 1789 to the period of Napoleonic rule, but also the revolutionary process itself and what the various assemblies hoped but ultimately failed to accomplish”.⁶⁷

Durkheim notes that the “effects of the revolutionary effervescence was immensely productive of brand new ideas (for education)”, however, “the Revolution did not know how to create organs which could give these ideas life, institutions in which they could be embodied”.⁶⁸ “The Revolution’s real tasks ... were to erect a state apparatus and legal system (and a system of education pk) appropriate to a rising bourgeois social and economic order”,⁶⁹ but in reality the path to a new order was seldom clear to those involved in the day-to-day management of the chaotic events of the period from 1789-1804. As Barnard notes, at the centre of their task lay “the difficulty of reconciling individual freedom of thought and actions with nationalist requirements prescribed by the State”, an issue which remains to challenge modern states.⁷⁰

While the Revolution entailed the destruction of the system of education of the *ancien regime*, it did not succeed in setting up a new system of education on the ruins of the old. In broad terms, there was a strong belief that education was fundamental to the transformation of society, in keeping with the views of Rousseau and Enlightenment philosophers that man was naturally good and had been corrupted by society. What was needed was to ‘implement deliberately’ the elements of the good society in the next generation. Education was

⁶⁷ A Green, *Education and state formation: Europe, East Asia and the USA* (London: McMillan, 1990), p. 140.

⁶⁸ E Durkheim (1969): 294.

⁶⁹ WH Sewell, “The rhetoric of Bourgeois Revolution”, G Kates (ed.) *The French Revolution: Recent debates and new controversies* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 153.

⁷⁰ HC Barnard, *Education...*, p. 214.

expected to produce that general transformation of society.⁷¹ There were, therefore, many plans for educational reform between 1789 and 1804.

Adamson summed up the results:

In the field of concrete achievement, the innovators failed badly, but in that of abstract principle their discussion gave currency to certain doctrines which from that date onwards formed integral parts of French liberalism – laicisation, free public instruction, compulsory schooling without respect to gender and a curriculum informed by scientific principles.⁷² These issues continue to be the concern of educational theory and practice to the present day.

Condorcet proclaimed a utopian ideal for education. He supported independent schools; opposed the use of schools as a means of spreading religious or nationalist propaganda; and argued that the 'Rights of Man' were to be explained and promoted, and to be based on reason and not taught as dogma. However, the view that the schools should be instruments of propaganda for the nationalist state came to dominate as the Revolution developed and was seen in the most acute form in Lepelletier's scheme for conditioning children in state boarding schools.

As Barnard explained:

When the old order of things was swept away and the supremacy of the Church and royalty alike were overthrown, the school became an important instrument for inculcating and explaining not the old religion but new political doctrines. So among the things that the Revolution did was to bring to the fore the idea that the main purpose of the school was to serve the state and educate the youth in the virtues of nationalism, and that is the idea which has tended to develop and expand in Europe and elsewhere ever since.⁷³

Yet "a policy of education based exclusively on the idea of patriotism and utility was bound to destroy the very premiss of liberal education that had lain at the heart of Condorcet's project – freedom to think without concern for immediate practical results." It had significant implications for the organisation and financing of schools, for teachers, teaching, pedagogy and curriculum, both then and now.⁷⁴

During the time of the Constituent Assembly (1791-1792) and the National Convention (1792-1793), when a committee of Public Instruction was established,

⁷¹ RR Palmer, *The improvement of humanity...*, pp. 4-7; Silver (1965): 149.

⁷² A Adamson, *A short history of education* (Cambridge: CUP, 1919), p. 239, cited by HC Barnard, *Education...*, pp. 211-212.

⁷³ HC Barnard, *Education...*, pp. 214-216.

⁷⁴ HC Barnard, *Education...*, p. 216.

there were lively debates around education. Thereafter, during the stormy period of the Terror (1793-1794), there was little sustained attention to these issues. Under the Directory (1795-1799), and in the context of Napoleon's rise to power, the first elements of a new policy emerged that were to significantly influence the future of educational thinking and of policy in the years to come and place severe restrictions on notions of democratic education. As Sharma has pointed out, insufficient attention has been given to the irreconcilable interests at play in this context—the creation of a potent state and the creation of a community of free citizens. One key element of the Revolution was the drive towards democracy in the sense of equality, which was blocked and superseded by other concerns of the Enlightenment, notably the belief in progress and a desire for efficiency, for the training of qualified experts, and for the process of modernisation. All these trends were present throughout and remained so in later times; they simply varied in strength at any given moment.⁷⁵

The balance between the utopian goals for education and the context in which the reforms take place remains a challenge to the present day, both in France and globally. In the modern global context, Joel Samoff notes that there has been a failure to institutionalise democratic practice in schools. Put crudely, in transition societies, the reproductive charter of the schools has overwhelmed its role in establishing and nurturing democratic practice. The schools, the society, and the transition have all suffered.⁷⁶ To what extent is it possible to trace the roots of these issues to the events considered above? What are the implications of this reading of the events of the French Revolutionary period for an understanding of the trajectory of global educational policy in the two centuries that followed, and more specifically in relation to the South African transition to democracy at the end of the twentieth century?

⁷⁵ RR Palmer, *The improvement of humanity...*, p. 331.

⁷⁶ J Samoff, "Socialist education?" *Comparative Education Review*, 1991, p. 1.

Part II: South Africa and the “Rainbow Nation”: Popular Education and the Utopian Dream

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a9>

Peter Kallaway

School of Education
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch, South Africa
peter.kallaway@uct.ac.za

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2738-7482>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a9>

The Freedom Charter

Congress of the People, Kliptown, Johannesburg – June 1955

The Doors of Learning and of Culture Shall Be Opened!

The government shall discover, develop, and encourage national talent for the enhancement of our cultural life; All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas, and contact with other lands; the aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty, and peace; Education shall be free, compulsory, universal, and equal for all children; Higher education and technical training shall be open to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit; Adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass state education plan; teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens; the colour bar in cultural life, in sport and in education shall be abolished.

South African Constitution (1994)

The Aims of Education

Rights to education must be understood in light of the aim of education. Education should be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The right to education as described above is based on the premise that education is a precondition for the exercise of other rights. If guaranteed, it has the ability to unlock the enjoyment of other human rights and ultimately empower individuals to contribute and participate meaningfully in a free society.

(Web: Helen Suzman Foundation: The Right to Basic Education)

Introduction

As Crain Soudien has noted

The advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994 brought to an end one of the greatest struggles of the second part of the twentieth century. The coming of democracy meant the promise of an end to division, separation and inequality and the beginning of new order of social harmony, development and prosperity. The vision of an education to promote equity, to focus on the development of critical thinking, and to promote social ethics, was in keeping with the promise of the Constitution adopted in 1996. Yet thirty years into this bright new world, the portents are less than auspicious. . . all reviews show that the progress in strategic areas of social development (including education) has either been minimal or that stasis has occurred.¹

Should we see that as confirmation of Tony Morphet's observation in 1990 that "the freedom of blacks in South Africa from white rule was conflated with a classless Utopia"?²

The transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa took place at a time of fundamental global changes, from the optimistic welfarist social-democratic politics of the post— World War II era to the 'Sixties counter-culture' and the Third World revolt against colonialism. From the mid-seventies, these transformations were strongly influenced by a new global world order informed by neo-Liberal politics and the sanctity of the Market— what came to be known as the Washington Consensus. The central role of education in crafting that new, just society was framed in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and prosecuted vigorously by students and activists during the sixties.³ Yet, it became clear over time that

... open elections and oppositional rights in themselves provide a very limited basis for popular rule when a whole realm of decisions – those concerning ownership, investment, production and employment – were excluded from the democratic process. The control by capital in economic life not only restricts the scope of democracy, it also undermines popular rule in the narrowly political sphere – as decisions are forced to conform to the dictates of capital and as the ideological power of capital shapes the entire environment of decision making . . . with intra-elite conflict and the co-optation of radical opposition, leading democracy to be

¹ C Soudien, "The 'A' factor: Coming to terms with the question of legacy in South African education", *International Journal of Educational Development*, 27(2), 2007, pp. 182-193.

² T Morphet, "Brushing history against the grain", *Theoria*, 76, October 1990, pp. 89-99.

³ G de Groot, *The Sixties unplugged: A kaleidoscope history of a disorderly decade* (London: Macmillan, 2008); T Judt, *Postwar: A history of Europe since 1945* (London: Vintage, 2010).

*compartmentalized into separate realms – allowing us to have political democracy while we postpone economic democracy to another day.*⁴

In the aftermath of Cold War politics, anti-colonial liberation movements relied heavily on the appeal of education as an emblem in their struggle for political freedom. As in revolutionary France, formal debates about educational transformation seldom brought dramatic results.

Liberation movements often rejected the prevailing colonial Western school systems in the Southern African colonies and appealed to alternatives founded on explicit socialist and progressive ideologies. Examples include the models of revolutionary education associated with the USSR, Communist China or Cuba, or those derived from Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in Latin America.⁵ At times, there were also appeals to romantic models of Indigenous African education or calls for a return to old missionary appeals for “Industrial Education” for rural life and work.⁶ Yet few of these radical experiments in educational policy bore substantial fruit.

In South Africa, the terms of transaction were very different from those in France two centuries earlier. Here ‘transformation’ was to take place in the context of a modern state structured by capitalist market relations that had been in place for over two centuries. Despite the eruption of widespread defiance of the apartheid government after the Soweto uprising of 1976, South Africa as a whole did not descend into a situation resembling the Terror in Paris of 1793/1794.⁷ What follows is a modest attempt to describe the complex nature of educational transition in South Africa and to provide some pointers relating to the successes and failures of the educational struggles in this context. What were the education policy goals for the new society that was envisaged, and how did they change over time? What role did the Utopian goals for education framed during the years of opposition (‘Peoples Education’ or education in exile) have in the framing of educational policies for

⁴ A McEwan, “Transitions for authoritarian rule”, *Latin American Perspectives* 15(3), 1988, pp. 115-130; also see S Aronowitz & HA Giroux, *Education under siege: The conservative, liberal and radical debate over schooling* (London: Routledge, 1985).

⁵ P Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

⁶ M Prew, “People’s education for people’s power: The rise and fall of an idea in Southern Africa”, TG Griffiths, & Z Miller (eds.), *Logics of socialist education: Engaging with crisis, insecurity and uncertainty* (Springer, 2013), pp. 133-53; T Norton & B Ollman, *Studies in Socialist Pedagogy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978); JR Sheffield & VP Diejomaoh, *Non-formal education in African development* (New York: African - American Institute, 1972); J Nyerere, *Education for self-reliance* (OUP, 1967).

⁷ The educational aspect of the struggle in South Africa has often been neglected in literature on the transition and cannot be taken up here, despite its relevance to the issues raised in this paper. For the general background see J Seekings, *The UDF: A history of the United Democratic Front in South Africa 1983-1991* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2000).

a future democratic South Africa after 1994? And, more tentatively, can these events be fruitfully compared with the changes outlined in relation to Revolutionary France?

Freedom Charter and background to Soweto 1976

One of the most cited documents relating to the educational struggle during the apartheid era is the statement from the Freedom Charter, signed at the Congress of the People, Kliptown, Johannesburg, in June 1955. The famous educational clause urged that “*The Doors of Learning and of Culture Shall Be Opened!*” (See above). This emphasised universal state provision of education without regard to race in keeping with the United Nations Organisation (UNO) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). It became the sheet-anchor of the future educational policy of the African National Congress (ANC), the major opponent of apartheid education. Reflecting the struggle against racial segregation and apartheid, the main emphasis was on the expansion of provision and on equality of provision. These issues had been central to calls for educational reform by Africans, missionaries, and liberals for over a century.⁸

In a context where the emergent policy of apartheid education or Bantu Education was being implemented in the 1950s with a focus on the promotion of ethnic identity and *own language education*, the tone of all educational proposals from opponents was essentially to support the pre-apartheid *status quo*. Blacks wanted *the same education as whites*—in terms of access, resources, provision, funding, and curriculum! Such was the situation all through the apartheid era and was to be a key element of the Soweto uprising in 1976.⁹ In such a context, there was very little public debate about what is today referred to as curriculum change.

The African education movement

There has been little scholarly attention given to the issue of education policy as an aspect of the politics of resistance to apartheid from the 1950s to the mid-1980s. Although

⁸ See B. Rose, & R. Tunmer (eds.) *Documents in South African education* (Johannesburg: AD Donker, 1975); P. Kallaway (ed.), *Apartheid and education: The education of Black South Africans* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1984); P. Kallaway, *History of education under apartheid: 1948-1994* (New York: 2002/Cape Town: Peter Lang, 2002/Cape Town: Pearson Education, 2002); C. Soudien, C. Fisher, M. Cross & P. Kallaway, *A new history of formal schooling in South Africa 1658-1910: An education of contradictions* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2024) and the following volume on the modern period (forthcoming).

⁹ B. Hirson, *Year of fire, year of ash: The Soweto revolt: Roots of a revolution* (London: Zed, 1979); J. Kane-Berman, *SOWETO: Black revolt white reaction* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1978); Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa 1940-1990* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1999).

the opponents of the apartheid government were united in their condemnation of the apartheid education policies, few works on the history of the liberation movements pay attention to educational issues.¹⁰

Tom Lodge records that Zeke Mphahlele remembered approaching ANC activists in 1952 and attempting to discuss Bantu Education with them, but failing to elicit much interest. Only in the Cape, the All-African Convention (AAC), with its roots in the Cape radical traditions of the Unity Movement, did Lodge discover a focus on education and schooling.¹¹ Given the uncertainty and disagreement between different sections of the leadership and between leaders and rank and file, the default position of the ANC in the 1950s was simply to boycott school boards set up in response to the new apartheid policy.

The ANC national executive undertook to establish a National Educational Council which would make provision for alternative or informal education in the form of ‘cultural clubs’. An initiative to establish a more comprehensive alternative education took the form of the African Education Movement (AEM), established in Johannesburg in mid-1955 through a collaboration of some churches, the Congress of Democrats, and the ANC. All that can be said with confidence is that the ANC attempted to provide some kind of alternative to Bantu Education, which included aspects of progressive education. The AEM and the cultural clubs were a brave experiment, however, their existence became increasingly symbolic as numbers dwindled and children were re-absorbed into new government schools. The financial capacity of the state in relation to the delivery of education, together with the shortage of qualified teachers for community schools, pointed to the limits of these bold attempts at resistance, and the experiment faded out within a short period.¹² The only other markers of an alternative tradition in South African education are presented by the adult education tradition and night schools that I have outlined elsewhere.¹³

¹⁰ See for example F Meli, *The history of the ANC: South Africa belongs to us* (London: J Currey, 1989); E Maloka, *The South African Communist Party: Exile and after apartheid* (Jacana, 2013). South African Democracy Education Trust, *The road to democracy in South Africa* Vol I and 2 (Pretoria: UNISA Press.); T Simpson, *Umkhonto we Sizwe: the ANC's armed struggle* (Cape Town: Penguin, 2016).

¹¹ T Lodge, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983); C Soudien, *The Cape Radicals: Intellectual and political thought of the new era fellowship, 1930-1960s* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019); Of particular note in this literature is I B Tabata, *Education for Barbarism: Bantu (apartheid) education in South Africa* (London: Unity Movement, 1960).

¹² T Lodge, *The parent's school boycott: the Eastern Cape and East Rand townships, 1955* (AfricaBib, 1980); P Kallaway, *Apartheid and education: The education of Black South Africans* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1984); T Karis, G Carter, & G Gerhart, From protest to challenge: *Challenge and violence, 1953-1964*, Vol. III (Stanford: Hoover, 1972); E Feit, *African opposition in South Africa: The failure of passive resistance* (Stanford: Hoover, 1967).

¹³ P Kallaway, “Knowledge for the people: Understanding the complex heritage of colonial education in South Africa”, *Yesterday & Today*, 28, December 2022, pp. 44-81.

The challenge of educational reform in South Africa

In the wake of the Soweto Schools Uprising in 1976, there was a revival of interest in education as an aspect of the anti-apartheid struggle. An optimistic outline for a new revolutionary socialist educational ethos in the Third World, which drew much attention from anti-apartheid campaigners in South Africa, was sketched out in the important publication in 1979 by Stephen Castles and Wiebke Wüstenberg, *The Education of the Future*.¹⁴ It promoted the call for a cultural revolution and various forms of 'polytechnic education' that had been developed in the USSR, China, Scandinavia, and Cuba. This provided a handbook to education for many of the socialist liberation movements in the region.

Joel Samoff has provided an excellent survey of the scope and limitations of alternative education programmes in the Third World in the last decade of the twentieth century.¹⁵ The demand for a progressive form of education was at the forefront of the demands of the liberation movements and "was intimately woven into the liberation rhetoric and programmes".¹⁶ Yet, Samoff notes that "there has been a failure to institutionalise democratic practice in the schools". Put crudely, "in transition societies, the reproductive charter of the schools has overwhelmed its role in establishing and nurturing democratic practice. The schools, the society and the transition have all suffered".¹⁷ It is within this context that the transition to education for democracy in South Africa must be understood.

The dream of emergent worker and peasant socialist states in Africa faded in the 1980s, as many new states that emerged embraced populist, neo-liberal political norms. Ultimately, for all the rhetoric about educational transformation as part of a wider social transform of society, "the alternative models were marginalized by the adaptation of the colonial (or apartheid) system to an education system based on neo-liberal orthodoxy, as part of a new world order".¹⁸ Despite the formal commitment of the new South African government to progressive and socialist ideologies, and the presentation of education as a key vehicle for social and economic transformation prior to 1994, there has been almost

¹⁴ S Castles & W Wüstenberg, *The education of the future: An introduction to the theory and practice of socialist education* (London: Pluto, 1979).

¹⁵ J Samoff, "Socialist education?" *Comparative Education Review*, 35(1), February 1991, pp. 1-22; also see his "The Intellectual/Financial Complex of Foreign Aid," *Review of African Political Economy*, 53 (1992): 60-75; JR Sheffield & VP Diejomaoh, *Non-formal education*....

¹⁶ M Prew, "Peoples education ...", T G Griffiths & Z Miller, *Logics of socialist education*..., p. 133.

¹⁷ J Samoff, "Socialist education," *Comparative Education Review*, 1991, p. 1.

¹⁸ M Prew, "Peoples education...", T G Griffiths & Z Miller, *Logics of socialist education*..., p. 133; S Aronowitz & HA Giroux, *Education under siege*....

universal agreement that education has failed to play that role and that three decades after independence, Southern African states (including South Africa) still have academically-orientated, iniquitous, bifurcated systems which have changed little since the colonial period. Schools continued “to identify, segregate and socialise the elite of the next generation with few exceptions they have not created the new person, the visionaries and architects and carpenters and masons of social transformation ... nor have they become the foundation of a new order”.¹⁹ The promised educational Utopia has not arrived.

Little attention was given to this wider process by those who attempted to frame new policies for education in South Africa in the early 1990s. None of this history was drawn upon in the new world of educational policy debate that emerged in the 1980s when the National Party (NP) government, in response to the devastating events surrounding the Soweto Uprising in 1976, began to consider education as part of a wider mandate of limited political and labour reform and “the modernization of apartheid”.²⁰ The De Lange Committee report of 1981, *Provision of Education in the RSA* (HSRC),²¹ set the tone for those changes and provided a platform for the reforms that were to follow the transfer of power in 1994. However, those proposals did not look back to history, nor to the field of comparative education, for solutions to educational policy dilemmas. Neither, for that matter, did the People’s Education movement of the 1980s nor the ANC in exile.

In the context of the South African “transition to democracy” from the Freedom Charter (1955) to the era of the United Democratic Front (UDF)²² and the People’s Education movement of the 1980s, there were many challenges to the apartheid educational system. However, the new policies adopted after the formal transition of power in 1994, firstly to a Government of National Unity (GNU) and then to the ANC government, did little to transform either the quality of the education offered by the state to the majority of the population or the form of that education.

The vague notion of ‘People’s Education’, which was a prominent aspect of the internal political struggle of the UDF during the 1980s, played a small part in the establishment of a new policy regime after 1994.

¹⁹ M Prew, “Peoples education...”, TG Griffiths & Z Miller, *Logics of socialist education...*, citing (1991:21).

²⁰ H.Adam, *The modernization of racial domination* (Berkeley: UCLA Press, 1971).

²¹ Human Sciences Research Council, (HSRC) *Provision of education in the RSA* (the De Lange Report) (HSRC, Pretoria, 1981).

²² J Seekings, *The UDF: A history...*.

People's Education

After the SOWETO uprising of 1976, and as part of the general defiance of the government in communities, workplaces, and schools, the UDF played a key role in the field of educational struggle. People's Education, as conceived in the documents put before the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) conference at the University of the Witwatersrand in December 1985, rejected apartheid education and proposed a set of recommendations for the future. People's Education had a utopian ring. It was "to be a true force for liberation, democracy and equality" in the struggle for national liberation in a democratic South Africa.²³

As defined in the resolutions of the National Consultative Conference on Education in 1986, the goals of People's Education were framed in terms of a rejection of apartheid and capitalism. It held that People's Education:

1. *Enables the oppressed to understand the evils of the Apartheid system and prepares them for participation in a non-racial democratic system*
2. *Eliminates capitalist norms of competition, individualism and stunted intellectual development, encourages collective input and active participation by all, as well as stimulating critical thinking and analysis*
3. *Eliminates, illiteracy, ignorance and exploitation of one person by another*
4. *Equips and trains all sectors of our people to participate actively and creatively in the struggle to attain People's Power in order to establish a non-racial democratic South Africa.*²⁴

Echoing Condorcet's work, Father Smangaliso Mkatshwa, a leader of the People's Education movement, summed up these goals in his keynote address to the conference:

*... when we speak of alternative education or People's Education, we mean one which prepares people for total human liberation; one which helps people to be creative, to develop a critical mind, to help people to analyse; one that prepares people for full participation in all social, political and cultural spheres of society. Education based on values of consumerism or affluence, of military adventurism and aggression and on racism is certainly not our ideal type of education.*²⁵

²³ P Kallaway, G Kruss, A Fataar & G Donn, *Education after apartheid: South African education in transition* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1997), pp. 74, 80-81; G Kruss, in P Kallaway et al. (eds.), *Education after apartheid...*, p. 88.

²⁴ Report on National Consultative Conference on Crisis in Education, organised by the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee at University of the WWR, Johannesburg; Resolutions of the NCC, December 1985 (SPCC, 1985).

²⁵ Report on National Consultative Conference on Crisis in Education, organised by the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee at University of the WWR, pp. 11/13. Fr. Mkatshwa held a number of prominent positions in government as well as in the ANC between 1994 and 2000. In 1994, he was elected to the

Significantly, this address represents one of the very few policy statements of the time which make any reference to the history of Black education in South Africa. In contrast to the previous reviews of “native education” policy in the Welsh report of 1936 and the Eiselen report of 1953,²⁶ which included comprehensive accounts of that history, none of the documents or policy proposals from the 1980s to 1990s from the NP, the UDF/NECC or the ANC makes any attempt to refer to that history. In this regard, they reflect the mode of ahistorical policy research and reporting that had come to dominate international agencies like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and even UNESCO, from the 1970s.²⁷

By the mid-1990s, Greenstein recognised the shift away from key issues highlighted in the People’s Education movement—culture and multiculturalism, race relations, the promoting of critical thinking, adult education, literacy training, women’s education and early childhood development (ECD) – towards a new emphasis related to the relationship between education and economic growth, shadowing the agendas of the De Lange Report.²⁸

As Palmer pointed out in relation to the French Revolutionary era,

*... one key element of the Revolution was the drive towards democracy in the sense of equality, which was blocked and superseded by other concerns of the Enlightenment, notably the belief in progress and a desire for efficiency, for the training of qualified experts, and for the process of modernization. All these trends were present throughout and remained so in later times; they simply varied in strength at any given moment.*²⁹

The parallels to the South African situation seem obvious. The challenge of the new government was to balance these dual priorities.

National Assembly and in 1996 became the Deputy Minister of Education, a post he held until 1999.

²⁶ See footnote 8.

²⁷ See my review of Jeanne Moulton et al (eds) “*Educational reform in Sub-Saharan Africa: Paradigm lost?*” (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002) in *Africa Today* 52(4), 2006, pp. 141-144.

²⁸ R Greenstein, “Education, identity and curriculum policies in the New South Africa”, P. Kallaway et al. (eds.), *Education after apartheid...*, p. 128.

²⁹ RR Palmer, *The Improvement of Humanity: Education and the French Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 331.

As Badat noted, what the Freedom Charter and the People's Education advanced

...were essentially principles and objectives of educational provision along with some policies of an extremely general nature. ... (with) the emphasis on principles and objectives, without a concentration on the development of policies.... While perhaps appropriate during a period of protest and oppositional politics, this clearly became inadequate for any project of transformation.³⁰

As indicated above, it is important to emphasise that a variety of initiatives to engage with change came from the apartheid government—from the De Lange committee report (1981) to the Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) (1991-2)—and from civic organisations ranging from the churches (South African Council of Churches (SACC)) to big business.³¹

Both Badat and Kallaway (1997) pointed to the centrality of the period 1990-1994 for an understanding of the educational developments in the post-election period. Badat pointed to the tensions between the utopian rhetoric of the politics of popular education associated with People's Education during the 1980s and the reforms of the late apartheid government, the educational legacies of the GNU, and the hopes and aspirations of the ANC from the time it came to power. By the mid-1990s, it became clear that the earlier hopes and aspirations of People's Education would be severely constrained. The political climate was increasingly incompatible with the promise of radical educational transformation. In the end, systemically the old order was left intact—with superficial adjustments to curriculum and access—a far cry from the radical transformative vision of the People's Education movement or the visions of radical socialist reformers.

The shifting sands of engagement here are just as significant for the eventual outcomes as the battles between the Jacobins and the Girondins in the National Assembly. Here, the battle lines were drawn between those who supported a socialist/social democratic/welfarist approach to the state which took the form of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), and those who favoured a market-orientated political and economic orientation of the Growth, Employment, and Redistributions (GEAR) strategy characterised by neo-liberalism and the Washington Consensus.

³⁰ S Badat, "Educational politics in the transition period", in P Kallaway et al. (eds.) *Education after apartheid*, pp. 21-22.

³¹ The 1961 Education Panel, *Education for South Africa: The 1961 Education Panel first report; Education and the South African economy: Second report* (Johannesburg, Univ. of the Witwatersrand Press, 1961); SPRO-CAS Education Commission, *Education beyond apartheid* (Johannesburg: Christian Institute, 1971); P Kallaway, "Privatization as an aspect of educational politics of the New Right: Critical signposts for understanding shifts in educational policy during the 'eighties," *British Journal of Educational Studies* XXXVII (3), August 1989 pp. 268-275.

The expansive calls by the liberation movement not only for freedom in terms of social and political rights, but in terms of welfare and educational provision, that had first surfaced in the Freedom Charter, were taken up in this new context in the drawn-out negotiations process that began in Dakar and ended in the final negotiations at NASREC. Once an agreement had been reached between the NP and the ANC, once Mandela and other political prisoners were released and the negotiations for the end of apartheid were under way and the exiled had returned, there was a period of reflection and negotiation to prepare for the new form of government to be established after the election in 1994. However, educational policy was to form a minor aspect of those deliberations. The major books on the transition by John Saul, Hein Marais, Patrick Bond, and Martin Murray, hardly mention the issue.³² Suffice to say that those deliberations took place in the context of the policy frameworks mapped out within the context of the broad Washington Consensus that was a marker of these events. The policy discourse that emerged, and the policy platform that came to be shared by the NP and the ANC during the negotiations, laid the groundwork for public policy to be articulated, at first in the form of the RDP, and subsequently modified to accommodate the new GEAR frameworks, and captured so graphically in the title of Patrick Bond's account of these events in his book *Talk Left, Walk Right*.³³

Despite this neglect of educational policy at this time, as Linda Chisholm has pointed out, South Africa's first democratic election was a watershed in the country's educational history:

*In the first instance, it signalled a move away from the determination of policy by a white minority state for a black majority; in the second, official state education policy, historically geared towards building a united white nation, was now reoriented to redressing inequalities and 'nation-building' between white and black; and third, instead of being predicated upon exclusion and denial of rights, social, and educational policy became based on the principles of inclusion, social justice and equity.*³⁴

³² H Marais, *South African limits to change: The political economy of transformation* (London: Zed, 1998); P Bond, *Elite transition: From apartheid to neoliberalism in South Africa* (London: Pluto, 2000); MJ Murray, *Revolution deferred: The painful birth of post-apartheid South Africa* (London: Verso, 1994). For the broader context also see Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The past and the present* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002); J Saul, *The Crisis in South Africa* (London: Zed, 1986).

³³ P Bond, *Talk Left, Walk Right* (Scottsville: UKZN Press, 2006), pp. 201-252.

³⁴ L Chisholm, & B Fuller, "Remember people's education? Shifting alliances, state-building and South Africa's narrowing policy agenda", *Journal of Education Policy*, 11(6), 1996, pp. 693-716.

State responsibility for basic “education for all”, which had been a fundamental element of UNESCO policy from the 1960s, and had underwritten earlier struggles against apartheid education, was, from the 1980s, to change in keeping with a new set of priorities for UNESCO and the World Bank framed by IMF Structural Adjustment Programmes. Instead of universal access and state-led universal education,

*across the world, in both developed and developing countries, the goals of educational policy were being redefined and restructured to accommodate new traditions which focussed on the need for educational development to support economic growth (human capital theory), decentralization, privatization, choice, community responsibility, flexibility, relevance, cost-recovery, unit standards and cost sharing.*³⁵

In addition, there was a strong drive towards vocational working-class education, in order, it was assumed, to promote economic growth. As Andre Kraak argued, “the ‘narrow and technicist’ learning methodology entailed in Unit Standards and National Qualifications Framework (NQF) had little in common with the earlier People’s Education discourses developed in the 1980s and the early 1990s”.³⁶ This development further fractured hopes for a comprehensive and inclusive curriculum for all. The new policies promoted a shift in financial responsibility from public to private sources. In South Africa, as both Chisholm and Fataar term it, “a narrowing of the educational policy agenda” took place.³⁷

Both in relation to the governance of schooling, and in terms of the curriculum content, it is possible to therefore discern parallels between the developments reported above in relation to the French Revolutionary period and the South African case.

³⁵ D Simon, *Structurally adjusted Africa: Poverty, debt and basic needs* (Boulder, Col.: Pluto, 1995); B Soobrayan, “Banking on education: A critical assessment of the World Bank’s involvement in education in the South”, *Perspectives in Education*, 16(1), 1995, pp. 5-31.

³⁶ Cited by L Chisholm & T Petersen, “Education policy and practice on the eve of the 1999 election”, in L Chisholm, S. Motala & S. Vally (eds) *South African Education Policy Review* (Heinemann, 2003), 541-542.

³⁷ P Kallaway et al. (eds.), *Education after apartheid...*, p. 50; L Chisholm & B Fuller, “Remember people’s education...”, *Journal of Education Policy*, 11(6); P Kallaway, “Privatization...” (1989); A Fataar, *Education policy development in South Africa’s democratic transition, 1994-1997* (Stellenbosch: Sun Media, 2010).

Education in Exile

African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP)

After the Soweto uprising in protest against Bantu Education in June 1976, issues of educational change were relocated to the context of exile for the thousands of students who had crossed the border to join the liberation movement. However, the contest over the nature of the education to be provided by the liberation movement in exile remains largely unexamined by scholars.

The experience of education derived from the “education in exile” in the camps of Angola at Novo Catengue, and at Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) and Dakawa in Tanzania, was largely neglected by the ANC and the SACP on their return to power after 1994.³⁸ The history of the ANC Department of Education in exile remains to be written.³⁹ The initiative relating to Education with Production (EWP) pioneered by Patrick van Rensburg and Swedish Aid (SIDA) in Botswana and Zimbabwe, while often seen to provide a blueprint for new policy perspectives, was ignored by South African policymakers after 1994.⁴⁰

³⁸ See M Sparg, J Schreiner & G Ansell (eds.), *Comrade Jack: The political lecture and diaries of Jack Simons* (Johannesburg: ANC, 2001), p. 116; S Morrow, B Maaba & L Pulumani, *Education in exile: SOMAFCO, The African National Congress school in Tanzania 1978 to 1992* (Cape Town: HSRC, 2004); R Govender, “The contestation, ambiguities and dilemmas of curriculum development at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, 1978-1992” (PhD dissertation, University of the Western Cape, 2011). It is notable that Friedman omits referencing these works when considering the educational career of Harold Wolpe who was to play a key role in education policymaking after 1994. (S Friedman, *Race, class and power: Harold Wolpe and the radical critique of apartheid* (Scottsville: UKZN Press, 2015). Surprisingly Njobe, the headmaster of SOMAFCO from 1978-1981, does not refer to these issues (MW Njobe, *Education for liberation* (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1990).

³⁹ Extensive archival papers relevant to these issues are to be found in the Jack and Ray Simons Collection at the University of Cape Town, but these have not yet been explored in detail in relation to educational issues. See D Simons, *Structurally adjusted Africa...*, p. 18 and sections 5.8 13.3, 5, 13.1. and elsewhere. Although Harold Wolpe was the chair of the ANC’s London Education Committee (LEC), Sam Govender notes that “curiously enough the Wolpe Papers have no material on SOMAFCO or on the LEC”. See R Govender, “The contestation, ambiguities...”, p. 302. Seretse Choabe, who had studied at Fort Hare and Oxford, and been head of the Luthuli Foundation, and subsequently the ANC Department of Education in Lusaka, defined the general goals for the educational programmes of the ANC in a paper dated 19/9/1981 on “The Role of Education in the Liberation Struggle”. H Macmillan, *The Lusaka years: The ANC in exile in Zambia 1963-1994* (Jacana, 2013), pays no attention to educational issues.

⁴⁰ M Prew, “Peoples education...”, TG Griffiths & Z Miller, *Logics of socialist education...*; P van Rensburg, *Report from Swaneng Hill: Education and employment in and African Country* (Uppsala, Dag Hammerskjöld Foundation, 1974); K Shillington, *Patrick van Rensburg: Rebel, visionary and radical educationalist* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2020).

Govender provides an outline to these policy issues raised in the context of the SOMAFCO/Dakawa educational experience—based on the limited archival material available relating to the London Education Committee (LEC), the Dar es Salaam Education Committee (DESEC), the Lusaka Education Committee (LEC), and the debates conducted in *The African Communist* between 1969 and 1992.⁴¹

Reflecting wider debates of the time on the nature of education in independent African states referred to above, these initiatives centred around the conflict between various interpretations of academic education, political education, vocational education or skill training (or polytechnic education in terms of SACP), or specialised skill training related to the needs of the armed struggle. In broad terms it would seem that the ANC leadership in general, and in particular, Oliver Tambo and Winshi Njobe, the founder principal of SOMAFCO, favoured academic education, as it reflected their shared background in missionary education in the era prior to apartheid education. There was also a strong case for this form of education for the students of SOMAFCO if they were to be prepared for opportunities for further studies at international higher education institutions. Such preparation was seen by many as essential to the future need for ‘high level manpower’ (the term current at the time) to train future leadership for the return to South Africa when the ANC would face the challenge of replacing the existing (white) professional elite.

Within this broad framework there was also much debate, as there had been in the Revolutionary period in France, about the need for the political education of these students. Were they to follow a curriculum that reflected the norms of western education as exemplified by the London University O Level examination that was still widely used in post-colonial Africa,⁴² or was that education to follow the Freirean model of constructivist education, or polytechnic education on a socialist model? As Govender points out, “in promoting the case for political education there seemed to be a Utopian belief in ‘political education’ as if it existed in a knowledge vacuum. That was the same issue that had been levelled at Freireans over the years”.⁴³ In the long run, these issues remained unresolved during the years of exile.

⁴¹ Eric Stilton, “The function of education in the struggle for liberation”, *African Communist*, 92, 1983, pp. 54-63; Kwanele, “We will formulate our own education policies”, (reply to Stilton) *African Communist*, 93, 1983, pp. 104-106; Boy Moremi, “The role of education in the struggle for national liberation”, *African Communist*, 96, 1984, pp. 108-110.

⁴² Also see the view of A Gramsci on the topic – R Govender, “The contestation, ambiguities...”, p. 109 citing AS Sasoon, *Gramsci's politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

⁴³ R Govender, “The contestation, ambiguities...”, pp. 197-205.

At the University of Essex, Harold Wolpe, a major figure in the revival of Marxist studies on South Africa from the 1970s,⁴⁴ established a unit for Research on Education in South Africa (RESA) which attempted to frame a debate about the future of education in a "new" South Africa and to provide a platform for "providing a political education for exiles".⁴⁵ Wolpe was also a member of ANC's LEC which played a key role in shaping the policies of ANC educational institutions at SOMAFCO and Dakawa in Tanzania.⁴⁶ In due course Wolpe returned to South Africa to head the Education Policy Unit at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and chaired the committee which coordinated the work of all the Education Policy Units (EPUs) established to research the field of educational policy. He participated in the work of the National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI) and ANC's Implementation Plan for Education and Training (IPET) (1994). Yet what remains unexplained is why, despite his influential position in the SACP, he was never offered any formal official role in the reconstruction of education in the new South Africa.⁴⁷

Even the impressive policy review of NEPI, sponsored by the NECC and funded by Swedish SIDA, which drew a large number of participants to policy conferences during the transition, had little long-term impact on the framing of policy by the new government.⁴⁸ As Badat noted, these exercises were too utopian in character, echoing Margaret Archer's remarks cited above, (Part 1 pp. 3-8) as they demonstrated "limited sensitivity to the difficult choices and trade-offs implied by any restructuring of education which was to simultaneously address questions of equality/redress/ development and economic growth".⁴⁹

⁴⁴ For more detail of the career of Wolpe see S Friedman, *Race, class and power...* His most important paper was H Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour power in South Africa", *Economy & Society*, 1(4), 1972, pp. 425-456. Despite his longstanding membership of the South African Communist Party and his prominent role in the revival of Marxist studies on Southern Africa, Wolpe is curiously hardly mentioned in the broader literature of the ANC and the SACP by Meli, Johnson, Maloka, Shubin, Ellis, Sapire, and Saunders.

⁴⁵ Also see J Muller cited in S Friedman, *Race, class and power...*, p. 63. See also E Unterhalter, H Wolpe & T Botha, *Apartheid education and popular struggles* (papers of RESA conference of 1989 sponsored by the Swedish Agency for Research in cooperation with Developing Countries) (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1991); E Unterhalter, H Wolpe & T Botha, *Education in a future South Africa: Policy issues for transformation* (Johannesburg: Heinemann, 1991).

⁴⁶ R Govender, "Contestation, ambiguities..."

⁴⁷ For debate on this issue see S Friedman, *Race, class and power...*, pp. 60-67.

⁴⁸ The National Education Policy Investigation, *The framework report* (Cape Town: OUP & NECC, 1993). See also P Kallaway et al. (eds.), *Education after apartheid...* It is a sad reflection on the process that there is only very limited reference to these proceedings in the indexes to the major works on the field by Linda Chisholm and Pam Christie. See L Chisholm (ed.), *Changing class: Education and social change in post-apartheid South Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004); P Christie, *Opening the doors of learning: Changing schools in South Africa* (Sandton: Heinemann, 2008).

⁴⁹ S Badat, "Educational politics...", P Kallaway et al., *Education after apartheid...*, p. 24.

During the negotiations that led to the political transition, the ANC was late in coming to the table on educational policy. It produced a preliminary *Discussion Paper for the ANC on Education Policy* (March 1991) to be followed by the famous Yellow Book, the ANC Education Department's, *Policy Framework for Education and Training* (APET) (1994). The Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) played a significant role in educational policy development by making strategic interventions into the policy and legislative process.⁵⁰ The CEPD worked closely with the political structures of the ANC to build consensus within the ANC educational alliance regarding policy objectives. It built channels of communication with the Ministry and Department of Education to ensure coherence in education policy development.⁵¹ These forums were also used to eliminate critical voices during these crucial debates.

The work of the CEPD

The CEPD, based in Johannesburg, was established in 1993 on the initiative of the mass democratic movement, its aim being to develop education policy for a democratic South Africa. It was promoted by the Parent/Teacher Associations, the NECC, the UDF, and the ANC. The Centre assisted in developing the framework on which many of the new South Africa's education and training policies were to be based and played an influential role in the development of the new South African education system.

In addition, it is important to recognise, as pointed out above, that the apartheid government, like the pre-revolutionary government in France, had made considerable effort to change the terms of educational policy in keeping with reforms in the economic and social system after the chaotic revolutionary events of Soweto 1976. Throughout the 1980s, in the wake of the pathbreaking HSRC report, chaired by the head of the Broederbond, Professor De Lange, there were a variety of attempts to accommodate critiques of apartheid education and propose alternative policies which would bring them in line with global policy trends—with particular attention to the cost-recovery model for public schooling and the vocational bias for mass education referred to above.

⁵⁰ Trevor Coombe, who had been on the staff of the University of Zambia and the Institute of Education, London University, was to play a major, but largely hidden role in crafting the new policy regime. His background during the 1980s in educational policy development in Africa, linked to the ODA and UNESCO, meant that he was well suited to the new roles he assumed in South Africa after 1996. Coombe was associated with the ANC Education Department in exile and became director of the CEPD in 1986. From 1993 he was Chief Director of the National Department of Education and oversaw much of the hard work of establishing new structures and processes, and crafting the finances of education. Coombe has not left a record of his work.

⁵¹ B Nzimande & S Mathieson, *Transforming South African education: The role of the ANC education study group, 1994 to 1999*, (CEPD, Braamfontein, 2004), pp. 1-2.

It is, therefore, important to recognise that, as a result of these reforms, the NP was able to retain considerable control of the terms of policy debate relating to educational reform at the time of the transition. The educational planners of the incumbent government could link their objectives to those of the World Bank and the IMF in a much more coherent manner than the amateur educational planners of NEPI, the NECC, and the ANC. The broadly progressive and socialist vision for education associated with the socialist left of the 1960s, and even the World Bank's visions confronting the “World Crisis in Education” and visions of mass rural education in Africa during the 1970s,⁵² were not entertained. The ANC simply did not have a plan, and the dynamics of international policy development left the major initiative for educational planning substantially in the hands of the incumbent government!

The narrowing of the educational policy agenda

That rendering down of the agenda took place primarily on two fronts, both related to the relationship between education and the marketplace. In broad terms these can be characterised under the headings of *Privatisation* and *Vocationalisation*.

In relation to *privatisation*, there was a shift in responsibility for the provision of education (funding to education) from the public to the private realm from the state to the community/parents and students, and the privatisation or semi-privatisation of state assets, with an increased reliance on the market in the provision of education and the promotion of a private school's sector. Under newly constituted School Governing Bodies (SGBs), the former white schools were placed under parental committees which were responsible for the management, maintenance, admissions, and financing of the schools. In this way the former white state schools were transformed into the new non-racial Model C Schools with strict selection criteria and high fees.

It is also important to note that, in the wake of the major civil unrest and political changes being discussed here, in both France (as indicated above) and South Africa, private education flourished. Only those with the financial resources managed to secure quality education for their children in these times of disorder. This occurred either via access to private educational institutions for those who could afford the high fees, or for the

⁵² PH Coombs, *The world education crisis: A systems analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); E Faure, F Herrera, A Kaddoura, H Lopes, A Petrovsky, M Rahnema & F War, *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow* (Paris: UNESCO, 1972); P Coombs & M Ahmed, *Attacking rural poverty: How nonformal education can help* (Washington: World Bank, 1974); World Bank, *Education sector policy paper* (Washington, 1980); P Coombs, *The world crisis in education: The view from the eighties* (UNESCO, 1985).

limited numbers of, usually middle-class black children, who now managed to gain access to formerly whites-only state schools. This implies a major drift towards the advantages bestowed to middle-class children in these circumstances—a pull in the opposite direction to the equalitarian popular rhetoric of People's Education.⁵³

The other key aspect of the reform agenda from the 1980s was the *vocationalisation* of basic education. The rhetorical claims of a constructivist view of knowledge, and the Freirian emphasis on the expression of the grievances of the dispossessed, which were featured prominently in the oppositional discourse of the People's Education movement and the powerful FOSATU/COSATU trade union movement, came to be translated into skill development programmes and a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). These placed an emphasis on training programmes that were modelled on New Right programmes originating in the United Kingdom and Australia.⁵⁴ The training programmes were to be regulated by a South African Qualifications Framework (SAQA) and to be financed through Sector Education Training Authorities (SETAs), which provided a levy on the private sector to promote skills development, explicitly aimed at promoting global economic competitiveness. These reforms, which were directed at the training of the workforce, were then translated into the language of school curriculum reform through Outcomes Based Education (OBE) and Curriculum 2005, or subsequently, the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) (2002).⁵⁵

The change of emphasis from the calls for mass popular education on the model of the previous apartheid era curriculum was translated into a shift towards a vocational education approach in keeping with international trends at the time. Or, to express differently, to align education and training policy to bring it in line with the perceived goals of the new Growth plans as set out in the pro-market GEAR programme of the ANC government during the Mbeki era.

⁵³ N Spaull, "Equity: A price too high to pay", N Spaull & J Jansen (eds.), *South African schooling: The enigma of inequality: A study of the present situation and future possibilities* (Springer, 2019); S van der Berg, "Apartheid's enduring legacy; Inequality in education", *Journal of African Economics*, 16(5), 2007, 849-880; EB Fiske & HF Ladd, *Elusive equity: Education reform in post-apartheid South Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 2005); M Hunter, *Race for education: Gender, white tone and schooling in South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁵⁴ S McGrath, "Reading the NQF: Towards an analytic framework", P Kallaway et al. (eds.), *Education after apartheid ...*, pp. 169-182; S Allais, *Selling out education: National qualifications frameworks and the neglect of knowledge* (Rotterdam: Sense, 2014); H Lauder & D Hughes, *Trading in futures: Why markets in education don't work* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999).

⁵⁵ See P Kallaway et al. (eds.), *Education after apartheid ...*; L Chisholm (ed.) *Changing Class: Education and Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004).

Fataar summarises these developments with respect to educational policy. He argues that 'a pragmatic equity-based development discourse' occupied centre stage in ANC circles prior to the 1994 election. These proposals had been based on a somewhat insubstantial tradition of educational reform that reached back to the Freedom Charter. An increasing ambivalence subsequently crept into the policy positions of the GNU after the election. At this time, government policy manifested an uneasy balance between a focus on equality or growth.

The narrowing of the policy agenda was achieved through GEAR's preference for growth as the conceptual pivot of state policy. The educational policy development trajectory has to be evaluated in relation to this constricting framework. While the transition enabled South Africa to move toward political democracy it also entrenched a political and ideological framework which limited the extent to which educational transformations could be achieved. ... policy – making was affected by the constricting parameters of the global economic environment, which South Africa, like all other LDCs, had to face.⁵⁶

These choices, in line with World Bank guidelines, were to be made within the restricted political and economic framework often referred to as *voluntary structural adjustment*.⁵⁷

The adoption of GEAR in 1996 represented a victory for the growth-led macro-economic policy and the sidelining of equality as the focus of reconstruction. In real terms the RDP was replaced by the business-friendly GEAR policies very soon after the transition, a development which ensured that a broadly neo-liberal agenda replaced the social/democratic/welfarist tone of the RDP.⁵⁸ This, in Fataar's terms, is what occasioned the narrowing of the policy agenda in education. These moves related to issues of 'flexibility and integration', fiscal discipline, public sector restructuring, pointed to above. The key issues highlighted above were cost-efficiency/cost-effectiveness/cost recovery and cost-sharing, privatisation, and decentralisation and they promote a radically different vision of society to that which informed the liberation struggle.

The old terms of social justice inherited from the French Revolutionary tradition (liberty, equality, and fraternity) had been redefined within the terms of the conservative restoration of the 1990s to "the guaranteeing of individual choice under the conditions of the free market".⁵⁹ Despite much fanfare about the end of apartheid education, education reforms moved very slowly under the new Minister of Education, Bengu, despite significant exercises to promote policy debate within circumscribed boundaries.

⁵⁶ A Fataar, *Education policy* ..., p. 110.

⁵⁷ J Moulton, *Educational reform in Sub-Saharan Africa*

⁵⁸ A Fataar, *Education policy* ..., Ch. 6.

⁵⁹ A Fataar, *Education policy* ..., p. 58 citing M. W. Apple, "How equality has been redefined in the Conservative restoration", WG Secada (ed.), *Equity in education* (London: Falmer, 1989), p. 9.

The National Development Plan (NDP) (2012), which was an attempt to keep the dream of the RDP alive and retain “development” as a key aspect of economic growth, was recently judged to have “been marginalized”, as it had not been provided with the policy muscle to deliver on its mandate.⁶⁰ The NDP set out optimistic social and economic goals to be achieved by 2030. Yet by 2023, the Public Economy Project (PEP) at the University of the Witwatersrand reported that “a chronic deterioration in the capacity of the state, the quality of the social services, and the outcomes they are intended to achieve” meant that “in the decade after 2012 there were significant reductions in real spending on basic education and criminal justice, while healthcare budgets have been increasingly under pressure”⁶¹ The Gini coefficient measure of poverty demonstrated that South Africa had remained at 0.69% between 2012 and 2022, meaning that it remained one of the most unequal societies on earth.

ANC policy on education

The constraints of the GNU were only too soon to become obvious to observers. As a government that had come to power through the ballot box, as part of a coalition between the old (National Party) and the new (Alliance) there was not a great deal of space for manoeuvre on major political principles....there was a broad assumption that New Right agendas would be taken for granted and the nature of international power relations at the end of the twentieth century ensured that the choices of the GNU, and even its successor Alliance government, were extremely limitedthe rule of law, the entrenchment of property rights, and the commitment to a free market order (with all that it entailed in terms of fiscal stringency, a limited state, the immanent privatization of key areas of the public sector constraint, (including education), ensured that there would be no radical changes that would disrupt the entrenched class structure of South African society.⁶²

Just as Thermidor had opened the way for a measure of social reform in revolutionary France, the early 1990s also opened the way for such reforms in South Africa, however, just as the Napoleonic era had arrested radical social reform in the interests of modernisation,

⁶⁰ City Press, *Business* (17 September 2023), p. 1.

⁶¹ S Smit, “Austerity, the NDP’s grim reaper”, *Mail & Guardian*, 29 September 2023; Imraan Valodia – on line; In 2019 the World Economic Forum on Global Competitiveness Report noted that South Africa ranked 137 out of 141 countries in the quality of its primary education. Despite spending 6% of GDP on education, it was noted that significant features of the system were inadequate infrastructure, low teacher morale and lack of access to quality resources (*Daily Maverick*, 1/10/23).

⁶² P Kallaway et al. (eds.), *Education after apartheid...*, p. 38.

economic efficiency and bureaucratic centralisation, so there were severe constraints on radical reform in the South African context. The Utopian vision of a new education which would construct a new, equal, and just society was superseded by the kinds of trade-off’s that Archer refers to above.

Apartheid education had demonstrated the potentially negative effects of a modern education system, and the response to that in the post-Soweto era was often associated with Freirean pedagogy of liberation and the fashionable constructivist views of knowledge, with the vision of a potential new chapter in educational history. Mandela’s successor, Thabo Mbeki, supplemented these trends with his support for the notion of an *African Renaissance*, which represented a weak link between modernisation and identity politics.⁶³

The Freirean emphasis on pedagogy as a mechanism for the expression of the grievances of the dispossessed featured prominently in the oppositional discourse of the People’s Education movement and the educational projects of the powerful FOSATU/COSATU trade union movement. Yet, as Chisholm pointed out in her review of policy in 2002, the problematic nature of the commitment to a “people-driven education and policy development” that was a key feature of the IPET process and the RDP programmes, would inevitably lead to potential conflict between constituencies in the future.⁶⁴

There was no Condorcet to provide guidance in the field of education. The nearest equivalent was Rick Turner who had studied at the Sorbonne, and his work, reflecting the ethos of the ‘Sixties’, highlights the need for critical learning and independent critical education. This view often put Turner at odds with the workerist world of industrial workers’ organisations in Durban. Turner was assassinated by the apartheid police.⁶⁵

A significant commentary on the above developments is that none of the key actors were experienced educators or planners in the field of education. However, nowhere in the documents is there any sign of attention to the need to engage with broader issues of educational philosophy or policy practice. It was only with the emergence of RESA, under

⁶³ As Tom Lodge commented at the time, the idea of an African Renaissance “all too easily could become debased into a series of self-congratulatory maxims in which the recollections of African identity of ancient civilizations...become the foundation myths of a new imagined community in which racial sentiment rather than political principle is the animating idea”, Tom Lodge, *South African Politics since 1994* (Cape Town: David Philips, 1999), pp. 108-109.

⁶⁴ L Chisholm, (2002), p. 85.

⁶⁵ R Turner, *The eye of the needle: Towards participatory democracy in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1973); B Keniston, *Choosing to be free: A life story of Rick Turner* (Jacana Media, 2013); P Ensor, D Glaser, C Hobden, B Keniston, A Omar, JS Sanni ... & C Soudien, *Rick Turner’s politics as the art of the impossible* (Johannesburg: Wits Press, 2024).

the guiding hand of Harold Wolpe, that some attention came to be given to these issues. The general lack of expertise among educational planners was to come at a high cost in the future.

Conclusion

In the absence of a policy framework in education, inherited from the years in exile, the ANC was unable to provide a significant counterpoint to the educational reforms already under way in South Africa by 1990. The point of reference for both the ANC and the NP initiatives during the period of transition was often the expertise of international agencies, such as the World Bank, the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), and the IMF. The critical perspectives which were consolidated in the important NEPI exercise (1991-1993) were largely ignored in the policy development exercise of the new generation of planners that was assembled by Trevor Coombe and John Samuel at the CEPD from 1993. On the other hand, the worker education, adult education, and the training discourses of the labour movement context, remained an abiding influence on the new educational proposals. Their powerful influence due to the support of COSATU can be recognised in the White Paper on Education and Training (WPET) (1995), the National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI) (1995) and the NQF proposals which came to have a dominating influence on policy.

The conclusions of Fataar and Govender seem convincing with relation to the development of educational policy in the 1990s. The NEPI exercise was bypassed as being far too abstract for the concrete policy realities that had to be faced in the final negotiations in 1994. "The ANC favoured a traditional curriculum approach that, while consistent with an academic approach it had favoured historically and while in exile, resonated with the reformist politics that came to be dominated by the expertise of the free market ideologues, business interests, the National Party and World Bank expertise."⁶⁶ They argue that RESA and the NEPI recommendations advanced an amalgam of progressive interests (which) were simply too nebulous to inform the concrete requirements of the new democratic government. The ANC now had to contend with demands for specific policy proposals instead of the policy option scenarios presented by RESA or NEPI.

Roger Southall notes: "'The Revolution Betrayed' is almost as old as the idea of social revolution itself for human history offers a litany of examples of frustrated revolutionary

⁶⁶ R Govender & A Fataar, p. 7.

hopes.”⁶⁷ The South African reformers inherited the ideals and ideology/philosophy of previous experience, as did other revolutions and reformers during transitions, however, they did little to explicitly explore the traditions upon which they were building outside of vague references to Freire’s ‘pedagogy of hope’.

My tentative task has been to attempt to compare the radical atmosphere of change and expectation related to the reform of education that surfaced in France two centuries ago—with similar challenges which faced South Africa at the end of apartheid—where there was also a strong expectation that educational change would create a new society in which the social evils of the *ancient regime*/the apartheid regime would be vanquished and social justice would be secured for all.

Both in France and in South Africa, the utopian promise relating to social justice, reflected in the educational discourses of the revolutionary phase, was severely compromised after the old regime had been overturned. The ideals for education as a major lever of social change fell far short of expectations. The difficulty of reconciling individual freedom of thought and actions, as conceived of by Condorcet in terms of the Enlightenment ideas of human perfectibility, or the vision of political freedom associated with Rick Turner, presented significant challenges to educational reformers, then and now.

Barnard’s comments on educational policy during the French Revolution could apply to, the present time:

*The difficulty of reconciling individual freedom of thought and actions with nationalist requirements prescribed by the State is one which remains and which sometimes confronts even modern democracies.... A policy of education based exclusively on the idea of patriotism and utility (“or the ‘needs’ of the market pk”) was bound to destroy the very premise of liberal education – freedom to think without concern for immediate practical results.*⁶⁸

⁶⁷ R Southall, *Liberation movements in power: Party and state in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2013), p. 10.

⁶⁸ HC Barnard, *Education and the French Revolution*. (Cambridge: CUP, 1969): pp. 212-217.

From Turning Point to Footnote: The 1976 Soweto Uprising in the CAPS History Curriculum

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a10>

Bongumenzi Mthethwa

University of Zululand, Empangeni, South Africa

MthethwaBM@unizulu.ac.za

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8604-8367>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a10>

Abstract

The 1976 Soweto Uprising is a significant turning point in South African history. This student-led revolt not only exposed the brutality of apartheid to the world, it also reshaped the trajectory of the liberation struggle, contributing profoundly to the system's eventual overthrow. However, 50 years later, its place within the school History curriculum remains surprisingly marginal. Under the current Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), the Soweto Uprising is briefly taught in Grade 9 Social Sciences, within the unit "Turning points in South African history: 1948, 1960, 1976 and 1990". It reappears in Grade 12 History under the theme "Civil Resistance in South Africa, 1970s–1980s", but again, receives even less attention. In both instances, the event is not explored in depth, raising important concerns about how such a pivotal moment in anti-apartheid resistance features in contemporary national education. I argue that this situation is untenable. The arguments align with three theories: Critical Curriculum Theory (CCT); Postcolonial Theory (PT); and Critical Pedagogy (CP). These theories help examine whose knowledge becomes included and excluded in the curriculum, how colonisation influences knowledge production even post-independence, and discuss how power, oppression, and liberation influence education. The current study proposes, amongst other things, that CAPS allocate more time and in-depth content to the Soweto Uprising; that the Soweto Uprising be taught as a stand-alone topic; that the History curriculum be reviewed for it to foreground Black youth agency, African epistemologies, and 'history from below'; and the inclusion of oral histories from the surviving participants of the Soweto Uprising. All proposals were made after consulting the CAPS documents and prescribed textbooks to investigate how the Soweto Uprising is featured in the school's History curriculum.

Keywords: Soweto Uprising; Curriculum; Postcolonial; Critical Pedagogy; African epistemologies; History from below

Introduction

2026 marks the 50th anniversary of the 1976 Soweto Uprising. As we commemorate the heroism of the young Black school children who took it upon themselves in their tender ages to challenge the colonial and racist apartheid regime, it is vital to evaluate how the 1976 Soweto Uprising is represented in the formal school History curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa. History education plays a vital role in shaping national identity and collective memory (Carretero et al., 2013; Bentrovato, 2017; Carretero, 2017; Wassermann, 2017; Cajani et al., 2019; Nkosi, 2025). The question of how historical events and figures feature in the school curriculum is therefore very significant. Sadly, this epochal event is given only marginal attention in the current History curriculum.

In this paper, I argue that the representation of the Soweto Uprising in the school History curriculum has reduced it to a footnote. The study proposes four major interventions to the curriculum to effectively feature the Soweto Uprising and ensure it receives the recognition it deserves as a watershed in South African history. I submit that, rather than being part of the broad topic on the challenge of Black Consciousness to the apartheid state in the Grade 12 History curriculum, the 1976 Soweto Uprising should be treated as a stand-alone topic to allow for a more in-depth critical examination of its causes, effects, and historical significance. The curriculum should also be revised to include African epistemologies¹ (See Adeate and Sewchurran, 2023), Black youth agency² (Jovino et al., 2023), and “history from below”³ (Rediker, 2022, p. 296). Oral histories from surviving participants should be incorporated to guarantee a more decolonised, participative, and critically grounded portrayal of 1976.

As 2026 marks the end of the fifth decade after the outbreak of the 1976 Soweto Uprising, it is necessary to interrogate the ideological and pedagogical role of the curriculum in framing this watershed moment. Curriculum is a site of struggle; there is an inevitable process of selection, emphasis, simplification, and omission (Apple, 2004). This is more so because of the enduring colonial-apartheid residues, transformations, and in light of the

¹ African epistemology refers to the study of knowledge from an African perspective with emphasis on unique cultural, historical, and social contexts of African societies. It challenges the individualistic nature of Western epistemology as it focuses on the importance of communal relations and interconnectedness in knowledge production

² Black youth agency refers to young Black people's capacity to think independently and make decisions of their own about their lives and their future.

³ History from below refers to the historiographical approach that focuses on the lives, experiences, contributions, and agency of ordinary people instead of ‘great men’ histories which focus only on the elites and major political events.

calls for decolonial approaches (Godsell & Maluleka, 2025). This article critically analyses how the Uprising is positioned and contextualised within the CAPS History curriculum, to illuminate the broader politics of memory and knowledge production in post-apartheid education. It also investigates whether the curriculum does justice to the radical agency, plurality of voices, and enduring significance of the 1976 generation.

The marginalisation of a turning point: 1976 Soweto Uprising in the CAPS curriculum

The Soweto Uprising marked a watershed in the South African liberation struggle (Brown, 2016; Heffernan et al., 2016; Seroto, 2018). What began as a student protest in the streets of Soweto on 16 June 1976 became a turning point that culminated in the overthrow of the oppressive and discriminatory apartheid regime (Brown, 2016). Offended by the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in Black schools and many other challenges that affected and compromised Black education, such as overcrowded classrooms, unqualified educators, lack of resources, and poor infrastructure, the students in Soweto embarked on a peaceful march aimed at expressing their grievances to the authorities. After the confrontation with the police, the peaceful demonstration turned violent when the police opened fire and killed unarmed school children in full school uniform (Ndlovu, 2017). The unrest that began in Soweto spread across the country quickly, as students from different parts of the country joined in solidarity with those who took it upon themselves to challenge the imposition of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction, Bantu Education and ultimately, the apartheid government (Radebe, 2022). The protest became nationwide and caught the national and international attention as it exposed the brutality of apartheid to a larger audience. The 1976 Soweto Uprising became very instrumental in mobilising both local and international support against the apartheid regime (Mkhabela, 2001). The 1976 Soweto Uprising brought schoolchildren to the centre of the liberation struggle in South Africa (Brown, 2016).

The Soweto Uprising, due to its historical importance, is a crucial component of South African collective memory and national identity. However, it is disturbing that, 50 years later, the Soweto Uprising's place within the school History curriculum remains surprisingly on the periphery. In the current South African school curriculum prescribed by CAPS, the Soweto Uprising is taught only in two grades. Firstly, it is covered in Grade 9 Social Sciences within the unit *"Turning points in South African history: 1948, 1960, 1976 and 1990"* (Department of Basic Education, 2011a, p. 44) Secondly, it is also included in Grade

12 History under the theme “*Civil Resistance in South Africa, 1970s–1980s*” (Department of Basic Education, 2011b, p. 29). In both these Grades, the Soweto Uprising receives limited attention. In these grades, the event is not explored in depth, raising genuine concerns about its underrepresentation.

The Soweto Uprising not only exposed the brutality of the apartheid regime, it also revitalised the history of powerful youth in South African activism, community mobilisation, and international solidarity; therefore, one would reasonably expect it to be covered in depth within the formal school History curriculum. However, its presence remains comparatively marginal as it is situated within a wider narrative of resistance rather than being examined as a distinct and complex historical event. In the current school curriculum, both in Grades 9 and 12, the Soweto Uprising is allocated limited depth and scope, thereby constraining opportunities for thorough understanding and critical engagement. Although included under “turning points in South African history” (Department of Basic Education, 2011a, p. 44), in Grade 9 the Soweto Uprising is also not covered in depth. This marginalisation raises important concerns regarding historical representation, pedagogical emphasis, and the framing of transformative events within the post-apartheid educational discourse, as they remain in the footnotes of the curriculum. Moreover, the manner in which the Soweto Uprising is portrayed in the CAPS curriculum influences the students’ understanding of apartheid history and the broader struggle for justice.

From resistance to representation: Scholarly perspectives on the Soweto Uprising and the politics of knowledge production in South African History education

Different scholars have written about the 1976 Soweto Uprising from different perspectives. The focal point for many is the debate about the actual causes and what transpired on 16 June 1976. As Ndlovu (2017), who is part of the 1976 generation, posits, the Uprising can be interpreted from different perspectives. Scholars such as Brown (2016), Heffernan et al., (2016), and Ndlovu (2017) have focused on many issues underpinning the Soweto Uprising. The aforementioned scholars focused on the role that Black Consciousness played as the popular philosophy among young Black people in the townships at the time of influencing students in Soweto and across the country. As Brown (2016) argues, Black Consciousness sowed the seeds of resistance that flowed during the Soweto Uprising. There has also been a focus on contextualising the Soweto Uprising within the broader,

long history of Black resistance, linking the Uprising to other protests that preceded it (See Brown, 2016). For example, Brown argues that the Soweto Uprising should be seen as the culmination of developments that had been unfolding for a decade; it was never a dramatic break. The author stated this while arguing against the myth of a “quiet decade” between the 1960s and 1970s (Brown, 2016, p. 89; Cole, 2017). Brown’s argument dispels the notion that there was a political vacuum after the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in 1960, following the Sharpeville Massacre and the earlier banning of the South African Communist Party (SACP). However, one can add that the Soweto Uprising was a continuation of the Black people’s struggle against colonialism that began long before 1976. The influence of racist and exploitative apartheid policies, including the Bantu Education Act of 1953, has also been looked at as a foreground for the explosion of the Uprising (See Mafeje, 1978).

While scholars have grappled with the 1976 Soweto Uprising, a prevailing limitation in the literature is its focus on the representation of the Uprising in the school curriculum. Studies focusing on the representation of the 1976 Soweto Uprising in the curriculum are comparatively few. Seroto (2018) examined the representation of the 1976 Soweto Uprising in Grade 9 History textbooks. Five different Grade 9 History textbooks were selected for Seroto’s study. When Seroto published his article in 2018, History was, as it continues to be, taught as a component of the Social Sciences subject in Grade 9 under the CAPS curriculum. Seroto (2018) found that in Grade 9 there is an omission of historical facts about the causes of the Soweto Uprising and this limits learners’ opportunity to make evidence-based and reasoned judgements about the topic; there is an inadequate use of primary and secondary sources to mediate the effective aspects of the Soweto Uprising; the content covered by the textbooks lacks multiple voices and perspective; and what the topic entails does not fully engage learners in complex and contested issues about the 1976 Soweto Uprising (Seroto, 2018). These are the interesting findings about the representation of the 1976 Soweto Uprising in the selected Grade 9 History textbooks; however, the limitation of Seroto’s study is that it focuses only on the representation of the 1976 Soweto Uprising in Grade 9, whereas the same topic is also covered in Grade 12 at the Further Education and Training (FET) phase.

It is, however, worth acknowledging that many scholars have discussed History textbooks across various curriculum reforms. According to Bertram and Wassermann (2015), studies analysing South African History textbooks date back to the 1940s. Many of these studies have analysed History textbooks in relation to curriculum changes or

reforms influenced by political shifts, especially during the transition from apartheid to the post-apartheid dispensation (Bertram & Wassermann, 2015). Scholars such as Auerbach (1965), Dean, Hartman, and Katzen (1983), and Du Preez (1983) analysed History textbooks in apartheid South Africa. These textbooks were largely influenced by Afrikaner nationalist historiography and the European point of view (Wassermann, 2011; Bertram & Wassermann, 2015). The History textbooks produced in apartheid South Africa represented a particular version of history that sought to legitimise and promote apartheid and colonial establishment (Bertram & Bharath, 2011; Wassermann, 2011; and Maposa, 2014). Bertram and Wassermann (2015) argue that the conception, production, and uses of textbooks are politically and educationally contentious.

Studies that analysed History textbooks found that apartheid-era textbooks were teeming with stereotypes, prejudices, and biases that served the ruling party, the National Party (NP) (See Engelbrecht, 2006; Chernis, 2010; Bertram & Wassermann, 2015). The content carried by these History textbooks and their complicity with apartheid raised some controversy as some of the writers such as Chisholm (1981) and Waller (2009) challenged the presence of apartheid ideology in the textbooks (also see Maposa, 2014). These studies also found that the textbooks were essential in promulgating the history that was taught in apartheid South Africa, which was full of indoctrination and promoted rote learning over critical thinking (Kallaway, 2012). Kallaway (2012) further states that the history curriculum has always been at the centre of the debate about the nature of education in South Africa, focusing mainly on what version of history is presented in the curriculum and textbooks. This is because, as Maluleka and Mathebula (2022) argue, history is a dynamic, contested discipline.

The question of who is writing a History textbook, and when, how, and why, is crucial (Ramoroka & Engelbrecht, 2015), especially in the South African context, where there is a long history of colonialism and apartheid. In the main, historians from different schools of thought have written books that have been crucial to the curriculum taught in schools. These schools included the British imperialist school, the settler or colonialist school, the Afrikaner nationalist school, the liberal school, the revisionist or radical school, and the African nationalist school (Visser, 2004). These different schools, especially the British imperialist school and the Afrikaner nationalist school, have determined what events and narratives are covered or omitted in the school curriculum (Nyathi & Nkosi, 2025). These schools have not been without criticism. In the main, the idea is that they have always written from the Eurocentric framework, and their positionality is questionable for being predominantly white settlers (Maluleka & Ledwaba, 2023).

The transition period to post-apartheid South Africa saw a rise in both new History textbooks aligned with the revised curriculum (Schoeman, 2009) and studies analysing History textbooks (Maposa, 2014). This was because of the realisation of the power and influence that History textbooks have in shaping society (Bertram & Wassermann, 2015). The post-apartheid period marked the emergence of curriculum changes and reforms that restructured content and pedagogical approaches in History textbooks (Bertram & Bharath, 2011). There was a shift from the teaching (and learning) of History that relied solely on a positivist model, which saw history as “objective, truthful History”, suppressing critical thinking and multiple perspectives in engaging with History (Wassermann, 2011:131). This marked the beginning of a trajectory to undo the teaching of History that focused on fact-learning tradition dependent on rote learning (Mthethwa & Maluleka, 2025) in post-apartheid South Africa, History curriculum and textbooks carried a responsibility of representing the new democratic values and social justice to be inclusive and balanced (Bertram & Bharath, 2011). However, the debate on whether the current History curriculum and textbooks have achieved these objectives remains ongoing.

There is a thriving body of scholarship on the representation of history from below in history textbooks. Some scholars use a gender lens and focus on the representations of women in the content of these textbooks (See Osler, 1994; Schoeman, 2009; Chiponda & Wassermann, 2011; Wills, 2016; and Nkosi, 2025). Nkosi (2025) argues that the South African History curriculum remains male-centric and underrepresents women’s experiences, despite the country’s rich and diverse history. Nkosi (2025) further states that although CAPS advocates for inclusivity and social justice, certain events remain underrepresented in History textbooks. Nkosi uses the 1976 Soweto Uprising as one of the examples, and posits that the role of young women is ignored in favour of male-dominated narratives.

Almost similar concerns about the underrepresentation of women in the South African History textbooks have also been raised by scholars such as Schoeman (2009), Chiponda and Wassermann (2011), and Wills (2016), who argue that there is a persistent marginalisation of women in the school History textbooks, which makes History taught and learnt in schools a ‘men’s history’. These studies bring to light the fact that women in post-apartheid South Africa are underrepresented. This underrepresentation of women goes a long way, both in distorting history and in perpetuating systemic gender biases.

Studies on the underrepresentation of some histories in the South African History textbooks have not only focused on gender biases. Some of these studies have focused on

broad aspects that scholars consider highly important, and they are worth considering in History textbooks to achieve the CAPS-set objective of an inclusive and representative curriculum. Mthethwa and Maluleka (2025), for example, have written about the underrepresentation of certain histories in the school History curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa, using the 1950s *Drum* generation as a case study. The article argues that the school History curriculum marginalises the contributions of the 1950s *Drum* generation to the liberation struggle (Mthethwa & Maluleka, 2025). Maluleka and Godsell (2024) have written about the continued absence of the LGBTIQA+ community in the History textbooks in post-apartheid South Africa. Their concern is that despite their contribution to the struggle for liberation, the LGBTIQA+ community continue to face exclusion in the school History curriculum (Maluleka & Godsell, 2024). These studies expose the limitations of current History textbooks, which do not adequately cover some significant historical events and figures.

Theorising curriculum marginalisation in post-apartheid South Africa

The arguments made in the current article resonate with three theories, namely Critical Curriculum Theory (CCT), Postcolonial Theory (PT), and Critical Pedagogy (CP). CCT, for instance, posits that the social, political, and economic dynamics of society shape the school curriculum. This makes the curriculum vulnerable to capture by powerful, dominant groups in society (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2010). PT provides critical lenses for analysing how the political, social, cultural, and epistemic legacies of colonialism and imperialism persist in the postcolonial era in formerly colonised societies (Said, 1978; Wa Thiong'o, 1986). In the South African context, this theory offers a framework to examine the enduring residues of apartheid in the post-apartheid period. CP, rooted primarily in the works of Paulo Freire (1970), understands education as inherently political and is underpinned by broader culture, ideology, and power relations. It opposes the idea of neutral education. According to this theory, education can be used either to reproduce or to contest social inequalities (Freire, 1970).

These theories are useful in supporting the current analysis and discussion on the underrepresentation of the 1976 Soweto Uprising in the CAPS History curriculum. They are also useful in supporting the lens employed in the current study when offering the proposals in this article. When using these lenses, it becomes clear why significant historical events such as the 1976 Soweto Uprising are in the margins of the school's History

curriculum prescribed by CAPS. The curriculum remains Eurocentric and reproduces the status quo, where histories of Black people remain poorly written and excluded from mainstream History. The inclusion of a well-written, broad history of the 1976 Soweto Uprising would enable the History curriculum to play a significant role in emancipation and social transformation in post-apartheid South Africa.

Document analysis of CAPS and textbook representations of the 1976 Soweto Uprising

For the purposes of the current article, the CAPS History Curriculum (Grades 10-12) and CAPS Social Sciences Curriculum (Grades 07-09) documents were used, as well as the prescribed History textbooks for Grades 9 and 12, to analyse and interpret the portrayal of the 1976 Soweto Uprising in the CAPS History curriculum. Both CAPS documents and prescribed textbooks were analysed using the Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) design to examine how the Soweto Uprising is represented in the school History curriculum and textbooks (Bowen, 2009; Lichtman, 2023). I purposively chose two textbooks that are among the prescribed CAPS-aligned learner textbooks: *New Generation History Grade 12 Learner's Book* (2013), edited by Dr Gengs Pillay, Lindiwe Sikhakhane, and Niny West, for Grade 12 and *Oxford Successful, Social Sciences Learner's Book* (2013), edited by J. Bottaro, S. Cohen, L. Dilley, D. Duffett, and P. Visser, for Grade 9. I examined how content about the 1976 Soweto Uprising is selected, structured, and presented in the official curriculum documents and prescribed textbooks. Focus was particularly placed on the sections dealing with resistance, liberation struggle and the Soweto Uprising. The documents analysed and interpreted are significant, because they are the authoritative texts used by the state to transmit historical knowledge to learners.

In the above-mentioned documents, the depth and breadth of the content covered by the textbooks on the 1976 Soweto Uprising in post-apartheid South Africa was examined, and second, whether the 1976 Soweto Uprising is treated in the curriculum as a vital watershed or marginalised as a minor event. Thirdly, the patterns of inclusion and exclusion (what is included in the curriculum and what is excluded) were analysed. Lastly, the ideological assumptions underpinning the representation of the 1976 Soweto Uprising were examined.

Reducing a watershed to a debate: The framing of the 1976 Soweto Uprising in Grade 12

In Grade 12, CAPS is clear from the outset: “The events of 1976 should not be covered in-depth, but as part of the debates around the influence of the Black Consciousness Movement on pupils in schools and in particular, on the Soweto Uprising” (History CAPS document Grades 10-12, p.29). CAPS further states that “The Soweto Uprising is not studied in full here, because it was covered in Grade 9” (Department of Basic Education, 2011b, p. 29). Therefore, anyone who engages with the Grade 12 History book knows that there is little to expect about the significant event that became a watershed in South African history and led to the overthrow of the apartheid regime. In Grade 12 History, learners are told that they have already learnt about the Soweto Uprising years back when they were doing Social Sciences in Grade 9 in the General Education and Training (GET). CAPS suggests that in Grade 12 History, students should focus only on debates about whether the Soweto Uprising was influenced by Black Consciousness ideology.

The *New Generation History Grade 12 Learner's Book*, edited by Dr Gengs Pillay, Lindiwe Sikhakhane, and Niny West, is widely used for its detailed content. In this book, the Soweto Uprising appears under “Topic 4: Civil Resistance in South Africa, 1970s to 1980s: What was the Nature of the Civil Society Resistance after the 1960s?” It is covered only in three pages (pages 243-246). As prescribed by CAPS, this textbook focuses mainly on the debates surrounding whether learners in 1976 were influenced by Black Consciousness thinking. Anything else mentioned about the Soweto Uprising is not explored thoroughly; it is mentioned in passing to focus on the targeted debate. The debate itself is necessary, because the section focuses on the challenge of Black Consciousness to the apartheid state, this includes the outbreak of the Soweto Uprising, particularly the influence of Black Consciousness on the uprising.

The section on the 1976 Soweto Uprising begins with the following line: “Now let us briefly review the events of June 1976 which you learnt about in Grade 11 (Stephenson et al., 2013, p. 243). This line is misleading, because the Grade 11 content does not cover the 1976 Soweto uprising. The only topic more closely related to the Soweto Uprising is Topic 5: Apartheid in South Africa, 1940s to 1960s. This topic covers events that predated and can be linked to the Soweto Uprising for their influence, including the Sharpeville Massacre; however, it does not cover the 1976 Soweto Uprising. The content itself covered in the brief review in Grade 12 is vague; for example, it is mentioned in the textbook that “the

police then fired on the crowd with live ammunition, killing Hector Pieterse and Hastings Ndlovu. Hundreds more were injured” (Stephenson et al., 2013, p. 243). Mentioning only Pieterse and Ndlovu, whereas many students were killed on 16 June 1976, including in the following days, is problematic. The sentence quoted from the textbook suggests only Pieterse and Ndlovu were killed, whereas Cummings (2016) wrote that by the end of 16 June 1976, police had killed 176 students and injured thousands.

Regarding the debate about the Soweto Uprising itself and political influence, the youth were indeed influenced not only by the Black Conscious Movement, but also by ANC members, as the textbook suggests. This is true, because some students were influenced by their parents, family, and community members who were affiliated with the banned organisations, including the ANC and the PAC (see Ndlovu, 2017). However, it is worrisome that nothing is mentioned about the PAC’s influence. Zeph Mothopeng of the PAC is one of the people who were influential in the 1976 generation (Hlongwane, 2021; Ndlovu, 2017). In 1976, Mothopeng was a teacher and a resident in Soweto. He and other PAC-linked teachers, such as Sithembele Khala and Dan Mofokeng, are credited for their underground operations in Soweto during the Soweto Uprising (Ndlovu, 2017).

The Grade 12 History curriculum reduces the Soweto Uprising to just another event in South African history. The curriculum misses the opportunity to share the rich, detailed history of the Soweto Uprising. This would help learners understand how significant this event was in the struggle for Black liberation. The current History curriculum misses many other opportunities. Firstly, it should have focused on the Soweto Uprising as a watershed moment and its influence on the collapse of the apartheid regime. This would include the short and long-term achievements of the uprising, including the international support that South Africa gained following the Soweto Uprising and the widespread distribution of the iconic picture of the shot Hector Pieterse carried by Mbuyisa Makhuba, who was running together with Antonette Sithole trying to rush the young boy to the nearest Phefeni clinic. Astonishingly, even that iconic picture is not included in some History textbooks, including the widely used *New Generation History Grade 12 Learner’s Book*. Secondly, the curriculum does not link the Soweto Uprising with other events that created the space for it to happen. For example, since March 1976, some schools in Soweto had already been protesting the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction (Ndlovu, 2017). This makes the Soweto Uprising not a dramatic break, but a culmination of smaller activist moments (See Cole, 2017).

Thirdly, there is no focus on the debated accounts of what exactly transpired during the day of action (16 June 1976), what exactly turned a peaceful march into a violent confrontation that led to the loss of innocent children, whose only sin was to demand quality education. Fourthly, there is no attempt to link 16 June with the following days and weeks. What began as a march organised by schoolchildren on 16 June was, in the following days and weeks, joined by university students and workers. The protests spread from Soweto to different corners of the country. Workers were on strike, and students from Black universities marched in solidarity with school children (Radebe, 2022). At the University of Zululand, students went so far as to burn the university administration building (Radebe, 2022). The Grade 12 History textbook misses the opportunity to capture all these moments and show how influential the Soweto Uprising became.

The Grade 12 History textbook also omits the significant roles played by both supportive teachers and parents. The students who participated in the Soweto Uprising had radical teachers who became their mentors and role models (Ndlovu, 2017). The *New Generation Grade 12 History* textbook mentioned that several South African Student Organisation (SASO) members became teachers after graduating. They introduced Black Consciousness ideas to their students; this alone is not enough to explain the significant role played by some of the teachers, such as Abraham Onkgopotse Tiro, who taught at Morris Isaacson High School and mentored students such as Mashinini. Tiro had been expelled from the University of the North after delivering a controversial graduation speech (Brown, 2016). He was one of the leaders of SASO. Tiro's stay as a teacher in Soweto was short-lived; he was compelled to go into exile (Valela, 2022). The content on the Soweto Uprising in the textbook should have at least included Tiro's story to highlight the significant role of Black teachers associated with Black Consciousness.

On the other hand, some parents, community leaders, and political activists were very influential during the Soweto Uprising. This became clearer a few days after the Soweto Uprising as the Black Parents Association (BPA) was formed. All of the aforementioned, however, is not covered in the History curriculum. The role that these parents and activists, including Dr Ellen Khuzwayo, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Dr Nthato Motlana, and Professor Fatima Meer played is nowhere to be found in the textbook. Some of these activists worked closely with the students even before 16 June 1976. Madikizela-Mandela, for example, met with student leaders such as Tsietsi Mashinini and Dan Montsitsi almost daily (Meer, 2017).

The Grade 12 History textbook also missed the opportunity to discuss the consequences that the 1976 generation faced as a result of their involvement in the Soweto Uprising. The government used an iron fist in dealing with those who dared challenge its authority and legitimacy. Many students were killed during and after the Soweto Uprising; some were wounded, and they lived with permanent scars. Many were sent to prison. The Soweto 11 Trial⁴ is a significant historical episode that is omitted from the History textbooks. This is one of the most important and unique trials in the history of South Africa, as young children were sent to prison for demanding decent education. Some of these children were sent to maximum security prisons and served solitary confinement (Mkhabela, 2001). Their names are not even mentioned in the History textbooks. The curriculum is silent about how thousands of Black students were forced to flee the country and seek refuge in exile since the apartheid regime targeted them because of their involvement in the 1976 Soweto Uprising. Most of these students joined the exiled ANC and PAC. Within the ANC, they were referred to as 'The June 16 Detachment' and became an important group of soldiers in the camps of the ANC-linked *uMkhonto we Sizwe* Military Wing (Radebe, 2022). Surprisingly, History textbooks do not cover these experiences. The History textbooks treat the Soweto Uprising as an episode; it fails to link it with other events and the influence it had in producing young, vibrant leaders who contributed to the overthrow of apartheid.

In the introductory message, the editors of the *New Generation Grade 12 History Learner's Book* wrote, "This history textbook offers fresh perspectives, new approaches and covers various important historical skills" (Stephenson et al., 2013, p. ii). However, it is disappointing that this is not the case regarding the Soweto Uprising. There are no fresh perspectives or new approaches to the Uprising.

As mentioned earlier, the Soweto Uprising also appears in Grade 9 Social Sciences textbooks. However, just like in Grade 12, the Grade 9 content on the 1976 Soweto Uprising is very limited. As previously discussed, Seroto (2018) has focused on the limitations of the Grade 9 textbooks when it comes to the representation of the Soweto Uprising. In my discussion, I focused on Grade 12 History textbooks limitations. No study had been conducted to focus specifically on how the Soweto Uprising is represented in Grade 12. Social Sciences, as a subject that consists of both History and Geography components expected to be taught and learned equally, is likely to have Grade 9 content that is not in-depth. It is expected that the content covered in the GET will not be as broad and deep as

⁴ A trial where 11 leaders of the Soweto Uprising were charged with sedition.

in the FET. What is astonishing is the underrepresentation of the 1976 Soweto Uprising in Grade 12 and FET, because that is where History is a standalone subject.

Towards an inclusive History curriculum that cherishes the significance, complexity and distinctiveness of the 1976 Soweto Uprising.

In this study, I make the following recommendations, which I believe would help the school's History curriculum expose the learners to in-depth, complex, and contested accounts of the 1976 Soweto Uprising. These recommendations, if taken into account and incorporated into the curriculum, would enable learners to approach the Soweto Uprising from multiple critical perspectives. They would enhance various important historical skills such as critical thinking, historical interpretation, contextualisation, source analysis, and empathy.

The study argues that CAPS allocate more time and explicit depth to the 1976 Soweto Uprising in the curriculum, especially in Grade 12. This recommendation is against the current inclusion of the event, as it has been reduced to a debate about the influence of Black Consciousness thinking. Recommendation was made that, in Grade 12, the Soweto Uprising be studied as a standalone topic rather than a subsection within a broader unit. Reducing the event, as the current curriculum denies students the opportunity to learn thoroughly about how young people of their age were at the centre of the liberation struggle and shaped the political discourse in the 1970s. The current study advocates for the school History curriculum that would include the actual causes of the Soweto Uprising, the build-up of events that led to the march on 16 June 1976 to be as significant as it was, accounts of what exactly transpired during the day of the Uprising, what were the long- and short-term consequences of the Soweto Uprising (including, killings, imprisonment, exile, etc.), and include the role that was played by Black teachers, parents, and community leaders who became mentors to the young children. It is recommended that the History curriculum be arranged such that it foregrounds Black youth agency, African epistemologies, and 'history from below' from around 1976. This would include consideration of the voices of the actual participants in the Soweto Uprising and of some witnesses. The participants in the Soweto Uprising have written several books; they have been interviewed, and fortunately, 50 years later, some participants are still alive. The inclusion of their voices is vital. The last recommendation is including oral histories and testimonies from surviving participants in the Soweto Uprising.

Conclusion

The current study posits that 50 years after the 1976 Soweto Uprising, the event is poorly covered in the CAPS History curriculum. Despite the Soweto Uprising being a defining moment in South Africa's liberation history, its representation in the CAPS History curriculum does not fully reflect its significance. In this study, it is demonstrated how 32 years into democratic South Africa, the school History curriculum remains a site of power where some historical events and narratives are amplified, while others are marginalised. Reducing the scope of the Soweto Uprising in the curriculum has negative implications, including relegating one of the most important events in the history of Black youth resistance against apartheid to a footnote in the school curriculum. To ensure that the 1976 Soweto Uprising is well featured in the school's History curriculum, four major changes are proposed, including: allocating more time and providing explicit, in-depth content on the 1976 Soweto Uprising; having the Soweto Uprising as a stand-alone topic in Grade 12, for the History curriculum to foreground Black youth agency, African epistemologies; and 'history from below', the use of oral histories from the surviving participants of the Soweto Uprising.

References

- Adeate, T and Sewchurran, A 2023. African epistemologies and the decolonial curriculum. *Acta Academica*, 55(1):1-9.
- Apple, MW 2004. *Ideology and curriculum*. Routledge New York.
- Auerbach, FE 1965. *The power of prejudice in South African education: An enquiry into history textbooks and syllabuses in the Transvaal high schools of South Africa*. Balkema: Cape Town.
- Bentrovato, D 2017. History textbook writing in post-conflict societies: From battlefield to site and means of conflict transformation. In: C Psaltis, M Carretero, and S Čehajić-Clancy (eds.). *History education and conflict transformation: Social psychological theories, history teaching and reconciliation* (pp. 76-37). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Bertram, C and Bharath, P 2011. Specialised knowledge and everyday knowledge in old and new Grade 6 history textbooks. *Education as Change*, 15(1):63-80.
- Bertram, C and Wassermann, J 2015. South African history textbook research: A review of the scholarly literature. *Yesterday and Today*, 14:151-174.

- Bottaro, J 2013. *Oxford Successful Social Sciences: Learner's Book Grade 9*. 2nd ed. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa.
- Bowen, GA 2009. Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 2(9):27-40.
- Brown, J 2016. *The road to Soweto: Resistance and the Uprising of 16 June 1976*. Southern Africa: Jacana Media.
- Cajani, L, Lässig, S, and Repousé, M (eds.) 2019. *The Palgrave handbook of conflict and history education in the post-Cold War era*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Carretero, M 2017. The teaching of recent and violent conflicts as challenges for history education. In: C Psaltis, M Carretero, and S Čehajić-Clancy (eds.). *History education and conflict transformation: Social psychological theories, history teaching and reconciliation* (pp. 377-341). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Carretero, M, Rodríguez-Moneo, M, and Asensio, M (eds.) 2013. *History education and the construction of national identities*. IAP.
- Chernis, RE 2010. *The past in service of the present: A study of South African school history syllabuses and textbooks 1839-1990*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria.
- Chiponda, A and Wassermann, J 2011. Women in history textbooks: What message does this send to the youth? *Yesterday and Today*, 6:13-25.
- Chisholm, L 1981. Ideology, legitimization of the status quo, and history textbooks in South Africa. *Perspectives in Education*, 3(5):134-151.
- Cole, P 2017. The road to Soweto: Resistance and the Uprising of 16 June 1976. *South African Historical Journal*, 69(1):143-145. DOI: 10.1080/02582473.2016.1271446
- Cummings, B 2016. The Soweto Uprising: share your experience, pictures and perspectives. *The Guardian*, 31 May 2016. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-05-31-the-soweto-uprising-share-your-experiences-pictures-and-perspectives/>
- DBE 2011a. Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Grades 7-9 Social Sciences. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.
- DBE 2011b. Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Grades 10-12 History. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.

- Dean, E, Hartman, P, and Katzen, M 1983. *History in black and white: An analysis of South African history textbooks*. UNESCO: Paris.
- Du Preez, JM 1983. *African Afrikaner. Master symbols in South African school textbooks*. Librarius Felicitas: Alberton.
- Engelbrecht, A 2006. Textbooks in South Africa from apartheid to post-apartheid: Ideological change revealed by racial stereotyping. *Promoting social cohesion through education: Case studies and tools for using textbooks and curricula* (pp. 71-80). World Bank Publications.
- Fanon, F 1961. *The wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Freire, P 1970. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum New York.
- Giroux, HA 2010. Rethinking education as the practice of freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of critical pedagogy. *Policy Futures in Education*, 8(6):715-721.
- Godsell, S and Maluleka, P 2025. Towards a decolonised framing and understanding of the historical thinking project in a Global South space. *Historical Encounters*, 12(1): 1-13.
- Heffernan, A, Niefertgodien, N, Ndlovu, SM and Peterson, B (eds.) 2016. *Students must rise: Youth struggle in South Africa before and beyond Soweto '76*. NYU Press.
- Hlongwane, AK 2021. *The lion of Azania: A biography*. Skotaville Press.
- Jovino, IDS, Abramowicz, A and Portela, BFF 2023. *Black youth agency in hip-hop culture*. Emerald Insight.
- Kallaway, P 2012. History in senior secondary school CAPS 2012 and beyond: A comment. *Yesterday and Today*, 7:23-62.
- Lichtman, M 2023. *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide*. Routledge.
- Mafeje, A 1978. Soweto and its aftermath. *Review of African Political Economy*, 5(11):17-30.
- Maluleka, P and Godsell, S 2024. The continued absence of the LGBTIQ+ community in school history textbooks in post-apartheid South Africa. *Yesterday and Today*, 31:37-61.
- Maluleka, P and Ledwaba, LT 2023. Attempts to (re) capture the school history curriculum? Reflections on the history ministerial task team's report. *Yesterday and Today*, 29:72-99.
- Maluleka, P and Mathebula, T 2022. Trends in African philosophy and their implications for the Africanisation of the South African history caps curriculum: A case study of Odera Oruka's philosophy. *Yesterday and Today*, 27:65-89.

- Maposa, MT 2014. *An analysis of the construction of African Consciousness in contemporary South African History textbooks*. Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Meer, F 2017. *Memories of love and struggle*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Mkhabela, S 2001. *Open earth and black roses: Remembering 16 June 1976*. Skotaville Press.
- Mthethwa, B and Maluleka, P 2025 Peripheralisation of some histories in the school history curriculum in the post-apartheid South Africa: The case study of the 1950s Drum generation and their contributions to the liberation struggle. *Yesterday and Today*, 33:96-117.
- Ndlovu, SM 2017. *The Soweto uprisings: Counter memories of June 1976*. Pan Macmillan South Africa.
- Nkosi, N 2025. Forgotten footsteps: Reclaiming the legacy of South Africa's unsung heroines in history education. *Yesterday and Today*, 34:49-67.
- Nyathi, PA and Nkosi, ND 2025. The significance of environmental history in South Africa's school history curriculum within a VUCA context. *Yesterday and Today*, 34:68-92.
- Osler, A 1994. Still hidden from history? The representation of women in recently published history textbooks. *Oxford Review of Education*, 20(2):219-235.
- Radebe, MJ 2022. *The lost prince of the ANC: The life and times of Jabulani Nobleman 'Mzala' Nxumalo 1955-1991*. South Africa: Jacana Media.
- Ramoroka, D and Engelbrecht, A 2015 The role of history textbooks in promoting historical thinking in South African classrooms. *Yesterday and Today*, 14:99-124.
- Rediker, M 2022. Reflections on history from below. *Trashumante. Revista Americana de Historia Social (Trashumante, American Journal of Social History)*, 20:296-299.
- Said, E 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Schoeman, S 2009. The representation of women in a sample of post-1994 South African school history textbooks. *South African Journal of Education*, 29(4):541-556.
- Seroto, J 2018. Analysing the presentation of the 1976 Soweto uprising in Grade 9 history textbooks. *Africa Education Review*, 15(4):1-19.

- Sithole, F and Fru, R 2024. The pros and cons of history as a compulsory subject in South Africa through the lens of history teachers in the Frances Baard District. *Yesterday and Today*, 32:177-207.
- Stephenson, C-A, Frank, F, Mbansini, T, Pillay, R, and Sikhakhane, L 2013. *New generation history Grade 12 learner's book*. Edited by G Pillay, L Sikhakhane and N West. Durban: New Generation Publishers.
- Valela, Z 2022. *Now you know how Mapetla died*. Cape Town: Tafelberg NB Publishers.
- Visser, W 2004. *Trends in South African historiography and the present state of historical research*. Paper presented at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden.
- Waller, BJ 2009. *How does historical literacy manifest itself in South African Grade 10 history textbooks?* Master's thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Wassermann, J 2011. Learning about controversial issues in school history: The experiences of learners in KwaZulu-Natal schools. *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 29(1):131-157.
- Wassermann, J 2017. The historical significance of African liberation—the views of South African history education students. *Revista electrónica interuniversitaria de formación del profesorado (Interuniversity Electronic Journal of Teacher Training)*, 20(2):17-28.
- Wa Thiong'o, N 1986. *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. London: James Currey.
- Wills, L 2016. The South African high school history curriculum and the politics of gendering decolonisation and decolonising gender. *Yesterday and Today*, 16:22-39.

Exploring Anti-Bantu Education Protests in Grahamstown/Makhanda Through Drama-in-Education Techniques with Grade 9 Learners

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a11>

Phemelo C. Hellemann

Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, and Drama Department

Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa

p.hellemann@ru.ac.za

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3352-3249>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a11>

Thembela Madliki

Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, and Drama Department

Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa

thembelamadliki9@gmail.com

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a11>

Abstract

The paper explores how Drama-in-Education (D-i-E) served as a decolonial and creative pedagogical tool to recontextualise local anti-Bantu Education histories within the Grade 9 South African History curriculum. The study foregrounds the largely understudied Grahamstown (now Makhanda) youth protests between 1975 and 1985, thus offering them as critical narratives that complement the 1976 Soweto Uprising. Through a Drama-in-Education production titled *A Childhood in Chalk* (2025), learners from a local high school in Makhanda engaged with these forgotten histories by assuming the fictional role of journalists reporting on the events depicted in the production.

Following a participatory case study design, the D-i-E intervention combined a theatre production and audience participation techniques to foster historical inquiry, empathy, and critical reflection. Learners' written scene reflections and forum discussions served as data, which were analysed thematically using a decolonial framework alongside Bertram's (2020) concepts of recontextualisation and relocation. The findings reveal that embodied, participatory, and creative pedagogical approaches, such as D-i-E, enhance

learners' historical understanding, contextual awareness, and emotional engagement with the past. By repositioning local stories within national narratives, the paper argues for the inclusion of community-based histories and creative pedagogies in the school curriculum to decolonise history education and humanise the forgotten voices of youth.

Keywords: Grade 9 History; Anti-Bantu Education protests; History education; Drama-in-Education

Introduction

The National Party (NP) introduced the Bantu Education policy as a recommendation by the government to offer Africans an “inferior type of education that was designed to maintain the subordinate and marginal status of the majority racial group of the country” (Thobejane, 2013:2). The policy was part of the NP's agenda, emanating from the 1950s apartheid policies designed to enforce separate developments and provisions according to people's racial and ethnic groups (Booyse, 2011). Christie and Collins (1982) state that the NP conceptualised this policy in 1949 as part of the Commission on Native Education under the leadership of Dr Eiselen until 1951 (Christie & Collins, 1982:59). Eiselen's report informed the decision taken by the then Minister of Native Affairs, Hendrik Verwoerd, to announce the nationalist government's support of Bantu Education in 1953 as a pragmatic strategy to maintain white dominance (Thobejane, 2013). The public declarations by both Eiselen and Verwoerd to maintain white dominance set in motion plans to pass the Bantu Education Act in parliament in 1953, which the nationalist government gradually implemented.

However, as Christie and Collins (1982:60) explain, English-speaking liberals opposed the act because it ran counter to their “liberal ideals of integration”. This opposition, however, did not have enough traction to stop the full implementation of the racially segregated education. The deliberate separatist design meant that African children would receive inferior education, thus relegating them to low-paying jobs and a low social status in society. Other than the need for nationalist Afrikaners to maintain racial supremacy, the policy was also a response to the supposed threat that the increasing number of Black people in urban areas meant competing for good jobs with their white counterparts (Booyse, 2011; Christie & Collins, 1982).

This internalised fear was further exacerbated when South Africa entered “an economic depression in the 1970s”, followed by “black labourer protests causing a shortage of skilled labour” (Booyse, 2011:216). These circumstances fast-tracked and solidified the

implementation of Bantu Education. As such, in 1974, the nationalist government added a recommendation that saw Afrikaans become a mandatory language of instruction in all African schools in apartheid South Africa (Maedza, 2019). Many young people across South Africa rejected this amendment and took to the streets to express their discontent. Against the background of the activities of several liberation movements, including the Sharpeville protest and the police massacre in 1960, as well as the launch of the African National Congress (ANC)'s Umkhonto we Sizwe, the African youths from various township spaces of South Africa organised themselves to boycott Bantu Education, thus deeming it generally unacceptable. Thobejane (2013) states that, as early as the 1950s, various political groups, such as the ANC, Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC), and Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), opposed Bantu Education and its implementation. However, the national youth revolts intensified around 1975. They continued into the latter part of the 1980s, and the well-known story of the revolts is that of the events that unfolded in 1976 in Soweto, a township in Johannesburg.

Maedza (2019) notes that the 1976 Soweto protest was the most significant march in the '70s since the Sharpeville massacre on 21 March 1960; hence, it tends to receive more attention. The attack on African children soon hit the airwaves and made headlines across South Africa and the world. About "20,000 black students joined the protest on June 16, 1976, leading to thousands of injuries, 23 deaths, and 176 students died" (Maedza, 2019:235). Booyse (2011:251) adds that the boycott and unrest lasted for eight months, and by then "575 people had died, with 3907 injured and inestimable damage to government and private property". Arguably, these accounts paint a grim picture of the human cost of freedom and the overwhelming sadness of the young lives lost in pursuit of quality and fair education. One of the well-known young lives that died that day was 12-year-old Hector Pieterse, whom the world got to know through the famous photograph by Sam Nzima depicting "young Antoinette Sithole in her school uniform, running alongside Mbuyisa Makubhu carrying a fatally injured 12-year-old Hector Pieterse in his arms while fleeing from the apartheid police" (Simbao, as cited in Maedza, 2019:236).

While all the camera lenses and the world focused on the Soweto events, similar stories were unfolding in Fingo Village, a multi-racial township in Grahamstown (renamed Makhanda in 2018). In 1979, Mercia Wilsworth produced a master's thesis entitled, *Transcending the culture of poverty in a Black South African township* (1979), which has a chapter on educational challenges and rebellion in Makhanda during the late 1970s. There, the story of the Nathaniel Nyaluza school boycott in 1975 is narrated. It provides a

local context for youth protests, offering additional sources that help learners and school pupils understand the impact of political unrest on the development of education in South Africa. Thus, looking beyond the 1976 Soweto marches, conscientizing local stories that contribute to the narratives of the Bantu Education youth revolt in South Africa is essential.

The aim of the study was, therefore, to use *A Childhood in Chalk* production as a teaching intervention to highlight the educational value of engaging learners with local history through performance and reflective writing. This aimed to address the problem identified regarding the lack of local history teaching in schools, especially the neglect of anti-Bantu Education stories outside the Soweto context. The paper, therefore, reports on how the authors used a play titled *A Childhood in Chalk* (2025) as a catalyst for Grade 9 learners at a local high school in Makhanda in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, engaged with a local anti-Bantu Education story from their context, thus gaining historical insight and knowledge to a pivotal historical event that forms part of the larger youth revolts narratives in South Africa.

Literature review: The inclusion and exclusion of anti-Bantu Education stories in the history curriculum

The South African Grade 9 History curriculum is mandated by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), which outlines the content teachers must teach. Other than the various topics presented under each grade, there is a set of history skills and concepts that the teacher needs to facilitate, thus teaching learners how to Find a variety of kinds of information about the past; Selecting relevant information; Deciding about whether information can be trusted; Seeing something that happened in the past from more than one point of view; Explaining why events in the past are often interpreted differently; Debating about what happened in the past based on the available evidence; Writing history in an organised way, with a logical line of argument; Understanding the importance of heritage and conservation. (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011:10)

In recent years, there has been much debate over what content should be included or excluded from the history curriculum. According to Maluleka (2021:80), since the national revision of CAPS in 2010, many subjects, such as History, underwent a transformation process that saw the revised CAPS embrace and encouraged a more “plurality of knowledge forms”. This meant that some previously excluded content, such as women’s stories and histories, was now included. However, there is a consensus that the change has not fully materialised, as many other stories are not featured in the curriculum (Maluleka, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ndlovu, 2021).

Therefore, in 2015, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) created a history ministerial task team (MTT) to recommend which content areas needed strengthening and to critique how teachers teach history in schools, among other priorities (Maluleka, 2021). Discussing the MTT in detail is beyond the scope of this study; however, the article addresses the latter part of the MTT's focus. As such, the review provides articulation of history; the Grade 9 History, particularly the Bantu Education component, is currently being taught in South Africa as mandated by CAPS, thus revealing which anti-Bantu Education stories are centred and which are excluded. Although the social science CAPS do not outrightly name Bantu Education as a topic under the curriculum, it is taught under the Grade 7-9 Social Science curriculum under term 4, whereby Grade 9 learners are required to learn about the turning points in South African history, 1960, 1976, and 1994 (DBE, 2011:16).

In this topic, learners and teachers explore the 1976 Soweto Uprising as a pivotal turning point in South African education history. Very little is written on how teachers approach this topic in their classrooms. The literature review, therefore, presents two examples of how the Soweto uprising has been presented in Grade 9 textbooks, which are sources that teachers rely on to teach history content. The first example is by Mutheiwana (2020), who studied the Grade 9 History curriculum and its pedagogical resources, such as textbooks, that teachers often use to teach historical content knowledge. Mutheiwana analysed three learners' textbooks and three teachers' guides (see Mutheiwana, 2020:12-13). Mutheiwana does not mention the Soweto Uprising event in her analysis. The second example is by Johannes Seroto, who focuses on how the Soweto Uprising is presented in five textbooks (see Seroto, 2018:4).

Mutheiwana (2020:38) notes that Bantu Education appears in the textbook, but primarily as a social science concept that provides learners with some conceptual knowledge and understanding of the NP, which operated through various oppressive laws and impositions. The author notes that other aspects of the textbooks, such as newspaper extracts, aim to show how Bantu Education affected people. However, they do not use easy language or everyday concepts that make learning accessible. The use of complex language is alienating, whereas everyday concepts are spontaneous language drawn from pre-existing knowledge the learner acquires at home (Mutheiwana, 2020).

In his analysis of the presentation of the Soweto Uprising history in textbooks, Seroto (2018) acknowledges that the event is one of the most important historical moments during the Bantu Education era, and as such, how writers present it influences how

learners acquire historical knowledge and understanding. The textbooks Seroto analysed provide a more detailed engagement with the effects of Bantu Education by centralising the knowledge around a specific event. The author notes that the textbooks engage with the Soweto Uprising through a cause-and-effect interpretation, which positions the uprising as driven by two factors: the Black Consciousness Movement and opposition to Afrikaans as the language of teaching and learning. Seroto (2018) critiques the textbooks for offering few opportunities for learners to develop historical thinking skills, and none of the learner activities stimulates critical thinking. Mutheiwana (2020:38) states that some of the textbooks are sufficient at teaching some of the intended skills outlined, such as finding a variety of kinds of information about the past in the history curriculum, but often are “insufficient when it comes to allowing learners to develop full scientific/historical concepts”.

The challenges noted above are further addressed in Carol Bertram’s (2020) research, which examined the shifting discourse in history education in South Africa. As noted above, issues of decontextualised knowledge and concepts continue to plague the implementation of effective history teaching, further delaying the inclusion of other histories in the curriculum. According to Bertram (2020), the issues of history education in South Africa are best viewed through Bernstein’s pedagogical device, which acknowledges that epistemological issues in history arise from the fields of production, recontextualization, and reproduction. Accordingly, production refers to where knowledge is made, recontextualization to where knowledge is selected and put into the curriculum, and reproduction to where knowledge is transmitted and evaluated (Bernstein & Solomon, 1999, as cited in Bertram, 2020). Bertram’s analytical approach is interesting because it allows for multiple viewpoints to see where history education is ‘struggling’.

When applied to the two studies reviewed here, one can see that both were indeed concerned with the production of historical knowledge by examining various textbooks by researchers and institutions to see how they teach Bantu Education. Additionally, Seroto (2018) and Mutheiwana (2020) allude to the challenges embedded in textbooks as pedagogical tools that teachers use as curriculum guidelines, which convey selected knowledge. As Bertram (2020) states, this selected knowledge creates a social order of what knowledge is important and what is not, putting teachers in an uncomfortable position of either teaching official knowledge or expanding on it unofficially. This also depends on whether the teacher has the agency or autonomy to teach beyond what the curriculum prescribes. This stage is the reproduction stage, in which teachers’ teaching autonomy,

interpretation and “own experiences of learning and beliefs about the purposes of teaching history” meet (Bertram, 2020:5).

What is apparent is that the neglect of teaching about local stories continues in all stages of the pedagogical device, as narrated by Bertram (2020). This means that if one wants to introduce these stories into the curriculum, one must consider how to integrate them across all three stages. Consequently, this is a decolonial issue. Maluleke (2021) argues that colonialism has mastered the art of neglecting marginalised stories from the knowledge production process. This challenge is present in the history education curriculum as well; hence, there is a need to decolonise the curriculum, knowledge production, and the contextualisation phase. Accordingly, in this article, decolonisation of the history curriculum is positioned within i) embedding local histories in the Grade 9 History curriculum when exploring the turning points in history content; ii) using creative pedagogies such as Drama-in-Education (D-i-E) techniques like a theatre production and writing activities as active learning tools that make historical content relatable and relevant to the learners. As Maluleke (2021) adds, this form of decolonisation seeks epistemic justice while decentring Western knowledge and ways of knowing by disrupting them and using creative pedagogies such as stories, indigenous knowledge, and dissemination methods that transcend academia.

Evidently, the MTT is striving to address the issue of selection, which, as authors of this paper, we have no influence over. However, as researchers and teachers working in the field of the history of education, we (the authors) can help teachers and learners in the contextualisation and reproduction stage by working collaboratively to make the stories/knowledge visible. To do so, a decolonial framework proposed by Maluleke (2021) was adopted, which disrupts and uses creative pedagogies to make sense of stages two and three of Bernstein’s (1999) pedagogical devices, helping both methodologically and pedagogically.

Decolonising peripheral histories: Why teaching, writing and learning beyond the 1976 Soweto Uprising is imperative

As mentioned earlier, in South African school protest history, the 1976 Soweto Uprising continues to receive more attention than any other youth protest. Here, we borrow Dei’s argument on how blackness and its stories have been “appropriated, commodified and packaged within the culture of modern capital” (2018:120). As such, the story of the

Soweto Uprising has indeed been commodified and used to meet the demands of modern capital, with many artists and politicians benefiting from it ever since the event unfolded in 1976. Accordingly, as Maedza (2019) reports, photojournalist Sam Nzima, who took the image of injured Hector Peterson, became famous from that iconic image, propelling theatre productions such as the 1987 and 1992 *Sarafina! The Sounds of Liberation* and the 1987 *Cry for Freedom* documentary drama film by Richard Attenborough (Maedza, 2019).

In more recent times, the story has continued to live on through the works of contemporary theatre makers such as Mandla Mbothwe's 2016 production *1976 Spirits* and the 2013 *19-Born-76-Rebels* production by Mamela Nyamza and Faniswa Yisa (Maedza, 2019). As such, it is evident that the story has received more attention, overshadowing similar stories that are less well-known or publicised. This is not to suggest that the story is not important, but rather to note that more stories like that one continue to exist in the peripheries. Within this understanding, there is a need for an epistemic justice that disrupts the sidelining of other youth protest stories, thus bringing the forgotten story of youth protest in Makhanda to the fore. Ruiz and Baca (2017:227) argue that part of doing decolonial work and writing involves reclaiming and re-centring "forgotten or erased histories".

To explore this idea of forgotten histories, Bertram's (2020) adaptation of Bernstein's (1999) pedagogic device and the concept of relocation are drawn on to unpack how the official recontextualising, pedagogic recontextualising, and field of production determine how history is taught in South Africa. According to Bertram (2020:3), de-location describes a process in which knowledge is constructed within a specific discourse. At the same time, relocation refers to the discourse in which this knowledge is "selected and sequenced into a curricular".

It is within these processes that forgotten histories are either explored or researched to generate new knowledge, or, if there is already research on them, they are selected or sequenced into the curriculum. However, as Bertram (2000) points out, these processes are run by agents of what the author calls actors, who serve as official and pedagogic recontextualizers and then enlist a field of production agents to implement the knowledge. Official recontextualising agents are the state and ministers. In contrast, pedagogic recontextualising involves actors in university spaces, such as teachers and researchers, however, does not exclude other agents such as journalists and textbook writers. These agents hold power over the choices and selection of knowledge in the curriculum, but teachers implement it. They do so, not in a passive way, but rather in a fashion that allows

them to “enact, interpret and adapt” the knowledge as agents in the field of production (Bertram, 2020:4).

The potential gap, therefore, in creating forgotten histories lies in these two processes by which some histories are prioritised over others, as we see with the 1976 youth uprising narratives. One way is through the relocation process and the recontextualization process. As Bertram (2020:4) explores, the relocation process can be a space of “struggle, conflict and competition”. Colonial hierarchical knowledge has long been accepted as the norm. Ruiz and Baca (2017) argue that hierarchical knowledge is a colonial design that seeks to control the narrative by deeming it legitimate or illegitimate, thereby determining which stories can dominate discourse and which face alienation. In the case of Soweto, the narrative gained attention because it was crafted and shaped a certain way, through the art, specifically to preserve memories, but also to ‘romanticise’ the art as a tool to fight apartheid, which presented an opportunity for the media to gain control of the narrative in and outside South Africa.

The school curriculum is one area where the story receives more attention than others, as noted in the earlier literature review. This, in itself, is a lingering effect of colonialism, which sought to legitimise and delegitimise knowledge, as explained earlier. Therefore, to decolonise, as Mpfu and Styne (2001:2) argue, is to “search for completeness through the recovery, restoration and recognition of the equal belonging of black people to the world”. The research and recovery of other Black people’s stories are ongoing, and through research such as this, more stories of local Black people can be restored, recognised, and legitimised. By doing this, we (the authors) are also resisting, refusing, and speaking back to the apartheid writing that also polarised history to cause more division among African people by individualising or singling out stories of certain ethnic groups or geographical locations. Therefore, plurality of stories is necessary.

Mpfu and Steyn (2001) argue that this way of writing is a form of coloniality of knowledge, in which African thinkers also fall into the trap of writing about African people through a singular story, which could inherently perpetuate stereotypes and simplify the stories of the oppressed. As also shown in the examples of various theatre productions on anti-Bantu Education, it is the Soweto 1976 story that tends to take centre stage, and effectively so. Given the effectiveness of theatre productions as communication and education tools, it was only fitting to produce and stage a play on the anti-Bantu Education youth revolts in Makhanda as a visual and educational approach that represents the story beyond the written text. Therefore, D-i-E became a desirable research and teaching method

that brought history content on anti-Bantu Education youth revolts in Fingo Village, Makhanda, to the Grade 9 learners at Andrew Moyake School of Excellence and the greater Makhanda community.

Historical context of anti-Bantu Education youth protests in Makhanda

A Childhood in Chalk (2025) was inspired by the true event that took place in Makhanda from 1975 until the latter part of the 1980s. Our search for the stories of protest led to notable contributions made by scholars such as Wilsworth (1979), Hyslop (1986), Roux and Helliher (1986), and Nishino (2002). From these authors, one can get a comprehensive overview of the various events that took place during the decade, even though they did not receive national media coverage like the Soweto Uprising.

According to Wilsworth (1979), the first revolt in Makhanda took place at a local high school, Nathaniel Nyaluza, which became the landmark for other protest events in the 1980s. Because Wilsworth's research was the first to document the events academically, it provides an entry point into the political and socio-economic challenges students faced during this time. Wilsworth notes that the 1974 era was marked by poor job markets that failed to match most people's abilities, leading many young people to leave their communities in search of work elsewhere (Wilsworth, 1979). Parallel to that struggle, the students felt that the education they were receiving was also inadequate in preparing them to participate in the dwindling job market. Therefore, the introduction of Bantu Education exacerbated the growing frustrations. As Hyslop (1986:21) explains, the students, especially those in urban areas, became weary of the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instructions and critical of the elimination of the last year of primary school from 1975, which meant that the "numbers in the first year of secondary school doubled" in the beginning on 1976 with inadequate financial and teaching resources.

According to Hyslop (1986), both the urban students in the Eastern Cape and the Rand were politically active in organising protests to challenge the Bantu Education implementation. As Wilsworth (1979:370) affirms, the political activism was a way to a "serious yearning for a better life and a good education that the youth perceived as a major escape from poverty". It was within this shared mission that the youth at Nyaluza High School mobilised to challenge the school and the government.

In 1975, Nyaluza reported having 700 high school students and 19 teachers, of whom only two were university graduates, with the remainder having only primary teaching

qualifications, which did not allow them to teach History and English (Wilsworth, 1979). The challenges kept mounting, leading to teachers resigning due to a lack of teaching resources and to being overworked, as they were expected to teach 45 periods a week (Wilsworth, 1979). As unbearable as the teaching conditions were for the teachers, they also disadvantaged the township students, who were already economically and politically at risk. The students were unable to thrive in this educational environment. Nishino (2002:20) notes that the discrepancy was due to their schools receiving less funding than their “white counterparts, they were in overcrowded classrooms with a lack of teaching equipment and poor provision of and political bias in the textbooks, as well as a lack of electricity in the classrooms”. Economically, this meant that Black township students could not adequately participate in the job market. As such, joblessness became a source of concern and frustration for both students and parents, leading to the first protest in Makhanda (Nishino, 2002; Wilsworth, 1979).

On 20 May 1975, the Nyaluza students staged an all-night sit-in protest on the school’s rugby field, refusing to write mid-year exams they had not been prepared for, given the circumstances described above (Wilsworth, 1979). This was the first time that students brought forward grievances they had experienced under Bantu Education and articulated them clearly and in an organised way, leading them to “occupy the buildings and hold mass meetings to discuss progress” (Hyslop, 1986). These were peaceful demonstrations that gave the youth a platform to challenge the status quo. As Roux and Heliaker (1986) explain, the culture of protest during this era became a way for Black communities to build a social and political movement that challenged apartheid and raised political consciousness among the Black majority. Hence, the rise of the Black Consciousness movement by Steve Biko.

The government, through the acting regional director of Bantu Education, shut down the school protests at Nyaluza and called the police, stating that the students were influenced by political outsiders, hence, they were evicted from the school (Wilsworth, 1979). It was at this point that there was a looming threat of violence enacted by the police and the government. Because the students were not allowed to return to school, the local non-governmental organisation, GRADA Education, stepped in to facilitate extra lessons for students away from the school grounds during this period, which ran until July and was led by white volunteers (Wilsworth, 1979). The help of white volunteers was a temporary solution to a much bigger issue. During the school closure, the Bantu Education director established a commission of inquiry (consisting of school inspectors) to investigate the

nature and reasons behind the protest; however, the report was not shared with the public or the school principal, even though 15 students were identified as protest ring leaders (Wilsworth, 1979). In July, the director ordered the children to return to school, and they took exams at the end of the year.

Tension continued to rise as students and teachers lost trust in each other. Wilsworth notes other incidents that point to the ever-growing political and social tension in Makhanda. For example, at the beginning of 1976, most schools were reported to have been vandalised during the school holidays, which preceded the June 16 protests in Soweto (Wilsworth, 1979). It was not clear who was to blame for the vandalism. Initially, the Nyaula students were also determined to protect their school property, as their protests had never been violent. As Hyslop (1986) contends, the 1976 protests were the continuation of previous student movements, however, they became violent as tensions between students, parents, teachers, and the police escalated.

After the 16 June 1976 protests, and well into the 1980s, more youth revolts spread across the country. As Nishino (1999) reports, the 1980s school boycotts were larger than the 1976 protests, with 1980, 1984, and 1985 as pivotal moments in Makhanda and only subsiding in 1986. The boycotts were heightened by greater formal organisation and alignment between student bodies and external political organisations such as the UDF, COSAS, the ANC, and AZASM¹ attached to Black Consciousness bodies (Nishino, 1999). For the current study, focus was placed on the May 1980 event. This event presents multiple viewpoints on the effects and the intersection of the various actors involved in the Bantu Education school boycotts. Nishino's research influenced this approach because their oral history study focused on interviewing parents and former students of Nyaluza and other local schools to share their memories and experiences of events in the 1980s. Upon further investigation, the story of Mthantiso Alfred Soya was found, a parent who died during one of the school boycotts in Makhanda. This story featured in Volume 3, Chapter 2 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa Report (1998) as part of the commission's consolidation of vigilante activity and TRC hearings in the Eastern Cape. Beyond this documentation, there has been no coverage or articles on this event; hence, we chose to focus on it.

From the TRC records and Nishino's article, it is evident that parental involvement became a prominent feature in the Makhanda 1980s boycotts. Accordingly, Nishino (2002)

¹ UDF (United Democratic Front), COSAS (Congress of South African Students), ANC (African National Congress), AZASM (Azanian Student Movement).

notes that parents expressed losing authority over their children during the '80s boycotts, because the children grew more boisterous and suspicious of parents as the police presence intensified in the township. Parents were genuinely concerned about their children's safety; hence, they formed a vigilante group, the Peacemakers. According to the TRC Report (1998), Alfred Soya was part of the Peacemakers vigilante group, formed in response to the lack of school attendance in the early months of the '80s. According to Nishino (1999), the Peacemakers forced students back into schools, sparking conflict between students and parents and becoming a landmark feature of the '80s boycott. Alfred's widow, Nomilile Philis Thandiwe Soya, testified before the commission about the events that led to her husband's death.

In her testimony, Nomilile narrated how the parents asked the Peacemakers to convince the students to return to class during the confrontation between the police and the children outside Andrew Moyake Primary, which is next to Nyaluza High School (TRC Report, 1998:6). As Nishino (1999) states, the students agreed to return to school, however, refused to attend classes because the government had not met their demands for better education and qualified teachers. It was at this interaction on 14 May 1980 that the primary school children stoned the Peacemakers, and the police responded violently, leading to a chaotic altercation that led to the death of Alfred Soya (Nishino 1999). From this moment, the boycott involved primary school children, and they were terrified to attend school.

Nishino (2002) goes further into other developments in school boycotts and the increasing violence, culminating in the pivotal state of emergency in Makhanda in 1985. The article offers detailed accounts of the various political groups and student organisations involved, thus painting a picture of the key role players in the fight for better education for African children. However, as Roux and Helieker (1986) point out, the school protests could have ended earlier had it not been for the violent confrontations between the students and the state. Hence, other township residents joined the protests, which in turn sparked consumer boycotts. Because of this, there was a "spill over of students into township politics from school politics", as township residents expressed their grievances by boycotting white-owned shops to put pressure on the state (Nishino, 1999:15).

Nishino (1999) also notes other incidents that took place in 1984, such as the death of a 15-year-old Ntsika student after the police opened fire with rubber bullets. As boycotts increased across the country, the students in Makhanda were in step. By November, only 5 per cent of students in the Eastern Cape wrote matric exams, as they were being boycotted nationally (Nishino, 1999). As previously expressed, primary school children were not

exempt from the chaos. Nishino (1999:14) notes how by 1985, “the involved grew from three primary schools to ten primary schools, involving 6300 primary school learners”. The unrest took a toll on both children and parents, as streets and schools became unsafe. The students expressed how the police’s presence made schools unsafe, thus, demanding that the police and security forces be removed from school grounds and their detained peers be released, and for the state of emergency to end (Nishino, 1999). However, the remaining were intertwined with consumer boycotts, as the rise of political activism in the township led to more children missing school. The conflict continued in 1986 as students grew bolder in confronting the local police; however, by March of that year, the first state of emergency expired, and another was declared on 12 June 1986 out of fear of another political uprising in commemoration of the 1976 riots (Nishino, 1999).

The political uncertainty and chaos led to the formation of the Grahamstown Education Crisis Committee (GECC), a branch of the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), at the end of 1986 (Nishino, 1999). This was an attempt to bring order and peace into the town. The efforts yielded fruit when the NECC agreed to negotiate with the Department of Education and Training, as the administrator of education for Black schoolchildren, thereby leading the GECC to convene negotiations on the return to schools in 1987 (Nishino, 1999). The students were also involved in negotiations with the GECC. By this time, students were tired, and approximately 400 of them subsequently agreed to return to school, even though their decade-long demands had not been fully met (Nishino, 1999).

The events narrated in this section led us (the authors) to create a play called *A Childhood in Chalk* (2025), which sought not only to map the school boycott stories over the decade, but also to disseminate this important part of Makhanda’s history. To do so, an intervention case study was followed, which employed the D-i-E approach.

D-i-E as a creative and decolonial pedagogy in history education

D-i-E stems from Theatre-in-Education (T-i-E), a theatre art form that uses theatre as an educational tool to deliver content, and is widely practised in countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and South Africa. This method was pioneered by John O’Toole (Morris, 2002). Morris (2002) states that T-i-E in a school context seeks to expose learners to theatre productions that are often devised with them in mind; thus, it is often theatre for educational purposes. Devising is a way of working in which the director and producer create a theatre production from scratch, with no script, and develop the script

as the work progresses with the performers (Mermikides, 2013). In essence, devised work is experimental theatre work. Perry (2010) explains T-i-E in a similar manner, defining it as theatre that can teach. According to Morris (2002), a South African T-i-E practitioner, T-i-E often has an intended audience and explores a certain topic through a performance process and a product. However, T-i-E is often used synonymously with D-i-E.

Hellemann (2022) defines D-i-E as a drama process that extends beyond traditional theatre plays, since it invites the audience or participants to work in or out of a fictional role. In another study, Hellemann and Heshu (2024) used D-i-E teaching techniques, such as teacher-in-role and games, to explore and re-enact the 1819 Battle of Egazini between the amaXhosa and the British in Makhanda. The researchers worked with Grade 10 History learners from four local high schools in Makhanda. They used the CAPS History curriculum requirements on warfare and conquest topics, aligned with the Battle at Egazini (Hellemann & Heshu, 2024). The researchers found these strategies effective in helping learners become active participants who developed historical perspectives and challenged dominant Western narratives about the battle and its key characters through fictional roles. This became a decolonial way of working that encourages plurality of perspectives.

As such, drawing on Hellemann's experience and expertise in D-i-E, we (the authors) adopted this approach with the Grade 9 History learners. The aim was to make students active participants by using fictional roles to invite them into the world of *A Childhood in Chalk*. In D-i-E, it is not uncommon for spectators to also take on fictional roles. This is called person-in-role, in which the audience, like trained actors, takes on a role, shifting them from neutral spectators to active spectators (Furring et al., 2022). This allows for the main actors and the spectators to interact through a role that allows them to ask questions and explore emotions in the 'imagined if' world of the play (Furring et al., 2022).

According to Perry (2010), T-i-E and D-i-E approaches are similar; however, they differ in that one tends to focus on drama as a learning process, while the other emphasises learning through a theatre production or process. For this study, the D-i-E model was adopted, which involves using both a theatre production and drama techniques as learning processes for the Grade 9 History learners. Below, the methodology is explained in detail.

Research design and methodology

This qualitative, participatory case study was conducted in Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown), the Eastern Cape province, South Africa. It was a collaborative, interdisciplinary study between Rhodes University's Department of Primary and Early

Childhood Education and the Department of Drama. This case study research focused on Grade 9 History learners' experiences of learning about the anti-Bantu Education youth protests of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly highlighting protest events in Makhanda. The case study introduced the learners to the local history by exploring the youth protests in Fingo Village from 1975 to 1985.

Moreover, the study explored how the drama production *A Childhood in Chalk* (2025) enhanced the learners' local historical content knowledge and how a scene reflection write-up exercise helped the learners find a variety of kinds of information about the past; selecting relevant information, debating, and writing about what happened in the past in Fingo Village. The learners had to draw on the evidence presented in the play to write a reflection. In essence, this case study has intrinsic interest, as the Fingo Village youth protest contributes to the broader national narrative on the role of anti-Bantu Education protests in advancing democracy in South Africa (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

The first phase of the research process involved sourcing literature and archival records that piece together the youth protest events that took place in Makhanda from 1975 to 1985. The documents worked with were Volume Three: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Nishino's 1999 article titled *The dynamics of school protests: Grahamstown school boycotts c. 1984-87*, and a chapter from Mercia Wilsworth's Master of Arts thesis titled *Transcending the culture of poverty in a Black South African Township*. Further, images from Peter Magubane's 1987 book, *The Fruit of Fear: June 16*, were used, which commemorated the tenth anniversary of the 16 June 1976 student revolts in Johannesburg, South Africa. Two YouTube videos (AP Archive, 2015a, 2015b). It was from these records that a working script, with a plot and characters, was created. The characters were drawn from TRC records and YouTube videos. The process of this phase is presented in another article elsewhere; thus, discussing the play-making process is beyond the scope of this study. However, the play synopsis is as follows:

The play explores the period of school boycotts in Fingo Village (in Makhanda, formerly known as Grahamstown) from 1975 to 1985. The narrative follows the experiences of seven 12-year-old learners from a local primary school who find themselves caught in the escalating conflict of anti-Bantu Education revolts. Their lives are forever changed by a single event that interrupts their childhood. This work delves into themes of memory, as the characters recall and piece together their childhood experiences amidst the invisible costs of struggle. Ultimately, the production focuses on the untold stories of the individuals affected by this pivotal event in their community.

Phase two of the research involved working with 90 Grade 9 History learners from Andrew Moyake School of Excellence in Makhanda. Andrew Moyake is a new art high school in Makhanda. The school is located in Fingo Village on A Street, Makhanda. It was a primary school established in 1927; however, it “closed down in 2020, due to a lack of resources and learner numbers” (Zono, 2023).² The school reopened as a high school in 2023 and has continued to operate as an art school, offering subjects such as drama, music, and art in addition to traditional subjects such as mathematics, history, and science. The school’s location is paramount to the research, as it was the hub of the 1975 and 1980 school boycotts. It was in A Street that a local man, Alfred Blaai Soya, died during the 1980 school protests and young learners from Andrew Moyake Primary School and Nathaniel Nyaluza High School between the ages of 12 and 18 were arrested for his murder (Nishino, 1999).

For the current study, a decision was made to work with learners from this school to also conscientize them about the history of their school, now a new school. Considering that the school is also an art school, the D-i-E approach that utilised the technique of enrolling learners as journalists to report on the historical events portrayed in the production was used. As mentioned earlier, journalists played an important role in reporting and documenting anti-Bantu Education protests in South Africa; therefore, it made sense to use that role as a catalyst for learners to make sense of the events in the stories and to write about them from that perspective. As Morris (2002) adds, often taking on a role does not necessarily mean acting out that role; sometimes it is about “metaphorically stepping into the shoes of another and assuming a social position or profession different from his or her own” (298). This allows the audience participants to view the play or the events before them from a different perspective.

The researchers first met with the learners the day before the performance to introduce themselves and gauge the learners’ knowledge of local history. During the first meeting, an exercise concerning prior knowledge was conducted using basic questions about what the learners knew about the history of anti-Bantu Education school protests in Makhanda. The YouTube archival school protest videos (AP Archive, 2015a) were used to start the conversation. Questions allow the teacher to gauge learners’ prior knowledge, and social science subjects like history are designed to “train learners also to ask questions” (DBE, 2011:8). The exercise also helped learners familiarise themselves with the content to be explored in the play. It was at this meeting that we (the authors) worked with the learners to create the journalist characters and filled out the enrolment card shown in the image below.

² <https://grocotts.ru.ac.za/2023/01/23/a-new-start-for-a-new-school-in-the-new-year/>



Figure 1: Journalist press pass cards made for the show

On the day of the play, the learners arrived in role, already wearing their journalist access cards around their necks. They watched the show; afterwards, PJ Hellemann facilitated a discussion between the ‘journalists’ and the performers, who remained in character for the forum theatre session. Forum theatre is a theatre technique pioneered by Augusto Boal, a Brazilian theatre practitioner who conceptualised the Theatre of the Oppressed games for actors and non-actors. Forum theatre allows audience members to interact with performers through various games (Boal, 1992). Performers can use the interrogation game to interact with the audience. Accordingly, in the interrogation game, each performer has an opportunity to sit before the audience and answer their questions (Boals, 1992:227). The interrogation questioning style follows that of a court proceeding, and the actors can be asked questions “about what they think of the other characters, what they think about the events in the play, anything” to do with the content covered in the play (Boal, 1992:227).

The questioning style was adapted to be more journalistic by introducing ourselves (the authors) and the fictional newspaper outlet we worked for, which helped remind the learners of their role as journalists witnessing the event. This Q&A lasted 15 minutes and followed the 45-minute play. The audience’s questions and the performers’ responses were noted. This session aimed to have learners witness events from the past through multiple

points of view, specifically the school boycotts in Makhanda, and how they impacted the lives of young learners during and after those events. The Q&A session particularly allowed learners to ask questions about events in the past, based on the evidence presented to them through the play and the local history discussions held at the school the previous day.

The learners recognised that they had not received any formal training in writing a scene analysis; therefore, a post-production lesson was conducted with them. The lesson served to introduce the learners to the performers and give them an opportunity to ask the performers and the production team questions about the play. Data was collected through a scene reflection write-up, which formed part of the post-performance teaching and learning activity.

Ethical considerations

The production and research team applied for ethical clearance through the Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee (EF-REC) in 2024 as part of the larger research project, 'Robbed of a Childhood', funded under the National Research Foundation Thuthuka Post-PhD Track grant. In the ethics application, the authors requested permission to conduct research with Andrew Moyake Grade 9 learners, in consultation with the DBE and the school principal. Both the school, DBE, and the learners gave their consent to participate in the research on the condition that no pictures or names of the learners would be used in publications or presentations, thus ensuring the confidentiality of the participants. As such, all the data collected and presented here have no identifying markers, such as names or pictures, that allow for facial recognition. Participants are referred to using synonyms that start with the Learner, then assign an alphabet after the prefix. EF-REC approved the ethics application listed under the following number: 2024-8026-8875.

Data presentation

The data in the current study are analysed thematically, with the researchers organising them into themes derived from Bertram's theory explored earlier in the paper. According to Kushnir (2025), thematic analysis is deductive in nature, as it allows the researcher to identify themes from patterns in the data, giving these patterns meaning through organising concepts from theory. The concepts drawn from come from a mixture of Bertram's (2020) take on relocation and de-location of knowledge, and Mpofu and Steyn's notion of writing beyond a single story. Thematic analysis is "a method of systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a

dataset” (Clarke & Braun, 2012:2). The responses from the scene reflection write-up form the dataset. Through a review of these responses, with patterns drawn from theory, it can be identified what is common in how learners understand and talk about past events. Before delving into the discussion, the dataset below is presented in two interaction moments: the preshow interaction and the post-show activity.

Pre-show meeting: Learners’ prior knowledge of Bantu Education and youth protests in Makhanda

On 30 July 2025, a day before the performance of *A Childhood in Chalk* (2025), the morning was spent visiting the group of Grade 9 learners from Andrew Moyake School of Excellence. The visit served two purposes: to get a sense of their history and prior knowledge, and to lead them in a theatre-based activity that enrolled them as journalists preparing to report on an event they witnessed. Shing and Brod (2016) define prior knowledge as a psychological construct that explains the relationship between memory schemas and the processes of consolidating and retrieving information. This process is recognised in CAPS as a legitimate way to assess what learners already know before learning new material. CAPS, as stated in the DBE (2011), encourages teachers to ask the who/where/what/why/show/how questions to assess what learners already know informally, their perceptions and concerns on the topic the teacher is exploring. By asking these questions, the teacher creates learning conditions in which new information can be “integrated into the individual’s existing knowledge structures” (Shing & Brod, 2016:154). Therefore, since the learners were in Grade 9, they had some prior historical knowledge of apartheid South Africa; however, it was necessary to find out how much they knew.

It was in this exploratory visit that we (the authors) learnt that indeed the learners have some basic knowledge of oppressive apartheid laws like Bantu Education from interactions with peers and family members. However, the learners had not covered the topic formally in the previous grade (Grade 8), as shown in Figure 3 below.

HISTORY CONTENT TOPICS GRADES 4 to 12	
TERM	GRADE 4
1	Local history
2	Learning from leaders
3	Transport through time
4	Communication through time
GRADE 5	
1	Hunter-gatherers and herders in southern Africa
2	The first farmers in Southern Africa
3	An ancient African society: Egypt
4	A heritage trail through the provinces of South Africa
GRADE 6	
1	An African kingdom long ago in southern Africa: Mapungubwe
2	Explorers from Europe find southern Africa
3	Democracy and citizenship in South Africa
4	Medicine through time
GRADE 7	
1	The kingdom of Mali and the city of Timbuktu in the 14th century
2	The Transatlantic slave trade
3	Colonisation of the Cape in the 17th and 18th centuries
4	Co-operation and conflict on the frontiers of the Cape Colony in the early 19th century
GRADE 8	
1	The Industrial Revolution in Britain and southern Africa from 1860
2	The Mineral Revolution in South Africa
3	The scramble for Africa: late 19th century
4	World War I (1914 – 1918)
GRADE 9	
1	World War II (1919 – 1945)
2	The Nuclear Age and the Cold War (1945 – 1990)
3	Turning points in South African history 1948 and 1950s
4	Turning points in South African history 1960, 1976 and 1994

Figure 2: Extract from the CAPS Social Science – History documents

Source: DBE (2011:7)

Therefore, it was understandable that the learners were not familiar with events like the TRC. However, they knew about Bantu Education from watching movies like *Sarafina!* where they informally learnt about the major anti-Bantu Education youth protest that took place on 16 June in Soweto in 1976. Hence, the learners also knew about the image of Hector Peterson explained earlier. However, they had neither heard of nor learned about anti-Bantu Education youth protests in Makhandla.

The visit and the play, therefore, were timely, as they preceded the teaching of Topics 3 and 4 highlighted in the image above. The learners' responses gave a sense of their existing knowledge of the events, thereby solidifying why the play was a fitting intervention strategy for educating Grade 9 learners about the history of the Makhanda protests. This encounter affirmed what we already had a sense of, that there is not much known or shared in the curriculum about the events of school protests in Makhanda.

As mentioned before, for this study, it was decided to enrol the learners as journalists, because journalists are one of the key actors that Bertram (2020) identified as agents that influence the de-location and relocation processes of knowledge construction. We (the authors) talked to the learners about their responsibilities as journalists when reporting on the events of 14 May 1980. They were, however, provided with predetermined questions that served as guidelines for writing their report. As shown in the image..., the learners had a fictional journalist access card; they had to use that card to come up with a fictional name and choose a real or fictional media house they work for. These choices were made in class, and each student had a chance to introduce themselves using their fictional names and workplace.

Post-show scene analysis questions

On the performance day, learners received a two-page scene-response leaflet to encourage journalistic note-taking. The scene response had nine questions, divided into three categories. The first set of questions pertained to the journalist's research; the second elicited the journalist's response to a specific scene of their choice in the play; and lastly, the questions probed for the journalist's overall reflections.

The preceding paragraphs articulate and summarise the responses to the questions as listed in the scene response leaflet. The first question asked the learners/journalists to state the event they had witnessed in the play. Their responses ranged from stating that they witnessed the anti-Bantu Education protests in 1980, to talking about witnessing Mr Jola's death (the character based on Mr Alfred Blaai Soya, who died during the protest in 1980). Among other responses, the learners noted that the protests were about fighting for education and that school learners were at the centre of these protests during the apartheid era. Overall, the overarching response to this question was that they had witnessed the history of Makhanda and Bantu Education and the fight against unfair laws, thus, gaining insight, as noted in the image below.

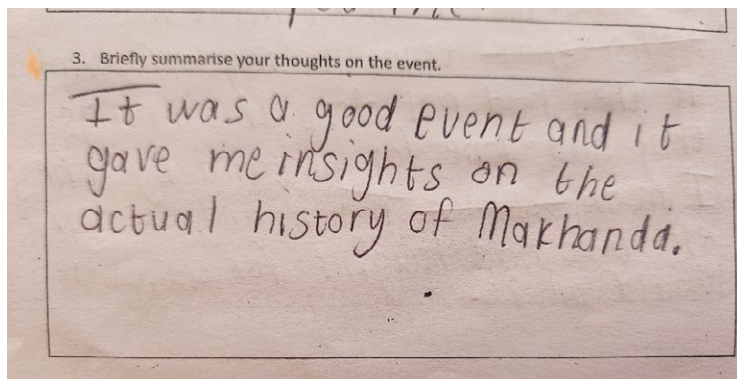


Figure 3: Extract from one of the Andrew Moyake learners reflecting their thoughts about the play

When asked *"who were the people of this event?"*, a question that was intended to interrogate the learners' ability to identify key role players and those who were most impacted by the protests, the responses identified the learners from Andrew Moyake and Nathaniel Nyaluza and members of the concerned parents' group, the Peacemakers, as key players in the event. Question three probed the learners' ability to engage with the production's metaphorical staging of violence and trauma. The learners were not only able to identify the material use of the tins, however, they were able to identify their representational use on stage, for example, the use of the tins to show explosions, to portray the violent stoning and explosions that took place, alongside symbolising telephones used for communication inside prisons.

A notable comment came from a student who identified that *"the way the tins were thrown around, in random patterns, showed the unpredictability of violence"*. This comment is a sophisticated interpretation of the use of the tins in staging the violence of the student protests and affirms the learners' ability in deductive reasoning.

The second set of questions asked the journalists to articulate their responses to the event. They were asked to choose a scene or moment and summarise what they saw. This set of questions encouraged learners to explain their reasoning for selecting the scenes. The dominant responses reflected that the scenes that were central to the learners' understanding were the moment Tony threw the stone that killed Mr Jola. The learners noted all the instances of staged protest action; one can assume it was due to the energised singing and

toyitoyi (high-kneed, foot stomping protest dance and chant) movements that represented the learners' struggle. The learners identified the moment when the peacemakers spoke to one another about their concerns for their children's safety, alongside the moments when Tony's mother called him into the house from the street, pleading with him to stop his involvement in the protests.

There were many other instances that the learners said they would have taken a photograph of, yet the dominant responses were that they would take a photograph of the student protests and the death of Mr Jola. There was also a notable response from one student, who said they would have taken a photograph of the characters playing happily to highlight that even joy existed in hard times.

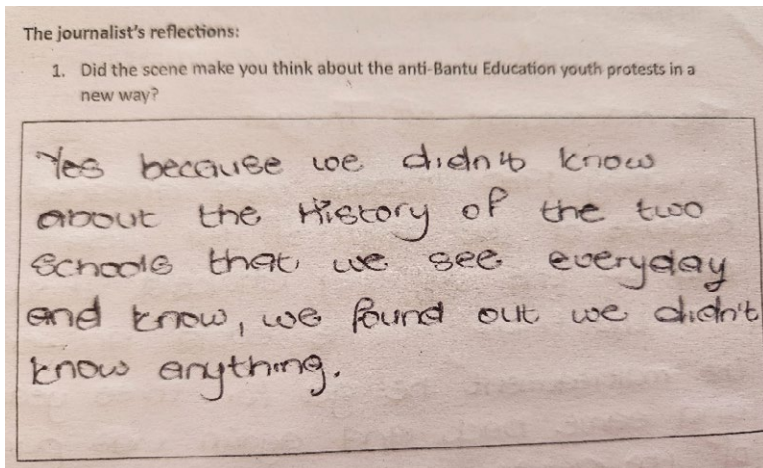


Figure 4: An extract from one of the learners' writing from a perspective of a journalist on which scene stood out for them during the play

The 'journalists' identified that the production had encouraged new ways of thinking about the protest action of the 1980s. As seen in the image above, they did not know about Andrew Moyake and the Nyaluza school children's involvement in the protests, and because they did not know, the new information inspired most learners to learn more about what had happened on their school grounds. In addition, the learners reflected on new ways of thinking about the emotional turmoil faced by both parents and school children, identifying the major sacrifices they had made to secure liberation from Bantu Education.

The moment that stood out to the ‘journalists’ was the death of Mr Jola. It is important to note that the death was staged in a protest sequence that culminated in one character, Tony, striking Mr Jola with a tin, killing him instantly. This was a brief moment in the context of the 45-minute production; as a result of this, it is believed that the response, “Mr Jola’s death”, could be understood as a way to signal to all the events that ensued after his death, in a sense marking the consequences of the protest action of 14 May 1980. The other moments that stood out reaffirm the significance of what the learners identified for themselves earlier, such as Tony’s mother’s pleas for Tony to stop his involvement in the protest, the police arresting the learners, and the naming of victims during Tony’s mother’s TRC testimony.

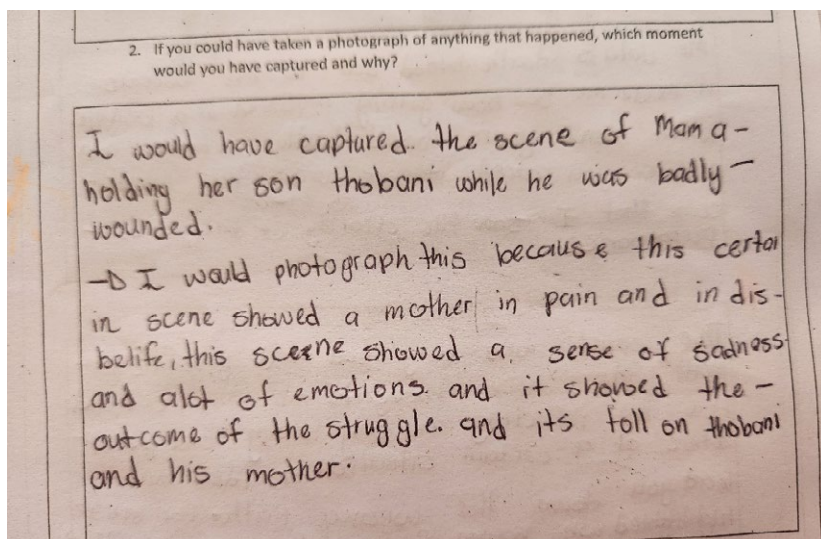


Figure 5: An excerpt of the learner’s response when asked which moment they would photograph in the play

The general response shown in Figure 6 summarises their thoughts on the event, which centred on the learners. The learners noted that they connected with the event’s high emotional intensity, felt immersed in the action, and found it interesting to learn about Makhanda. The learners were, however, saddened by the event, yet still inspired to learn more about the history of Makhanda.

Data analysis: Discussion and themes

This section draws on themes and concepts from decolonial theory and the pedagogic device. For the pedagogical device, data on participants' relocation experiences were examined, noting how informative and exciting it was to learn about the protest events that occurred outside their school.

Theme 1: Relocating and reclaiming a forgotten youth protest story through 'A Childhood in Chalk' (2025) production

The nature of the relocation process lies in recontextualising content by making choices about how it is "selected and sequenced into curriculum documents or textbooks" (Bertram, 2020:120). As established earlier, there is no specific selection or sequencing of Bantu Education in CAPS, however, it is only briefly articulated in the textbooks reviewed by Seroto (2018) and Muthiewana (2020). Moreover, there is no mention of using local anti-Bantu Education stories as additional knowledge sources to support the broader anti-Bantu Education youth protests in South Africa. This means local stories continue to be excluded from CAPS and classrooms. Therefore, given that learners' prior knowledge served well in establishing this, it is important to relocate, reclaim, and recover local historical moments, such as the protest events of 1975 to the 1980s, in Makhanda. The play became a tool for relocating, reclaiming, and recontextualising the forgotten Makhanda anti-Bantu Education protests.

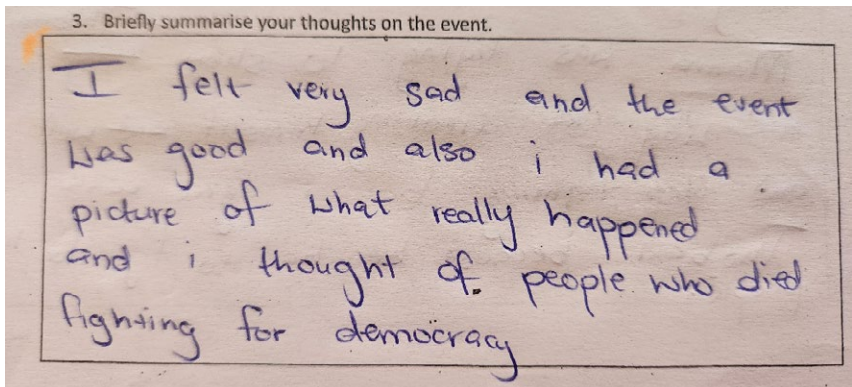


Figure 6: A learner's reflection on their thoughts on the play

From the data, one can see that the play indeed allowed learners to consistently transfer knowledge from the play to historical/political contexts by zooming in on the real-life stories of youth involved in the anti-Bantu Education protests. As O'Toole (2002) explains, drama often allows the audience to experience the event; although fictional, they often find the information presented to them relatable. This moment of connecting the staged events in the play with the historical context of youth protest became a learning moment. During the 1970s and 1980s, learner enrolment at schools fluctuated alongside issues of underqualified teachers (Nishino, 1999:8). Moreover, according to Roodt (2005:234), there was an increase in violence between the learners and the police; the decade was characterised by “cycles of teargas, gunshots, barricades, riot police and funerals” through the play, the learners were able to get a sense of the real-life events that took place in this decade. Through props, sounds, videos, and lights, learners were immersed in the world of the Makhandha youth protests.

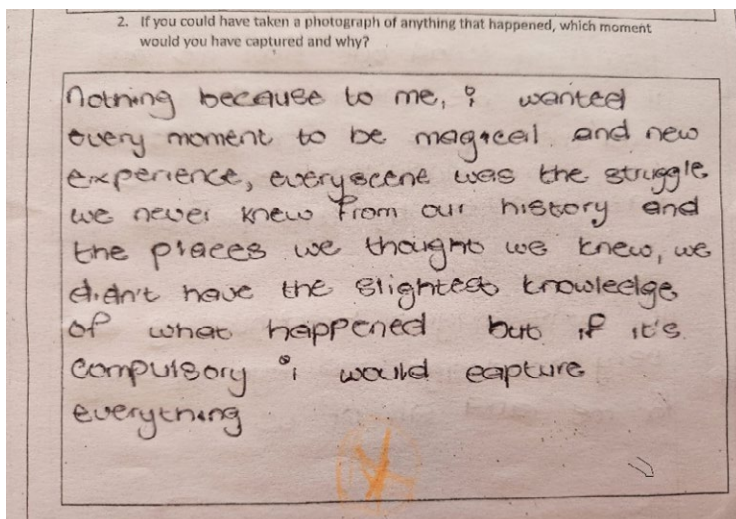


Figure 7: Another reflection showing the reasons behind which scenes they would take photographs of in the play

Moreover, through the play, learners acquired specific knowledge of their school and the street on which it is located. As seen in the response in the image above, most learners did not know that the street and their school hold a rich history of youth protests. As noted in the literature review, Nishino (1999:21) mentioned how learners from Andrew

Moyakhe School located in A Street “stoned a Peacemaker group member on school grounds”, Alfred Soya. This led to the arrest of 23 learners from Andrew Moyakhe School and Nathaniel Nyaluza High School. The play staged these events and their consequences. Throughout the play, the learners gained knowledge they could transfer to their classroom context in Term 4, when they are learning about turning points in South African history. Andersen (2004) affirms that this transfer of knowledge between the drama domain and the school context often helps mediate what the learners did not know and what they now know. As one of the learners noted, in the scene response, the play made them think about the anti-Bantu Education youth protests and how the Andrew Moyakhe School learners and Nyaluza High School learners played a role in fighting for freedom. As Sallis (2007) further argues, the strength of using drama productions as learning tools lies in their ability to facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge.

Although the production is not a textbook or a curriculum document, it became a tool that enabled us to show that local stories should be selected for inclusion in the curriculum to conscientize learners about their local history. In its full sense, recontextualising often occurs in a formal setting such as the MTT (Maluleke, 2021). Through the production, it was shown that this process can start informally in settings such as staged historical dramas. As Maluleke (2021) further adds, indeed, knowledge is not always produced in formal fields of production, but can also start in pedagogic practices that recontextualise forgotten histories. Through this engagement, the learners also developed historical consciousness by being immersed in the world of the performers, as if they were experiencing the youth protests live.

Overall, by selecting this local Makhanda story, learners were made aware of other youth protest stories beyond the widely accepted Soweto Uprising as the only major anti-Bantu Education youth protest. The learners also noted how they took note of the victims’ names that were recited in the last scene, thus, expanding their knowledge of various anti-Bantu Education youth protest activists and learners beyond the well-known Hector Peterson, who died during the Soweto Uprising on 16 June 1976. As one of the learners reflected, “... *one of my favourite moments was when the victims’ names were called at the end of the production*”. This rehumanised the forgotten victims of the struggle, who were mostly children. Accordingly, this restaging and remembering of forgotten histories and activists is a rehumanising process (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ndlovu, 2021). The hope is that more stories like this one can be shared in schools as a starting point, indicating to the MTT that there is a need for better selection and sequencing of history content drawn from local stories.

Theme 2: Contextualising as de-locating local anti-Bantu Education youth protests knowledge through theatre

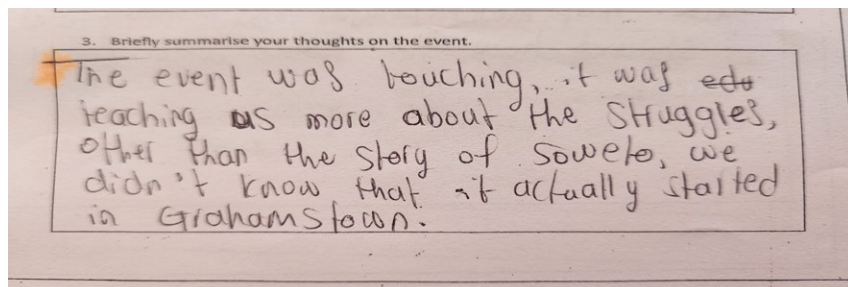


Figure 8: One of the learners' reflections on how they felt about watching the play and learning about the events in Grahamstown

Given that the teaching of local histories is not explicitly articulated in CAPS, it is essential that theatre productions, such as the one explored in this study, serve as sites where knowledge is constructed within a specific discourse (Bertram, 2020). Here, the Childhood in Chalk T-i-E event as a specific learning site was located. The audience, in this case, the Grade 9 learners, could construct and acquire knowledge of local history, as seen in the image above, through the two interactive moments had with them. According to Bertram (2020), learning history involves engaging with concepts of space, place, and time. The play offered the learners this content by clearly stating the place the event took place, Esingeni/A-street, the space, which was in a multiracial township in Makhanda, and the 10-year period from 1975-1985, as one of them noted in the figure below. Other than learning about Bantu Education, the learners also acquired history knowledge on the TRC, how the state enacted violence on Black people during apartheid and key events such as the state of emergency. All this information or knowledge was new to the learners, as they had expressed in the prior learning workshop that they were not familiar with these key historical events.

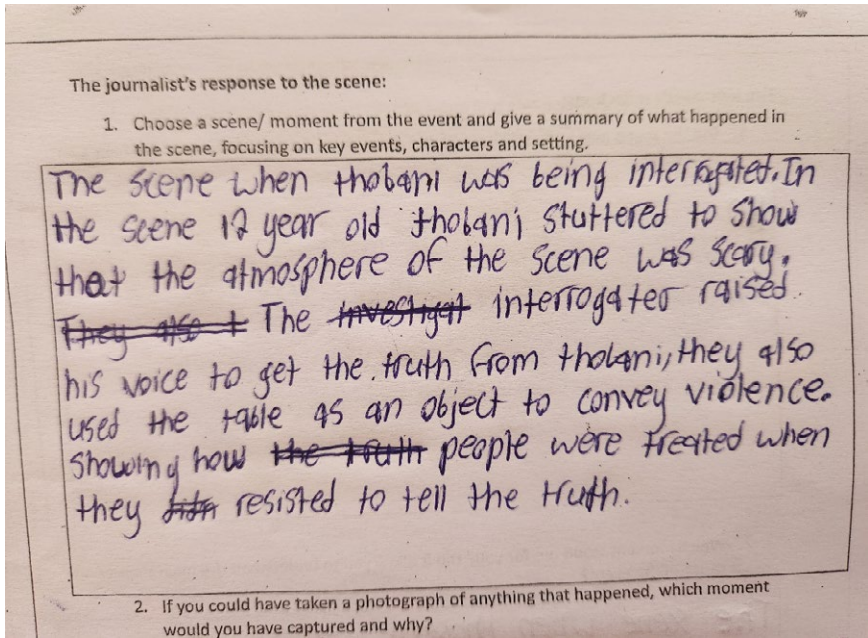


Figure 9: A learner's reflection on the scene that moved them the most, thus explaining how it helped them understand the kind of treatment the boycotters received during the protest period

The journalist's research:

1. What event did you witness?

I witnessed an event where a 12 year old was awfully treated just because he did not know anyth
2. Where was the event located?

The event was located in Grahamstown in South Africa, A-Street Esingeni

Figure 10: Learner's reflection articulating the specific information they acquired from the play.

The learners were taken from a basic level of prior knowledge to an adequate level of knowledge about Bantu Education. The data shows that the learners were able to better understand the impact and effect of Bantu Education on Africans by unpacking themes of violence, sacrifices and what apartheid meant. It was in the forum theatre-inspired Q&A session that the learners asked more questions for clarity, thus showing that they are conceptually and emotionally engaged in the learning process. According to Bird and Donelan (2020:220), drama events that have interactive activities give the audience a chance to ask questions and make meaning, because they can "interrogate and reflect on the world of the 'other' as well as their own 'moral stance' and beliefs". As seen in the data presented, the learners were not only able to learn about the effects of Bantu Education, but could also understand the complexities of being involved in the struggle for better education and the cost thereof. According to Nishino (1999), by 1985, the learners expressed a loss of direction and frustration with an education system that would not change. This time, however, the students redirected their attention to the state system, spending more time forming activist groups that took them further from their families, causing divisions between parents and children.

One of the key history skills intermediate learners need to learn is to see something that happened in the past from more than one point of view. It is believed that the play facilitated the exploration of this skill, especially when learners wrote their scene responses. Some empathised with Tony, while others thought Tony was causing trouble for his mother. The learner, in the scene responses, was able to identify the impact the protest action had on the parents through the inclusion of the Peacemaker group, the concerned parents.

The theatre space became a classroom space, where knowledge was acquired. As Bertram (2020) states, knowledge can be created across multiple fields of production, and in this case, the theatre space is one such field. As one learner reflected in their journalist report, *“It was amazing to learn about Makhanda... the event was eye-opening”*. Their reflection is a testament to the power of theatre as a field of production. The event gave learners the opportunity to learn outside the conventional classroom. They still had the opportunity to ask questions when they did not understand something. Through this, they developed a language to conceptualise and contextualise Bantu Education in Makhanda, thus no longer viewing it as an abstract concept or event that only took place in Soweto, countering/ contributing to Mutheiwana’s analysis of the textbooks. Accordingly, Bertram (2020) acknowledges that de-location is also about challenging the social order of how knowledge is produced or acquired (Bertram, 2020). Therefore, *A Childhood in Chalk* (2025) became a legitimate space for knowledge production, where learners gained a better understanding of the enacted Bantu Education law and of apartheid as an oppressive system.

Mutheiwana (2020) notes that Bantu Education appears in the textbook, but primarily as a social science concept that provides learners with some conceptual knowledge and understanding of the NP, which operated through various oppressive laws and impositions.

Theme 3: Tony’s character as a catalyst for collective storytelling

As mentioned before, the Makhanda youth protest forms part of the larger youth protest stories in South Africa. Therefore, it is essential that these narratives continue to be written. As Mphofu and Steyn (2001) argue, collective storytelling is a tool for humanising Africans. This is because collective storytelling challenges colonial stereotypes that portray Africans as a problem (Mphofu & Steyn, 2001). Therefore, showing the youth protest from a Makhanda context helped learners see the connections between this event and the one in Soweto in 1976. Movements such as the anti-Bantu Education revolts often carry associations with Black consciousness and Black identity. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu (2021) argue, Black people often carry the ‘problematic state’ because anytime

they rise against oppression, coloniality uses more force to silence them, thus posing them as rebellious. The data revealed two views of Tony and his comrades.

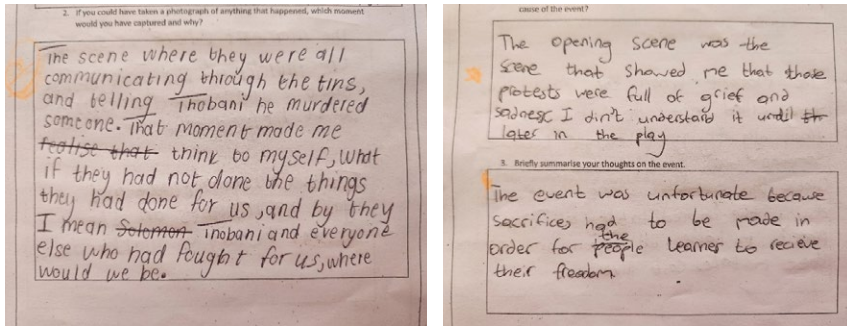


Figure 11: Images 1 and 2 show learners' articulation of empathy towards the learners involved in the protest, and how the state responded with violence as a form of silencing

Therefore, this way of seeing the Black youth dehumanises them, and this is a "monopolised view of what it means to be human by the West" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ndlovu, 2021:28). One reflection, however, stands out as particularly humanising the learners, as they reflect on the joy the school learners had before their lives were interrupted, as seen in the figure below.

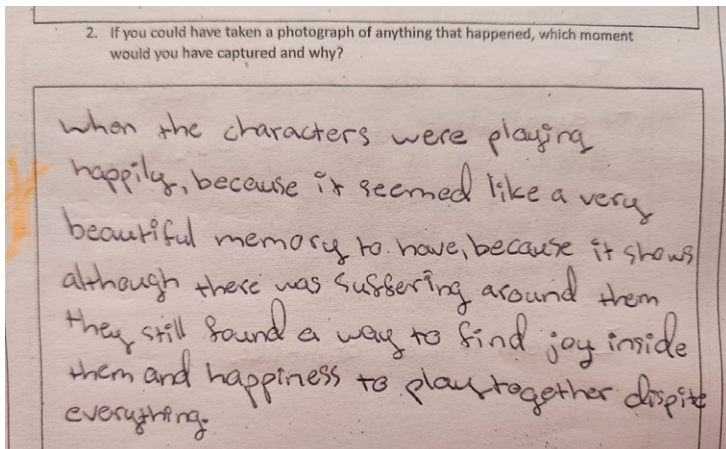


Figure 12: A learner's reflection noting how joy was also experienced amidst the chaos of protest, which gives one a glimpse of childhood innocence that was often interrupted by protests and violence.

It was interesting to see that most of the learners saw Tony beyond the ‘troubled teenager’ lens, as they tended to reflect on his challenges, how the other learners in that period also faced similar challenges, and their families had to navigate those. They tended to reflect from an empathetic view, as shown in the image above, thus humanising Tony’s experience. Hellemann and Heshu (2024) argue that emotions often arise in historical dramas and events, such as re-enactments, because they elicit responses that contribute to the development of historical empathy. However, not all the learners saw Tony’s actions as heroic. Still, rather as a child who was causing his mother stress, when they asked him about his actions in the Q&A hot seating interaction, both the young and old Tony were able to provide clarity on why the struggle was more important than maintaining good family relations. Barone (2002) noted a similar response in their drama production, in which the students initially saw the young schoolchildren in a negative, stereotypical way, but then had the chance to challenge their own perceptions. As affirmed by Bird and Donelan (2020:226), ethno-graphic productions do evoke emotions in the audience, even more so when the audience is given an opportunity to ask the performers questions because they gain “access to the character’s thinking”. And through this ‘thinking’, the audience gains empathy and allows themselves the gift to imagine different perspectives.

Conclusion

Having noted the gaps that exist in the curriculum, those still being worked through by MTT and those noted by Seroto (2018) and Mutheiwana (2020), the production *A Childhood in Chalk* (2025) contributes towards MTT’s goals of strengthening content using D-i-E intervention. Therefore, this intervention, the D-i-E event, aimed to bridge the knowledge gap about the events, ensuring that, alongside the Soweto Uprisings, these learners were also learning about their local history and its impact on their community. The current study showed how useful this was, as evidenced by the scene’s response, reflections, and emerging themes, indicating that learners were able to learn in both the relocation and de-location phases. Through ‘witnessing’ the event as journalists and engaging in the phases from pre-production to the post-show forum theatre-inspired Q&A, the learning outcomes outlined in the History CAPS curriculum, were achieved. Consequently, the learners could view historical events from multiple perspectives, those of parents and learners. It is proposed that theatre productions with local historical content be integrated into the school curriculum, making context-based productions a pedagogical tool that enhances history education in South Africa.

References

- Andersen, C 2004. Learning in 'as-if' worlds: Cognition in drama in education. *Theory Into Practice*, 43(4):281-286. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4304_8
- AP Archive 2015a. *Synd 19 05 80 fatality in Grahamstown protests* [Video]. YouTube, 24 July 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_El82a1gZs
- AP Archive 2015b. *Unused 29 7 80 funeral in Grahamstown, South Africa* [Video]. YouTube, 24 July 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vq4BDBHdE2A>
- Boal, A. (2002). *Games for actors and non-actors* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Barone, T 2002. From genre blurring to audience blending: Reflections on the field emanating from an ethnodrama. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 33(2):255-267. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2002.33.2.255>
- Bertram, C 2020. Remaking history: The pedagogic device and shifting discourses in the South African school history curriculum. *Yesterday and Today*, 23:1-29. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2020/n23a1>
- Bernstein, B, Solomon, J 1999. Pedagogy, identity and the construction of a theory of symbolic control: Basil Bernstein questioned by Joseph Solomon. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20:265-279.
- Bertram, C and Christiansen, I 2014. *Understanding research: An introduction to reading research*. Van Schaik.
- Bird, J and Donelan, K 2020. An interactive ethnographic performance: Using research-based theatre and drama pedagogy to enhance meaning making. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 25(2):218-235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2020.1722598>
- Boal, A 2002. *Games for actors and non-actors* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Booyse, JJ 2011. Education provisioning during the period of National Party rule. In: JJ Booyse, CS le Roux, J Seroto and CC Wolluter (eds.). *A history of schooling in South Africa: Method and context* (pp. 1-12). ABC Press.
- Christie, P and Collins, C 1982. Bantu education: Apartheid ideology or labour reproduction? *Comparative Education*, 18(1):59-75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305006820180107>

- Clarke, V and Braun, V 2012. Thematic analysis. In: NM Seel (ed.). *Encyclopedia of critical psychology* (pp. 1947-1952). Springer.
- Dei, GJ S, 2018. "Black Like Me": Reframing Blackness for Decolonial Politics. *Educational Studies*, 54(2), 117–142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2018.1427586>
- Department of Basic Education 2011. *Curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS): Grades 7–9 social sciences*. Government Printing Works.
- Firing, K, Thorkelsdóttir, RB, & Chemi, T 2022. The Theatre of War: leader development between personal identity and person-in-role. *Culture and Organization*, 28(3–4), 330–344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2022.2028146>
- Hellemann, PC 2022. Towards a problem-posing pedagogy: Using teacher-in-role in a special needs classroom, *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 12(1):1205. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.1205>
- Hellemann, PC and Heshu, M 2024. Beyond reenactment: Exploring the Battle at Egazini with grade 10 history learners using applied theatre. *Yesterday and Today*, 32(1), 39–75. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2024/n32a3>
- Hyslop, J 1986. *Food, authority and politics: Student riots in South African schools, 1945-1976*. University of the Witwatersrand. African Studies Institute.
- Kushnir, I 2025. Thematic analysis in the area of education: A practical guide. *Cogent Education*, 12(1):2471645. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2471645>
- Maedza, P 2019. Sarafina!: The children's revolution from Soweto to Broadway. *South African Theatre Journal*, 32(3):235-256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10137548.2018.1544503>
- Maluleka, P 2021. Fallism as decoloniality: Towards a decolonised school history curriculum in post-colonial-apartheid South Africa. *Yesterday and Today*, 26:68-91. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2021/n26a4>
- Mermikides, A 2013. Brilliant theatre-making at the National: Devising, collective creation and the director's brand. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 33(2):153-167. https://doi.org/10.1386/stap.33.2.153_1
- Morris, G 2002. Reconsidering theatre-making in South Africa: A study of theatre in education in Cape schools. *Theatre Research International*, 27(3):289-305. doi:10.1017/S0307883302000354

- Steyn, M, and Mpofu, W 2021. The trouble with the human. In: M Steyn and W Mpofu (eds.), *Decolonising the mind: Reflections from Africa on difference and oppression* (pp. 1-24). Wits University Press.
- Mutheiwana, P 2020. *A cultural-historical analysis of Grade 9 history curriculum and its pedagogical resources for learners' conceptual development*. Master's thesis, University of Cape Town.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, SJ and Ndlovu, PP 2021. The invention of blackness on a world scale. In: M Steyn and W Mpofu (eds.), *Decolonising the mind: Reflections from Africa on difference and oppression* (pp. 25-45). Wits University Press.
- Nishino, R 1999. *The dynamics of school protests: Grahamstown school boycotts c. 1984-87*. Grahamstown.
- Nishino, R 2002. An oral history project: Recording recollections of the school boycotts c. 1984 to 1987 in Grahamstown, South Africa. *Australasian Review of African Studies*, 24(1):20-26.
- O'Toole, J 2002. Drama: The productive pedagogy. *Melbourne Studies in Education*, 43(2):39-52. <http://hdl.handle.net/10072/6601>
- Perry, M 2010. *Theatre as a place of learning: The forces and affects of devised theatre processes in education*. Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia. <https://open.library.ubc.ca>
- Roodt, MJ 2005. Rhodes University From Apartheid Vastrap to African Swing. *African Sociological Review/Revue Africaine de Sociologie*, 9(1), pp.234-239.
- Roux, A and Helliker, K 1986. *Voices from Rini*. Rhodes University, Institute of Social and Economic Research.
- Ruiz, I and Baca, D 2017. Decolonial options and writing studies. *Composition Studies*, 45(2):226-229. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26402796>
- Sallis, R 2007. From data to drama—The construction of an ethnographic performance. *NJ*, 31(2):7-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14452294.2007.11649514>
- Seroto, J 2018. Analysing the presentation of the 1976 Soweto uprising in Grade 9 history textbooks. *Africa Education Review*, 15(4):1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2017.1358066>

- Shing, YL and Brod, G 2016. Effects of prior knowledge on memory: Implications for education. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 10(3):153-161. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mbe.12110>
- Thobejane, TD 2013. History of apartheid education and the problems of reconstruction in South Africa. *Sociology Study*, 3(1):1-12.
- National Archive (NA), Pretoria, Department of Education (DoE), Vol.10, Reference 8/1/3/452: Letter, K Lewis (Director General) / P Dlamini (Teacher, Springs College), 12 June 1960.
- Truth Commision Special Report, South African Broadcasting Commission, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa Report (1998), Vol. 3, Chapter 2, 29 October 1998. Available at <https://sabctrc.saha.org.za/reports.htm>. Accessed 24 April 2025
- Wilsforth, MJ 1979. *Transcending the culture of poverty in a black South African township*. Master's thesis, Rhodes University.
- Zono, S 2023. A new start for a new school in the new year: The story of the Andrew Moyake School of Excellence, *Grocott's Mail*, January. Available at <https://grocotts.ru.ac.za/2023/01/23/a-new-start-for-a-new-school-in-the-new-year/>. Accessed on 24 April 2024.

Controversial Memory and Digital Mediation: Preservice Teachers' Approaches to the Soweto Uprising

DOI: : <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a12>

P Bharath

Faculty of Education, Department of Humanities Education

University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

pranitha.bharath@up.ac.za

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6175-7109>

DOI: : <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a12>

Abstract

The controversial topic of the 1976 Soweto Uprising in the South African history curriculum poses significant challenges for teachers seeking to teach it critically. Extensively studied as a historical and political event, little attention has been paid to how it is taught, despite its powerful role in historical thinking. Teachers have the power to present the event as a closed chapter of the past or as a dynamic story that fosters interpretation and reflection. Located within a qualitative, interpretive paradigm, this study examines how preservice history teachers integrate digital tools into their instruction of this event, to foster learner engagement and civic consciousness. The study employs a collaborative design in which 268 students were divided into small groups of approximately 10. Data are generated from 10 purposively sampled Information and Communication Technology (ICT) projects, incorporating online resources and a reflective activity detailing their pedagogical approaches. Findings reveal considerable variation in source selection, teacher positionality, and uneven depth in historical reasoning and in the mediation of contemporary interpretations. Drawing on critical pedagogy (Freire, 2000) and the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), the study highlights that digital tools can be used to present historical sources, and through a process of sifting, sorting, and critiquing evidence for their reliability and trustworthiness, 'Learning by doing' as a fundamental teaching competency can stimulate learner skills, like multi-perspectivity.

Keywords: Soweto Uprising; Preservice teachers; Digital tools; Inquiry; Critical pedagogy; Multiperspectivity; Historical thinking

Introduction

While Youth Day (16 June), a public holiday in South Africa, commemorates the Soweto Uprising of 1976 as part of the country's democratic heritage, considerable controversy surrounds this event. Youth Day is widely regarded as a turning point in South Africa's struggle against apartheid (Seroto, 2018). Although the immediate trigger was the enforcement of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in selected subjects, the protest reflected broader frustrations with the inequalities of the Bantu Education system, which was designed to provide Black learners with an inferior education. Learners understand the origins of contemporary educational inequalities and debates about language, access, and social justice.

The 16 June peaceful protest in Soweto turned violent with police using tear gas, dogs, and live ammunition. Images of learners such as Hector Pieterse, who was fatally shot during the protests, circulated nationally and internationally, drawing attention to the brutality of the apartheid state. Protests spread to other townships across South Africa, resulting in further resistance and many deaths. Historians have subsequently viewed the uprising as a catalyst for renewed political mobilisation and the emergence of a new generation of youth activists who would play a significant role in the anti-apartheid struggle (Ndlovu, 2006).

The inclusion of this event in the South African History (Grades 9-12) and Life Orientation (Grade 6) school curriculum draws on themes of resistance against state oppression. There are multiple theories about its direct causes, which textbooks often condense or narrow, leading to incomplete accounts of this part of history (Seroto, 2018). The Social Sciences Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS), Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2011a:44), lists the event first for Grade 9 learners, as part of the "Turning Points in South African History", and later as part of "Topic 4: Civil Resistance in South Africa 1970s to 1980" within the CAPS History for Grade 12 (DBE, 2011b:29). Teaching the event requires attention to a range of factors, including the accessibility of public domain materials, such as curriculum documents, textbooks, media, and online sources, as well as identifying who is still available to speak about it (oral sources). Kondo (2023) suggests that we reconsider how the Soweto Uprising is recorded to foster a connection between the 1976 generation and today's local youth, enabling the youth to assume the role of storytellers. The role of museums and heritage sites, many of which are endorsed by the democratic government, also presents narratives of the event, adding

another layer to consider when selecting sources or field trips to teach the event in either grade. Additionally, the Fourth Industrial Revolution requires teachers to skilfully integrate digital tools to support contemporary learners in inquiry-based, critical analysis of sources and multimodal texts, enabling them to make meaning of the past. Digital mediation, in the current study, refers to how teachers use digital tools and resources to guide learners' interactions with historical content, evidence, and interpretations.

Teeger (2024) highlights how history lessons, in particular contexts, perpetuate unequal power relations in schools, underscoring the subtle reconfiguration of racism. Teachers' desire to avoid conflict may lead to historical distancing from the apartheid past (Teeger, 2024). Pace and Wassermann (2025) argue that teachers are typically not adequately prepared to represent the content, deal with students' reactions, and ward off criticism when teaching a violent and oppressive past. From Teeger's book, teachers spotlight how South African learners receive "a fragmented, distorted, traumatizing and trivialized view of the difficult past" instead of a "coherent history of the colonial roots of apartheid, structural racism, brutalizations of the Black majority population" (Pace & Wassermann, 2025: 1). Pace & Wassermann (2025) write about how teachers enter an avoidance mode, sidestepping difficult feelings to minimise conflict and thereby protect themselves. Preservice history teachers (student teachers) are trained and mandated to teach conscientiously and responsibly, being aware of learners' perceptions and their potential to build a false narrative. Learners who view teachers as authorities and credible sources of information may be inclined to accept a teacher's narrative. This positional power may limit critical engagement with other sources of information.

The post-apartheid South African history curriculum and the controversial topic of the Soweto Uprising require a specialised or disciplinary focus that "aims for learners to develop the skills to analyse historical sources and evidence and to recognize that there are different interpretations of particular events" (Bertram, 2019:125). Additionally, learners need access to knowledge that is reliable and closer to the truth (Young, 2013), one that disciplines offer specialised ways of thinking to investigate the world. South Africa's move away from the memory-history approach to historical inquiry is influenced by its own contested memory and by global trends in history education (Bharath, 2015).

From a pedagogical perspective, teachers must consider how historical events are presented to learners, ensuring that content not only conveys factual knowledge but also promotes critical reflection. This involves pedagogical reasoning, which, for this study, refers to the process through which teachers make instructional decisions about what

knowledge to teach, how to teach it, and why particular pedagogical approaches are appropriate in specific classroom contexts. Through the lens of Freire (1970), teaching is never a neutral act, as teachers must actively decide how knowledge is presented. These educational practices can challenge or reproduce existing inequalities and power relations.

The purpose of the current study is to understand how preservice history teachers use digital tools to teach the contentious Soweto Uprising. At the heart of effective teaching lies the educator's commitment to bring the curriculum to life by understanding what is expected and integrating their training and resourcefulness. A certain level of responsibility is expected in selecting sources, and teachers are trained to access, interpret, and integrate them. Without this training, teachers are limited to surface-level textbook narratives and cannot expose learners to the multiple versions of the 1976 event. In this way, learners are taught to think historically, which challenges them in two ways: first, to "think about how historical knowledge claims are constructed"; secondly, it is about challenging students to "think of historians as actively engaged in constructing knowledge claims about the past through argument" (Chapman, 2010:21-22).

Key research questions

The research focuses on two integral questions:

1. How do teachers use ICT to teach the Soweto Uprising as a controversial historical topic?
2. What patterns of pedagogical reasoning are evident in teachers' approaches to teaching this event as a controversial historical topic?

Background

During the oppressive apartheid period of the 1960s, research on South African history textbooks was dominated by Afrikaner Nationalist historiography (Ndlovu, 1993). Like the British and American sociological movements of the 1970s, which viewed schooling as a means of training the working class for their place in society, Chisholm (2008) argued that history textbooks, as representatives of the curriculum, played a critical role in legitimating and promoting apartheid. The shift towards a skills-based approach to the teaching of history in South Africa was influenced by a progressive movement in Britain in 1974. Identified as the Schools' Council Project, this movement aimed to reconsider the nature and relevance of history, effectively replacing the chronological, factual approach to teaching history with a skills-based one.

Following the 1994 reforms, South African historical methodology is characterised by critical perspectives that distance it from colonial narratives. Thus, learning history at school involves both the acquisition of specialised substantive knowledge (sometimes referred to as first-order knowledge) and specialised second-order knowledge (Bertram, 2009). These second-order concepts in the English tradition of historical thinking relate to “broad concepts and modes of thinking that are necessary to build, organise, apply and express historical knowledge and historical thinking” (Chapman, 2017:15). These are essential for the practice of history, for understanding how substantive knowledge is generated in history (through historical inquiry), and for developing the cognitive tools used to organise and structure substantive knowledge (concepts such as change, cause, and significance and historical significance) (Counsell, 2016). This second-order knowledge is essential if learners are to understand history as a particular interpretive account of the past, rather than merely as a series of events that occurred during the Uprising.

The purpose of school history is to develop learners' historical literacy or historical thinking, where learners 'do' history by engaging with evidence from primary sources (Maggioni, 2010). It is about understanding the significance of events before, during, and after, while engaging with ethical dimensions. These are not just 'skills', and cannot be developed without deep substantive content knowledge. Postmodernist theory holds the view that there is no single position from which the study of the past can be told (Southgate, 1996). A historian or a teacher may foreground details they consider relevant, ignoring others. The epistemology of a subject like history can, therefore, be understood as 'fairly objective', 'constructed', or 'subjective'. While it seems contradictory, Kissack (1997:214) states that “knowledge itself is conventionally associated with truth and objectivity”. Even the inaccurate or biased versions present a perspective, and learners should be able to use their analytical skills to identify the inaccuracies or bias, considering other evidence.

These theoretical insights have implications for pedagogical decision-making. In the context of the Soweto Uprising, this requires that teachers move learners beyond a factual recounting of the event to critical engagement with the debates.

Literature review

This section highlights existing historical scholarship on the Soweto Uprising, which emphasises the event's root causes and argues that they cannot be attributed to a single factor. There are varying interpretations regarding the nature of participation, responsibility, and the escalation of violence. There is consensus on youth agency, however, there is

tension over how the event is perceived. The teacher's power lies in these perceptions and pedagogical decisions.

Teachers must create opportunities for learners to evaluate competing interpretations of the Soweto Uprising. Part of these interpretations includes how "school children cannot, by themselves, topple a strong intransigent regime" (Hirson, 1979:1). Pohlandt-McCormick (2000) attributes the protests of Black schoolchildren in Soweto to the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in their schools. Carrying a political inflection, Pohlandt-McCormick argues that the government crafts an official narrative, particularly the African National Congress (ANC), for situating its role in the dismantling of apartheid. The ANC selectively utilised aspects of the Uprising to support its own cause, appropriating voices and images for its own use, and gradually downplayed and diminished the independent actions of the young participants (Pohlandt-McCormick, 2000). The ANC, thus, emerged as the victor, all but silenced and in exile during the uprising. Simultaneously, Pohlandt-McCormick (2000) considers how those who did the physical violence erased the histories of their victims and contributed to creating a history that denies their culpability. By inference, Pohlandt-McCormick's reference is to the oppressive, authoritarian context of apartheid South Africa, which produced collective memories, sometimes obstructing the ability of individual historical actors and witnesses to place themselves in history. The author concludes that "documents and historical narratives must be scrutinised for the silences they countenanced and the lies they perpetuated" (Pohlandt-McCormick, 2000:24). This duplicity needs to be understood to teach how accounts of events are shaped by power and context, and how to create structured opportunities to engage with competing interpretations rather than presenting a single account.

Teaching controversial topics can challenge historical thinking when emotional responses are provoked. When historical narratives are juxtaposed, learners may struggle to distinguish between evidence-based inquiry and speculative narrative. Historical accounts, such as oral evidence, may be construed as fabricated narratives rather than explanations grounded in experience. Thus, there is a need for multiple testimonies of the past, which can be sifted and critically corroborated using historians' heuristics (Havekes et al., 2012). Digital mediation allows for the exposition of these narratives.

Sapire's (2013) research focused on two bodies of writing: the literature that chronicled the revolt as it unfolded; and the historical literature that explored township politics and culture during the first half of the twentieth century. This highlighted gaps and blind spots, specifically that township rebellions were subordinated to those of the exiled ANC in

contemporary public history. The controversies about the ANC's involvement are included in Nieftagodien & Moloi's research (2006:361), where the researchers reveal that some "students also had contact with ANC figures in Soweto, although these connections were not always explicit". Nieftagodien & Moloi (2006:362) also mention that "students were no longer only opposing Afrikaans but were now resisting Bantu education and apartheid in general".

Given the different interpretations, Seroto (2018:14) argues that the design of the history curriculum should enable learners to engage with history without imposing a single dominant view. Learner activities could begin with critical thinking exercises, with questions like: Were the motives political or ideological? Another possible angle was that the National Party considered African schools as strategic sites where Afrikaner hegemony could be established by using Afrikaners as the medium of instruction (Ndlovu, 2006:325). Learners move beyond a descriptive account towards negotiating meaning about the past, justifying and reasoning claims (Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2008).

Although the current study focuses on ICT approaches to teaching the Soweto Uprising, textbooks remain important, as they contain encoded knowledge about the event that can be used to reinforce or challenge digital resources. Goal 19 of the *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realization of Schooling 2025* states that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) aims to "ensure that every learner has access to the minimum set of textbooks" (DBE, 2010), reinforcing the role of textbooks, even though some people in the books receive insufficient or no coverage. For instance, Johnson (2025:7) describes the emergence of certain patterns of knowledge about the past, where a gendered narrative of 'youth' of 1976 was implicitly male, a phenomenon which became explicitly noted as young Black men were increasingly visible, and visibly violent, while young women were liminal within the narratives. The history textbook remains a significant resource in contemporary South Africa, as history teachers often 'read from the textbook' or ask learners to summarise and take notes from it (Bharath, 2026). Seroto (2018) argues that textbooks do not provide a balanced view of the causes of the Soweto Uprising. The author highlights how some books emphasised the causes of the Soweto Uprising as the ideology of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction. Some textbooks portrayed students as being influenced by the ideas of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness. Omissions, according to Seroto (2018), limited the options learners could consider and served as an obstacle to a perspective from which learners could view, examine, and analyse the protest.

Like textbooks, teachers can be ideological and political instruments that shape learners' thinking. Malawana (2019:613) argues that "The youth of 1976, of #FeesMustFall, of #RhodesMustFall, of countless other struggles, and of Equal Education is evidence that children continuously play a vital role as social justice activists both in education and in social justice as a whole", and that "conscientized learners have the power to shape what they want South Africa to be, and what they want the education system to achieve". The history teacher plays a significant role in achieving this.

Some research examines the role of peace education in promoting social justice and sustainable peace within the national curricula of post-conflict societies, weaving these themes into subjects such as Social Studies and History at the university level (Adan, 2025). In countries such as Rwanda and Sierra Leone, there is more structure surrounding peace education and citizenship initiatives (Bertram, 2019; Adan, 2025). While history can promote nationalism and social cohesion, it can also be a wedge that divides and fragments society (Chimbunde & Moreeng, 2024). If history is to play a role in developing social cohesion and citizenship, then teaching it should encourage diverse perspectives rather than a closed view of the past. Adan (2025) argues that the lack of a curriculum that actively teaches conflict resolution and reconciliation is a missed opportunity to equip youth with the essential skills and frameworks needed to navigate post-conflict realities. The role that teachers play in empowering learners to understand citizenship and peaceful coexistence cannot be underestimated.

The way learners perceive the world has changed. Books, papers, and journals no longer provide the exclusive means of passing on historical knowledge. A normal classroom shifts into a virtual archive, turning learners into instant historians who can now investigate their own case studies. Teaching becomes more learner-centred, more active, and more three-dimensional (Jardine, 2011). The digitisation of African materials has made it easier than ever to access primary source materials and conduct research (Kelly & Badsha, 2020). There is limited research on how ICT shapes the teaching of controversial histories. The current study addresses this gap by examining the pedagogical reasoning underpinning preservice teachers' ICT projects on the Soweto Uprising.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

The study is informed by Freire's (2000) critical theory, which acknowledges the teacher's role or power in moving beyond textbook narratives and engaging in a transformative process of dialogue and critical reflection. It moves away from the authoritarian model

of teachers depositing knowledge into passive learners, however, it advocates for critical awareness and for functioning as co-constructors of knowledge in pedagogy (Majola et al., 2025). This framework complements the disciplinary requirement that learners interrogate historical narratives in a dialogical manner. The complex knowledge needed for such planning is known as technological pedagogical content knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), which combines technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge (TPACK). This framework can be extended to include context because effective technological integration also depends on the contextual realities of the classroom and school. This is a powerful instructional tool that alleviates the cost of an actual field trip. It does not take away the impact of an actual field trip to the sites, which are 'living history' in South Africa. A virtual tour can prepare students for the actual tour, bringing history to its full potential. Teachers' pedagogical approaches are shaped or constrained by contextual factors and by the school's infrastructure and organisational policies. Where schools have few or no resources to support an actual or virtual field trip, teacher agency and adaptability are required to work with what is practically feasible. A teacher's 'resourcefulness' is demonstrated by the conversion of the technological script into print. Equally significant is the ability to teach conflict resolution that leverages empathy and respect for different beliefs, using digital techniques to make historical ideas and concepts more accessible and relevant to learners.

Methodology

Following established ethical protocols and informed consent outlined in the pilot study by Wassermann and Bentrovato (2018) on the teaching of controversial issues, this qualitative research used a collaborative design, in which 268 final-year Bachelor of Education history methodology students were divided into small groups of approximately 10 to complete an ICT project, with three components for assessment. The first component involved creating a virtual field trip using Google Earth Project Maker to identify sites associated with the Soweto Uprising. The mapped sites were augmented with content and tasks of varying cognitive demand. The second component involved designing a single, pedagogically coherent slide that incorporated clickable elements or hyperlinks to additional online sources and activities on the Soweto Uprising. The slides were expected to include essential historical content knowledge about the causes, effects, key actors, and other contextual details to sustain learning, debate, and activity. Activities set for the first two components of the project were guided by Bloom's revised taxonomy to cater for all levels of questioning, and by the CAPS history policy document for Grades 10-12 on the three levels of source interrogation (DBE, 2011b). Preservice teachers were required to balance

primary and secondary sources to ensure a wide spectrum of perspectives for learners to interpret. The third component involved a written reflection on the ICT project, outlining the pedagogical choices the group made and the rationale for those choices. The categories emerging from the reflections would subsequently be developed into themes, providing the analytical framework for interpreting the data. The themes are presented in tabular form, with ticks indicating varying levels of engagement.

Of the 35 groups, 10 were purposively selected for their depth and complexity, allowing for a meaningful analysis of only substantive written reflections. The written reflections would provide insight into the pedagogical reasoning underpinning the digital artefacts and enable an examination of how preservice teachers justified their instructional decisions. Through repeated reading and comparison of the projects and accompanying reflections, categories emerging from these pedagogical choices were identified and refined into themes. The combination of digital artefacts and written reflections enabled the triangulation of data sources, thereby enhancing the credibility of the interpretations. Trustworthiness is enhanced by this triangulation, grounded in both digital artifacts and the written reflection that informs their reasoning.

Each project is identified as Project 1-10, anonymising the contributions. Since much of the slide work juxtaposed images of people and places involved in the protest with other copyrighted materials, students were required to acknowledge all sources with full reference lists. To effectively supervise the projects, teacher training in critical pedagogy was foregrounded. Preservice teachers were introduced to digital archives. They were reminded not to use ICT instruction as “baby-sitters” for classrooms full of students seeking visual and auditory stimulation (Bellan & Scheurman, 1998:36). This multisensory learning project afforded an ‘escape’ from traditional textbooks while fostering interactive learning. The components of the ICT project served as an accessible mechanism for learners and teachers who lack financial means to undertake field trips.

Figure 1 below shows the structure of a single project, illustrating the sources, URLs, and their use. It illustrates how technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge intersect within the project design and provides an example of the kinds of artifacts analysed in the current study. The URLs are hyperlinks that provide more information on the sources and topics. The data in the projects show how substantive and procedural knowledge are combined with technological knowledge and skill. The URLs were verified at the time of the project submission but have since become unavailable.

The 1976 Soweto Uprising
Grade 9: History

Let's explore the Hector Pieterse Museum
CLICK THE LINK OR THE EARTH IMAGE BELOW!
https://earth.google.com/earth/d/1TRIPJa8oszi53qJpiNU_tloWQfdNdXh?usp=sharing

Did you know?
The main cause of the Soweto Uprising was the government's implementation of the Afrikaans Medium Decree, which meant that Black students had to be taught in Afrikaans.
CLICK THE LINK BELOW TO READ MORE!
<https://pdf.ac/TluUU7c5LcW>

Key leaders and organisations
The protests were primarily organized by students. The South African Students' Movement was the main student organisation that mobilized the protest with Tlokotsi known as "Tsietse" Mashinini as a student from Moroka house High School as the key organizer and leader of the events.
READ MORE!!
<https://sahistory.org.za/article/key-people-june-16-soweto-youth-uprising>

The events of the Uprising
On June 16, 1976, thousands of students from Soweto went on a peaceful march from their schools in Orlando Stadium, in Soweto west against the new language policy. On their way to the rally, they met with the police who started shooting at them and as a result of this death of students like Hastings Ndlovu and 12-year-old Hector Pieterse.
Click link below to watch YOUTUBE video
<https://youtu.be/EL5DDeOpGV8?si=XU448881UaThw5Nv>

Spiraling events & Consequences
The initial protest caused protests to break out all over South Africa. Protests spread to townships in Port Elizabeth, Cape Peninsula and Pretoria.
The government responded with brutal force, imprisoning mass arrests, detentions without trial, and surveillance against student leaders and other apartheid activists. Thousands of South Africans activated like a role. Global condemnations led to international sanctions.
CLICK LINK BELOW
<https://shorturl.at/qUtmj>

School Activity:
NOTE: Please refresh the page if the game says: The challenge is ongoing!
<https://kahoot.it/challenge/036380976?challenge-id=6472293d-22c4-4017-ad1c-f0db6ad06837-1769186300961>

Photograph of a contemporary newspaper reporting on the Soweto Uprising

Photograph of hundreds of youths gathered in protest

Image of a uniformed officer wielding a baton on a protester near other fleeing protesters

Photograph of police brutality. A uniformed policeman holding a young protester on the floor

Sam Nzima's famous photograph of Hector Pieterse (carried by Mbuyisa Makhubu)

Figure 1: Project 2 showing the Soweto Uprising through ICT-mediated sources (images redacted due to copyright issues)

Disclaimer: Hyperlinks/URLs have since been changed/are inactive.

Findings

The qualitative analysis of 10 ICT projects reveals variations in pedagogical approaches across the sample, with differences and similarities evident in how the Soweto Uprising is historically framed. Preservice teachers used a variety of primary and secondary sources, tangible for understanding the event, and had a plethora of activities, games, and quizzes linked digitally for learners to explore. The findings demonstrate that preservice teachers’ pedagogical reasoning and ICT practices significantly shaped how the Soweto Uprising was approached as a controversial historical topic. The seven themes, tabled below, are drawn from the reflections. The themes present preservice teachers’ choices regarding how source selection shaped the learner activities they designed. These activities influenced opportunities for multi-perspectivity, which in turn affected how teachers and learners were positioned within the inquiry process. It showed how controversy was mediated and ultimately, the challenges and limitations associated with teaching the Soweto Uprising through ICT.

This exercise positioned learners within an inquiry framework to varying degrees (strong, moderate, or weak) while exploring the event’s controversial nature in multiple ways. Table 1 shows the variation in the strength and manifestation of the themes across the ten projects.

Table 1: Pedagogical choices of preservice teachers’ ICT projects

ICT Project	Primary Sources			Secondary Sources			Levelled Activities			Multiple -Perspectives			Learner Positioning			Teaching Controversy		
	S	M	W	S	M	W	S	M	W	S	M	W	S	M	W	S	M	W
1.		√			√			√			√			√			√	
2.		√			√			√			√			√			√	
3.	√				√		√			√			√			√		
4.		√			√				√		√			√		√	√	
5.		√			√				√			√	√		√			√
6.		√			√			√			√			√			√	
7.		√			√		√				√		√			√		
8.		√			√				√		√			√			√	
9.		√			√		√			√			√			√		
10.		√			√			√			√			√			√	
Key: S– Strong Use, M– Moderate Use, W-Weak Use																		

This table is not merely a description of the 10 projects, but an intensive analysis, revealing important patterns in how preservice teachers conceptualise the relationships among ICT, historical inquiry, learner agency, and controversy.

What emerged was a variation in approaches—preservice teachers did not use digital sources in the same way. They generally recognised the importance of source work, however, implemented it unevenly. All ICT projects successfully used Google Earth to incorporate actual sites and museums in South Africa. The projects differed in how they treated evidence, with some engaging sources as objects for interpretation, while others used them more illustratively. Project 5, for instance, used the material to show what happened, effectively using ICT as a presentation tool. Project 3, on the other hand, treated the sources as evidence for interpretation. Project 3 placed the Soweto Uprising at the centre of the ongoing resistance, centring African voices and oral histories. This project reflected on how reclaiming these stories could challenge the colonial narrative that has historically marginalised African experiences. Project 3 moves beyond narratives that represented the youth primarily as ‘rioters’ and instead foregrounded their agency as political actors resisting apartheid education.

Projects 3 and 5 illustrate the broader patterns of the analysis, while the following section presents a more in-depth examination of the pedagogical decisions underpinning preservice teachers’ instructional choices.

Use of sources

The sources teachers choose can shape learners’ perspectives and influence how they understand historical events. Thus, it is not a neutral exercise, but one that involves intentional choices. Freire’s (1970, 1974) critical pedagogy offers a vision of learning through dialogue and critical reflection, in which learners are not passive recipients, but active agents and co-creators of knowledge. In the current study, the selection of sources was calculated, designed to highlight the variation in historical accounts of the same event. In the literature review, these angles are discussed, however, some preservice teachers did not engage with them. All the projects focused on Grade 9 lesson planning, avoiding Grade 12, possibly because it was more challenging to teach. CAPS Social Sciences for Grade 9, allocate five hours on the “causes, leaders, events of 16 June, spiralling events that followed throughout the country, longer-term consequences for resistance and repression” (DBE, 2011a:44). The “debates about whether the students were influenced by Black Consciousness thinking” and “the legacy of Black Consciousness on South African politics”

are to be understood later in Grade 12 (DBE, 2011b:29). Teachers may have entered an avoidance mode, sidestepping difficult emotions and contentious issues to minimise conflict. If these controversies are not discussed in the earlier grades, the implication is that the event may be interpreted as closed. Simplified narratives can obscure the complexity of the event, denying learners opportunities to understand how the legacies of colonialism and apartheid continue to shape contemporary society. This is especially true for learners who do not choose History as an elective in Grade 10 and beyond.

Learner tasks on source contextualisation and interpretation suggest that preservice teachers are beginning to understand the importance of historical inquiry. For ICT use, there was access to oral histories, online photographs, newspaper reports, museum collections, and online repositories showing how a digital environment expanded source availability beyond the textbook. ICT provided learners with opportunities to compare and authenticate sources. The idea of controversy, however, seemed limited to who planned and executed the event, rather than who fired the first shot. Some projects lacked classification of sources as primary or secondary, as well as an understanding of how each type of source affects the kind of claims it makes. Preservice teachers thus require further development in source classification, contextualisation, and critical evaluation to move beyond a descriptive engagement towards more sophisticated reasoning.

Learner activities

The project activities were expected to have learners engage with historical evidence and construct their own interpretations of the Uprising. These were to be levelled in terms of cognitive demand and to engage with historical inquiry. The analysis revealed considerable variation in this understanding. Projects 3, 7, and 9 depicted stronger inquiry by incorporating tasks that encourage learners to contextualise evidence and consider issues of reliability. By contrast, Projects 1, 2, 6, and 10 showed moderate engagement, and Projects 4, 5, and 8 showed weak levels, not moving beyond mere factual knowledge acquisition. All projects incorporated activities of varying levels, however, this was uneven in historical inquiry. Digital tools primarily served as mechanisms for content delivery, with preservice teachers using online quizzes, interactive tasks, and hyperlinks to test recall or lower-level cognitive skills. Consequently, opportunities to engage learners in higher-order historical thinking were often underutilised. The findings, therefore, suggest that access to digital tools alone does not guarantee engagement with the past. It depends on the extent to which activities interrogate evidence, identity bias, and justify interpretation. Teachers

retain control over the activities and, therefore, opportunities for multiple perspectives. Depending on their understanding of the event and their willingness to engage with controversial interpretations, they may present a descriptive account. By prioritising sources that create a coherent timeline and avoiding any debate, they lose chances for interpretation. For Grade 9 learners, this may be acceptable, since CAPS History (DBE, 2011a) does not require a deeper analysis of the event. More explicit debates are introduced only in Grade 12. The elective nature of History in the Further Education and Training Phase (FET) means that learners may never encounter these discussions.

Multi-perspectivity

Seven of the 10 ICT projects demonstrated a moderate engagement with multiple perspectives. While the projects moved beyond presenting a single, uncontested account of the Soweto Uprising, the inclusion of alternative interpretations was often limited. In many cases, the projects sought to foreground previously marginalised African voices, however, this did not engage differing interpretations of the event. Project 4, for example, illustrates this tendency. The group centred its lesson on the relationship between Bantu Education, the Black Consciousness Movement, and the Soweto Uprising, presenting these as the principal catalysts of the revolt. In their reflections, the preservice teachers acknowledged that their school experiences had been shaped by a single prescribed textbook that portrayed the uprising as a closed, uncontested story. University training prompted them to question this approach and, consequently, to present a more Afrocentric account. The use of ICT expanded opportunities for accessing a wider range of historical voices and digital sources. Although the project acknowledged the controversy surrounding the event, multiple perspectives were largely treated as the inclusion of alternative voices, rather than as a historical inquiry that required evaluating different claims.

This pattern suggests that the preservice teachers understood the importance of challenging singular narratives and recognised the value of representivity. However, their projects revealed a more limited conception of multi-perspectivity, one that prioritised voices and representation over the disciplinary practice. Consequently, the projects reflected an emerging, rather than a fully developed understanding of multi-perspectivity.

Learner and teacher positioning

The ICT projects revealed that teachers' positionality played an important role in determining how controversial issues were framed, which sources were chosen, and how

learners engaged with the knowledge. In Projects 3, 5, 7, and 9, digital tools were used to encourage learners to search for evidence, compare perspectives, and develop their own interpretations. In Projects 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10, ICT was mainly used to deliver information, positioning teachers as the primary holders of knowledge. This understanding was more narrowly framed, potentially exposing learners to a partial view of the past and limited opportunities to engage with alternative interpretations. Although CAPS History Grade 9 (DBE, 2011a) requires learners to engage with the causes, consequences, and key actors of the Soweto Uprising, the ICT projects revealed differing views of the teacher's role. In line with Freire's (2000) ideas, ICT can support a shift from learners simply receiving information to actively engaging with it. The findings, however, suggest that balancing learner agency with purposeful teacher guidance remains a challenge. This highlights the importance of reflective practice and an awareness of how teachers' own positionality and pedagogical choices shape learners' understanding of controversial histories.

Teaching controversy

In teaching the controversial event, preservice teachers realise there are unresolved issues and that history is tentative. Therefore, to teach this, there will be more questions based on who one is and how much one engages with the space for alternate views on the same event. Ndlovu (2006:317) argues that various causal factors need to be taken into account when analysing the historical origins of the Soweto uprising. He mentions political, economic, educational and youth-related factors. Project 5 proposes that the principal contribution to the Soweto Uprising was the BCM ideology, based on their sources. This pedagogically naïve, selective portrayal of the uprising simplifies the problems. Omitting important information or presenting events without engaging learners in logical thinking and critical decision-making about historical facts runs counter to the inquiry approach. The event was more than just a protest; it was a struggle for equality and a turning point for liberty and freedom. Having multiple documents with different viewpoints on the same event can be a valuable part of the analysis. ICT connection is revealed in how digital environments expose learners to competing narratives and how teachers and learners require digital literacy to guide the evaluation of evidence and avoid misinformation. Ongoing professional development and research are critical to the understanding of historical events.

Pedagogical choices and narratives

The preservice teacher reflections noted that CAPS was the primary reference for determining what content to teach, however, professional judgment, different

interpretations, and technological skills also influenced the approaches taken. Some projects focused on the key ideas of youth resistance and unequal education, and how students protested the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. Others focused on the BCM as the main narrative, promoting interpretations aligned with political ideology.

Another approach was to highlight the victims or those killed in the event to build a narrative. Hector Peterson is often the main character in this portrayal, although he was not the first fatal victim of 16 June 1976. This project highlights that Hastings Ndlovu was the first student to be shot by the police as he crossed the Orlando West Bridge in Soweto. It is unlikely that a learner would know that Ndlovu was the first to be killed unless this is specifically addressed in historical accounts. Hector Pieterse was 12 years old in 1976, which places his birth around 1963–1964. If born in 1963, he would have been 62 or 63 years old in 2026, 50 years after the event. Perhaps there were others as young as him who experienced the event who can still contribute to the contemporary understanding of it. This project sheds light on how obtaining new information can change or augment current narratives. It also emphasises the role of local people who shape history, rather than the voices of political leaders.

Hector Peterson's image dominates both local and international media. While it invokes emotions, there are those voices during apartheid who tried to portray the youth of the time as creating trouble. For example, a newspaper article of the time on how "Soweto pupils' riot– Six dead" does not focus on how the five Blacks died, but describes how one white motorist was dragged from his car by rioting pupils and stabbed to death. The article also includes how another white person in a car was assaulted before escaping ('The Argus Correspondent, 1976). Project 5 focused on incorporating second-order concepts of time, cause, and consequence, while paying little attention to higher-level questioning. The focus was on Afrikaans as the language of instruction and the violence of the police to maintain the system of apartheid. Additionally, their activities were more on the 'remember' end of the cognitive demand spectrum. Their reflections acknowledge that online activities expose learners to 'authentic materials', fostering digital literacy alongside historical inquiry skills. However, digital materials are not all 'authentic' and, therefore, training must be ongoing to help students and teachers discern what are facts and what is potentially misleading to the reader.

Preservice teachers acknowledged that the ICT projects were a step away from the traditional way of teaching the event. The method helped develop critical thinking through interactive, multimodal activities that catered to learners who preferred visual stimulation.

Spatial contextualisation through digital mapping is a distinctive contribution of ICT.

In this inclusive classroom, learner-centredness accommodated various learning styles and created a nexus of concepts and events with visual representation. Some reflections highlighted the event's historical significance, connecting it to present-day issues affecting youth and education rights, and went further with questions like *"How do you think the government or the police could have handled the situation differently?"* and *"Examine Hector Peterson's death and understand why this image became a symbol of resistance"*. This type of questioning helps learners think differently about the incident and develops higher-level thinking.

Preservice teachers augmented slide material with debates, group discussions, Kahoot quizzes, worksheets, and a series of online activities, Google Forms, and apps like Padlet, shaping it beyond just answering questions as homework. Teachers considered the planning fun, and the technology-based assessment tasks and games critical for supporting a broader range of learning styles and enhancing conceptual understanding. The use of Google Earth helped learners visualise the geographical layout of Soweto and identify key locations where the protests occurred. With the Adobe Express Poster maker, preservice teachers could enhance their technological knowledge and contextualize content and images. Through spatial movement, learners can locate key sites and engage with places in real time, thereby enhancing their knowledge and experience. A refreshing move away from textbook learning, it is a way to absorb content about context interactively. Additionally, the links to the tasks can be shared with learners to take home, along with opportunities for them to create their own projects. This history is an actual place learners can visit virtually to understand how the event unfolded. The Morrison Isaacson High School (which was central to the mobilisation of learners), Hector Pieterse Square (memorial site for remembrance), Regina Mundi church (a refuge meeting space), Orlando Stadium (where mass gatherings were held), West Rand administrative buildings (apartheid state authority building), are key sites associated with the uprisings spatially sequenced to enable learners to explore how the uprising unfolded across the locations. Each site is accompanied by activities and questions to check whether learners can locate it and understand its significance.

Challenges in teaching controversial histories and ICT use

While ICT expanded access to a wide range of historical resources, the findings suggest that access alone does not guarantee critical historical engagement. Table 1 indicates that although all projects incorporated digital sources and activities, only one project demonstrated a strong use of primary sources. In contrast, most projects relied on moderate engagement with source work, multi-perspectivity, and controversy. This suggests that the challenge is not merely locating digital information, but using it in ways that support historical inquiry. Without guidance, learners may struggle to distinguish between evidence-based historical accounts and misleading or incomplete representations of the past. Teaching controversial histories through ICT, therefore, requires teachers to address not only historical thinking but also misinformation, source verification, and the ethical use of digital information. Contemporary youth, especially those born into democracy, would interpret the uprising differently from the participants in 1976, some of whom are still alive. This would involve negotiating the interpretations and what must be taught, with the curriculum as a 'guide'.

Discussion

The students' ICT projects, as valuable artefacts, demonstrate the connection between historical knowledge and pedagogy. This research acknowledges that each project is a collective effort rather than an individual decision-making process. Consequently, the instructional choices may not fully reflect how individual students would teach in practice. Additionally, the use of ICT as a pedagogical medium introduces a contextual limitation. The instructional choices made within a resource-rich university-supported environment may differ from those in a classroom, limited by technology, resources, or infrastructure, a very real problem in South Africa (Bharath, 2026). The project is part of the students' assessment, which may have encouraged them to invest creatively, a task that individual teachers may not have the time to execute. This does not detract from the value of the task, as it was learning-oriented, enabling students to engage deeply with historical content and fostering greater collaborative effort. This networking method can be replicated in schools, serving as a model for teaching historical thinking with innovative learning materials. Peer interaction, negotiations, and shared problem-solving are skills worth pursuing.

The findings underscore the importance of developing TPACK to teach controversial history. Teacher education programmes provide opportunities for preservice teachers to experiment, reflect on their pedagogical choices, and support historical thinking through

collaborative work. Digital mapping tools such as Google Earth help learners understand spatial relationships and the unfolding of events. There is a shift from teaching from text to visual interactions, building learners who learn in multiple ways. Learners are positioned to take perspectives from various sources and are trained to understand the types and relevance of primary and secondary sources. Training on controversial topics also enhances the decisions teachers make when teaching diverse learner populations.

Drawing on critical pedagogy and the TPACK framework, the findings suggest that teaching the Soweto Uprising can be enhanced by integrating digital tools that support inquiry and learner agency. The use of Google Earth demonstrates how, when aligned with content and pedagogy, 'learning by doing' is facilitated. Rather than sticking to one narrative, students are encouraged to consider multiple perspectives based on the evidence.

Conclusion

The findings contribute to history education scholarship by demonstrating how ICT-mediated approaches, such as interactive slides and spatial tools like Google Earth, can enable preservice teachers to frame the Soweto Uprising as a dynamic, inquiry-based learning experience. By foregrounding spatial contextualisation, source evaluation, and learner agency, the study shows how digital pedagogy can support 'learning by doing' and disrupt closed narratives of the past. In doing so, it extends existing work on teaching controversial history by illustrating how technology, when pedagogically aligned, can deepen engagement with complex and sensitive historical events. Perhaps the most significant outcome is the recognition that the past is represented through multiple and often competing narratives. When approaching controversial history, learners must be taught how to critically evaluate digital and historical sources, identify bias and misrepresentation, and apply investigative techniques to distinguish reliable evidence from unreliable or misleading information.

This interpretive qualitative study offers insights drawn from a purposively selected sample of preservice teachers' projects within a teacher education context, focusing on intended pedagogy rather than observed classroom enactment. Future research could explore how such ICT-mediated approaches are implemented in school classrooms, how learners respond to spatial and inquiry-based teaching of the Soweto Uprising, and how similar pedagogical strategies might be applied to other controversial topics in South African and global history curricula.

References

- Adan, MY 2025. The role of peace education in promoting social justice and sustainable peace in post-conflict societies: A 4Rs framework analysis. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2025.1650027>
- Bellan, JM and Scheurman, G 1998. Actual and virtual reality. Making the most of field trips. *Social Education*. 62(1):35-40.
- Bertram, C 2009. Procedural knowledge and the construction of knowledge in History Education. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 41(6):767-786.
- Bertram, C 2019. What is powerful knowledge in school history? Learning from the South African and Rwandan school curriculum documents. *The Curriculum Journal*, 30(2):125-143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2018.1557536>
- Bharath, P 2015. *An investigation of progression in historical thinking in South African history textbooks*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.
- Bharath, P 2026. Exploring South African history textbook access and usage as pathways to inequality in the post-democratic era. *Human Rights Education Review*, 9(1):39-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25355406.2025.2563559>
- Chapman, A 2010. *Understanding historical knowing: Evidence and accounts*. Open University Press.
- Chapman, A 2017. Historical interpretations. In: I Davies (ed.). *Debates in history teaching* (2nd ed., pp. 96-113). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Chimbunde, P and Moreeng, BB 2024. Can history be used to build the nation? An analysis of the idea of a compulsory school history curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa. *Yesterday & Today*, 32:154-176. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2024/n32a7>
- Chisholm, L 2008. Migration, Citizenship, and South African History Textbooks. *South African Historical Journal*, 60(3):352-374.
- Counsell, C 2016. History teacher publication and the curricular 'what?': Mobilising subject-specific professional knowledge in a culture of genericism. In: C Counsell, K Burn, and A Chapman (eds.). *Masterclass in history education: Transforming teaching and learning* (pp. 225-231). London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

- Department of Basic Education 2010. *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025* (Goal 19, p. 3). Pretoria: Government of South Africa. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/dobeshortened-action-plan-2025031120100.pdf
- Department of Basic Education 2011a. *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS): Social Sciences (Grades 7–9)*. Government Printing Works.
- Department of Basic Education 2011b. *National Curriculum Statement Grades 10–12: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS): History*. Government Printing Works.
- Freire, P 1970. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum, New York.
- Freire, P 1974. *Education for critical consciousness*. Seabury Press.
- Freire, P 2000. *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th Anniversary Edition). New York: Continuum.
- Havekes, HGF, Arno-Coppen, P, Luttenberg, JM, Van Boxtel, CAM 2012. Knowing and doing history: A conceptual framework and pedagogy for teaching historical contextualization. *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research*, 11(1):72-93. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18546/HERJ.11.1.06>
- Hirson, B 1979. *Year of fire, year of ash: The Soweto revolt: Roots of a revolution?* London: Zed Press.
- Jardine, V 2011. South African history online's education programme. *Yesterday and Today*, 6:79-84. Available at http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S222303862011000100011&lng=en&tlng=en Accessed on 10 June 2026.
- Johnson, RE 2025. *Voice, silence and gender in South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle: The shadow of a young woman*. University of London Press. <https://doi.org/10.14296/rync2520>
- Kelly, JE and Badsha, O 2020. Teaching South African history in the digital age: Collaboration, pedagogy, and popularizing history. *History in Africa*, 47:297-325. <https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2020.6>
- Kondo, K 2023. A place of remembrance in South Africa's post-memory boom: Depicting the Hector Pieterse memorial and museum from everyday life in Soweto. *Journal of African Cultural Heritage Studies*, 3(1):203-221.

- Kissack, M 1997. Irony as objectivity: Orientations for history teaching in post-Apartheid South Africa. *Curriculum Studies*, 5(2):213-228.
- Malawana, T 2019. Children as social justice activists. *De Jure Law Journal*, 52:610-613. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2225-7160/2019/v52a35>
- Maggioni, L 2010. *Studying epistemic cognition in the history classroom: Cases of teaching and learning to think historically*. PhD thesis. University of Maryland. DOI: <https://drum.lib.umd.edu/handle/1903/10797>
- Majola, E, Rangana, N, and Geduld, D 2025. Rethinking Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy: Challenges and relevance in South Africa's TVET sector. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 14(1): 26-42. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15311357>
- Mishra, P and Koehler, MJ 2006. Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge. *Teachers College Record*, 108(6):1017-1054. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9620.2006.00684.x>
- Ndlovu, SM 1993. *Perceptions of history and experiences of learning among African students in the early 1990s in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg*. Unpublished master's thesis. University of Natal.
- Ndlovu, SM 2006. The Soweto Uprising. Part 1: Soweto. In: South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET). *The Road to Democracy in South Africa. Volume 2 (1970–1980)*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 317–350.
- Nieftagodien, N & Moloi, T 2006. The Soweto Uprising. Part 3: Thembisa. In: South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET). *The Road to Democracy in South Africa. Volume 2 (1970–1980)*. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 359–368.
- Pace, J and Wassermann, JM 2025. *Distancing the past: Racism as history in South African schools* [Review of the book *Distancing the past: Racism as history in South African schools*, by C. Teeger]. Teachers College Record.
- Pohlandt-McCormick, H 2000. "I saw a nightmare...": Violence and the construction of memory (Soweto, June 16, 1976). *History and Theory*, 39(4):2344.
- Sapire, H 2013. Township histories, insurrection and liberation in the late apartheid South Africa. *South African Historical Journal*, 65(2)167-198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2013.777089>

- Seroto, J 2018. Analysing the presentation of the 1976 Soweto Uprising in Grade 9 history textbooks. *Africa Education Review*, 15(4):1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2017.1358066>
- Southgate, B 1996. *History: What & why? Ancient, modern and post-modern perspectives*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Teeger, C 2024. *Distancing the past: Racism as history in South African schools*. Columbia University Press.
- The Argus Correspondent 1976. Soweto pupils riot – six dead. *The Argus*, 16 June 1976. South African History Online. https://sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/soweto_pupils_riot_-_six_dead_16-6-76.pdf
- Van Drie, J and Van Boxtel, C 2008. Historical reasoning: Towards a framework for analyzing students' reasoning about the past. *Educational Psychological Review*, 20(2):87-110, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10648-007-9056-1>
- Wassermann, J and Bentrovato, D 2018. Confronting controversial issues in history classrooms: An analysis of preservice high school teachers' experiences in post-apartheid South Africa. *Yesterday and Today*, 20:72-90.
- Young, MD 2013. Overcoming the crisis in curriculum theory: A knowledge-based approach. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 45(2):101-118. Doi:10.1080/00220272.2013.764505

Linking liberation legacies: How the 1976 Soweto Uprising and 2015-2016 #MustFall Uprising inform and shape the pursuit of an LGBTQIA+ inclusive school history curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a13>

Paul Maluleka

University of South Africa

Tshwane, South Africa

malulp@unisa.ac.za

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3168-150X>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a13>

Abstract

From the 1976 Soweto Uprising led by Black school learners protesting against the policy of Bantu Education introduced by the apartheid regime to the 2015-2016 student protests under the banner #MustFall led by Black students protesting high fees and colonial-apartheid influences in universities, South African youth have consistently mobilised for epistemic and ontological recognition. This study investigates how these two uprisings and their legacies inform and shape ongoing efforts to develop an inclusive school history curriculum for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual/Aromantic/Agender (LGBTQIA+) in post-apartheid South Africa. Drawing on a decolonial intersectional queer theory and Southern social movements framework as theoretical orientations, and a qualitative case study design underpinned by a critical paradigm, with critical discourse analysis as tools of analysis, I contend that the uprisings' demands for rehumanisation, visibility, decolonised knowledge, and dismantling oppressive structures offer vital, yet underexplored strategies for advancing a school history curriculum that is LGBTQIA+ inclusive. I also argue that developing such a curriculum represents the essential next phase in post-apartheid South Africa's continued pursuit of epistemic and ontological liberation. Thus, truly honouring the revolutionary spirit of the 1976 and #MustFall youths requires confronting the erasure of LGBTQIA+ histories in official historical narratives and building a school history curriculum that reflects the full diversity and richness of all South Africans.

Keywords: CAPS; Decolonisation; Fees Must Fall; LGBTQIA+; Rhodes Must Fall; School history; Social movement theory; Soweto Uprising; South Africa.

Introduction

South Africa's journey towards achieving epistemic and ontological liberation, especially for the colonised Other, remains unfinished. Engraved in the banners and slogans of the 1976 Soweto Uprising and the 2015-2016 #MustFall student protests, the youth of South Africa have persistently and consistently challenged the violent architectures of exclusion. These two uprisings, 40 years apart, not only speak to the rich history of a liberation struggle in the country; they also highlight a continuum of South African youth agency.

Yet, as post-1994 school history curricula such as the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) claim epistemic and ontological inclusivity (Department of Basic Education, 2011); they continue to perpetuate erasures – most glaringly, the absence of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual/Aromantic/Agender (LGBTQIA+) experiences, voices, histories, and ontologies in their knowledge base (Maluleka & Ramoupi, 2022; Maluleka & Soldaat, 2025).

In this article, how the legacies of the 1976 Soweto Uprising and the 2015-2016 #MustFall student protests inform and shape contemporary pushes for an epistemic and ontologically just post-apartheid school history curriculum are investigated. The article begins by outlining preferred theoretical orientations which is followed by a discussion on the preferred methodological approach. Thereafter, three literature reviews are carried out focusing on (a) the convergences and divergences between the 1976 Soweto Uprising and the 2015-2016 #MustFall student protests, (b) LGBTQIA+ epistemic and ontological realities in South Africa and its schools, and (c) post-apartheid school history curricula reform. Lastly, the article concludes by making a case for an LGBTQIA+ inclusive school history curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa.

Theoretical orientations

This article is anchored by two interconnected theoretical frameworks. The first aspect of this is what I call a decolonial intersectional queer theory, which merges decolonial theory, intersectionality, and queer theory. This merger is understood within and through Said's (2014) understanding of a 'travelling theory', which provides a framework for understanding how theories and ideas, irrespective of where they originate, move across varied contexts and transform in the process.

Decolonial theory, characterised by its core ideas of coloniality of power, knowledge, and being, emerged in Global South contexts (Mignolo, 2007; Walsh, 2014), and must not be conflated with postmodernism and postcolonialism that originate from dominant Euro-North American academic institutions and the influences of the South Asian Subaltern Studies collective (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Therefore, decolonial theory is interested in understanding, as well as in challenging, the lasting impacts of colonialism and coloniality that have continuously reinforced and sustained colonial power structures, as well as epistemic and ontological hierarchies that continue to marginalise Othered ways of knowing, being, and becoming.

Intersectionality, on the other hand, is believed to have been coined first by Crenshaw (1989) to make sense of the problems that Black women in the Global North experienced with the law. However, Gouws (2017) has since argued that other persons such as Sojourner Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell were also writing about and through intersectionality the same time as Crenshaw. Since then, intersectionality has been embraced throughout varied contexts globally for its flexibility, breadth, and complexity (hooks, 1994; Gqola, 2011; Atewologun, 2018), as well as its ability to enable one to try to understand the “relation between systems of oppression that shape our multiple identities and our positions within hierarchies of power and privilege” (Carastathis, 2014:304). Hence, I (the author) am in agreement with the argument that suggests that intersectionality rejects single-category analysis in favour of multifaceted approaches to examining the world (Mazibuko, 2020)—in line with what decolonial theory advocates for as well. In essence, intersectionality acknowledges multiple forms of oppression and opens spaces (Crenshaw, 1989), “to move beyond conceptualising oppressions as separate analytical categories and classifications and to create a multidimensional framework to look at the different oppressions on one’s complex identities” (Hlatshwayo, 2020:168).

To understand queer theory, it is important to first understand the origins of the term ‘queer’ (Maluleka & Soldaat, 2025). Queer as a term/concept first emerged in the Global North as a slur for those who were labelled as outcasts, abnormal, and nonhuman. It was then reclaimed by scholars from the 1980s onwards to theorise about the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990). These scholars repurposed the term as a theoretical tool to challenge entrenched heterosexual norms of kinship, gender, and sexuality (Butler, 1990; McCormick, 2013). However, the conceptualisation of the term into a theory from the Global North did not initially find universal acceptance.

For instance, Global South scholars, especially those from Africa, have critiqued its postmodern and poststructuralist underpinnings, which they argued that they often overlooked the lived experiences and epistemologies of the colonised Other (Ombagi, 2019, 2021). Some of these scholars contend that while this version of queer theory merits recognition, it should not dominate Global South research agendas, as it risks further sidelining and undermining indigenous efforts to define queer lives, reclaim their humanity and forge identities and epistemic communities based on localised terms or realities (Woubshet, 2003; Macharia, 2015, 2016). Out of this critique, a vibrant scholarly movement was born. Instead of outright dismissal of queer theorisation from the Global North; scholars from the Global South proposed expanding and fortifying queer theory as a 'traveling theory' (Said, 2014), that is able to evolve, adapt, and embed itself in other global contexts outside the Global North. However, such a move demanded keen awareness of its shortcomings amid an enduring and persuasive coloniality (Otu & Van Klinken, 2023).

It was through these intricate theoretical journeys that queer theory engaged productively and meaningfully with decolonial theory and intersectionality, and from this careful process and engagement emerged decolonial intersectional queer theory. This framework draws attention to the geopolitics of knowledge production, wherein the Global South is frequently positioned as a source of raw experience, while the Global North is cast as the producer and exporter of theory to be implemented elsewhere (Pereira, 2019).

Hence, a decolonial intersectional queer theory was employed as one aspect of the theoretical framework, as it addresses the rich diversity, complexity, and historical formation of gendered and sexualised subjectivities in the Global South (Otu & Van Klinken, 2023). From a decolonial standpoint, the term queer is employed as an anti-essentialist umbrella concept that affirms plurality and seeks to challenge and transcend oppressive systems, rather than assimilate into them (Ubisi, 2021). More specifically, this framework offers the epistemic and ontological resources to interrogate *why* the post-apartheid school history curricula continues to omit, within its knowledge base, the contributions, experiences, and narratives of LGBTQIA+ individuals, and *how* this situation can be transcended. This framework was also used to guide my engagement with of post-apartheid school history curricula literature to demonstrate this said exclusion and marginalisation, as well as highlight opportunities to reimagine a post-apartheid school history curriculum that includes, rehistoricises and recentres LGBTQIA+ humanities.

The second aspect of the study's theoretical framing draws from Southern social movements framework, which was developed and conceptualised in the Global South as a counter to the old social movement theory and the new social movement theory of the Global North. Despite the fact that the Southern social movements framework and the old and new social movement theories are all concerned with *how* and *why* groups of people collectively mobilise to question and challenge deepening crises that confront them (Tilly, 1978, 1985, 2004). The latter two frameworks were developed in the Global North, primarily Europe, as a response to the industrial-era struggles, 1960s student protests, anti-war campaigns, and environmental activism (Ballard et al., 2006), and this means that they did not and continue to not have the ability in them to fully make sense of the world in its entirety (Mamdani et al., 1988; Burawoy, 2005a, 2005b; De Sousa Santos, 2007; Escobar, 2008; Chakrabarty, 2009; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; Mentan, 2015).

That is why Burawoy (2005a) and many others (Ballard et al., 2006; Habib, 2008; Gaventa, 2010; Thompson & Tapscott, 2010; Motta & Nilsen, 2011) have called for the provincialisation of the social sciences and the humanities. Similarly, Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) have argued for 'inverting the order of things' by conceptualising and developing theories grounded in empirical studies from the Global South. In terms of social movements theory specifically, Fadaee (2017:45) has called for "Bringing in the South", so that social movement theories can respond to the localised realities of the Global South. All of these calls made by Burawoy et al. (2005ab) align with Said's (2014) notion of a traveling theory.

Therefore, Southern social movements framework is made up of four characteristics, which are not entirely exclusive to it, but are "defining features of many Southern movements and they need to be taken seriously" (Fadaee, 2017:47). With this in mind, it should also be noted that social movements in the Global South are not homogeneous (Fadaee, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c), because no single social movement studies framework exists in and for the Global South (Cox, 2017). Nevertheless, the four characteristics that underpin the Southern social movements include: first, that many of these movements in the Global South were constructed and developed within colonial, apartheid, and postcolonial contexts which have, in turn, informed and shaped both their emergence and deployment of specific forms of mobilisation (Fadaee, 2017). Second, these social movements came to be under diverse political systems and regime types that, in turn, influenced and shaped how they organised themselves and acted on what confronted them (Fadaee, 2017). Third, the continuous reconfiguration of state-civil society relations in some Global South

contexts influence the potential for the emergence and expansion of social movements (Fadaee, 2017). Lastly, social movements in these contexts are best understood through their multiple intersections that typically link democratisation processes, ontological, epistemic, identity and material concerns, as well as (in)formal politics (Fadaee, 2017).

Given this and for the purposes of the current study, the Southern social movements framework was used to investigate the implicit connections between the 1976 Soweto Uprising and the 2015-2016 #MustFall Uprisings. This framework was also used to theorise the link between the legacies of the 1976 Soweto Uprising and the 2015-2016 #MustFall Uprisings to calls made concerning an inclusive LGBTQIA+ inclusive school history curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa. Lastly, this framework was employed in conjunction with a decolonial intersectional queer theory and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to reflect on and analyse discourses on how 1976 Soweto Uprising and the 2015-2016 #MustFall protests intersect LGBTQIA+ with class, race, and gender under post-apartheid democratising processes.

Methodological insights

For the purposes of the current study, a qualitative case study design approach was used (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) to investigate how the legacies of the 1976 Soweto Uprising and the 2015-2016 #MustFall student protests inform and shape contemporary efforts to conceptualise and develop an epistemically and ontologically just post-apartheid school history curriculum. This design was chosen, since it provided a focused approach to understand the continued erasures of LGBTQIA+ experiences, voices, histories, and ontologies in the post-apartheid school curriculum in South Africa, as well as explore how this situation could be transcended. Additionally, this design also enabled me (the author) to immerse myself in these two specific case studies to uncover rich insights about them (Cohen et al., 2011).

To support the abovementioned research design, a critical paradigm (CP) was employed due to its activist-oriented approach to research that foregrounds the analysis of power, inequality and knowledge production in educational research (Asghar, 2013). CP enabled me (the author) to move beyond neutral description in my analysis and towards interrogating the structures and practices that perpetuate the marginalisation of LGBTQIA+ experiences, voices, histories, and ontologies in the post-apartheid schools and school history curriculum in South Africa, despite the legacies of the 1976 Soweto Uprising and the recent 2015-2016 #MustFall student protests. CP was also adopted, since

it aligns with the study's preferred theoretical orientations, as well as the qualitative case study design adopted.

Furthermore, CP was employed because it guided the use of CDA to interrogate curriculum documents, literature, and narratives concerning the 1976 Soweto Uprising, the 2015-2016 #MustFall student protests, as well as the post-apartheid school history curriculum—enabling the study to identify the silences, erasures, and reproductions of oppressive structures (Fairclough, 1993, 1995).

To operationalise CDA, I (the author) analysed purposively selected official school history curricula documents that trace the trajectory of post-apartheid curriculum reform in South African dating back to the transitional period to the present. Because of this, I was then able to use CDA in a particular way that included the precise analysis of text, to read the varied and layered meanings contained therein (Maluleka & Godsell, 2024). However, my reading also involved reading for absence: looking for what is not there and to an extent, imagining what could be there. This enabled me to better understand ways in which exclusionary hegemonic historical narratives and representations are situated, maintained, reproduced, and transmitted in post-apartheid school curricula. All of this was possible to achieve because CDA is “fundamentally interested in analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Martin & Wodak, 2003:6).

Furthermore, CDA also proved useful to this study, because of its three processes of analysis, that is, (1) the object of analysis (verbal, visual, or verbal and visual texts); (2) the process by which the object is produced and received (writing/speaking and reading/listening/viewing) by human subjects; and (3) the socio-cultural conditions which govern these processes (see Fairclough, 1989). These processes are not only interrelated but are dialectical and intersectional too; they also are governed by different types of analysis which are: text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation), and social analysis (explanation) (Fairclough, 1989).

From the 1976 Soweto Uprising to the 2015-2016 #MustFall Moment

In June 1976, exactly 50 years ago, hundreds of Black high school learners across South Africa took to the streets to protest the apartheid government's mandate that Afrikaans be the compulsory medium of instruction in schools (Nieftagodien, 2014). Decades later, in October 2015, thousands of Black university students mobilised to challenge the

rising tuition fees, commodification of education, the continued colonisation of university curricula and culture, and the exploitation of outsourced workers (Luescher et al., 2022). Therefore, both uprisings emerged in different political moments of South Africa, the former during apartheid and the latter in post-apartheid. Yet, they are connected by a common thread, that is, Black youth at the forefront of leading the challenge against sociopolitical, economic and education systems (Naidoo, 2016), that continue to construct and portray them as nonhuman in the land of their birth (Kumalo, 2018, 2020).

However, it is also important to recognise that student/learner activism in Africa, particularly South Africa, did not begin with the 1976 Soweto Uprising, nor did it end with the 2015-2016 #MustFall movement. Across the African continent, student activism has historically been intertwined with the broader political liberation struggles, spanning from the 1940s through the 1980s, marked by waves of university protests throughout West and Central Africa. In South Africa, in 1955, the African National Congress responded to the adoption and introduction of the Bantu Education Act by organising school boycotts aimed at creating an alternative education system for Black learners (Hyslop, 1987). These efforts can be viewed as the foundation for the 1976 Soweto Uprising, as well as precursors to the 'People's Education' campaigns of the 1980s (Mkatshwa, 1985), as well as 2015-2016 #MustFall protests for a decolonised education that is to people centred. In the late 1960s, Bantu Biko and his fellow comrades conceptualised and established the South African Student Organisation (SASO), a radical Black student body that developed the philosophy of Black Consciousness (BC) (Tleane, 2024). Both SASO and BC played a foundational role in informing and shaping the struggles of 1976 (Lekgoathi, 2016; Moloi, 2016), and 2015-2016 youths (Naidoo, 2016), as well as the 'People's Education' campaigns of the 1980s (Mkatshwa, 1985).

Therefore, it is within these complex and nuanced historical realities that I sought to make sense of and theorise about the convergences and divergences between the 1976 Soweto Uprising and the 2015-2016 #MustFall student protests, while also highlighting how both movements pursued the epistemic and ontological recognition of all individuals, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The 2015-2016 #MustFall student protests should be viewed as a contemporary continuation of the tradition of Black student/learner activism seen in 1976 during the Soweto Uprising and other uprisings before that (Heffernan & Nieftagodien, 2016; Naidoo, 2016). This is because while the 1976 Soweto Uprising was against apartheid and its specific policies, the 2015-2016 #MustFall student protests was challenging post-

apartheid systemic inequalities by demonstrating that the legacies of racialised oppression in education and society persists. Both movements or uprisings reveal the ongoing struggle of Black students and learners to confront structural inequities that are racialised, as well epistemic and ontological violence they continue to encounter (De Beer, 2008; More, 2012)—in their ‘quest for true humanity’ (Biko, 1979).

In critiquing colonial-apartheid education and society, these movements also incorporated principles from BC, Pan-Africanism, and intersectionality to advocate for the epistemic and ontological rehumanisation of the oppressed. While the 1976 learners did not explicitly include LGBTQIA+ communities in their calls for their rehumanisation, it can be argued that their demand for restoring dignity and humanity to the oppressed implicitly encompassed LGBTQIA+ people as well, given the theoretical and philosophical frameworks they drew on. This claim is made, based on a pool of scholarly literature that argues that some of those who were part of the 1976 Uprising did, in fact, conceptualise oppression through and within complex lenses of gender and sexuality (Lorenz, 2002; Johnson, 2010; Boswell, 2013; Matebeni & Kiguwa, 2024). This scholarship also recognises that while the theoretical and philosophical frameworks mentioned above were often androcentric; the lived experiences and narratives of some of the participants in the Uprising such as Simon Tseko Nkoli¹ did, in fact, challenge patriarchal and heteronormative frameworks that characterised and underpinned the protest itself, as well as the formal ideologies relied on.

For instance, Lorenz (2002) argues that while some BC writers romanticised traditional gender relations and roles in their writing, the movement’s focus on ‘the power of self-definition’ provided both Black women and LGBTQIA+ persons with a psychological framework that enabled them to challenge all forms of internal and external subjugation. This argument is supported by Matebeni and Kiguwa (2024), who call for a ‘queering’ lens to be adopted in our engagement with South Africa’s past in order to challenge the heteronormative perspectives or understandings embedded in that very past. This is because the matrix of oppression faced by those who were oppressed under apartheid included not only race, ethnicity, and class; but sexual orientations and gender too. This then compels one to conceptualise, understand, and engage histories of the liberation struggles and movements as a tapestry of these overlapping struggles (Maluleka & Soldaat, 2025).

¹ Nkoli Tseko Simon (1957-1998) was the founding member and leader of the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW)—South Africa’s LGBTQIA+ movement that embodied its link with the anti-apartheid struggle.

On the other hand, the 2015-2016 #MustFall movement explicitly incorporated the call for the rehumanisation of LGBTQIA+ communities in its messaging. This is because their conceptualisation and understanding of what constitutes humanity was not singular; instead, it was an intersectional understanding of humanity that was underpinned by multiple identities and experiences (Du Plessis, 2021). However, this was not an easy task, as tensions arose over prioritising issues such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, leading to ideological conflicts within the movement (Oxfam South Africa, 2016; Ramaru, 2017; Xaba, 2017; Andrews, 2020; Daniel, 2021; Wang, 2025).

Therefore, both the 1976 Soweto Uprising and the 2015-2016 #MustFall protests were, as Kilani (2025) suggests from a curriculum theory perspective, a 'Black radical protest' that functioned as a form of knowledge production in its own right. A function that confronted, head on, disciplinary frameworks of colonial-apartheid education from beyond its institutional boundaries.

LGBTQIA+ epistemic and ontological realities in South Africa and its schools

Prior to colonial contact, indigenous African societies, including those found in the southern tip of the continent, did not condemn sexual minorities such as the LGBTQIA+. This is highlighted in Epprecht's (2013) historical research that shows that many indigenous African societies across the continent acknowledged and recognised diverse sexual orientations and gender identities before their contact with the colonisers. Tamale's (2013) comprehensive analysis, on the other hand, supports Epprecht's research findings by highlighting how colonial-apartheid's legal and educational systems rooted in European laws, Calvinist ideology and heteronormativity demonised and criminalised diverse indigenous African sexual gender practices. These legal and educational systems also transitioned indigenous African people's attitudes from acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ to outright disapproval (McNamara, 2018).

That is why the apartheid regime in South Africa enacted multiple laws listing sodomy within key schedules or provisions, including the Criminal Procedure Act 52 of 1977 and sections of the Sexual Offences Act of 1957 (Reddy, 2006; Wells & Polders, 2006; Botes, 2023; Mchunu, 2023). At the level of schooling generally, and within and through the school history curriculum in particular, this meant that LGBTQIA+ learners were denied epistemic and ontological self-recognition (Godsell, 2019), stemming from multiple forms of violences (Giroux, 2025), including curricular scholasticide (Rossouw, 2025) or

epistemicide (De Sousa Santos, 2014), which is the deliberate and systematic exclusion of certain forms of knowledge within curriculum design (Francis, 2017). This exclusion often contributed to hostile school climates (Mayeza & Vincent, 2019) that, in turn, intensified vulnerabilities for LGBTQIA+ learners while support systems weakened (Zembylas, 2021).

The 1994 democratic transition promised a new South African society with legal and education systems that were inclusive and recognised diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Maluleka & Godsell, 2024). In 1996, a Democratic Constitution and its Bills of Rights (Chapter 2 of the Constitution) that was meant to concretise this promise, were adopted. This was then followed by the introduction of sexuality education, which was necessitated, partly, by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Despite this, research has revealed that there are still persistent gaps between policy intentions and classroom implementation concerning LGBTQIA+ community (Francis, 2019; Ngabaza & Shefer, 2019), as well as their lived experiences and histories especially where the school history curriculum is a concern (Maluleka & Godsell, 2024; Maluleka & Soldaat, 2025). These realities also reveal how homophobia and heteronormativity continue to inform and shape educational practice, despite constitutional protections (Francis, 2017).

Msibi's (2014) study with LGBTQIA+ learners in a township school in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal reveals how these learners often experience discrimination, harassment, and exclusion at the hands of school administrators and teachers, despite these constitutional guarantees and protections. In the study, one learner who identifies as lesbian was quoted describing the victimisation they suffered at the hands of one of her homophobic teachers:

... called me to the staffroom. She started shouting at me and was telling me to stop acting like a boy. She said I need to stop this lesbian thing because I will start making other learners like me. (Msibi 2012: 524).

More recently, Adewoye and Mavhandu-Mudzusi (2026) revealed how LGBTQIA+-based school bullying continues to persist. One of the learners they interviewed remarked how reluctant teachers are to intervene when they experience bullying due to their sexuality, and this has perpetuated their victimisation:

Sometimes, we do report, but even at that, most teachers take it for a joke and never punish or call the learners who bully us to order. (Adewoye & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2026:23).

The studies above and many others, both locally (Msibi, 2011, 2014; Mavhandu-Mudzusi and Ganga-Limando, 2014; Reygan, 2016; Francis, 2017, 2022; Francis & Kuhl,

2020; Mayeza, 2023; Francis & McEwen, 2024) and globally (UNESCO, 2016; Crothers et al., 2017;; Earnshaw et al., 2019; Mishna et al., 2019; Jugović & Bezinović, 2019), highlight the embeddedness and pervasiveness of bullying faced by LGBTQIA+ learners in schools around the world, despite laws put in place to protect them from such violence.

Post-apartheid school history curricula reform: 1990-2018

From 1990-1996, what is considered the transitional period in South Africa, liberation movements and civic organisations that were tasked with negotiating with the apartheid regime made educational and curriculum one of their key negotiation priorities. This is because, under apartheid education, particularly its school history syllabi, Eurocentrism and Afrikaner nationalism were promoted as part of the broader phenomenon of white supremacy (Du Preez & Du Preez, 1983).

Immediately after the democratic elections of 1994, an Interim Core Syllabus (ICS) document was adopted in place of apartheid education and syllabi (Kros, 1996; Seleti, 1997), as part of the process of *Ukuhlambulula* or cleansing of education and curriculum from their colonial-apartheid past (Jansen, 2001; Maluleka, 2021). According to Bertram (2020), the ICS served as a temporary measure while plans for a comprehensive education and curriculum reform were being conceptualised and developed. Bertram's understanding of the ICS might also excuse why LGBTQIA+ experiences, voices, histories, and ontologies did not form part of the ICS' knowledge base.

However, other reasons for the exclusion of LGBTQIA+ experiences and histories in the knowledge base of all post-apartheid school history curricula, and not just the ICS document might, because LGBTQIA+ histories, contributions and experiences were in fact, considered difficult knowledge² (Simon, 2011; Jonker 2012; Zembylas, 2014) to be historicised and included because Christian apartheid legacy that helped institutionalise and normalise heteronormativity and heterosexuality. Because of this, history education in general was co-opted to serve the apartheid state's Christian-nationalist ideology, which ultimately found expression in post-apartheid South Africa too. In addition, this exclusion of LGBTQIA+ histories, contributions and experiences can also be read as a deliberate, sustained and deeply ideological process that continues to construct LGBTQIA+ bodies

² Difficult knowledge as a concept has been theorised in many different ways. However, in this study, difficult knowledge is understood to refer to historical knowledge and/or past realities that feel alien or unintelligible that forces one to confront the very boundaries of their own intellectual tolerance and/or capacity.

and their lived experiences as historically insignificant³ (Partington, 1980; Phillips, 2002; Lévesque, 2005; Bradshaw, 2006). This situation is then exacerbated by arguments around the over-crowdedness of the curriculum which in turn, leaves little room for other specialised historical exploration (Bertram, 2020; Teeger, 2023), as well resistance from teachers, parents, religious organisations, and others for the historicisation and inclusion of LGBTQIA+ histories in the curriculum with is not unique to post-apartheid South Africa (Goetz & Mayer, 2023; Francis, 2024).

In 1997, an outcomes-based curriculum known as Curriculum 2005 (C2005) was adopted for primary school up to Grade 9 (Department of Education, 1997). It was presented as ‘inclusive’, with the hope of creating a school history curriculum based on alternative interpretations and representations of the past that diverged from colonial-apartheid narratives (Mthethwa & Maluleka, 2025). Hence, de-emphasise content knowledge in favour of learning outcomes, robust knowledge integration and generic skills—all of which were strongly informed and shaped by the markets and labour (Hoadley, 2017). Moreover, school history was no longer taught and learnt as a standalone subject in the Foundation and General Education phases; instead, it was merged with geography into Human and Social Sciences (HSS) (Weldon, 2005). The history component of the HSS consisted of broad sets of concepts which were labelled ‘range statements’ that indicated to History teachers what to teach, as well as ‘performance’ indicators which described what learners should be able to do and how they should be assessed (Department of Education, 1997). This meant that there were no clear lists of content topics provided in the C2005 document. Thus, the lack of content clarity could be the reason why the LGBTQIA+ experiences, voices, histories, and ontologies were marginalised and erased in C2005.

In 2000, another curriculum review was carried out, which resulted in the adoption of Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) in 2002 (Department of Education, 2002). Within the RNCS, history and geography were again divided into two distinct subjects, each with their own learning outcomes and content, though they remained within the Social Sciences learning area (Department of Education, 2002). Like NCS, the RNCS also remained outcomes based through the specification of outcomes and assessment standards to be met while promoting learner-centred pedagogies and activity-based approaches to education (Bertram, 2020). For history, this meant an acquiring of enquiry and interpretation skills for investigating about the past were encouraged (Department

³ Historical (in)significance is concerned with exploring and understanding why certain historical events, people and their lived experiences, or artifacts are considered important enough by historians to study and remember today, and why others are not.

of Education, 2002). Despite these improvements, the LGBTQIA+ experiences, voices, histories, and ontologies continued to also be sidelined in the RNCS.

In 2011, yet another curriculum known as CAPS was adopted after a curriculum review process that was started in 2009 (Department of Basic Education, 2011). CAPS provided history teachers and their learners with a clear, term-by-term specification of content to be taught and learnt (Department of Basic Education, 2011). At level of knowledge, CAPS aimed to balance coverage of South African, African, and world history (Department of Basic Education, 2011). However, even with this balance in historical knowledge offering, CAPS like its predecessors failed to include in its knowledge base the experiences, voices, histories, and ontologies of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Finally, in 2015, during the height of the #MustFall student protests, the then Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Matsie Angelina 'Angie' Motshekga, appointed the History Ministerial Task Team (HMTT) to investigate, advise on, and oversee the implementation of school history as a compulsory subject in schools, particularly in the Further Education and Training (FET) band (Grades 10-12) (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Interestingly, the appointment of the HMTT coincided with the student protest in South African public universities, which were demanding a fee-free decolonised university education and curricula under the banner of #MustFall. In 2018, the HMTT released their report in 2018 (Department of Basic Education, 2018), in which several suggestions were made, including, but not limited to strengthening the CAPS school history curriculum in the interim, with the hope that the Department of Basic Education would completely overhaul the CAPS curriculum and content in future. The HMTT also argued that this would depend, among other things, on whether history becomes a compulsory subject in the FET phase (Department of Basic Education, 2018). Another interesting suggestion that the report made, which relates to this study, was the suggestion that the gender lens of understanding the past needed to be integrated more into the curriculum which would, in turn, address the CAPS 'masculinist' biases (Wills, 2016), which marginalise women's experiences and reinforce oppressive gender ideas. However, progressive as this suggestion is, it was also a missed opportunity, because the report makes no mention of the need to recentre LGBTQIA+ histories, experiences, and voices in the school history curriculum (Maluleka & Ramoupi, 2022; Maluleka & Ledwaba, 2023).

All of the above not only highlight the embeddedness of continued mutually reinforcing convergence between two processes that construct LGBTQIA+ bodies and their lived experiences as difficult knowledge and their simultaneous consignment to historical

insignificance. Furthermore, this situation also signals an urgent need to champion an LGBTQIA+ inclusive school history curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa.

Towards an LGBTQIA+ inclusive school history curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa

There was (apartheid) and still (post-apartheid) is a deliberate institutionalisation of compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity in South African schools at the level of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and school culture (Francis and Kuhl, 2020). This institutionalisation often assumes and then constructs all learners as heterosexual and cisgender. This is best experienced in school history curricula that continue to completely erase LGBTQIA+ experiences, voices, histories and ontologies. To counter this, there is a need to work towards an LGBTQIA+ inclusive school history curriculum that confronts and challenges epistemic and ontological erasures, heterosexuality, and heteronormativity, while drawing from human rights and socio-epistemic and ontological mandates of the 1996 Constitution. Furthermore, this confrontational approach should be done in light of the HMTT report, its recommendations (Department of Basic Education, 2018), its shortcomings concerning its proposed gender history approach (Maluleka & Ledwaba, 2023), as well as calls made by the 1976 and 2015-2016 youth for the rehumanisation of all.

Maluleka and Soldaat (2025) recently argued for the need to weave together historical knowledge into a tapestry within the knowledge base of the post-apartheid school history curriculum. This essentially means deliberately rehistoricising and recentring LGBTQIA+ struggles and everyday lives within the core narratives of colonialism, apartheid, and democracy, rather than isolating them as marginal or add-on topics. This approach also aligns with the proposal by Maluleka and Ledwaba (2023) for a need to broaden the gender history approach recommended by the HMTT report (Department of Basic Education, 2018). It further aligns with the argument made by the HMTT itself that it is “against the exercise of wholesale changes or a complete overhaul of the CAPS syllabus and content at this present time”, suggesting that such changes would be “too soon” (Department of Basic Education, 2018:84). Instead, it advocated using the existing CAPS curricula as the “basis of strengthening the content in the interim”, with the expectation that the Ministry of Basic Education might in future consider more substantive revisions (Department of Basic Education, 2018:84). In this sense, weaving LGBTQIA+ histories, experiences, and ontologies into existing topics within the CAPS school history curriculum would represent a practical and policy-aligned strategy for curriculum enrichment rather than structural overhaul.

Moreover, such curricula rehistoricisation and recentring resonates with the calls that emerged from the 2015-2016 #MustFall student protests, which demanded the decolonisation of education and the transformation of how knowledge is produced within South African public universities and schools. These movements highlighted the need to challenge and transcend colonial, apartheid, patriarchal, and heteronormative knowledge frameworks or systems and ontologies, while advocating for the inclusion of marginalised and peripheralised knowledge forms and ontologies—including those like the LGBTQIA+ communities.

Therefore, there are ways within the current CAPS Social Sciences (Grades 7-9) and History (Grade 10-12) curricula in which this rehistoricisation and recentring can be undertaken in an academically rigorous, knowledge-informed, and pedagogically effective manner. For instance, in the CAPS Grades 7-9 curricula, learners in Grade 9 are meant to engage with themes such as *Turning points in South African history: 1948 and the 1950s* and *Turning points in South African history: 1960s, 1976, and 1994*. In Grade 10-12 curricula, learners in Grade 11 are expected to engage with the theme of *Apartheid in South Africa 1940s to 1960s*; and in Grade 12 they then engage with themes of *Civil Society protests 1950s to 1990s*, *Civil resistance 1970s to 1980s in South Africa*; and *The coming of democracy in South Africa, and coming to terms with the past*.

These themes provide opportunities to integrate LGBTQIA+ histories and activism into broader liberation narratives of South Africa. The emergence of organisations such as the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) in 1980 and the later formation of the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) illustrate the development of organised LGBTQIA+ activism during apartheid and the democratic transition period (Bilchitz, 2015; Bhardwaj, 2023; Pakade, 2024). Moreover, the life and activism of Simon Tseko Nkoli (1957-1998) would further demonstrate the intersections between anti-apartheid struggles and LGBTQIA+ organising, because Nkoli participated in the Soweto Uprising of 1976 as a Black gay man and was later arrested and charged in the Delmas Treason Trial (Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action [GALA], 2020; Botes, 2023). From this, Nkoli became a prominent figure linking the liberation movement with LGBTQIA+ rights activism, including his role in GLOW (GALA, 2020; Mchunu, 2023). Similarly, activists such as Beverley Palesa Ditsie represent the emergence of a new generation of openly LGBTQIA+ activists during the democratic transition, notably as a founding member of GLOW alongside Nkoli, and as the first openly Black lesbian speaker at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China (South African History Online, 2017a, 2017b; Martin, 2020).

Thus, integrating the abovementioned histories and lived experiences, alongside the contributions of many other LGBTQIA+ activists and movements, would enable both history teachers and learners to recognise and appreciate that LGBTQIA+ individuals were not peripheral observers, but active participants in South Africa's broader liberation struggles. Equally, it would also enable them to appreciate that South Africa's struggles for freedom were never monolithic; they encompassed different, yet intersectional visions of freedom that insisted that racial, classed, and ethicised oppression could not be separated from the fight against gender and sexual oppression. In this way, the CAPS history curriculum can be taught and learnt in ways that foreground the entangled histories of race, gender, sexuality, and political resistance in South Africa.

Conclusion

Post-apartheid South Africa is among the first nations in the world to constitutionally protect LGBTQIA+ communities. Yet, its school history curricula since the 1990s and to date, as well as the HMTT report (Department of Basic Education, 2018) that called for a compulsory and African centred school history curriculum, have remained stubbornly exclusory toward LGBTQIA+ histories, identities, and ontologies. This has resulted in a sanitised version of the past where, for instance, the history of the liberation struggle that only speaks of heterosexual and cisgender men and women fighting racial oppression culminating the 1994 democracy is presented. However, for a learner sitting in that history classroom who identifies as LGBTQIA+, this version of the past feels oddly silent to them, because they cannot see nor feel themselves in that version (Godsell, 2019). It is as if LGBTQIA+ South Africans did not exist, or worse, did not contribute to the liberation struggles that ultimately resulted in the freedoms and democracy that we now enjoy.

Thus, to contribute to correcting this silence, the current article has argued for the weaving of LGBTQIA+ histories, experiences, and ontologies into the knowledge base of the post-apartheid school history curriculum. This argument was presented drawing from the struggles advanced by the 1976 Soweto Uprising, as well as the 2015-2016 student protests. A decolonial intersectional queer theory and Southern social movements framework were used as theoretical orientations, and a qualitative case study design underpinned by a critical paradigm, with critical discourse analysis as tools of analysis.

Funding

This work was supported by the National Research Foundation (NRF) Thuthuka Post PhD Track under Grant TTK240515218754. The findings and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NRF.

References

- Adewoye, SE and Mavhandu-Mudzusi, AH 2026. Roadblocks to combatting LGBT-based school bullying in South African schools: A phenomenological study. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 31(1):18-30.
- Andrews, G 2020. Teaching gender and sexuality in the wake of the must fall movements: Mutual disruption through the lens of critical pedagogy. *Education as Change*, 24(1):1-20.
- Asghar, J 2013. Critical paradigm: A preamble for novice researchers. *Life Science Journal*, 10(4):3121-3127.
- Atewologun, D 2018. Intersectionality theory and practice. In: *Oxford research encyclopaedia of business and management*. Oxford University Press.
- Ballard R, Habib A, Valodia, I 2006. *Voices of protest: Social movements in post-apartheid South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Bertram, C 2020. Remaking history: The pedagogic device and shifting discourses in the South African school history curriculum. *Yesterday and Today*, 23:1-29.
- Bhardwaj, M 2023. Queertopia's new world order: Simon Nkoli's legacy in queer Black nightlife spaces in Johannesburg. *Gender Questions*, 11(1):1-17.
- Biko, S 1979. Black consciousness and the quest for a true humanity. In: A Stubbs (ed.). *I write what I like: Selected writings* (pp. 87-97). Harper & Row.
- Bilchitz, D 2015. *Constitutional change and participation of LGBTI groups: A case study of South Africa*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA).
- Boswell, B 2013. Black revolutionary masculinity in Miriam Tlali's *Amandla*: Lessons for contemporary South Africa. *Agenda*, 27(1):32-39.
- Botes, J 2023. 'We are claiming space, we are visible!': The gay and lesbian organisation of the Witwatersrand as a space of solidarity, 1980s–1990s. *Gender Questions*, 11(1):1-17.
- Bradshaw, M 2006. Creating controversy in the classroom: Making progress with historical significance. *Teaching History*, 125:18-25.
- Butler, J 1990. *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Burawoy, M 2005a. For public sociology. *American Sociological Review*, 70(1):4-28.

- Burawoy, M 2005b. Provincializing the social sciences. In: G Steinmetz (ed.). *The politics of method in the human sciences: Positivism and its epistemological others* (pp. 508-525). Duke University Press.
- Carastathis, A 2014. The concept of intersectionality in feminist theory. *Philosophy Compass*, 9(5):304-314
- Chakrabarty, D 2009. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference*. Princeton University Press.
- Cohen, L, Manion, L, and Morrison, K 2011. *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). Routledge.
- Comaroff, J, and Comaroff, J L 2012. *Theory from the South: Or, how Euro-America is evolving toward Africa*. Paradigm Publishers.
- Cox, L 2017. *The multiple traditions of social movement research: Theorising intellectual diversity* [Working paper]. *Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme* (Foundation House of Human Sciences).
- Crenshaw, K 1989. Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1):139-167.
- Crothers, LM, Kolbert, JB, Berbary, C, Chatlos, S, Lattanzio, L, Tiberi, A, and Wells, DS 2017. Teachers', LGBTQ students', and student allies' perceptions of bullying of sexually diverse youth. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 26(9):972-988.
- Daniel, A 2021. Rhodes Must Fall: Different layers of intersectionality in students' protests in South Africa. *Interface: A Journal for and About Social Movements*, 13(1):12-13.
- De Beer, S 2008. *Taking back our streets: Reading Steve Biko's Black consciousness and the quest for true humanity on the streets of Tshwane*. In: CW du Toit (ed.). *The legacy of Stephen Bantu Biko: Theological challenges* (pp. 169-197). Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa.
- Department of Education 1997. *Curriculum 2005: Lifelong learning for the 21st century*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Department of Education 2002. *Revised national curriculum statement Grades R-9 (Schools) policy: Social sciences*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Department of Basic Education 2011. *Curriculum and assessment policy statement, grades 10-12: History*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

- Department of Basic Education 2015. *National Education Policy Act (Act no 27 of 1996), Establishment of the History Ministerial Task Team. Government Gazette (GG), Notice no 926, 9 October 2015*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Department of Basic Education 2018. *Executive summary of the History Ministerial Task Team*. Available at <https://www.education.gov.za/Resources/Reports.aspx> Accessed on 6 March 2026.
- De Sousa Santos, B (ed.) 2007. *Another knowledge is possible: Beyond Northern epistemologies*. Verso.
- De Sousa Santos, B 2014. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*. Routledge.
- Du Plessis, P 2021. Decolonisation of education in South Africa: Challenges to decolonise the university curriculum. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 35(1):54-69.
- Du Preez, JM, and Du Preez, H 1983. *Africana Afrikaner: Master symbols in South African school textbooks*. Librarius.
- Earnshaw, VA, Menino, DD, Sava, LM, Perrotti, J, Barnes, TN, Humphrey, DL, and Reisner, SL 2019. LGBTQ bullying: A qualitative investigation of student and school health professional perspectives. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 17(3):280-297.
- Escobar, A 2008. *Territories of difference: Place, movements, life, redes*. Duke University Press.
- Epprecht, M 2013. *Sexuality and social justice in Africa: Rethinking homophobia and forging resistance*. Zed Books.
- Fadaee, S 2016a. Post-contentious politics and Iran's first ecovillage. *Local Environment*, 21(11):1305-1316.
- Fadaee, S 2016b. Rethinking Southern environmentalism: Iranian environmental movement and its premises. In: S Fadaee (ed.). *Understanding Southern social movements* (pp. 15-26). Routledge.
- Fadaee, S 2016c. *Understanding Southern social movements*. Routledge.
- Fadaee, S 2017. Bringing in the South: Towards a global paradigm for social movement studies. *Interface: A Journal for and About Social Movements*, 9(2):45-60.
- Fairclough, N 1993. Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: The universities. *Discourse & society*, 4(2):133-168.
- Fairclough, N. 1989. *Language and power*. London: Longman.

- Fairclough, N 1995. *Critical discourse analysis*. London: Longman.
- Francis, DA 2017. *Troubling the teaching and learning of gender and sexuality diversity in South African education*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Francis, DA 2019. What does the teaching and learning of sexuality education in South African schools reveal about counter-normative sexualities? *Sex Education*, 19(4):406-421.
- Francis, DA 2022. *Queer activism in South African education: Disrupting cis(hetero) normativity in schools*. Routledge.
- Francis, DA 2024. Queer and trans activism in South African schools: Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) disrupting LGBT+ inequalities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 148:1-9.
- Francis, DA, and Kuhl, K 2020. Imagining a curriculum beyond compulsory heterosexuality in South African education. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 19(4):469-488.
- Francis, DA and McEwen, H 2024. Normalising intolerance: The efforts of Christian right groups to block LGBTIQ+ inclusion in South African schools. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 26(2):236-247.
- Gaventa, J 2010. Foreword. In: L Thompson and C Tapscott (eds.). *Citizenship and social movements: Perspectives from the Global South* (pp. xi-xiv). Zed Books.
- GayandLesbianMemoryinAction2020.2020vision. *GALA Times: The Quarterly Newspaper of GALA – Queer Archive*. <https://gala.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020-14-final.pdf>
- Giroux, HA 2025. Scholasticide: Waging War on Education from Gaza to the West. *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, 24(1):1-16.
- Godsell, S 2019. Poetry as method in the history classroom: Decolonising possibilities. *Yesterday and Today*, 21:1-28.
- Goetz, J and Mayer, S 2023. *Global perspectives on anti-feminism: Far-right and religious attacks on equality and diversity*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Gouws, A 2017. Feminist intersectionality and the matrix of domination in South Africa. *Agenda*, 31(1-2):19-27.
- Gqola, PD 2011. Whirling worlds? Women's poetry, feminist imagination and contemporary South African publics. *Scrutiny*2, 16(2):5-11.

- Habib, A 2008. *Speaking to global debates with a national lens: South African social movements in comparative perspective*. 8th International Conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research, Barcelona, Spain.
- Heffernan, A and Nieftagodien, N (eds.) 2016. *Students must rise: Youth struggle in South Africa before and beyond Soweto '76*. Wits University Press.
- Hlatshwayo, MN 2020. Being Black in South African higher education: An intersectional insight. *Acta Academica*, 52(2):163-180.
- Hoadley, U 2017. Curriculum 2005 and the dissolution of boundaries. In: U Hoadley (ed.). *Pedagogy in poverty: Lessons from twenty years of curriculum reform in South Africa* (pp. 86-111). Routledge.
- hooks, b 1994. *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- Hyslop, J 1987. "Let us cry for our children": Lessons of the 1955–6 school boycotts. *Transformation*, 4:3-26.
- Jansen, J 2001. Rethinking education policy making in South Africa: Symbols of change, signals of conflict. In: A Kraak and M Young (eds.). *Education in retrospect: Policy and implementation 1990–2000* (pp. 40–57). HSRC Press.
- Johnson, RE 2010. *Making history, gendering youth: Young women and South Africa's liberation struggles after 1976*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Sheffield. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/522418/1/12808.pdf
- Jonker, E 2012. Reflections on history education: Easy and difficult histories. *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society*, 4(1):95-110.
- Jugović, I and Bezinović, P 2019. Victimisation experiences in school and perceived teacher support of same-sex-attracted high school students. In: JI Kjaran and H Sauntson (eds.). *Schools as queer transformative spaces: Global Narratives on Sexualities and Gender* (pp. 103-123). Routledge.
- Kilani, L 2025. Decolonising the curricular's disciplining methodologies' quest to humanise the humanities. *Transformation in Higher Education*, 10:1-8.
- Kros, C 1996. *Trusting to the process – reflections on the flaws in the negotiating of the history curriculum in South Africa* (Report No. 1). University of Witwatersrand.
- Kumalo, SH 2018. Explicating abjection – Historically white universities creating natives of nowhere? *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning*, 6(1):1-17.

- Kumalo, SH 2020. Curriculating from the black archive: Marginality as novelty. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning*, 8(1):111-132.
- Lekgoathi, SP 2016. Youth politics and rural rebellion in Zebediela and other parts of the “homeland” of Lebowa, 1976–1977. In: A Heffernan and N Nieftagodien (eds.). *Students must rise: Youth struggle in South Africa before and beyond Soweto '76* (pp. 109–118). Wits University Press.
- Lévesque, S 2005. The importance of ‘historical significance’. *Canadian Social Studies*, 39(2).
- Lorenz, N 2002. *Responses by black women to race and gender dynamics under South African Apartheid with special reference to the Black Consciousness Movement*. Master’s thesis, Stellenbosch University. [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/archive-files3/the20020300.008.000.pdf](https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/archive-files3/the20020300.008.000.pdf)
- Luescher, TM, Wilson Fadji, A, Morwe, K, Erasmus, A, Letsoalo, TS, and Mokhema, SB 2022. *#FeesMustFall and its aftermath: Violence, wellbeing and the student movement in South Africa*. HSRC Press.
- Macharia, K 2015. Archive and method in queer African studies. *Agenda*, 29(1):140-146.
- Maluleka, P 2021. Fallism as decoloniality: Towards a decolonised school history curriculum in post-colonial apartheid South Africa. *Yesterday and Today*, 26:68-69.
- Maluleka, P and Godsell, S 2024. The continued absence of the LGBTQIA community in school history textbooks in post-apartheid South Africa. *Yesterday and Today Journal*, 31(1):37-61.
- Maluleka, P and Ledwaba, LT 2023. Attempts to (re)capture the school history curriculum? Reflections on the history ministerial task team’s report. *Yesterday and Today*, 29(1):72-99.
- Maluleka, P and Ramoupi, NLL 2022. Towards a decolonized school history curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa through enacting legitimization code theory. In: MN Hlatshwayo, H Adendorff, MAL Blackie, A Fataar, and P Maluleka (eds.). *Decolonising knowledge and knowers: Struggles for university transformation in South Africa* (pp. 65-82). Routledge.
- Maluleka, P and Soldaat, M 2025. Weaving together a tapestry of historical knowledge in the post-apartheid school history curriculum: The case of Palesa Beverley Ditsie. *Yesterday and Today*, 34:31-48.

- Mamdani, M, Mkandawire, T Wamba-dia-Wamba, E 1988. Social movements, social transformation and struggle for democracy in Africa. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23(19):973-981.
- Martin, Y 2020. 'Now I am not afraid': Simon Nkoli, queer utopias and transnational solidarity. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46(4), 673-687.
- Martin, JR and Wodak, R 2003. *Re/reading the past: Critical and functional perspectives on time and value*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Matebeni, Z and Kiguwa, P 2024. Queering South African history. In: D Magaziner (ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of South African History*. Oxford Academic.
- Mavhandu-Mudzusi, AH and Ganga-Limando, M 2014. Being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) students at a South African rural university: Implications for HIV prevention. *Africa Journal of Nursing and Midwifery*, 16(2):125-138.
- Mayeza, E 2023. Homophobic violence in African primary schools. In: L Allen and ML Rasmussen (eds.). *The Palgrave encyclopaedia of sexuality education* (pp. 9-1). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mayeza, E and Vincent, L 2019. Learners' perspectives on life orientation sexuality education in South Africa. *Sex Education*, 19(4):472-485.
- Mazibuko, M 2020. Being a feminist in the fallist movement in contemporary South Africa. *Critical Times*, 3(3):488-495.
- McCormick, TL 2013. Queering discourses of coming out in South Africa. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus*, 42:127-148.
- Mchunu, K 2023. The queer activism of Simon Nkoli's clothed and styled body. *Gender Questions*, 11(1):1-23.
- McNamarah, CT 2018. Silent, spoken, written, and enforced: The role of law in the construction of the post-colonial queerphobic state. *Cornell International Law Journal*, 51(2):495-526
- Mentan, T 2015. *Unmasking social science imperialism: Globalization theory as a phase of academic colonialism*. Langaa RPCIG.
- Mignolo, WD 2007. Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3):449-513.

- Mishna, F, Newman, PA, Daley, A, and Solomon, S 2009. Bullying of lesbian and gay youth: A qualitative investigation. *British Journal of Social Work*, 39(8):1598-1614.
- Mkatshwa, S 1985. Keynote address. In: *Report on the National Consultative Conference on the Crisis in Education*.
- Moloi, T 2016. 'Let's begin to participate fully now in politics': Student politics, Mhluzi township, 1970s. In: A Heffernan and N Nieftagodien (eds.). *Students must rise: Youth struggle in South Africa before and beyond Soweto '76* (pp. 128-137). Wits University Press.
- More, MP 2012. Black Consciousness movement's ontology: The politics of being. *Philosophia Africana*, 14(1):23-39.
- Motta, S, and Nilsen, AG (eds.) 2011. *Social movements in the Global South: Dispossession, development and resistance*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Msibi, T 2011. The lies we have been told: On (homo)sexuality in Africa. *Africa Today*, 58(1):55-77.
- Msibi, T 2012. 'I'm used to it now': Experiences of homophobia among queer youth in South African township schools. *Gender and Education*, 24(5):515-533.
- Msibi, T 2014. Is current theorising on same-sex sexuality relevant to the African context? The need for more African voices on same-sex desire in Africa. *Pambazuka News*.
- Mthethwa, B, and Maluleka, P 2025. Peripheralisation of some histories in the school history curriculum in the post-apartheid South Africa: The case study of the 1950s Drum generation and their contributions to the liberation struggle. *Yesterday and Today*, 33:96-117.
- Naidoo, L 2016. Contemporary student politics in South Africa: The rise of the blackled student movements of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall in 2015. In: A Heffernan and N Nieftagodien (eds.). *Students must rise: Youth struggle in South Africa before and beyond Soweto '76* (pp. 180-190). Wits University Press.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, SJ (2013). Perhaps decoloniality is the answer? Critical reflections on development from a decolonial epistemic perspective. *Africanus*, 43(2):1-12.
- Ngabaza, S and Shefer, T 2019. Sexuality education in South African schools: Deconstructing the dominant response to young people's sexualities in contemporary schooling contexts. *Sex Education*, 19(4):422-435.
- Nieftagodien, N 2014. *The Soweto uprising*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media.

- Ombagi, EC 2019. *Becoming queer, being African: Re-thinking an African queer epistemological framework*. Doctoral dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Ombagi, EC 2021. Queer fragmentation as method: Nairobi's example. *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies*, 7(4):258-270.
- Otu, KE and Van Klinken, A 2023. African studies keywords: Queer. *African Studies Review*, 66(2):509-530.
- Oxfam South Africa 2016. *Oxfam South Africa condemns attacks on queer and feminist activists by male members of the Fallist movement!* Retrieved from <https://www.oxfam.org.za/oxfam-south-africa-condemns-attacks-on-queer-and-feminist-activists-by-male-members-of-the-fallist-movement/>
- Pakade, N 2024. Simo Nkoli's practices of freedom. In: M Motimele and R Hlasane (eds.). *Wondering hand(s) and spirited ink: Snapshots into the Black public humanities* (pp. 67-100). Keleketla!
- Partington, G 1980. What history should we teach? *Oxford Review of Education*, 6(2):157-176.
- Pereira, PPG 2019. Reflecting on decolonial queer. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 25(3):403-429.
- Phillips, R 2002. Historical significance: The forgotten key element? *Teaching History*, 106:14-19.
- Ramaru, K 2017. Feminist reflections on the Rhodes Must Fall movement. *Feminist Africa*, 22:89-96.
- Reddy, V 2006. Decriminalisation of homosexuality in post-apartheid South Africa: A brief legal case history review from sodomy to marriage. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 20(67):146-157.
- Reygan, F 2016. Making schools safer in South Africa: An anti-homophobic bullying educational resource. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 13(1-2):173-191.
- Rossouw, J 2025. Curricular scholasticide: LGBTQ+ omissions and representation in South African sexuality education. *African Perspectives of Research in Teaching and Learning Journal*, 9(5):597-610.
- Said, EW 2014. Traveling theory. In: D Damrosch (ed.). *World literature in theory* (pp. 114-133). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Sedgwick, EK 1990. *Epistemology of the closet*. University of California Press.

- Seleti, Y 1997. *From history to human and social sciences: The new curriculum framework and the end of history for the general education and training level* (Education Policy Unit Working Paper No. 14). University of Natal.
- Simon, RI 2011. A shock to thought: curatorial judgment and the public exhibition of 'difficult knowledge'. *Memory Studies*, 4(4):432-449.
- South African History Online 2017a. *Beverly Palesa Ditsie is the first out lesbian woman to address the United Nations about LGBT rights*. <https://sahistory.org.za/dated-event/beverly-palesa-ditsie-first-out-lesbian-woman-address-united-nations-about-lgbt-rights>
- South African History Online 2017b. *The first gay pride march is held in South Africa*. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/first-gay-pride-march-held-south-africa>
- Tamale, S 2013. Confronting the politics of nonconforming sexualities in Africa. *African Studies Review*, 56(2):3145.
- Teeger, C 2023. (Not) feeling the past: Boredom as a racialized emotion. *American Journal of Sociology*, 129(1):1-40.
- Thompson, L and Tapscott, C (eds.) 2010. *Citizenship and social movements: Perspectives from the Global South*. Zed Books.
- Tilly, C 1978. *From mobilization to revolution*. Addison-Wesley.
- Tilly, C 1985. Models and realities of popular action. *Social Research*, 52(4):717-747.
- Tilly, C 2004. *Social movements, 1768–2004*. Paradigm Publishers.
- Tleane, LC 2024. The Black Consciousness Movement in Azania (South Africa): A triple heritage. *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 20(1):1-10.
- Ubisi, L 2021. Addressing LGBT+ issues in comprehensive sexuality education for learners with visual impairment: Guidance from disability professionals. *Sexuality, Society, and Learning*, 21(3): 347-361.
- UNESCO 2016. *Out in the open: Education sector responses to violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity/expression: Summary report*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Walsh, C 2014. Pedagogical notes from the decolonial cracks. *e-misférica* (Hemispheric), 11(1).
- Wang, Z 2025. Black feminists' resistance and the intersectional agenda in the #MustFall movements in South Africa. In: G Yang, J Zhang, X Xiong, and L Liu (eds.). *Risks, resilience and interdependency* (pp. 179-209). Palgrave Macmillan.

- Weldon, G 2005. *A comparative study of the construction of memory and identity in the curriculum in societies emerging from conflict: Rwanda and South Africa*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria.
- Wells, H and Polders, L 2006. Anti-gay hate crimes in South Africa: Prevalence, reporting practices, and experiences of the police. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 20(67): 20-28.
- Wills, L 2016. The South African high school history curriculum and the politics of gendering decolonisation and decolonising gender. *Yesterday and Today*, 16:22-39.
- Woubshet, D 2003. Staging the rainbow nation. *Art South Africa*, 2(2):33-36.
- Xaba, W 2017. Challenging Fanon: A Black radical feminist perspective on violence and the Fees Must Fall movement. *Agenda*, 31(3-4):96-104.
- Zembylas, M 2014. Theorizing 'difficult knowledge' in the aftermath of the 'affective turn': Implications for curriculum and pedagogy in handling traumatic representations. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 44(3):390-412.
- Zembylas, M 2021. *Affect and the rise of right-wing populism: Pedagogies for the renewal of democratic education*. Routledge.

When History Education and English Literature Merge: Teaching the 1976 Soweto Uprising through Athol Fugard's "My Children! My Africa!"

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a14>

PraysGod Siphesihle Mhlongo

Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Wellington, South Africa

mhlongoP@cput.ac.za

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1226-2502>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a14>

Abstract

Literature transcends mere literary analysis and aesthetics. This is what I always tell my students. It plays a crucial role in shaping responsible, empathic, and cultured citizens in a non-racial and non-prejudiced society. In reference to the quote, "those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it" by George Santayana (1905), it is important, therefore, to reflect on and constantly conscientize ourselves about our histories. However, in South Africa, as in many nations that have experienced oppression and segregation, debates or discussions on race relations and the violent past still spark considerable rage among those who were oppressed, thus making it difficult to carry out constructive dialogues on the current state of the nation and the envisioned future. Drawing on personal experience as a lecturer of English literature for education or applied literature studies, this reflective practitioner article aims to demonstrate how the play "*My Children! My Africa! (MCMA)*" by Athol Fugard succeeds in narrating, commemorating, and motivating discussions or debates on hot-potato issues, such as race, racism, race relations, and other related matters, as well as historical events such as the 1976 Soweto Uprising. These are issues and events that most of the population still finds difficult to engage with without their blood boiling or pointing a finger at the 'other'. Such a demonstration entails a discussion on the appropriateness of the text as an enabler of discussions of this nature. Subsequently, the author discusses the method used in his English literature classes to facilitate race-related discussions and the type of questions that enable students to look beyond what the text

means in the classroom and to use the text to engage in discussions that may potentially promote and contribute to a socially cohesive society.

Keywords: Athol Fugard; My Children! My Africa!; 1976 Soweto Uprising; Social justice language education (SJLE); Fiction-based social justice pedagogy/practice.

Introduction

Positioning the article within social justice pedagogy or practice

This article draws inspiration from the method—*fiction-based social justice pedagogy or practice*—used by the author to teach and facilitate the learning and remembering of historical events such as the 1976 Soweto Uprising, using literature or literary texts. Social justice is defined in this article as the act of treating all people with dignity and fairness. Social justice pedagogy or practice is therefore defined as the explicit and implicit teaching of past and present systems, policies, and events that affect people's educational and economic opportunities, survival, and political freedom. It is also argued that social justice pedagogy or practice is often a means to an end, and not an end in itself. In other words, learning about apartheid or the 1976 Soweto Uprising, for example, is not only about learning the details and facts of events. It is also about advancing greater causes such as social cohesion and responsible citizenship, the cultivation of empathy and critical thinking, and the preparation of future professionals in diverse settings to interact with people from diverse economic and racial backgrounds with care and humility.

Since the proposed approach (fiction-based social justice pedagogy or practice) emerged from the language literature classroom, this article is positioned within the interdisciplinary field of social justice language education (SJLE). SJLE is a discipline that “explores the ways in which language classrooms can be transformed to disrupt the existing oppressive policies and practices in schools and in society at large” (Yilmaz et al., 2024:1).

The proposed intervention can also be implemented in history classes. The intervention's adaptation to history classes may help facilitate discussions on difficult topics, which many history teachers tend to tiptoe around because of the divisions and conflicts characterising countries with painful pasts (Twala, 2005). The failure to critically and creatively treat topics such as race may, in turn, easily create and breed tensions among students in history classes (Twala, 2005; Stacey et al., 2025). Therefore, the formulation of creative methods and frameworks for teaching difficult and controversial histories, such as the one proposed in this article, remains significant, as there is still a huge pedagogical gap in this area of research (Maluleka, 2023).

Justifying the article's contribution to social justice pedagogy or practice and the current special issue

As a practice-sharing article, the Community of Practice Theory (COPT) is adopted as a compass or theoretical justification for a contribution of this nature. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger-Trayner initially conceptualised this theory in 1991. Since then, it has been reformulated multiple times to reflect subsequent developments. According to Wenger-Trayner et al. (2023), communities of practice consist of like-minded individuals in a specific sector or field whose intention is to learn from one another.

...a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015:11)

The alternative definition describes communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

In my (the author) view, the concept of Community of Practice (COP) goes beyond groups of people who are working jointly on a common issue or goal, or working towards developing their competencies. COP can also refer to the amalgamation of specialists' thoughts and ideas that could potentially pave the way to a solution, or simply expand a focused pool of literature or knowledge that others could draw from for their future research and practices. That is, knowledge-sharing communities of practice (KCOP) refer to the practice of sharing timely and relevant practical knowledge, or knowledge that can be put into practice or tried expeditiously. Through shared knowledge or expertise, other individuals within the same community (who share similar interests) learn from the contributors.

According to the COPT, for successful learning to occur, three integrated conditions, prerequisites, or elements must be in place, namely domain, community, and practice (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023:12-13):

- **Domain:** What is the community about? What do people identify with?
- **Community:** Who should be at the table? What relationship should they form?
- **Practice:** What should they do together? How can they make a difference in practice?

For the purposes of this article, these elements are adapted or reconceptualised to reflect KCOP, as Figure 1 demonstrates.

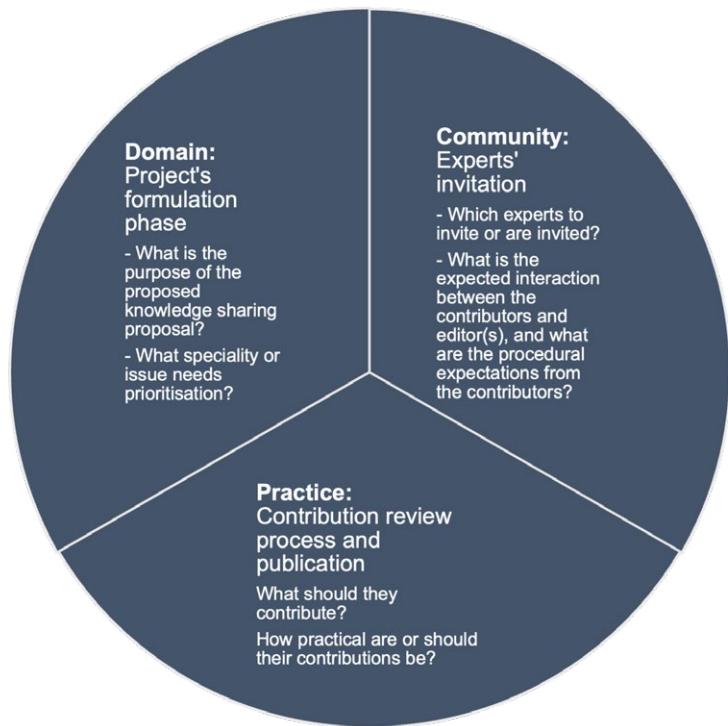


Figure 1: KCOP Model

Source: Adapted from Wenger-Trayner et al. (2023)

- **KCOP domain:** This refers to the guest editors' and editors' foundational mandate, which entails discussions about the necessity of the special issue (SI) or book, and may involve decisions about the SI or book's niche.
- **KCOP community:** This phase entails decision-making about potential contributors, and the drafting of the call and its distribution through channels such as the journals' websites, associations' websites, LinkedIn, and other social media platforms such as Facebook.
- **KCOP practice:** This is the review phase, which entails the evaluation of the manuscript's contribution and the practicality of such a contribution. Based

on the reviewers' feedback, the manuscript is either rejected; revised and eventually accepted for publication; or accepted without revisions.

By default, SI and book chapter calls create a temporary professional environment that allows individuals from similar or different fields of study with shared interests to come together as "occasional invitees" (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023:13) and discuss or contribute towards a common topic, theme, or issue. Specifically, the current issue invited practitioners from schools, universities, museums, and community settings to contribute towards a deeper understanding and advancement of history education, hence a contribution of this nature.

A Tribute to Athol Fugard: The voice of the oppressed, the silenced, and the deliberately unheard

This part of the article aims to commemorate the absolute brilliance of one of the greatest and most highly decorated playwrights that South Africa has ever produced: the gift to the global literary world, Harold Athol Lanigan Fugard, famously known as Athol Fugard.

Athol Fugard was born on 11 June 1932, in Middelburg in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, to an English-speaking father and an Afrikaans-speaking mother (Mathe, 2025). However, he spent most of his upbringing in Port Elizabeth (now known as Gqeberha), the city located in the Eastern Cape Province, as portrayed in "Master Harold and the Boys". Following the completion of his basic education (Grades 1–12) and a course in motor mechanics, he travelled to Cape Town, where he enrolled in a humanities degree at the University of Cape Town (UCT). He, however, did not complete his studies at UCT: a few months before his final examinations in 1953, Fugard dropped out in an attempt to find himself and discover his true calling. After dropping out of UCT at the age of 20, Fugard travelled across continents, and it was during this time that his calling or passion for writing was conceived (Mathe, 2025). However, his breakthrough into a writing career was not immediate.

On his return to South Africa, he worked as a freelancer for organisations such as the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the Evening Post. Subsequently, he worked as a clerk at the Native Commissioner's Office in Johannesburg in 1958 (Mathe, 2025). The injustices and inhumanity towards Africans that he witnessed as a clerk deeply troubled him, and they were the catalysts that launched his professional writing career (Mathe, 2025). From then on, he never looked back and published a series of literary works, with his writing career spanning more than six decades.

Although descriptors such as ‘playwright’, ‘novelist’, ‘actor’, and ‘director’ emerge when one searches for ‘Athol Fugard’, one can argue that Fugard was more than that. In the true essence of his work, Fugard was also a political activist, history teacher, and historical narrator.

Through storytelling, Fugard delicately and creatively preserved the sensitive history of South Africa. He made historical knowledge accessible and enjoyable through his remarkable writing skills. Fugard used his extraordinary gift of writing to craft what may be described as ‘timeless’ narratives that depict a vivid picture of the struggles of ordinary and often oppressed people in South Africa. He walked in the shoes of those who could not speak for themselves and embodied sincere and passionate resistance against the injustices of the past perpetuated by apartheid (a government system founded on principles of racial segregation). Fugard’s plays are still ‘alive’, serving as a necessary, relevant, and constant reminder of our unfortunate past.

Athol Fugard:

[was] a titan of South African and world theatre whose voice and vision shaped the landscape of storytelling both at home and abroad. (The Market Theatre Foundation, 2025)

[was] ferocious in his devotion to theatre and social justice, but unfailingly kind and gracious for others, he stood as a moral compass—and not just for apartheid-era South Africa. (Mann, 2025)

[was] the great South African playwright who captured what it means to be human.

All Fugard’s people — tramps, discarded people, poor people, people on the fringes — they are connected with all the people we know of today who are refugees. Who are going around the world looking for a safe home. (Walder, 2025)

...hoisted the flag of this country during the madness and anarchy of the apartheid years. He penned stories that gave ordinary, faceless people a pedestal. He inspired multitudes of playwrights, not only in South Africa, but internationally. (James Ngcobo quoted by Spector, 2025)

South Africa’s greatest playwright as well as theatrical craftsman, Athol Fugard made the comprehension of the apartheid regime’s style of perfidy, turpitude, moral corruption, hypocrisy and almost unspeakable oppression clear and performatively visible on stages and screens throughout the world.

His sharp-witted, ironic prose crystallised humanity's issues like no else's. He was credibly called the greatest playwright in the English language during his lifetime. (David Coplan quoted by Spector, 2025)

...an extraordinary storyteller in extraordinary times, and the moral conscience of a generation.

...will be remembered for being an outlier amongst the millions of white South Africans who blithely turned a blind eye to the injustices being perpetrated in their name. (Republic of South Africa, 2025)

...fearlessly exposed the devastation and distortion of living under apartheid, chronicling the lives of poor, disempowered and dysfunctional South Africans, sharing the complex relationships between ordinary people shaped by the apartheid and post-apartheid years, and questioning what being human means. (Nelson Mandela University, 2025)

...sacrificed so many of his privileges to tell the story of South African pain under apartheid with honesty and bravery.

...[and gave] a voice to those silenced by oppression. (Republic of South Africa, 2025)

His work:

...serve as cultural documents which testify to the lived realities of the everyday experience of apartheid beyond the level of historical information. (Flockemann, 2025:1)

...confronted what it is to be human in an imperfect world, and offered a study of relationships that are unsurpassed. His collaborative plays...challenged injustice and held a mirror to our society that was recognised globally.

[...] continues to inspire generations of playwrights who strive to tell stories with courage and conviction. (The Market Theatre Foundation, 2025)

...was deeply political but did not solely stay at the level of its immediate politics but transcended them.

...still have huge, universal resonance for audiences today. (Royal Court Theatre, 2025)

...helped people to understand the world we live in and the human condition. (Walder, 2025)

...was not merely about reflecting society but about interrogating it, questioning injustices, and urging change. His work illuminated the lives of those marginalized by apartheid and explored universal human struggles of identity, belonging and conscience. (Ngowi, 2025)

Humanity was always at the core of Fugard's art. (McNulty, 2025)

No one can tell the story of protest theatre without mentioning the names of Athol Fugard, Winston Ntshona, and myself. (Kani, 2025)

These tributes not only highlight Fugard's absolute brilliance, they also demonstrate the role and importance of Fugard's writing's calling or higher purpose, and work, in advancing the social justice struggle and teaching, which the current article deliberates on.

In conclusion, Athol Fugard came and taught us what it means to be *umuntu ebantwini* (selflessly giving oneself to others), to have *Ubuntu* (being one with others), to live a principled life guided by values of justice, and to be kind in a cruel world. Fugard embodied empathy and was therefore, the true definition of an empath. He also left us with a legacy that will live forever. Athol Fugard died at the age of 92 on 8 March 2025 in Stellenbosch, South Africa. May the 'Athol-Fugard-spirit', characterised by selflessness and *Ubuntu*, live eternally.

Why “My Children! My Africa!”?

Within the five and a half years (2015-2020) that I worked as a high school English Second Language teacher in Phuthaditjhaba, Free State Province, South Africa, I was fortunate to teach, for the first time, the play “My Children! My Africa!” (MCMA) by Athol Fugard to one of the Grade 12 classes in 2017. I instantly fell in love with it. A few years later, I prescribed the same text to my university English major students, training to become Senior Phase and Further Education and Training Phase teachers. For context, MCMA is a play that was first published in 1989 and highlights the past injustices and educational inequalities perpetuated by the apartheid system. At the centre of the play is the symbolic 1976 Soweto Uprising, which Fugard uses to highlight the clash of resistance ideologies and the inevitable consequences resulting from suppressed voices. As an audience, one can deduce the play's commemorative intent regarding the 1976 Soweto Uprising through several commonalities shared between the events in the play and the actual events of the

1976 protest, such as Bantu Education as a trigger, the violent nature of the protests, and the inferior learning conditions, to name a few. The discussion of the 1976 Soweto Uprising's finer details, which may exceed the scope of this article, is thoroughly outlined by Brown (2016) and Ndlovu (2017). Therefore, the author could not think of a better reference suited to commemorate the 1976 Soweto Uprising, which took place 50 years ago, than using MCMA as a case study.

What makes MCMA the appropriate text for teaching or facilitating dialogues about past events such as the 1976 Soweto Uprising and social justice in universities is that it is a young adult literature (YAL) text driven by young adult protagonists (Short et al., 2015). Although YAL's description is contentious, and there is still confusion regarding its precise definition, it is often associated with the transition from youth to adulthood, hence the descriptive markers of its definition, such as puberty, adolescence, and teenager (Short et al., 2015). Given these descriptive markers, one may be tempted to define it as the literature read by teenagers or young adults, which is not always the case, as adults also read and find these texts meaningful and enjoyable (Dinnison, 2015). In this article, YAL is defined by the author as the kind of literature or texts that speak to the immediate challenges that young adults often contend with, such as relationship problems, identity issues, issues of belonging, career choices, mental health issues, finding one's voice, friendship, bullying, sexuality, political association and views (as portrayed in MCMA), and many others. These texts often act as companions to young adults who may otherwise feel like they are the only ones dealing with certain challenges. This relatability is accomplished through main characters who are young adults and through carefully chosen and thoroughly addressed themes that universally resonate with young adults. Furthermore, YAL can also be used in classrooms to create awareness, sensitise the young audience to certain issues, and ultimately cultivate empathy. For example, bullies may not often comprehend the magnitude of their detrimental actions toward others. Exposing them to YAL that addresses bullying, and subsequent discussions emanating from the text, may teach them about the unacceptability and negative consequences of bullying, and ultimately foster empathy. YAL can be any genre (drama, novel, poetry) that is centred on the young adult protagonist and narrates the struggles of young adults. Therefore, there is no doubt that the young adult audience (students) in universities may find MCMA relatable to their lives.

Secondly, the text's events set in Brakwater (a Black township) and Camdeboo (a predominantly white suburban area) are representative of the historical and contemporary realities of South Africa. That is, more than thirty years into democracy, South Africa

remains one of the most highly unequal countries in the world, with a 31.4 per cent unemployment rate recorded in the last quarter of 2025 (Business Tech, 2026).

Finally, Fugard cleverly and implicitly mitigates potential rage emanating from the text's discussion or interpretation by portraying different races in a non-prejudiced and non-racist manner, an approach that eases the difficulty often associated with race relations dialogues. In other words, through character portrayal, Fugard avoids painting Black people as the 'uncivilised', 'unintelligent', or 'rebellious' race. This is evident, for instance, through the creation of two Black characters: Thami, who is Mr M's favourite intelligent learner, and Mr M, a Zolile High School English teacher who believes in the power of words to resolve conflicts. Similarly, although Fugard does an excellent job of revealing the evils of apartheid, he also convincingly demonstrates that not all white people were evil and that not all of them supported apartheid. He achieves this through Isabel, who gets along very well with the Black domestic workers, Aunty and Samuel, who work at her home and her father's chemist shop. Furthermore, at the end of the play, we witness Isabel's full transformation into a young and open-minded white girl who is against the 'madness' happening in the country. This more mature version of Isabel also represents the new generation of young white South Africans who are hopeful about the future of South Africa as a 'rainbow nation' or a melting pot, as Isabel articulates in Act 2, Scene 5:

[Isabel alone. She stands quietly, examining the silence. After a few seconds she nods her head slowly.]

Isabel: Yes! Thami was right, Mr M. He said I'd feel near you up here. He's out there somewhere, Mr M... travelling north. He didn't say where exactly he was going, but I think we can guess, can't we? I'm here for a very 'old fashioned' reason, so I know you'll approve. I've come to pay my last respects to Anela Myalatya. I know the old-fashioned way of doing that is to bring flowers, lay them on the grave, say a quiet prayer and then go back to your life. But that seemed sort of silly this time. You'll have enough flowers around here when spring comes... which it will. So instead, I've brought you something which I know will mean more to you than flowers or prayers ever could. A promise. I am going to make Anela Myalatya a promise. You gave me a little lecture once about wasted lives... how much you didn't want that to happen to Thami and me. I sort of understood what you meant at the time. Now, I most certainly do. Your death has seen to that. My promise to you is that I am going to try as hard as I can, in every way that I can, to see that it doesn't happen to me. I am going to try my best to make my life useful in the way that yours was. I want you to be proud of me. After all, I am one of your children, you know. You did welcome me to your family.

[A pause] The future is still ours, Mr M. (Fugard, 2020:102-103)

Although this narration style may somewhat be perceived as a 'both sides of the story' approach, which Teeger (2015) perceives as problematic, this notion is not portrayed explicitly in the play. Fugard leaves it to the audience to conclude the characterisation of the characters.

Arguably, Isabel's transformation could also be a symbol of South Africa's transition from being a racially segregated nation to a democratic state, as characterised by the 1994 watershed election. In his own words, Athol Fugard confirms these sentiments in a documentary interview, stating:

In writing My Children, My Africa I tried to deal with something which has been a source of great courage, inspiration, and hope to me over the years, which is quite simply young South Africans: White and Black and Coloured and brown and all the other colours. Even during the years of apartheid, somehow or other, I had the good fortune to keep on encountering young South Africans — as I say, of all skin colours, — who had somehow miraculously escaped the evil indoctrination of apartheid. They remained open, outward-going, decent human beings. I mean, a lot of people, a lot of young South Africans were trapped and ended up repeating the sins of their fathers, but there were just enough of those exceptions to constantly inspire me and give me faith in the eventual future decency of this country. And I wrote My Children, My Africa in the sense of acknowledging that debt to young South Africa, and it was a play I also wrote before President de Klerk made his speech, and it was very rewarding for me to then watch the events of the past two years because they have certainly vindicated my faith in this country, my refusal to be one of the prophets of despair. We haven't solved any of our problems yet. All our problems still lie ahead of us, but I mean, problems and challenges are what life is about, and our art will respond. Our art will be vigorous to the extent that our life is vigorous, and I foresee a very, very vigorous life for us South Africans. (Tekweni, 2019).

The "most bleak, depressing, dingy classroom" (Fugard, 2020:52) described by Isabel in Scene 2 represents the current state of education in South Africa, characterised by vast inequalities due to the lack of essential resources such as laboratories, prescribed textbooks, libraries, advanced and modern technology, and proper ablution facilities, among others, mostly in previously disadvantaged schools (Spaull & Jansen, 2019).

Essentially, MCMA is "a good book" (Glasgow, 2001:54), which Glasgow (2001:54) defines as a book that "unsettle[s] us, make[s] us ask questions about what we thought was certain; [and does not] just reaffirm everything we already know".

Literature and social justice teaching: Advancing history education through literature and enabling race relations dialogues in learning spaces

I agree with George Santayana (1905) that “those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it”, which got me thinking and asking: How can we ensure that learning about our past or history lives on? This part of the article aims to answer this question by sharing the practice that I (the author) use in my own university English literature classes. However, first, a justification for adopting literary texts to promote safe dialogues about past and current injustices is provided.

As initially articulated, literature transcends mere literary analysis and aesthetics. It plays a crucial role in shaping responsible, empathic, and humanistic citizens in a non-racial and non-prejudiced society. Glasgow (2001) affirms these sentiments by stating that, to promote tolerance of individual differences and cultivate socially responsible citizens, educators must create democratic and critical spaces in classrooms where students can openly discuss and debate viewpoints that either reinforce or challenge social justice viewpoints. Glasgow (2001) further argues that young adult literature is capable of conscientizing students about their worldviews and that it offers alternative lenses that enable them to view the world differently or from other people's perspectives, thereby enhancing their understanding of human relations.

Advocating for the use of *fiction-based social justice pedagogy or practice*, dramatization of children's literature specifically, to promote social justice, Yilmaz et al. (2024) argue that this approach has the potential to cultivate perspective-taking, empathy, and self- and identity awareness. It also challenges stereotypes and prejudice, and enables students to see others for who they truly are. Finally, dramatization may also enhance students' knowledge about socio- and geopolitical issues, which in turn, shapes their global citizenship (Yilmaz et al., 2024). These are essential skills and attributes that young people need in order to survive and thrive in a diverse world, and through social justice education, teachers can assist students in developing these competencies (Pillay & Pillay, 2018; Banas & Gershon, 2022).

However, despite the persisting and unfortunate racial tensions in South Africa's schools (Madlingozi et al., 2024)—which serve as reminders of the importance of continuous reflections and progressive debates on the successes and failures of the democratic government in improving citizens' lives, as well as the need for dialogues that promote

social cohesion—some students may still not be inclined or may find such discussions uncomfortable (Yilmaz, 2024). Kapp (2025) points out that even History teachers, especially in private schools, find race-related discussions uncomfortable to facilitate. In instances where attention is afforded to topics such as “apartheid and systematic racism; colonisation, eugenics and land dispossession; geopolitical conflicts; gender and sexuality topics; and current South African politics,” this is often done in a superficial manner (Kapp, 2025:192). It appears that this reluctance is a global phenomenon, especially in countries with a history of an oppressive and violent past. Carman Williams and Boyd (2023) note that even in the United States of America, particularly in states such as Florida, there is often discomfort associated with social justice topics.

Learners’ unwillingness could be due to the sensitive nature of the dialogues, as well as the fear of being judged and becoming outcasts because of their unique or liberal views. In the case of teachers, reasons could include attempts to avoid tension in class, which may negatively affect the relationships that learners have with one another or disrupt classroom camaraderie. Teachers also fear being politically incorrect or having their views or methods of facilitating sensitive discussions misconstrued, which may have serious consequences, such as the loss of livelihood as a result of student complaints or public uproar (Kapp, 2025). Because schools are aware of such risks, they may caution against or restrict teachers from facilitating sensitive dialogues (Kapp, 2025). Furthermore, school cultures, religious affiliations, teachers’ backgrounds and beliefs, and learners’ perceptions of and sense of relatability to teachers may influence teachers’ motivation to facilitate discussions on sensitive topics (Kapp, 2025). Kapp (2025) also highlights the lack of proper training in facilitating sensitive discussions, which often leaves teachers feeling ill-equipped, a notion shared by Maluleka (2023). Maluleka (2023) argues that the current South African History curriculum fails to capacitate History teachers with the creative teaching methods or frameworks necessary to handle and deal with difficult and controversial topics delicately and with love, while cultivating “empathy, cognitive, social epistemic justice, inclusivity, critical thinking, respect, love, and tolerance for others, as well as promotion for knowledge co-construction” (Maluleka, 2023:31).

Therefore, as a potential intervention, this article proposes that schools and universities should capitalise on fiction texts as drivers of historical consciousness and as tools for advancing race relations and social cohesion.

Practical intervention

In my English literature classes, we have what we call “text reading feedback” sessions. These are semi-formal sessions, because even though the discussions are highly significant, I try to maintain fluidity and bring a bit of ‘enjoyment’ into them. As a result, I have observed that many students enjoy these sessions because of their relaxed nature and because a classroom is one of the few platforms where they can freely voice their genuine views about the current political, socio-economic, and social relations of South Africa. To facilitate the sessions, students are first tasked with reading the entire text on their own and making notes if they wish. During the sessions, I initially asked specific students at random to respond to the posed questions. However, this approach did not seem to work well, as students preferred the questions ‘to be thrown in the air’ (their words), allowing whoever felt confident or capable to respond. A sample of the questions that are posed to students with the aim of facilitating text comprehension, cultivating empathy (the ability to put oneself in others’ shoes and remain patient and non-judgmental), and cultivating social cohesion (the ability to tolerate differences and intercultural competence) is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample of questions posed to students for discussions

Discussion Questions’ Sample	
1	In Act 1, Scene 1, Thami tells Isabel that school does not mean the same to “them” as it does to her. What do you think he means by this statement?
2	How does Mr M’s passion for debate align with his beliefs or ideologies for freedom attainment?
3	How would you generally describe Isabel’s relationship with Black people, including Auntie and Samuel, and what does it tell us about her personality and her outlook on South Africa at that time?
4	In Act 1, Scene 2, what do descriptions such as “Miss Isabel” and “Baas’s daughter” tell us about class in apartheid South Africa?
5	In Act 1, Scene 2, what do you think the descriptions of Brakwater as a “terrible mess” and “eyesore” symbolise or imply?
6	In Act 1, Scene 2, Isabel describes the Number One Classroom as “the most bleak, depressing, dingy classroom” she has ever been in. What factors do you think may have contributed to this unconducive learning environment?
7	In Act 1, Scene 2, what do you think the following statement by Isabel implies: “That’s what I want, now. I didn’t really know it before that debate, but I do now. You see, I finally worked out what happened to me in the classroom”?

Discussion Questions' Sample	
8	In Act 1, Scene 3, Mr M says, "What a contest! But at the same time, what a waste, I thought! Yes, you heard me correctly! A waste! They shouldn't be fighting each other. They should be fighting together!" Who are "they" and why does he say "them"?
9	In Act 1, Scene 3, who are the "wasted people" that Mr M refers to in the play?
10	In Act 1, Scene 3, what are the "wasted chances" that Mr M refers to in the play?
11	In Act 1, Scene 3, what is the "country's lunacy" that Mr M refers to in the play?
12	In Act 1, Scene 3, what does Mr M mean by "the time for lamentations is passed"?
13	In Act 1, Scene 3, what do you think Mr M means by the following statement: "[He takes an envelope from his pocket.] Two days ago I received this in the mail. It's the programme for this year's Grahamstown Schools Festival. It has given me what I was looking for ... an opportunity to fight the lunacy"?
14	In Act 1, Scene 4, what does Mr M imply by the following statement: "Yes! The clocks are ticking, my friends. History has got a strict timetable. If we're not careful we might be remembered as the country where everybody arrived too late"?
15	In Act 1, Scene 4, Mr M says: "Yes! The clocks are ticking, my friends. History has got a strict timetable. If we're not careful we might be remembered as the country where everybody arrived too late." Do you think this statement is still relevant to the current situation in South Africa?
16	Refer to Isabel's monologue about her experience at Zolile High School and share what you think it (the monologue) tells us about "her world" and privileges in apartheid South Africa.
17	Refer to Mr M's monologue and share what you think it (the monologue) tells us about his imagined South Africa.
18	Refer to the #RhodesMustFall articles you found and discuss what you think Thami's statement in Act 1, Scene 5 may mean in and for the current South Africa: "Don't joke about it, Miss Dyson. There are quite a few Ozymandias in this country waiting to be toppled. And with any luck you'll live to see it happen. We won't leave it to Time to bring them down."
19	In Act 1, Scene 5, Thami says that people would pull Nelson Mandela's statue down fast. Why do you think he says this?
20	In Act 1, Scene 5, Thami says that Mr M is out of touch with what is really happening to Black people and the way they feel about things. Do you agree with him?
21	In Act 1, Scene 6, Thami describes Oom Dawie as someone who has good intentions or is hopeful about the education provided by the State to Black people. Why is Thami not taking his words (Oom Dawie's) seriously as they are intended?
22	In Act 1, Scene 6, Thami says they will soon be shouting "AMANDLA". What does it mean and imply?

Discussion Questions' Sample	
23	In Act 2, Scene 1, Mr M and Thami have fierce exchanges about their disapproval of the inferior Bantu Education. Why do they describe it as inferior, and do you think that a fight against it is justified?
24	Refer to Act 2, Scene 1 and Mr M's justifications, and argue whether you agree with Mr M that his fight against Bantu Education through 'his' methods has indeed been a successful one.
25	Refer to Mr M's argument in Act 2, Scene 1, about the power of words, and argue whether he is being naïve or hopeful.
26	Act 2, Scene 2 could arguably be a reference to the 1976 Soweto Uprising. What do you understand about this protest?
27	In Act 2, Scene 4, Thami says that he is leaving the country, going north, to join the movement. What movement is he referring to? Explain your answer in detail.
28	Athol Fugard is described as being a voice of the oppressed, silenced and the deliberately unheard. How does "My Children! My Africa!" function as a weapon against oppression?
29	Discuss whether you agree with Athol Fugard's statement that "putting words on paper is a valid form of protest". Argue by making reference to the text (MCMA) as a whole.
30	Reflect on the text as a whole and think about the current South Africa—do you think that over the last 30 years, race relations have improved?

From an autoethnographic perspective (Poulos, 2021), the *fiction-based social justice pedagogy or practice* has the potential to be one of the effective strategies that can facilitate healthy teaching of difficult or controversial historical content. The pronounced confidence in this approach is supported by the observed strong engagement in my classes. I have noted on multiple counts that the discussions often evoke a variety of emotions and levels of engagement, ranging from frank enthusiasm to saying only what feels safe, and implicit and explicit defensiveness. In the end, everyone leaves the lecture room having learned something from others' diverse views and with a better or enhanced comprehension of the text. Other important outcomes include opportunities to develop one's voice and express one's views confidently. Students also leave the lecture room with their views vindicated. As a facilitator, I always feel a great sense of contribution towards training socially conscious future teachers who are sensitive to the realities of all people. Finally, it is important to mention that entirely smooth and tension-free discussions cannot always be guaranteed, and it is in such instances that the role of a lecturer as a facilitator becomes crucial in ensuring constructive and respectful engagement.

Subsequently, students in my English literature classes prepare for the literary analysis presentations on the same text. This task contributes 80 per cent to the component's term mark.

In history classrooms, a similar approach could be adopted. A teacher may recommend a text such as MCMA to amplify discussions of specific topics that may have been taught prior, such as:

- a. class, and superiority and inferiority complexes in apartheid South Africa - addressed by question 4;
- b. Group Areas Act of 1950 - addressed by question 5;
- c. socio-economic inequalities - addressed by questions 5 and 16;
- d. Bantu Education - addressed by questions 6 and 23;
- e. race relations or social cohesion - addressed by question 8;
- f. apartheid - addressed by question 11;
- g. students' awareness of the past or history through past-and-present comparisons - addressed by questions 15 and 17;
- h. post-apartheid education protests - addressed by question 18;
- i. political figures and their causes - addressed by question 19;
- j. the 1976 Soweto Uprising - addressed by question 26;
- k. movements and organisations that fought for freedom and their methods - addressed by question 27; and
- l. students' lived experiences in post-apartheid South Africa - addressed by question 30.

Amplification, in this instance, refers to finding creative ways to engage students in a classroom. For example, students may be reluctant to engage in difficult or controversial discussions from an immediate personal perspective, as they may fear being judged or isolated because of their personally held strong views. Arguably, they may be more inclined to participate if they take on the perspective of characters. For example, as opposed to asking, "Would you participate in a mob to voice your dissatisfaction about specific issues?" a teacher could phrase the question as follows: "Do you think that the mob, as portrayed in the text, is justified, or a justified means of protest?"

In addition to facilitating ‘putting’ oneself in others’ shoes (empathy), these questions cultivate the ability and willingness to ‘walk’ in others’ shoes. That is to say, to not only imagine what it must be like to be in specific situations, but also to engage critically and willingly in difficult or controversial discussions, no matter how unsettling that may be, with the aim of becoming sensitised to others’ struggles. Therefore, the use of fiction to initiate and facilitate difficult or controversial discussions may not only ease potential tensions in a classroom, it may also motivate students to engage freely because of the excitement that such texts evoke, as I have witnessed in my own classes. Lecturers need to capitalise on this ‘fun’ aspect, as it is likely to enhance learning, teaching, and overall engagement.

Motivating students to participate

Since these are semi-formal discussions, which primarily aim to create a peer-to-peer learning, educational, healing, and unifying platform, less emphasis is placed on marks. The most important element is the dialogue itself. However, students do receive a mark out of five, which counts for 20 per cent of the term mark, and is structured as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Scoring or mark allocation template

0 = No response
1 = Basic/limited response
2 = Satisfactory response
3 = Good response
4-5 = Excellent response

Although the marks do motivate students to a certain extent, I have observed that as the sessions progress, they tend to find them enjoyable, with everyone wanting to jump into discussions even when they have already had an opportunity to voice their views. What this essentially means is that the mark is potentially an initiator of motivation, while the atmosphere that these discussions evoke is the sustainer of such motivation.

Closing remarks

Before commencing with the task, it is important to ensure that students understand that discussions of this nature are meant to facilitate the collective reflection on the past and progressive dialogue, rather than create division and animosity. In my classes, the trigger warning (see Figure 2) forms part of the task instructions.

Reminders and Trigger Warning(s)
The lecturer acknowledges that some students may find some aspects of the discussions sensitive, triggering, or personal, and for these very reasons, the lecturer wishes to issue the following reminders: A. Discussions are by no means intended as agendas to attack or humiliate any individuals or groups of people. B. These discussions are designed to facilitate important debates on issues relevant to young people and to contemporary South Africa. After all, the whole purpose of literature is to provide opportunities and platforms for debate and discussion, enabling difficult, yet important conversations that contemporary South Africa urgently needs. This significant role of literature is vital in shaping active citizens and future leaders. Discussions are also an important aspect of preparing prospective English teachers for the classroom, as they not only help students sharpen their oratory skills and strengthen their confidence, they also develop their analytical and critical thinking skills. Finally, students are to conduct themselves professionally during discussions by remaining objective when expressing their intended arguments and by respecting others' views. If a student disagrees with others' arguments, such disagreements or questions should be expressed respectfully and with the intention of contributing to a healthy, constructive debate.

Figure 2: Trigger warning example for sensitive discussions

Facilitating difficult race discussions can be daunting. However, the fortunate aspect is that there are numerous scholarly publications that provide guidance such as Maluleka (2023), Wassermann and Bentrovato (2018), Twala (2005), Glasgow (2001), and many others. Furthermore, a simple search for 'facilitating difficult race discussions' yields several useful tips that instructors can use to facilitate fair, respectful, and unbiased discussions in their classes.

Conclusion

Essentially, the message that this reflective article aims to communicate is that teachers have a responsibility to cultivate and prepare responsible and empathic citizens and professionals. These are the essential graduate attributes that help individuals adapt to a working environment consisting of people from different racial and economic backgrounds. They also have the potential to improve individuals' interpersonal skills, which are highly valued in the workplace.

The prescription or recommendation of texts such as "*My Children! My Africa!*" does not serve English majors alone. It could also be recommended by history teachers to

enhance engagement and narrative depth in the learning of certain controversial topics that are taught or discussed in their learning spaces.

Finally, the article only presented findings from an autoethnographic perspective, contextualised within a higher education setting. In the future, it may be worth investigating the benefits of fiction-based social justice pedagogy or practice from students' perspective and in schools.

References

- Banas, J and Gershon S 2022. A Novel approach to social justice education. *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*, 34(2).
- Brown, J 2016. *The road to Soweto resistance and the Uprising of 16 June 1976*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media.
- Business Tech 2026. *Two provinces in South Africa where more people are unemployed than working*. Available at <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/851236/two-provinces-in-south-africa-where-more-people-are-unemployed-than-working/> Accessed on 15 March 2026.
- Carman Williams, LI and Boyd, AS 2023. Teaching social justice through gothic young adult literature. *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, 38(2).
- Dinnison, K 2015. *Young adult literature belongs to everyone*. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYRsQ1YzTtU> Accessed on 5 July 2026.
- Flockemann, M 2025. (Re)living moments with Athol Fugard (1932–2025). *South African Journal of Science*, 121(5/6).
- Fugard, A 2020. *My children! My Africa!* Johannesburg: Pearson South Africa & Wits University Press.
- Glasgow, JN 2001. Teaching social justice through young adult literature. *The English Journal*, 90(6):54-61.
- Kani, J 2025. *John Kani's tribute to Athol Fugard*. Available at <https://www.litnet.co.za/press-release-john-kanis-tribute-to-athol-fugard/> Accessed on 15 March 2026.
- Kapp, M 2025. Discomfort as a pedagogical mirror – views of a history teacher. *Yesterday & Today*, (35).

- Madlingozi, T, Booï, S, and Tumbo A 2024. *Persistent racism in South African Schools: A cry for urgent intervention measures beyond formal instruments*. Human Rights Commission. Available at <https://www.sahrc.org.za/index.php/sahrc-media/opinion-pieces/item/4185-persistent-racism-in-south-african-schools-a-cry-for-urgent-intervention-measures-beyond-formal-instruments>. Accessed on 15 March 2026.
- Maluleka, P 2023. Teaching and learning sensitive and controversial topics in history through and with decolonial love. *Yesterday & Today*, (29).
- Mann, E 2025. *Athol Fugard was my hero*. Available at <https://www.americantheatre.org/2025/03/19/athol-fugard-was-my-hero/> Accessed on 15 March 2026.
- Mathe, S 2025. Athol Fugard: 1932-2025 (Obituary). *South African Theatre Journal*, 37(2):169-173.
- McNulty, C 2025. *Appreciation: Playwright Athol Fugard proved the pen could be mightier than the sword*. *Los Angeles Times*, 10 March 2025. Available at <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2025-03-10/playwright-athol-fugard-blood-knot-master-harold-boys-valley-song-apartheid> Accessed on 15 March 2026.
- Ndlovu, SM 2017. *The Soweto Uprisings: Counter memories of June 1976*. Johannesburg: Pan Macmillan South Africa.
- Nelson Mandela University 2025. *Statement on the passing of Dr Athol Fugard on 8 March 2025*. Available at <https://news.mandela.ac.za/News/Statement-on-the-passing-of-Dr-Athol-Fugard-on-8-M> Accessed on 15 March 2026.
- Ngowi, K 2025. The final curtain: Remembering Athol Fugard's theatre of conscience. *Mail & Guardian*, 10 March 2025. Available at <https://mg.co.za/friday/2025-03-10-the-final-curtain-remembering-athol-fugards-theatre-of-conscience/> Accessed on 15 March 2026.
- Pillay, P and Pillay T 2018. Using South African stories to create understanding and appreciation of diversity. *African Renaissance*, 15 (Special Issue 1).
- Poulos, CN 2021. *Essentials of autoethnography*. American Psychological Association.
- Republic of South Africa 2025. *Statement on the passing of global great Athol Fugard*. Ministry of Sport, Arts and Culture in Republic of South Africa. Available at <https://www.dsac.gov.za/Statement%20on%20the%20Passing%20of%20Global%20Great%20Athol%20Fugard> Accessed on 15 March 2026.

- Royal Court Theatre 2025. A tribute to Athol Fugard, 1932 – 2025. Available at <https://royalcourttheatre.com/stories/a-tribute-to-athol-fugard-1932-2025/> Accessed on 15 March 2026.
- Santayana, G 1905. *The life of reason: Reason in art*. Vol. 1. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Short, KG, Tomlinson, CM, Lynch-Brown, C, and Johnson, H 2015. *Essentials of young adult literature*, 3rd ed. Pearson.
- Spaull, N and Jansen JD (eds.) 2019. *South African schooling: The enigma of inequality (A study of the present situation and future possibilities)*. Cham: Springer.
- Spector, JB 2025. Athol Fugard's plays offered hope where there was despair, courage where there was dismay. *Daily Maverick*, 11 March 2025. Available at <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2025-03-11-athol-fugards-plays-offered-hope-where-there-was-despair-courage-where-there-was-dismay/> Accessed on 15 March 2026.
- Stacey, M, Wood, J, Amazan, R and Baker, S 2025. Teaching social justice education: The nature, role and future of discomfort, *Critical Studies in Education*, 66(4):449-462.
- Teeger, C 2015. "Both sides of the story": History education in post-apartheid South Africa, *American Sociological Review*, 80(6).
- Tekweni 2018. Inside the mind of Athol Fugard: A master playwright's journey. *YouTube*, 2 July 2018. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtkbPMd6Mks&t=929s> Accessed on 15 March 2026.
- The Market Theatre Foundation. 2025. A tribute to Athol Fugard from the market theatre foundation. Available at <https://markettheatre.co.za/a-tribute-to-athol-fugard-from-the-market-theatre-foundation/> Accessed on 15 March 2026.
- Twala, C 2005. Race and ethnicity in the teaching of history: Challenges to history educators in the new dispensation. (2005). *Southern Journal for Contemporary History*, 30(2):19-36.
- Walder, D 2025. Athol Fugard: The great South African playwright who captured what it means to be human. *The Conversation*, 10 March 2025. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/athol-fugard-the-great-south-african-playwright-who-captured-what-it-means-to-be-human-251829> Accessed on 15 March 2026.

- Wassermann, J and Bentrovato, D 2018. Confronting controversial issues in History classrooms: An analysis of preservice high school teachers' experiences in post-apartheid South Africa. *Yesterday & Today Journal*, (20).
- Wenger-Trayner, E and Wenger-Trayner, B 2015. *Introduction to communities of practice: A brief overview of the concept and its uses*. Available at <https://www.wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/> Accessed on 15 March 2026.
- Wenger-Trayner, E, Wenger-Trayner, B, Reid, P and Bruderlein, C 2023. *Communities of practice within and across organisations: A guidebook*. Sesimbra: Social learning Lab.
- Yilmaz, A, Hart, DO and Sonmez, N 2024. Promoting social justice through dramatizing children's literature: Lessons from EFL classrooms in Türkiye. *TESOL Journal*, 15(4):e857.

From Soweto Protest Chants to Setswana Motswako Hip-Hop: Youth Agency, Language Reclamation and Cultural Resistance

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a15>

Bodibadi Dorothy Modungwa

Department of Humanities Education, University of Pretoria, South Africa

mokgoko.bodibadi@up.ac.za / mokgokodorothy@gmail.com

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9406-8935>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a15>

Khumile Molotsane

Department of African Languages, University of Pretoria, South Africa

E-mail: Khumile.molotsane@up.ac.za / kehumile@live.com

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3054-4577>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a15>

Abstract

The 1976 Soweto Uprising marked a defining moment in South Africa's struggle for educational, linguistic, and cultural liberation. In resisting the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, young people employed protest chants, struggle songs, slogans, and *toi-toi* (high-kneed, foot stomping protest dance) performances as powerful forms of collective expression and resistance. Nearly five decades later, the legacy of this youth activism continues to resonate in contemporary Setswana cultural production. This article examines how Setswana-dominant genres such as *Motswako* hip-hop, *Amapiano*, and spoken-word poetry function as sites of language reclamation, cultural affirmation, and youth agency. Using a qualitative interpretive approach that combines historical analysis, textual analysis, and cultural interpretation, the study compares selected protest traditions of the Soweto Uprising with contemporary musical and poetic texts by artists including Hip Hop Pantsula (HHP), Tuks Senganga, Khuli Chana, Focalistic, and Bothale Boikanyo. Guided by decolonial and sociolinguistic perspectives, the analysis explores how contemporary youth employ Setswana not merely as a medium of communication, but as a form of cultural capital, identity construction, and resistance to linguistic marginalisation.

The findings reveal significant continuities between the protest traditions of 1976 and contemporary youth expression. Repetition, rhythmic delivery, collective participation, audience engagement, and performative practices evident in protest chants and *toi-toi* performances reappear in contemporary music, spoken-word poetry, and dance cultures. While resistance has shifted from direct opposition to state-imposed language policies towards cultural and symbolic forms of assertion, contemporary artists continue to advance linguistic pride, social recognition, and African-centred identities. The article argues that music, dance, and musical, spoken-word, and embodied performance practices remain important vehicles through which young people negotiate belonging, preserve cultural memory, and sustain the ongoing project of linguistic justice and cultural resistance.

Keywords: Soweto Uprising; Setswana music; *Motswako* hip-hop; Youth agency; Language reclamation; Cultural resistance; Dance and performance; Decoloniality

Introduction

Language, music, and dance are powerful vehicles through which communities' express identity, preserve memory, and challenge systems of domination. Beyond their communicative and artistic functions, they serve as important resources for collective mobilisation, cultural affirmation, and social resistance. Throughout African history, songs, chants, oral performance traditions, and embodied forms of expression have played significant roles in articulating political grievances, strengthening communal solidarity, and transmitting cultural knowledge across generations (Coplan, 2007; Finnegan, 2012). In South Africa, these forms of expression became particularly significant during the struggle against apartheid, where music, movement, and language functioned as interconnected tools of resistance.

The 1976 Soweto Uprising remains one of the most significant moments in South Africa's history of educational and linguistic liberation. Triggered by the apartheid government's decision to impose Afrikaans as a compulsory medium of instruction, the uprising reflected broader struggles over language, identity, power, and access to education (Lodge, 2011; Witz, 2022). While the protests are often remembered for their political significance, they were equally important as cultural and collective acts performances. Protest chants, struggle songs, slogans, and *toi-toi* performances enabled learners to transform public spaces into arenas of collective resistance and political education. Through rhythmic chanting, singing, movement, and call-and-response participation, young people articulated opposition to linguistic oppression while simultaneously constructing solidarity, courage, and collective identity (Coplan, 2007; Schumann, 2008).

Nearly five decades later, the legacy of these forms of youth expression continues to resonate within contemporary South African popular culture. Across genres such as *Motswako* hip-hop, *Amapiano*, and spoken-word poetry, young artists employ African languages, particularly Setswana and Setswana-dominant varieties such as *Sepitori*, to articulate identity, negotiate belonging, and assert cultural pride. These artistic forms frequently draw upon performative features of musical and spoken-word performances associated with protest traditions, including repetition, rhythmic delivery, audience participation, collective address, and embodied performance. While contemporary youth operate within a different social and political context, their cultural productions continue to reflect concerns with visibility, recognition, linguistic justice, and self-definition.

This article examines the relationship between the protest chants, struggle songs, and performative traditions of the 1976 Soweto Uprising and contemporary Setswana youth cultural expression. Rather than suggesting a direct causal link, the study explores historical resonances and continuities between these moments of youth agency. Particular attention is given to how contemporary artists employ language, music, spoken word, and dance as resources for cultural resistance and identity formation. Drawing on decolonial and sociolinguistic perspectives, the article argues that contemporary Setswana music, and musical and spoken-word performance constitute important sites of language reclamation and cultural affirmation, extending the legacy of the Soweto Uprising into the everyday cultural practices of post-apartheid youth. The social and psychological legacy of apartheid continues to shape contemporary understandings of identity, language, and belonging among South African youth (Manganyi, 2016).

By placing contemporary musical and performative texts in dialogue with the historical traditions of 1976, the study contributes to broader discussions on language activism, youth agency, cultural memory, and decolonisation. It further demonstrates that the legacy of the Soweto Uprising extends beyond political history and educational discourse into contemporary spaces of music, dance, performance, and popular culture, where new generations continue to negotiate questions of identity, belonging, and cultural visibility.

Literature review

The Soweto Uprising of 1976 occupies a significant place in scholarship on youth resistance, language politics, and educational transformation in South Africa. Existing studies emphasise that the uprising was not merely a reaction to the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, but a broader challenge to systems of racial domination and

cultural oppression embedded within apartheid education (Ndlovu, 2006; Kallaway & Hyslop, 1999). Scholars have demonstrated that language functioned as both a symbol and instrument of power, making resistance to Afrikaans simultaneously an educational, political, and cultural struggle (Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Alexander, 2003). The uprising further highlighted the capacity of young people to act as agents of social change, mobilising around issues of linguistic identity, educational access, and cultural self-determination. This understanding of youth agency provides an important historical foundation for examining contemporary forms of linguistic and cultural expression among South African youth.

Research on music and resistance has similarly demonstrated the important role of musical and protest performance in anti-apartheid struggles. Music scholars argue that protest songs, chants, slogans, and the *toi-toi* served not only as tools of political mobilisation, but also as mechanisms for constructing collective identity and sustaining resistance movements (Coplan, 2007; Schumann, 2008). Through repetition, rhythm, call-and-response structures, and collective participation, struggle songs transformed political messages into shared social experiences. These performative traditions enabled ordinary people to participate actively in political struggles and created alternative spaces for communication and solidarity. Studies of African oral performance traditions further highlight the interconnectedness of song, speech, movement, and audience participation within African expressive traditions, suggesting that resistance was often embodied as much as it was verbal (Gunner, 2004; Finnegan, 2012). Such scholarship provides a useful framework for understanding continuities between historical protest traditions and contemporary youth cultural practices.

A growing body of literature has examined the emergence of South African hip-hop as an important site of youth identity formation, political expression, and linguistic creativity in post-apartheid South Africa (Haupt, 2008; Satyo, 2014; Motsapi, 2015). More recent scholarship has similarly examined the rise of *Motswako* hip-hop and *Amapiano* as genres through which young people negotiate language, identity, locality, and cultural belonging (Storey, 2018; Mhlongo, 2021). Such multilingual practices support the view that languages are fluid social resources rather than fixed linguistic systems (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). This reflects broader patterns in which South African youth employ language as a resource for negotiating identity and belonging (Lekalake, 2016).

The relationship between language, cultural memory, and decolonisation has also attracted considerable scholarly attention. Decolonial scholars argue that the revitalisation of African languages constitutes an important aspect of challenging colonial

epistemologies and restoring indigenous forms of knowledge and identity (Fanon, 1967; Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Nyamnjoh, 2020). Cultural memory theorists further contend that societies preserve and reinterpret historical experiences through symbolic practices such as music, storytelling, performance, and collective remembrance (Assmann, 2011). Within this context, contemporary Setswana music, spoken-word poetry, and dance may be understood as cultural spaces through which historical memories of linguistic struggle are reimagined and transmitted to new generations. While existing scholarship has explored the Soweto Uprising, protest music, and contemporary African-language cultural production separately, limited attention has been given to the historical connections between the performative traditions of 1976 and contemporary Setswana youth expression. This study contributes to addressing this gap by examining how language, music, dance, and performance continue to function as vehicles of youth agency, cultural resistance, and linguistic reclamation across generations.

Research design and methodology

Research design

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive research design situated within a cultural-historical framework. The design is informed by the understanding that music, language, dance, and musical and spoken-word performances function as cultural texts through which social meanings, identities, and forms of resistance are produced and communicated (Burke, 2005; Storey, 2018). The study seeks to explore how contemporary Setswana youth musical and performative practices reflect, reinterpret, and transform elements of the linguistic and cultural resistance associated with the 1976 Soweto Uprising. Rather than establishing direct causal relationships between historical and contemporary phenomena, the study investigates historical continuities, cultural resonances, and shifts in forms of youth agency across different socio-political contexts.

The research is grounded in interpretivism, which assumes that cultural products such as songs, spoken-word performances, protest chants, and dance practices carry meanings that must be understood within their historical and social contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach is appropriate, because the study examines how young people employ language, music, and musical and spoken word performance to construct identity, negotiate belonging, and articulate forms of cultural resistance. The focus is, therefore, not on measuring behaviour or establishing generalisable patterns, but on interpreting symbolic meanings embedded within cultural expression.

Data sources

The study utilised two complementary categories of data. The first category consists of historical materials relating to the 1976 Soweto Uprising, including published historical accounts, scholarly literature, archival records, documented protest chants, struggle songs, slogans, and descriptions of *toi-toi* performances (South African History Online, n.d.; Bonner & Segal, 1998; Hyslop, 1999; Ndlovu, 2006). These sources provided insight into the linguistic, musical, and performative characteristics of youth resistance during the uprising.

The second category consisted of contemporary Setswana youth cultural texts drawn from *Motswako* hip-hop, *Amapiano*, and spoken-word poetry. Purposively selected texts included musical works by Hip Hop Pantsula (HHP), Tuks Senganga, Khuli Chana, and Focalistic, as well as spoken-word performances by Bothale Boikanyo. These texts were selected because they foreground Setswana or Setswana-dominant linguistic varieties, enjoy significant circulation among youth audiences, and contain themes related to identity, language, belonging, cultural pride, and social commentary. Audio and video performances available through publicly accessible platforms were used as primary sources for analysis.

Sampling strategy

Purposive sampling was employed to select both historical and contemporary texts that were relevant to the objectives of the study (Patton, 2015). Historical materials were selected based on their documented association with the Soweto Uprising and their relevance to language activism, protest performance, and youth mobilisation. Contemporary texts were selected according to three criteria: the prominence of Setswana as a linguistic resource; the visibility of the artist or performance within youth cultural spaces; and the presence of themes relating to identity, language reclamation, cultural expression, or resistance.

The sample was intentionally drawn from multiple expressive forms, including protest chants, struggle songs, hip-hop, *Amapiano*, spoken-word poetry, and dance-based performance cultures. This enabled the study to explore similarities and differences across historical periods and performance genres while avoiding an overly narrow focus on lyrics alone.

Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

Trustworthiness was enhanced through the triangulation of multiple data sources, including historical records, scholarly literature, musical texts, and spoken-word performances. The use of established historical sources and publicly accessible cultural artefacts enabled the verification of interpretations and contextual claims. Furthermore, the analysis maintained transparency by distinguishing between textual evidence and researcher interpretation throughout the study.

Because the research relied exclusively on publicly available historical documents, published literature, musical recordings, and publicly performed artistic works, no human participants were directly involved. Consequently, no ethical risks associated with interviews, surveys, or participant observation arose. Nevertheless, all artists, performers, and scholarly sources were appropriately acknowledged and cited in accordance with academic conventions.

Sample composition and justification

The protest chants and struggle songs of the 1976 Soweto Uprising served as powerful instruments of mobilisation, solidarity, and resistance. Chants such as “*Amandla!*” (Power!) and the collective response “*Awethu!*”, (Ours!/ To the People!) together with freedom songs and *toi-toi* performances, transformed language into a participatory form of political expression. Through repetition, rhythm, call-and-response structures, and collective vocalisation, these chants unified learners around a common cause and enabled them to communicate resistance in ways that transcended individual voices (Coplan, 2007; Schumann, 2008). The integration of song, movement, and spoken slogans created a shared political identity and sustained the momentum of collective action.

Beyond their mobilising function, these chants constituted acts of linguistic defiance and informal political education. By foregrounding African languages in public spaces, protesting learners challenged the symbolic authority of apartheid language policies and asserted the legitimacy of indigenous linguistic identities (Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1986; Alexander, 2003). The repeated performance of chants and songs also created alternative spaces of learning where ideas of justice, solidarity, and self-determination were collectively constructed and shared (Freire, 1970; Hyslop, 1999). These linguistic and performative features provide an important foundation for understanding how contemporary Setswana youth artists continue to employ language, repetition, and collective expression as resources for cultural agency and identity formation.

The selection of contemporary texts was informed by the study's objective of examining how youth agency, linguistic identity, and cultural expression are articulated through Setswana-dominant musical and poetic forms.

To facilitate a historically grounded comparison, the sample was constructed around genres and artists whose work foregrounds Setswana as a significant linguistic resource and whose performances enjoy broad circulation among youth audiences. The selection was further informed by the linguistic and performative characteristics of the protest chants and struggle songs associated with the 1976 Soweto Uprising. Beyond their political significance, these chants relied on repetition, short memorable phrases, call-and-response structures, rhythmic delivery, and collective participation, enabling large groups of learners to engage actively in acts of resistance and solidarity (Coplan, 2007; Schumann, 2008). The repetitive nature of slogans such as "*Amandla! Awethu!*", together with the integration of chanting, singing, and *toi-toi* movement, transformed protest into a collective performative act in which language, music, and bodily expression reinforced political consciousness and group identity.

The sample spans three expressive domains: *Motswako* hip-hop, Amapiano popular culture, and spoken-word poetry. Within the *Motswako* hip-hop tradition, artists such as HHP, Tuks Senganga, and Khuli Chana were selected, because their work foregrounds Setswana and employs musical and linguistic strategies that lend themselves to comparison with the participatory forms evident in protest chants. HHP's *Tswaka*, Tuks Senganga's *Bona Fela* and *Monate Thwaa*, and Focalistic's "*16 Days No Sleep*" incorporate repetitive refrains, memorable hooks, and forms of collective address that encourage audience participation, while Botlhale Boikanyo's spoken-word performances draw on direct audience engagement, rhythmic delivery, and oral performance traditions (Finnegan, 2012). Collectively, these texts provide a suitable corpus for examining how linguistic affirmation, performance, and youth expression are articulated across different genres, while also enabling comparison with the musical and performative features associated with the protest traditions of 1976 (Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Jamison & Eyerman, 1998).

Analysis and discussion

This study analyses contemporary Setswana-dominant youth musical and poetic texts as historically situated expressions of youth agency, language reclamation, and cultural resistance, placing them in dialogue with the linguistic, educational, and cultural struggles associated with the 1976 Soweto Uprising. Rather than assuming a direct historical lineage,

the analysis adopts a continuity-through-transformation perspective, examining how the logics of resistance, justice, identity, and solidarity that characterised the protest culture of 1976 continue to resonate within contemporary youth cultural production. Contemporary musical and poetic texts are, therefore, treated as cultural artefacts that both preserve and reinterpret earlier traditions of youth expression, enabling a comparative analysis without collapsing the distinct historical contexts within which they emerged.

The study focuses on Setswana-dominant musical and spoken-word texts, because Setswana occupies a distinctive position within South African youth culture through genres such as *Motswako* hip-hop, where language itself becomes a symbolic resource for identity formation, cultural affirmation, and resistance to linguistic marginalisation. Songs and performances by HHP, Tuks Senganga, Khuli Chana, Focalistic, and Bothale Boikanyo were selected because they foreground Setswana or Setswana-dominant linguistic varieties, enjoy significant circulation among youth audiences, and engage themes of identity, belonging, language, and social commentary. Through thematic, discourse, and comparative historical analysis, the study explores how contemporary youth artists employ language, music, dance, and performance to negotiate visibility and agency in post-apartheid South Africa.

A useful starting point for this discussion is the protest culture of the 1976 Soweto Uprising itself. The uprising was not only a political response to the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, but also a cultural and linguistic struggle in which learners challenged apartheid authority through collective forms of expression (Hyslop, 1999; Ndlovu, 2006). Protest chants, slogans, struggle songs, and *toi-toi* performances functioned as powerful tools of mobilisation, solidarity, and resistance. Central to these practices were repetition, call-and-response structures, rhythmic delivery, audience participation, and embodied dance performance. Slogans such as “*Amandla!*” followed by the collective response “*Awethu!*” relied on repetitive and memorable structures that transformed individual voices into expressions of collective political identity (Coplan, 2007; Schumann, 2008). Similarly, struggle songs and *toi-toi* performances integrated singing, chanting, movement, and communal participation, creating visible and audible demonstrations of unity, resistance, and determination. Through these practices, language became more than a medium of communication; it became a performative resource through which learners articulated demands for justice, dignity, and educational freedom.

In this way, Setswana functions as a form of symbolic and cultural capital through which artists negotiate recognition, legitimacy, and identity (Bourdieu, 1991). In HHP’s, the

repeated refrain “*Tswaka, tswaka, tswaka*” (Mix, mix, mix) performs a function comparable to that of protest chants by creating a memorable linguistic hook that invites audience participation and collective identification (HHP, 2004). Similarly, Tuks Senganga’s *Monate Thwaa* (Real enjoyment) and *Bona Fela* (Just look) employ repetition, rhythmic delivery, and recurring phrases that encourage communal engagement while simultaneously affirming the legitimacy of Setswana within cultural spaces often dominated by English (Tuks Senganga, 2005). Although these contemporary texts are not directed at a specific political authority in the manner of 1976 protest chants, they continue to challenge linguistic hierarchies by positioning African languages as legitimate vehicles of creativity, authority, and public expression.

A further point of continuity is evident in oral performance and audience engagement. During the Soweto Uprising, slogans, speeches, and chants depended upon collective participation and direct forms of address that transformed listeners into active participants. Similar communicative strategies are visible in Botlhale Boikanyo’s spoken-word performances, where expressions such as “*Hee theetsang! Nkuthwelleng!*” (Hey listen! Listen to me!) directly engage audiences and position the performer as both narrator and social commentator. Through rhythm, oral delivery, and audience interaction, contemporary spoken-word poetry continues traditions of public expression that characterised earlier forms of youth activism. In both historical and contemporary contexts, language functions not merely as communication but as a means of constructing moral authority, collective consciousness, and cultural identity (Mogote wa Poko, 2018 -2022).

The relationship between *toi-toi* (Chants) and contemporary youth dance cultures further demonstrates how forms of resistance and collective expression evolve across generations. During the Soweto Uprising, synchronised movement and rhythmic chanting transformed protest into an embodied act of solidarity and political commitment. Contemporary genres such as *Motswako* hip-hop and *Amapiano* similarly integrate music, movement, and audience participation through dance routines, performance challenges, and communal engagement. While these practices are often associated with entertainment, they continue to create spaces through which young people negotiate belonging, visibility, and cultural pride. In both contexts, dance functions alongside language and music as a powerful medium of collective expression and identity formation.

The comparison between the protest traditions of 1976 and contemporary Setswana youth cultural production reveals both continuity and transformation. Resistance during the Soweto Uprising was overtly political and directed towards state-imposed linguistic and

educational policies. In contemporary cultural texts, resistance is often symbolic, linguistic, and cultural. Artists such as HHP, Tuks Senganga, Khuli Chana, and Focalistic advance linguistic pride and cultural visibility through the strategic use of Setswana and Setswana-dominant varieties, while spoken-word performers such as Botlhale Boikanyo employ oral performance to engage contemporary social concerns. Although the contexts differ, the recurring use of repetition, audience participation, collective performance, rhythmic delivery, and embodied expression demonstrates that contemporary youth continue to draw upon broader African traditions of language-based and performative resistance. These practices illustrate how the ideals of identity, solidarity, justice, and agency that animated the Soweto Uprising continue to be negotiated and reimagined through music, dance, and spoken-word performance in post-apartheid South Africa.

Findings

1. Language remains the primary site of youth agency across generations

A central finding is that language continues to function as the core resource through which youth assert agency, just as it did in 1976. While the uprising rejected Afrikaans as a tool of domination, contemporary youth reclaim Setswana and Sepitori as tools of dignity and authority. In *“Ke ba hupetsa ka Setswana, leleme la Mme”* (I am choking them with Setswana, my mother tongue). (Tuks Senganga, 2005), language becomes both a weapon and inheritance, echoing the 1976 insistence that meaningful education and expression must occur in the learners’ own languages. Contemporary artists do not necessarily reject English as the youth of 1976 rejected Afrikaans. Rather, they challenge the symbolic dominance of English by elevating Setswana to equal status within popular culture. Through code-switching and linguistic hybridity, artists reposition African languages from the margins to the centre of cultural production.

2. Protest chant logic persists in musical and poetic form

A notable continuity between the protest traditions of 1976 and contemporary Setswana youth music is the use of hooks and refrains. During the Soweto Uprising, slogans functioned as collective refrains that reinforced solidarity, participation, and resistance through repetition. Similar strategies are evident in contemporary music, where repeated hooks create memorable and participatory performances. HHP’s *Tswaka* (Mix), Tuks Senganga’s *Bona Fela* and *Monate Thwaa*, and Focalistic’s *“16 Days No Sleep”* all employ recurring phrases that encourage audience engagement and collective identification. While

these songs emerge from different historical contexts, their use of repetitive refrains mirrors the communicative and unifying functions of protest chants (Focalistic, 2020). In both cases, repetition serves to strengthen collective identity, sustain participation, and affirm the visibility of African languages in public cultural spaces.

3. Resistance has shifted from confrontation to cultural and moral assertion

Another key finding is that youth resistance has transformed in form, however, not in intent. HHP's "*Bosso*" redefines authority from hierarchical to communal ("*Bosso ke wena le wena*"), (Boss is you and you) echoing the 1976 rejection of illegitimate power structures in schools. Khuli Chana's "*Kasi Yami*" (My Neighborhood) demonstrates resistance through ethical self-positioning, refusing imposed criminal identities (Khuli Chana, 2012). This indicates a historical shift from resistance against overt state oppression to resistance against symbolic, social, and discursive marginalisation.

4. Justice is framed as dignity, recognition, and fair participation

Justice in the analysed texts is not primarily legalistic; it is experiential and moral. In "*See*", social injustice is exposed through testimony of poverty, addiction, and broken educational hopes ("*She thinks o kwa sekolong* (she is at school)..."), paralleling 1976's link between schooling and life chances. In Amapiano texts like "*16 Days No Sleep*", justice appears as survival amid scarcity, highlighting enduring inequalities despite political transition

5. Youth identity is constructed as African, ethical, and linguistically confident

The findings indicate that contemporary Setswana music and spoken-word poetry reflect key principles associated with Black Consciousness, particularly the affirmation of African languages as resources for identity, self-representation, and cultural pride. The selected texts demonstrate a deliberate foregrounding of Setswana within artistic spaces that have historically been dominated by colonial languages. This linguistic choice resonates with the ideals of Black Consciousness, which emphasise the reclamation of African languages and cultures as part of broader processes of empowerment and self-definition (Biko, 1978). Similar to the learners of 1976 who resisted linguistic domination through the assertion of African identities, contemporary artists employ Setswana to express local experiences, challenge linguistic marginalisation, and promote cultural visibility.

Through their artistic practices, HHP, Tuks Senganga, Focalistic, and Bothale Boikanyo position Setswana as a legitimate medium for creativity, social commentary, and youth expression. In doing so, the artists contribute to the continued valorisation of African languages within contemporary cultural spaces, reflecting the enduring influence of Black Consciousness ideals in post-apartheid South Africa.

6. Solidarity is reimagined from mass mobilisation to everyday collectivity

While 1976 solidarity manifested through mass protest, contemporary solidarity often takes the form of shared recognition and collective endurance. Songs like “16 Days No Sleep” and “Bona Fela” construct solidarity through shared hustle, gossip, exhaustion, and perseverance. Youth poetry extends solidarity across linguistic and racial boundaries, as seen in “*madi bhambhaneni sibe monye* (let’s unite and be one)”, reaffirming unity as a core liberation value.

7. Multilingualism functions as a historical argument

The findings indicate that contemporary Setswana youth music shares several musical and performative characteristics with the protest chants and struggle songs of the 1976 Soweto Uprising. One of the most prominent features is repetition, which reinforces key messages and encourages collective participation. During the uprising, repetitive slogans and call-and-response structures enabled large groups of learners to engage actively in protest performances and sustain a sense of solidarity (Coplan, 2007; Schumann, 2008). Similar patterns are evident in the selected musical texts, where recurring hooks, refrains, and rhythmic phrases create memorable performances that invite audience participation and strengthen communal identification. These features demonstrate how repetition continues to serve both aesthetic and social functions within youth cultural expression.

The findings further highlight the importance of spoken word performance, rhythm, and audience engagement as shared characteristics across historical and contemporary contexts. The integration of chanting, singing, and *toi-toi* movement during the 1976 protests transformed resistance into a collective performative act, while contemporary artists employ rhythmic delivery, vocal emphasis, and interactive performance techniques to engage listeners and communicate cultural meanings. Similarly, Bothale Boikanyo’s spoken-word performances draw on oral traditions through direct address to the audience, expressive delivery, and rhythmic narration. These musical and performative practices suggest that contemporary Setswana youth expression extends beyond linguistic

affirmation to incorporate modes of participation and performance that echo the collective spirit of protest traditions, thereby reinforcing youth agency and cultural identity (Jamison & Eyerman, 1998; Finnegan, 2012).

8. Dance and Embodied Forms of Youth Expression

The findings indicate that dance constitutes an important dimension of youth agency and collective expression in both the 1976 Soweto Uprising and contemporary youth culture. During the uprising, the *toi-toi* functioned as more than a physical accompaniment to protest chants and struggle songs; it served as a symbolic expression of unity, resistance, and collective determination. The synchronisation of movement, rhythm, and vocal performance transformed protest into an embodied act through which participants communicated solidarity and political commitment (Coplan, 2007; Schumann, 2008). In this context, resistance was expressed not only through words and songs, but also through coordinated bodily movement that reinforced collective identity.

A similar emphasis on movement and participation is evident in contemporary Setswana youth music, particularly within genres such as Amapiano and *Motswako* hip-hop, where dance forms an integral part of musical performance and audience engagement. Dance challenges, choreographed routines, and participatory performance practices enable young people to actively engage with music and express shared cultural identities. Although these forms of expression operate within different social and historical contexts, they retain the collective and participatory qualities associated with the *toi-toi* tradition. The continued integration of music, movement, and communal performance suggests that dance remains an important medium through which youth negotiate identity, visibility, and belonging within contemporary cultural spaces (Jamison & Eyerman, 1998; Finnegan, 2012).

Limitations of the study

As a historically oriented analysis of contemporary cultural texts, this study operates within several methodological constraints. First, the study does not claim a direct causal relationship between the protest chants of the 1976 Soweto Uprising and contemporary Setswana youth music. Rather, the identified similarities are interpreted as historical resonances, shared performative practices, and recurring forms of linguistic and cultural expression. This approach aligns with cultural-historical methodologies that emphasise contextual interpretation and continuity over linear models of influence or causation (Burke, 2005; Tosh, 2015).

The current study primarily relies on publicly available musical and spoken-word texts. As a result, the analysis is confined to the linguistic, thematic, and performative features visible within the selected artefacts. It does not directly explore the intentions of the artists, the reception by audiences, or the interpretations of listeners. The absence of interviews, oral histories, and audience-based data restricts the extent to which broader meanings and social impacts can be assessed. Nevertheless, the texts are treated as cultural documents situated within specific historical and social contexts, an established approach in cultural and oral history scholarship (Portelli, 1991; Trouillot, 1995).

Third, although the study engages with musical and performative dimensions such as repetition, rhythm, audience participation, and oral delivery, it does not undertake a formal musicological analysis of melody, harmony, tempo, instrumentation, or compositional structure. The emphasis remains on the cultural, linguistic, and performative significance of the selected texts rather than on their technical musical properties. Future studies may benefit from incorporating ethnomusicological approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between protest traditions and contemporary music practices.

Finally, the purposive selection of a small corpus of highly visible artists and texts limits the generalisability of the findings. The selected examples are intended as illustrative case studies rather than representative samples of all Setswana youth musical productions. Furthermore, while Setswana was selected because of its prominence within genres such as *Motswako* hip-hop and its relevance to the current study's focus on linguistic identity and youth agency, South Africa is a multilingual society with numerous African languages that have similarly contributed to cultural expression, resistance, and identity formation. The exclusive focus on Setswana, therefore, does not capture the full diversity of linguistic practices evident in contemporary South African youth culture. Future studies may extend this line of inquiry by examining comparable themes in other African languages, such as isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho, Sepedi, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, isiNdebele, and Siswati, to provide a broader understanding of the relationship between language, music, and youth agency in South Africa.

In addition, the current study remains attentive to the risk of presentism when relating contemporary cultural forms to the Soweto Uprising. To mitigate this, the uprising is treated as a historically situated moment of linguistic and educational resistance, while contemporary texts are analysed as distinct cultural productions that may reflect continuity, adaptation, or transformation rather than direct equivalence (Bonner & Segal, 1998).

The findings should therefore be understood as a historically grounded interpretation of selected texts, rather than a comprehensive account of all contemporary South African youth cultural expression.

Conclusion

The current study has examined contemporary Setswana youth music and spoken-word performance as cultural texts that preserve, reinterpret, and extend elements of the protest traditions associated with the 1976 Soweto Uprising. The study explores the connections between the chants, struggle songs, and *toi-toi* performances from 1976 and contemporary expressions found in *Motswako* hip-hop, *Amapiano*, and spoken-word poetry. It demonstrates that music, together with musical, spoken-word, and embodied performances remain vital platforms for young people to express their identity, agency, and sense of belonging. The analysis shows that musical features such as repetition, hooks, refrains, rhythmic delivery, audience participation, and collective performance remain significant communicative strategies in the works of artists such as HHP, Tuks Senganga, Focalistic, and Bothale Boikanyo, echoing the participatory qualities of protest chants and struggle songs.

The study further highlights the importance of dance and embodied performance in sustaining traditions of collective expression across generations. Just as the *toi-toi* combined movement, rhythm, and vocal performance to communicate solidarity and resistance during the Soweto Uprising, contemporary music genres such as *Motswako* hip-hop and *Amapiano* continue to integrate dance, audience engagement, and communal participation as central components of youth cultural expression. These performative practices demonstrate that resistance and identity formation are communicated not only through language, but also through music, movement, and shared performance experiences. Contemporary Setswana music and spoken-word poetry serve as platforms where historical memory, cultural pride, and youth voices are continuously negotiated and reaffirmed.

The current study emphasises the importance of music, dance, and performance in understanding the historical significance of the Soweto Uprising. It shows how the legacy of the uprising continues to influence contemporary cultural practices. The findings reveal that the impact of the 1976 uprising extends beyond political memory and educational discussions; it also permeates the everyday musical and performative experiences of young people today.

By incorporating Setswana, participatory musical structures, and collective forms of expression, contemporary artists play a crucial role in affirming African languages and identities. Therefore, this article argues that music and dance should not be viewed merely as forms of entertainment, but rather as historically significant practices that enable youth to engage with issues of identity, cultural visibility, and social meaning in post-apartheid South Africa.

References

- Alexander, N 2003. *The African Renaissance and the use of African languages in tertiary education*. Cape Town: PRAESA.
- Assmann, J 2011. *Cultural memory and early civilization: Writing, remembrance, and political imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Biko, S (1978). *I write what I like*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa.
- Bonner, P and Segal, L 1998. *Soweto: A history*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.
- Bourdieu, P 1991. *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Burke, P. (2005). *What Is Cultural History?* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Coplan, DB 2007. *In township tonight! South Africa's Black city music and theatre*. 2nd edn. Johannesburg: Jacana Media.
- Creswell, J.W. & Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fanon, F 1967. *Black skin, white masks*. New York: Grove Press.
- Finnegan, R 2012. *Oral literature in Africa*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
- Focalistic 2020. *Sghubu ses excellent* [Album]. Johannesburg: New Money Gang / Sony Music Africa.
- Freire, P 1970. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Gunner, L 2004. Remaking the warrior: Orality, literacy and performance in Zulu praise poetry. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17(1):1-18.
- Haupt, A 2008. *Stealing empire: P2P, intellectual property and hip-hop subversion*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

- HHP (Hip Hop Pantsula) 2004. *Motswako* [Album]. Johannesburg: CCP Records. Songs analysed include *Tswaka* and *Motswako*.
- Hyslop, J 1999. *The classroom struggle: Policy and resistance in South Africa, 1940–1990*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Jamison, R. & Eyerman, R. (1998). *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kallaway, P (ed.) 2002. *The history of education under apartheid, 1948–1994: The doors of learning and culture shall be opened*. Cape Town: Pearson Education South Africa.
- Khuli Chana 2012. *Lost in time* [Album]. Johannesburg: Motswako Republic.
- Kunnuji, M 2020. Music, memory, and resistance: Sonic decolonization in contemporary African performance. *African Music*, 10(2):45-62.
- Lekalake, R 2016. Youth and the language of identity in post-apartheid South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42(3):523-540.
- Lodge, T 2011. *Sharpeville: An apartheid massacre and its consequences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Manganyi, NC 2016. *Apartheid and the making of a Black psychologist: A memoir*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Mhlongo, S 2021. Amapiano and the reconfiguration of South African youth culture. *South African Journal of Cultural Studies*, 35(1):45-60.
- Mogote Wa Poko 2018-2022. *Recorded spoken-word performances* [Unpublished performance recordings].
- Motsapi, M 2015. Hip-hop as social critique in post-apartheid South Africa. *African Identities*, 13(2):131-147.
- Ndlovu, S 2006. The Soweto Uprising. In: S Ndlovu and R Suttner (eds.). *The road to democracy in South Africa, Vol. 2 (1970–1980)* (pp. 321–364). Pretoria: UNISA Press, .
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986. *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. London: Heinemann.
- Nyamnjoh, FB 2020. *Decolonising the academy by doing anthropology in Africa*. Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG.

- Patton, M.Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Portelli, A. (1991). *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Satyo, S 2014. Motswako hip-hop and the politics of language in South Africa. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 26(3):289-302.
- Schumann, A 2008. The beat that beat apartheid: The role of music in the resistance against apartheid in South Africa. *Stichproben: Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien*, 14(8):17-39.
- South African History Online (SAHO) no date. *The 1976 Soweto Uprising*. Available at <https://www.sahistory.org.za> Accessed on 18 December 2025.
- Storey, J 2018. *Cultural theory and popular culture: An introduction*. 8th edn. London: Routledge.
- Tosh, J. (2015). *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of History*. 6th ed. London: Routledge.
- Trouillot, M-R 1995. *Silencing the past: Power and the production of history*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Tuks Senganga 2005. *Mafoko a me* [Album]. Independent release. Song analysed: *Monate Thwaa*.
- Witz, L 2022. *Apartheid's festival: Contesting South Africa's national pasts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Decolonising the Curriculum Through Language: Lessons from the Soweto Uprising for Contemporary South African Distance Teacher Education

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a16>

Raudina Madina Simelane

Institute for Open and Distance Learning,
University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa
simelrm@unisa.ac.za

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6922-7316>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a16>

Abstract

This qualitative case study explored how pre-service history teachers in a South African Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution understand and engage with the linguistic dimensions of curriculum decolonisation, drawing lessons from the 1976 Soweto Uprising. Through online semi-structured interviews with 10 student teachers, the study examined their perspectives on language as a vehicle for decolonisation in contemporary higher education. Framed by an integrated theoretical framework combining postcolonial theory and critical pedagogy, and analysed through thematic analysis, the research reveals that students recognise language as central to epistemic justice, but face institutional constraints in multilingual pedagogical practice. Findings indicate tensions between decolonial aspirations and practical implementation, with participants advocating for indigenous language integration while navigating persistent colonial language hierarchies. The study contributes to History Education scholarship and to scholarship on decolonising teacher education by demonstrating how the Soweto Uprising—as a historical and pedagogical lens—illuminates the relationship between language, epistemic justice, historical consciousness, and the preparation of history teachers. The study offers implications for curriculum reform in ODL environments.

Keywords: Decolonisation; Language policy; Soweto Uprising; History Education; Historical consciousness; Teacher education; Distance learning; Postcolonial theory

Introduction

The call to decolonise South African higher education has intensified since the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall movements of 2015-2016, compelling institutions to confront colonial legacies embedded in curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional culture.¹ Central to these decolonisation debates is the question of language—which languages are valued, who has access to knowledge in different languages, and how linguistic practices perpetuate or challenge colonial power relations. This concern echoes the historic 1976 Soweto Uprising, when thousands of Black students protested against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, sparking a watershed moment in South Africa's liberation struggle.²

History Education is a particularly important site through which to examine these dynamics. As a discipline, History has historically been used both to legitimise colonial narratives and to serve as a site of resistance and counter-memory. The way History is taught—whose stories are told, in whose language, and from whose epistemological standpoint—shapes students' historical consciousness and their sense of identity and agency.³ For pre-service History teachers, developing a critical understanding of language, memory, and decolonisation is therefore not peripheral, but central to their professional formation.

Nearly five decades after the Soweto Uprising, language remains a contentious issue in South African education. Despite constitutional recognition of 12 official languages and post-apartheid language policies promoting multilingualism, English dominates higher education, marginalising African languages and the knowledge systems they carry.⁴ This linguistic colonialism raises critical questions for contemporary teacher education:

- How do pre-service History teachers in a South African ODL context understand the relationship between language and curriculum decolonisation?
- What lessons from the Soweto Uprising inform their pedagogical perspectives in contemporary distance-based History teacher education?

¹ S Heleta, "Decolonisation of higher education: Dismantling epistemic violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa", *Transformation in Higher Education*, 1(1), 2016, pp. 1-8.

² South African History Online. The June 16 Soweto Youth Uprising. *South African History Online*, 2013. <https://sahistory.org.za/article/june-16-soweto-youth-uprising>.

³ S Heleta, "Decolonisation of higher education...", *Transformation in Higher Education*, 1(1), 2016, pp. 1-8.

⁴ VN Webb, *Language in South Africa: The role of language in national transformation, reconstruction and development* (John Benjamin Publishing, 2002).

- How can ODL institutions prepare History teachers to challenge linguistic hierarchies and implement multilingual, decolonial pedagogy in schools?

These questions are grounded in the following research problem: despite post-apartheid constitutional commitments to multilingualism and over a decade of calls to decolonise higher education,⁵ pre-service History teacher education in South Africa has engaged insufficiently with language as a site of historical struggle and epistemic justice. This gap is particularly pronounced in ODL institutions, which serve linguistically diverse student populations, but whose materials and assessment practices remain predominantly English-medium. This study investigated these questions through a qualitative case study of 10 pre-service History teachers enrolled at a South African ODL university.

History education provides a particularly relevant context for examining decolonisation, as the discipline has historically been used to legitimise colonial narratives while simultaneously serving as a site of resistance and counter-memory. The ODL context adds a further dimension: distance education democratises access for students from diverse linguistic and geographic backgrounds, however, it also risks reinforcing linguistic colonialism when materials and assessments are predominantly in English and when students lack opportunities for collaborative multilingual engagement. The distance education environment thus shapes the participants' experiences of language, access to materials, and pedagogical imagination in ways that are directly relevant to the study's findings.

The research was guided by the following objectives:

- To explore how pre-service History teachers enrolled in an ODL institution conceptualise the relationship between language and curriculum decolonisation.
- To examine how student teachers understand the Soweto Uprising's relevance to contemporary language policies and practices in distance-based History teacher education.
- To identify the challenges and opportunities specific to the ODL environment for implementing multilingual, decolonial pedagogy in History teacher education.
- To generate recommendations for integrating linguistic justice and epistemic equity into History teacher education programmes offered through ODL institutions.

⁵ A Mbembe, "Decolonizing the university: New directions", *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 15(1), 2016, pp. 29-45.

The study is theoretically framed by postcolonial theory and critical pedagogy, explained fully in the theoretical framework section. The Soweto Uprising functions throughout this article not merely as historical background, but as the central historical and pedagogical lens through which language, epistemic justice, and the preparation of History teachers are examined.

Literature review

Decolonising the curriculum: Conceptual foundations

Decolonisation in higher education encompasses multiple dimensions: epistemological, curricular, pedagogical, and institutional. Scholars such as Heleta argue that at its core, decolonisation involves interrogating whose knowledge counts, challenging Eurocentric epistemologies, and centring marginalised knowledge systems.⁶ Scholars distinguish between superficial diversity initiatives and substantive decolonisation that transforms power relations and knowledge hierarchies.⁷ Mbembe argues that decolonising the university requires reimagining the institution as an African intellectual project rather than a colonial transplant, fundamentally questioning what constitutes valid knowledge and who has the authority to produce it.⁸

In the South African context, decolonisation scholarship emphasises the continued marginalisation of indigenous knowledge systems, despite post-apartheid reforms. Ndlovu-Gatsheni critiques the persistence of coloniality—the ongoing patterns of power and knowledge production established during colonialism—which continues to shape curriculum content, research agendas, and pedagogical practices.⁹ Le Grange cautions against simplistic approaches to decolonisation that replace one hegemonic framework with another, advocating instead for pluriversal thinking that embraces multiple, coexisting knowledge systems.¹⁰

⁶ S Heleta, “Decolonisation of higher education ...”, *Transformation in Higher Education*, 1(1), 2016, pp. 1-8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/the.v1i1.9>

⁷ JD Jansen, “The lost scholarship of changing curricula”, *South African Journal of Science*, 113(5/6), 2017, pp. 1-2.

⁸ A Mbembe, “Decolonizing the university: New directions”, *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 15(1), 2016, pp. 29-45.

⁹ SJ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa: Myths of decolonization* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2013).

¹⁰ L Le Grange, “Decolonising the university curriculum”, *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(1), 2016, pp. 1-12.

Language as site of colonial power and resistance

Language occupies a central place in decolonial theory, because it structures thought, mediates knowledge transmission, and reflects power relations. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's seminal work on linguistic imperialism argues that colonial languages displace indigenous epistemologies and alienate colonised peoples from their cultural heritage.¹¹ Language policy in education, thus, becomes a mechanism for either perpetuating or challenging colonial domination. Makoni and Pennycook extend this analysis by critiquing the invention of languages as discrete, bounded systems during colonialism, arguing for more fluid understandings of linguistic practice.¹²

In South Africa, language policy has always been intimately connected to political power. Under apartheid, Afrikaans and English were privileged, while African languages were systematically underdeveloped and associated with Bantu Education's inferior curriculum.¹³ The post-apartheid Constitution recognises 12 official languages and mandates language rights, yet implementation remains uneven. Research shows that English hegemony persists in higher education, with African languages rarely used as languages of learning and teaching despite their constitutional status.¹⁴

Scholars identify multiple barriers to multilingual higher education: lack of academic terminology in African languages, insufficient learning materials, staff capacity constraints, and persistent ideologies that associate English with modernity and African languages with tradition.¹⁵ However, others argue that these barriers are not insurmountable and that the real obstacle is political will and commitment to linguistic justice.¹⁶ Successful multilingual pedagogies in primary and secondary education suggest that similar approaches could be adapted for higher education contexts.¹⁷

¹¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature* (London: James Currey, 1986).

¹² S Makoni and A Pennycook, "Disinventing and reconstituting languages", *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 4(2-3), 2007, pp. 137-156.

¹³ S Vally and E Motala, *Education, economy and society* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2014), pp. 67-92.

¹⁴ VN Webb, *Language in South Africa*, pp. 145-178.

¹⁵ KK Prah, "Mother tongue education, literacy and multilingualism in Africa", G Kamwendo, J Dudu and AM Chebanne (eds.), *Multilingualism in education and communities in Southern Africa*, pp. 31-34

¹⁶ KK Prah, "Mother-tongue education in Africa...", pp. 35-39.

¹⁷ L Makalela, "Moving out of linguistic boxes: The effects of translanguaging strategies for multilingual classrooms", *Language and Education*, 29(3), 2015, pp. 200-217.

The Soweto Uprising: Historical context and educational significance

The Soweto Uprising of 16 June 1976 stands as the central historical reference point for this study. Thousands of Black students in Soweto marched against the apartheid government's decree that mathematics and social sciences be taught in Afrikaans in secondary schools.¹⁸ The protest was met with police violence, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of young people over subsequent weeks and months. The Soweto Uprising became a turning point in South Africa's liberation struggle, galvanising international anti-apartheid solidarity and inspiring continued resistance within the country.¹⁹

The 1976 protests were fundamentally about language as a tool of oppression. Students and parents rejected Afrikaans not only because of practical difficulties, but because they recognised language policy as a mechanism for political control and cultural domination.²⁰ As the student slogan proclaimed, they were "fighting for the right to be taught in a language they could understand".²¹ The uprising demonstrated that language policy is never merely technical, but always deeply political, connected to questions of identity, dignity, and self-determination. For History Education, the Soweto Uprising offers a powerful pedagogical case study: it illustrates how the language of instruction is not a neutral technical choice, but a site of power where epistemological justice is won or lost. Teaching this history critically can help pre-service History teachers develop the historical consciousness needed to understand contemporary language debates as continuations of earlier struggles.

Historical scholarship on the Soweto Uprising emphasises its educational dimensions beyond language alone. The protests challenged Bantu Education's entire system of inferior schooling designed to prepare Black South Africans for subordinate roles in an apartheid society.²² Students demanded quality education that would equip them for full citizenship and intellectual development. Their struggle connected language rights to broader questions of educational justice, knowledge access, and human dignity. Contemporary commemorations of the Soweto Uprising often emphasise youth activism and courage, History Education scholarship increasingly highlights its pedagogical lessons for present-

¹⁸ The Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974 mandated that Black secondary schools use Afrikaans as the medium of instruction for mathematics, arithmetic, and social studies, while other subjects would be taught in English. This policy was deeply resented as Afrikaans was associated with apartheid oppression.

¹⁹ Various sources estimate between 176 and 700 deaths during the uprising and subsequent months of resistance. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission later documented many of these casualties.

²⁰ S Vally and E Motlale, *Education, economy and society*, 2014, pp. 78-81.

²¹ This slogan appeared on many placards during the June 16 protests and subsequent demonstrations.

²² Bantu Education, implemented through the Bantu Education Act of 1953, deliberately provided inferior education to Black South Africans, designed to prepare them for subordinate roles in apartheid society.

day decolonisation efforts,²³ particularly in understanding students as agents of historical change and in recognising language policy as a site of political struggle.²⁴

Teacher education and decolonisation

Teacher education plays a critical role in educational transformation, because teachers mediate curriculum implementation and shape classroom knowledge practices. However, research indicates that South African teacher education programmes inadequately prepare teachers to teach for social justice, critically engage curriculum, or implement decolonial pedagogies.²⁵ Many programmes remain wedded to technical-rational approaches focused on skills transmission rather than critical reflection on power, knowledge, and identity.²⁶ Scholars advocate for reconceptualising teacher education through decolonial frameworks that centre critical consciousness, reflexivity, and commitment to social justice.²⁷ This includes examining how teachers' own educational experiences have been shaped by colonial knowledge systems and developing pedagogical approaches that validate diverse knowledge forms.²⁸ Language is central to this project, as teachers must be equipped to challenge linguistic hierarchies and implement multilingual pedagogies that honour students' home languages.²⁹

Distance education presents particular opportunities and challenges for decolonising teacher education. On one hand, distance learning institutions in South Africa serve diverse student populations who bring varied linguistic and cultural resources, potentially enriching decolonial conversations.³⁰ Distance education can also reach students in rural areas and provide flexibility for working adults who might otherwise be excluded

²³ G Weldon, "Memory, identity and the politics of curriculum construction in transition societies: Rwanda and South Africa", *Perspectives in Education*, 27(2), 2009, pp. 118-122.

²⁴ P Vale, L Hamilton and E Prinsloo, *Intellectual traditions in South Africa: Ideas, individuals and institutions*, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014, pp. 75-78.

²⁵ Y Sayed, A Badroodien, T Salmon and Z McDonald, "Social justice and teacher education in South Africa," T Barkatsas and A Bertram (eds.), *Global learning in the 21st Century* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2016), pp. 61-80.

²⁶ Y Sayed, A Badroodien, T Salmon and Z McDonald, "Social justice ..." T Barkatsas and A Bertram (eds.), *Global learning ...*, pp. 68-71.

²⁷ M Zembylas and V Bozalek, "Towards a critical pedagogy for the Anthropocene", K Misiaszek (ed.), *Educating the global environmental citizen*, (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 41-52.

²⁸ PE Barnett and K Teise, K, "Initial teacher education for social justice in South Africa: A higher education policy perspective", *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, 6(1), 2024, pp. 72-89.

²⁹ L Makalela, "Moving out of linguistic boxes: the effects of translanguaging strategies for multilingual classrooms", *Language and Education*, 2015, pp. 202-205.

³⁰ Distance education institutions in South Africa serve significantly more diverse student populations than residential universities, with higher proportions of African language speakers and students from rural areas.

from teacher education. On the other hand, distance learning may reinforce linguistic colonialism if materials are predominantly in English and pedagogies fail to leverage students' multilingual competencies.³¹

Theoretical framework

This study is guided by one integrated theoretical framework combining postcolonial theory and critical pedagogy. These are not separate frameworks, but complementary theoretical traditions that together provide analytical tools for understanding colonial power relations and possibilities for transformation through education. Postcolonial theory provides analytical tools for examining how colonial power relations persist in contemporary knowledge systems, institutions, and practices.³² Key concepts include hybridity (the mixing of coloniser and colonised cultures), ambivalence (the complex, contradictory nature of colonial relationships), and subalternity (the silencing of marginalised voices).³³ Applied to education, postcolonial theory reveals how curricula privilege Western knowledge while marginalising Indigenous epistemologies, and how language policies perpetuate colonial hierarchies even in nominally decolonised contexts.³⁴

Critical pedagogy, drawing from Paulo Freire's work, emphasises education as a practice of freedom that enables learners to critically examine and transform oppressive social conditions.³⁵ Freire's concepts of conscientisation (developing critical consciousness), dialogue (horizontal communication that respects all participants' knowledge), and praxis (reflection and action to transform the world) inform this study's understanding of decolonial teaching and learning.³⁶ Critical pedagogy recognises education as inherently political and teachers as potential agents of social change.³⁷

These frameworks guided both data collection and analysis. During coding, concepts such as conscientisation and praxis shaped the identification of units related to critical awareness and action; hybridity and ambivalence informed coding of participants' complex, contradictory relationships with English and African languages; subalternity and epistemic justice guided attention to silenced voices and knowledge systems. In the

³¹ Learning materials in distance education have historically been text-heavy and English-dominant, though some institutions are exploring multimedia and multilingual options.

³² A Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015).

³³ HK Bhabha, *The location of culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

³⁴ A Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (Routledge, 2002), pp. 87-115.

³⁵ P Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum, 2000).

³⁶ P Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed...*, pp. 79-86.

³⁷ P Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed...*, pp. 72-75.

interpretive phase, the frameworks provided the conceptual language for explaining why participants' experiences take the forms they do within ODL structures shaped by colonial legacies.

Synthesising these frameworks, the study examines how pre-service teachers navigate postcolonial linguistic landscapes while developing critical pedagogical orientations. Language serves as both an object of analysis (examining colonial language policies) and a medium through which critical consciousness develops (using dialogue to interrogate taken-for-granted assumptions). The Soweto Uprising functions as a historical case that illuminates the political nature of educational language policy and inspires contemporary decolonial practice.

Research methodology

Research design

The current study employed a qualitative case study design, which enables in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within their real-life contexts.³⁸ The case was bounded as pre-service History teachers at a specific South African ODL university who were engaged with questions of curriculum decolonisation and language policy. Case study methodology was particularly appropriate for examining how individuals make meaning of their experiences and for generating rich, contextual understanding.³⁹

The research adopted an interpretivist paradigm, recognising knowledge as socially constructed and emphasising participants' subjective understandings.⁴⁰ While this study's engagement with power, coloniality, and linguistic inequality might also suggest a critical paradigm, the interpretivist orientation was selected, as the primary aim was to understand how pre-service teachers make meaning of their experiences, rather than to critique structural conditions from a pre-determined emancipatory standpoint. The interpretivist focus allowed for a more open, participant-centred exploration of meaning, which aligned with the study's inductive-deductive thematic analysis. The critical theoretical framework, however, informed the interpretation of findings, ensuring that power relations and coloniality remained central to the analysis.⁴¹

³⁸ RK Yin, *Case study research: Design and methods*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2014).

³⁹ RE Stake, *The art of case study research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1995).

⁴⁰ W Creswell, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2013), pp. 24-27.

⁴¹ L Tikly and T Bond, "Towards a postcolonial research ethics in comparative and international education",

Research context

The current study was conducted at a South African ODL university that serves predominantly working adults, students from rural and peri-urban areas, and students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The institution's student profile includes high proportions of African language speakers who study through English-medium materials. This context is directly relevant to the study's focus, as the tension between the institution's linguistically diverse student body and its English-dominant pedagogical infrastructure is precisely the site where decolonisation challenges play out in practice.

Participant selection

Ten participants were purposively selected from third- and fourth-year students majoring in History education at the institution. Purposive sampling is appropriate for qualitative research seeking information-rich cases.⁴² Selection criteria included enrolment in the History education programme, completion of at least one module on South African history, enrolment in modules that had engaged with decolonisation debates as part of the curriculum (rather than self-reported 'awareness', which may have introduced self-selection bias), and willingness to participate. The sample size of 10 was not based on claims of data saturation. Rather, the sample size enabled rich, in-depth exploration within a bounded case, consistent with the interpretive case study design.

Participants represented diverse linguistic backgrounds. Five indicated isiZulu as their home language, two spoke Sesotho, two Setswana, and one Xitsonga. All were multilingual, with varying levels of proficiency in English, which most had not spoken as a first language before entering formal education. Eight participants were mature students (over 25 years old) who had entered distance education after working or raising families. This profile is consistent with published demographic data from the institution, which reports that the majority of History education students are mature, multilingual, and from non-English home language backgrounds.

Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility to explore emerging themes while maintaining focus on research

Compare, 43(4), 2013, pp. 422-442.

⁴² W Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry ...* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2014), pp. 156-158.

objectives.⁴³ An interview guide was developed covering four main areas: participants' understanding of curriculum decolonisation; their perspectives on language in education; their knowledge of and reflections on the Soweto Uprising; and their views on preparing to teach History in multilingual classrooms.

Sample interview questions included: 'How do you understand the relationship between language and decolonisation in your own education?'; 'What does the Soweto Uprising mean to you as a future History teacher, and how do you see it connecting to contemporary debates about language in education?'; and 'What challenges do you anticipate in implementing multilingual approaches in your History classroom?'

Interviews were conducted in participants' language of choice. Nine participants chose English, while one requested a combination of English and isiZulu. Interviews ranged from 45 to 60 minutes and were conducted through a video conferencing platform, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Using digital communication aligns with the distance learning context and enabled participation across geographic locations. The researcher's role as a staff member was disclosed at the outset and emphasised the voluntary nature of participation and that it would have no bearing on participants' academic standing, in order to mitigate the power differential inherent in researcher-participant relationships in educational settings.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns of meaning across the dataset.⁴⁴ The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase process: familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.⁴⁵ Analysis was both inductive (themes emerging from data) and deductive (informed by theoretical framework and research questions).

Theoretical concepts from the integrated framework guided the coding process. Conscientisation informed codes related to critical awareness of linguistic hierarchies; praxis shaped codes related to proposed pedagogical strategies; hybridity and ambivalence guided attention to participants' complex relationships with English; and epistemic justice informed codes about language and knowledge access. This deductive layer complemented the inductive identification of themes from the data.

⁴³ W Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry...* pp. 163-165.

⁴⁴ V Braun and V Clarke, "Using thematic analysis in psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 2006, pp. 77-101.

⁴⁵ V Braun and V Clarke, "Using thematic...", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 2006, pp. 87-93.

The researcher maintained reflexive notes throughout the process, acknowledging how personal background as a South African educator influenced interpretation. Themes were reviewed for internal coherence and distinctiveness, and representative quotations were selected to illustrate each theme.

Ethical considerations

The study received ethical clearance from the university's research ethics committee. Participants provided informed consent after receiving detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. Pseudonyms (Student 1, Student 2, etc.) are used to protect anonymity. Participants could withdraw at any time without penalty, though none chose to do so. The researcher was mindful of power dynamics as a faculty member, emphasising the voluntary nature of participation and ensuring it would not affect academic standing.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies enhanced the study's trustworthiness. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement with the data, reflexivity about researcher positionality, and member checking, where participants reviewed transcript summaries to confirm accuracy.⁴⁶ Transferability was supported through thick description of context and participants, enabling readers to assess applicability to other settings.⁴⁷ Dependability was enhanced through maintaining an audit trail of research decisions and analytical processes.⁴⁸ Confirmability was pursued by grounding interpretations in data and acknowledging researcher subjectivity.⁴⁹

Presentation of findings

Analysis revealed five major themes regarding student teachers' perspectives on language, decolonisation, and the Soweto Uprising's contemporary relevance:

Theme 1: Language as a carrier of knowledge and identity

All participants articulated strong connections between language and identity, emphasising that language carries cultural knowledge and shapes worldviews. Student 3 explained:

⁴⁶ YS Lincoln and EG Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1985), pp. 318-319.

⁴⁷ YS Lincoln and EG Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*... pp. 316-319.

⁴⁸ YS Lincoln and EG Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*... pp. 318-319.

⁴⁹ YS Lincoln and EG Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*... pp. 320-321.

"When we use English only, we are not just changing words. We are changing how we think, how we see the world. Our languages have wisdom that cannot be translated."

This perspective aligns with postcolonial critiques of linguistic imperialism, recognising language as epistemologically significant rather than merely instrumental⁵⁰.

Several participants connected language to ubuntu philosophy and communal knowledge systems. Student 7 stated:

"In my language, Setswana, we say 'motho ke motho ka batho'—a person is a person through other people. This way of thinking about humanity is built into the language. When we only learn in English, we lose these philosophies."

This comment illustrates how indigenous languages embed ethical frameworks and relational ontologies that differ from Western individualism.

Participants also described the emotional and psychological dimensions of language use. Student 5 shared:

"When I read History in English, I understand the facts. But when I discuss it in isiZulu with my family, I feel it differently. The meaning goes deeper."

This affective dimension suggests that linguistic decolonisation involves not just cognitive access, but also an emotional and spiritual connection to knowledge. However, participants acknowledged complexity in language-identity relationships. Student 9 noted:

"I feel South African, but I think partly in English now after so many years of education. Does that mean I am colonized? Or can English also be African?"

This ambivalence reflects the hybridity central to postcolonial experience, where colonial languages become indigenised and identities resist simple categories.

Theme 2: Recognition of linguistic colonialism in higher education

Participants demonstrated critical awareness of how linguistic hierarchies operate in their own education. Student 2 observed:

"All our textbooks are in English. All our lectures are in English. Even when we write about African history, we must write in a European language. How is this decolonised?"

⁵⁰ Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the mind ...*

This comment captures frustration with the contradiction between decolonisation rhetoric and continued linguistic colonialism. Participants also described how instruction in English-medium disadvantages multilingual students. Student 4 explained:

"I know the History content. But sometimes I cannot express my ideas in English well enough, so I get lower marks. The lecturer thinks I do not understand, but I do—just not in English."

This highlights how language requirements function as gatekeeping mechanisms that conflate linguistic proficiency with intellectual ability. In the ODL context, this problem is compounded by the absence of face-to-face interaction: participants cannot code-switch with peers or lecturers in real time, and assessments offer no flexibility for home language use.

Some participants discussed the scarcity of learning materials in African languages. Student 1 noted:

"I wanted to write my assignment about the Soweto Uprising in isiZulu, but I could not find any sources. All the books are in English or Afrikaans. So even our own history is available only in colonial languages."

This is a particularly pointed observation for a History Education context: if the historiography of the Soweto Uprising itself is only accessible in colonial languages, then the decolonisation of History curriculum is constrained at the most basic level of epistemological access.

Participants also recognised institutional structures that maintain English dominance. Student 6 stated:

"The university says we should use African languages, but then all the assessment is in English. How can we develop academic language in our own languages if there is no opportunity to practice?"

Furthermore, the theme of internalised linguistic hierarchies also emerged. Student 8 admitted:

"Sometimes I feel that English is more academic, more serious. I have to remind myself this is not true, that my language is equally capable of complex thought. But the feeling is there from years of education that treated African languages as inferior."

This reflects how colonial language ideologies become internalised, requiring conscious effort to deconstruct.

Theme 3: The Soweto Uprising as inspiration for current struggles

Participants engaged with the Soweto Uprising not only as a historical event, but as a pedagogical resource for understanding contemporary language debates—which is precisely the contribution that this article argues History Education can make to decolonisation. Student 10 stated:

“When I learned about June 16, I thought it was just about Afrikaans. But now I see it was about dignity, about the right to learn in a way that respects you. That is the same thing we need today.”

Participants admired the courage and agency of the Soweto students. Student 3 reflected:

“Those students were younger than us, but they stood up to the whole apartheid government. They knew education was important enough to risk their lives. That inspires me to be brave about challenging injustice in education today.”

This admiration positions the Soweto students as role models for contemporary activism. Most participants noted historical continuities between apartheid language imposition and current English dominance. Student 5 observed:

“Then it was Afrikaans forced on Black students. Now it is English forced on all students. The methods are different, but the result is the same—our languages are marginalized.”

This historical consciousness—the capacity to connect past, present, and future in structural rather than merely chronological terms—is a key goal of History Education. That participants demonstrated it in relation to language suggests that the Soweto Uprising, when taught well, can function as an entry point for developing precisely the kind of critical historical thinking that decolonial History Education requires.

Participants also reflected on the Soweto Uprising’s educational demands beyond language. Student 7 explained:

“The students wanted Bantu Education to end. They wanted quality education, not inferior education that prepared them for oppression. Today we say we must decolonize the curriculum—this is the same demand.”

This broader understanding connects language rights to comprehensive educational transformation. However, some participants noted important differences between historical and contemporary contexts. Student 2 cautioned:

“The Soweto students faced brutal violence. We have freedom to protest and speak out that they did not have. We must use that freedom wisely and not pretend our struggle is exactly the same.”

This nuanced perspective acknowledges both continuities and ruptures between apartheid and post-apartheid eras.

Theme 4: Tensions between decolonial ideals and practical constraints

While participants strongly supported linguistic decolonisation in principle, they identified numerous practical challenges. Student 6 articulated a common concern:

“I want to teach History in isiZulu so my students can understand deeply. But the textbooks are in English, the exams are in English, and most curriculum advisors speak English. How can I do this alone?”

This highlights systemic constraints that individual teachers cannot easily overcome. Other participants worried about disadvantaging students by teaching in African languages. Student 4 explained:

“If I teach in Sesotho, my students will understand better. But then when they go to university, everything is in English. Am I helping them or holding them back?”

This dilemma reflects internalised assumptions about linguistic capital and mobility that participants simultaneously critique and reproduce. Participants also noted their own limited academic vocabulary in African languages. Student 9 admitted:

“I speak Setswana at home, but I do not know how to teach History concepts in Setswana. We were never taught this way, so we do not have the language for it.”

This points to the intergenerational effects of linguistic colonialism, where academic discourse has developed almost exclusively in English and Afrikaans. Moreover, resource constraints in distance learning contexts emerged as an additional challenge. Student 1 described:

“I do not have contact with other isiZulu-speaking History students to practice teaching in our language together. Everything in distance learning is individual, and everything is in English.”

This isolation limits opportunities for collaborative development of multilingual pedagogies. Some participants expressed concern about linguistic diversity in classrooms.

Student 8 noted:

"In South Africa, one classroom might have students speaking six different languages. If I teach in my language, what about students who speak other languages? English is the common language everyone understands at least a bit."

This multilingual complexity complicates straightforward solutions and reflects the pragmatic appeal of *lingua francas*.

Despite these challenges, participants resisted defeatism. Student 10 asserted:

"These are real problems, but they are not insurmountable. The Soweto students faced bigger obstacles. If we are committed to decolonization, we must find ways to make it work, not just list reasons why it is difficult."

This determination reflects critical pedagogical praxis, combining realistic assessment with transformative action.

Theme 5: Multilingual pedagogy as decolonial practice

Participants articulated various strategies for implementing multilingual, decolonial History teaching. Student 2 proposed:

"We can teach concepts in English but discuss and debate in home languages. Let students write first drafts in their languages, then translate to English if required. This validates their thinking while meeting institutional requirements."

This approach recognises translanguaging as a pedagogical resource. Other participants advocated for developing curriculum materials in African languages. Student 5 suggested:

"Teachers should work together to create History resources in different languages. It will take time, but it is necessary work. We cannot wait for publishers or government to do it."

This collaborative approach addresses resource scarcity through grassroots knowledge production. Participants also emphasised the importance of incorporating oral history and community knowledge. Student 7 explained:

"In African cultures, history is often passed through oral storytelling. We should bring elders into classrooms to share histories in our languages. This is also decolonizing because it values oral knowledge, not just written texts."

This pedagogical approach challenges colonial privileging of literacy and written documentation. Some participants proposed starting with local histories taught in local languages. Student 3 stated:

"We could begin by teaching community histories in the languages of that community. Students learn to do history in their own language before moving to national or global topics."

This scaffolding strategy builds from familiar content and languages toward more challenging material.

Participants recognised that multilingual pedagogy requires reconceptualising assessment. Student 6 argued:

"We need to assess understanding of History, not English proficiency. Oral presentations, visual projects, dramatizations—these can show knowledge without requiring perfect English."

This challenges the linguistic bias in traditional written examinations.

Several participants connected multilingual pedagogy to broader decolonial goals. Student 4 reflected:

"Using African languages is not just about translation. It changes what knowledge we include, how we discuss it, whose voices we hear. It is about epistemic justice."

This sophisticated understanding positions language as central to transforming knowledge production itself. Participants also saw their role as teacher educators as crucial for systemic change. Student 10 stated:

"When we become teachers, we can teach differently than we were taught. We can show that African languages belong in academic spaces. And when we teach future teachers, we multiply the impact."

This generative vision emphasises teachers as change agents who can influence educational systems across time.

Discussion of findings

The findings reveal complex negotiations of linguistic decolonisation among pre-service History teachers who simultaneously critique colonial language hierarchies and navigate institutional structures that maintain those hierarchies. The discussion that follows

synthesises these findings in relation to the study's theoretical framework and existing scholarship, organised around the central argument that the Soweto Uprising provides a productive historical and pedagogical lens for understanding—and responding to—contemporary language politics in History teacher education.

Language, knowledge, and historical consciousness

Participants' articulation of language as carrying cultural knowledge and shaping identity strongly aligns with postcolonial theory's emphasis on language as epistemologically significant.⁵¹ Their recognition that certain concepts and philosophies are embedded in linguistic structures supports Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's argument that colonial languages alienate colonised peoples from indigenous knowledge systems.⁵² For History Education, this finding is particularly significant: if language shapes historical consciousness—the way people connect past, present, and future—then English-only History instruction does not merely inconvenience multilingual students; it structurally limits the kinds of historical understanding they can develop. The participant who noted that ubuntu philosophy is 'built into' Setswana, demonstrates how languages encode ontological and ethical frameworks that differ from Western paradigms. This finding corroborates research on multilingual education that documents how students' home languages serve as cognitive and affective resources for learning.⁵³ Studies in South African schools show that when learners can engage content in familiar languages, comprehension improves and participation increases.⁵⁴ This study, however, extends existing research by examining how future teachers understand these dynamics. Their meta-awareness suggests they could implement pedagogies that leverage multilingualism rather than treating it as a deficit.

The ambivalence participants expressed about English—simultaneously critiquing its dominance while acknowledging its utility and their own partial identification with it—reflects the hybridity central to postcolonial experience.⁵⁵ This complicates simplistic narratives of language politics that position English purely as a colonial imposition to be rejected. Instead, participants recognise English as both a tool of oppression and a potentially useful resource, embodying what Bhabha calls the "in-between" space of

⁵¹ A Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism...*, pp. 91-96.

⁵² Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind...*, pp. 11-15.

⁵³ O García and L Wei, *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁵⁴ L Makalela, "Moving out of linguistic boxes...", *Language and Education*, 29(3), 2015 pp. 210-213

⁵⁵ HK Bhabha, *The location of culture...*, pp. 1-18.

postcolonial identity.⁵⁶ This nuanced perspective is less evident in some decolonisation literature that takes more absolutist positions on colonial languages.

Critical awareness of linguistic colonialism

Participants demonstrated sophisticated analysis of how linguistic hierarchies operate in higher education, identifying contradictions between decolonisation rhetoric and continued English dominance. Their observations about textbooks, assessment, and material resources reveal what Ndlovu-Gatsheni calls the “coloniality of knowledge”—the ongoing patterns that privilege Western epistemologies and languages even in nominally decolonised institutions.⁵⁷ In the ODL context, this coloniality is particularly visible: even the history of the Soweto Uprising—a struggle explicitly about language—is accessible to student teachers primarily through English-language sources, as Student 1’s comment about isiZulu sources illustrates.

This critical awareness aligns with Freire’s concept of conscientisation, the process of developing critical consciousness about oppressive structures.⁵⁸ However, the theme of internalised linguistic hierarchies reveals that conscientisation is partial and uneven. Even while intellectually critiquing English hegemony, some participants described feeling that English is “more academic”. The variation in how deeply this internalisation had been worked through—from Student 8’s ongoing self-correction to Student 6’s more resolved counter-hegemonic identity—suggests that teacher education must provide sustained, reflective engagement with language ideology, not only theoretical critique.⁵⁹

Negotiating tensions: Ideals and constraints

The tensions participants identified between decolonial aspirations and practical constraints reflect contradictions within educational systems that are simultaneously sites of domination and potential liberation.⁶⁰ Participants’ concerns about disadvantaging students by teaching in African languages reveal how linguistic colonialism becomes self-perpetuating. Because higher education remains English-dominant, preparing students for university success requires English proficiency, which justifies English-medium

⁵⁶ HK Bhabha, *The location of culture ...*, p. 13.

⁵⁷ SJ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of power ...*, pp. 23-45.

⁵⁸ P Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed ...*, pp. 79-82.

⁵⁹ F Fanon, *Black skin, white masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), pp. 17-40.

⁶⁰ HA Giroux, *Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning* (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1988), pp. 108-112.

instruction, which perpetuates English dominance.⁶¹ Freire's concept of praxis⁶²—critical reflection combined with transformative action—is useful here: participants did not simply accept this circular logic, they sought ways to work within and against it. Their strategies, however, are constrained by the ODL environment's individualised structure, which limits the collaborative development of multilingual pedagogies that a community of practice approach might enable.⁶³

The participants' acknowledgment of South Africa's linguistic diversity complicates romanticised notions of simply replacing English with African languages. In multilingual classrooms where students speak different languages, pragmatic questions arise about communication and inclusion. This finding adds nuance to decolonisation debates that sometimes underestimate implementation complexities. It suggests that linguistic decolonisation in South Africa cannot mean reverting to monolingual education, but requires developing truly multilingual pedagogies that honour multiple languages simultaneously.

Multilingual pedagogy as transformative practice

Participants' proposals for multilingual pedagogy demonstrate awareness of translanguaging—using all linguistic resources flexibly rather than keeping languages separate.⁶⁴ Their suggestions to allow discussion in home languages while working toward English academic writing reflects research showing that multilingual pedagogies enhance learning when thoughtfully implemented.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the emphasis on oral history and community knowledge connects linguistic decolonisation to epistemic decolonisation. By validating oral traditions and community expertise, participants challenge colonial privileging of written texts and certified expertise.⁶⁶ This aligns with African philosophy of education that emphasises communal knowledge production and intergenerational transmission.⁶⁷ It also reflects postcolonial theory's critique of Western epistemological dominance and its call to centre indigenous knowledge systems.⁶⁸

⁶¹ The concept of hegemony, developed by Antonio Gramsci, refers to how dominant groups maintain power through cultural and ideological means rather than force alone, making their domination appear natural and inevitable.

⁶² P Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*..., p. 125.

⁶³ M Priestley, G Biesta and S Robinson, *Teacher agency: An ecological approach* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁶⁴ O García and L Wei, *Translanguaging*..., pp. 21-25.

⁶⁵ L Makalela, "Moving out of linguistic boxes...", *Language and Education*, 2015, pp. 214-215.

⁶⁶ LT Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2012), pp. 143-161.

⁶⁷ DP Pattenayak, *Multilingualism and mother-tongue education* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981).

⁶⁸ WD Mignolo, *The darker side of western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

Participants' focus on local histories taught in local languages as an entry point for multilingual pedagogy, demonstrates pedagogical wisdom. This approach provides scaffolding—beginning with familiar content in familiar languages before introducing more challenging material. It also addresses the concern that teaching in one African language may exclude speakers of other African languages by starting where linguistic communities align with content.

The recognition that multilingual pedagogy requires reconceptualising assessment is crucial. Research documents how assessment practices often undermine multilingual teaching by requiring demonstration of learning in specific languages.⁶⁹ Participants' suggestions for diverse assessment formats reflect principles of authentic assessment that prioritises understanding over linguistic performance.⁷⁰

Finally, participants' vision of themselves as change agents positions teacher education as critical for systemic transformation. This aligns with scholarship emphasising teachers' potential to serve as organic intellectuals who challenge dominant ideologies and create counter-hegemonic spaces.⁷¹ Distance learning contexts, which educate many teachers for under-resourced schools, may be particularly important sites for cultivating decolonial pedagogies that can reach marginalised communities.

Implications for teacher education

The findings suggest several implications for decolonising teacher education, particularly in distance learning contexts. These implications flow from the article's central argument: that the Soweto Uprising, understood as a historical and pedagogical lens, offers a concrete entry point for History teacher education programmes to engage with language, epistemic justice, and historical consciousness in an integrated and discipline-specific way. First, History teacher education programmes should explicitly use the Soweto Uprising—and comparable cases of language-based educational resistance—as pedagogical cases for developing historical consciousness in relation to contemporary decolonisation. This positions History Education's contribution as unique: not a generic decolonial-language discussion, but one grounded in the discipline's own historiography and methods.

⁶⁹ M Turnbull, S. Lapkin and D. Hart, "Grade 3 immersion students' performance in literacy and mathematics", *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 47(1), 2001, pp. 3-19.

⁷⁰ D Vlachopoulos and A Makri, "A systematic literature review on authentic assessment in higher education: Best practices for the development of 21st century skills, and policy consideration", *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 83, 2024, p. 101425.

⁷¹ HA Giroux, *Teachers as transformative intellectuals*, HA Giroux, *Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning* (Granby, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1988). pp. 121-128.

Second, ODL programmes should create opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop academic language competencies in African languages. This could include modules taught in African languages, assignments that can be completed in home languages, and collaborative projects developing curriculum materials in multiple languages. Third, distance learning pedagogies must be actively designed for multilingual collaboration, rather than defaulting to the individualised, English-medium model that participants described. Technology enables connections across geographic distance; programmes should leverage this to create virtual communities of practice where multilingual pre-service History teachers collaborate on developing multilingual pedagogical materials, including history resources in African languages.

Fourth, programmes should address internalised linguistic hierarchies through consciousness-raising activities—autobiographical writing about language histories, critical analysis of personal language ideologies, and exposure to examples of African languages used in academic and professional contexts.

Finally, teacher education should emphasise historical consciousness—the ability to connect past struggles to present challenges and future possibilities. The Soweto Uprising offers one powerful historical reference point, however, programmes should explore multiple histories of educational resistance and linguistic activism, both in South Africa and globally.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how pre-service History teachers in South African distance education understand the linguistic dimensions of curriculum decolonisation, drawing on the 1976 Soweto Uprising as a central historical and pedagogical lens. The central argument that has emerged is that the Soweto Uprising is not merely contextual background for a study about language and decolonisation: it is the most powerful historical resource available to South African History Education for teaching students to understand language as a site of political struggle, epistemic justice, and historical agency.

The findings demonstrate that student teachers possess sophisticated, though unevenly developed, critical awareness of linguistic colonialism in higher education while simultaneously navigating practical constraints that complicate decolonial implementation. Language operates simultaneously as a site of colonial power and potential liberation. Participants recognised that African languages carry knowledge systems and philosophies marginalised by English hegemony, yet they also acknowledged the pragmatic challenges

of implementing multilingual pedagogy in contexts structured around English dominance. Their reflections embody the hybridity and ambivalence characteristic of postcolonial experience. Critically, the variation in how deeply this awareness had been developed—from sophisticated critique to unresolved internalised hierarchy—underscores the need for History teacher education programmes to actively cultivate, and not assume, critical language consciousness.

The Soweto Uprising emerged as a productive historical and pedagogical lens through which participants could connect past and present, structure and agency, and historical consciousness and contemporary practice. Their capacity to use it this way demonstrates the discipline-specific contribution that History Education can make to the decolonisation agenda—and it points to the kind of History teaching that pre-service teacher education programmes should be preparing students to enact.

Tensions between decolonial ideals and institutional realities revealed how linguistic colonialism becomes self-perpetuating through structures, resources, and internalised ideologies. However, participants demonstrated agency and creativity in proposing multilingual pedagogical strategies, embodying Freirean praxis. Their suggestions—translanguaging, developing materials collaboratively, incorporating oral history, teaching local content in local languages, and reconceptualising assessment—offer concrete pathways toward linguistic decolonisation in History Education.

Limitations and future research

The limitations of the current study must be acknowledged. The small sample size and single institutional context limit transferability, though the rich contextual description enables readers to assess relevance to other settings. The reliance on self-reported perspectives means the study cannot speak to actual teaching practices, only stated intentions and beliefs. Future research could include classroom observations of how pre-service teachers implement multilingual pedagogies during teaching practice.

The study focused exclusively on History Education; comparative research across disciplines could reveal how disciplinary cultures shape linguistic decolonisation. Research including faculty perspectives would illuminate institutional constraints and possibilities more fully. Longitudinal research tracking participants into their teaching careers could examine how initial commitments to linguistic decolonisation evolve when confronting classroom realities.

Further research is needed on how the Soweto Uprising and similar historical events can be explicitly integrated into History teacher education curricula as pedagogical cases for language, memory, and epistemic justice. Studies examining how ODL institutions can design multilingual collaborative spaces for History teacher education would also address a significant gap identified in this study.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations emerge for policy and practice.

Government and institutional leaders must recognise that linguistic decolonisation requires sustained investment, not just policy documents. Funding should support curriculum development, learning materials production, faculty training, and research on multilingual pedagogy. Policies should create incentives rather than barriers for multilingual teaching.

History teacher education programmes specifically should: (1) integrate the Soweto Uprising and other historical cases of language-based educational resistance as discipline-specific entry points for decolonial pedagogy; (2) create structured opportunities for developing academic literacy in African languages; (3) design collaborative ODL activities that enable multilingual communities of practice among pre-service History teachers; and (4) revise assessment practices to allow demonstration of historical understanding through multiple languages and modalities.

In terms of practice, educators can begin implementing multilingual practices even within constraining systems by allowing home language discussions, incorporating oral history, validating translanguaging, and diversifying assessment. Teachers should connect with colleagues to share resources and strategies, building communities of practice around linguistic decolonisation.

Women in Protest: Indian Activism in the Wake of Soweto, 1970s-1980s

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a17>

Kalpana Hiralal

University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)

Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

hiralalk@ukzn.ac.za

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-000-1733-4643>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a17>

Abstract

The Soweto Uprising of 1976 was a pivotal event in South Africa's history of resistance. Before the Uprising, Indian women's participation in politics was limited to a small group of women, who embraced non-racialism and hence, affiliated with political parties such as the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUF), the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), and the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC). The mass student protests in Soweto, however, re-awakened many Indian women to the shared realities of racial oppression and inspired a new wave of resistance in the liberation struggle. This article utilises archival sources, digital interviews, newspapers, and secondary sources, focusing on Natal, and arguing that the Soweto Uprising of 1976 had a profound impact on the political consciousness of South African women of Indian origin¹. It marked a significant shift in their political identity and activism. Early participation, before 1976, was limited to a few, politically well-connected and educated individuals. The uprising of 1976 saw the emergence of a more assertive, vocal, and visible radical group of Indian women who took on leadership roles and challenged gendered norms. It broadened their political ideologies within the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). It hastened their growing involvement in student movements, civic organisations, and national campaigns, notably through the revitalised NIC and the later United Democratic Front (UDF). This paper contributes to the growing historiography on liberation narratives, which seeks to integrate the role of minorities in their efforts to strengthen non-racial unity and dismantle apartheid, thereby providing a

¹ Under apartheid, non-white South Africans were classified into racial categories. The Population Registration Act of 1950, one of the cornerstone laws of apartheid in South Africa, classified South Africans into these racial categories: White, African (Native or Bantu), Indian (people of Indian descent), and Coloured (mixed race). From the late 1960s, 'Black' emerged as a political identity encompassing all groups oppressed by apartheid. These categories were apartheid-era social constructs rather than natural or fixed identities. The term Indian and Indian women is used here in this historical context.

broad understanding of political resistance in apartheid South Africa.

Keywords: Soweto; Women; Indians; Riots; Black Consciousness

Introduction

The Soweto Uprising of June 1976 marked a decisive turning point in South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle. Although it began as a protest by African high school learners against the implementation of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, its repercussions reverberated far beyond Soweto and far beyond the youth who first demonstrated. Among those profoundly affected were Indian women.² Yet, in the vast corpus of literature, its effects and impact on Indian women have been eclipsed by scholarly works that have largely focused on the causes, effects, legacy, memory, commemorative, and transnational aspects of the 1976 uprising.³ There is scholarly consensus that the event was a turning point in anti-apartheid political struggles, that it "changed the course of history in South Africa";⁴ in "defining [the] role of youth in South Africa"⁵ and a "watershed in the national liberation struggle".⁶ Gendered discussions of the event are few and far between, with past and recent scholarly studies seeking to problematise how gender hierarchies shaped women's involvement in the uprising and how the apartheid state structures used 1976 to malign the political identity of African women activists.⁷

² J Brown, *The road to Soweto: Resistance and the Uprising of 16 June 1976* (Johannesburg, Jacana, 2016); J Seroto, "Analysing the presentation of the 1976 Soweto Uprising in Grade 9 History textbooks", *Africa Education Review*, 15(4), 2018, pp. 1-19.

³ R Butterworth, "South Africa after Soweto", *New Zealand International Review*, 3(1), 1978, pp. 26-28; G Baines, "The master narrative of South Africa's liberation struggle: Remembering and forgetting June 16, 1976", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 40(2), 2007, pp. 283-302; S Gukelberger, "Youth and the politics of generational memories: The Soweto uprising in South Africa", *Ateliers d'anthropologie*, 47, 2020, <https://journals.openedition.org/ateliers/12436>, accessed 1 March 2026; AJ Hall, "Black students and the U.S. anti-apartheid movements on campus, 1976-1985", *Zanj: The Journal of Critical Global South Studies*, 6(1), 2022, pp. 8-28; J Herbst, "Prospects for revolution in South Africa", *Political Science Quarterly*, 103(4), 1988-1989, pp. 665-685; RE Johnson, "The day that fell off the calendar: 16 June, South African newspapers, and the making of a national holiday, 1977-1996", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42(6), 2016, pp. 1143-1160; J Brown, *The road to Soweto...* D Mokonyane, "Soweto and The Next Perspectives", *Présence Africaine*, 140, 1986, pp. 25-34; H Pohlandt-McCormick, "'I saw a nightmare...' Violence and the construction of memory (Soweto, June 16, 1976)", *History and Theory*, 39(4), 2000, pp. 23-44; J Seroto, "Analysing the Presentation...", *Africa Education Review*, 15(4), 2018, pp. 1-19.

⁴ R Butterworth, "South Africa after Soweto", *New Zealand International Review*, 3(1), 1978, p.26; G Baines, "The master narrative...", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 40(2), 2007, p. 283; SM Ndlovu, "The Soweto Uprising" In *The road to democracy in South Africa*, vol. 2, 2004, pp. 320-321, <http://www.sadet.co.za/docs/RTD/vol2/Volume%2020-%20chapter%207.pdf>, accessed 10 March 2026.

⁵ G Baines, "The master narrative...", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 40(2), 2007, p. 283.

⁶ J Seroto, "Analysing the presentation...", *African Education Review*, 15(4), 2018, p.1.

⁷ H Pohlandt-McCormick, "Controlling woman: Winnie Mandela and the 1976 Soweto Uprising", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33(3), 2000, pp. 585-614; E Bridger, "Soweto's female

Scholarly work on the roles and contributions of Indian women in South Africa's political struggles still remains under-researched. Past and current historiography have largely focused on biographies, autobiographies, and general accounts of political activism. Scholarly work on Indian women's political resistance, at the turn of the century, notably the Satyagraha campaigns between 1907 and 1913, argues that their political activism was limited and temporary. Women's participation was largely a response to specific socio-political conditions. Constrained by a patriarchal social order, their activism was deemed acceptable, and even encouraged, because it was framed as defending religion and fulfilling domestic responsibilities rather than challenging gender norms.⁸ Since 1994, a growing body of biographies and autobiographies by and about Indian women has, to some extent, assisted in highlighting their political contributions. These works illuminate women's experiences of family, race, class, gender, sexuality, and identity, particularly under apartheid, while foregrounding their agency in navigating systems of oppression. Notable examples include the works of Zubeida Jaffer, Pregs Govender, Amina Cachalia, and Sam Naidu.⁹

In recent years, a growing body of scholarship has expanded the historiography to include oral histories and feminist frameworks to highlight how Indian women navigated and assimilated their ethnic identity within the anti-apartheid struggle.¹⁰ Govinden's *Sister Outsiders* offers a feminist intervention by recovering the neglected writings of Indian women under apartheid. Govinden's work highlights the complexities of identity formation and the ways women navigated racial, gendered, and political oppression.¹¹ Lallas's study of Indian members of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) examines how activists reconciled ethnic identity with political commitment, contributing to understandings of Indian participation

comrades: Gender, youth and violence in South Africa's township uprisings, 1984–1990", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 44(4), 2018, pp. 559–574.

⁸ C Walker, *Women and resistance in South Africa* (New Africa Books, 1991); D Chetty, "'Sammy' and 'Mary' go to Gaol: Indian women and South African politics in the 1940s", Unpublished paper presented at the In: Conference on 'Women and Gender', 30 January – 2 February 1991, University of Natal, Durban, pp. 1–24.

⁹ A Cachalia, *When hope and history rhyme: An autobiography* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2013); P Govender, *Love and courage: A story of insubordination* (Johannesburg, Jacana, 2007); Z Jaffer, *Our generation* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2003); S Naidu, *Navi Pillay* (Arcadia Books: New York, 2011).

¹⁰ P Naidoo, *156 hands that built South Africa* (Durban: Art Printers, 2006); A Diesel, *Shakti: Stories of Indian women in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2001); B Govinden, 'Sister outsiders' *The representation of identity and difference in selected writings by South African Indian women* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2008); D Rajab *Women–South Africans of Indian origin* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011); S Gunn, *Knocking on: Mothers and daughters in struggle in South Africa* (Cape Town: Human Rights Media Centre, 2008). S Haricharan and S Gunn (eds.), *Voices from the underground* (Cape Town: Penguin, 2019).

¹¹ B Govinden, 'Sister outsiders' *The representation of identity...*

in the liberation struggle.¹² Devi Rajab's *Women – South Africans of Indian Origin* documents the achievements of Indian women across politics, academia, media, and culture.¹³

The discussion around the impact of the Soweto Uprising in 1976 on Indian women is rare and is often fleetingly explored.¹⁴ Rarer still, are the lived experiences and voices of Indian women on the event. When examined, it is cursory, framed within the discourses of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM).¹⁵ The current article addresses current historiographical gaps by exploring and documenting how the Soweto Uprising of 1976 served as a significant catalyst for the political re-awakening of Indian women. The Uprising re-awakened many Indian women to the shared realities of racial and gender oppression, as well as a rethinking of the 'Indian' identity and how they positioned themselves within the larger political struggles. The impact of 1976 was, however, long-term, rather than short-term, most noticeable in their grassroots activism, through civic and women's organisations. It inspired a new wave of resistance from a constituency that remained on the periphery of political activism: mothers; wives; housewives; university students; and high school learners. This article expands liberation historiography by foregrounding minority women's efforts to build non-racial unity and challenge apartheid, offering a broader understanding of political resistance in South Africa.

The current article is based on archival sources, digital interviews, face-to-face oral interviews with women activists, newspapers, and secondary sources. One of the most invaluable oral collections utilised was the *Voices of Resistance* housed at the Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre on the Westville campus at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The project captures the voices of political activists involved in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. These oral histories are significant because they highlight ongoing Indo-African unity during the anti-apartheid struggle. In addition, both telephonic and face-to-face interviews were conducted by the author with Indian women activists between 2009 and 2012, and provided insights into individual political experiences. Moreover, it

¹² V Lalla, "Being Indian, being MK: An exploration of the experiences and ethnic identities of Indian South African *Umkhonto we sizwe* Members" (MA thesis, Rhodes University, 2011).

¹³ D Rajab, *Women...*

¹⁴ DS Dhillon, "*The Indians of Natal-resistance to apartheid, 1971-1985*" (PhD dissertation, National University of Singapore, 1999); K Naidoo, "The politics of youth resistance in the 1980s: The dilemmas of a differentiated Durban", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18(1), 1991, pp. 148-165; V Padayachee, "Struggle, collaboration and democracy: The 'Indian community' in South Africa, 1860-1999", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(7), 1999, pp. 393-395; G Vahed and A Desai, "A case of 'strategic ethnicity'? The Natal Indian congress in the 1970s", *African Historical Review*, 46(1), 2014, pp. 22-47.

¹⁵ K Moodley, "The continued impact of Black Consciousness in South Africa", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 29(2), 1991, pp. 237-251; S Moodley (ed.), *Time to remember-reflections of women from the Black Consciousness Movement* (Durban: Women For awareness, 2018).

illuminated how Indian women navigated their ethnic identity, and how being 'Indian' and South African was contested, negotiated, and embraced at different historical periods. Whilst there are potential discrepancies between personal memories and documentary evidence, these oral accounts remain valuable for revealing how individuals understood and experienced both their own lives and broader political realities. Community newspapers such as *Indian Opinion*, *The Leader*, *Flash*, the *Graphic*, *Post*, and *Sechaba* were important sources, as they provided eyewitness accounts and historical context of the Uprising and how it shaped Indian women's political consciousness. Collectively, these sources proved indispensable, recovering silenced and overlooked narratives that broaden one's understanding of liberation narratives.

Historical context: Indian women under apartheid

To understand the impact of 1976, it is essential to situate Indian women within the broader historical context of South African history. Indian women's resistance to oppression and political and social inequities can be traced back to the 1860s. Indentured women, who arrived in 1860 to work on Natal's coastal plantations, were subjected to physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. Working as domestic servants and as fieldhands on plantations, whilst others did surface work on the coal mines in the Natal Midlands, some employers were at times abusive and exploitative. These women lived in poorly ventilated, overcrowded conditions, and employers at times withheld wages and rations.¹⁶ However, some women resisted exploitation by means of desertion, reporting late for work and submitting grievances to the Protector of Immigrants.¹⁷

By the turn of the century, however, agrarian labour activism gave way to broader political activism. The myriad grievances that Indians in Natal, as in other provinces, faced were to galvanise the community into protest actions. For example, former indentured labourers were forced to pay the dreaded £3 (British Pound) tax, introduced in 1895 and implemented in 1902, which was a means to coerce ex-indentured labourers into re-indenturing.¹⁸ 'Passenger' Indians (who paid their own fare to Natal), who followed in the wake of indentured labourers, were equally targeted, because their long working hours, thrifty living habits and competitive pricing made them a formidable competitor to the

¹⁶ J Beall, "Women under indentured labour in Colonial Natal 1860–1911", C Walker (ed.), *Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1990), pp. 147–167.

¹⁷ J Beall, "Women under Indentured Labour...", C Walker, *Women and gender...*, pp.147–167.

¹⁸ South African History Online, ; *Indian Opinion*. 1992.

colonial trader.¹⁹ Subsequently, the Natal government, upon receiving self-rule in 1893, introduced a series of legislation that hindered their mobility, trade, and political franchise. Similar oppressive laws were passed in the Transvaal (now Gauteng), most notably the Asiatic Law Amendment, dubbed the 'Black Act', which provided for the compulsory registration of all Indians.²⁰ These measures galvanised the Indian community to resist and led to the first Satyagraha campaign between 1907 and 1911.

During the first Satyagraha campaign, conservative gender norms significantly restricted Indian women's participation. The vast majority of Indian women were housewives, while others worked as domestic servants or plantation labourers. Access to education was also severely limited, restricting their economic opportunities. Despite their marginalised position within the household and wider society, women expressed a strong desire to join the resistance, but were denied the opportunity. Gandhi and the wider Indian community operated within a masculinised notion of resistance that defined political activism as a male responsibility. Since the 'Black Act' directly targeted Indian men, husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers, resistance was constructed as a male obligation, effectively barring women from active involvement. Gandhi himself acknowledged that several women had volunteered to join the struggle and even accompany imprisoned Satyagrahis to jail. However, he opposed their participation, arguing that it, "...would be derogatory to our manhood if we sacrificed our women in resisting a law, which was directed only against men."²¹ Thus, Gandhi, while challenging racial discrimination, upheld traditional gender beliefs that confined women to supportive roles. These included cooking meals and providing moral and material support to Satyagrahi families. Women also mobilised through organisations that served as important platforms for challenging the government's racial policies. It gave rise to the Durban Indian Women's Association (1907), and the Transvaal Indian Women's Association (TIWA) in 1909.²²

However, by the second campaign in 1913, women's participation could not be denied, largely because the two key issues, the 3£ tax and the invalidation of non-Christian marriages, severely affected both indentured and 'passenger' Indian women. Indian women's reactions

¹⁹ S Bhana and J Brain, *Setting down roots, Indian migrants in South Africa, 1860-1911* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand Press, 1990), pp. 73-75

²⁰ *Indian Opinion*, "South African British Indian Committee and the Registration Act", 2 November 1907; *Indian Opinion*, "The Registration Law", 28 December 1907; "Passive Resistance", *Indian Opinion*, 31 August 1907; *Indian Opinion*, "Mass Meeting in Johannesburg", 4 January 1908.

²¹ MK Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, (Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1961), p. 275.

²² MK Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, p. 275; *Indian Opinion*, "Indian Women's Association", 6 November 1909; *Indian Opinion*, "Notes on the Transvaal Struggle", 10 April 1909; *Indian Opinion*, "A Fruit of Passive Resistance", 28 October 1911.

were bold and vociferous: they were willing to offer “stubborn satyagraha” and “suffer imprisonment”.²³ The campaign, launched in September 1913, united women from all walks of life, students, teenagers, wives, mothers, grandmothers, domestic workers, hawkers, and labourers from sugar and tea estates as well as the coal mines.²⁴ Defying traditional roles, they risked arrest by crossing the Natal border, entering the Transvaal at Volksrust, without permits and flouting inter-provincial immigration laws; they heckled the police by challenging municipal by-laws on hawking. They also rallied indentured workers in the mines and on the railways in the Natal Midlands, strengthening the movement’s reach and impact. The campaign was successful in achieving limited concessions, most notably the scrapping of tax and the recognition of Indian customary marriages.²⁵

In the campaign of 1913, Indian women could not be denied participation, because they were responding to specific grievances: the £3 tax drove some ex-indentured women to poverty, and the non-recognition of non-Christian marriages was a slur on ‘passenger’ Indian women as it invalidated their status as a wife and mother within Indian customary marriages.²⁶ Indian women’s persistent demands and determination made it clear to Gandhi and the wider Indian community that their participation in the 1913 campaign could no longer be denied, “...Not only could the women now be not prevented from joining the struggle, but we decided even to invite them to come into line along with the men.”²⁷ However, in the aftermath of the Satyagraha campaign of 1913, the women’s political activism dissipated. This was primarily due to enduring patriarchal norms that still prevailed in Indian society. Conservative cultural values continued to confine women to subordinate roles, limiting their public engagement to welfare and charitable organisations such as the Durban Indian Women’s Association (DIWA), the Red Cross, and Friends of the Sick Association (FOSA).²⁸ These organisations were viewed as acceptable, because they extended women’s domestic responsibilities into the public sphere. While they provided opportunities for leadership and community involvement, women remained

²³ MK Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, p. 277; *Indian Opinion*, “Indian Women as Passive Resisters”, 10 May 1913.

²⁴ *Indian Opinion*, “Indians on Strike”, 22 October 1913; MK Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi, Publications Division, Government of India, 1958-1994), vol. 12, p. 512.

²⁵ The Indians’ Relief Act, a negotiated settlement between General Smuts and Gandhi in 1914, recognised Indian customary marriages, even though polygamous, but only one wife was allowed to enter the Union. Source: *Indian Opinion*, 25 March 1914.

²⁶ *Indian Opinion*, “The Marriage Imbroglia”, 12 April 1913.

²⁷ MK Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, p. 277

²⁸ *The Leader*, “Sterling Work Done to Uplift Community”, 28 September 1990; *The Leader*, “Girl Strike Blow to Make Egos”, 22 August 1986; *Fiat Lux*, “Durban Indian women’s Association”, June-July 1979, vol. 14, No. 5, p. 14.

largely reformist and apolitical, reinforcing rather than transforming existing gender hierarchies and male dominance.²⁹

However, with the outbreak of World War II and the gradual urbanisation of both African and Indian women in the 1940s, there was a shift towards greater politicisation and non-racial collective resistance. War conditions led to rent and food hikes, food shortages, and increased poverty amongst the working class. Many African and Indian women entered factory employment and trade unions. Together they confronted labour and gender exploitation, and shared motherhood struggles. It laid the early foundation of working-class activism for Indian women.³⁰

This was, to some extent, noticeable in their participation in the Passive Resistance campaign between 1946-1948 against the discriminatory legislation, the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act (1946). Dubbed the 'Ghetto Act', it restricted Indian land ownership, as well as the purchase and occupation in specific areas in Natal. Many Indian women, among them Dr Goonam, Zainab Asvat, Suriakala Patel, and many others courted arrest and were imprisoned.³¹ These movements, however, remained largely 'Indian', despite some support from whites and Africans. Early forms of meaningful, collective non-racial activism were minimal, at best superficial, largely because the two key political bodies, the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Indian Congress (NIC), representing the interests of Africans and Indians respectively, operated in relative isolation, responding primarily to legislation affecting their own constituencies, with little attempt to forge broader political solidarity against shared oppression. Both groups were denied the vote, treated as secondary citizens, and their mobility restricted (passes for Africans and permits for Indians seeking to travel between the provinces).³²

Despite this political setback, there were efforts by progressive Indians to forge closer relationships with like-minded individuals across racial groups. In the 1930s, a group of educated Indians formed a multi-racial organisation, known as the Liberal Study Group (LSG), where weekly regular discussions were held on a range of topics. It included, people of diverse political ideologies, moderates, liberals, and radicals. Indian women,

²⁹ J Beal, "Women under indentured labour...", C Walker (ed.), *Women and gender...*, p. 107; D Chetty, "'Sammy' and 'Mary' go to Gaol", pp. 1-23

³⁰ J Beal, "Women under indentured labour...", C Walker (ed.), *Women and gender...*, pp. 41-42.

³¹ Historical Papers, Research Archive, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (Digital Collection), *Flash*, July 1946, AD 1715-23-9-3-001, South African Institute of Race Relations; *Flash*, 14 April 1947, AD1715-23-9-3-001, South African Institute of Race Relations.

³² J Beal, "Women under indentured labour...", C Walker (ed.), *Women and gender in South Africa*, pp. 33-34; D Chetty, "'Sammy' and 'Mary' go to aol", pp. 1-23.

though their numbers were negligible within the group, consisted of young, educated, and progressive women, some of whom came from middle-class and politically connected families. Among them were Dr Goonam and Halima Ahmed Nagdee. Dr Goonam was a feisty, Tamil-speaking Hindu who qualified in Edinburgh, Scotland, as a medical doctor. A passionate activist, she drew sharp criticism from conservative members of society for her chain-smoking habits and consumption of alcohol.³³ Nagdee, a devout Muslim, had little formal education, but abhorred the injustice and discrimination that prevailed in society. She was an avid reader who submitted articles in the local press on diverse topics such as poetry, history, purdah, and women's education. Writing under the pseudonym H. Ahmed in the local community newspaper, *Indian Views* column "Muslim Girl", Nagdee articulated radical critiques of male dominance and advocated for women's emancipation. Goonam and Nagdee were strong advocates of non-racialism and believed it could be achieved only through political solidarity.³⁴ Goonam, in the 1940s noted, "it was already becoming apparent to us that we would only succeed against oppressive race laws through a non-European united front".³⁵ Many Indian women later became members of the non-racial organisations such as the National Liberation League (NLL); the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUF), later revived as NEUM, with branches throughout South Africa. For example, Nagdee, became secretary of the NLL and was actively involved in the NEUF in the Cape. In August 1938, she was a speaker at the Non-European Women's Suffrage League and organised a Laundry Workers Union.³⁶

Moreover, the gradual shift towards non-racialism must also be viewed against the framework of the 'Indian' identity. By the 1940s, a vast majority of Indians were born in South Africa, and viewed South Africa as their 'home', as the place of their birth. They recognised that political change in South Africa had to come from within, and that unity among oppressed groups was essential. In a letter dated 4 July 1940, Dr Yusuf Dadoo wrote to ANC President-General Professor DDT Jabavu, "...that the future of the Non-European people of this country depends on the coming together of the African, the Coloured, the Indian and the Malay into one solid powerful organisation."³⁷ This subsequently culminated in the Indo-African pact, signed in 1947 by the NIC, Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC), and

³³ K Goonam, *Coolie doctor, An autobiography by Dr Goonam* (Durban: Madiba Publisher, 1991), p. 99; *The Leader*, "Coolie Doctor Succumbs at 92", 25 September 1998; *Graphic*, "Boss Quiz Durban Doctor", 6 July 1973.

³⁴ K Goonam, *Coolie doctor*, p. 99; *The Leader*, "Girl Strike Blow to Make Egos", 22 August 1986.

³⁵ K Goonam, *Coolie doctor*, p. 100.

³⁶ *The Leader*, "Girls Strike Blow to Make Egos", 22 August 1986.

³⁷ *Indian Views*, "Dr Dadoo's Advice to Prof Jabavu", 26 July 1940.

the ANC, which sought to challenge oppression and racism through collective activism while respecting their political individuality. This solidarity pact became a practical reality when Indian women joined forces with the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) and embarked on a joint Defiance Campaign in 1952 to defy all discriminatory and civic laws. Their participation was not only visible as organisers, speakers, resisters, and courting imprisonment, but it symbolised that Indian women were determined to be part of a broader political struggle that transcended racial divisions.³⁸ This was reinforced when the Natal-based ANCWL, an auxiliary of the ANC, and women from the NIC sought to engage collectively in grassroots activism and established the non-racial women's organisation, the Durban and District Women's League, at the Bantu Social Centre on 4 October 1952. Among its key members, consisting of social workers, activists, professionals, and housewives, were Bertha Mkhize, Fatima Meer, Dr Anusya Singh, Marie Naicker, V Ponen and RI Arenstein, Fatima Seedat, Ruth Shabane, and Edith Khuzwayo. The symbolism of collective grassroots political activism was poignantly expressed by political commentator AC Meer in his memoirs, "It was most potent political work showing how Indians and Africans had common problems, common suffering and common objectives."³⁹

The 1950s created further opportunities for Indo-African political solidarities and for rethinking the 'ethnic' identities. Classifying themselves as South Africans rather than Indians, activists such as Fatima Meer, Fatima Seedat, Amina Cachalia, Radhi Singh, and Anusya Singh began to broaden their political associations. They became active members of the first non-racial women's organisation, the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW).⁴⁰ Within FEDSAW, these activists worked side by side with women from other racial groups and organised a massive march to the Union buildings against the imposition of passes on African women. Although pass laws did not directly affect Indian women, many supported the protests, recognising them as a dehumanising assault on the dignity of African women. Their participation reflected a growing political awareness that their own futures were inseparable from those of the broader oppressed population. This commitment to a shared struggle was later sustained through their activism in organisations such as the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW), Black Women's Federation (BWF),

³⁸ *The Leader*, "Defiance Campaign Launched in Natal at Berea Station", 25 November 1988

³⁹ *The Leader*, "Women and Youth Contributed to Framing Charter", 31 March 1989; Enuga S Reddy and Fatima Meer, "I REMEMBER Reminiscences of the Struggle for Liberation and the Role of Indian South Africans, 1924-1958 by I. C. Meer", Bertha Mkhize and Fatima Meer in Cato Manor, accessed 30 July 2026 https://sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/I_remember_IC_Meer.pdf

⁴⁰ Gandhi Luthuli Documentation Centre (GLDC), University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Westville, Cachalia Family, Accession no. 1963/01-17.

and the United Democratic Front (UDF), where collective, non-racial resistance remained central.⁴¹ The 1950s marked a turning point in Indian women's political activism, laying the groundwork for later non-racial mobilisation. By the 1970s and 1980s, the struggle had shifted, as the rise of the BCM and the Soweto Uprising steered Indian women to the forefront of the liberation struggle.

Rise of Black Consciousness and the impact on Indian women

The Soweto Uprising of 1976 must be seen against the backdrop of growing international support for the anti-apartheid struggle, the emergence of youth activism, and the development of a new ideology, BCM. These factors significantly shaped youth political ideology and activism. More significantly, it catalysed Indian women's political activism, and challenged narrow notions of 'Indian' identity, fostering renewed political consciousness and solidarities that transcended racial and community boundaries.

In the 1960s, Black students, frustrated by the anti-apartheid, white-dominated, liberal organisation, the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) formed the South African Student Organisation (SASO) to address their grievances. Established during the political lull of the 1960s when the ANC, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and many activists were imprisoned, banned, or driven into exile, SASO attracted young and dynamic members from various racial groups.⁴² Key among them were activists Steve Biko, Mamphela Ramphele, Strini Moodley, Arun Naicker, Asha Moodley, Janey Juggernath Ramkissoo, Sam Moodley, and Hersheela Narsee, to name a few. Added to this was the growing international support for the anti-apartheid struggle and the emergence of independent African states, who began to break free from colonial and imperial rule. It is against this background that Biko's Black Consciousness (BC) ideology must be viewed: it inspired students, sparked an interest in reclaiming their lost heritage and reignited their political consciousness. BC celebrated Black power, and solidarity through physical and mental liberation from colonialism. While it appealed to university students and high school learners, it did so too for intellectuals, urban communities, and young women, particularly Indians.⁴³

⁴¹ GLDC, Cachalia Family, Accession no. 1963/01-17; *Sechaba*, August 1967; *The Leader*, "Architects of Group Areas Accused of Causing Ruin and Misery", 24 August 1990; Alison Mary Lazarus, Personal interview by author, 6 December 2010, Durban

⁴² J Brown, *The road to Soweto...*, pp. 40-46.

⁴³ *Sechaba*, "Black Students Unite", January 1973; Interview, Sam Moodley, 7 September 2018, 1860 Heritage Centre, Durban; SM Ndlovu, "The Soweto Uprising", In *The road to democracy...*, pp. 320-321, J Brown, *The road to Soweto*, pp. 47-49; K Naidoo, "The politics of youth resistance in the 1980s...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18(1), 1991, pp. 148-149.

For Indian women, like Sam and Asha Moodley, Ramkissoon, Naicker, and Narsee, BC transformed their political thinking and allowed them to transcend and negotiate their ethnic (Indian) identity and to embrace a broader South African identity in a multicultural, multiracial political space. For Merebank (suburb south of Durban) high school learner, Ramkissoon, BC was a powerful formative vehicle for early politicisation, it, "...really got us thinking politically, it definitely had a place... it awakened a lot in me".⁴⁴ Similarly, for Durban-born Naicker, a community activist, in the 1980s, BC allowed her to assert her voice, and to think more critically around issues such as her ethnic identity, racial, economic, and gender oppression,

*... [It BC] impacted on me and I started to ask deeper questions. The oppression of women, the lives of domestic workers, mine workers, solidarity amongst the oppressed and worker rights became concerns I expressed in our discussions....My attraction to the ideas of Black Consciousness grew. I was drawn, in particular to the values of self-definition and self-reliance. It began to dawn on me that the option of a psychological revolution was possible; that I could free myself from the narrow stereotypes and the slave mentality that were embedded in the psyche of the oppressed and exploited in our society.*⁴⁵

For activist, Zeni Thumbadoo, her "active Black Consciousness Movement days" provided a space for mutual political comradeship and activism, "They were ..vibrant days with long bus trips to AZAPO congresses and meetings. We would read and analyse articles and documents, engage in animated discussions and debates and sing the protest songs with great enthusiasm. We learnt so much from each other..."⁴⁶

BC inspired organisations, such as the Black Women's Federation (BWF), established in 1975, provided a political platform for Indian and African women to challenge the apartheid state. It worked in urban and rural areas seeking to promote gender literacy and healthcare programmes. Added to this were BCM 'Protest Theatres'. Key among them was the Theatre Council of Natal (TEACON), which utilised drama and arts to educate the youth and communities on the evils of apartheid. It was through TEACON that Kogila Perumal Cooper, a student in the 1970s, became politically conscious of BC, which then spurred her political activism, "I did not consciously choose to become an activist.

⁴⁴ GLDC, Interview, Janey Juggernath Ramkissoon, 10 September 2002, *Voices of Resistance*, pp. 51-53.

⁴⁵ A Naicker, "A beginning of a journey", S Moodley (ed.). *Time to remember-Reflections of women from the Black Consciousness Movement* (Durban: Women For awareness, 2018), pp. 177-178.

⁴⁶ Z Thumbadoo, "A blue bench and Black Consciousness", S Moodley (ed.). *Time to remember-reflections of women from the Black Consciousness Movement* (Durban: Women For awareness, 2018), p. 181.

TEACON catapulted me into the world of political activism. I was in the company of very radical thinkers, some of whom, unbeknownst to me, were the founders of the Black Consciousness Movement.”⁴⁷ Asha Moodley, an ardent BC activist and a member of SASO, worked within BC community initiatives, most notably with the media department. She managed the BC publication *Black Review*, and part of her job description was to “...get newspaper cuttings, file them into particular subject categories, and isolate themes, which would be written up for *Black Review*.”⁴⁸ Before the Soweto Uprising in 1976, whilst the ANC and PAC were banned, BC, to some extent, served as a vehicle for youth activism. Reflecting on this period, Moodley notes, these were “exciting times” as there were protests and meetings against the apartheid state on various campuses.⁴⁹ On Salisbury Island, an Indian-designated university established in 1961, BC activists formed the Café Clan and produced a series of satirised plays to “stimulate debate” on political issues.⁵⁰ The play “Black on White”, “did extremely well” and was promoted on across campus in Fort Hare, Zululand, and Rhodes.⁵¹

Equally significant, the BC ideology also shifted debates around notions of “Indianess”. BC members of Indian origin, like Saths Cooper, Asha Moodley, and Strini Moodley, were critical of the NIC and challenged it for being an ethnic and narrow community-based organisation that hindered broader political solidarity and advocated for a more inclusive, non-racial struggle.⁵² Thus, BC did, to some extent, create political-ideological differences amongst Indian activists over how they should navigate Indian identity in a multi-racial struggle for freedom. Moreover, Indians, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, whilst politically conscious, were yet to make inroads in mobilising the community.⁵³ While politics began to attract many radical youths and working class groups, some Indians were still conservative and reluctant to become involved in the struggle, because they feared state repression. Asha Moodley recalls her parents fears, “... [They] didn’t support your activities precisely because of their fears for you. It wasn’t anything else, they just didn’t want you to get involved.”⁵⁴

⁴⁷ K Cooper, “A destiny unchallenged”, S Moodley (ed.). *Time to remember-reflections of women from the Black Consciousness Movement* (Durban: Women For Awareness, 2018), p. 65

⁴⁸ GLDC, WC, UKZN, Interview, Asha Moodley 15 August 2002, “Voices of Resistance”, Oral History Project, University of Durban-Westville, . 14.

⁴⁹ Interview, Asha Moodley 15 August 2002, p.15.

⁵⁰ Interview, Asha Moodley 15 August 2002, pp. 23-24.

⁵¹ Interview, Asha Moodley 15 August 2002, pp. 24-25.

⁵² Interview, Asha Moodley 15 August 2002, p.15.

⁵³ Interview, Asha Moodley 15 August 2002, p.16; Vahed and Desai, “A case of ‘strategic ethnicity’?”, pp.22-47.

⁵⁴ Interview, Asha Moodley 15 August 2002, pp. 22-23.

Added to youth resistance in the early 1970s were labour activism. In 1973 a series of spontaneous strikes swept through Natal, with over 360 stoppages recorded that year and 54 more in 1974. In February 1973, more than 50 000 African workers marched in Durban demanding higher wages, including dockworkers, bricklayers, and employees from the textile, rubber, and municipal sectors. Indian workers were an integral part of the strike and showed solidarity with their African counterparts.⁵⁵ It is against this political context that the Soweto uprising of 1976 must be viewed and its impact on Indian women.

The Soweto Uprising 1976

The outbreak of the Soweto Uprising of 1976 must be viewed against a broader, political, social, and economic landscape. Some commentators, scholars, and activists have attributed its outbreak to it being spontaneous, a political awakening, shaped by ideas, rather than by political organisations.⁵⁶ The political lull of the 1960s provided for the ideas of BC to spread widely, and thus, made inroads amongst the youth. For example, Asha Moodley reiterates this point,

I'm not going to say that it was the Black People's Convention that was responsible for it. Nor will I say that it was the South Africa Students Organisation, but certainly I think, it is a result of the kind of awareness, political awareness that was created that was re-awakened by the Black Consciousness Movement.....The BC Movement worked overtly and was heard quite openly at conferences and I've mentioned all those movements to you so I would say that the uprisings were a kind of expression of black consciousness without specifically saying that any organisation was responsible for it.⁵⁷

Similar sentiments were expressed by the Azanaian People's Organisation (AZAPO), which stated that BC did not view itself as an "alternative" to existing banned political organisations, but recognised its role in contributing to the struggle, and hence advocated, "psychological liberation which was the driving force behind the student uprisings of

⁵⁵ G Houser, "The International Impact of The South African Struggle for Liberation", January 1982, United Nations (available at <https://africanactivist.msu.edu/recordFiles/210-849-29845/32-130-C9C-84-al.sff.document.acoa000562.pdf> as accessed on 19 March 2026).

⁵⁶ Interview, Asha Moodley 15 August 2002, pp. 24-25; A Moodley, "The continued impact of Black Consciousness in South Africa", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 29(2), 1991, pp. 237-251; K Naidoo, "The politics of youth resistance in the 1980s...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18(1), 1991, pp. 148-165; AZAPO, *Azaniaan People's Organisation, June 16, 1976, background and aftermath*, (available at <https://azapo.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/AZAPO-June-16-1976-Background-and-Aftermath.pdf> as accessed on 19 March 2026).

⁵⁷ Interview, Asha Moodley 15 August 2002, pp. 31-32.

1976”.⁵⁸ Whilst BC may have ignited youth consciousness and activism, its roots can be traced, to some extent, to decades of inferior education, systematic inequalities, and abject poverty. African urbanisation in the 1930s and 1940s overburdened the already insufficient school facilities. There were overcrowded classrooms and a lack of qualified teachers. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 merely exacerbated these problems. It brought African education under state control, and African schools were subject to state funding on the acceptance of a racially discriminatory curriculum, administered by a new Department of Bantu Education, that prepared African learners for manual labour. There were rumblings by African students of discriminatory education by the 1960s, however, the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in African schools was the catalyst for protest. Afrikaans was seen as an attempt by the State to oppress the African community psychologically. In contrast, the BC ideology espoused psychological liberation, thereby making resistance and protest inevitable.⁵⁹

Before 16 June 1976, the day of the protest, students had already been engaging in stay-away class boycotts. However, students decided to make a “public stand”.⁶⁰ Students mobilised in Soweto schools, with placards and posters made from cardboard boxes, which read, “Away with Afrikaans”, “Afrikaans is the language of the oppressors”, raised fists and confronted security forces. Police tried to disperse the crowds with teargas initially, and later resorted to using ammunition, killing and wounding hundreds of students.⁶¹ The brutal repression of African students in Soweto led to international condemnation and sanctions against the apartheid state. Locally, it also drew strong criticism from various non-white political organisations as well as increased state repression. Thousands of men and women were banned and arrested, there were house-to-house searches and intimidation of students and workers. According to some reports, some people had simply “disappeared without a trace” and there were “mass graves and midnight burials in Doornskop and other cemeteries in Soweto”.⁶²

⁵⁸ AZAPO, *Azanian People's Organisation, June 16, 1976, background and aftermath*.

⁵⁹ AZAPO, *Azanian People's Organisation, June 16, 1976, background and aftermath*.

⁶⁰ H Pohlandt-McCormick, “Controlling Woman...”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33(3), 2000 pp. 585-614; H Pohlandt-McCormick, “‘I saw a nightmare.’”, *History and Theory*, 39(4), 2000, pp. 23-44; AZAPO, *Azanian People's Organisation, June 16, 1976, Background and Aftermath*.

⁶¹ Pohlandt-McCormick, “Controlling Woman...”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 33(3), 2000, pp. 585-614; Pohlandt-McCormick, “‘I saw a nightmare.’”, *History and Theory*, 39(4), 2000, pp. 23-44; AZAPO, “Azanian People's Organisation, June 16, 1976, Background and Aftermath”.

⁶² *Sechaba*, “ANC Report to OAU Liberation Committee”, vol. 11, Third Quarter, 1977, pp. 4-5

Indian response to the Soweto Uprising

Indian women's response to the Soweto Uprising must be viewed within the dynamics and complexity of segregated politics and socialisation. At the time of the Uprising in 1976, non-African students, for example, Coloureds and Indians, remained generally racially segregated, given the apartheid policies and may explain their immediate non-involvement, "... Indian and 'Coloured' secondary students in the 1970s were not involved in significant resistance. Durban did not feature prominently in the 1976 student uprisings even though there were both university and high school boycotts in some African communities... .. The Indian schools in Durban were virtually untouched by the events of the period..."⁶³ However, by the mid-1970s, the minimal relaxation of racially based admissions allowed more interactions and collective political activism across races. By the late 1970s, despite the social segregation, there was a growing solidarity between African and Indian students.⁶⁴ Moreover, whilst SASO was an increasingly African movement, there were some Indians who became members, "Although officially the Black Peoples Congress (sic) cannot show significant numbers of Indians as members, due to fear of political repercussions. the idioms and essential message of this movement have penetrated the minds of a significant number of university students and, to an even greater extent, high school students."⁶⁵ This may explain the politicisation of Indian university students and in the aftermath of the 1976 riots, "... well over half the black students arrested by the police in Durban for distributing pamphlets were Indian."⁶⁶ For example, in June 1976, 87 students, mainly Africans and Indians, from the University of Natal medical school appeared at the Durban Magistrate's court for contravening the Riotous Assemblies Act for staging a march in Durban in sympathy with the Soweto students.⁶⁷

For BC and SASO supporters, such as Narsee and Alison Lazarus, June 1976 was a political turning point. Lazarus, at the time of the Uprising, was a matriculant at the Durban Indian High School. Her school circle of friends consisted of young girls who

⁶³ K Naidoo, "The politics of youth resistance in the 1980s...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18(1), 1991, pp. 149.

⁶⁴ K Naidoo, "The politics of youth resistance in the 1980s...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18(1), 1991, pp. 146-148.

⁶⁵ Cited in K Naidoo, "The politics of youth resistance in the 1980s...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18(1), 1991, pp.148-149.

⁶⁶ K Naidoo, "The politics of youth resistance in the 1980s...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18(1), 1991, pp.149.

⁶⁷ *Post*, The Riotous Assemblies Act of 1956 was a repressive law that empowered the apartheid state to suppress political opposition by banning gatherings, censoring publications, and criminalising acts deemed to encourage protest, civil disobedience, or racial dissent. *Post*, 18 June 1976.

were politically conscious and motivated. Amongst them were Vidhu Vedalankar, Pregs Govender, and Sagoona Gordhan. In 1976, in the last year of her secondary school studies, Lazarus was appointed head prefect, however, she declined it. Instead, she successfully motivated for the formation of a Student Representative Council (SRC) and subsequently became its first president. The outbreak of the 1976 riots made a lasting impression and fuelled her political consciousness and activism,

*When 1976 happened ... we were very challenged; how can you not write matric exams, education was of utmost importance ... but ... I remember us coming together, as a form of protest ... we handed in our prefect badges, we formed an SRC. I was first SRC President at Girls High, and we made a promise ... that if we pass and go onto university ... we will make a contribution to society. And that drove us. It drove us ... it turned my direction from the law to teaching ...*⁶⁸

Upon matriculating, Lazaurus enrolled at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW), an apartheid-created tertiary institution for Indians, and continued her political activism. Together with her contemporaries, such as Pregs Govender, Lazarus was active in university and school protests of the early 1980s. They mobilised students at schools, Technikons, and other campuses and organised rallies and protest meetings. Lazarus became involved in coordinating and assisting in student orientation programmes off-campus, attended several political meetings, and drew up posters. She recalls, "I marched ... I got baton-charged, but it made me go into the classroom with a fire ...".⁶⁹ Lazarus was not detained by the security police, nor served with banning orders, however, she provided refuge for many political activists when they were hiding from the Special Branch.⁷⁰

Similarly, for Narsee, in solidarity with the Soweto pupils, she attended meetings and distributed pamphlets and handbills, whilst a student at UDW. Moreover, Narsee drew inspiration from imprisoned ANC political leaders such as Nelson Mandela, and American civil rights activist, Martin Luther King. She read widely on political literature, such as the Russian and Chinese revolutions, to help her understand the complexity of class, race and politics. The 1976 Soweto resistance spearheaded her political awakening.⁷¹ Thus, one of the Uprising's most significant impacts on Indian women was a greater political awareness, both in terms of their identity and how they could spearhead non-racial collective activism.

⁶⁸ Alison Mary Lazarus, Personal interview by author. 6 December 2010, Durban.

⁶⁹ Alison Mary Lazarus, Personal interview by author. 6 December 2010, Durban.

⁷⁰ Alison Mary Lazarus, Personal interview by author. 6 December 2010, Durban.

⁷¹ Hersheela Narsee, Telephonic Interview by Author. 11 November 2010, Johannesburg, South Africa; Hersheela Narsee, Email message to author. 6 December 2010.

Non-racial solidarity, whilst it existed, was further nurtured, strengthened, and reinforced in the wake of 1976. The brutal state repression by state security forces made African and Indian women realise the urgency of non-racial political solidarity. They increasingly saw their struggles as inseparable and the need to present a united front. As women, they had shared grievances, both political and gendered, and it provided a catalyst for accelerated politicisation and rising committed resistance. Apartheid had segregated communities along racial lines, thus making it difficult for the ANC and NIC to reach out to Indian and African communities.⁷² Hence, a new strategy was warranted post-1976: grassroots activism, which was revived with the formation of new civic bodies, youth movements, and women's groups, often spearheaded by women.⁷³ BC conscious members within the NIC, and a new radicalised, politicised group of university students stressed the urgency to work within the communities, to mobilise political support, promote non-racialism and the "...coordination and effectiveness of grassroots struggles".⁷⁴ This was to be achieved through the formation of civic organisations, largely spearheaded by university students, high school learners, and young activists.⁷⁵ Moreover, the economic climate of the 1970s and early 1980s saw communities struggling with high costs for housing, transportation, electricity, forced removals, and water issues, thereby, making it conducive to political mobilisation.⁷⁶

In several Indian working-class areas, Indian women were at the forefront in the formation of civic organisations. It led to the establishment of the South Durban Civic Association, Phoenix Working Committee (PWC 1978), Chatsworth Housing Action Committee (CHAC 1979), Cato Manor Residents Association (1979), Durban Housing Action Committee (DHAC) and the Asherville Housing Action Committee (1980), amongst others. Similar structures were transplanted in Coloured and African townships.⁷⁷ For Indian women activists, grassroots activism made them aware of the daily struggles of working-class families, and it marked the beginning of their committed political

⁷² K Naidoo, "The politics of youth resistance in the 1980s...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18(1), 1991, pp. 150.

⁷³ DS Dhillon, "The Indians of Natal-resistance to apartheid, 1971-1985", pp. 23-25; Hersheela Narsee, Telephonic Interview by Author. 11 November 2010, Johannesburg, South Africa; Alison Mary Lazarus, Personal interview by author. 6 December 2010, Durban.

⁷⁴ K Naidoo, "The politics of youth resistance in the 1980s...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18(1), 1991, pp. 163.

⁷⁵ DS Dhillon, "The Indians of Natal-resistance to apartheid, 1971-1985", pp. 22-26.

⁷⁶ K Naidoo, "The politics of youth resistance in the 1980s...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18(1), 1991, pp. 148-153; DS Dhillon, "The Indians of Natal-resistance to apartheid, 1971-1985", pp. 23-24.

⁷⁷ DS Dhillon, "The Indians of Natal-resistance to apartheid, 1971-1985", pp. 22-25.

consciousness. For law student activist Dhaya Pillay, her “real political education” began post-1976, when she was embedded in community organisations through her interactions with PWC, CHAC, and the DHA. It became more “focused” and “structured” and she was involved in a number of “support activities”.⁷⁸ As an Article clerk, Pillay drafted letters, formed residential organisations, co-ordinated meetings, engaged in fundraising, and distributed pamphlets. For example, she was actively involved in the Release Mandela Campaign,⁷⁹ and the Prisoners Education Campaign.⁸⁰

After 1976, Lazarus seized the opportunity to fulfil her high school pledge “to make a contribution” to society. She became deeply involved in youth activism, serving as a founding member and project coordinator of the Ashport Youth Club (1982-1984). In this role, Lazarus focused on political mobilisation, civic education, organising matric winter schools, and advancing environmental awareness and non-racialism through multi-racial camps.⁸¹ Similarly, Durban resident, and activist Narsee, formed the Durban Central Residents Association (DCRA). This body was established to oppose the forced removal of residents from the Warwick Avenue Triangle in central Durban. The State sought to clear the area, home largely to non-white communities, to designate it for white residential use. The DCRA successfully challenged these plans. It also confronted exploitative rental practices, where many families in flats were subjected to excessive rents by unscrupulous landlords.⁸²

Civic organisations spearheaded the political consciousness of Indian women across the class spectrum: the factory workers, housewives, mothers, teachers, university students, high school learners, and labourers. They played a pivotal role in mobilising around ‘bread and butter’ issues that affected the community, such as rent campaigns, high food prices, and poor education. Their activism was grounded in their maternal identities, particularly as mothers, and frustrations with a system that robbed their children of their dignity and a future, and voiced their grievances, “The spectre of hungry mouths to feed, to any mother, particularly, would certainly not provide any frivolity”;⁸³ “They are killing our children. Why

⁷⁸ Dhaya Pillay, 6 April 2009, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal; GLDC, UKZN, WC, Dhaya Pillay, Interview. 16 October 2002; “Voices of Resistance”, Oral History Project, University of Durban-Westville, pp.14-16.

⁷⁹ The Release Mandela Campaign, launched in 1980, was a major international and domestic initiative aimed at freeing Nelson Mandela from imprisonment.

⁸⁰ Activists fought for prisoner education, especially those on Robben Island.

⁸¹ Alison Mary Lazarus, Personal interview by author. 6 December 2010, Durban.

⁸² Hersheela Narsee, Email message to author. 6 December 2010

⁸³ K Naidoo, *Class, consciousness and organisation: Indian political resistance in Durban, South Africa, 1979-1996*, (available at https://sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/archive_files/Class%2C%20Consciousness%20and%20Organisation%20Indian%20Political%20Resistance%20in%20Durban%20

don't they come with bombs and do it quicker".⁸⁴ Many who had previously been apolitical, became active, leading meetings, attending protests and rallies, and signing petitions. Sari-clad women from Indian townships such as Chatsworth and Phoenix were visible at these events, holding placards and joining Coloured and African women in mobilising around the DHAC slogan, "Houses at rents that people can afford."⁸⁵

Post 1976, trade union militancy also intensified, with women central to their activism. By 1985, they made up a third of the paid workforce, concentrated in the garment, textile, and food-processing sectors. Union membership surged in the 1980s, aided by state-sanctioned registration intended to contain unrest, but instead enabled rapid organisation. Workers formed federations committed to non-racialism and solidarity against apartheid, culminating in the creation of Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and in 1985, its merger into the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Others included the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union, later renamed the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union (SACCAWU). Unrest, driven in large part by women, spread across Johannesburg, Durban, Port Elizabeth, and Cape Town, taking the form of strikes, boycotts, and stay-aways.⁸⁶ For example, Narsee supported SACCAWU in its campaign for better wages and conditions at Game stores in Durban, and endorsed a targeted consumer boycott against exploitative labour practices. While putting up boycott posters in Warwick Avenue, Narsee was arrested by the police. Detained overnight, she was interrogated for hours before being released following legal intervention by activist Zac Yacoob. Narsee's activism also led to the confiscation of her passport in the 1980s, restricting her international engagement until it was restored in 1989.⁸⁷

Women's grassroots activism and trade unionism following the Uprising of 1976, led to the formation of powerful non-racial regional women's organisations. FEDSAW, which had become defunct in the 1960s due to constant banning and arrests of its members, re-emerged in the 1980s. Ex-FEDSAW members in the Western Cape formed the United

South%20Africa%201979-1996%20by%20Kumi%20Naidoo.pdf as accessed on 10 February 2026).

⁸⁴ K Naidoo, *Class, consciousness and organisation...*, p.63.

⁸⁵ Natal Indian Congress, *90 Fighting Years 1894-1984 Natal Indian Congress*, (Durban, Art Printing Press, 1984), pp. 38-41.

⁸⁶ Z Magubane, "Attitudes towards feminism among women in the ANC, 1950-1990: A theoretical re-interpretation", In *Road to democracy*, South African Democracy Education Trust, vol. 4, Part 2, (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2006), pp. 975-1033.

⁸⁷ Hersheela Narsee, Email message to author. 6 December 2010
K Naidoo, *Class, consciousness and organisation...*, p. 63.

Women's Organisation (UWO). UWO launched campaigns against rents, food, and bus fare increases, poor housing, and police brutality against children. Others included the Port Elizabeth Women's Organisation (PEWO) and the Port Alfred Women's Organisation (PAWO). In Natal, NOW, and the UDF, the latter a mass collation of anti-apartheid political parties, of student groups, youth congresses, civic associations, religious groups, and trade unions, became the key vehicles for anti-apartheid resistance.⁸⁸ These political and organisational structures provided Indian women with an opportunity not only to intensify their activism, but also to strengthen non-racial solidarity ties with women across all races in the fight against apartheid. For example, Narsee, Vidhu Vedalaker, Shamim Meer, Preggs Govender, and Maggie Govender, amongst others, worked alongside activists in NOW such as Phumzile Mlambo, Nozizwe Madlala, Victoria Mxenge, Maiketso Thipe, Thandi Sigodi, Jacky Leach, Lillian Gabriel, and Jean Faibairn.⁸⁹ As members of NOW, Indian women worked across racially divided, poverty-stricken communities in Lamontville, KwaMashu, Chesterville, Umlazi, Inanda, Claremont, KwaMashu, Umlazi, and Chatsworth, setting up branches and working groups.⁹⁰ NOW's campaign for better housing, maternity, and child-care benefits, not only addressed common maternal and material struggles, it also enabled Indian women to gain better insights into the socio-economic realities of grassroots communities in Natal, particularly the plight of women and children in the rural areas.⁹¹ NOW played a critical role in Natal's political struggles of the 1980s. During this period, when many political leaders were banned or detained, NOW provided political leadership in Natal and spearheaded several UDF campaigns in their absence.⁹²

Equally significant is how, in the aftermath of the 1976 riots, there was a greater shift in the reconfiguration of gender roles, to some extent, within the Indian communities. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, heightened political activism saw an increase in Indian women, particularly university students, some radicalised, who became more vocal and visible, stepping into leadership and organisational roles. For example, the NIC, NOW, and the UDF were to play a critical role in spearheading Narsee's political activism. For example, she was elected secretary of NOW in 1987. Narsee recalls her role within the NIC and how she had to grapple with being affiliated with an organisation that described itself as 'Indian',

⁸⁸ Killie Campbell Africana Library (KCAL), NOW, KCM 98/61/1/76.

⁸⁹ KCAL, NOW, Membership List, KCM 98/61/8/38.

⁹⁰ KCAL, NOW, KCM 98/61/1/76.

⁹¹ Hersheela Narsee, Telephonic Interview by author. 11 November 2010.

⁹² Hersheela Narsee, Telephonic Interview by author. 11 November 2010.

*As a political organisation, one of the tasks of NIC and one of our tasks then is to conscientise our communities where we ... came from. So the area where I live [Durban Central] ...we have in the NIC area committee so that any issue that comes up our task is essentially to educate and conscientise people about this ... so for example, during 1984 there was a Tricameral election so we...went door to door to all the homes, to all the people we spoke to them about it [to vote against the Tricameral elections], we held mass meetings on it....*⁹³

*Whilst the NIC was an Indian political organisation...NIC was also part and parcel of the civic organisations and was affiliated to the UDF ... it was very difficult to take up day-to-day issues affecting people and... people would respond more easily to a community organisation rather than a political organisation....*⁹⁴

Moreover, political activism also empowered Indian women to become more critical of their gendered roles within the home in the 1970s. Women began to raise questions about their status, both within the domestic and political spheres. Hersheela recalls how she became conscious of sexism within her own family as a young girl in the 1970s, “..in the home situation when you see that your brother doesn’t participate in the kitchen chores or anything like that...you feel something wrong unconsciously...”⁹⁵ These sexist attitudes were also pervasive within political organisations such as the ANC, NIC, and the UDF and attempts to redress them were side-lined, with the belief that political liberation would inevitably bring gender liberation.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, organisations such as NOW sought to shift women’s issues from the periphery to the centre of liberation struggles. For example, Narsee noted that NOW was guided by two specific aims, to combat racial and gender oppression, “One of... encouraging women to participate in the struggle for national liberation on the one hand, and also to encourage women to assert ... themselves within the national liberation organisations... take up issues that affect women directly and which other organisations ... do not really take up...”⁹⁷

⁹³ Hersheela Narsee, Interview by Diana Russell, South Africa, 1987, Diana Russell Personal Collection (available at https://search.alexanderstreet.com/preview/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C3383423 as accessed on 19 February 2020).

⁹⁴ Hersheela Narsee, Interview by Diana Russell, South Africa, 1987.

⁹⁵ Hersheela Narsee, Interview by Diana Russell, South Africa, 1987.

⁹⁶ S Hassim, “The limits of popular democracy: Women’s organisations, feminism and the UDF”, *Transformation*, 51, 2003, pp. 48-73; S Hassim, *Women’s organisations and democracy in South Africa contesting authority* (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), pp. 69-75; APC, UKZN, Nozizwe Madlala, Interview. 18 September 1991.

⁹⁷ Hersheela Narsee, Interview by Diana Russell, South Africa, 1987.

In addition, civic organisations and grassroots activism provided Indian women with an opportunity, to some extent, to “get women thinking about their role, not only on the struggle, their role at home.. they were oppressed.”⁹⁸ It facilitated the mushrooming of women’s organisations, which provided spaces for conversations and activism around gender issues to “get women conscientised”.⁹⁹ For example, the Merebank Women’s Organisation (MWA) was established in the early 1980s, where very few women were engaged in community or political activism. Activist, Ramkissoon, recalls how grassroots activism sought to create political and gender awareness among women, in Merebank,

So we began working on activities ...one of them was the Netball Association. We used to have Road Groups and then we worked in Minitown because that is where the Rate Payers had a finger you know well we had a lot of influence there. People began to trust us so we got the women from Minitown involved and we started off kitchen gardens you know, little, the little land in front of these one or two-bedroom houses. We planted things like dhania (coriander), puthina (mint) and thyme and little things ... and then of course we spoke to them about the way they were oppressed.....every year we had a spring walk around September, ...the objective was get to women out of their houses and we walked about three kilometres in Merebank and that was phenomenal because we used to get women from all walks of life all ages..¹⁰⁰

The MWA also inspired young Indian high school learners who joined in their activities. The MWA was also involved in fund raising through jumble sales, collecting old clothes, and forging affiliated links with NOW and women from the predominantly Coloured township of Wentworth.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

The Soweto Uprising of 1976 was indeed a turning point in South African liberation history. For Indian women, it acted as a moral and political re-awakening. Shared oppression, both political and gendered, fostered non-racial solidarity through collective mobilisation. The long-term consequences of the 1976 Uprising for Indian women were most noticeable in their activism through community structures, national coalitions, and grassroots movements. Their political consciousness evolved and led to a rethinking of their identity,

⁹⁸ GLDC, UKZN, Interview, Janey Juggernath Ramkissoon. 10 September 2002, “Voices of Resistance”, Oral History Project, University of Durban-Westville, p.15.

⁹⁹ Janey Juggernath Ramkissoon, Interview. 10 September 2002, p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ Janey Juggernath Ramkissoon, Interview. 10 September 2002, pp. 57-58.

¹⁰¹ Janey Juggernath Ramkissoon, Interview. 10 September 2002, pp. 57-59.

from being 'Indian' to embracing a broader South African identity linked to race, gender, and class oppression. Thus, the Uprising did not merely spark protest, it catalysed a new generation of activists: Indian women. In the narratives of South African liberation history, Indian women emerged not as peripheral supporters, but as active agents in the making of a democratic South Africa.¹⁰²

¹⁰² *The Leader*, "NIC Rejects 'Black Label'", 24 December 1971; *Sechaba*, "Soweto Anniversary", vol. 11, Fourth Quarter, 1977; Dhaya Pillay, Interview. 16 October 2002, pp. 20-21.

Silencing Struggles through Colonial-Apartheid Amnesia in Planning Education: Lessons from the 1976 Soweto Uprising

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a18>

KJP Sebola-Samanyanga

University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

jackson.sebola@up.ac.za

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5292-5617>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a18>

Abstract

The 1976 Soweto Uprising serves as a lens for examining the resistance of South African youth against an educational system designed to erase historical memory and impose colonial knowledge frameworks. The Uprising's central insight, that curricula are sites of political contestation and epistemic violence, frames the critique presented here. Five decades later, a structurally similar erasure persists within urban and regional planning education in South Africa. Drawing on Rüsen's typology of historical consciousness and the decolonial perspectives of Mignolo and Quijano, this article employs document analysis, discourse analysis, and analyses of silence to interrogate The South African Council for Planners (SACPLAN's) Guidelines for Competencies and Standards for Curriculum Development. Just as Bantu Education entrenched colonial subjectivity through pedagogical design, these guidelines are examined for their role in normalising an ahistorical professional formation, which this article terms curricular complicity. Five systemic silences are identified: (i) the profession's colonial origins; (ii) complicity in racialised spatial violence during the apartheid era; (iii) the ongoing racialisation of post-apartheid space; (iv) the existence of epistemic alternatives to Euro-Western planning theory; and (v) second-generation curricular complicity stemming from unreflexive pedagogy. Together, these silences contribute to the emergence of the ahistorical planner: technically skilled, yet historically unconscious. The article argues that SACPLAN needs to establish historical consciousness as a foundational, non-negotiable requirement of planning education in post-apartheid South Africa.

Keywords: Historical consciousness; Planning education; Soweto Uprising; Curriculum development; Apartheid spatial legacies; Professional competencies.

Introduction

On 16 June 1976, thousands of Black South African learners took to the streets of Soweto in protest against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. This Uprising represented a fundamental rejection of an educational system designed to perpetuate epistemicide and apartheid's dehumanising logic (Phiri, 2024). The learners understood what Fanon (1963) had articulated: colonialism extends beyond physical brutality to encompass the systematic erasure of indigenous knowledge systems, historical memory, and the consciousness of colonised peoples. Fifty years later, a structurally similar erasure persists within urban and regional planning education, one that risks rendering the Soweto learners' sacrifice inconsequential.

The Soweto Uprising was, in the deepest sense, an educational event, a moment in the history of schooling, youth consciousness, and the politics of knowledge. Given the history of education, which concerns how curricula shape subjectivity, how professional formation transmits ideological assumptions, and how educational institutions reproduce or resist structures of domination, the curriculum of planning education in post-apartheid South Africa is concerning. Bantu Education's lesson is that pedagogy is never innocent. The curriculum produced the racialised subject; it trained the compliant body; it normalised the hierarchy. The question this article poses is whether contemporary planning education has inherited that lesson or the structure.

This article examines how historical consciousness, or its systematic absence, becomes institutionalised within planning education curricula. History education scholarship has long argued that cultivating historical consciousness is foundational to democratic citizenship and to understanding how the present is constituted by the past (Seixas & Morton, 2013; Grever & Adriaansen, 2019). Msila (2007) has demonstrated that historical memory in post-apartheid South Africa is deeply contested, and that educational institutions bear particular responsibility for how that memory is curated or suppressed. This article extends those arguments, insisting that planners cannot serve spatial transformation without a historically grounded understanding of what must be transformed, and why.

It has come to my attention, through academic facilitation engagement with planning students at several South African universities, including the University of Witwatersrand, the University of Pretoria, and the University of Johannesburg, that young aspiring planners increasingly echo the view that colonialism and apartheid are historical artefacts that require no sustained professional engagement. While appearing pragmatic and future-oriented,

this perspective reveals a historical amnesia that undermines the very transformation many aspiring planners champion. The ‘why’ question is precisely what historical consciousness answers. Without it, how can young planners effectively address South Africa’s persistent spatial fragmentation and socio-economic inequality when, as Mamdani (1996) and Fraser (2007) have demonstrated, we inhabit the colonial-apartheid presence?

The central argument advanced in this article is that the South African Council for Planners (2014b) (SACPLAN’s) Guidelines for Competencies and Standards for Curricula Development inadvertently institutionalise historical amnesia by omitting explicit engagement with South Africa’s colonial and apartheid history as a core professional competence. This omission is not benign; it represents the ongoing reproduction of colonial power relations through seemingly neutral technical frameworks. By failing to mandate critical engagement with the historical conditions that produced South Africa’s contemporary spatial reality, SACPLAN’s guidelines indirectly preserve epistemic racism, wherein Euro-Western planning paradigms are universalised. In contrast, local historical specificity is marginalised (Munyaradzi, 2024).

This work provides three contributions. First, it applies historical consciousness theory to planning education, demonstrating how its absence preserves colonial epistemologies. Second, it responds to calls by scholars such as Mbembe (2015), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), Makakavhule and Landman (2025), and Sebola-Samanyanga et al. (2025) for South African scholarship to confront the ongoing coloniality of knowledge production within institutions. Third, it provides evidence of mechanisms through which planning institutions inadvertently reproduce colonial-apartheid logics, and calls for historical consciousness to become foundational to planning education and practice.

Methodology

A qualitative research design situated within a decolonial theoretical framework is adopted. The methodology centres on document analysis, interrogating SACPLAN’s Guidelines for Competencies and Standards for Curricula Development (2014b), the Consolidated Report on Competencies and Standards (2014a), and historical planning profession documents, including founding texts of the South African Institute of Town and Regional Planners (SAITRP). Three analytical strategies are employed: genealogical analysis traces institutional evolution from colonial origins through to SACPLAN; discourse analysis examines specific language in SACPLAN’s competency documents, attending to how terminology such as ‘transformation’, ‘undo’, and ‘correct’ acknowledges historical injustice

abstractly while depoliticising its origins; and silence analysis, following Trouillot's (2015) methodology, identifies systematic omissions, treating absences not as neutral oversights, but as structurally significant erasures. The five silences identified in the findings section emerge from this analytic procedure.

Background

Bantu Education as curriculum and ideology

The Soweto Uprising did not emerge from a single grievance, but from the accumulated weight of Bantu Education. This system was simultaneously a curricular project, an ideological formation, and a mechanism of political control. To understand the Uprising as an educational-historical event, one must engage with Bantu Education's deliberate architecture. Hendrik Verwoerd, as Minister of Native Affairs, articulated the system's purpose with rare candour: education should not mislead Africans by "showing them the green pastures of European society in which they are not allowed to graze" (Verwoerd, 1975 (1954): 266; Horrell, 1969; Clark & Worger, 2016). The Bantu Education Act of 1953 formalised this vision, transferring responsibility for African schooling from provincial authorities to the Department of Native Affairs, effecting a decisive shift in the epistemological orientation of Black schooling.

Christie and Collins (1982) demonstrate in their analysis that Bantu Education was a differently constituted education, structured to reproduce a racialised division of labour. The curriculum was designed to produce docile, low-skilled labour for white capital, while simultaneously foreclosing African intellectual and political aspiration. Textbooks were vetted for politically dangerous content; the history taught in Black schools was a history of benevolent colonialism and tribal primitivism (Hyslop, 1999). What was taught, and crucially, what was not taught, produced a particular kind of subjectivity, one oriented to acceptance of one's ordained social position rather than to critically interrogating of the structures that produced it.

The language question was not incidental, but architectural. Afrikaans was imposed as a vehicle of ideological interpellation. Wa Thiong'o (1986) theorises the colonisation of the mind precisely through language: when a colonised person is compelled to think, dream, and know in the coloniser's tongue, their relationship to their own historical consciousness is severed. The Soweto learners understood this with a sophistication that most educationists took decades to articulate. As Ndlovu (2006) documents in his detailed

historiographical account, the protests that began on 16 June 1976 were not spontaneous; they were organised by the South African Students Movement (SASM), which had been developing a critique of Bantu Education's ideological function for several years. The Uprising, properly understood, was the political expression of a developing historical consciousness among Black youth.

Hyslop (1999) provides a crucial corrective to purely structural accounts of the Uprising, insisting on the significance of student agency. He demonstrates that by the mid-1970s, Black Consciousness ideology, transmitted through organisations such as SASM and the South African Students Organisation (SASO), had generated a generation of learners capable of diagnosing the ideological function of their own schooling. The language policy was the precipitating cause, however, the Uprising's depth reflected a broader educational politics; a rejection of an entire knowledge system designed to produce compliant subjects rather than historically conscious citizens. This pedagogical politics is the dimension of 1976 that is directly relevant to planning education today.

The parallels this article draws are structural and specific. Bantu Education produced the ahistorical African subject by design, a subject capable of performing assigned functions but incapable of interrogating the system that assigned them. Contemporary planning education, this article argues, risks producing the ahistorical planner: technically capable of executing spatial interventions, yet unable to interrogate the historical production of the spatial conditions those interventions address. The mechanism in Bantu Education was explicit political control over curriculum; the mechanism in contemporary planning education is the ostensibly neutral professional competency framework that omits historical consciousness from its requirements. The outcomes, while different in degree and intent, share a structural logic, the production of professional subjects whose horizons of understanding are calibrated to prevent fundamental critique.

The educational politics of 1976 illuminate curriculum, pedagogy, and professional formation in the present in a further, more concrete sense. The Soweto Uprising, through its analysis, memory, and ongoing historiography, generated a body of educational and political thought about the relationship between knowledge, power, and subjectivity. Scholars such as Nkondo (1976), Biko (1978), and subsequent interpreters have theorised how schooling either liberates or domesticates. If planning education draws on this tradition, it recognises that the curriculum is not a neutral transmission of professional knowledge, but a site where particular subjectivities are produced. The curriculum either enables the planner to ask 'whose interests does this spatial intervention serve and what

historical injustice does it respond to?', or it forecloses that question. The Soweto Uprising provides the historical and theoretical warrant for insisting that the question must remain open.

Student agency, language policy, and educational resistance in 1976

Scholarship on the Soweto Uprising has evolved considerably since the first wave of accounts that emphasised the spontaneous character of the revolt. Brooks and Brickhill (1980), writing in the immediate aftermath, provided an early account of the mobilisation structures. Karis and Gerhart (2010) documented the Black Consciousness Movement's intellectual formation, situating the Uprising within a longer trajectory of youth politics. More recent scholarship, particularly Ndlovu's (2006) authoritative historiography in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, reconstructs the organisational networks that made the Uprising possible and emphasises that the participants possessed a developed critique of Bantu Education as an ideological system.

This historiography matters for the current article's argument about planning education for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that the Soweto learners were agents of a sophisticated educational politics, not simply victims of a bad curriculum. They had developed a historical consciousness of their own situation, including consciousness of how the curriculum functioned ideologically, and acted on that consciousness. Second, it demonstrates that curriculum is always a political question, the language policy was not an administrative convenience, but a deliberate epistemic intervention, and the learners understood it as such. This understanding, that curriculum shapes the possibilities of thought, that professional formation transmits ideological assumptions, and that resistance to unjust curricula is a legitimate educational-political act, is what contemporary planning education must recover.

Colonial-apartheid planning in South Africa

To understand contemporary colonial-apartheid amnesia in planning education, one must first confront the profession's deep-seated colonial roots in South Africa (see Table 1).

Table 1: Genealogy of planning and its institutions in South Africa

Period / Year	Planning Institution/Legislative Milestone	Dominant Planning Logic/ Epistemic Orientation
Colonial era		
1652	British and Dutch Colonial administration	Early planning was influenced by European approaches and models
1919	Transvaal Town Planning Association	Colonial spatial control and segregationist urban ordering
1924	Planning is incorporated into Provincial powers	Adoption of British planning legislation and administrative models
1944	Southern African Branch of the Town Planning Institute of Great Britain	Consolidation of British colonial planning doctrine
Apartheid era		
1950s	Department of Native Affairs	Control of Black areas, planning townships and Bantustans to enforce racial separation
1954	South African Institute of Town and Regional Planners (SAITRP)	Institutionalisation of apartheid spatial engineering
1967	Physical Planning Act (1967)	Strengthened national control for apartheid implementation, introducing Guide Plans
1975	National Physical Development Plan	Proposed decentralised development to manage racial spatial order
1981	The Good Hope Plan	Decentralise industry to growth points near homelands to boost employment and control Black populations, fundamentally driven to enforce apartheid's spatial separation
Post-apartheid era		
1994	Reconstruction and Development Programme	Embedded democratic goals and quality of life improvements
1994	Development Planning Association of South Africa (DPASA)	Parallel 'progressive' planning trajectory alongside statutory planning
1995	The Development Facilitation Act (DFA)	Post-apartheid law designed to speed up land development and address historical spatial inequalities
1996	Constitution of the Republic of South Africa	Established democracy, equality, and sustainability, guiding planning reform
1996	Merger forming the South African Planning Institute (SAPI)	Emergent transformation discourse within the profession

Period / Year	Planning Institution/Legislative Milestone	Dominant Planning Logic/ Epistemic Orientation
1997	White Paper on Local Government	Developmental local governance, service delivery, participatory democracy, and integration, rural focus
2002	Planning Profession Act and establishment of SACPLAN	Regulation through professional competency and accreditation frameworks

Source: Author's own

Planning's prejudiced foundations were laid during both the British colonial rule and the apartheid era. The establishment of the Transvaal Town Planning Association in 1919 marked the beginning of an organised planning fraternity, explicitly modelled on British planning legislation (Lewis & Nel, 2025). Planning was defined through land-use management, health, hygiene, and traffic management, seemingly neutral technical concepts that functioned as proxies for racial segregation and slum control (Muller, 1991).

The transition from the colonial to the apartheid era in 1948 did not represent a turn, but rather the formalisation and intensification of these colonial spatial practices. Planning became increasingly technocratic, focusing on the what and how of development control. As Muller (1991:22) observed, most planners were complacent, "turning a blind eye to the social consequences attaching to apartheid legislation". This blind eye was not a passive omission, but an active professional stance that prioritised technical competence over moral accountability.

Wendy Ovens provides a crucial testimony: "Because planners had been so instrumental in the construction of the apartheid, after 1994 there tended to be a diminished status for planners... the core set of planners that were available were those that were not trusted due to the historic role of planning" (Ovens, 2007:47). This reveals a serious blind spot: while attention focused on transforming professional bodies, insufficient interrogation occurred regarding the transformation of planning knowledge itself (Sebola-Samanyanga et al., 2025).

The post-1994 transition sought to transform this legacy. On 25 June 1996, the SAPI was established through the amalgamation of SAITRP and DPASA (Van Zyl, 1997; Lewis & Nel, 2025). As Mbembe (2001) argues, the post-colony is characterised by a temporal complexity in which colonial pasts actively constitute post-colonial presents. For

South African planning, this means that the profession's colonial-apartheid genealogy is not archived history, but a structurally present condition. The current article argues that planning cannot redress what it refuses to remember.

Theory and literature

Historical consciousness and decolonial theory

This article employs historical consciousness as a primary theoretical lens, understood both as an analytical concept and as an ethical-political commitment. Historical consciousness refers to the ways individuals and collectives understand their temporal embeddedness, how they interpret the past, situate themselves in the present, and imagine possible futures (Rüsen, 2004). In post-colonial contexts, historical consciousness must be theorised through decolonial frameworks that account for how colonial power has shaped historical memory and knowledge production.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) articulates a specifically African conception of historical consciousness grounded in recognition that colonialism and its afterlives systematically disrupted indigenous temporalities and historical sensibilities. Coloniality, as Quijano (2007) theorises, encompasses interlocking systems, the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being, that continue to structure social reality even after formal decolonisation. Rüsen's (2004) typology identifies four modes through which individuals make sense of historical time: Traditional consciousness (the past provides normative models); Exemplary consciousness (history offers general rules); Critical consciousness (present experiences call inherited traditions into question); and Genetic consciousness (change itself becomes the principle for understanding temporal development). For a post-colony, developing critical and genetic historical consciousness is essential for disrupting colonial temporal logics.

It is important to acknowledge the theoretical tension in bringing Rüsen's framework into dialogue with decolonial thought. Rüsen works within a broadly European hermeneutic tradition; Mignolo (2007; 2011; 2023) and Quijano (2007) operate from a decolonial epistemological tradition, attending to how colonial power structures the very conditions of knowledge production. Rather than treating this tension as a problem to be resolved, this article holds it productively: Rüsen's typology provides a diagnostic taxonomy for identifying which modes of temporal orientation a curriculum cultivates or suppresses, while Mignolo and Quijano supply the power-critical analysis of why certain temporalities are systematically marginalised within Euro-Western knowledge frameworks.

Epistemic justice, as theorised by Fricker (2007) and extended by De Sousa Santos (2015) through the concept of epistemicide, requires recognition that colonial violence included the systematic destruction of non-Western knowledge systems. For planning, epistemic justice demands fundamentally interrogating whether Euro-Western planning theories, developed to manage European industrial cities, are adequate for addressing spatial injustice in post-colonial African cities shaped by colonial conquest.

History of education under apartheid and historical consciousness

As established in the Background, Christie and Collins (1982) and Hyslop (1999) demonstrate that Bantu Education's curriculum was designed to produce docility, and was met with sophisticated learner resistance. The theoretical contribution added here is Biko's (1978) Black Consciousness framework: circulating among student activists in the years preceding the Uprising, it supplied the intellectual apparatus through which young people could diagnose their own educational subordination and articulate a counter-vision.

The language policy controversy crystallised the epistemological stakes of Bantu Education. Heugh (2000) demonstrates that the imposition of Afrikaans in 1975 was understood by teachers and learners alike as a deepening of the epistemological injury already inflicted by Bantu Education's curricular content. The curriculum had already told Black learners that their history, their languages, and their knowledge systems were inferior; Afrikaans as a medium of instruction added linguistic displacement to epistemological dispossession.

Curriculum control under apartheid extended to the formation of professional knowledge. As Nkondo (1976) argued in the immediate wake of the Uprising, the production of professionals through apartheid education was the production of a particular kind of professional, one oriented to serving the apartheid system's needs rather than to critically interrogating it. This observation is directly applicable to planning education. The planners trained in South African universities during the apartheid era were not simply trained in neutral technical competencies; they were trained within an epistemological framework that normalised racial spatial order. Muller (1991) and Parnell and Mabin (1995) have documented how planning's technical vocabulary, spatial efficiency, development control, and slum clearance served ideological purposes while appearing scientifically neutral. Curriculum control and professional formation were, in this respect, continuous with Bantu Education's broader project.

Scholarship on history education in South Africa provides the second scholarly context within which this article's argument is situated. Following the transition to democracy in 1994, the question of what history to teach, and how to teach it became a major site of curriculum contest; this question is deliberated to this day. Kros (2010) provides a detailed account of the negotiations over history curriculum in the 1990s, demonstrating that the question of whose history counts as canonical knowledge was not resolved by democracy, but rather became an ongoing site of struggle. Msila (2007) has examined how historical memory is negotiated in post-apartheid schools, arguing that educational institutions bear particular responsibility for whether the past is engaged critically or suppressed.

Seixas and Morton (2013) identify several key dimensions of historical thinking: historical significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspective, and ethical judgment. These competencies are directly applicable to planning education. Planning decisions require assessing which spatial conditions are historically significant, what evidence exists for their causes, how to understand continuity and change in spatial inequality, and what ethical judgments are required in responding to historical injustice. A competency framework for planning education that does not mandate historical thinking in this sense is not only incomplete; it is inadequate.

Samuel (2008) has examined the challenges facing history teachers in post-apartheid South Africa, documenting how teachers navigate between official curriculum frameworks, institutional cultures, and the competing demands of historical consciousness and nation-building. Samuel's work highlights the institutional mechanisms through which historical memory is managed in educational settings, mechanisms directly relevant to understanding how SACPLAN's competency framework manages the memory of planning's apartheid history. The parallel is instructive; just as history teachers sometimes retreat to safe, depoliticised narratives to manage the discomfort of contested history, planning's competency framework retreats to technical language to manage the discomfort of the profession's colonial-apartheid inheritance.

Nuttall and Coetzee (1998), in their collection on negotiating the past in post-apartheid South Africa, argue that the past is not simply something to be acknowledged or archived, but an active force in constituting the present. Their argument is directly relevant to this article; that planning education's refusal to engage with the colonial-apartheid past is not a neutral omission, but an active production of a present in which that past cannot be interrogated. The ahistorical planner is produced by an educational system that has decided, at the institutional level, that the past need not be faced.

The Soweto Uprising in educational historiography

Much of the existing literature situates the Uprising primarily within political history, the history of the liberation struggle, the crisis of apartheid legitimacy, the emergence of Black Consciousness, or the international dimensions of South African resistance (Karis & Gerhart, 2010; Lodge, 1983). This framing is important; however, Ndlovu's (2006) account in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa* is more closely aligned with the argument advanced in the article. His analysis demonstrates that the students were engaged in a sophisticated critique of curriculum and pedagogy, not simply protesting against Afrikaans as a language, but against the entire epistemological orientation of Bantu Education.

Bonner and Segal (1998) situate the Uprising within the longer social history of Soweto, demonstrating that the educational protests of 1976 were continuous with a longer tradition of community resistance to the conditions of life under apartheid. Their account is important for understanding how the Uprising connected educational politics to spatial politics, the same system that designed Bantu Education also designed the townships, the pass laws, and the spatial geography of racial subjugation. This connection is precisely what makes the Soweto Uprising analytically productive for a critique of planning education. The spatial dispossession that planners are tasked with addressing today is the same dispossession against which the Soweto learners rose in 1976.

Hyslop's (1999) analysis of the classroom struggle provides a crucial conceptual contribution. He demonstrates that student agency in 1976 was not simply reactive, but constitutive; the learners did not simply resist an imposed curriculum, they actively generated an alternative educational politics rooted in historical consciousness and political solidarity. This insight resonates with this article's argument about planning education. The call is for both planning students to be given more historical information and for planning education to cultivate the kind of historical consciousness that enables critical interrogation of the profession itself. The Soweto learners' example demonstrates that such consciousness is possible and has genuine transformative consequences.

Crucially, the Soweto Uprising illuminates the relationship among curriculum, language, professional formation, and political subjectivity in ways directly applicable to planning education today. The Uprising demonstrated that curriculum is never just technical; it produces subjects with particular orientations toward the social world, particular capacities for critique or compliance, and particular relationships to historical memory. Bantu Education produced a curriculum designed to foreclose political subjectivity; the learners

of 1976 refused that foreclosure. Contemporary planning education, by omitting historical consciousness from its competency requirements, risks producing a similarly foreclosed professional subjectivity.

There are, of course, limits to this comparison that must be acknowledged. Bantu Education was a consciously racist project, designed with explicit ideological intent to subordinate African intellectual development. Contemporary planning education does not operate from such intent; SACPLAN's omission of historical consciousness is, as this article consistently argues, inadvertent rather than deliberate. The scale of violence is not equivalent; Bantu Education was a system of mass educational dispossession enforced by a police state; the omissions in SACPLAN's competency framework are institutional oversights operating in a democratic constitutional order. While these distinctions matter, they do not dissolve the structural parallel; both systems produce professional or educational subjects whose historical consciousness is constrained by what the curriculum omits. The parallel is structural, not moral; it illuminates a mechanism, not an equivalence.

Coloniality of planning knowledge and transformation

Planning was not, and is not, politically neutral. In South Africa, this relationship was explicit during apartheid. Planners provided technical expertise that made racial segregation appear rational and scientific rather than ideological and violent. Planning's technical language, spatial efficiency, land-use optimisation, and development control obscured the racist purposes these techniques served (Parnell & Mabin, 1995). Post-apartheid transformation has involved changing terminology and introducing concepts such as spatial justice, equality, and transformation; however, as Sihlongonyane (2015) demonstrates, these function as empty signifiers without historical grounding.

A critical distinction must be established between transformation and decolonisation. Transformation suggests changing form while potentially maintaining essential characteristics. Decolonisation requires fundamental rupture; dismantling colonial power relations and creating genuinely new social formations (Fanon, 1963; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Planning in South Africa may be transforming, but not yet decolonising. Demographic representation has improved; progressive policy language has been adopted. However, the epistemic foundations of planning knowledge remain Euro-Western; spatial theories developed for European contexts continue to dominate curricula; and historical consciousness of planning's colonial-apartheid genealogy is not mandated as core professional competence.

Mignolo (2007) distinguishes between decolonisation, which is political independence, and decoloniality, which is the ongoing process of dismantling colonial power relations in knowledge, being, and social organisation. South Africa achieved political decolonisation in 1994, yet, decoloniality remains incomplete. Planning's transformation discourse has focused on increasing racial representativeness while inadequately addressing epistemic decoloniality, the transformation of planning knowledge itself. Genuine decolonisation, as Mbembe (2016) articulates, requires a process of (re)membering, not recalling the past, but (re)constituting dismembered knowledge systems, spatial imaginaries, and African identities.

SACPLAN's competency frameworks directly shape what planning schools teach and what knowledge is validated as essential for professional practice. Sebola-Samanyanga et al. (2025) demonstrate how colonial epistemic frameworks persist in higher education despite decolonisation calls following the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements, arguing that decolonisation requires not superficial curriculum adjustments, but a fundamental epistemic transformation centring African knowledge systems and historical consciousness. Lewis and Nel (2025:101) state that "the Standards and Competencies project has probably been one of the most transformative actions undertaken by SACPLAN", noting that these standards "impact planning education, registration, and practice". This underscores the significance of competency frameworks and, therefore, the particular consequences of their omissions.

Findings

Document analysis: SACPLAN competency guidelines

A systematic analysis of SACPLAN's Guidelines for Competencies and Standards for Curriculum Development reveals a striking absence. South Africa's colonial and apartheid history is nowhere explicitly identified as a core professional competence. The guidelines specify numerous technical competencies, land-use management, spatial analysis, environmental assessment, project management, and many others, however, historical consciousness is absent (see Table 2).

Table 2: Presence of historical consciousness in SACPLAN competency categories

Competency Category	Colonial-Apartheid History Mentioned	Historical Consciousness Required
Professional Knowledge	No	No
Technical Skills	No	No
Legislative Framework	Partially (current legislation)	No
Ethical Practice	Vaguely (general ethics)	No
Contextual Awareness	Minimal (socio-economic context)	No
Spatial Planning Theory	No	No
Community Engagement	No	No

Source: Author’s own

Under Professional Knowledge, the guidelines specify “knowledge of planning systems, theories, principles and methods” (SACPLAN, 2014b:8), however, there is no reference to colonial or apartheid history. Under the Legislative Framework, current post-apartheid legislation is cited as required knowledge, however, the apartheid-era legislative architecture that produced the spatial conditions contemporary legislation must address, is absent. This is a particularly significant silence. The Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA)’s spatial justice principle cannot be understood without understanding the colonial-apartheid laws it responds to (Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act [SPLUMA], 2013). Under Professional Ethics, adherence to the code of professional conduct is required, however, there is no mandate to engage with planning’s historical violations of professional ethics during apartheid.

The framework, thereby, aims to produce the ahistorical planner, that is historically unconscious, and unable to critically interrogate the colonial-apartheid planning presence.

Discourse analysis: Transformation terminology

Examination of institutional documents reveals that transformation discourse consistently favours the language of ‘undoing’ and ‘correcting’ rather than ‘redressing’ and ‘repairing’. As Sihlongonyane (2015) identifies, terms such as transformation, undo, correct, address, and improve recur, however, function as empty signifiers, deployed without sufficient historical grounding. Where ‘undo’ implies a technical reversal requiring no moral reckoning, ‘redress’ implies acknowledging an injustice and accepting a duty to repair. This linguistic

choice positions planning's colonial-apartheid past as a technical malfunction rather than a structural wrong demanding moral accountability. This discursive pattern enables what appears to be progressive transformation rhetoric, while maintaining colonial-apartheid amnesia.

Silence analysis: What remains unsaid

Following Trouillot's (2015) methodology, examination of SACPLAN documents reveals five systematic erasures:

While competency guidelines acknowledge unjust spatial policies, colonialism is not mentioned once. By silencing colonialism, transformation discourse gives the impression that planning's problems began in 1948, when in fact, they originated with colonial conquest. This silence enables apartheid to be treated as an aberration from otherwise legitimate planning rather than an intensification of colonial spatial control.

Literature demonstrates that "planners had been so instrumental in the construction of the apartheid space economy" (Ovens, 2007:47), yet there is minimal engagement with mechanisms of this complicity. How did planning education produce professionals willing to collaborate with the apartheid regime? Without confronting this question, the risk persists of reproducing complicity under new terminology.

Competency guidelines address spatial transformation without explicitly naming race as the organising principle of South African space. As Mamdani (1996) argues, apartheid was a system of racial governance that continues shaping spatial relations even after legal abolition. By avoiding explicit racial analysis, competency frameworks enable graduates to address poverty and inequality as general technical problems rather than the ongoing effects of racialised dispossession.

Competency guidelines validate Euro-Western planning theories while not mandating engagement with African urbanisms, indigenous spatial governance systems, or ubuntu-informed approaches to communal space. This silence preserves epistemic colonialism; European knowledge is validated as universal professional knowledge while African knowledge remains marginalised as cultural particularity.

SACPLAN documents focus on apartheid-era planners' complicity, however, remain silent about the unconscious transmission of colonial-apartheid epistemic frameworks by planners and educators trained within apartheid-era institutions who continue teaching at South African universities today. The mechanism is Bourdieu's (1990) *habitus*, durable

dispositions acquired through socialisation, which structure pedagogical choices below the threshold of individual intentionality. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) identifies this as the coloniality of knowledge, the persistence of colonial epistemic frameworks through the ordinary reproduction of academic culture.

These silences are not accidental, but systematic. They enable a transformation discourse that acknowledges historical injustice while avoiding confrontation with the fact that planning knowledge itself remains rooted in colonial-apartheid assumptions. The effect is colonial-apartheid amnesia masquerading as transformation.

Discussion

Colonial-apartheid amnesia as epistemic violence

The findings demonstrate that SACPLAN's competency frameworks institutionalise historical amnesia by failing to mandate colonial-apartheid history as a core professional competence. This omission constitutes what De Sousa Santos (2015) terms epistemicide, the systematic destruction of knowledge systems. By rendering historical consciousness optional rather than foundational, competency frameworks enable the production of planners who can technically execute spatial interventions without understanding the historical conditions those interventions must address.

The parallel to Bantu Education is analytically instructive, though the distinction it illuminates is as important as the similarity. Verwoerd designed Bantu Education as a consciously racist project, explicitly intended to limit African intellectual development and produce docile labour for white capital. Contemporary planning education does not operate from such intent; SACPLAN's omission of historical consciousness is inadvertent. However, this distinction sharpens rather than weakens the critique; if colonial-apartheid amnesia in planning education were a product of explicit racism, it could be addressed through personnel change. The more troubling reality is that it operates structurally, through ostensibly neutral professional frameworks that carry colonial epistemic logics without announcing them. Bonilla-Silva's (2021) concept of racism without racists is pertinent; a system can produce racialised outcomes through colour-blind mechanisms that feel entirely legitimate to all participants. This is why mandating historical consciousness in competency frameworks is a structural imperative, not a gesture.

Hyslop's (1999) analysis of the Soweto Uprising provides a further analytical resource here. Hyslop demonstrates that the Soweto learners did not simply resist bad policy;

they generated an alternative political subjectivity rooted in historical consciousness. The lesson for planning education is not only diagnostic, it is constructive; historical consciousness, once cultivated, and generates the capacity for critical professional practice. A planner with historical consciousness of how the Group Areas Act produced the spatial configurations they are tasked with transforming is a fundamentally different professional from one who understands those configurations as natural or economic. The Soweto Uprising demonstrates that this kind of consciousness is possible; that it can be collectively developed; and that it has transformative political consequences. Planning education that cultivates such consciousness would not be honouring an analogy; it would be drawing on a directly relevant tradition of educational-political thought.

Planning education's lessons from the 1976 Soweto Uprising

The Soweto Uprising helps theorise the relationship between curriculum, language, professional formation, and political subjectivity in ways that bear concretely on planning education decolonisation. First, it demonstrates that the medium of professional knowledge is not neutral. Just as Afrikaans was not simply a language, but an epistemological vehicle, the theoretical frameworks through which planning knowledge is transmitted, predominantly Euro-Western, are not neutral conduits, but shaped by particular historical and political formations. A curriculum that transmits spatial theory exclusively through the works of Ebenezer Howard, Jane Jacobs, Danial Burnham, Donald Appleyard, Patrick Geddes, Le Corbusier, and Kevin Lynch without equivalent engagement with African spatial philosophers or indigenous land governance systems is not providing neutral professional knowledge; it is reproducing a particular epistemological orientation, one formed within European industrial modernity and not designed for post-colonial African urban conditions.

Second, the Uprising demonstrates that learner agency in relation to curriculum is a legitimate educational-political act. Ndlovu's (2006) historiography makes clear that the 1976 students were not simply protesting; they were enacting an alternative educational politics rooted in the conviction that education either serves liberation or domination. Planning education that takes this lesson seriously should approach curriculum development in a way that recognises students as the very agents who will, at first hand, be dealing with the redress of past socio-economic and spatial injustices.

Third, the history of Bantu Education and school resistance might reshape the curriculum of planning education in the following ways: (i) the colonial-apartheid

history and legislative architecture should be core mandated knowledge, because planners cannot understand what SPLUMA's spatial justice principle is responding to without understanding the legal instruments of dispossession it responds to; the genealogy of planning's professional institutions, as documented in Table 1, should be part of professional knowledge, enabling planners to understand that SACPLAN does not exist in a historical vacuum, but inherits an institutional culture formed within colonial and apartheid spatial practice and therefore, needing a conscious and deliberate colonial-detoxification; and African urbanisms, indigenous land governance systems, and ubuntu-grounded approaches to communal space should be introduced as foundational knowledge rather than as supplementary cultural material.

Critical planning education questions

Ovens' (2007:47) statement that apartheid-era planners were "not trusted due to the historic role of planning" raises questions about professional responsibility that remain unresolved. During apartheid, planning was taught as a doctrine; these teachings informed laws and policies that enabled planners to implement racial segregation with technical legitimacy. The Silence analysis demonstrates that SACPLAN's competency frameworks remain silent about this history of complicity. Without explicitly confronting inherited epistemic planning frameworks, the threat persists of intergenerational transmission of colonial-apartheid ideologies even among academics who sincerely reject explicit racism.

The irony that structures planning in democratic South Africa must be named plainly. Most planning work directly addresses colonial-apartheid spatial injustices, yet planning education risks producing graduates who view colonial-apartheid as historical artefacts requiring no sustained engagement (Sebola-Samanyanga, 2026). On any given day, planners implement spatial transformation policies, facilitate land restitution, design integrated human settlements, and develop socio-economic redress frameworks, all in response to the legacy of colonial-apartheid. Technical competence divorced from historical consciousness produces interventions that may be technically sophisticated, but socio-politically naive, addressing symptoms rather than structural causes.

Racism, as Bonilla-Silva (2021) theorises, is more than individual prejudice; it is a structural system that can operate through formally race-neutral mechanisms. Planning's technical rationality can continue producing racialised spatial outcomes while claiming neutrality. Standards of efficiency, order, and development can encode racial preferences while appearing objective. This is why historical consciousness is essential; without

understanding how technical planning concepts historically served racist purposes, young planners remain vulnerable to perpetuating racialised outcomes through apparently neutral technical practice. A transformation that addresses demographic representation without addressing epistemic foundations leaves racist logics embedded in professional knowledge systems.

Conclusion

Half a century after the Soweto Uprising, this article illustrates that a structurally analogous form of educational erasure persists within South African planning education. This phenomenon arises not from intentional design, but from the inadvertent institutionalisation of colonial-apartheid amnesia within professional competency frameworks. The Soweto Uprising serves as a foundational analytical context. It demonstrated that the curriculum is a site for political contestation, where education can either promote liberation or reinforce domination. It emphasised that historical consciousness is a necessity, and that resistance to epistemologically unjust curricula constitute a legitimate educational act. Planning education that acknowledges the Uprising should actively draw on these insights and engage with them.

The implications for curriculum reform are concrete. SACPLAN must revise its competency guidelines to explicitly mandate comprehension of South Africa's colonial-apartheid history as a foundational professional requirement, not as a contextual supplement to technical skills, but as the epistemological ground from which technical competence must develop. Planning schools must confront the theoretical monoculture of Euro-Western paradigms and create genuine space for African epistemologies, indigenous spatial philosophies, and ubuntu-grounded approaches as foundational knowledge.

The Soweto learners of 1976 refused an educational system designed to produce historical amnesia. Planning education, fifty years later, must make the same refusal. As Fanon (1963:146) wrote: "Each generation must discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it, in relative opacity." The mission confronting this generation of planning educators and professional bodies is to ensure that historical consciousness becomes foundational to the planning profession; that colonial-apartheid is recognised not as a closed chapter, but as an ongoing structural condition requiring sustained critical engagement.

References

- Biko, S 1978. *I write what I like: Selected writings*. University of Chicago Press.
- Bonilla-Silva, E 2021. *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- Bonner, P and Segal, L 1998. *Soweto: A history*. Maskew Miller Longman.
- Bourdieu, P 1990. *The logic of practice*. Stanford University Press.
- Brooks, A and Brickhill, J 1980. *Whirlwind before the storm: The origins and development of the Uprising in Soweto and the rest of South Africa from June to December 1976*. International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa.
- Christie, P and Collins, C 1982. Bantu Education: Apartheid ideology and labour reproduction (pp. 160–183). In: P Kallaway (eds.). *Apartheid and education: The education of Black South Africans*. Braamfontein: Ravan Press.
- Clark, NL and Worger, WH 2016. *South Africa: The rise and fall of apartheid*. Routledge.
- De Sousa Santos, B 2015. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*. Routledge.
- Fanon, F 1963. *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press.
- Fraser, A 2007. Land reform in South Africa and the colonial present. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 8(6):835-851.
- Fricker, M 2007. *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press.
- Grever, M and Adriaansen, RJ 2019. Historical consciousness: The enigma of different paradigms. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 51(6):814-830.
- Heugh, K 2000. *The case against bilingual and multilingual education in South Africa* (Vol. 3). Cape Town: PRAESA Occasional Papers, 6.
- Horrell, M 1969. *Bantu Education to 1968*. South African Institute of Race Relations.
- Hyslop, J 1999. *The classroom struggle: Policy and resistance in South Africa 1940–1990*. University of Natal Press.
- Karis, T and Gerhart, GM 2010. *From protest to challenge: A documentary history of African politics in South Africa, 1882-1990*. Indiana University Press.

- Kros, C 2010. *The seeds of separate development: Origins of Bantu Education*. Unisa Press.
- Lewis, M and Nel, V 2025. Institutional change and transformation of the planning profession. In: D du Plessis (ed.). *Territorial governance and spatial transformation in post-apartheid South Africa* (pp. 87-111). Local and Urban Governance. Springer, Cham.
- Lodge, T 1983. *Black politics in South Africa since 1945*. London: Longman.
- Makakavhule, K and Landman, K (eds.) 2025. *Decolonising the built environment: Process, product, and pedagogy*. Routledge.
- Mamdani, M 1996. *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton University Press.
- Mbembe, A 2001. *On the postcolony*. University of California Press.
- Mbembe, A 2015. *Decolonising knowledge and the question of the archive*. Lecture transcript, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Mbembe, A 2016. Decolonising the university: New directions. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 15(1):29-45.
- Mignolo, WD 2007. Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of decoloniality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3):449-514.
- Mignolo, WD 2011. *The darker side of Western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options*. Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, W 2023. The colonial matrix of power. In: CO Christiansen, ML Machado-Guichon, S Mercader, OB Hunt, and P Jha (eds.). *Talking about global inequality: Personal experiences and historical perspectives* (pp. 46-39). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Msila, V 2007. From apartheid education to the revised national curriculum statement: Pedagogy for identity formation and nation building in South Africa. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16(2):146-160.
- Muller, J 1991. Professionalism, community, and empowerment. *Town and Regional Planning*, 31:20-24.
- Munyaradzi, J 2024. A historical review of African scholarship and the decolonial discourse: Challenges and prospects. *The Thinker*. 99(2):1-23.

- Ndlovu, SM 2006. *The road to democracy in South Africa: Volume 2 1970-1980*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, SJ 2013. *Empire, global coloniality and African subjectivity*. Berghahn Books.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, SJ 2018. *Epistemic freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and decolonisation*. Routledge.
- Nkondo, GM 1976. *Turfloop testimony: The dilemma of a Black university in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Nuttall, S and Coetzee, C 1998. *Negotiating the past: The making of memory in South Africa*. Oxford University Press.
- Ovens, W 2007. *Towards a JIPSA business plan for strengthening urban planning skills in South Africa: Assessment of planning skills in South Africa*. Draft report (September 2007).
- Parnell, S and Mabin, A 1995. Rethinking urban South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21(1):39-61.
- Phiri, MZ 2024. The ideology of epistemicide. In: JS Sanni and MZ Phiri (eds.). *Monuments and memory in Africa*. Routledge.
- Quijano, A 2007. Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3):168-178.
- Rüsen, J 2004. Historical consciousness: Narrative structure, moral function, and ontogenetic development. *Theorising Historical Consciousness*, 4:63-85.
- SACPLAN (South African Council for Planners) 2014a. *Consolidated report on competencies and standards*. Document number 8/4/1/C&S/SQ/12-2014, Midrand.
- SACPLAN (South African Council for Planners) 2014b. *Guidelines for competencies and standards for curricula development*. Document number 8/4/1/C&S/Curr/12-2014. SACPLAN, Midrand.
- Samuel, M 2008. Accountability to whom? For what? Teacher identity and the force field model of teacher development. *Perspectives in Education*, 26(2):1-14.
- Sebola-Samanyanga, KJP 2026. *Spatial epistemologies: Towards critical consciousness in South Africa's built environment education*. SURE-Built 2025. Springer, Cham.

- Sebola-Samanyanga, KJP, Nkosi, HZ, and Peter, K 2025. The lingering coloniality of knowledge: Challenges to decolonising South African universities. *Yesterday and Today*, 34(1):203-223.
- Seixas, P and Morton, T 2013. *The big six historical thinking concepts*. Toronto: Nelson Education.
- Sihlongonyane, MF 2015. Empty signifiers of transformation in participatory planning and the marginalisation of black people in South Africa. *Planning Practice and Research*, 30(1):83-100.
- South African Government 2013. *Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act 16 of 2013*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Trouillot, MR 2015. *Silencing the past: Power and the production of history*. Beacon Press.
- Van Zyl, J 1997. The amalgamation process and the planning profession in South Africa. *Town and Regional Planning*, 44:46-51.
- Verwoerd, HF 1975 (1954). "Speech in the Senate, June 7 1954", in Brian Rose and Raymond Tunmer (eds.), *Documents in South African Education*. Johannesburg: A.D. Donker, 260–266.
- Wa Thiong'o, N 1986. *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. James Currey.

Land Cover Change, Historical Memory and Resistance: GIS-Integrated Climate Adaptation Pedagogy from the 1976 Soweto Uprising

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a19>

Tolulope Ayodeji Olatoye*

Department of Human Science Teaching, Faculty of Education,
Centre for Global Change, Faculty of Natural & Applied Sciences, Sol Plaatje University
Kimberley, South Africa

* Corresponding Author's Email: tolulope.olatoye@spu.ac.za

ORCID : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2249-9258>

Raymond Nkwenti Fru

Department of Human Science Teaching, Faculty of Education, Sol Plaatje University
Kimberley, South Africa

Email: raymond.fru@spu.ac.za

ORCID : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0507-5269>

Anathi Magadlela

Centre for Global Change, Faculty of Natural & Applied Sciences, Sol Plaatje University
Kimberley, South Africa

Email: anathi.magadlela@spu.ac.za

ORCID : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1381-2054>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a19>

Abstract

At a time when historical memory and environmental vulnerabilities overlap, rethinking how the 1976 Soweto Uprising is taught offers a pathway for cultivating critical engagement and climate-consciousness. This study addresses the pedagogical limitation wherein the 1976 Soweto Uprising is taught as a static historical event and disconnected from climate change adaptation and spatial inequality challenges. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-

Analyses (PRISMA) protocols, the study integrates spatial justice theory, critical pedagogy, and resilience thinking, positioning learning as historically grounded, spatially situated, and future-oriented. The findings reveal that Geographic Information Systems (GIS)-based digital mapping of protest geographies, when linked with present-day climate vulnerability and adaptive strategies, deepens learners' historical consciousness, spatial literacy, and capacity to connect past resistance with present resilience. Such integrative approaches foster critical awareness of environmental injustice and empower learners to envision sustainable futures. The study recommends integrating geospatial technologies, climate change adaptation frameworks, and teacher professional development in geo-humanities to advance transformative pedagogy. This approach provides a compelling model for bridging historical memory and environmental action in South African classrooms.

Keywords: Digital humanities; Geographic Information Systems (GIS); Spatial justice; Soweto Uprising; Transformative pedagogy.

Introduction

In an era of climate change and persistent social inequality¹, education is being fundamentally reimaged. The classroom is no longer a site for transmitting static historical facts but viewed as a crucial arena for fostering the critical consciousness, spatial literacy, and adaptive capacities necessary for navigating an uncertain future². This study proposes a radical re-envisioning of how foundational historical events, specifically the 1976 Soweto Uprising, can be taught. It argues that by integrating Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and a climate change adaptation framework, history education can be transformed from a passive exercise in remembrance into an active, empowering practice of resistance and resilience. The Soweto Uprising, which began on June 16, 1976, as a student protest against the apartheid regime's decree that Afrikaans be used as a medium of instruction in Black schools, stands as a watershed moment in South African history³. It marked a definitive shift in the anti-apartheid struggle, galvanising a new generation of activists and drawing unprecedented international attention to the brutal realities of racial segregation⁴⁵

¹ L Sealey-Huggins, *The climate crisis is a racist crisis: Structural racism, inequality and climate change. The fire now: Anti-racist scholarship in times of explicit racial violence* (London, UK: ZED Books, 2018), pp. 99-113.

² K Swargiary, *Navigating the modern classroom: A teacher's journey* (LAP, 2024).

³ L Fekisi, *A comparison of Drum's coverage of the 1976 Soweto student uprisings and the 2015# FeesMustFall student protests* (Master's dissertation, University of the Free State, 2018).

⁴ A Anisin, "Identity, repression, and the collapse of apartheid", *The Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 43(2), 2021, pp. 308-336.

⁵ S Gukelberger, "Youth and the politics of generational memories: The Soweto uprising in South Africa", *Ateliers d'anthropologie: Revue éditée par le Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative* (47), 2020.

The uprising was fundamentally a spatial event, a contestation over the right to the city, a violent expression of power mapped onto the bodies of young people in the streets of a specifically designed township, and a reaction to the spatial engineering of apartheid that confined Black South Africans to under-resourced, peripheral urban areas. The memory of 1976 is etched in the geography of Soweto (the Southwestern townships of Johannesburg), its layouts, its landmarks, and the enduring spatial inequalities that continue to shape the lives of its residents.

Despite its significance, the pedagogical treatment of the Soweto Uprising often suffers from historical sequestration⁶. It is frequently taught as a discrete, concluded event or a chapter in a textbook confined to the past, with limited connection to the lived realities of contemporary South Africa. This approach overlooks the spatial injustices that fuelled the uprising, which were not dismantled with the advent of democracy in 1994; they were, in many ways, reconfigured and persist today. The sprawling townships, characterised by inadequate housing, limited access to green spaces, and under-resourced infrastructure, are now also the very spaces most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change⁷e. Communities in these areas face risks from extreme heat, flooding, and water scarcity, challenges that are a direct legacy of the apartheid-era spatial planning. The disconnect between historical pedagogy and present-day realities fail to equip learners with the tools to see the past as prologue and to understand the historical struggle as intimately linked to contemporary battles for spatial and environmental justice. The primary issue this study addresses is this pedagogical gap: the failure to leverage the teaching of historical events like the Soweto Uprising as a perspective through which to understand and act upon current crises, particularly climate change adaptation. While there is a robust body of literature on the history of the uprising, on digital humanities, and on climate change pedagogy, these fields remain largely siloed. Debates may arise from those who view the integration of a climate perspective as diluting or politicising the ‘pure’ historical narrative of the anti-apartheid struggle. The current study, however, contends that such integration is not a dilution, but a deepening that honours the memory of the 1976 students by demonstrating that their struggle against spatial oppression was an act of resilience, with lessons applicable to building adaptive capacity.

⁶ J Seroto, “Analysing the presentation of the 1976 Soweto uprising in Grade 9 history textbooks”, *Africa Education Review*, 15(4), 2018, pp. 1-19.

⁷ PI Onyemenam, “The green space paradox: Adaptive infrastructure and its displacement effects on low-income urban residents.” *International Journal of Rural and Urban Development*, 2(1), 2025, pp. 1-8.

The background context for this study is twofold. First, it is rooted in the history and ongoing spatial reality of Soweto's landscape of oppression and resistance. Second, it is anchored in the need for climate change adaptation in South Africa, a country identified as among the world's most vulnerable to its effects. The problem statement can be articulated as follows: Current pedagogical approaches to the 1976 Soweto Uprising, fail to cultivate in learners a conceptualisation of the enduring nature of spatial injustice and climate vulnerability. This represents a lost opportunity to foster the spatial literacy, historical consciousness, and adaptive resilience essential for engaged and transformative citizenship. The primary aim of this study is to synthesise interdisciplinary scholarship to develop and propose an innovative pedagogical model. This model will demonstrate how GIS-based digital mapping of the protest geographies of the 1976 Soweto Uprising can be effectively linked with present-day climate vulnerability data and adaptive strategies to create a powerful, transformative learning experience. To achieve this, the study is guided by the following research question: *How can the integration of GIS-based historical mapping of the 1976 Soweto Uprising with contemporary climate change adaptation frameworks foster spatial literacy, deepen historical consciousness, and cultivate resilience-thinking in South African learners?* The Spatial Justice Theory provides a theoretical understanding of how space is a product of social relations and a vehicle for (in)justice. Critical Pedagogy grounds the study in the imperative to create learning experiences that move learners from passive reception to critical agency. Also, Resilience Thinking provides the future-oriented framework by reframing the community's capacity to adapt, transform, and thrive in the face of disturbance and change, a capacity prefigured in the collective action of youth in 1976. In essence, this study posits that mapping the memory of resistance is an essential precursor to building the resilience of the future.

Literature review

Spatial justice theory

Spatial justice theory, principally developed through the work of geographer Edward Soja (2010) and building upon Henri Lefebvre's "production of space" concept⁸, posits that social justice is inherently geographical, focusing on the fair and equitable distribution of resources, services, and opportunities across space produced by social relations which in

⁸ S Przybylinski, "Spatial justice", J Ohlsson and S Przybylinski, *Theorising justice* (Bristol University Press, 2023), pp. 191-204. Bristol University Press.

turn, reinforces those relations.⁹ Soja’s key contribution demonstrates how the organisation of space, the location of resources, the design of infrastructure, and the patterns of exclusion and inclusion are primary mechanisms through which power operates, and inequalities are sustained.¹⁰ For this study, spatial justice theory provides the essential connection between 1976 and 2026. Apartheid was a project of spatial engineering, because the Group Areas Act, the pass laws, the deliberate under-resourcing of townships like Soweto, and the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction were all spatial strategies designed to control, contain, and exploit Black South Africans.¹¹ The 1976 uprising was, therefore, a spatial rebellion, as young people took to the streets to reclaim space, to make them visible in public thoroughfares from which they were marginalised, and to challenge the spatial order of oppression.¹² Figure 1 depicts the spatial justice theory.

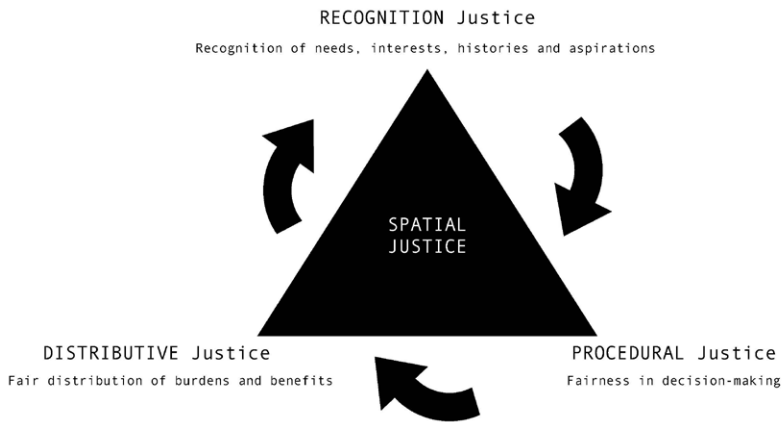


Figure 1: The spatial justice theory

Source: Rocco (2025)

⁹ R Rocco, *Spatial justice: The basics* (Routledge, 2026).

¹⁰ S Przybylinski, “Where is justice in geography? A review of justice theorizing in the discipline.” *Geography Compass*, 16(3), 2022, p. e12615.

¹¹ F Adegalu and T Mitchell, “The impact of the United Nations Human Rights Treaties on the domestic level in South Africa”, *In The impact of the United Nations Human Rights treaties on the domestic level: Twenty years on* (Academic Publishers, 2024), pp. 1077-1146.

¹² J Seroto, “Analysing the presentation of the 1976 Soweto uprising...”, *Africa Education Review*, 15(4), 2018, pp. 1-19

Spatial justice theory guided the search strategy by prioritising keywords and literature that address the spatial dimensions of both apartheid history and inequality. It directs attention to scholarship on apartheid urban planning, township geography, and post-apartheid spatial continuity. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol is operationalised using the following spatial keywords: ‘Soweto geography’, ‘apartheid spatial planning’, ‘township morphology’, and ‘post-apartheid spatial inequality’. This ensures that the literature reviewed is not merely historical, but geographically informed. Also, spatial justice theory provided the analytical lens for identifying how the protest routes of 1976 intersect with contemporary climate vulnerability maps, the areas that witnessed the fiercest resistance then, that are now most susceptible to flooding or extreme heat. The theory also transformed historical photographs, GIS coordinates, climate models, and oral histories into a coherent narrative about the enduring nature of spatial injustice.

Critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy, rooted in the work of Paulo Freire (1970), the theory challenges the ‘banking model’ of education, which advocates for a problem-posing education that is dialogical and transformative. The goal is *conscientização* (critical consciousness), that is, the ability to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to act against the oppressive elements of reality. For this study, critical pedagogy is indispensable, because the research question itself is pedagogical. It asks what should be taught about the Soweto Uprising, and how to foster critical engagement and climate consciousness. The theory positions the learner as an active agent in the construction of knowledge. Figure 2 depicts the composition of the critical pedagogy word cloud terms stock illustration.



Figure 2: Critical pedagogy word cloud composition terms stock illustration

Source: Shutterstock (2026)

By applying the critical pedagogy to the current study, the very identification of the pedagogical gap as a problem emerges from theory. As current teaching methods are inadequate because they are disempowering and treating history as a closed chapter, learners are denied the opportunity to see themselves as historical actors capable of shaping the future. The problem statement, therefore, reflects the critical pedagogue's commitment to education as a practice of freedom. Further, the theory bridges the spatial justice theory and resilience thinking towards achieving transformative educational practice. Critical pedagogy provides the 'how', that is, the methodological principles for designing learning experiences that empower learners to connect past, present, and future. Regarding the proposed pedagogical model, GIS mapping exercise is designed according to critical pedagogy principles as a student-centred inquiry project. Learners formulate their own questions about the relationship between past protest and present vulnerability. They engage in dialogue with peers, community members, and digital resources. The technology becomes a tool for problem-posing: 'Why is this area flood-prone? Was it always this way? What did people here do in 1976? What can we learn from them?' The final output is not merely a map, but a critical analysis and potentially, a proposal for community action embodying Freire's insistence that critical consciousness must lead to transformative action.

Resilience thinking: The future-oriented framework

Resilience thinking originates in ecology, particularly the work of CS Holling (1973), and has been adapted for social-ecological systems¹³ and is understood as the capacity of a system, for example, an ecosystem, a community, or a city to absorb disturbance, reorganise while undergoing change, and retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedback.¹⁴ In social contexts, it encompasses adaptive capacity (the ability to learn and adjust) and transformative capacity (the ability to create fundamentally new systems when the old ones become untenable).¹⁵ Figure 3 depicts the resilience thinking theory.

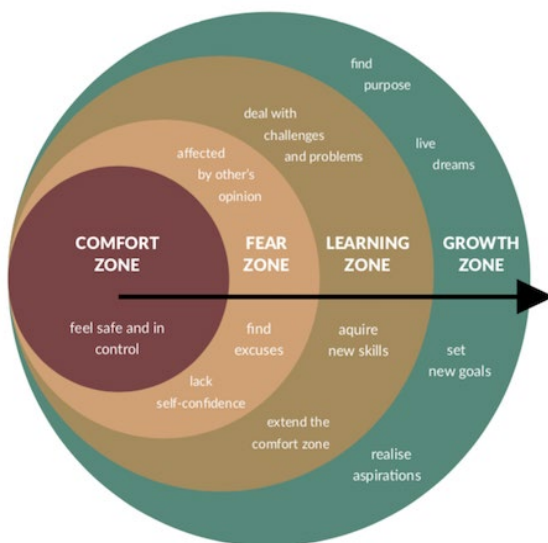


Figure 3: The resilience thinking theory

Source: Maguire (2020)

¹³ HD Hellige, "The metaphorical processes in the history of the resilience notion and the rise of the ecosystem resilience theory", M Ruth and S Goessling-Reisemann, *Handbook on resilience of socio-technical systems* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019), pp. 30-51.

¹⁴ NM Lister, "(Re) Think (Re) design for resilience", In: *Sustainable Coastal Design and Planning* (CRC Press, 2018), pp. 35-49.

¹⁵ JC Canizares, SM Copeland, and N Doorn, "Making sense of resilience", *Sustainability*, 13(15), 2021, p. 8538.

For this study, resilience thinking is crucial because it reframes the Soweto Uprising as an event of resistance and an act of community resilience.¹⁶ The youth of 1976, in the face of overwhelming state violence, demonstrated extraordinary adaptive and transformative capacity. They reorganised their social structures (forming the Soweto Students' Representative Council), learned rapidly from events, and ultimately contributed to the transformation of the entire political system.¹⁷ This historical resilience holds direct lessons for contemporary climate adaptation. Resilience thinking guided in framing the research question. The inclusion of 'resilience' in the research question signals that the study demands a future-oriented dimension. With reference to South African education, the cognitive capacity to approach contemporary challenges with the adaptive and transformative mindset was demonstrated by historical actors. The study's recommendations for teacher professional development are informed by resilience thinking. Teachers need pedagogical capacity to foster adaptive learning environments where students feel empowered to grapple with uncertainty, complexity, and contested knowledge, the very conditions of resilience.

Methodology

The current study employs a qualitative research design grounded in a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, guided by PRISMA protocols.^{18 19} The PRISMA framework was selected for its rigorous, transparent, and replicable procedures, which ensure that the synthesis of existing scholarship is conducted with methodological integrity and can be critically evaluated by the academic community. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the research question, which bridges digital humanities, GIS education, climate change pedagogy, and South African history education, an SLR is particularly appropriate, as it enables the systematic identification, evaluation, and synthesis of diverse bodies of literature that might otherwise remain siloed within their respective disciplines. The objective is not merely to summarise existing research, but to integrate findings across fields to generate new theoretical and pedagogical insights that could not emerge from a single disciplinary perspective alone. The literature search strategy was developed iteratively to capture the full

¹⁶ J Thubron and R Sacks, Rethinking resilience: South Africa and self-reliance, *Social Dynamics*, 48(1), 2022, pp. 2-15.

¹⁷ R Cohen and W Cobbett, (eds.), *Popular struggles in South Africa* (Taylor & Francis, 2024).

¹⁸ D Pati, and LN Lorusso, "How to write a systematic review of the literature", *HERD: Health Environments Research & Design Journal*, 11(1), 2018, pp. 15-30.

¹⁹ PC Sauer and S Seuring, "How to conduct systematic literature reviews in management research: A guide in 6 steps and 14 decisions", *Review of Managerial Science*, 17(5), 2023, pp. 1899-1933.

breadth of scholarship relevant to the study's tripartite theoretical framework. Electronic searches were conducted across multiple academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), JSTOR, and Google Scholar, ensuring comprehensive coverage of both education-focused and interdisciplinary literature. The search employed a combination of keywords and Boolean operators, grouped thematically to reflect the study's core conceptual domains. For the historical and spatial dimensions, search terms included "Soweto Uprising 1976", "apartheid education", "township geography", and "spatial justice South Africa". For the digital and pedagogical dimensions, terms included "GIS in education", "digital humanities", "geospatial technologies secondary schools", and "transformative pedagogy". For the climate and resilience dimensions, search terms included "climate change adaptation education", "climate vulnerability South Africa", "community resilience", and "environmental justice curriculum". The reference lists of included studies were also hand-searched to identify additional relevant publications through a snowballing technique, ensuring that seminal works and emerging scholarship were not overlooked.

The study employed clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the quality and relevance of the sources synthesised. Inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and conference proceedings published in English post-2018. While the direct inclusion of pre-2018 primary sources would have been methodologically ideal, the post-2018 corpus, when combined with backward citation tracing proved sufficient for capturing all essential concepts, empirical findings, and theoretical debates from the earlier foundational literature. This timeframe was deliberately chosen to capture scholarship produced in the democratic era, reflecting both the post-apartheid reimagining of history education and the parallel development of digital technologies and climate change discourse. Furthermore, studies were included if they addressed at least one of the core thematic areas, namely South African history education, GIS or digital humanities in educational contexts, climate change pedagogy, or spatial justice theory and if they demonstrated clear relevance to the South African context or offered transferable insights applicable to similar post-colonial or spatially unequal settings. Exclusion criteria eliminated non-academic sources, such as opinion pieces and blog posts, studies not available in full text, and publications that addressed GIS, climate change, or history education in purely technical terms without pedagogical or social justice considerations.

Data extraction and synthesis were conducted through a thematic analysis approach aligned with the study's theoretical framework. A data extraction sheet was developed to capture key information from each included source, including author(s), year of publication, disciplinary field, research context, methodological approach, theoretical underpinnings, and primary findings. This systematic extraction allowed for the identification of patterns, convergences, and gaps across the literature. The synthesis process was guided by the three theoretical lenses of spatial justice, critical pedagogy, and resilience thinking, with extracted data being organised thematically under these overarching frameworks. For example, literature on apartheid urban planning and contemporary climate vulnerability was analysed through the spatial justice lens; scholarship on student-centred, dialogical teaching methods was examined through the critical pedagogy lens; and studies on community adaptation and socio-ecological systems were interpreted through the resilience thinking lens. This theoretically informed thematic analysis enabled the study to move beyond a descriptive summary toward interpretive integration, revealing how insights from disparate fields could be woven together to construct a coherent pedagogical model.

The final stage of the methodology involved synthesising the extracted findings into a proposed pedagogical framework, which is presented in the current study's recommendations. This synthesis was not merely aggregative, but generative, identifying how the integration of GIS technology, historical content, and climate adaptation frameworks could be operationalised in South African classrooms. The PRISMA protocol ensured transparency throughout this process, with each stage identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion documented to allow for critical appraisal and replication. By adhering to these rigorous procedures, the study provides a trustworthy foundation for its argument that GIS-based historical mapping, when linked to contemporary climate challenges, offers a powerful pathway for transformative, justice-oriented education. The methodology, thus, serves not only to answer the research question, but also as a model for how interdisciplinary synthesis can generate innovative responses to complex educational problems.

Screening: This stage involved the importation of 868 records into Rayyan, an AI-assisted systematic review platform that facilitates transparency and efficiency in the records screening processes (Blaizot et al. 2022). Firstly, 224 duplicate records that overlapped from the records across the seven databases were removed, generating 644 deduplicated records. The inclusion and exclusion stage followed, which ensured the alignment of the records with at least one of the study's major thematic areas of spatialised climate education/GIS

literacy; public sector capacity building in emerging economies, green public finance or climate-responsive fiscal governance, climate resilience or adaptive governance, and their relationships to African geographies. Hence, 387 unrelated records were expunged at this stage, yielding a corpus of 257 full-text records for eligibility evaluation. Ultimately, 75 articles were eligible for the study. Figure 4 depicts the PRISMA flow diagram adopted for the study.

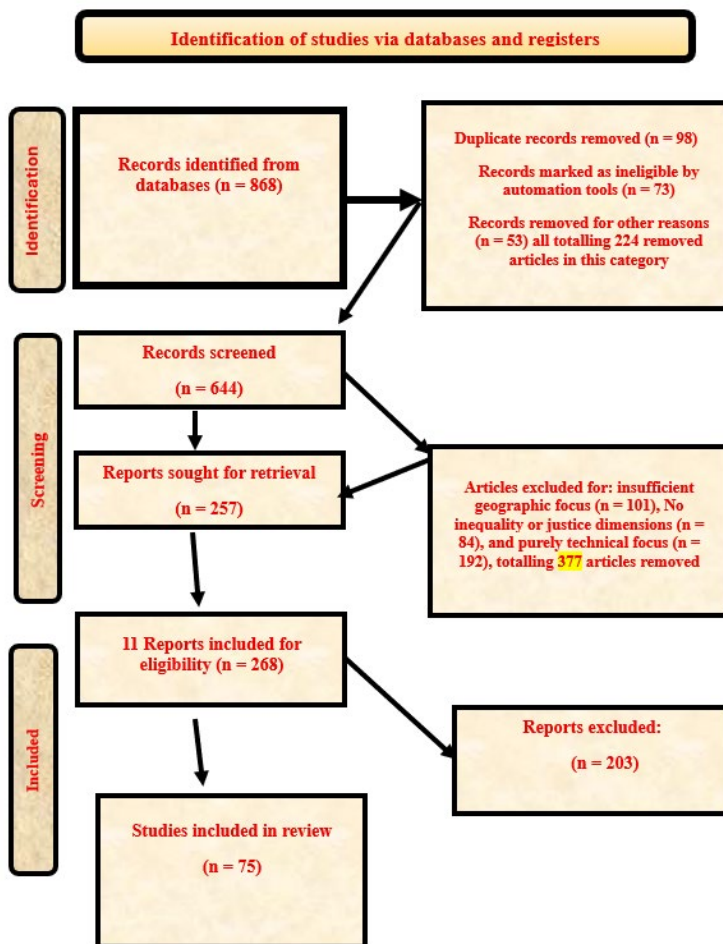


Figure 3: The SLR methodology adopted for the study using PRISMA protocols

Limitations of the study: Based on the SLR methodology of the current study, the research focused on synthesised secondary sources of literature; hence, the absence of classroom-based evidence. From the foregoing, empirical studies such as design-based research, action research, or quasi-experimental studies can be conducted to test the proposed pedagogical framework's effectiveness in actual educational settings.

Findings

Finding one: The persistent spatial legacies of apartheid create a pedagogical imperative for GIS integration

The first major finding emerging from the literature concerns the enduring material connections between apartheid-era spatial planning and contemporary climate vulnerability in South African townships. Scholarship in urban geography and South African history consistently demonstrates that the spatial logic of apartheid did not dissolve with the transition to democracy but rather became embedded in the built environment, continuing to shape patterns of risk, resource distribution, and resilience. Studies by Rogerson, as well as Todes and Houghton reveal that townships such as Soweto, designed as labour reserves with minimal infrastructure and situated on peripheries least desirable for white residential and commercial development, remain characterised by inadequate stormwater drainage, limited green space, and high-density informal settlements built on flood-prone or environmentally marginal land.^{20 21} These spatial characteristics, direct legacies of apartheid planning, now intersect with climate change projections indicating increased frequency of extreme rainfall events, heatwaves, and water scarcity in the Gauteng province, South Africa.²² What makes this finding significant for the present study is that multiple sources identify GIS as a uniquely powerful tool for making these spatial legacies visible to learners²³

²⁴. Soucy et al. argue that GIS enables students to move beyond abstract descriptions of

²⁰ CM Rogerson, "The economic development of South Africa's townships", J Knight and C Rogerson, *The geography of South Africa: Contemporary changes and new directions* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), pp. 187-194.

²¹ A Todes and J Houghton, "Economies and employment in growing and declining urban peripheries in South Africa", *Local Economy*, 36(5), 2021, pp. 391-410.

²² N Kambule, G Hoogendoorn, and G Visser, "'Bringing Sandton into Soweto': Perceptions of tourism-led gentrification in a South African township", *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 72(2), 2024, pp. 131-146.

²³ J Hickman, "Spatial thinking and GIS: Developing and assessing student competencies", *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 32(2), 2023, pp. 140-158.

²⁴ JJ Kerski, "Teaching and learning geography with a Web GIS approach", A Klonari, ML De Lázaro y Torres and A Kizos, *Re-visioning geography: Supporting the SDGs in the post-COVID era* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), pp. 113-135.

historical injustice toward concrete, place-based understanding²⁵. When applied to the South African context, research by Bunting demonstrates that learners who engage with historical maps of the apartheid-era Soweto alongside contemporary satellite imagery and climate risk data, develop the capacity to 'read' their own environments as texts inscribed with histories of power and inequality.²⁶ The literature suggests that this spatial literacy is a form of critical consciousness, enabling learners to recognise that the flooding they witness in their communities during summer storms is not a natural phenomenon divorced from history^{27 28}, but a manifestation of decisions made decades ago about where Black South Africans would be permitted to live. This finding establishes the foundational rationale for GIS integration: the technology provides the means to visualise and interrogate the spatial continuity between past injustice and present vulnerability, transforming abstract historical knowledge into personally relevant, place-based understanding.²⁹³⁰

Finding two: Historical consciousness is deepened when learners trace continuities between past resistance and present challenges

The second finding concerns the relationship between historical pedagogy and the development of historical consciousness, that is, the understanding that the past is not a foreign country, but rather a living force that shapes present conditions and future possibilities^{31 32}. The reviewed literature reveals a consistent critique of conventional history teaching in South Africa, wherein the anti-apartheid struggle is often presented as

²⁵ AR Soucy, P Rahimzadeh-Bajgiran, S De Urioste-Stone, K Eitel, J Jansujwicz and M Brownlee, "Impact of a place-based educational approach on student and community members' experiences and learning within a post-secondary GIS course", *Journal of Geoscience Education*, 73(4), 2025, pp. 386-401.

Bunting, L., Gleghorne, N., Maguire, A., McKenna, S., & O'Reilly, D. 2024. Changing trends in child welfare inequalities in Northern Ireland. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 54(5), 1809-1829. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcad259>

²⁶ S Sanders, An investigation into the state of environmental education and the use of technology in environmental education in Gauteng, South Africa (Master's dissertation, University of Johannesburg, 2018).

²⁷ K Smith, CJ Fearnley, D Dixon, DK Bird and I Kelman, *Environmental hazards: Assessing risk and reducing disaster* (Routledge, 2023).

²⁸ M Favretti, *Learning in the age of climate disasters: Teacher and student empowerment beyond futurephobia* (Routledge, 2022).

²⁹ M Pavlovskaya, "Critical GIS as a tool for social transformation", *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, 62(1), 2018, pp. 40-54.

³⁰ SM Radil and MB Anderson, "Rethinking PGIS: Participatory or (post) political GIS?", *Progress in Human Geography*, 43(2), 2019, pp. 195-213.

³¹ A Clark and M Grever, "Historical consciousness: Conceptualizations and educational applications", *The Wiley International Handbook of History Teaching and Learning*, 2018, pp. 177-201.

³² N Popa, "Operationalizing historical consciousness: A review and synthesis of the literature on meaning making in historical learning", *Review of Educational Research*, 92(2), 2022, pp. 171-208.

a completed narrative with a triumphal endpoint in 1994.³³ Studies by Blair indicate that this narrative closure, while politically important in the immediate post-apartheid period, can inadvertently distance learners from the material by suggesting that the struggles of the past have been resolved and therefore, hold limited relevance for contemporary life³⁴. In contrast, research that explicitly connects historical events to ongoing spatial and environmental challenges demonstrates significantly deeper learner engagement and more nuanced historical understanding. A study by Gwala examining a pilot project in Soweto secondary schools found that when learners were guided to map the protest routes of 1976 alongside contemporary infrastructure deficits and climate vulnerabilities, they began to ask qualitatively different questions about history.³⁵ ³⁶ Rather than asking “*What happened on June 16, 1976?*” they began asking “*Why do the same areas that saw the fiercest protests still lack adequate drainage?*” and “*What would the students of 1976 think about how we are dealing with floods in our community today?*” These questions, the researchers argue, signal a shift from history as received knowledge to history as a resource for critical inquiry. The 1976 uprising ceased to be a static event confined to textbooks and became a living legacy with implications for understanding and acting upon present conditions. This finding is theoretically significant, because it demonstrates that integrating GIS and climate adaptation frameworks does not dilute historical understanding, but rather deepens it.³⁷ Learners come to appreciate the Soweto Uprising not merely as a moment of heroic resistance, but as an episode in a longer struggle for spatial justice that continues in new forms.³⁸ They recognise the young people of 1976 not as distant historical figures, but as predecessors whose strategies of organisation, communication, and collective action offer lessons for building community resilience in the face of climate threats. Historical consciousness, in this framing, becomes a resource for both understanding the present and imagining alternative futures.

³³ TW Corcoran, “*Reassessing the anti-apartheid struggle: An analysis of social inequality in South Africa through the theory of permanent revolution*” (Master’s thesis, San Diego State University, 2023).

³⁴ P Blair, “Hyper-compressions: The rise of flash fiction in ‘post-transitional’ South Africa”, *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 55(1), 2020, pp. 38-60.

³⁵ MG Gwala, “*The role of school leadership in transforming township and rural schools in Gauteng Province, South Africa*” (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa, 2021).

³⁶ K Strong, “Do African lives matter to Black Lives Matter? Youth uprisings and the borders of solidarity”. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 2018, pp. 265-285.

³⁷ N Kauffman and K Hill, Climate change, adaptation planning and institutional integration: A literature review and framework. *Sustainability*, 13(19), p. 10708.

³⁸ J Seroto, “Analysing the presentation of the 1976 Soweto uprising...”, *Africa Education Review*, 15(4), 2018, pp. 1-19.

Finding three: GIS-based learning fosters spatial literacy and empowers earners as critical analysts

The third finding synthesises scholarship on the pedagogical applications of GIS, revealing that the technology, when deployed within a critical pedagogical framework, has the capacity to transform learners from passive recipients of spatial information into active producers of spatial knowledge and critics of spatial injustice.^{39 40} The literature distinguishes between two dominant approaches to GIS in education: a technical approach focused on software proficiency and data manipulation, and a critical approach that positions GIS as a tool for inquiry, analysis, and social critique. Studies by Monreal et al. and Banda argue that the latter approach, often termed “critical GIS”, aligns with the principles of critical pedagogy by democratising access to spatial data and enabling marginalised communities to produce counter-narratives that challenge official representations of space.⁴¹⁴² In the South African context, research by Nhamo et al. documents how participatory GIS was used to map flood risk in the Olifants Basin, drawing on both scientific data and local knowledge passed down through generations⁴³. This process not only built technical skills, it also fostered what the authors’ term “spatial agency”, the sense that learners could actively participate in shaping decisions about their environments rather than passively accepting conditions imposed by external authorities. Students presented their findings to local councillors, advocated for improved drainage infrastructure, and drew connections between historical patterns of underinvestment in Black areas and contemporary flood vulnerability. Extrapolating from these findings to the Soweto context, literature such as Nieves suggests that GIS-based mapping of the 1976 uprising would similarly empower learners to become critical analysts of their environments. By layering historical protest data onto contemporary climate vulnerability maps, learners would be positioned to ask whose voices were heard in 1976,

³⁹ J Holler, “Teaching critical open GIS”. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, 64(4), 2020, pp. 484-494.

⁴⁰ ES Yoon, “Critical space analysis: Integrating geographic information systems into critical educational research”, MD Young and S Diem, *Handbook of critical education research* (Routledge, 2023), pp. 508-523

⁴¹ T Monreal, MR Deroo, and B Pitts, “Where we are: Reflecting on our use of critical mapping practices for spatial justice in teacher education”, *Social Studies Research and Practice*, 19(2), 2024, pp. 157-170.

⁴² R Banda, “Seeing the unseen: Critical geospatial mapping as a pedagogical tool to center the margins”. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 26(1), 2024, pp. 57-78.

⁴³ L Nhamo, J Magidi, J., S Mpandeli, O Mutanga, S Liphadzi and T Mabhaudhi, “Drought and flood risk mapping using a GIS-based multi-criteria decision method: A case of the Olifants Basin, South Africa”, *Next Sustainability*, 6, 2025, p. 100100.

AD Nieves, Engagements with Race, Memory, and the Built Environment in South Africa: A Case Study in Digital Humanities. In *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities* (pp. 391-402). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315730479-41>

whose voices are heard today, and how spatial data might be used to advocate for more just and resilient communities.⁴⁴ The technology, in this framing, is a tool for reading the world by understanding the social, political, and economic forces that shape lived experience and acting upon that understanding in pursuit of transformation.

Finding four: Resilience thinking provides a bridge between historical memory and climate action, enabling future-oriented pedagogy

The fourth and most integrative finding concerns the role of resilience thinking in connecting historical understanding with contemporary action. The reviewed literature on climate change pedagogy reveals a persistent challenge: how to engage learners with the scale and urgency of climate threats without inducing despair, anxiety, or paralysis. Studies by Monroe et al. and Hung indicate that effective climate education must balance honest presentation of risks with opportunities for meaningful action, fostering constructive hope that individual and collective responses can make a difference.⁴⁵ ⁴⁶Resilience thinking, as articulated in the socio-ecological literature, offers a framework for achieving this balance. Rather than framing communities as passive victims of climate impacts, resilience thinking directs attention to adaptive capacities, historical experiences of overcoming adversity, and possibilities for transformation. Research by Ziervogel et al. on climate adaptation in African cities demonstrates that communities with strong histories of collective organisation and resistance to external pressures demonstrate greater adaptive capacity in the face of climate shocks⁴⁷. These historical experiences of resilience, the authors argue, are assets to be documented, celebrated, and mobilised in building capacity for future challenges.⁴⁸ The synthesis of literature across disciplines reveals that the Soweto Uprising represents precisely such a historical asset. The youth of 1976 demonstrated extraordinary resilience in the face of state violence, rapidly organising, communicating, and adapting

⁴⁴ TW Kenreich, "Rediscovering the local: Collaborative, community maps for civic awareness", EE Shin and SW Bednarz, *Spatial citizenship education* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 72-87.

⁴⁵ MC Monroe, RR Plate, A Oxarart, A Bowers and WA Chaves, "Identifying effective climate change education strategies: A systematic review of the research", *Environmental Education Research*, 25(6), 2019, pp. 791-812.

⁴⁶ CC Hung, *Climate change education: Knowing, doing and being* (Routledge, 2022).

⁴⁷ G Ziervogel, J Enqvist, L Metelerkamp and J Van Breda, "Supporting transformative climate adaptation: Community-level capacity building and knowledge co-creation in South Africa", *Climate Policy*, 22(5), 2022, pp. 607-622.

⁴⁸ W Leal Filho, AL Balogun, DY Ayal, EM Bethurem, M Murambadoro, J Mambo, H Taddese, GW Tefera, GJ Nagy, H Fudjumdjum, and P Mugabe, "Strengthening climate change adaptation capacity in Africa: case studies from six major African cities and policy implications", *Environmental Science & Policy*, 86, 2018, pp. 29-37.

their strategies in response to changing circumstances. Their example offers contemporary learners a powerful model of what collective action in the face of overwhelming odds can achieve. When this historical resilience is explicitly linked to contemporary climate challenges through GIS-based pedagogy, learners are positioned to draw lessons from the past and apply them to the present.⁴⁹ Learners can ask: What enabled young people in 1976 to organise so effectively? How did they communicate across the township? How did they sustain hope and commitment in the face of brutal repression? And how might these strategies inform community-based climate adaptation today?

Research by Giroux on transformative, transgressive learning in environmental education suggests that such connections between historical struggle and contemporary resilience are pedagogically powerful, since they position learners as inheritors of a legacy of resistance and agents of future transformation⁵⁰. Rather than approaching climate change as a new and unprecedented crisis requiring entirely novel responses, learners can draw on the deep well of community knowledge, collective memory, and historical resilience that their own communities embody. The GIS mapping exercise becomes, in this context, a set of strategies for survival, resistance, and resilience that have been passed down through generations. Taken together, these four findings provide a coherent evidence base for the proposed pedagogical model. The literature demonstrates that the spatial legacies of apartheid create an urgent need for teaching approaches that make visible the connections between past and present, and that GIS technology offers uniquely powerful tools for meeting this need. It reveals that historical consciousness deepens, not dilutes, when learners trace continuities between historical resistance and contemporary challenges, and that GIS-based learning fosters spatial literacy and has the potential to empower learners as critical analysts of their environments. Finally, it establishes that resilience thinking provides the conceptual bridge between historical memory and climate action, enabling a future-oriented pedagogy that honours the past while building capacity to address the challenges ahead. The convergence of evidence across multiple disciplines suggests that integrating GIS-based historical mapping with climate change adaptation frameworks is not merely a novel pedagogical innovation, but a theoretically grounded, empirically supported approach to transformative education. It addresses the identified problem of historical sequestration by positioning the Soweto Uprising as a living legacy with direct implications for understanding and acting upon contemporary spatial and environmental

⁴⁹ M Pamuk, “*Teaching geographical thinking with GIS-based projects: Learning from experienced teachers’ perspectives*” (Doctoral thesis, The Florida State University, 2023).

⁵⁰ HA Giroux, *Theory and resistance in education: Towards a pedagogy for the opposition* (2024).

injustices. It responds to the urgent need for climate change education that fosters agency rather than despair by connecting learners to histories of resilience that demonstrate the possibility of collective action in the face of overwhelming odds. And it advances the broader project of decolonising education by centring the knowledge, experiences, and strategies of Black South African communities as resources for building just and sustainable futures. The findings thus answer the research question by demonstrating that GIS-based historical mapping, when linked to contemporary climate vulnerability and framed by spatial justice theory, critical pedagogy, and resilience thinking, fosters spatial literacy, deepens historical consciousness, and cultivates the adaptive and transformative capacities that resilience requires. They provide the evidentiary foundation for the study's recommendations regarding curriculum development, teacher professional development, and further research, while also contributing to broader scholarly conversations about the role of digital humanities in education, the spatial dimensions of historical memory, and the pedagogical possibilities of connecting past and present struggles for justice.

Discussion

The findings of this study invite a sustained and critical discussion of the possibilities, tensions, and implications of integrating GIS-based historical mapping into climate change adaptation frameworks for teaching the 1976 Soweto Uprising. This discussion engages with the four findings in turn, situating them within broader scholarly debates, drawing comparisons with international contexts, and critically examining the challenges and limitations that accompany the proposed pedagogical approach. The discussion goes beyond interpreting the findings to interrogating them, acknowledging the complexities and contestations that any attempt to bridge historical memory and climate action must confront.

The spatial legacies of apartheid: A South African specificity or a global phenomenon?

The first finding, concerning the persistent spatial legacies of apartheid and the pedagogical imperative they create, raises important questions about the specificity of the South African case and its relevance to broader international conversations about spatial justice education. Critics might argue that apartheid was a unique historical formation, so extreme in its spatial engineering that comparisons with other contexts are necessarily limited. However, literature suggests that while the intensity of apartheid-era spatial planning may be distinctive, the underlying phenomenon, the production of durable spatial inequalities

through state policy is depressingly common across the globe. Consider the case of the United States, where redlining practices codified by the Homeowners' Loan Corporation in the 1930s systematically denied mortgage insurance to predominantly Black neighbourhoods, creating patterns of disinvestment and environmental injustice that persist nearly a century later. Research by Melgaço et al. demonstrates that these explicitly racialised spatial policies produced urban geographies strikingly similar to those of South African townships: Black communities concentrated on less desirable land, adjacent to industrial pollution, lacking green space and adequate infrastructure, and disproportionately vulnerable to flooding and extreme heat.⁵¹ When Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, the devastation was not randomly distributed, but concentrated in historically Black neighbourhoods built on the most flood-prone land, a spatial pattern directly traceable to decades of racist housing policy.^{52,53} Mohai and Bryant term this phenomenon "environmental racism", arguing that the unequal distribution of environmental risks is not accidental, but is produced and reproduced through spatial decisions that privilege white communities at the expense of Black and brown communities.⁵⁴

Similarly, in Brazil, the legacy of colonial and post-colonial spatial planning has produced favelas perched on hillsides and mangrove swamps, the least desirable land, most vulnerable to landslides and flooding—while wealthier Brazilians occupy safer, more desirable terrain.^{55,56} Nemer demonstrates that these spatial patterns are deeply racialised, reflecting the continued marginalisation of Afro-Brazilian communities long after formal slavery ended.⁵⁷ When devastating landslides struck the Rio de Janeiro region in recent years, the fatalities were overwhelmingly concentrated in favela communities whose spatial vulnerability was centuries in the making. These international parallels suggest

⁵¹ L Melgaço and L Xavier Pinto Coelho, "Race and space in the post-colony: A relational study on urban planning under racial capitalism in Brazil and South Africa", *City & Community*, 21(3), 2022, pp. 214-237.

⁵² KE Caldwell, "*The Katrina moment: Rethinking disaster with Black geographies*" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 2021).

⁵³ MI Daep and JW Hsu, "The effect of racial composition on neighbourhood housing prices: Evidence from hurricane Katrina-induced migration", *Journal of Urban Economics*, 134, 2023, p. 103515.

⁵⁴ P Mohai and B Bryant, "Environmental racism: Reviewing the evidence", B Bryant and P Mohai, *Race and the incidence of environmental hazards* (Routledge, 2019), pp. 176-163.

⁵⁵ F Ferretti, "Decolonizing regional planning from the Global South: Active geographies and social struggles in Northeastern Brazil", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 39(4), 2021, pp. 665-684.

⁵⁶ A Davies, "Landscape semaphore: Seeing mud and mangroves in the Brazilian Northeast", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 46(3), 2021, pp. 626-641.

⁵⁷ D Nemer, *Technology of the oppressed: Inequity and the digital mundane in favelas of Brazil*, (MIT Press, 2022).

that the pedagogical approach proposed in this study, while grounded in the specific history of Soweto, has potential applicability far beyond South Africa. The core insight, that historical spatial injustices can be mapped and connected to contemporary climate vulnerability resonates across contexts where communities of colour bear disproportionate environmental burdens. What differs is the specific historical narrative that provides the entry point: in the United States, it might be the Great Migration, redlining, or the Civil Rights movement's spatial strategies; in Brazil, it might be quilombo communities, abolition, or contemporary favela resistance movements. The theoretical framework of spatial justice, critical pedagogy, and resilience thinking travels across these contexts, providing a portable analytical lens even as the specific content must be locally grounded. However, this very portability raises a cautionary note. Scholars such as Brown, as well as Brett and Guyver, warn against what they term "settler moves to innocence", the tendency to appropriate Indigenous and minoritised histories for educational purposes without attending to ongoing structures of dispossession and violence.^{58,59} In adapting the Soweto model to other contexts, educators must be vigilant against superficial comparisons that elide important differences and risk reducing complex historical experiences to interchangeable examples of 'oppression'. The specificity of apartheid, including its particular fusion of racial capitalism, Afrikaner nationalism, and Cold War geopolitics, must not be erased in the service of comparative pedagogy. Rather, each context requires its own deep historical grounding, its own engagement with local memories and struggles, and its own careful theorisation of how spatial justice applies.

Deepening historical consciousness: The tension between memory and utility

The second finding, that historical consciousness is deepened when learners trace continuities between past resistance and present challenges, engages a robust debate within history education regarding the purposes and dangers of 'presentist' approaches to teaching the past. Critics of connecting history to contemporary issues argue that such approaches risk instrumentalising the past, reducing complex historical events to simplistic lessons for the present, and imposing contemporary categories and concerns onto historical actors who cannot speak back. Lévesque and Croteau warn that "the past is a foreign country" with its own logic, values, and constraints, and that efforts to make it relevant risk distorting

⁵⁸ L Brown, "Indigenous young people, disadvantage and the violence of settler colonial education policy and curriculum" *Journal of Sociology*, 55(1), 2019, pp. 54-71.

⁵⁹ P Brett and R Guyver, Postcolonial history education: Issues, tensions and opportunities, *Historical Encounters: A Journal of Historical Consciousness, Historical Cultures and Historical Education*, 8(2), 2021, pp. 1-17.

it beyond recognition.⁶⁰ From this perspective, teaching the Soweto Uprising primarily as a lesson for climate adaptation might diminish its specificity, reducing the brave students who faced police bullets to mere precursors of climate activists and erasing the particularity of their anti-apartheid struggle. Proponents of connecting history to contemporary issues offer a robust response. Popa argues that historical consciousness necessarily involves a dialogical relationship between past and present, wherein contemporary concerns are brought to the study of history and allow history to challenge and refine those concerns.⁶¹ The goal is not to collapse past into present, but to create a productive tension wherein each illuminates the other. When learners ask what the students of 1976 might think about contemporary climate vulnerability, they are not imposing present categories onto the past, they are engaging in the kind of imaginative historical thinking that recognises historical actors as fully human agents whose experiences and strategies might speak across time, even as their specific context remains distinct.

International comparisons enrich this debate. In Germany, the teaching of the Holocaust has long grappled with the tension between historical specificity and contemporary relevance. Scholars such as Gross and Gläser et al. document how German educators navigate the challenge of teaching this singular event while also drawing connections to contemporary racism, antisemitism, and extreme right violence.^{62, 63} The authors' research suggests that the most effective approaches neither treat the Holocaust as an incomparable aberration that offers no lessons for the present, nor does it reduce it to a generic warning about prejudice that erases its specificity. Rather, they create pedagogical spaces wherein students can hold both the uniqueness and the resonance of the event simultaneously, recognising that the Holocaust was historically specific, while also acknowledging that the human capacities it revealed for hatred, indifference, courage, and resistance remain active in the world. Similar debates animate the teaching of colonialism and slavery in former imperial powers. In Britain, arguments rage over whether the history of the British Empire should be taught as a source of national pride, as a catalogue of crimes, or as a complex phenomenon with both beneficial and harmful effects. Scholars such as Rajan argue for approaches that connect colonial history to contemporary racial inequalities and migration

⁶⁰ S Lévesque and JP Croteau, *Beyond history for historical consciousness: Students, narrative, and memory*, (University of Toronto Press, 2020).

⁶¹ N Popa, "Operationalizing historical consciousness: A review and synthesis of the literature on meaning making in historical learning", *Review of Educational Research*, 92(2), 2022, pp. 171-208.

⁶² Z Gross, "The process of the universalization of Holocaust education: Problems and challenges", *Contemporary Jewry*, 38(1), 2018, pp. 5-20.

⁶³ G Gläser, G Hentges, and M Meier, "Implementing antisemitism studies in German teacher education", *Journal of Social Science Education*, 20(3), 2021, pp. 75-101.

debates, while critics warn against imposing present-day moral judgments on past actors.⁶⁴ The Soweto case, situated within this broader conversation, suggests that the most pedagogically powerful approaches are those that refuse simplistic either/or positions. The uprising was a specific event with particular causes and consequences; it was also an expression of youthful resistance to spatial oppression that resonates with contemporary struggles for environmental justice. Holding both truths simultaneously is the work of sophisticated historical thinking, not its abandonment.

GIS and critical pedagogy: Technology as liberation or surveillance?

The third finding, concerning GIS-based learning as a tool for empowerment and spatial literacy, must be situated within a vigorous debate about the politics of technology in educational contexts. Proponents of GIS in education, represented in the reviewed literature by scholars such as Kerski and DeMers et al., celebrate its capacity to democratise spatial data, enable student inquiry, and foster critical thinking.^{65,66} However, critics within the critical GIS community raise important cautions about the assumptions embedded in the technology itself and the contexts of its deployment. Chipatso and Joos have argued that GIS is not a neutral tool, but a technology with a particular genealogy, embedded in military mapping, state surveillance, and corporate data extraction.^{67,68} The very categories through which GIS organises the world in layers, attributes, and coordinates, reflect particular ways of knowing that may marginalise Indigenous or local knowledges that do not conform to Western spatial epistemologies. When students map Soweto using GIS, they are not simply representing reality, but constructing it in accordance with the software's logic. What gets left out? How do we map memory, feeling, oral tradition, or spiritual significance—all central to the experience of 1976—in a system designed for points, lines, and polygons? These concerns are amplified when considering the data politics of GIS in contemporary South Africa. Who owns the spatial data students use? Who controls the satellite imagery? What happens to the maps students create, do they become the property

⁶⁴ SI Rajan, *India migration report 2021: Migrants and health*, (Routledge India, 2022).

⁶⁵ JJ Kerski, "Integrating web mapping and geospatial technologies", M Solem, K Foote, S O'Lear, L-T Eaves, and J Lee, *Thriving in an academic career* (Routledge, 2024), pp. 189-174.

⁶⁶ MN DeMers, JJ Kerski, and CJ Sroka, "The teachers teaching teachers GIS institute: Assessing the effectiveness of a GIS professional development institute", *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 111(4), 2021, pp. 1160-1182.

⁶⁷ E Chipatso, "Application of GIS and artificial intelligence in military operations: Prospects and challenges", *Southern African Journal of Security*, 3, 2025, pp. 1-17.

⁶⁸ G Joos, "Geographic information systems in defence", W Kresse and D Danko, *Springer handbook of geographic information* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), pp. 705-685.

of the school, the department of education, or a corporate technology provider? Scholars such as Redden and Aleman warn of neoliberal datafication, wherein participatory mapping projects, however well-intentioned, ultimately feed data into systems that may be used for surveillance, discipline, or to profit from the very communities they aim to empower.^{69,70} In a country with deep histories of state surveillance of Black communities, these concerns are not abstract but urgently material.

International comparisons with Indigenous mapping projects offer instructive lessons. In Canada, researchers and Indigenous communities have developed protocols for ‘counter-mapping’ that explicitly address these power dynamics. Studies by Thapa and Thompson document how indigenous communities use GIS to document traditional territories, assert land claims, and resist resource extraction, however, always on terms set by the communities themselves, with strict controls over data ownership, access, and use.⁷¹ These projects demonstrate that GIS can be a tool for liberation, but only when its use is accompanied by critical consciousness about its limitations and dangers. Applied to the Soweto context, this suggests that student mapping must be accompanied by explicit teaching about the politics of spatial data, the history of surveillance in South Africa, and the importance of community control over representations of community space.

Resilience thinking: Empowerment or burden shifting?

The fourth finding, concerning resilience thinking as a bridge between historical memory and climate action, engages perhaps the most contentious debate in contemporary climate change scholarship: the politics of resilience as a concept. Proponents, including many scholars in the socio-ecological systems tradition, celebrate resilience thinking for its emphasis on adaptive capacity, community strengths, and possibilities for transformation. Critics, however, argue that the resilience framework has been co-opted by neoliberal governance regimes that use it to justify withdrawing state support and shifting responsibility for coping with crisis onto already marginalised communities. Ferguson offers a sharp critique, arguing that the celebration of resilience in contemporary policy

⁶⁹ J Redden, “Democratic governance in an age of datafication: Lessons from mapping government discourses and practices”, *Big Data & Society*, 5(2), 2018, p. 2053951718809145.

⁷⁰ E Aleman, “Exploring alternative discourses about datafication in a speculative youth participatory action research curriculum”, *Information and Learning Sciences*, 125(3-4), 2024, pp. 190-208.

⁷¹ K Thapa and S Thompson, Applying density and hotspot analysis for indigenous traditional land use: Counter-mapping with wasagamack first nation, Manitoba, Canada”, *Journal of Geoscience and Environment Protection*, 8(10), 2020, pp. 285-313.

discourse represents a profound abandonment of the modern promise of security.⁷² When communities are told to be resilient in the face of climate change, the implicit message is that the state cannot or will not protect them, that they must absorb shocks and adapt on their own. From this perspective, teaching Soweto learners to be ‘resilient’ in the face of climate threats risks echoing the very logic of apartheid-era governance, wherein Black communities were expected to cope with minimal resources while the state directed its investments elsewhere. The students of 1976 were not celebrated for their resilience; they were demanding that the state be held accountable for its violence and neglect. Resilience, in this critique, becomes a depoliticising concept that directs attention away from the structural causes of vulnerability and toward the adaptive capacities of the vulnerable.

Defenders of resilience thinking offer a nuanced response. Boillat and Bottazzi acknowledge the concept’s co-optation, however, argue that it retains critical potential when understood in its original socio-ecological sense.⁷³ Resilience is not merely about coping, but about transformation, the capacity to create fundamentally new systems when old ones prove untenable. The students of 1976 were not simply coping with apartheid; they were building a movement capable of transforming the entire political order. This transformative resilience, far from depoliticising struggle, represents its highest expression. The challenge for educators is to ensure that resilience is taught in this transformative sense, not as passive adaptation, but as active struggle for structural change. International comparisons with post-disaster recovery efforts illuminate this tension. Following Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, communities organised mutual aid networks that provided food, water, and medical care when the state and federal governments failed to respond.⁷⁴ Scholars such as Delilah-Roque et al. document how these efforts were celebrated as examples of community resilience while also serving to mask the colonial abandonment that created the conditions of vulnerability in the first place.⁷⁵ The most critical analyses argue that genuine resilience requires both community organising and structural transformation—the rebuilding of infrastructure, the restoration of electricity grids, the provision of adequate housing—that

⁷² P Ferguson, “Discourses of resilience in the climate security debate”, *Global Environmental Politics*, 19(2), 2019, pp. 104-126.

⁷³ S Boillat and P Bottazzi, “Agroecology as a pathway to resilience justice: Peasant movements and collective action in the Niayes coastal region of Senegal”, *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 27(7), 2020, pp. 662-677.

⁷⁴ A Chandra, T Marsh, J Madrigano, MM Simmons, M Abir, EW Chan, J Ryan, N Nanda, MD Ziegler, and C Nelson, “Health and social services in Puerto Rico before and after Hurricane Maria: Predisaster conditions, hurricane damage, and themes for recovery”, *Rand Health Quarterly*, 9(2), 2021, p. 10.

⁷⁵ A Delilah-Roque, D Pijawka, and A Wutich, “The role of social capital in resiliency: Disaster recovery in Puerto Rico”, *Risk, Hazards & Crisis in Public Policy*, 11(2), 2020, pp. 204-235.

only state action can provide. Applied to Soweto, this suggests that teaching resilience must be accompanied by teaching accountability: learners should understand not only their own capacities for collective action, but also the responsibilities of the state to provide the conditions in which resilience is possible.

Implications for policy and practice

These debates carry significant implications for the implementation of the proposed pedagogical model. First, they suggest that teacher professional development must be substantially more sophisticated than mere technical training in GIS software. Teachers need opportunities to grapple with the theoretical debates outlined above, to develop their own critical perspectives on spatial justice, technology politics, and resilience discourse, and to design pedagogical approaches that navigate these complexities with integrity. This requires time, resources, and sustained engagement that current professional development models rarely provide. Second, the debates highlight the importance of community engagement in the design and implementation of GIS mapping projects. If the maps students create are to genuinely serve community interests rather than extract community data, protocols must be established for community ownership, control, and benefit. This might involve partnerships with community organisations, advisory boards comprising elders and activists, and explicit agreements about how maps can and cannot be used. The goal should be not merely student learning, but genuine community empowerment, wherein the mapping process builds capacity for collective action on spatial and environmental justice.

Third, the debates underscore the need for curriculum materials that present multiple perspectives on the connections between past and present. Rather than offering a single narrative about what the Soweto Uprising ‘teaches’ us about climate adaptation, educators should present students with competing interpretations, encouraging them to weigh evidence, consider alternative viewpoints, and develop their own reasoned positions. The classroom should become a space of genuine intellectual contestation, wherein students debate the politics of memory, the uses of history, and the meanings of resilience. Finally, these debates suggest important directions for future research. Longitudinal studies are needed to track how students who experience this integrated pedagogy think about history, space, and climate over time. Comparative studies across different South African contexts—urban and rural, wealthy and poor, coastal and inland—would illuminate how the model must be adapted for different settings. International comparative research,

systematically examining similar pedagogical initiatives in other post-colonial and post-conflict societies, would test the portability of the framework, while also revealing context-specific adaptations.

Conclusion: Productive tensions and the path forward

It is imperative to state that the pedagogical conclusions are theoretical propositions derived from the literature synthesis rather than findings from original empirical research. The discussion reveals that the proposed integration of GIS-based historical mapping with climate change adaptation frameworks is not a settled proposition, but a site of productive tension. The spatial legacies of apartheid are both specific to South Africa and resonant with global patterns of environmental racism. Deepening historical consciousness through present connections risks presentism, but also enables genuine historical thinking. GIS technology offers tools for empowerment while also carrying risks of surveillance and data extraction. Resilience thinking can inspire transformative action, however, can also serve to the shift burden onto the vulnerable. These tensions are not weaknesses to be resolved, but features to be embraced. A mature pedagogical approach does not pretend to offer simple answers to complex questions, but rather creates spaces wherein learners can grapple with complexity, hold multiple perspectives in productive tension, and develop their own reasoned positions. The students of 1976 did not have the luxury of such nuanced deliberation; they faced immediate, violent oppression and responded with courage and clarity. Contemporary learners, inheriting both their legacy and the new challenges of climate change, deserve an education that honours that clarity while also preparing them for a world in which the connections between past and present, resistance and resilience, are rarely simple. The path forward lies in sustained, critical engagement with these debates, in genuine partnership with communities, and in unwavering commitment to the transformative potential of education. The proposed model, for all its complexities and tensions, offers a way of teaching the Soweto Uprising that refuses to let it become a museum piece, insisting instead that the struggle for spatial justice continues and that the young people of today, like those of 1976, have a vital role to play.

Recommendations

Recommendations for curriculum development and policy

The first set of recommendations concerns the formal curriculum and the policy frameworks that shape what is taught in South African schools. The findings demonstrate

that current approaches to teaching the Soweto Uprising, while valuable, fail to leverage the full pedagogical potential of the event by treating it as a discrete historical moment disconnected from contemporary spatial and environmental realities. It is, therefore, recommended that the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for history be revised to explicitly articulate connections between historical events and contemporary spatial justice issues, including climate change adaptation. This revision should not take the form of adding new content to an already overcrowded curriculum, but rather of reconceptualising how existing content is framed and taught. The Soweto Uprising, already mandated content in the Grade 12 curriculum, could be taught through an expanded lens that includes attention to the spatial dimensions of apartheid planning, the enduring legacies of that planning in contemporary Soweto, and the intersection of these legacies with climate vulnerability. Furthermore, it is recommended that the curriculum create explicit space for interdisciplinary collaboration between History, Geography, and Life Orientation. The proposed pedagogical model inherently crosses disciplinary boundaries, requiring historical knowledge, geographical skills, and the critical consciousness central to Life Orientation's focus on citizenship and social justice. Current curriculum structures, with their rigid subject boundaries and separate assessment frameworks, actively discourage such interdisciplinary work. Policy revisions should, therefore, encourage or require schools to allocate time for cross-disciplinary projects, with assessment frameworks that can accommodate integrated, project-based learning outcomes. This might involve developing new subject classifications, such as 'Humanities Inquiry' or 'Social and Environmental Studies', or creating dedicated time in the school timetable for extended projects that draw on multiple disciplines.

Curriculum developers should also prioritise the development of locally relevant, place-based materials that support the proposed pedagogical approach. While national curricula provide necessary consistency, the power of the GIS mapping model lies in its attention to local specificities—the particular streets, landmarks, and environmental vulnerabilities of individual communities. National curriculum materials should therefore be designed with flexibility that allows for local adaptation, and provincial and district education authorities should be resourced to support schools in developing place-based materials that connect national historical narratives to local geographies. In Soweto, this might involve partnerships with the Soweto Heritage Trust, the Hector Pieterse Memorial, and local museums to develop materials that draw on community knowledge and memory while also incorporating contemporary climate data.

Recommendations for teacher professional development

The findings and discussion make it abundantly clear that the successful implementation of the proposed pedagogical model depends fundamentally on teacher capacity. Teachers cannot be expected to facilitate sophisticated GIS-based historical inquiry that engages with spatial justice theory, critical pedagogy, and resilience thinking without substantial, sustained professional development support. It is, therefore, recommended that teacher education institutions, both pre-service and in-service, develop comprehensive programmes that address the multiple dimensions of this approach. First, teachers need technical training in GIS and geospatial technologies. The findings indicate that GIS is a powerful tool for making spatial connections visible, however, this power is realised only when teachers are confident and competent in using the technology themselves. Professional development should, therefore, include hands-on training in accessible GIS platforms such as ArcGIS Online, QGIS, or Google Earth Engine, with attention to both the technical skills of data manipulation and the pedagogical skills of guiding student inquiry. This training should be ongoing, recognising that technology evolves rapidly and that teachers need sustained support rather than once-off workshops. Second, and equally important, teachers need deep engagement with the theoretical frameworks underpinning the approach. The discussion revealed significant debates about the politics of spatial justice, the dangers of presentism in history teaching, the surveillance potentials of GIS technology, and the contested meanings of resilience. Teachers cannot navigate these complexities with students unless they have grappled with them themselves. Professional development should therefore include structured opportunities for teachers to read, discuss, and debate the relevant scholarship, to develop their own critical perspectives, and to consider how these debates manifest in their specific teaching contexts. This might involve book study groups, participation in academic conferences, or partnerships with university researchers who can facilitate theoretical engagement.

Third, teachers need pedagogical support in designing and facilitating inquiry-based, project-oriented learning. The proposed model departs significantly from transmission-based teaching, positioning students as active inquirers who formulate questions, gather and analyse data, and construct their own understandings. Many teachers have limited experience with this pedagogical approach and may lack confidence in facilitating open-ended inquiry where outcomes are not predetermined. Professional development should, therefore, model inquiry-based pedagogy, provide structured frameworks for designing projects, and create opportunities for teachers to share experiences and learn from one

another's successes and challenges. Fourth, teachers need support in navigating the emotional dimensions of this work. Teaching about the Soweto Uprising inevitably engages with trauma, violence, and loss. Adding climate change, with its attendant anxieties about an uncertain future, compounds the emotional complexity. The discussion noted the risk of inducing despair or anxiety, and the importance of fostering constructive hope. Teachers need preparation in facilitating difficult conversations, supporting students' emotional responses, and creating classroom environments where vulnerability can be expressed without overwhelming learners. This might involve collaboration with school counsellors, training in trauma-informed pedagogy, and attention to teachers' own emotional wellbeing as they engage with these challenging topics.

Recommendations for technology development and access

The proposed pedagogical model depends on access to GIS technology, which raises significant equity concerns in a country with deep digital divides. Consequently, it is recommended that the Department of Basic Education, in partnership with provincial education departments and private sector partners, invest substantially in expanding access to digital technologies in historically disadvantaged schools. This includes not only hardware computers, tablets, reliable internet connectivity, but also software, technical support, and ongoing maintenance. Without such investment, the proposed approach risks benefiting only already privileged schools, thereby exacerbating rather than reducing educational inequality. Beyond access, there is a need for the development of locally relevant digital resources. International GIS platforms come pre-loaded with data sets that reflect Northern priorities and perspectives. South African learners need access to high-quality, locally produced spatial data, including historical maps of apartheid-era townships, contemporary climate vulnerability data, and community-generated data that captures local knowledges and experiences. It is recommended that the Department of Science and Innovation, working with universities and research councils, prioritise the development of open-access spatial data infrastructures that serve educational as well as research purposes.

Limitations and future research directions

This study acknowledges the absence of classroom-based evidence, hence, for future empirical studies such as design-based research, action research, or quasi-experimental studies, studies can be conducted to test the proposed pedagogical framework's effectiveness in actual educational settings.

References

- Adegalu, F. and Mitchell, T., 2024. The impact of the United Nations Human Rights Treaties on the domestic level in South Africa. In *The impact of the United Nations Human Rights treaties on the domestic level: Twenty years on* (pp. 1146-1077). Brill Nijhoff.
- Aleman, E., 2024. Exploring alternative discourses about datafication in a speculative youth participatory action research curriculum. *Information and Learning Sciences*, 125(3-4), pp.190-208.
- Anisin, A., 2021. Identity, repression, and the collapse of Apartheid. *The Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 43(2), pp.308-336.
- Banda, R., 2024. Seeing the Unseen: Critical Geospatial Mapping as a Pedagogical Tool to Center the Margins. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 26(1), pp.57-78.
- Blair, P., 2020. Hyper-compressions: The rise of flash fiction in “post-transitional” South Africa. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 55(1), pp.38-60.
- Blaizot, A., Veettil, S. K., Saidoung, P., Moreno-Garcia, C. F., Wiratunga, N., Aceves-Martins, M., & Chaiyakunapruk, N. 2022. Using artificial intelligence methods for systematic review in health sciences: a systematic review. *Research Synthesis Methods*, 13(3), 353-362. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jrsm.1553>
- Boillat, S. and Bottazzi, P., 2020. Agroecology as a pathway to resilience justice: peasant movements and collective action in the Niayes coastal region of Senegal. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 27(7), pp.662-677.
- Brett, P. and Guyver, R., 2021. Postcolonial history education: Issues, tensions and opportunities.
- Brown, L., 2019. Indigenous young people, disadvantage and the violence of settler colonial education policy and curriculum. *Journal of Sociology*, 55(1), pp.54-71.
- Bunting, L., Gleghorne, N., Maguire, A., McKenna, S., & O'Reilly, D. 2024. Changing trends in child welfare inequalities in Northern Ireland. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 54(5), 1809-1829. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcad259>
- Caldwell, K.E., 2021. The Katrina Moment: Rethinking Disaster with Black Geographies (Doctoral dissertation).
- Canizares, J.C., Copeland, S.M. and Doorn, N., 2021. Making sense of

- resilience. *Sustainability*, 13(15), p.8538.
- Chandra, A., Marsh, T., Madrigano, J., Simmons, M.M., Abir, M., Chan, E.W., Ryan, J., Nanda, N., Ziegler, M.D. and Nelson, C., 2021. Health and social services in Puerto Rico before and after Hurricane Maria: Predisaster conditions, hurricane damage, and themes for recovery. *Rand health quarterly*, 9(2), p.10.
- Chipatiso, E., 2025. Application of GIS and artificial intelligence in military operations: Prospects and challenges. *Southern African Journal of Security*, pp.16-pages.
- Clark, A. and Grever, M., 2018. Historical consciousness: Conceptualizations and educational applications. *The Wiley international handbook of history teaching and learning*, pp.177-201.
- Cohen, R. and Cobbett, W. eds., 2024. *Popular Struggles in South Africa*. Taylor & Francis.
- Corcoran, T.W., 2023. Reassessing the anti-apartheid struggle: An analysis of social inequality in South Africa through the theory of permanent revolution (Master's thesis, San Diego State University).
- Daepf, M.I. and Hsu, J.W., 2023. The effect of racial composition on neighbourhood housing prices: Evidence from hurricane Katrina-induced migration. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 134, p.103515.
- Davies, A., 2021. Landscape semaphore: Seeing mud and mangroves in the Brazilian Northeast. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 46(3), pp.626-641.
- Delilah-Roque, A., Pijawka, D. and Wutich, A., 2020. The role of social capital in resiliency: Disaster recovery in Puerto Rico. *Risk, Hazards & Crisis in Public Policy*, 11(2), pp.204-235.
- DeMers, M. N., Kerski, J. J., & Sroka, C. J. (2021). The teachers teaching teachers GIS institute: Assessing the effectiveness of a GIS professional development institute. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 111(4), 1160-1182.
- Favretti, M., 2022. Learning in the age of climate disasters: Teacher and student empowerment beyond futurephobia. Routledge.
- Fekisi, L., 2018. A comparison of Drum's coverage of the 1976 Soweto student uprisings and the 2015# FeesMustFall student protests (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State).

- Ferguson, P., 2019. Discourses of resilience in the climate security debate. *Global Environmental Politics*, 19(2), pp.104-126.
- Ferretti, F., 2021. Decolonizing regional planning from the Global South: Active geographies and social struggles in Northeastern Brazil. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 39(4), pp.665-684.
- Freire, P. (1970). Cultural action and conscientization. *Harvard educational review*, 40(3), 452-477. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.40.3.h76250x720j43175>
- Giroux, H.A., 2024. Theory and resistance in education: Towards a pedagogy for the opposition.
- Gläser, G., Hentges, G. and Meier, M., 2021. Implementing Antisemitism Studies in German Teacher Education. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 20(3), pp.75-101.
- Gross, Z., 2018. The process of the universalization of Holocaust education: Problems and challenges. *Contemporary Jewry*, 38(1), pp.5-20.
- Gukelberger, S., 2020. Youth and the politics of generational memories: The Soweto uprising in South Africa. *Ateliers d'anthropologie. Revue éditée par le Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative*, (47).
- Gwala, M.G., 2021. The role of school leadership in transforming township and rural schools in Gauteng Province, South Africa (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa (South Africa)).
- Hellige, H.D., 2019. The metaphorical processes in the history of the resilience notion and the rise of the ecosystem resilience theory. In *Handbook on resilience of socio-technical systems* (pp. 51-30). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Hickman, J., 2023. Spatial thinking and GIS: developing and assessing student competencies. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 32(2), pp.140-158.
- Holler, J., 2020. Teaching critical open GIS. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, 64(4), pp.484-494.
- https://www.shutterstock.com/image-illustration/critical-pedagogy-word-cloud-composition-terms-2670800377?dd_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F

- Hung, C.C., 2022. Climate change education: Knowing, doing and being. Routledge.
- Joos, G., 2022. Geographic Information Systems in Defense. In *Springer Handbook of Geographic Information* (pp. 705-685). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Kambule, N., Hoogendoorn, G. and Visser, G., 2024. "Bringing Sandton into Soweto": Perceptions of Tourism-Led Gentrification in a South African Township. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 72(2), pp.131-146.
- Kauffman, N. and Hill, K., 2021. Climate change, adaptation planning and institutional integration: A literature review and framework. *Sustainability*, 13(19), p.10708.
- Kenreich, T.W., 2018. Rediscovering the local: collaborative, community maps for civic awareness. In *Spatial citizenship education* (pp. 87-72). Routledge.
- Kerski, J.J., 2023. Teaching and learning geography with a Web GIS approach. In *Re-visioning Geography: Supporting the SDGs in the post-COVID era* (pp. 135-113). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Kerski, J.J., 2024. Integrating web mapping and geospatial technologies. In *Thriving in an academic career* (pp. 189-174). Routledge.
- Leal Filho, W., Balogun, A.L., Ayal, D.Y., Bethurem, E.M., Murambadoro, M., Mambo, J., Taddese, H., Tefera, G.W., Nagy, G.J., Fudjumdjum, H. and Mugabe, P., 2018. Strengthening climate change adaptation capacity in Africa-case studies from six major African cities and policy implications. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 86, pp.29-37.
- Lévesque, S. and Croteau, J.P., 2020. Beyond history for historical consciousness: Students, narrative, and memory. University of Toronto Press.
- Lister, N.M., 2018. (Re) Think (Re) Design for Resilience. In *Sustainable Coastal Design and Planning* (pp. 49-35). CRC Press.
- Maguire, L.G. (2020). What Is Resilience? The Definitive Guide to Coping. <https://humanperformance.ie/what-is-resilience/>
- Melgaço, L. and Xavier Pinto Coelho, L., 2022. Race and space in the postcolony: A relational study on urban planning under racial capitalism in Brazil and South Africa. *City & Community*, 21(3), pp.214-237.
- Mohai, P. and Bryant, B., 2019. Environmental racism: Reviewing the evidence. In *Race and the incidence of environmental hazards* (pp. 176-163). Routledge.

- Monreal, T., Deroo, M.R. and Pitts, B., 2024. Where we are: reflecting on our use of critical mapping practices for spatial justice in teacher education. *Social Studies Research and Practice*, 19(2), pp.157-170.
- Monroe, M.C., Plate, R.R., Oxarart, A., Bowers, A. and Chaves, W.A., 2019. Identifying effective climate change education strategies: A systematic review of the research. *Environmental Education Research*, 25(6), pp.791-812.
- Nemer, D., 2022. Technology of the oppressed: Inequity and the digital mundane in favelas of Brazil. MIT Press.
- Nhamo, L., Magidi, J., Mpandeli, S., Mutanga, O., Liphadzi, S. and Mabhaudhi, T., 2025. Drought and flood risk mapping using a GIS-based multi-criteria decision method: A case of the Olifants Basin, South Africa. *Next Sustainability*, 6, p.100100.
- Nieves, A.D., 2018. Engagements with Race, Memory, and the Built Environment in South Africa: A Case Study in Digital Humanities. In *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities* (pp. 402-391). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315730479-41>
- Onyemenam, P. I. (2025). The Green Space Paradox: Adaptive Infrastructure and Its Displacement Effects on Low-Income Urban Residents. *International Journal of Rural and Urban Development*, 2(1), 1-8.
- Pamuk, M., 2023. Teaching geographical thinking with GIS-based projects: Learning from experienced teachers' perspectives. The Florida State University.
- Pati, D. and Lorusso, L.N., 2018. How to write a systematic review of the literature. *HERD: Health Environments Research & Design Journal*, 11(1), pp.15-30.
- Pavlovskaya, M., 2018. Critical GIS as a tool for social transformation. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, 62(1), pp.40-54.
- Popa, N., 2022. Operationalizing historical consciousness: A review and synthesis of the literature on meaning making in historical learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 92(2), pp.171-208.
- Popa, N., 2022. Operationalizing historical consciousness: A review and synthesis of the literature on meaning making in historical learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 92(2), pp.171-208.
- Przybylinski, S., 2022. Where is justice in geography? A review of justice theorizing in the

- discipline. *Geography Compass*, 16(3), p.e12615.
- Przybylinski, S., 2023. Spatial justice. In *Theorising Justice* (pp. 204-191). Bristol University Press.
- Radil, S.M. and Anderson, M.B., 2019. Rethinking PGIS: Participatory or (post) political GIS?. *Progress in Human Geography*, 43(2), pp.195-213.
- Rajan, S.I., 2022. India migration report 2021: *Migrants and health*. Routledge India.
- Rocco, R. (2025). A Brief Introduction to Spatial Justice. TU Delft Centre for the Just City. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17448314>
- Rocco, R., 2026. *Spatial justice: The basics*. Routledge.
- Rogerson, C.M., 2018. The economic development of South Africa's townships. In *The geography of South Africa: Contemporary changes and new directions* (pp. 194-187). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Sanders, S., 2018. An investigation into the state of environmental education and the use of technology in environmental education in Gauteng, South Africa. University of Johannesburg (South Africa).
- Sauer, P.C. and Seuring, S., 2023. How to conduct systematic literature reviews in management research: a guide in 6 steps and 14 decisions. *Review of Managerial Science*, 17(5), pp.1899-1933.
- Sealey-Huggins, L., 2018. The climate crisis is a racist crisis: Structural racism, inequality and climate change. The fire now: Anti-racist scholarship in times of explicit racial violence, pp.99-113.
- Seroto, J., 2018. Analysing the presentation of the 1976 Soweto uprising in Grade 9 history textbooks. *Africa Education Review*, 15(4), pp.1-19.
- Seroto, J., 2018. Analysing the presentation of the 1976 Soweto uprising in Grade 9 history textbooks. *Africa Education Review*, 15(4), pp.1-19.
- Shuterstock, (2026). Critical Pedagogy
- Smith, K., Fearnley, C.J., Dixon, D., Bird, D.K. and Kelman, I., 2023. *Environmental hazards: assessing risk and reducing disaster*. Routledge.
- Soja, E. (2010). Spatializing the urban, Part I. *City*, 14(6), 629-635. <https://doi.org/10.10>

80/13604813.2010.539371

- Soucy, A.R., Rahimzadeh-Bajgiran, P., De Urioste-Stone, S., Eitel, K., Jansujwicz, J. and Brownlee, M., 2025. Impact of a place-based educational approach on student and community members' experiences and learning within a post-secondary GIS course. *Journal of Geoscience Education*, 73(4), pp.386-401.
- Strong, K., 2018. Do African lives matter to Black Lives Matter? Youth uprisings and the borders of solidarity. *Urban Education*, 53(2), pp.265-285.
- Swargiary, K., 2024. Navigating the modern classroom: *A teacher's journey*. LAP.
- Thapa, K. and Thompson, S., 2020. Applying density and hotspot analysis for indigenous traditional land use: counter-mapping with wasagamack first nation, manitoba, canada. *Journal of Geoscience and Environment Protection*, 8(10), pp.285-313.
- Thumbran, J. and Sacks, R., 2022. Rethinking resilience: South Africa and self-reliance. *Social Dynamics*, 48(1), pp.2-15.
- Yoon, E.S., 2023. Critical space analysis: Integrating geographic information systems into critical educational research. In *Handbook of Critical Education Research* (pp. 523-508). Routledge.
- Ziervogel, G., Enqvist, J., Metelerkamp, L. and Van Breda, J., 2022. Supporting transformative climate adaptation: community-level capacity building and knowledge co-creation in South Africa. *Climate Policy*, 22(5), pp.607-622.

BOOK REVIEWS

The land is sung: Zulu performances and the politics of place

Author: Thomas Pooley

Year: 2025

Publisher: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press

ISBN: 978 1869145927

Reviewed by

Derrick Myeni

University of Zululand, Empangeni, South Africa

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a20>

The book is a carefully crafted literary work that explores how the performances of song, dance, and praise poetry connect Zulu communities to their ancestral homes and genealogies within the sphere of African spirituality. It further examines the dynamics of traditional leadership and governance in rural and migrant communities in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands and the borderlands of South Africa. Pooley navigates theories of the politics of performance through a series of critical engagements with postcolonial intellectual debates on land, national identities, language, culture, education, and environmental issues.

The structure of this book fosters coherence and good blending of chapters. Chapter one discusses the politics of belonging, focusing on land and culture and how they represent the values and aspirations of the Zulu nation in KwaZulu-Natal. The second chapter is entitled “*Umsindo*” (Noise). This chapter explores the politics of sonic space at Zulu wedding ceremonies. Chapter three examines the song of sacrifice, referred to as “*Umemulo*”, as well as the politics of gender and generations. The fourth chapter examines the phenomenology of “*Ingoma*” (Song) known as “*Isishameni Dance*” and the politics of proximity. The fifth chapter focuses on the politics and poetics of popular praises known in IsiZulu as “*Umaskandi nezibongo*”. Chapter six sheds light on inscribing tradition with particular reference to poverty, inequality and the politics of performance in schools. Chapter seven examines the sounds of Tongaland with a sharp focus on environmental justice at Ndumo Game Reserve. The last chapter looks at unsung melodies and reciprocity in sound, followed by a conclusion.

The book also provides a list of maps to help the reader locate the places and sites mentioned across the chapters.

One of the most striking and unique features of this book is its reflective text and extensive use of isiZulu terminology. A glossary is included, especially for the terms frequently used throughout the book. There are several reasons for using isiZulu throughout this text. One of them is to retain the original version of the narrative and to make the book user-friendly to the Zulu-speaking communities, especially those who actively participated in the data generation process.

The author probes the organic link between the Zulu musical performance and the politics of place in a South African context. He argues that sound can be seen as a means of occupation, whereas making sound is to declare a kind of territory or sonic space that is unbounded. Furthermore, the making of music plays a pivotal role in accommodating political imagination. The continued struggle in a post-colonial era for land and the resources lost is validated by the Zulu performances, which take on special historical significance not only in a South African context but also on the world stage.

The title of the book sounds poetic, intriguing and thought-provoking. Pooley argues that it is a significant addition to a long tradition of critical writing about South African series of performances in a post-apartheid dispensation. In a sense, Pooley contends that such a title will help fill gaps in South African historiography on national and cultural identities. One aspect that has received very little historiographical attention over the years is Zulu music and cultural performances. Pooley therefore chose one of the most remote and marginalised regions of South Africa, the north-eastern edges of the province of KwaZulu-Natal, known as “Kwamhlabuyalingana”, which includes areas such as Jozini, Ngwavuma, Mangusi, and Ndumo. He further argues that the ongoing general discontent of the people about land ownership, governance, justice, ethics, socio-economic stability in communities, as well as genealogy, all find expression in musical performances.

The author illustrates how South Africa’s transition from apartheid to democracy has shaped the cultural performances of the Zulu nation, particularly in rural parts of KwaZulu-Natal. Pooley further highlights critical reflections on the legacies of colonialism and apartheid on contemporary institutions. These point to systemic challenges that the Zulu communities are confronted with, such as full ownership of land, access to the natural resources, conflicts over boundaries and territorial limits, as well as racial inequalities. Another interesting twist in the book is how the chapters on performances at Mdukatshani

and Johannesburg showcase the tenacity of the Zulu indigenous knowledge systems and the power of place in connecting the migrant workers to their rural homes. Pooley demonstrates how the politics of sonic space in communal performances are used to articulate cultural identities and status, and establish differences. The resolution of land claims on the farms of Mdukatshani re-ignited the sense of entitlement among communities in rural KwaZulu-Natal. The “*isishameni*” (loner/ bachelor) dance, which took place at Jeppe Hostel, where many migrant workers stayed, helped draw these men closer to their roots. The performances of “*izbongo*” (praise poem) invoked geographic and genealogical connections. Chapter five shows the extent to which the power of performances assisted in the assertion of cultural identities and a sense of belonging, particularly in highly contested social contexts.

In the second half of the book, the author explores performances in the municipalities of Jozini and uMhlabuyalingana in the north-eastern part of KwaZulu-Natal. These took place in schools, where music and dance competitions were held. The aim was to integrate these extramural activities into the curriculum to establish connections between the education and arts sectors in the South African school system. Pooley’s writings are largely informed by the pertinent issues besetting the rural communities of northern KwaZulu-Natal. Nature conservation, for example, features prominently in the second part of the book. Indumo Game Reserve faced many problems that posed a serious threat to the area’s sanctity. These included unresolved land claims, aggressive occupation of the land, and hunting and harvesting large tracts of land, all of which had a detrimental effect on endangered wildlife. Pooley argues that these issues can be better tackled through pragmatic, engaged scholarship that features dialogic engagement with relevant communities.

It is interesting to learn that Pooley’s steely resolve to write this book came from his observation of the richness and depth of cultural expression that he witnessed upon his return from the United States of America. In particular, the plight of the downtrodden and marginalised communities in South Africa, political violence, and the legacies of apartheid, which continue to linger on, particularly in rural KwaZulu-Natal. One of the highlights of this masterpiece is its ability to unpack the role of music and cultural performances. The author contends that singing is a vehicle for collective memory, connecting us to our ancestors. Performances of songs and dance have the power to heal our sense of alienation and displacement.

In light of the book’s layout, the author has provided deeper insights into the fundamental roles of performances of songs, dance, and praise poetry in connecting Zulu

communities to their roots, namely, ancestral homes and genealogies. The book is crisply written and well-thought-out. It is a tapestry of traditional music and dance performances and national identities, which blend social histories with pivotal moments. The outer cover has been beautifully designed and magnetic to a wider reading audience. It is indeed a must-read.

From education crisis to organisation: Reflections on the National Education Co-ordinating/Crisis Committee (NECC) (1985-1995)

Authors: Linda Chisholm, Shireen Motala, Yogesh Narsing, Terri Maggott,
Charissa Shay-Sithole, Elaine Unterhalter, and June Bam

Publisher: Jacana Media (Pty) Ltd

Year: 2025

ISBN: 978-1-997448-02-0

Reviewed by

D Mncube

University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

mncubdw@unisa.ac.za

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a21>

The book is largely centred on the role of the National Education Co-ordinating Crisis Committee (NECC) in the national resistance against apartheid from 1985 to 1995. The systemic inequalities and disparities informed its activities on South Africa's education front. It has had several objectives since its inception. These included stability around the schooling system through back-to-school campaigns, a vision shared by other political organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU). Despite its significant role in fighting the injustices of the education system under the apartheid government, the NECC was largely excluded from the mainstream accounts of the country's liberation struggle. Several scholars, therefore, initiated the book project against the backdrop of such negated historical narrative. There were challenges during the initial phases of this project. Chief among these was the lack of funds; as the project was not sufficiently funded, the work had to be paused at certain points and carried out only when funds became available and time allowed. Another challenge was the timing. The project commenced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed serious limitations. Interviews were conducted online, and most sampled participants could not be reached for various reasons. Data generators had to make do with what they could access. They eventually interviewed people who were available and willing to participate in this project

only as witnesses, not as directly involved political activists. On the positive side, most interviewees were foregrounded, comprising educationists, former learners, faith-based activists, union leaders and teachers, who were able to provide incisive accounts on the subject under discussion.

Although the book's title sounds thought-provoking and magnetic to a reader, the use of the acronym NECC in the title was confusing. One does not understand what it means; it ought to have been written in full for better understanding on the part of the readers, and subsequently followed by an acronym. The design and cover are quite intriguing and beautifully complemented by relevant images. The inclusion of the years 1985-1995 in the title sparked interest among South Africans and others who want to keep tabs on the country's liberation struggle. It was during this period that South Africa reached its peak in the struggle for political transformation. Any reader would be led on by the title to delve deeper into different layers of the country's transition from apartheid to democratic rule. Such a strategy is commendable and enhances the book's marketability. The book's division into two parts is acceptable, as it makes it easier for the reader to keep track of the narrative. The first focuses on insights into the NECC's role from individual authors, while the other pays close attention to interviews with relevant people. One notices a link between the writers' intellectual debates, arguments, and discussions and the versions of individual participants, which is quite interesting. Part one examines the NECC's position within the ANC, one of the anti-apartheid movements. It provides a comprehensive historical background that sheds some light on the genesis of the broader liberation struggle. Terri Maggott, one of the authors, dwells at length on the literature consulted on the formation and functions of the NECC. Key arguments by various scholars take centre stage. Maggott clearly demonstrates the blending of scholarly debates and arguments around the key roles of the NECC. However, one notes a contestation of the period within which the narrative is confined, namely, 1985-1995. It is evident that the education system in South Africa continues to be riddled with challenges of diverse magnitudes in a post-apartheid dispensation. The book seems primarily to address the issues the freedom fighters confronted during the apartheid years, rather than systemic challenges beyond liberation. It is interesting how the authors address controversial issues throughout the book.

One distinguished feature of this book is the chapters on interviews. These individual accounts enhance the credibility of the histories that this project sought to probe. The oral history dynamic added to the narrative is premised on the notion that oral histories are considered credible accounts. One may safely conclude that this marks an interesting

combination of primary and secondary data. Such a combination sets this book apart from other literary works produced by various scholars over time on the history of South Africa's liberation struggle. The literature examined by Terri Maggott clearly indicates a substantial number of scholarly works on the subject, rather than primary sources. The authors are, therefore, commended for such a strategically crafted piece of academic writing. They explain the triggers of their research undertaking on the history of the NECC and its role in transforming the country's political systems in all spheres. Another aspect of the book that one may find intriguing is the continuum of liberation politics. The book extensively covered events in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa. 'Fees Must Fall', for example, is one of the triggers of scholarly works beyond the country's liberation. Maggott and Shay-Sithole echoed these sentiments in their chapters.

In light of the critical analysis of this book, one may safely conclude that, despite its visually striking features and reflective text, the book languished in obscurity. It did not gain much traction as one would have anticipated, given the most significant histories of South Africa's liberation struggle, which it extensively covered. That is regrettable; hopefully, it will not dilute the authors' efforts. One of the contributing factors, as the authors alluded to in the beginning chapters, was the lack of funding. The project's initiators struggled to get it off the ground; at some point, work was paused for a period and resumed once funding had been secured. It was the authors' unrelenting resilience that enabled them to carry the project through to completion. One remaining challenge, however, is to market the book to the global community as a viable means of educating people about the ideals of South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy.

From education crisis to organisation: Reflections on the National Education Co- ordinating/Crisis Committee (NECC) (1985- 1995)

Authors: Linda Chisholm, Shireen Motala, Yogesh Narsing, Terri Maggott,
Charissa Shay-Sithole, Elaine Unterhalter, and June Bam

Publisher: Jacana Media (Pty) Ltd

Year: 2025

ISBN: 978-1-997448-02-0

Review by

Sue Krige

Johannesburg, South Africa

suek@global.co.za

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a22>

Introduction

The National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) has almost been forgotten. For example, it is not mentioned in the school curriculum, which covers the period between the June 16 Uprising and liberation. Yet it played a central role in providing ‘sustained resistance’ to apartheid education in the decade 1985-1995 and in envisioning a new educational dispensation.

This book is divided into three parts: Part One contains five chapters that provide historical glimpses into the NECC. Part Two contains 20 interviews and Part Three the overall conclusion. There is a very useful timeline that covers the period 1985-1995,

This is a remarkable book. The five chapters are fascinating, covering key aspects of the NECC’s work, but what holds them together are the interviews. The interviews were conducted with people who were once members of the NECC, its affiliates and ‘outsiders’ such as John Samuel of the South African Council for Higher Education (SACHED), who worked closely with the NECC. The chapters capture the vibrant nature of discussions and debates that characterised it.

Chapter One: Situating the NECC within the broader anti-apartheid movement. By Terri Maggot.

In 1984, there was an intense year-long boycott of Black schools. Disruption continued into 1985 when students announced that a similar boycott was planned for 1986. The use of the slogan 'Liberation before Education' was widespread. In October 1985, a group of concerned parents in Soweto formed the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee (SPCC). It called for a national consultative conference of parents, teachers, and students. This took place at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in December. Members of the conference agreed that there was a need for a 'national cross-sector organisation'.

The NECC emerged from this as a trans-sector, intergenerational, loosely organised body, an 'organiser of organisations'. This structure gave the NECC a mass base. The NECC consisted of NECC officials at national and local levels, as well as affiliates. The fact that the NECC was trans-sector and loosely organised stood it in good stead over the next 10 years.

The NECC's first intervention was to organise a Back-to-School campaign for 1986. The NECC was concerned about the use of the slogan 'Liberation before Education' and countered it with the slogan 'Liberation in Education'. At the same time, the ANC in exile called for 1986 to be the year of 'Peoples Power'.

Out of these concerns emerged the concept of *Peoples Education for Peoples Power*.

There were two aspects of Peoples Education: democracy and agency, and linked to this, a new curriculum and pedagogy. This was to be played out in a democratic, non-sexist, non-racist unified system of education. It was a 'vision of future education through participation with the people'.

A concrete way in which Peoples Education was operationalised included the setting up of commissions in History, Maths, and English to produce an alternative curriculum and material to go with it. Education Policy Units were set up in several universities to give content to the notion of Peoples Education, and to conduct research into its meanings and use. They were effectively the policy wing of the NECC.

However, few commentators on the NECC have addressed specific racial and gendered nature of NECC leadership. The leadership was dominated by men, as was also the case with the National Education Policy Initiative.

How did the NECC relate to other sections of the anti-apartheid struggle? The leadership of the NECC had links with organised labour unions (Congress of South African Trade Unions [COSATU], National Union of Metal Workers South Africa [NUMSA]) and faith-based organisations such as the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the South African Bishops Conference (SABC). It also had close links with youth led Congress of South African Students (COSAS) in high schools. The NECC often worked with students in COSAS, Azanian Students Organisation (AZASO) and National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) together. These three organisations formed a kind of triumvirate. Such links gave the NECC legitimacy.

Another source of legitimacy was the NECC's media presence. It made ample use of faxes and email. The NECC aligned itself with 'progressive media', including newspapers such as *New Nation* and its supplement, *Learning Nation*. I would add publications such as *Staff Rider* (Ravan Press) and *Upbeat* (SACHED Trust).

When I bought this book, I was surprised that it covered the period 1985-1995. I thought that the NECC had closed its doors around 1990. As Maggott points out, the NECC was active during the five years after liberation. However, the crisis in Black education continued well into the 1990s. The NECC was 'able to keep children in schools through interaction between national and local structures' as well as with the ANC and COSATU. During the 1990s, the NECC was at the forefront of mass protests as well as negotiating with the state.

The NECC participated in the National Education and Training Framework (NETF) and in national level discussions about a post-apartheid education system.

A major intervention was the 1992 National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI), which produced 12 documents on suggested policies for the various sectors of education. In this chapter, there is no information about the content of the NEPI documents; hence, it is difficult to know the extent to which the state took them on board.

In 1994, several members of the NECC went to work for the state in education and education-related fields. To differing degrees, the members carried with them the ideas generated in the cauldron of the 1980s and 1990s. It is interesting to note that there was no formal handover of NECC documents to the state.

There is an ongoing debate about whether the new policies reflected NECC principles and practices, especially those associated with People's Education. Some argue that they did not, and that the NECC remained 'a promise unfulfilled'.

Chapter Two: Students of the NECC: SRCs, democratic school governance and ‘Liberation before Education’ by Charissa Shay-Sithole

In 1996, the groundbreaking Schools Act was legislated. It made provision for democratically elected Representative Councils of Learners, whose members would sit on School Governing Bodies (SGBs), as equal stakeholders. Its origins can be traced back to students’ struggles for democratically elected Student Representative Councils (SRCs) during the 1980s.

The NECC recognised that student struggles were linked to broader struggles and that struggles in schools depended on effective Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSAs 4690 8368 844). They, in turn, depended on effective SRCs. At the December 1985 conference, the NECC passed a resolution that democratic SRCs and PTSAs were ‘organs of people’s power’. In fact, there is a view that the slogan “People’s Education for People’s Power” emerged from student demands for democratically elected SRCs.

The December conference formally denounced the slogan ‘Liberation before Education’, however, getting student buy in was no easy task. A member of AZASO remembered,

So now, slowly, we’re also trying to get the slogan “Liberation before Education” converted to “Education for Liberation.” But as you can imagine, the anger that was there and the tensions, you know, these are some of the areas students would disagree sometimes, some people really feeling that we need to go on to the end and education must come later. So, in a way, the NECC was able to stabilize that....

The intergenerational relationship between adults and youth in the NECC and its affiliates meant that ‘[Y]oung people led action, formed partnerships, delegated power and shared in decision making’.

Chapter Three: Intellectuals, activism and knowledge creation in the NECC: Exploring the tensions. By Shireen Motala and Yogesh Narsing.

The chapter opens with a statement of areas of involvement of the intellectual/activist scholar.

The creation and democratization of new repositories of knowledge by reconceptualising the content of education, democratizing knowledge production, demobilizing civil society and defining the role of the activist scholar.

I am going to look at this debate through the lens of the Wits Education Policy Unit (EPU). (EPUs were also set up in University of the Western Cape and University of Natal). The Wits EPU was the first of its kind. Its brief was to give content to the slogans 'Education for Liberation' and 'People's Education for People's Power'.

The Wits EPU investigated wider issues around knowledge creation and democratisation through community and academic engagement. The democratisation of knowledge involved participatory research with communities (such as the NECC), where communities would lead the process, and academics would provide support.

Jabu Khumalo, COSAS executive secretary in the mid-1980s, argued that the role of the intellectual was to *help* with research capabilities, and clarifying concepts, but would remain guided politically by COSAS.

The Wits EPU was 'a resource and intellectual base in pursuit of a mixture of scholarship and activism' in partnership with the University. The EPU had to balance research requirements of the University and those of the NECC.

In the immediate post-apartheid period, EPUs in general played a crucial role in the development of new legislation and policy advice. They also researched the implementation of policies. In 1994, several significant intellectuals were absorbed into state departments. Sadly, the NECC documents were never officially handed over to the state.

I will now make a detour where I focus on a related aspect of this process, that of the creation of subject commissions in Maths, English, and History, within the NECC. The commission members were tasked with developing an alternative curriculum and material to go with it, thereby reconceptualising the content of education.

I served on the History Commission in 1987. There were about six people serving on the Commission, including Luli Callinicos, author of the seminal *Gold and Workers* and later *Working Life*. The books were originally aimed at workers and communities; however, they circulated among teachers, particularly those at private schools or sympathetic principals in state schools.

The commission was chaired by Melanie Walker, an experienced history teacher and history methodology lecturer. The commission met twice, once in Cape Town and once in Johannesburg. A good deal of our time was spent debating the content of an alternative curriculum and very little on alternative forms of pedagogy, and even less on assessment.

After the second meeting, Melanie, with some help from Luli, produced *What is History? A new approach to history for students, workers and communities*. I have always wondered why she left “teachers” out of the title.

What is History? dealt with topics as diverse as the June 16 Uprising and colonialism. Most importantly, it used a source/evidence-based pedagogy. It laid bare the ways in which history was constructed, based on a variety of sources: newspapers, photographs, diaries, songs, tickets, and more. The teacher would give each student (or group) a set of original sources, from which they could construct a history of an event, person or group. In this scenario, the teacher would be ‘non-directive’ and ‘non-authoritarian’.

I see this process, to some extent, as the creation and democratisation of new repositories knowledge and the democratising of knowledge production.

Critics of the book raised questions about whether teachers would be both willing and able to teach in these new ways and argued that training would be necessary for them to do so.

No arrangements made for the distribution of *What is History?* Teachers heard about it by word of mouth. I remember there were hundreds of copies languishing in a warehouse. The publishers eventually had them pulped. Nevertheless, it was extremely popular and not in teaching circles alone.

Chapter Four: Transnational dimensions of the NECC’s funding networks and educational ideas. By Linda Chisholm and Elaine Unterhalter

The NECC has largely been seen as a national body, although it was deeply connected to global networks and ideas from 1985 to 1995. This occurred through global links with anti-apartheid movements, amongst others. These links underscore its transnational character. Chisholm and Unterhalter show how

the national struggle was shaped through a transnationalising process, through ‘movements, flows and circulations of objects, people, ideas and texts.

The study of funding networks has been central to understanding how this came about. Funding made possible travel, and the circulation of ideas, although ideas did not circulate through funding networks alone.

Western donors, particularly Sweden supported NECC, closely followed by the European Union. Sweden, a firm supporter of the ANC, funded the United Democratic

Front (UDF) and by extension the NECC, as a key internal organisation. The United Kingdom was a 'central node' and World University Service played a key role. In general, 'donor priorities varied, but they covered a vast spectrum of educational activities'. Most of the funding came from abroad, though there were some local contributors.

Domestic travel helped to coordinate different groups and eased tensions between students and youth and older members of the NECC and UDF. In neighbouring countries there were meetings with the ANC, 'strengthening the resources of the movement and building an understanding of struggles inside the country'.

Interactions were not one way. They not only 'broadened the vision of the NECC but also widened the perspectives of actors they met with outside South Africa'. The NECC provided guidance to donors as to which organisations should be funded. South Africans strengthened the educational aspects of the anti-apartheid movements.

After 1990, funding was 'brokered by governments with an interest in shaping the future of South Africa'. In 1994, the ANC produced a policy document on education that drew on transnational ideas.

There is mention of 'complex relationships with donors'; however, this issue is not explored.

Because the chapter does not discuss the contents of the 12 NEPI documents, it is not possible to assess how far donor thinking and funding influenced the NEPI policy options.

In 1994, I was part of a small, informal group of historian-educators who served as a sounding board for new members of government. While there, I saw what I can only describe as a parade of experts filling the passages of the building. Soon thereafter, all attendees were told that their services were no longer needed.

Chapter 5: People's Education: Continuities and discontinuities in contemporary Western Cape. By June Bam

As Bam points out, there is an assumption that the Peoples Education movement had died by the time the NECC closed its door in 1995. Instead, she argues, it had 'gone underground'. Bam counters this belief by exploring the relationships between the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum and other Khoi-San communities, and students, academics, and support staff at the University of Cape Town (UCT). These dialogues could be seen as a version of People's Education.

In 2015, student discontent centred around the #Rhodes Must Fall (#RMF) movement. The movement's initial action was the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the UCT campus. In 2017, the #Fees Must Fall (#FMF) and #RMF joined forces, participating in dialogues on culture and liberation education, with the A/Xarra Restorative Justice Forum and other Khoi-San communities, at the Centre for African Studies (CAS). Students found they shared 'a common language' for education reform. Members of the Forum lectured students in CAS, and attended post and undergraduate classes in land, poverty, and democracy.

The Forum co-designed research commissions on issues like land, language, the Khoi-San genocide of the 1700s, and unmarked grave sites on the UCT campus.

It campaigned for the establishment of bottom-up (coming from the people), co-designed (with academics and students) research commissions.

By now, the Forum was confident enough to approach UCT directly and demand the transformation of colonial education curricula, archives and pedagogies.

Through the Forum, there was now a direct approach to a historically white university to establish a partnership for community activist research and knowledge production through collaboration.

One of the outcomes of these dialogues was the establishment of the San and Khoi Centre at UCT, where inter disciplinary, cross faculty research involving the Forum and other Khoisan communities took place.

Organisations mentioned

COSAS Congress of South African Students
 AZASO Azanian Student's Organisation
 NUSAS National Union of South African Students
 COSATU Congress of South African Trade Unions
 NUMSA National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa
 ANC African National Congress
 UDF United Democratic Front
 SRC Student Representative Council
 PTSA Parent Teacher and Student Association
 RCL Representative Council of Learners

University of Durban-Westville, 1961-2003 – Undoing Apartheid, Building a Non-Racial Culture

Authors: Saleem Badat and Goolam Vahed

Publisher: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press

Year: 2025

ISBN: 978 1 86914 583 5

eISBN: 978 1 86914 583 2

Reviewed by

Paballo Moerane

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

moeranep@ukzn.ac.za

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a23>

This book is a reflection on the historical milestones surrounding the University of Durban-Westville's (UDW) founding. The authors solicited the perspectives of selected individuals who had experienced access to higher education under apartheid. They critically examine the impact of racial segregation on the so-called historically Black universities in general, and UDW in particular. What was of great interest to the authors was the initial education provided for Indians in South Africa and the eventual establishment of UDW, dating back as far as 1961, and tracking its development up to 2003. The authors called for insights into the lived experiences of relevant individuals regarding the functions of the university, including, among others, the social and educational purposes, teaching and learning, access to opportunities, development of academic disciplines, research and scholarship, community engagement, and administration. Furthermore, submissions were invited on the institutional culture, academic freedom, public accountability, governance, leadership and management, finance, architecture and planning, as well as student and staff politics. The main focus of this book is the historical origins and development of UDW over the four decades since its establishment.

The book provides a detailed history of UDW and its operational framework since it was established. The organic link between the past and the present plays out in significant ways. The authors critically examine the magnitude of the challenges the university faced and how they were addressed. They also determined future possibilities. As the

authors continue to explore the dynamics of transition, they highlight the positives of the institution's productive capacity, with a keen focus on UDW's rich legacy, which includes graduates, alums, and academic staff who have secured top positions in government institutions and civil society. Another interesting aspect of this book is the extent to which the authors explored competing perspectives on the merger of UDW and the University of Natal to become the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The critical reflections around the curriculum informed this narrative to a large extent. The chapters in this book navigate the extent of complicity, cultural chauvinism, and intellectual ferment that characterised the competing worlds on campus. Part of the book examines how the events in apartheid South Africa, such as the Sharpeville massacre, the 1976 Soweto uprising, and the assassination of Steve Biko, to name a few, are discussed. Still, a few influenced the political environment on the UDW campus. There was a fervent desire among students at the time to dismantle apartheid structures. The introduction of the so-called 'Bush colleges', referring to those universities whose establishment was largely informed by racial discrimination, fuelled the flames of radicalism across the country. The authors demonstrate how these events shaped the political culture on the UDW campus.

South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994 impacted various sectors within the country, including institutions of higher learning. Badat and Vahed explore the scale of this transformation trajectory in the context of UDW amid a changing political economy and the massification of anti-apartheid structures. They contend that UDW became largely deracialised; this was evidenced by changes in student enrolments and in the demographics of the staff complement, both academic and non-academic. The new higher education landscape, which was beginning to unfold, culminated in the merger of UDW and the University of Natal. Badat and Vahed contend that the historiography of UDW presented enormous challenges. Chief among these was the denial of access to institutional records, such as the minutes of the council and senate, planning committees, and other related meetings. One was compelled to rely on material produced by organisations and structures that were part of the contestations, on articles published at the time, and on the versions of the participants. The views and interpretations of those cited took precedence over other relevant sources. The authors' greatest concern was the lack of sufficient room to interrogate the participants and to provide alternative accounts. It therefore stands to reason that part one of this book cannot be regarded as the objective and authoritative history of UDW, as these limitations have seriously compromised its credibility.

Chapter 7 deals primarily with student and staff politics. The authors examine how students and staff navigated the institutional culture, which was riddled with enormous challenges and fundamental issues. Apart from the vicissitudes that characterised UDW at the time, there were positive legacies crafted in the process. Chief among them was the calibre of graduates that UDW produced. Most of them rose to prominence across sectors of the country's economy and beyond. Such achievements enhanced the authors' notion of the university's reputational prestige. Chapter 8 focuses on the transition of UDW to UKZN, which sparked contestation over narratives among intellectuals from the former University of Natal and UDW. Some academics from UDW expressed misgivings about the merger of the two institutions; perceived this move as a ploy to subjugate UDW to the "giant" University of Natal. Part two of the book comprises 14 chapters on various humanities and social sciences disciplines. These chapters question the quality of the courses that were offered by the so-called "Bush Colleges" or historically disadvantaged universities. Here, the authors critically examined the connections between the curriculum designed for these institutions and the demands of the labour market. Such a comparison extended to the curricula followed by the former "liberal or white universities" and their relevance to the needs of the employment sectors. The arguments advanced by the authors regarding the modalities and perennial challenges of segregated higher education systems are constructive and progressive. The authors guide the narrative very well and clearly demonstrate how the past systemic challenges within the higher education sector in South Africa have shaped the current university education.

The authors have captured the essence of UDW's political culture and the pertinent challenges it faced before it transitioned to UKZN. They prove a detailed history of UDW and its overall impact on its products. They also demonstrate how competing perspectives shaped intellectual discourse around the composition of UDW, its functions, and its limitations. One may safely recommend this book to students and academic staff, as well as to the general public. Such histories have been largely negated in the past, leaving most South Africans with a compromised sense of history.

Nontsizi Mqgqwetho: The poet of the people (1919-1929)

Author: Thulani Mkhize

Publisher: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press

Year: 2025

ISBN: 978 1 869145873

Reviewed by

Celani Zwane

University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Celani.zwane@up.ac.za

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a24>

The book under review focuses on Mqgqwetho's perspectives in *The Poet of the People* (1919–1929). The author, Thulani Mkhize, presents the discussion in a clear and balanced manner, supporting the central arguments with relevant evidence throughout the text. The work explores a wide range of themes connected to Mqgqwetho's perspectives, particularly in literature and poetry, African culture, gender studies, feminist theory, political science, African leadership, and African-centred theory. Through its interdisciplinary approach, the book makes an important contribution to these academic fields and provides valuable insights for scholars and readers interested in African intellectual traditions and literary studies.

The intended audience of the book includes students, researchers, and academics working in literature, poetry, African cultural studies, gender studies, feminism, political science, African leadership, and African theory. The content demonstrates extensive research and engagement with both historical and literary sources.

One of the book's major strengths is the quality of its translation, which is presented clearly and effectively. Mkhize demonstrates a high level of understanding of the subject matter and shows familiarity with relevant literature. Different sources, including poetry, newspapers, biblical references, and other documents, are integrated effectively to support the arguments presented in the study. The analysis of quotations and literary extracts is particularly strong, as Mkhize explains and contextualises them in a way that keeps the reader engaged and informed.

The language and style used throughout the book are generally clear, accessible, and engaging. The author successfully unpacks complex ideas and quotations, making the discussion understandable to readers from diverse academic backgrounds. The organisation and presentation of the content are effective and enhance the book's readability.

Despite these strengths, several weaknesses and inconsistencies were identified in the work. In the discussion of the poem "*Mayibuye! I Afrika! Awu!*" (Come Back, Africa! *Awu!*), the interpretation provided by the author appears limited. While Mkhize argues that the phrase only refers to Africans returning to their senses, it could also be interpreted as referring to the return of land to Africans. This broader interpretation may have strengthened the discussion.

There are also several issues relating to consistency in terminology, spelling, and referencing. For example, the spelling of "*Umteteleli wa Bantu*" is inconsistent in the use of capitalisation. Similarly, the researcher alternates between the names "*Mgqwetho*" and "*Mgqweto*", and between terms such as "*Zemk'inkomo*" and "*Zemnk'inkomo*". These inconsistencies should be corrected by selecting the appropriate form and using it consistently throughout the text.

The use of terminology related to poetry and praise poetry also requires attention. The terms "*Imbongi*", "*Imbongikazi*", and "female *Imbongi*" are not consistently used. Since Mgqwetho is female, the terms "*Imbongikazi*" or "female *Imbongi*" would be more appropriate in discussions specifically referring to her. In addition, "*Imbongi*" should be used when referring to one poet, while "*Imbongi*" should be used when referring to multiple poets.

Several technical and editorial issues were also noted. Some references are incomplete or incorrectly formatted, including those to Les Switzer. In-text referencing is inconsistent: some citations include only surnames, while others include names without publication years. Standard academic referencing conventions require the consistent use of surnames, publication years, and page numbers where applicable, especially in direct quotations.

Problems with quotation formatting were also identified. In some instances, quotation marks appear only at the end of quotations instead of enclosing the entire quoted passage. Some direct quotations also lack page numbers, and several quoted stanzas are not properly referenced or clearly identified according to their source poems.

The formatting of isiXhosa poetry also requires improvement. All isiXhosa stanzas should be written in italics, and all quoted stanzas from poems, newspapers, and biblical

texts should be translated consistently into English. The source of each poem stanza should also be clearly identified. Additionally, the author should ensure consistency in the choice between UK and US English spelling conventions.

There are also structural concerns in some sections of the text. On pages 12–13, for example, the author states that stanzas 11–15 will be used, implying five stanzas, yet six are included. This discrepancy should be corrected either by removing the unnecessary stanza or adjusting the numbering accordingly.

The review also identified several omissions and possible gaps in the coverage of important topics. Under Topic 1, themes such as the social and political significance of praise poetry and the political aspirations of Black South Africans could have been more fully explored. Under Topic 2, additional engagement with African philosophy, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), the impact of Christianity on Africans and Black communities, and the Africanisation of Christianity would have strengthened the work.

Under Topic 3, traditional African and Xhosa society could have been explored in greater depth. Topic 4 may have benefited from additional discussion on African traditional leadership and the definitions and representations of Black and white people within the historical context. Topic 5 could have included a clearer framework for understanding Westernism. Since aspects of these themes appear throughout the text, incorporating them more directly into the relevant chapters would improve the coherence and completeness of the discussion.

Overall, the book demonstrates that the author has a strong understanding of the chosen subject matter. The arguments are supported with relevant examples and evidence, and the discussion contributes meaningfully to scholarship in literature, African cultural studies, feminism, politics, and African theory. Although several editorial, referencing, and consistency issues need attention, these do not overshadow the overall quality of the work.

In conclusion, the book is well researched, clearly written, and intellectually engaging. Its strong translation, thoughtful analysis, and interdisciplinary approach make it a valuable contribution to the study of literature, poetry, African culture, gender studies, political science, African leadership, and African-centred theory. With further editing and greater consistency in formatting and referencing, the work could become an even stronger academic resource for scholars and students in these fields.

A new history of formal schooling in South Africa, 1658-1910: An education in contradictions

Authors: Crain Soudien, Charlotte Fischer, Michael Cross, and Peter Kallaway

Year: 2024

Publisher: HSRC Press

ISBN: 9780796926807

Reviewed by

Bronwyn Strydom

University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

bronwyn.strydom@up.ac.za

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8019-6995>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2026/n36a25>

A new history of formal schooling in South Africa is a very welcome and stimulating addition to the scholarship on education in South Africa. It takes a fresh look at the origins and development of schooling in both the public and private sectors, from the establishment of the first school in the Cape in 1658 until the Union of South Africa in 1910. At first glance this rather ambitious scope, in terms of the length of time and the diversity of schooling experiences, has been brought together in a relatively concise volume. The chapters themselves also do not seem overly long in relation to the topics and periods which they cover, which is a move away from more traditional histories of education, which often favoured an immense amount of detail. With these features in mind, the authors are to be commended on successfully accomplishing the extremely complex task of weaving together the diverse and contradictory histories involved in schooling in South Africa. In a very readable and accessible volume, the authors have brought together various strands of the wide range of schooling experiments, experiences, policies, and directions in a narrative which has a strong core focus, while also embracing the contradictions and exceptions present in this history. While this book does not aim to include the volume of detail found in pioneering narratives of education in South Africa, it is by no means superficial, dealing with care and taking into account the changing context and the complexities of the educational and social landscape.

The introduction, which gives an overview of trends in the historiography and literature review, sets the tone for the authors' novel approach to the history of schooling in South Africa, which is to consider the social, cultural, economic, and ideological aspects of formal schooling, highlighting not only the roles education can play in subjugation and dominance, but also "the potential for disruption".¹ This is also summarised in the second part of the title "an education of contradictions", setting this book apart from earlier histories which provided often grand, triumphalist and neatly delineated descriptions of education and schooling. Not only in this opening chapter, but throughout the book, the authors draw on a wide range of relevant and significant literature, which also makes it useful to scholars. The literature incorporates important sources on race, class, social history, missionary histories, and identities. While this chapter, and the book, have an overarching focus on modernity, the book takes into account different perspectives and debates throughout.

Much attention is given in the narrative to the context in which schooling developed in South Africa. At times, even the book reads more like a general history of South Africa than a history of education. This focus on the context, however, bears evident fruit as the many aspects of society—including race, class, culture, economics, intellectual and religious thought, and politics—point to the motivations, aspirations, and responses regarding schooling of diverse interest groups. Furthermore, what emerges is not a simple tale of either positive or negative growth, but a complex interwoven history of nuanced and sometimes contradictory experiences. This strongly contextual approach brings the history of South African schooling into the mainstream of the historical narrative of the country, in contrast to many earlier histories of education which tended to be more inward looking and parochial. This book, in a very real sense, places "education at the centre of the historical picture"² following the urging of one of its authors, Peter Kallaway.

The guiding question around which the narrative is framed is the notion of modernity and how ideas of progress and the project of modernity can be traced in efforts to adopt or promote schooling and responses to schooling. The book gives a concise, but detailed and nuanced view of the socio-cultural landscape of South Africa over time, returning at each juncture to the framework of modernity and what this meant for education. The elements addressed include the politics of identity, race, and class; intellectual thought; ideas of progress; and modernity. The book successfully encapsulates key developments and trends in context which, while also calling attention to evident contradictions, is commendable.

¹ C Soudien, C Fischer, M Cross, and P Kallaway, *A new history of formal schooling in South Africa, 1658-1910: An education in contradictions* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2024), p. 8.

² P Kallaway, "The forgotten history of South African education", *South African Review of Education*, 18(1), 2012, p. 15.

A new history of formal schooling in South Africa covers the history of schooling in South Africa, chronologically and by geographical region chapter by chapter, considering the former British colonies and Boer republics. The periodisation makes sense as the book endeavours to cover the pre-unification period of South African history, before the advent of an increasingly centralised and uniform policy regarding education. Particular attention is given to missionary schools, as in many places these were the first formal schools of any sort to be established. In chapter five, this examination of missionary schools expands to also include neighbouring countries. The description of how missionary education evolved in neighbouring areas (Bechuanaland, Basutoland, Swaziland, and Namibia) adds texture and nuance to the role and form of missionary education in the region, which is a bonus in the text. Furthermore, in this chapter and throughout the narrative, the incorporation of individual cases and examples adds a personal element, reinforcing the sense of agency of those involved.

The four authors of the book come from a variety of academic backgrounds and institutions—something which appears to have been a strength in this project. Despite the shared authorship, the style and the overarching focus of this volume remain remarkably consistent. Perhaps it is the varied expertise and experience of the authors which has resulted in a volume with a wide appeal. It can be highly recommended to all scholars of South African education as a starting point for a range of key issues historically. It is also fertile ground for young scholars, pointing to areas of interest and matters which need further investigation, as the authors pertinently point out questions and potential points of debate throughout the narrative. It also is of interest to a wider audience than just historians of education as through the lens of education, the authors paint a history of the layers of identity and socio-cultural elements of South Africa as a whole. It should, therefore, also be of interest to social historians.

What follows are some impressions which arise out of a close reading of the narrative. In the first instance, the reader is left with a strong sense of the heterogeneous nature of various ‘groups’ and their attitudes and responses regarding schooling. The agency of those on the receiving side of education is especially brought out, as responses to schooling or a lack thereof are foregrounded, often revealing unexpected and complex attitudes. The motivations regarding providing schooling in various settings over the period also show diverse goals and interests. Furthermore, the reader is also struck by the fluid and pioneering nature of schooling endeavours over the majority of the era, with differing degrees of government involvement, a lack of skilled teachers, difficulties of language

and physical distance and in many cases, parental resistance to children being removed from the labour force. In addition, the immense impact of the discovery on minerals on the politics and economy of the region is striking in the way in which this played out in the sphere of schooling. The more fluid racial and ethnic boundaries become increasingly galvanised with the sudden industrial growth, laying the foundation for the systematic protection of white interests and the promotion of white supremacy, for which schooling became a critical vehicle. The intense focus on self-protection and promotion by the white population resulted in the beginnings of a more systematically segregated and unequal provision of schooling, leading to what, in the final words of this volume, would become “A bitter harvest”.³

³ C Soudien et al., *A new history of formal schooling...*, p. 248.