History Teaching in and beyond the formal curriculum Two Students Looking Back and Looking Forward

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Introduction

This article focuses on the learning journey, experiences, and research related to history education in schools and the interaction between them. I am Mechall Abrahams, a recent graduate of the Two Oceans Graduate Institute in Cape Town, where I completed my B.Ed. degree in the intermediate phase. I live in Park Rynie, a rural community in KwaZulu-Natal. As an online English teacher, I work with students from various cultures across the globe. In addition, I have gained a greater understanding of myself and other cultures through studying history. As I have become more aware of other people's viewpoints and have begun to listen to them first, my views have also evolved.

My name is Waseemah Arendse, and I have just completed my B.Ed. (Intermediate Phase Teaching) from the Two Oceans Graduate Institute. I live in Bonteheuewel, Cape Town—commonly known as the Cape Flats. I work as a Grades 6 and 7 mathematics and science teacher at a school in this same area. This article will reflect on our journey with our studies, experiences, research, and interaction with how history is taught in our schools.

Mechall Abrahams: Looking back: an evaluation and reflection on primary history education in the intermediate phase

In my four years as a student at the Two Oceans Graduate Institute, one of the most valuable opportunities was visiting different primary schools for teaching practice. By doing so, I could learn about various history teachers, history lessons, and strategies. I learned that history is commonly considered a divisive subject that is either admired or despised without much understanding of historical significance and meaning.

As a result of reviewing the Curriculum and Policy Statements CAPS Social Sciences

documents for Grades 4 to 7, it was noted that Grade 4 term one could include more oral history and folklore to understand how people perceived their environment. Moreover, I noticed that great leaders and the first settlers needed more emphasis, like focusing on oral history, poetry, and Indigenous knowledge.

Whilst having the pleasure of teaching Grade 7 learners History, I observed that most learners had not developed the cognitive capacity required to comprehend the content associated with the transatlantic slave trade. I think Grade 7 learners develop historical cognitive skills over time from Grade 4 concerning historical content. A perfect example would be critical thinking skills and collaborative skills. Furthermore, I firmly believe that providing learners with more in-depth content will give them background knowledge of how to apply historical thinking skills in the FET phase.

Moreover, I noticed that diversity and inclusiveness fit together like a puzzle, allowing learners to achieve their desired outcomes through learning. In addition, I strongly feel that in an inclusive history classroom, the teacher's primary goal must be to make all students feel valued and comfortable so they can meaningfully participate in the learning process.

When learning history during the 1980s, lessons seemed monotonous. In addition, there were no classroom debates, and as a student, I had no opportunities to question the past, investigate, explore, and research using historical thinking skills. As a history teacher, I aim to investigate unique contexts for exploring a variety of emotions and issues in history; and examine the emotional and controversial issues affecting modern society and how they interact so that we can reflect on and effectively teach controversial and emotive issues.

Waseemah Arendse: Looking back: an evaluation and reflection on primary history education in the intermediate phase

History teachers are often labelled irrelevant, and they should envy teachers who teach subjects like mathematics and science. I want to state that as a mathematics and science teacher, I have been full of envy of the history teachers at my school. For example, I knew that the passing of the late majesty Queen Elizabeth II was a fantastic opportunity to bring relevant information into the classroom that would be considered history for centuries.

Through my studying of history teaching, I discovered that the CAPS document proposes a focus on social transformation, Ubuntu, and indigenous knowledge. History education in South Africa is tasked with achieving three specific goals. Developing critical thinking involves a range of evidence and developing nation-building to create an identity,

social relations, and solidarity amongst diverse communities and cultures.

Sitting in a history classroom during my teaching practice experiences, topics such as Ancient Egypt turn into a contest of who can write like the Egyptians best instead of what they can learn from how they lived and how they built their success. Much can be said about Ubuntu and inclusivity. Teaching our learners only what is available in the textbook cannot teach them to be inclusive human beings and to create environments and communities with Ubuntu practices.

Studying at an institution that thrives on equipping us with 21st-century skills, our expectations for going to schools were relatively high. I was disappointed when I realised that teaching history consists of the teachers planning dictated in the CAPS guidelines and the textbook chosen by the school. Learners enter the classroom prepared to listen to the teacher for approximately ten minutes, and a discussion about the content might occur. The rest of the period is dedicated to learners copying notes from a textbook already in their possession.

The classrooms of the schools I visited and the way history lessons are taught have not changed since the last time I sat at those desks. I saw the conventional way of teaching with the teacher being the only person speaking for the lesson duration.

Too few resources and too little time for anything else. The learners are seemingly uninterested and uninvolved in what is taught in the classroom. Inclusivity to investigate, explore, and research using historical skills and thinking is non-existent.

Mechall Abrahams: Looking forward: possible solutions for teaching and learning primary history education

The CAPS document highlights the importance of preserving South Africa's rich heritage and legacy of the past. In addition, the CAPS content contains some references to Ubuntu and indigenous knowledge systems. However, much more needs to be added. Also, when restructuring a history curriculum, it is essential to consider the diversity of cultures and the inclusiveness of the classroom.

Regarding teaching controversial and emotive topics, I would suggest recommendations included in the CAPS curriculum for teachers to ask learners more questions. I firmly believe having the ability to listen is an essential skill that all learners can learn if they are shown how to do it. Moreover, it is essential to point out the consequences of all emotions and feelings. Consequently, it influences the learner's thinking and learning; as a result, we may be able to imagine what others feel when we have more knowledge.

The history taught in school should focus on displaying the lives of ordinary people through time. Furthermore, it should focus on integrating the 6Cs of 21st-century history education into the development of primary history education and how we teach history in our classrooms. Communicating and collaborating with learners can help develop empathy in them when dealing with emotive issues.

Waseemah Arendse: Looking forward: possible solutions for teaching and learning primary history education

So how can new teachers, along with teachers who have been teaching history for 30 years, teach history that will allow learners to become historians in the classroom? How do we teach history for learners to learn about their own cultures and heritage and feel proud of who they are as individuals living in such a fast-paced, evolving world flooded with technology that did not even exist 20 years ago?

Additionally, when reviewing and restructuring a history curriculum, it is vital to consider the diversity of cultures and the inclusiveness in a primary history classroom setting.

Teaching relevant and age-appropriate content would be an excellent example of how teaching in the intermediate phase can be transformed into an effective subject that is not perceived as a repetition of facts or a tedious practice.

Creativity should be treated with a very high level of importance. It is significant since the world's future is unknown, and we have no idea what to expect or how much innovation will be necessary to succeed. As adults, we may not see this future, but our children will, and it is our responsibility to guarantee they can thrive. Historical thinking is critical for students to build skills and tactics to help them understand the past. These skills are critical for our learners to examine, interpret, and comprehend past experiences rather than remember what occurred.

Conclusion

The past cannot be changed, but we can create new knowledge about it. To ensure the aims and outcomes of the country's curriculum are met, teachers must teach the content in a way that meets those aims and outcomes. While it is evident that primary history education requires revising and restructuring, it is our opinion that this should be started within the intermediate phase and ensure the effectiveness of the changes and implementation in the

higher grades. Our recommendation is to elevate historical thinking skills, oral history, folklore, and controversial and emotive topics to a deeper level in the classroom, thus encouraging students to become responsible citizens. Students who work with content that relates to their daily lives in the 21st century are more likely to develop humane, empathetic traits as humans.