Petro van Niekerk

Past and present ideologies in South African schooling: towards a framework of ethics

A general climate of inertia, low teacher morale and a lack of accountability are dominant features of the current South African education system. This article argues that the root cause of the problem lies in underlying entrenched mindsets and attitudes derived from ideologies and value systems. An in-depth investigation of past and present ideologies revealed mindsets such as a culture of entitlement and a victim mentality directly related to a lack of accountability. This article aims to inform and empower educators to become change agents in their classrooms. It is recommended that a framework of ethics be adopted by all stakeholders in education to make a difference to education and society.

Vorige en heersende ideologieë in die Suid-Afrikaanse onderwysstelsel: 'n etiese raamwerk

'n Algemene klimaat van passiwiteit, 'n gebrek aan motivering by onderwysers en 'n tekort aan verantwoordbaarheid by talle onderwysowerhede is kenmerkend van die huidige Suid-Afrikaanse onderwysstelsel. In hierdie artikel word geargumenteer dat die hoofoorsaak van die probleem geleë is in onderliggende denkpatrone en gesindhede wat voortspruit uit ideologieë en waardestelsels. Navorsing oor pre-demokratiese en huidige waardestelsels bevestig dat 'n kultuur van verontregting en "entitlement" verband hou met die gebrek aan verantwoordbaarheid by onderwysowerhede. Die doel van hierdie artikel is om onderwysers te bemagtig om as agente van verandering in hul klaskamers op te tree. 'n Etiese raamwerk wat deur alle rolspelers in die onderwys aanvaar en geleef word, word aanbeveel.

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Since 1994 numerous new policies have been introduced into the South African education system to indicate a radical break from the apartheid past. Although one acknowledges the successful amalgamation of fourteen different apartheid education departments into one national department of education with provincial counterparts, the rapid pace and top-down manner in which these radical changes – in particular those linked to Curriculum 2005 – have been introduced by the Department of Education (DoE) without proper consultation with teachers and principals have caused resistance and feelings of discouragement. Lewis (2009), an independent analyst and communication specialist, has raised various concerns on this issue. He states that the idea of changing the face of education by making continual and sudden changes to many aspects of the education system, without adequate support to teachers and learners, is tantamount to unrealistic or utopian ideals about how an education system functions and how much time people need in order to incorporate changes meaningfully without getting lost on the way. He also mentions that education departments in South Africa follow the ideology of utopianism with an exclusive focus on short-termism.

Not only did the introduction of Curriculum 2005 and outcomes-based education (OBE) throw the whole system of education and its office-bearers off balance, but teachers who were the change agents perceived that the DoE was continuing to introduce new policies unilaterally before the earlier policies had been successfully implemented (*cf* Lewis 2009, Jansen 1999, Bloch 2009). As a result a general climate of confusion between teachers and the DoE, low teacher morale and a lack of accountability are some of the dominant features that have come to characterise the formal South African education system. What could be the underlying problem of this climate of inertia?

This article argues that much of the inertia concerns the underlying value systems embedded in past and present ideologies and their influence on South African schooling in order to indicate certain relationships between prevailing mindsets, behaviours and cultures of learning which derive from particular values and ideologies in South African schooling.

The article aims to inform and empower teachers to become change agents in their communities, by participating actively in educational debates with other stakeholders such as parents, community leaders and educational officials about values and ideologies with a view to influencing policymaking, as they ultimately implement policy. In this regard, Ginsburg (1990: 498) urges educationists to take part in educational debates via civil society and not to leave policymaking entirely to the politicians, especially in a newly established democracy, since education is a minefield of values and interests. It is interesting to note that, in the case of South Africa, the dominant underpinning value system of the curriculum choice in favour of OBE was characterised by neo-behaviourism[1] and not by the Freirean ideals previously held dear by the broad democratic movement of the liberation struggle. This happened because the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) dominated the curriculum debate when important choices had to be made (Skinner 1998). This article also aims to make teachers aware of their inherent power, responsibility and autonomy to make a difference in their own classroom practices and communities by exemplifying sound values. Teachers cannot avoid transmitting values as education, in general, and schooling, in particular, are primarily value-laden and fundamentally moral endeavours (Nieuwenhuis *et al* 2007). In other words, if teachers realise how their underpinning value systems and ideologies have a bearing on their attitudes and behaviour as professional role models, counterproductive attitudes and value systems could be revised, which should lead to positive behaviour changes which, in turn, can make a difference to society.

Finally, it is hoped that this article will convince educationists, such as teachers, education officials, teacher educators and policymakers to contribute to an effective education system, responsible citizenship and thus a humane society. This can only be done by adopting a framework of ethics in various spheres of society and education (Christie 2008: 210-6).

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1   Neo-behaviourism refers to an approach that mainly emphasises measurable outcomes and behaviour modification in a production mode, whereas the Freirean approach (from Paulo Freire) would emphasise the critical consciousness-raising pertaining to mindsets of oppression and how one could get empowered by recognising those mindsets of oppression.

1. Education is a value-laden continuous engagement

The premise of the main argument in this section is that values have always been embedded in education, whether overtly (intentionally) in programmes or covertly (unintentionally) in what schools hold up as the mirror of a good society (Bernstein 1996: 76). In other words, teachers inevitably transmit values when they teach, because how they conduct themselves while teaching in their classrooms is underpinned by particular value systems. It is commonly known that education and schooling are primarily value-laden endeavours filled with ethical considerations and judgements.

The values debate in education has a long history and is sure to continue as educationists, teachers and decision-makers grapple with issues such as human rights, moral decay, school discipline and a breakdown in the culture of teaching and learning, which can threaten the stability of functioning schools (Berkowich 1998). Accepting that individuals – and communities as a whole – consider values to be something worth living or striving for highlights two fundamental aspects of values, namely cognition (what I think or believe) and emotion (what I feel) (Nieuwenhuis *et al* 2007: 8-10).

In addition, because of the inherent affective appeal of values it is crucial to realise that values involve the whole person, not only rational capacity, but also feeling and acting. Values thus underpin actions and manifest in actions and behaviour. More importantly, people's belief systems are informed by what they regard as meaningful in their lives.

Values usually underpin educational policies of countries. However, the task of examining and identifying the underpinning values embedded in policies is enormous. Value statements are inherently more problematic than they seem at face value. Values are hidden phenomena that are not easily detected by uncritical scholars who tend to evaluate curricula and policies at face value.

In addition, values are held by individuals who live in a specific society within a specific sociocultural, historical milieu. Comparative educationists must constantly be aware of the close relationship between education systems and political dispensations. Since education systems are linked to the political, social and economic interests of a particular state, it is crucial to engage with these questions critically, as power configurations shift and social relations change continuously.

The discussion has thus far focused on values and value systems underpinning all human actions and interactions. The significance of systematised value systems or ideologies and their influence on schooling in South Africa, in particular, will now be discussed.

2.   Common characteristics of ideologies

The concept "ideology" has different meanings according to different social discourses or theories. According to Marx, Engels and other proponents of critical theory, such as Althusser, ideology indicates a system of distorted and misleading ideas or a so-called false consciousness, according to a critical concept of ideology (Foster & Louw-Potgieter 1991: 349). Other scholars, such as Adorno and Thompson, prefer a neutral concept of ideology, which simply means that ideology is linked to a specific group's value system or any organised set of ideas, such as liberalism, fascism and behaviourism, among others. The final variation of the concept "ideology" is a relative use, by referring to expressions of different (class) interests, in struggle and competition with one another. At best, I would like to advocate a continuum of different meanings, depending on the context in which it operates.

The following working definition is used for the purpose of this article: "An ideological framework is thus a set of beliefs which coheres in a systematic way and is held by a group of people for whom they explain the nature of the reality they experience and have the power to commit them to action" (Ashley 1989: 2). Examples of ideologies can easily be identified if one remembers that they are usually indicated by the suffix -ism, for instance in words such as nationalism, socialism, capitalism, racism, populism and unionism. However, educational ideologies are systems of beliefs and values about the purpose of education, held by policymakers, and which result in educational practice (action) as manifested in national curriculum choices and other policies informing the provision of education in a specific country (Van Niekerk 2000: 10).

When dealing with ideologies it is vital to recognise the moment when the underlying value system has become dogmatic and impervious to criticism, in which case one can refer to ideological fixations or dogmas. In this instance, the ideological framework becomes frozen

and impermeable not only to criticism, but also to reality checks. In extreme cases, ideological fixations become underpinned by a fanatical consciousness often informed by feelings of fear or of being under threat (Pillay 1991). The latter feelings of uncertainty usually result in attitudes and behaviour characterised by the act of clinging to power and domination. In such an instance, the dominant values or interests of a group advancing a specific ideology may masquerade as neutral. However, on closer examination, one can observe the rigidity of dogma which is characterised by an unwillingness to negotiate with others or allow for difference. The apartheid ideology offers a very useful example in this respect. The policy of separate development was officially formulated and regarded as allowing for different ethnic groups to govern themselves, but unofficially it was merely an excuse to apply "the divide and rule" principle to legitimise minority domination (Joubert 1992, Nkomo 1992).

I now wish to contextualise my argumentation by narrating my own perspective on ideologies and underpinning value systems. Thereafter I will focus on the analysis of educational ideologies that were prevalent during the pre-democratic era in South Africa. As a young female teacher in the early 1970s in the erstwhile Transvaal Education Department, I was subjected to teach within the parameters of the official CNE policies of the day. When I moved to academia in the late 1980s, I obtained a Master's degree in the field of Comparative and International Education, consisting of a research project which investigated the Spanish education system and educational reforms that took place in the post-Franco era. The impact of the state-church alliance which formed a powerful ideological dogma and dominated the society and the education system in Spain struck me as very familiar to what had happened in South Africa, under the apartheid regime. This sparked my interest to examine the impact of ideologies in South African educational past and present dispensation (*cf* Van Niekerk 1992). I discovered the insightful work done by Ashley (1989) on ideologies and schooling in South Africa. My perspectives on ideologies oscillated between a neutral concept of an ideological framework and a relative understanding of the asymmetrical power relations often hidden within ideological frameworks which could easily conceal power-hungry agendas of dictatorial regimes and mislead uncritical communities, as was the case within the South

African dispensation under the apartheid government. It is a common known fact that, as a result of the ideological dogma of apartheid, a fragmented, unequal and racialised education system, dominated by the CNE policies, emerged. I became very conscious of the necessity to constantly demystify ideological frameworks (relative concept) as it can easily turn into an ideological fixation or dogma overnight, by leaders who feel threatened and want to cling to power and thus resort to stereotypes, and oversimplified notions of nationhood, unity, identity to convince the electorate to obey authority without any criticisms and to maintain the status quo at all costs. Such an authoritarian political dispensation usually leads to a general climate in the public domain that no state authority should be questioned. Any education system is particularly vulnerable to such mindsets and cultural influences. Most authoritarian dictatorships are good examples of such practices in the public domain which result in unfair political and educational dispensations of discrimination and tremendous human suffering to the detriment and destruction of the social fabric of an entire nation. This happened in Spain during the Spanish civil war and the Franco-era. This also happened in South Africa, in particular during the regime of P W Botha in the 1980s. In the light of this background, I want to alert readers when assessing ideological frameworks (a relative meaning) to become aware of the inherent dangers of leaders who hold on to ideological frameworks or dogmas that defy the dynamics of continual changing circumstances and are often impervious to critical voices.

My personal stance would favour a humanistic value system based on Christian spirituality in a broad sense. In other words, an ethical framework that allows for compassion towards the human condition in a pluralistic democracy where diverse voices are encouraged to co-exist and where citizens resolve conflict by dialogue and negotiations. Putting it differently, the Biblical principle of "Do unto others as you would like them to do unto you" encapsulates my ethics of compassion. To my mind, this will be possible if one could accept that no ideological stance (relative concept) has the moral high ground and thus being viewed as superior to another. In diverse societies difference should not be considered a threat but rather an enrichment of society as long as it contributes to the compassion for people and respect for nature and society at large. My value system is thus informed by a humanistic

approach which could be underpinned by Christian spirituality that does not necessarily emanate from any particular Church religion. I am wary of any dominant Church religion, as this kind of religion can easily intersect with a state ideology, to become a powerful and dominant dogma (*cf* Van Niekerk 1993: 423).

3. Pre-1994 ideologies that had a direct impact on education in South Africa

In a large-scale UNESCO-funded study done in South Africa, Ashley (1989: 7-60) identified three mainstream ideological traditions which were influential in schooling during the pre-democratic era in South Africa: Christian National Education, Liberalism and Liberation Socialism.

The main ideas of these three ideologies which influenced curricula, policies and educational goals and presumably carried the seeds for the formation of future ideologies in education will now be discussed.

3.1 Christian National Education

Christian National Education (CNE) was official policy within the white education system and enforced in all former white schools. The idea of CNE schools dates back to 1870, when an attempt was made to apply Calvinist teachings to all areas of life in order to escape British-oriented schools. However, it only received official codification in 1948 with the publication of the Policy Statement by the Institute for Christian National Education in Potchefstroom. The second revised concept of Christian Nationalism was defined by the National Educational Policy Act of 1967 which prescribed an official policy to the white education system to adhere to broad Christian and nationalistic values. This was the inspiration behind separatist policy developments and key legislation which determined the separate character of schooling for blacks, coloureds and Indians (Van Niekerk 1993: 431-2).

The value system of Christian national educators was based on a worldview that relies heavily on biblical authority for its justification (Ashley 1989: 9). Beliefs about selfhood and educating the young

were to a large extent pessimistic by nature, emphasising obedience towards unquestionable authority and corporal punishment when disobedience occurred. Facts were "beaten into" children and endeavours were made to mould the child in the spirit of Christian Nationalism (meaning Afrikaner nationalism).

As far as the curriculum of the time was concerned, a large-scale UNESCO survey of textbooks, documented in the study done by Ashley (1989), revealed the following hidden features, among others: white supremacist and glorified nationalistic attitudes; stereotyped beliefs that black people are inferior; firm beliefs that South Africa rightfully belongs to the Afrikaner, who has a special relationship with God and therefore needs to lead the country, and the belief that legitimate authority is not questionable.

It is interesting to note that, although the official value system resembled a broad Christian character, the non-official (lived) value system was that of inculcating ethnocentrism and attitudes of both superiority and obedience to (or not questioning) the state. The aim was to legitimise a separate education system and maintain white supremacy and privileged social and economic positions. On closer analysis it is clear that the underpinning value system prevalent in schools (in particular upper-class schools) had very little to do with biblical values such as love, mutual caring and communality, but related more to a selfish striving for positions of power and accumulating financial wealth – the underpinning values being predominantly materialism and consumerism based on Western capitalism (Joubert 1992: 257-60).

3.2 Liberalism

Liberalism is mainly concerned with the realisation of the potential of the individual with regard to his/her obligations to society. In stark contrast to CNE beliefs, the predominant beliefs of liberalism are characterised by optimism with regard to selfhood and human nature, which resulted in a belief system that favoured the optimal realisation of the individual's potential (as opposed to the group) to fulfil his/her obligations to society. The freedom of expression and the choice of the individual, as well the development of a critical rationality, are regarded as the main value preferences of liberals. Authority should

be critically assessed, by reasoning and rational argumentation. One of the aims of schooling in the liberal tradition was to instil self-discipline instead of meting out punishment to maintain discipline. These values were mainly expressed in interviews with teachers and principals in upper-class English-speaking schools, as well as in private schools in South Africa whose teachers had been imported from Britain (Ashley 1989: 30). It should be borne in mind that Western countries, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world comprising Britain, Australia and the USA, cherish liberal values. It should also be remembered that many of the black people who took part in the broad democratic movement in South Africa went into exile abroad where they were exposed to general liberal views. In stark contrast to these values, traditional Afrikaner views were historically heavily opposed to any liberal ideas about education as these were associated with British systems which reminded them of the times of British rule.

In assessing liberalism through the lens of a relative conception of ideology, one could raise the criticism that, although the predominant value system sounds very just, namely to value individual freedom of choice and merit, it often does not solve practical problems adequately, especially when certain contextual factors deriving from particular social-economic and historical circumstances such as the inequalities of South African educational realities require a different and more flexible approach to resolve critical issues.

3.3   Liberation socialism

Liberation socialism encapsulates all the viewpoints of the liberation struggle, including the views of English-speaking liberals, members of the Black Consciousness Movement (with the late Steve Biko as the main leader), COSATU and other trade unions resembling socialist, as well as moderate, idealistic African nationalists who envisioned a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist society. In this broad spectrum of value systems the nature of human beings was regarded as pre-dominantly pessimistic, similar to the Afrikaner views – but for different reasons. One of these reasons was that the dominant view of human beings was influenced by Marxist theories that emphasised alienation as a fundamental state of human beings being subjected to oppression (Van Niekerk 1993: 440). With the demise of the apartheid

regime in 1994, it is interesting to note how the exponents of liberation socialism, once so closely linked together, are being divided among themselves, and the competing ideological viewpoints take turns to voice their differences within the ranks of the political forces of the day.

Within the ranks of the Black Consciousness Movement, authors such as Es'kia Mphahlele and Steve Biko were important exponents. According to their writings, the cultural distinctiveness of being part of a black race had to be celebrated. Black South Africans were regarded as victims of European colonialism which deprived them of their self-respect and dignity as human beings. In educational terms, this can be explained as consciousness-raising about the conditions of oppression. The People's Education Movement emanated from the Black Consciousness Movement and embodied the following aims (Van Niekerk 2000: 19): to prepare people for participation in a non-racial, democratic system; to eliminate capitalist norms of competition, individualism and stunted intellectual development; to encourage collective input and active participation by involving the community in decisions on the content and quality of education, and to stimulate critical thinking and bridge the gap between theory and practical life, making education relevant to democratic struggles.

However, people's education did not materialise as the choice of Curriculum 2005, and OBE was strongly influenced by the predominant role played by trade unions when important curricular and policy choices had to be made (Skinner 1998).

Judging from a relative concept of ideology, liberation socialism resembles such a melting pot of ideological frameworks due to the lumping together of a variety of voices against a common enemy, namely the apartheid regime that it is hardly possible to make sense of which framework is the dominant force and what value system is being portrayed by whom. It is no wonder that when real societal problems occur, the easy solution is to refer to the only common denominator, namely the past and very often the language of the liberation struggle prevails.

In summary, one could observe that the pre-democratic ideologies have been described to indicate the relationships between the ideologies and the underlying values, mindsets and attitudes that

have developed and become entrenched in destructive and disruptive behaviour patterns of most role players, such as teachers, unions, parents and learners in South African schooling. For example, any dissatisfaction in schooling is often expressed in lengthy strikes by teachers who absent themselves from their classrooms irrespective of how counterproductive this is for the learners and the cause of education, or even the physical destruction of school property. If the role players can become aware of how these entrenched behaviour patterns have lived on despite the inception of a democratic dispensation, it will become possible to change the direction of the dominant value system of destruction towards a more humane ethos in South African schools. That mind-shift could perhaps gradually give rise to a culture of compassion and caring among learners and teachers, school principals and officials of the provincial departments of education and district offices which can enhance active citizenship and contribute towards mutual respect for human life and nature.

Table 1: Pre-democratic ideologies, values and mindsets

Ideologies	Values	Mindsets and attitudes
Christian Nationalist Education	Superiority Militaristic discipline Obedience towards authority Naïve realism	Stereotypical beliefs about race, class, and gender Unquestioning nature Naïve religious beliefs; uncritical/unaware of own stereotypical beliefs
Liberalism	Individual choice Freedom of expression Rationality Equality and fairness	Every individual is equal Differences debated on basis of critical rationality Merit counts in society
Liberation Socialism: Exiles and other freedom fighters influenced by liberal views (liberalism)	Freedom of expression Rationality Equality and fairness	Differences debated on basis of critical rationality Merit counts in society

Ideologies	Values	Mindsets and attitudes
Liberation Socialism: Black Consciousness	Proud to be black – respect Search for self-respect and identity Conscious of oppression Critical thinking	No feeling of inferiority about being black Acknowledge difference People's education Active participation by community
Liberation Socialism: Africanists	Democratic values Non-sexism, non-racialism	Fairness, equality, freedom of expression

The discussion now turns to a current South African example of actively promoting sound humanistic values of compassion with one another in schools that would enhance the humane qualities cultivated in this document The introduction of the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (DoE 2001: iv) gives an idea of how complex the issue of explicit values formation has become in a diverse social-political-historical context:

> In this report we make an argument for the promotion of the values of equity, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability and social honour at our schools. We believe that these values are important for the personal development of our school-going population. They also define the moral aspirations of South African democracy as defined in our Constitution and Bill of Rights.

In the light of the South African socio-political history, the following questions can be raised: Whose values are these mentioned in this document? Why are they being promoted in this instance? How are schools going to teach them? When does values education become indoctrination?

Continuing within the context of South Africa, the National Educational Policy Act of 1967, which was promulgated to contain Christian Nationalism as official education policy during the apartheid era, was underpinned by the values stipulated explicitly in the phrase "separate but equal". In its dominant educational philosophy, the importance of moral development within a narrow framework was stressed in predominantly white schools. Thus, the question can be raised: If the values of Christian Nationalism were successfully used to indoctrinate people to accomplish the social

engineering of society, as was the case during the apartheid regime, when official policies made people believe that they are so different according to ethnicity and colour that they need different spaces and homelands and can never freely associate with one another on an equal basis, is it not possible for another value system (such as embodied in the Values Manifesto) to perform another form of social engineering by enforcing uniformity of value systems determined by the state on a pluralist society? In other words, if a state ideology is being informed by a rigid value system, impervious to criticism, and thus not exposed to open debates and scrutiny, is it not possible for such a regime to have the official trappings of transparent democratic openness, but an unofficial ethos of authoritarianism which does tolerate difference? This brings us to the general question: How is it possible for the state to manipulate a set of values? My answer to this question would be very simple: Only if citizens do not actively engage the dominant ideology of the state by constantly calling those accountable into question and by not neglecting their active citizenship. In other words, all educational stakeholders should hold the education departments accountable to provide the necessary infrastructure for schools and logistical support for teachers.

4.   Current ideologies in South Africa with a bearing on education

In the 17 years of democratic rule since 1994, South Africans have witnessed the establishment of a single, unitary education system. It is crucial to observe critically the emerging ideologies that have a direct influence on formal education by closely examining the current dominant value systems and mindsets in South African society. The question may well be asked whether the inherent value systems that underpin newly found ideologies differ substantially to make a difference to society as a whole or not.

4.1   Democracy versus populism

Fourteen years after the democratic elections in 1994, monolithic ideologies within the dominant ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), emerged during the annual policy conference held in Polokwane in December 2008. Predominantly unquestionable

democratic ideals are currently challenged due to a one-sided perspective by populist ideals within the ANC. This has resulted in a rift between those who value the sober, democratic ideals of the Freedom Charter of the ANC, such as freedom of expression, equality before the law, participative governance and pluralist democracy, and those in favour of populism. The term "pluralist democracy" refers mainly to a system of governance that respects the will of all the people of a country and is supported by democratic institutions such as a constitution, a free press and an independent judiciary. Populism, on the other hand, denotes an ideology of governance dedicated to serve primarily the interests of the common, uncritical and un-intellectual populace (Baradat 1995: 93).

In addition, although veiled, issues of ethnicity, tribalism and socio-economic differences have come to the fore in the ANC Youth League's sentiments embodied in Julius Malema's call to "Kill for Zuma". Irrational and verbal attacks on judges and courts signal an ideological move towards populism (Gouws 2008). At the same time, a significant faction that represents a more intellectual segment of the ANC established a new breakaway political party, the Congress of the People (COPE), after the victory by the more populist faction of the ANC at the policy conference of the ANC, held in Polokwane in December 2008. This signalled an important shift in the dominant ideology, despite the ongoing leadership struggles within the organisation.

On the state of democracy in South Africa, and with reference to racist incidents at the University of the Free State, the former chair of the Human Rights Commission Jody Kollapen (Thys 2008: 4) contended that democracy had come too early for South Africans. He argued that, although the racist incidents had taken place among post-apartheid youth, their behaviour showed a lack of tolerance and respect for others. He attributed this to the fact that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a mediating body dealing with apartheid crime, and operative at the beginning of the democratic era, gave a romanticised idea of reconciliation, rather than basing it on broader grassroots dialogues on racism and democracy. This resulted in a nationhood that was officially liberated into democracy, without the majority of the people of South Africa experiencing a change of

heart to embrace democratic values such as tolerance for diversity and respect for democratic institutions.

This discussion gives rise to interesting questions: How will the current developments in state ideologies affect the country's economic policies in the eyes of the global world? How will the country's status as the role model of democratic governance on the continent be affected? How will these factors shape formal education provision in South Africa in the near future?

4.2 Utopianism or Romanticism

In a series of critical-analytical radio interviews, Gavin Lewis (2008, 2009), an independent analyst and communication specialist, maintained that much of the lethargy and feelings of discouragement among teachers and learners was due to unrealistic demands posed by the National Department of Education without the adequate support to teachers and their infrastructure.[2] He maintained that teachers, in general, were being continuously overwhelmed by newly formed educational policies which they were expected to implement instantly without any support from district offices and without any consideration of time constraints and the specific contexts in which teachers function daily. To compound this dilemma, new policies and changes were often enforced before the previous changes had been properly implemented. This situation was exacerbated by a general lack of accountability by educational provincial and district officials who were supposed to support teachers in their tasks, resulting in teachers being overburdened, overwhelmed and lethargic. He also mentioned that at that time education departments in South Africa were following the ideology of utopianism with an exclusive focus on short-termism.

Lewis also emphasised that effective education reform is not a short-term affair. On the contrary, good planning in the long term bears more fruit than sudden, ill-advised and short-term changes. Education starts with the involvement of loving and caring parents who actively promote and exemplify moral values of compassion, honesty and responsibility in the home. Committed primary school

2   A room with a view. Radio interview on Classic FM, 15 April 2008 and 24 February 2009.

teachers then build on this foundation by using effective learning and teaching; finally, learners are able to advance to secondary school (Huit 2003).[3]

In referring to the "romanticist" ideas that informed the curriculum choice in favour of OBE, Bloch (2009) attributes the decisions that were made primarily to feelings of euphoria, idealism and romanticism. He contends that they were neither grounded nor informed by the realities of South Africa, as these policies originated from very different societies and highly sophisticated contexts where large numbers of well-qualified teachers and supporting parents are prevalent and low teacher-pupil ratios in well-resourced schools are common place. After 17 years of democracy, a more realistic approach to appropriate curriculum choices is necessary to provide proper knowledge underlying functional literacy and numeracy in South Africa. That means a more "back to basics" approach, where the curriculum, focused on functional literacy and numeracy, will be more congruent to address the needs of the majority of South African teachers, and learners within a developing context will be more relevant (for example, CAPS curriculum).

Moreover, Taylor (2006: 2), director of the Joint Education Trust (JET), argues that schools are supposed to be more than production places for technical skills. He contends that the current overemphasis on science and technology is a utopian belief promoted by the DoE. He also mentions that, although scientific and technological skills are necessary for a growing economy, these are not the most important aspects of the curriculum. In his view, the development of cognitive capacity, underpinned by analytical language skills, is an even more important part of schooling. Extended reading and writing skills are the only way to develop this. Yet, even more important is the hidden curriculum, where learners learn to live together and respect diversity, in other words, learn to resolve conflict in a constructive, rational and non-violent manner. Table 2 provides a summary of the poor functioning of schools, based on the 2004 matriculation results (Taylor 2006).

3   *Cf* <http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/affsys/values.html>

Table 2: 2004 Matriculation results

2004 Matriculation results of schools	Fared well	Average	Very poor
1234 previously advantaged	380	254	600
4884 previously disadvantaged Black	34	573	4 277

It will require long-term planning and support to improve the results reflected in Table 2. Short-term, highly unrealistic plans will not be effective, since they will only exacerbate the split between official values and non-official (lived) values. People tend to pay lip service to the official values but do not put them into practice in real life. For example, if parents and families can live together with compassion towards one another and resolve conflict in a non-violent way, they can teach their offspring to live in peace and harmony with one another. This also implies that we should be working systematically to achieve practical and feasible solutions in education and not be held captive by an ideological gaze which tends to be fixed on issues dealing with the past, such as European colonialism of Africa or the romanticised notion of the African Renaissance.

4.3 Unionism

Teachers' unions such as the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), as the dominant teachers' union in South Africa, played a significant role during the liberation struggle. However, there is ample evidence that SADTU could not transform to adapt a new dispensation in education and that they are at present obstructing the overall cause of education in South Africa. Bloch (2008: 7), an education specialist at the Development Bank of Southern Africa, refers to the poor quality of teaching in many South African township schools and the resultant 50% failure rate in matriculation among African students. He cites the example of teachers in Alexandra who went on strike after learners complained about teachers' un-professional conduct, for example, absenteeism and sexual abuse of learners. In similar vein, Lewis (2008) remarks that, although more money has been allocated to the education budget in South Africa than in any other African country, a general lack of accountability in the education sector prevails. Due to a lack of a work ethic among

teachers, and accountability among provincial governments, districts and teacher unions, very little has been achieved in schools.

Boers (2008), the official whip at the education desk of the ANC in Gauteng, states explicitly that most township schools in Gauteng are dysfunctional for various reasons. One of the major reasons is teachers and principals' poor conduct which cannot be addressed adequately because SADTU obstructs the disciplinary processes. Jansen (2008b: 9) agrees with these experts and pleads for political intervention in dysfunctional schools. In many of the Soweto schools visited by Jansen considerable numbers of teachers and principals were absent from schools or were not in their classrooms. He also blames SADTU's failure to reprimand members for poor conduct or to act constructively when changes to the teaching culture were suggested. In terms of the latter, it was proposed that each teacher be tested with regard to his/her capacity to teach a specific subject at a specific level. Jansen argues that such testing would help the department to provide intensive training for those who need it. He blames SADTU for their lack of integrity, a quality which their predecessors possessed in the 1970s and 1980s, at the time of the liberation struggle.

4.4 Mindsets, attitudes and behaviours emanating from past and present ideologies

This section reflects on the underlying relationships between values, ideologies and concomitant mindsets, attitudes and cultures of behaviour and how the influence of underlying values and ideologies emanating from the liberation struggle lingers on and play out in patterns of destructive behaviour.

In South Africa, the central role that education played in the liberation struggle illustrates the above point. Christie (2006: 257-60) mentions the complex side effects of this struggle, such as youth militancy, the politics of immediatism (people wanting immediate effects), as well as the ongoing breakdown of a teaching and learning culture. Another outcome of this period, characterised by the breakdown of the culture of teaching and learning, is the emergence of a variety of problematic assumptions about what education entails, such as the notion of "education as a commodity" (Heese & Badenhorst 1992: 3-4). This implies that strikes will not have a negative

effect on education, because one can always "add more education" at another time in the form of extra classes. Jansen (2008a) maintains that this notion led learners to believe that education is something others can give to or withhold from you. Many learners and teachers have consequently come to view themselves as passive receivers of education or disadvantaged non-receivers (victims), a situation which could only be rectified by others, such as the state. According to psychologists, a so-called victim mentality originates from feelings of deep insecurity and a strong need for acceptance. Victims believe that things happen to them and instead of being accountable, they blame circumstances, events in the past and other people for their unhappiness. Remaining a victim gives one licence to not take ownership of one's own behaviour, feelings and destiny (Snyman 2010, Zimberhoff 2008). This reminds one of a prevailing "being a victim of apartheid" mentality – a remnant of the past dispensation, something that Max du Preez (1993: 3) cautioned about in the early 1990s:

> A victim mentality is going to cost us dearly. Instead of actively and energetically paving the way to a new future, we stand paralysed and blame it on the past. The racist architects of apartheid would smile in their graves if they could see that apartheid was working even better that they would ever have imagined; even after the death of apartheid, black South Africans are still victims; they remain a struggling lower class in their own country.

Another mindset that is equally destructive, according to Morrow (2009: 69-86), is the so-called culture of entitlement in South African education – a mindset that assumes that achievement in education is possible without concerted efforts from learners and teachers. Contrary to these viewpoints, educationists worldwide accept that active involvement in and personal responsibility for one's own learning are prerequisites for any successful achievement. In addition, Jansen (2008a: 13) maintains that youngsters in South Africa are currently motivated to a large extent by the prevalent "get rich instantly" attitude, characterised by consumerist and hedonistic values, in contrast to the previous generation, where a dedicated work ethic and service to the community were commonly valued.

The preceding discussion identified particular challenges for educators and learners in South Africa to come to grips with the

complex relationships between underlying attitudes, behaviour patterns and mindsets emanating from value systems and ideologies, past and current, that influence the underlying ethos of formal education system in South Africa. Table 3 provides a summary of the currently emerging ideologies and their concomitant values and mindsets.

Table 3: Currently emerging ideologies, values and mindsets

Ideologies	Values	Mindsets and attitudes
Populism	Uncritical thinking; anti-intellectual thinking	Group-think; tribalism; ethnicity emphasis; socio-economic benefits
Utopianism	Unrealistic idealism and romanticism Policy changes that look good on paper Short-term benefits	Teachers overwhelmed Lack of accountability Victim mentality Passivity in classrooms
Unionism	Group-think based upon populism and activism Teachers view themselves as blue-collar workers, not professionals Lack of accountability Self-interest dominates; not serving ethos	Struggle culture Victim mentality Culture of non-compliance Culture of entitlement Unprofessional behaviour Undisciplined, unethical uncaring behaviour

A few suggestions with regard to possible solutions that could make a difference to South African schooling and broader society will now be discussed.

5. A proposed framework of ethics for South African education

In the context of South Africa's liberation struggle, many illegal actions were justified as being the correct moral course of action. So how does one change a culture of resistance, of non-adherence, of non-payment, of disobedience, among others, into an ethical culture of accountability and taking ownership in a new democracy? Will

policies and legislation that prohibit certain behaviours encourage a change of heart? A legislative framework may assist judgements of right and wrong; however, legal regulations do not capture the full power of ethics. Parker (2003: 20-1) suggests basic strategies in education, for instance strengthening the powers and capacity of the South African Council of Educators (SACE) to inculcate a professional approach by enforcing compliance with basic practices of good conduct, such as non-violence and caring for others. Could teachers' unions such as SADTU also be encouraged to adopt the same principles?

Unless an ethical basis of compassion emanating from a deep spiritual sense of respect for other human beings and other forms of life informs the mindsets, attitudes and behaviour of all stakeholders, including teachers, learners and educational officials, no meaningful change will be possible to replace the current ethos of inertia and lethargy in South African education. I want to echo the views of Armstrong (Rabe 2012: 4) who goes on to say that it is essential that compassion should become a clear dynamic force in our divided world. She urges all men and women to strive for compassion which should take centre stage of morality and religion in order to promote cultural and religious diversity which, in turn, could foster harmonious human relationships and peaceful co-existence in the world.

In this regard I want to support Christie's (2008: 210-6) useful proposition, namely to adopt a framework of ethics characterised by compassion and integrity in various spheres of society and education. She mentions three key points: the ethics of commitment to intellectual rigour, the ethics of civility, and the ethics of care. She argues that this framework of ethics relates directly to the purposes of schooling in general, namely to prepare people for the world of work, to create responsible citizens for the state and teach them democratic values, and finally to develop the individual to reach his/her potential (Christie 2008: 21) These points are briefly discussed below.

5.1 Ethics of commitment to intellectual rigour

Education must help teachers and learners via a system of systematic teaching and learning to develop habits of mind and heart that are geared towards intellectual rigour. Christie (2008: 212-3) quotes an American educator, Ted Sizer, who maintains that schools should

teach learners to use their minds well. That means that both students and teachers should always strive to be informed and aware, to weigh up evidence and argument; not to argue for a particular political or theoretical position only, but rather to argue for intellectual vigilance and integrity in addressing issues of power, knowledge and moral dilemmas. The state should provide proper infrastructure, a feasible curriculum and minimum standards, governance training for principals and district/regional competence to manage the logistics of education provision (Christie 2008: 213). However, a commonly accepted axiom in comparative education is that if things do not happen in the classroom, they do not happen. In other words, no sophisticated policy or contingency plans of government can overshadow the huge responsibility and autonomy that teachers have to demonstrate. These include professional conduct, adequate subject knowledge, disciplined actions, and a sense of wholeness, which should underpin all their interpersonal transactions. Nieuwenhuis *et al* (2007: 70-82) make it clear that youngsters acquire and internalise values most effectively if they see individuals whom they admire and respect exemplifying those values in their everyday conduct.

5.2 Ethics of civility

Education should prepare young people for participation in public life. We should ask ourselves how we might best live together in a shared public realm. The public realm must be continually built and maintained. Arendt (2001: 22) puts this succinctly:

> Public life requires us to think in the presence of others, not simply trying to put yourself in the position of others or showing empathy, but acknowledging that there are other standpoints than your own in a public realm and that one should come to agreement by communication.

This is especially relevant in attempting to address the widespread violence in our broader society and in schools in particular. Civic education should perhaps receive more attention in schools to actively teach learners to become tolerant and law-abiding citizens, although if a mindset of lawlessness and corruption prevails among adults in South African society it will remain part of the official values and not necessarily be "lived values" in the heart of citizens (Kallaway 2010: 15-37).

5.3   Ethics of care

This is about considering the individual human being and living with others in a shared world. It raises questions such as what it means to be human in the midst of others. Christie (2008: 215) quotes the French philosopher Levinas, a Holocaust survivor, who stated that to be human means to have an ethical responsibility to care for others. In education, it means to reflect deeply on living with others who are different, but nevertheless with a specific focus on common humanness, expressed in care and responsibility for others. Human beings can thus understand themselves in a shared world where they can work together to change the world for the better. The challenge is not to view what exists as unchangeable or inevitable, but

> ... to speak truth to power and speaking truth about power [...] while accepting that our contributions are always provisional as we are people who create our own histories, but not in circumstances of our own choosing (Christie 2008: 216).

In a similar vein, Jansen (2008a: 13) expresses his concern about a new generation of people who are mainly concerned about themselves and their ability to accumulate goods at the cost of being passionate to serve. According to him, education in South Africa can only make a difference if young graduates are willing to serve their country by ploughing back their skills into needy communities. If teachers, in particular, can emulate the above mindset and embrace a framework of ethics, their voices might carry more legitimacy to influence the direction of formal education than what is currently the case, due to their dominant unionist affiliations.

Sitas (2008: 14) advocates a balance between the values of equality and freedom for South Africans. According to him, too much freedom leads to crass Americanism (consumerism), while too much equality leads to an abrogation of responsibility. A framework of ethics, comprising a commitment to intellectual rigour, a responsibility to participate in civil society and taking care of fellow human beings by serving one's own community, offers a useful strategy to address the need for living in harmony within one another while facing the challenge of conflicting value systems and ideologies within circumstances not of our own choice in South Africa.

6.   Conclusion

This article examined the problem of the current climate of inertia and lethargy within the South African education system. A general sense of confusion, low teacher morale due to very little consultation by the DoE when new policies and curriculum changes were adopted, and a lack of accountability among education officials are some of the current dominant features of South African education. It was argued that many of these features are caused by predominant mindsets, attitudes and behaviour patterns emanating from past and present ideologies and their concomitant value systems.

The investigation of past and present ideologies revealed the interwoven relationships between policies, curriculum choices and the dominant ideologies that leave teachers overwhelmed by the burden of implementing a range of newly introduced policies with very little support or necessary infrastructure. In addition, because education *per se* is a value-laden endeavour and schooling is interdependent with the society in which it is embedded, it has been indicated how prevailing value systems, attitudes and mindsets, deriving from past and present ideologies, have a direct bearing on the teaching and learning culture in schooling, entailing a poor work ethic among teachers, attitudes of immediatism among youngsters, a culture of entitlement, a victim mentality and a lack of accountability. To my mind, this means that spirituality and an ethics of compassion for common humanity should be emulated by teachers, parents, community leaders and all public figures to serve as role models to the youth in South Africa.

The main aim of this article was to create a better understanding of the powerful influence of the underpinning values and ideologies on schooling in South Africa. My aim is to make teachers more aware of their unique position to influence the direction and cause of education by striving to model moral principles of caring, of being honest, of living with passion and integrity according to the rules of having compassion with one another in their classrooms and by revising outdated mindsets and behaviour patterns which are detrimental to the education system as a whole. Consequently, it is hoped that this article will contribute by empowering teachers to become change agents and influence policymaking by participating in public debates and challenging the powers that be (including the

DoE and the trade unions) to be accountable for their ideological frameworks and underpinning value systems. This is to prevent the frameworks and value systems from becoming rigid dogmas with resultant devastating effects on schooling.

In conclusion, I want to emphasise the key role of teachers and teacher educators to continue questioning, probing and exploring the conditions around them. Poorly performing schools in South Africa will need much more support and more resources in terms of building professionalism, based on capacity and accountability. We need to make tough decisions in formal education to address our communal responsibility of exemplifying sound values of accountability and responsibility to an upcoming generation, if we want to become a successful and well-educated nation. This can only be done, I have argued, if educationists and other role players embrace an ethical framework of compassion and mutual respect which includes ethics of commitment to intellectual rigour, ethics of civility and ethics of care.

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