

## The curriculum and citizenship education in the context of inequality: Seeking a praxis of hope

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*In South Africa, more than most countries, the meaning of citizenship and related rights has faced severe contestation centred on categories such as race, class and nation. Close to two decades after the first democratic elections, notions of citizenship in South Africa represent a complex dynamic involving a combination of one or another of these social constructs, as they relate at different times to changing social, political and economic imperatives. In this article we explain that analyses of citizenship education in South Africa have traversed different phases over the last two decades and discuss some of the research on how ideas and values around citizenship are translated into classroom practice. We then examine notions about citizenship and social justice in the shadow of the xenophobic or Afrophobic attacks of 2008/2009 and in the light of the present rise in racial tensions within and across communities in South Africa. Our conclusion highlights the paradox that, despite the normative framework of the Constitution, policies and the curriculum, structural inequalities in society will continue to thwart attempts at social cohesion.*

**Keywords:** citizenship education, South Africa, social justice, rights, inequality, political mobilisation, identity, civic praxis, critical pedagogy, ethics, hope.

*A repositioning of any approach that claims to do ‘what is best’ must take up the apparent disconnect between neutral assumptions about citizenship on the one hand and the diverse and dynamic experiences and desires of democratic populations on the other hand [...] Citizenship education must negotiate a sense of belonging that re-imagines political community, encounters and engages diversity, and in exposing the symbolic level of citizenship, constructs citizenship as a site of struggle (Pashby, 2008: 21-23)*

Understandably, given South Africa’s provenance and history, the purpose of the Constitution itself is to “heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights” (The Constitution, 1996:1). Yet, these values and rights remain contradictory and contested and cannot be separated from conflicting claims constitutive of social divisions in our society, whether class or gender based or racially defined. As we will show, these divisions, often intersecting, remain pervasive. The Constitution as well as policy and legislation, promoting as they do consensual views of society, cannot on their own address conflicting claims.

This article argues that, in the context of continued inequality, officially sanctioned views of citizenship and democracy ring hollow because they rest too easily on the myth of the ‘homogeneous nation’ in a society where all citizens are not equal. Instead, critical citizenship admits to and identifies injustices and inequalities in society as a first step toward addressing them. Essential to the pedagogy informing critical citizenship is the praxis, agency and ‘voice’ of those who confront marginalisation, injustices and inequality as well as an active ethics of solidarity. Clearly, school communities face enormous challenges in meaningfully promoting human rights and critical thinking toward an emancipatory consciousness. Pivotal to the latter endeavour and a ‘praxis of hope’ is an understanding of inequalities in society which militate against social justice and the development of teachers as critical transformative intellectuals.

Analyses of citizenship and education in South Africa have gone through different phases over the last two decades. Initially, emphasis was placed on the various sections of the Constitution which spoke to citizenship and rights as well as the role of schools in contributing to citizenship and democracy education

beyond the formal curriculum (Enslin, 2003). This first phase of innocence gave way fairly quickly to a more introspective view of citizenship and education that focused on the lack of implementation, participation and issues around poverty and service delivery (Ahmed, Sayed & Soudien, 2007). This critique coincided with other work emphasising a strong commitment to social justice along with a trenchant critique of the ineffectual ‘declarationism’ of conventional human rights approaches (Keet & Carrim, 2006) and the problematic of citizenship education seen as a rationale for patriotism (Waghid, 2009).

Next we discuss some of the research that examined how ideas of citizenship contained in the Constitution, the Values in Education Manifesto (DoE, 2001) and the curriculum were translated into classroom practice. This research includes school-based research on values and democracy (Wits Education Policy Unit, 2001); discrimination in schools (Vally & Dalamba, 1999); work which assesses implications of schools and teachers creating space for dialogical memory making in post-apartheid South Africa (Dryden-Petersen & Siebörger, 2006); issues of nation and citizenship in history text books (Chisholm, 2008); how respect and responsibility are enacted in schools (Hammett & Staeheli, 2011); and an examination of the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy as applied in the classroom (Pillay & Ragpot, 2011).

We then revisit notions concerning citizenship and social justice in the shadow of the xenophobic or Afrophobic attacks of 2008/2009 and in the light of the present rise in racial tensions within and across communities in South Africa. Specifically, we describe recent events in school communities in the Eastern and Western Cape and attempt to examine the meaning of these events for citizenship education. Our core argument is that, because of the pervasive poverty and continuing inequality in South Africa, issues of social justice and related democratic ideals ring hollow in the lives and experiences of the majority of people whose rights have not yet been realised. We conclude by posing an alternative form of critical citizenship that includes the ‘ethics of care’ and public participation towards a praxis of hope.

## The evolution of citizenship education in South Africa

The recent and growing violent xenophobic and racial attacks described below provide an important context for thinking about how and why critical citizenship education plays an important role in democratic and social transformation at this particular point in South African history. In this context notions of cosmopolitan democracy and critical citizenship must be disentangled from the conservative conceptualisation of values, morals and responsibilities of citizens. Nation-states have always rigorously sought to define what their national cultures are, and have promulgated it through the school (Chisholm, 2008). In South Africa such a nation-building project has been confounded by the divisions and legacies of the past together with present policies which perpetuate and even exacerbate inequalities.

Initially, the Constitution was heralded as a document which would almost magically heal the divisions of the past. Beyond the Constitution the preparation for citizenship was to be constructed through education, and particularly civic education initiatives. As Keet and Carrim (2006:5) explain:

*In South Africa the notions and ideals of nation-building, reconciliation, social solidarity, social cohesion, inclusivity and anti-discrimination seem to provide the basis for the rationale, purpose and structure of (human rights) in the curriculum, and are linked to the popular education movement (of the 1970s-80s) and the broader anti-apartheid struggle.*

The language of rights was very clearly articulated in the General Education and Training Revised National Curriculum Statement (DoE, 2002:10):

*The curriculum can play a vital role in creating awareness of the relationship between human rights, a healthy environment, social justice and inclusivity. In some countries this is done through civics. The RNCS has tried to ensure that all Learning Area Statements reflect the principles and practices of social justice, respect for the environment and human rights as defined in the Constitution. In particular, the curriculum attempts to be sensitive to issues of poverty, inequality, race, gender, age, disability, and such challenges as HIV/AIDS.*

In February 2000, Kader Asmal as Minister of Education established a working group on Values in Education. It identified six core values to be encouraged in learners: equity and equal rights, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability, and social honour. Based on the earlier Values in Education Report, a Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy was issued the following year by the Department of Education. This Manifesto continues to form the preamble to all the current Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (Department of Basic Education, 2011) and articulates a framework for values in education which continues to focus on citizenship and the constitution.

An unusual feature of the ten-page *Values, Education and Democracy Report* was how it viewed the purpose of education and its challenge to some conventional assumptions around education and the marketplace. The working group argued that “the reduction of education to the market and jobs, important as they may be in some respects, commodifies education” (Department of Education, 2000a:5). Equally impressive was the need to affirm educators and support the notion of education as a vocation, and its associated norms and values as a public and national service. The privileging of critical pedagogy featured prominently in the report, not only by showing that schools are not adjuncts to the marketplace, but also through an emphasis on the importance of debate and critique in advancing intellectual development. Learning areas which do not traditionally have significant purchase in the marketplace were also given prominence. These areas include the performing arts, history and archeology, consideration was also given to the ‘underdeveloped’ reading culture.

Today, the new CAPS curriculum has embraced many of the recommendations of the working group and continues to build upon and emphasise ‘common citizenship’. In terms of the curriculum the learning area Human and Social Sciences aims to produce “responsible citizens in a culturally diverse, democratic society”. A specific outcome in this learning area is “active participation in the promotion of a democratic, equitable and just society”. Another is that learners will be helped to exercise their responsibilities and rights as citizens. It is important to recognise that the processes and ideas around human rights and social justice described in many of these curriculum policy statements carried over from previous deliberations and described elsewhere (Keet, 2004) reflect a thoughtful and coherent strategy.

Later, a concerted critique of symbolism and ‘declarationism’ in the curriculum and a stronger commitment to social justice praxis emerged (Keet & Carrim 2006). Other critiques were also developed best captured by Ahmed *et al.* (2007) in their essay *Creating the Rainbow Nation? Citizenship and Education in South Africa*. They review practices of citizenship in South African schools employing notions of inclusion and exclusion while “emphasizing the fault lines of marginality that emerge in the ... post-apartheid South Africa” (Ahmed *et al.*, 2007:119).

Their paper speaks to contexts and inequalities, arguing that the discursive construction of citizenship in post-apartheid SA constrains the “potential of a notion of transformative citizenship”. They provide evidence on how the concrete struggles of the poor are sublimated by the state to the tranquilising discourse of patriotism and nation building. “The argument that the state has made is that the imperatives of nation-building require these people to *live with their fate*” (ibid:127).

Our point is not to dismiss or diminish the important thinking that went into curriculum planning around human rights and citizenship education but, instead, we examine whether and how it has been understood and implemented in classrooms. In the following section we suggest that, because rights have remained at the rhetorical level and not part of praxis, neither the public engagement nor continued values or civic education has had the intended impact of wide-scale social transformation or addressing racial tensions. Apart from the critical literature mentioned above, there have been a few recent attempts to examine how these ideas were carried out in classrooms and in practice, which we discuss in the next section.

## **Curriculum in practice: School-based research on citizenship**

Some of the research below describes how, despite infusing the curriculum with the noblest of ideals and intentions, economic and social realities revealed a “mocking discrepancy between promise and fulfillment” (Centre for Education Policy Development, 2005:14). This conclusion was informed by

research conducted on the impact of the Manifesto of Values, Education and Democracy in close to a hundred schools. A key finding of this research remains valid today:

*... there were learners, educators, and parents who placed emphasis on the link between value formation and the material world. They questioned the 'space' for the promotion of human-centred values in the context of the great inequities in society at large, and between and within schools in particular. Parents were particularly articulate about the relationship between values in young people and the material conditions surrounding them. Several parents put forward a critique of the government in respect to the link between access to basic social services, and the facilitation of values in young people. They suggest that if the government were achieving its more basic mandates, with particular reference to the provision of housing, jobs and a quality education for all, then 'values' could be more successfully navigated in the home environment (Wits Education Policy Unit, 2001:6).*

Dryden-Peterson and Siebörger's (2006) article examines the use of testimony in the making of a new history in South Africa, situating this phenomenon in the context of public construction of memory and identifying history teachers as critical to the process. Through an ethnographic study of sixteen schools that illuminates the use of teacher testimony in Cape Town history classrooms, the authors explore the nuanced use of testimony as a pedagogic tool and probe the role of history teachers as memory makers. Finally, their article assesses the implications of teachers creating space for dialogical memory making in post-apartheid South Africa and outlines lessons of this experience for other countries in democratic transition.

Chisholm (2008) examines how 'nation' and 'citizenship' notions are addressed in new South African history textbooks with reference to changing approaches to textbook analysis, migration and xenophobia. Her article considers both representational issues in the textbooks as well as the uses of textbooks in several urban classrooms and suggests that the official curriculum represents an idealised vision of the kind of citizen the state wishes to create.

Hammett and Staeheli's (2011) research involved observing high school teaching in twelve high schools across the country and interviews with 64 educators. In their study, respect and responsibility emerged as core concepts. The constructions of these concepts are bound up with assumptions regarding power relations and the authors argue that respect is often unequal instead of reciprocal between educators and learners. They assert that "should an individual believe that the state is not fostering a culture of respect in which he or she is valued, there is the possibility that adherence to state goals and values will be undermined". They point out that the conditions of work and learning often have "a serious impact on the quality of and achievement in education in South Africa. They affect the ways in which educators and learners engage with the curriculum and ideals of citizenship and democracy" (ibid:275).

The official nation-building project in South Africa is agnostic about the continued struggle for equality and contestation over differential access to rights and resources. Instead, these tropes of 'the new rights' regime ensured by the Constitution and the curriculum are intentional and instrumental – signalling and affirming a new and reconciled society. What is needed is redefining citizenship education and the teaching of social justice and placing it more firmly in the curriculum in order to explicitly address inequality and contribute to the project of social transformation.

The questions posed by Crittenden are apposite: "How far should the 'curriculum' go"? He goes on to explain: "Citizens are taught to obey the laws; should they also be taught to challenge the laws and customs of the society? ... Civic education in a democracy... must... challenge what they see as inequities and injustices within that system" (Crittenden, 2007:5).

Our critique considers the continued social, economic and political inequalities that persist and is, instead, informed by the lived experiences of those whose rights have been and continue to be violated. This approach to teaching critical citizenship education would fundamentally rest on new ways of understanding democracy and social justice – as part of a continued struggle to build solidarity and a sense of belonging for all those who comprise South African society, regardless of status, origin, language, culture, gender or race. We suggest that inequality and continued social unrest must be better understood and more intentionally incorporated into the curriculum, along with greater attention to the role of social

movements and political struggle. These core ideas should be an essential part of democratic praxis that not only informs the teaching of history and civics, but also plays a much more important role in building a just, equitable and open democratic society.

While the 'infusion' of human rights, social justice and conceptions of democratic citizenship in the new curriculum are positive, the reality is that, under conditions where teachers are not provided with adequate training to understand, internalise and impart these views and where schools are not provided with adequate resources, this noble intention will not succeed. It is clear that the conditions and context for effective implementation of both the new curriculum and values in education are still not in place in most schools. Chisholm (2008:367) argues that:

*although new textbooks appear to foreground broader notions of South Africanism incorporating inclusionary, Africanist identities and embody understandings of history textbooks as source-based in order to promote critical thinking, teachers appear to make limited use of them, preferring to rely on their own notes.*

Pillay and Ragpot (2011), similarly, while promoting values of social justice in schools, show through research in six Gauteng schools that the proper management of the processes for implementing them is lacking. They recommend the elucidation of specific strategies to be applied in classrooms, schools, communities and at the various levels of the bureaucracy to provide real meaning to the intentions of this policy.

## **Paradoxes of citizenship and inequality in education**

The present dysfunctionality of the Eastern Cape Department of Education and the lack of progress of the National Department of Basic Education in rectifying problems unsurprisingly had disastrous effects on schools in that province. In 2011, 1.6 million learners in the Eastern Cape were denied their right to school nutrition and more than 100 000, many living in remote areas, prevented from accessing state-subsidised transport. In this period 4 252 temporary teachers also had their contracts suspended (Esakov, 2011).

In April of 2012, schooling in the Port Elizabeth area was disrupted by racial violence and protests. Initially, the discontent stemmed from overcrowding, a lack of state-paid teaching staff, language support and transport issues (Williams, 2012). In one school, Sancto High School, only 28 teachers are paid by the department in a school with 1 185 learners (Bodumela & Mkentane, 2012). Twelve additional teachers (resulting in R70 000 in salaries per month) are paid by a largely working class community (ibid). At the Kuyga Intermediary School at Greenbushes, staff shortages over Afrikaans-speaking teachers degenerated into conflict between so-called 'coloured' and 'African' parents and teachers (ibid). These inequalities and backlogs exist throughout the country. They also confront a relatively richer province, the Western Cape, where the Department is a functioning one. In Grabouw, for instance, the community also faced considerable unrest and racial violence as a result of overcrowded classrooms, the non-separation of primary and secondary schools and non-payment to taxi operators who transport learners to school (Quigley, 2012).

According to Department of Basic Education, Minister Angie Motshekga, South Africa needs 3 000 more schools and 60 000 classrooms. The infrastructure backlog includes 13 617 computer centres, 14 989 libraries, 15 368 multipurpose rooms, 15 435 nutrition centres, 16 516 administration blocks and 18 258 laboratories (DoE, 2012).

As early as 2002, Alexander warned that the new South Africa's nation-building project was "moving at a glacial tempo" and post-apartheid identity politics promise "volatility and danger" and that the country could "fall(s) apart into warring ethnic groups" (ibid:81-110). Elsewhere (Alexander 2006:10) he argues that:

*Social reconciliation under conditions of cruel inequality such as we have in South Africa is not only impossible; it is a lie that has to be exposed. We will have to work very hard at bringing about social cohesion and national unity. How and for what purposes such a project should be undertaken is too*

*big a subject to enter into here. Suffice it to say that unless the Gini coefficient is tackled seriously, all talk of social cohesion and national unity is so much nonsense.*

The inability fully to address issues of inequality and poverty, and effectively to provide for redress of past injustices, threatens any notion of a single South African nation – what is required, argue Bentley and Habib (2008:12-13):

*is a more inclusive notion of national identity, which would entail empathy for the fate of others and an ability to identify with them. And the way to achieve this and realize a sense of solidarity is by the sharing of institutions and a reduction of material inequalities. What is frequently seen as a cultural difference is in fact one of material circumstance.*

## Identity and common citizenship

Racial integration, particularly in schools has been thought to be the key to healing social divisions in post-apartheid SA. Yet, many argue that, in South African schools, there has merely been ‘mechanical desegregation’. Studies on racial integration (Vally & Dalamba, 1999) have shown the importance of drawing a distinction between desegregation and integration. Desegregation is seen as a mechanical process which involves simply establishing the physical proximity of members of different groups in the same school, without interrogating the quality of the contact. “The superficiality of relationships established by different groups in the schools studied is apparent, particularly the migration of ‘black’ African into “formerly ‘white’ schools” (ibid:20).

In related though later research on post-apartheid racial identity construction among youth, Soudien (2004) describes how South African schools are dealing with racial integration. He argues that racial integration in schools have been chiefly characterised by a push towards a non-racial, cosmopolitan national identity illustrated by an exodus from black schools and cultural spaces without movement into them. His research found that:

*while there has been a flight of children out of the former black schools, there has been no movement whatsoever in the direction of black schools ... this clearly suggests that the social nature of the education system has changed quite dramatically ... and made it possible for the expanded middle class ... to consolidate its position of power (ibid:89).*

Reflecting on the recent violent attacks and racial unrest, Jansen (2011) asks:

*Why would people who once fought side by side to end apartheid start to turn on each other? It's quite simple really and has happened in other postcolonial societies. As governments fail to deliver on their promises to people, the poor and desperate turn on themselves. And what better target than other poor people who are perceived to be relatively better off?*

Public statements that are racially derogatory contradict the messages coming from the Constitution or state policy. Also while the rhetoric and policy symbols of a non-racial, equal democratic state are displayed prominently, we continue to hear the pronouncements of state officials and politicians who contradict these ideals. A case in point is the continued and gratuitous use of apartheid-based racial classifications by state departments as well as in academia.

Motala (2010), in an article titled *Are racial categories useful for explanatory purposes in social science research and analysis*, raises a number of questions pertinent to any discussion of citizenship, social justice and the curriculum. He asks, for example, “what indeed is the meaning of the constant refrain about ‘national unity,’ ‘healing the nation,’ and such like phrases in the Constitution which signify the intention to overcome the trauma of a racist and violent past” (ibid:1). Motala argues compellingly that the use of race and racial classifications in the social sciences needs to be subjected to critical scrutiny. He argues that:

*its use reveals only the weakness of analysis since it has less explanatory power than might be understood through a much broader range of analytical categories, including income and poverty levels, social class, gender, geographic location, nationality and a wide a range of characteristics*

*attributable to the title of 'citizenship' – characteristics often obscured by the bluntness of racial classification ... Nothing here can or should be interpreted as a negation of the considerable effects and the impact of apartheid's racist policies, its emotional and personal consequences on the great majority of the population facilitated by the use of racialized descriptions which have now sunk deep into the very psyche of the nation struggling to reconstitute the identity of its citizenry as that of human beings entitled to equal freedoms and social justice (ibid:15).*

## **Conclusion: Citizenship education, hope and the ethics of care**

Placed against the backdrop of events in Grabouw and the Eastern Cape, concerns over emphasising a curriculum which focusses mainly on the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) disciplines at the expense of others could be a “recipe for increasing alienation and mutual incomprehension” (Alexander, 2012:6). Alexander explains that the tendency to view people as “potential clients and exploitable entities which can be instrumentalised for one’s own personal benefit or for that of one’s in-group” (ibid:6) is strengthened. He contends that “... difference, instead of constituting a bridge towards understanding the intrinsic value of diversity – biological, cultural, and political – becomes a springboard for xenophobic stereotyping and latent social conflict” (ibid:7).

Drawing on Nussbaum and Sen’s theories of justice to examine the potential of narratives in teaching and researching for social justice, Keet and Carrim (2006:12) suggest that “[h]uman rights can be presented as powerful ethical claims that can be critically examined by learners to consider their rights and responsibilities to others, at scales from the local to the global”. However, there is considerable confusion and contestation over the meaning of values in the curriculum. Official documents convey competing views of what is meant by values and morality and the role of education in facilitating value formation. One tendency is to approach these concepts by emphasising patriotism and honour through national symbols. The second approach emphasises human rights, critical and creative thinking as the basis for value formation. Carrim and Tshoane (2003:803) point out that the notion of values is seen as integral to the discourse of morality and ethics and is reflective of a wider discursive network which privileges particular views about morality. These debates will continue as the values and character-formation movement gain global resonance within the conservative, right-wing reform agenda around education, where morals and ethics are patriarchal and hetero-normative often viewing broader human rights as negative. Viewing values, moral and ethics in light of the growing discontent and alienation one can easily see ‘the other’ as the enemy rather than the unequal social and structural conditions.

Freire, instead, poses the praxis of ethics as a particular way of understanding morality. He speaks of the “ethics of universal human aspiration” which he considers the “ethics of solidarity” (Freire, 1998:116). In his book, *Education in hope: Critical pedagogies and the ethic of care*, Monchinski (2010) uses the arguments of Dewey, Freire, and feminist identifying scholars to show that critical pedagogy must reflect an ethic of care which is fundamentally at odds with conservative and narrow morality. He writes:

*Freire was clearly against capitalism and the ethics of the market. He railed against the ‘perverse ethic of profit’ and counselled refusal of the ‘dictatorship of the marketplace’. He considered himself a democratic thinker and attributed his concern with dehumanization in part to his Christianity and the liberation theology movement in Latin America ... At the same time, Freire could not deny his indebtedness to Marx. He was adamant that ‘democracy cannot be rooted in the ethics of the market’... According to Freire, because education forms human beings, education cannot be separated from moral formation (ibid:107-108).*

Nussbaum (2010:93-94) explains that global social justice and responsible citizenship requires:

*... the ability to assess historical evidence, to use and think critically about economic principles, to assess accounts of social justice, to speak a foreign language, to appreciate the complexities of the major world religions ... World history and economic understanding ... must be humanistic and critical if they are to be at all useful in forming intelligent global citizens, and they must be taught alongside the study of religion and of philosophical theories of justice. Only then will they supply a*

*useful foundation for the public debates that we must have if we are to cooperate in solving major human problems.*

Also taking issue with the human capital theory rationale behind the purpose of education, the economist, Chang, has similarly argued that the links between education and raising the productivity of an economy is tenuous at best and that the reasons to invest in education do not rest in the common-sense and instrumental and economic rationales for education. He argues:

*...there are many subjects that have no impact, even indirectly on most workers productivity – literature, history, philosophy and music, for example. From a strictly economic point of view, teaching these subjects is a waste of time. We teach our children those subjects because we believe that they will eventually enrich their lives and also make them good citizens. Even though this justification for educational spending is increasingly under attack in an age which everything is supposed to justify its existence in terms of its contribution to productivity growth, it remains ... the most important reason to invest in education (Chang, 2010:182).*

Relatedly, Giroux (2006:209-210) recognises critical pedagogy as a political pedagogy aiming to connect:

*understanding and critical engagement with the issue of social responsibility and what it would mean to educate students to not only critically [seek] to change the world but also be responsible enough to fight for those political and economic conditions that make its democratic possibilities viable.*

Following Pashby's words, cited in the epigraph, we continue to believe that education has an obligation to contribute to a sense of citizenship worthy of its name and its purpose should be to re-imagine political community and to challenge the broader inequalities in society. We concede that this is contested terrain and it will require public mobilisation, engagement and energies that once sustained the struggles against apartheid education. Yet, given our history, such struggles will do more to encourage a national identity than the official pronouncements and the exhortations of politicians. Habermas's (1992:3) statement, "The nation of citizens does not derive its identity from some common ethnic and cultural properties, but rather from the praxis of citizens who actively exercise their civil rights" remains pertinent.

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