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Of 'wealthy industrialists' and 'white protestant Europeans' - the history of race racism as portrayed in a South African textbook

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Abstract

Using a case study, this article examines parts of a chapter in a South African grade 11 History textbook about race and racism. Framed by a multi-modal theory of sign-making and communication, I use an inductive data categorisation and analysis process. At the broadest level, the analysis of the selected texts and images shows how both the values- and skills driven aims of the curriculum are interpreted and applied in the textbook. Within this broader theme are embedded sub themes such as processes of identity formation, social categorisation, a sense of learners' agency or empowerment (or lack thereof), and modes of story-telling. The case study shows that the texts in this book tend to offer a dominant (or 'hegemonic') reading whereby the reader is viewed as someone who will uncritically accept the texts' dominant ideas. Very few opportunities are given to readers to make their own value judgements that

they could base on multiple perspectives, and thus to develop critical literacy. Conclusions could be drawn about the interpretation and implementation of the History curriculum into a textbook medium.

Curriculum and the South African context

Studying the ideological and the academic or discipline-specific underpinnings of History education cannot be divorced from the context in which it is expected to be taught in schools. This context in South Africa can be summed up as one that has undergone major changes since the mid 1990s. Prior to that, History education has been termed dogmatic and indoctrinatory during the apartheid years (Bozzoli, 1983 in van Jaarsveld, 1990; Polakow -Suransky, 2002). The 'new' (national) curriculum, which was introduced in the mid 1990s, made a conscious attempt to turn this around and to make the study of History a discipline that embraces both political/values-driven as well as clearly-defined academic goals. This curriculum wants to promote democratic citizenship values while at the same time encourage a rigorous process of historical enquiry. To capture the process of enquiry within this contentious curriculum content has proved to be difficult for some History textbook authors.

The term curriculum can be interpreted in several ways. Fuchs (2006) emphasises, five dimensions that make up the totality of the teaching-learning process captured in the concept of "curriculum": the normative dimension (values and ethical norms); a functional dimension (developing certain abilities), a contents dimension (selection of topics); the organisational dimension (didactics), and the control dimension (measuring the outcomes). For the purposes of this article I will focus on the normative and functional dimensions. In other words, I will look at what values and skills the curriculum aims to transmit and how this is achieved through a textbook as a curriculum tool.

The stated value-development goal in the History curriculum emphasises students' sense of agency and personal empowerment to participate actively in their own communities for the betterment of society in general:

A study of History builds the capacity of people to make informed choices in order to contribute constructively to society and to advance democracy. As a vehicle of personal empowerment, History engenders in learners an understanding of human agency. This brings with it the knowledge that, as human beings, learners have choices, and that they can make the choice to change the world for the better. (Department of Education, 2003:9)

In addition, the South African Department of Education's aims of History is expressed in the curriculum as supporting democracy and acting as a vehicle for Human Rights in that it (espouses to) "enable(s) people to examine with greater

insight and understanding the prejudices involving race, class, gender, ethnicity and xenophobia still existing in *society* and which must be challenged” (Department of Education, 2002: 9, emphasis added). The problem here is the external, impersonal “society” – or “the other” - and not the student him- or herself. It is thus not surprising if textbooks interpret this curriculum ideal in the ways that they do. But if the study of history is supposed to somehow improve the present (Bain, 2000, p.337), then the way the agency of students is meant to manifests in this interchange must not remain elusive.

The South African curriculum also expresses what kinds of skills, in addition to the values, the study of history is meant to teach. The functional dimension of this curriculum can thus be understood as follows:

Learners who study History use the insights and skills of historians. They analyse sources and evidence, and study different interpretations, divergent opinions and voices. By doing so, they are taught to think in a rigorous and critical manner about society (Department of Education 2003, p10).

Arising from this, the curriculum spells out a more specific identification of what these skills are: 1) consultation with and evaluation of diverse points of view; 2) critical understanding of socio-economic and political systems; and 3) the view that historical truth consists of a multiplicity of voices expressing varying and often contradictory versions of the same history (Department of Education, 2003: 9). These skill components of the curriculum cannot be separated from the control dimension, which comprises four learning outcomes (what students are supposed to achieve or be able to do at the end of a unit of study), each with three to four assessment standards (ways of assessing or measuring whether the outcomes have been achieved and to what degree of competence). In this research I will treat these in an integrated manner as they generally relate to both values and skills-driven aims of the curriculum.

Balancing these skills with the values of history education is a tricky business and an old one indeed. Laichas (2005:1) points out that the two models of history education, the moral purposeful one, and the ‘habits of mind’ (academic or discipline-specific) one, have battled for attention over the past two centuries:

To the extent that the two views actually conflict, those who teach with moral purpose worry that simply teaching names and dates achieves limited higher ends, while those who teach “the facts” worry that a moral agenda will advance an explicit political agenda, compromising the intellectual integrity of historical study.

The key is to agree whether or not these two perspectives actually conflict. I will argue that there is a way to reconcile them.

Theoretical perspective, methodology and sampling

Textbook research is research into the encoding (Bernstein, 1996) and transmission of knowledge (Johnsen, 1993) and hence, by default, implies that learning is the object of these tools (textbooks). Of course textbooks are just one factor in this mediating relationship between what is to be learned and the pupils doing the learning. Teachers play a dominant role in this mediating relationship as they make important decisions about which textbook sections to focus on, and whether and in what combination to use different textbooks and other educational media, thereby becoming co-constructors of historical knowledge (see for example Geschier, 2010).

In South Africa especially, there is a strong demand to produce high quality textbooks in under-resourced schools because such textbooks provide teachers with much of the scaffolding, and some of the confidence to deliver what a new curriculum requires (Johannesson, 2004: 89, see also Siebörger, 2007: 165). Recently, the South African Minister of Basic Education stressed the importance of textbooks in curriculum delivery by stating that the textbook is the most effective tool to ensure consistency, coverage, appropriate pacing and better quality instruction (Motshekga, 2009). There is no question: the cause of better history teaching, at least in South Africa, is linked clearly to the provision of improved materials, including textbooks, which remains at the centre of the history learning encounter (Report of the History and Archeology Panel, 2000).

Notwithstanding the limitations of textbook research outside of classrooms, a general methodological problem in such research is that of classification, because the concepts of knowledge and of learning are broad epistemological issues. I narrowed them according to Selander's definition that "knowledge is the acquired capacity to use an established order of signs and [that] learning consequently [is] an increased capacity to use an established order of signs" (Selander, 2008a:148). From this perspective, what is important to consider are the signs and meaning-making systems that texts present to their readers through their discourse. The task of the analyst is to decode these signs and systems both in the original and in the sub-texts and by doing so, to show how the codes bring new knowledge and competence (Aamotsbakken, 2006). Textbooks are thus, like other artifacts used in education, semiotic tools with a specific way of encoding both academic skills and ideological orientations. The work of Basil Bernstein, which I do not discuss in this paper, is an example of how educational texts and curricula encode certain scripts and sub-scripts.

Some of the aims of the South African History curriculum can be interpreted as grounded in the view of a learning theory, as proposed by Kress (2008), according to which the learner constructs knowledge needed by her or him from their ethical, intellectual and conceptual principles for navigating the world and from their culturally available resources. In the present age of multiculturalism and multi-perspectivity, this implies a move towards an open learning space

where creative differences in the formation and transformation of knowledge and identity are invited (Selander, 2008b). More specifically, “it is a theory of learning where the interests, principles and the agency of the learner have replaced those of an extraneous authority” (Kress, 2008:257), or as Selander (2008c:42) puts it, a theory that “highlights the engagement and meaning making, thus emphasising the individual agency.” From this theoretical perspective I devised categories that explore how this sense of students’ agency and responsibility were addressed or engaged through the texts’ discourses. I was considering, at the outset of the analysis, how the texts invited learner authority/authorship. This broader construct of agency and responsibility led to the identification of more specific themes around identity.

This implied identifying markers/instances in the text that could, arguably, lead to young readers’ searching for themselves in and via the text, in other words, not what have “they done” that may be wrong or right, they could have the chance to say, “what would I have done?”, or “is this also how I see things?”, or “who is the perpetrator and the victim here?” Such a relationship between identity formation and textual reading can be understood, as Aamotsbakken (2006:103) shows, through a process of generating an “extra” text, which is ‘text created within the student’s mind, nourished by his imagination and accompanied by his various experiences with other text’. In other words, in the reading process, students contribute to the creation of an identity through both identifying and vividly constructing this extra text (or sub-text), which is, for them, the actual text. If they do not construct an own text, they are, by the same argument, not acting as agents, but as recipients of textbook authors’ messages. These may be skills-, or academic oriented, or they may be oriented towards a specific ideological position.

As the research progressed, the question thus arose: what are the possibilities for the creation of such “extra” texts during the process of reading and interpreting the history? To answer this question, I employed an inductive method, whereby I noted the themes as I identified them (from my own position as reader and as agent-researcher) in relation to the question above. For example, looking at identity construction, one of the themes that I noted was related to processes around forming judgements of others and of ourselves, or images of “self” and “other” (or “us” and “them”). Thus the analytical category was based on how social classifications and positioning of the subject occur (Ribiero, 2006). Where does the author of the text position herself/himself and where are the readers judged to be?

Hall (1973) has identified three positions that readers may adopt in the construction of meaning from a text:

- *dominant (or 'hegemonic') readings*: here the reader acknowledges, shares and responds to the text’s stated view of an issue, theme or problem.

This is then reproduced and transmitted in a preferred reading that is accepting and uncritical of the text's dominant ideas;

- *oppositional ('counter-hegemonic') readings*: here the reader, while they may understand the dominant and preferred reading, chooses to completely reject the text's assumptions replacing them within an alternative reading based upon their social and political values;
- *negotiated readings*: here the reader, while partly acknowledging the text's authority, as a preferred reading, may, by questioning its ideological assumptions, modify and re-interpret it in a way that reflects their ethnicity, class, gender, ideological and political perspectives. (Hall, 1973, pp.136-8).

For example, if the author's discourse is subtly biased towards an object in the text, the assumption is made that the reader will either share the bias (dominant reading), or challenge it, the latter implying that there will be reflection on the readers' side about their own positioning (oppositional reading). If the author does not see the reader as agent,, it would be evident in the discourse. It would be encoded as part of the epistemological package and would subvert the vision that Selander and Kress, for example, hold about learning and developing agency through negotiated readings of texts. Such negotiated readings would invoke critical literacy, which Shor (1992:32) defines as involving "analytical habits of thinking, reading, writing, speaking or discussing which go beneath surface impressions, traditional myths, mere opinions, and routine clichés; understanding the social contexts and consequences of any subject matter; discovering the deep meaning of any event, text, technique, process, object, statement, image, or situation; applying that meaning to your own context." Included in this type of analysis, then, are the physical features of textbooks such as layout and use of illustrations, which became analytical categories in themselves for the purpose of this article.

The materials used as the data source for this study consisted of the South African History curriculum document, and one chapter in a grade 11 History textbook, which is to some degree representative of officially approved textbooks. The method of sampling could be termed purposeful sampling in that the selected textbook was meant to serve the purpose of illustrating how one textbook interpreted and applied the curriculum. This paper is based on a broader study that examines all 10 officially approved grade 11 History textbooks. I chose grade 11 because it contains a chapter on race and racism, which is of particular interest in a post-conflict society such as South Africa.

The case – analysis and discussion

The South African curriculum is constructed in such a way that it emphasises certain themes or general topics (like Social Darwinism or eugenics) and textbooks can (and do) interpret them fairly openly. This confirms Hellern's findings (1988 in Johnsen, 1994) that modern curricula contain such broad formulations or teaching guides that textbook writers and publishers actually

enjoy great freedom. This is not to disown the reality of the political economy of textbook publishing globally which puts major constraints on authors. South Africa is no exception. However, the finding of the broader study is that there is a great deal of variation in the way textbooks interpret the curriculum, both its values and its content focus. This would indicate that despite the constraints, there is scope for creativity and room for movement. The question is how authors make use of the existing creative space, and not how to contest its boundaries. The latter is a question for another investigation.

The research is investigating in this case study reads in the curriculum as follows: *What was the impact of pseudo-scientific racism and Social Darwinism on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (including the eugenics movement in the late nineteenth century and its impact on ideas of race and racism in Africa, the USA, Australia, Europe and particularly leading to genocide in Nazi Germany)?* The selected textbook's interpretation of this reads: "Pseudo-scientific racism and Social Darwinism on the 19th and 20th centuries". The textbook treatment of this aspect of the curriculum transforms the curriculum from a question and leaves out, probably unintentionally, the important word "impact", thereby revealing tell-tale signs of the level of care and effort that went into the overall writing of the curriculum.

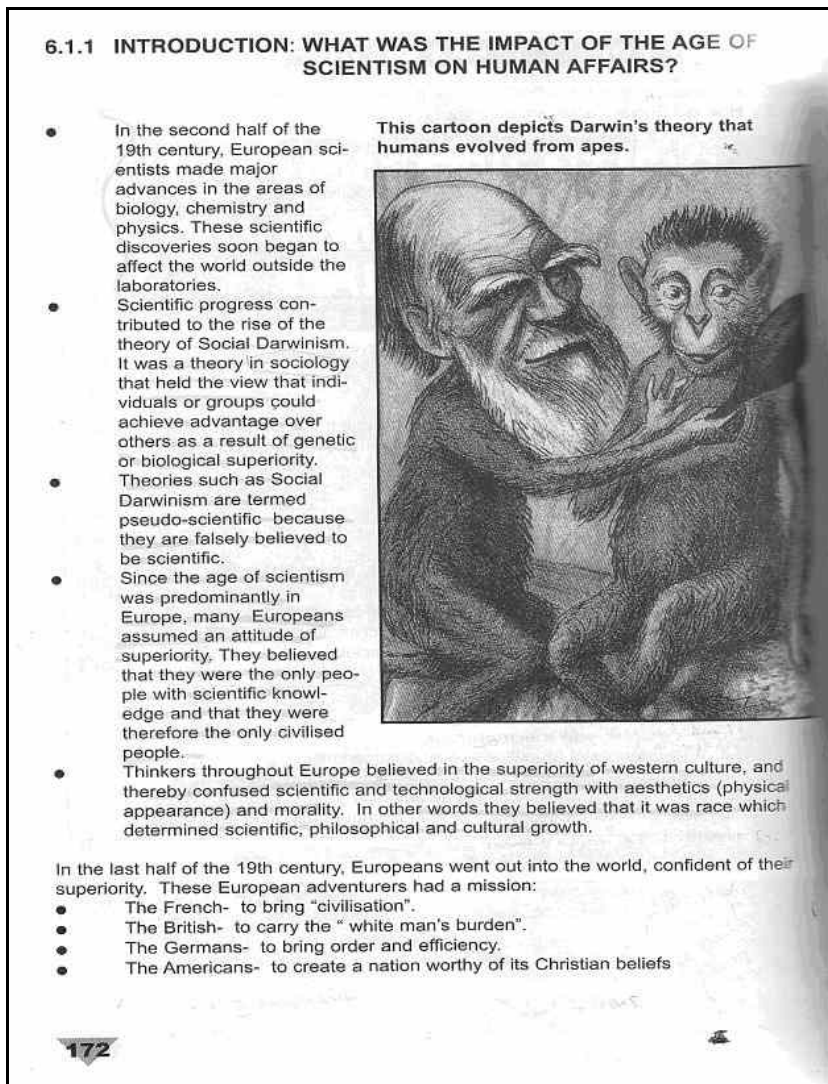
This case study includes large chunks of data so as to show how the graphics and layout, and not only the contents itself, influence the transmission of the message. The textbook condenses much text on the pages which corresponds with Johnsen's findings (1993) that History texts tend to be cluttered with material that may be more confusing than enlightening to the students. This cluttered style is illustrated in Figure 1. The slightly larger than A5 pages are filled with bulleted, point-form expository information, interspersed with photographs, cartoons and other primary sources (all South African official textbooks are printed in black and white – only the front and back covers are printed in colour). Every now and then a box of activities is placed in the text, together with "did you know" boxes. This crowdedness and "interrupted-ness" has the effect that thoughts and messages appear scattered and broken up. There is no flow or continuity. It seems as if the textbook wants to convey many messages and do so with great urgency at the expense of focus, depth, and reader-friendliness.

The busy layout of the textbook is mirrored by the many and varied topics this chapter addresses: Darwinism, Social Darwinism, eugenics, Nazi race ideology, racism in the USA (including incarceration of the Japanese and the Ku Klux Klan), and colonialism's and imperialism's impact on racism in Africa and in Australia. All this transpires in a space that represents a mere 9% of the total content of this textbook. It is not possible to cover a topic in any depth if so many are covered in such a short space. What this probably leads to is that readers will reduce their thinking, and abandon reflection and critical analysis because the sheer volume that has to be digested and because the superficial skimming over the topics disallows it. In the worst case, it will lead readers to come up with

simple answers to complex questions, which is a real danger to historical scholarship. This is especially ironic when studying the History of right wing extremism because it is exactly this kind of simple-solutions approach to complex problems that characterised many of such movements.

Space does not allow an in-depth analysis of the entire chapter content but a few features stand out: The bulleted style instead of stories reduces History to a series of loosely related points to remember. "Europeans" (including "Americans", presumably by virtue of their "whiteness") are clustered together as a group of people with strong and uniform attitudes and beliefs of superiority regarding all aspects of life (science, technology, aesthetics and morality). They are then divided into four nations and each is ascribed one line of explanation of the way their superiority colonized the world.

Figure 1: sample History textbook, p. 172



In figure 1 above, the cartoon of Darwin and the monkey is interpreted *for* students to mean one thing only: and that is a view that humans evolved from monkeys. It does not delve into the satirical component of the cartoon but rather accepts its message as “the truth”, ignoring the more “scientific” notion that Darwin’s theory is about natural selection and the likelihood of a common ancestor between primates and humans. This simple caption above the drawing communicates strongly what the text’s stance is to this topic and how, in turn, it disallows the development of historical or even literary skills of engaging with and interpreting a source and discussing its relevance and validity. Critical literacy is thus undermined and a dominant, or hegemonic (Hall, 1973), reading of the text prevails.

On the next page Darwinism is explored, taking up a whole page even though it could have been mentioned in passing since the focus is supposed to be on *Social* Darwinism. The assessment activity is largely about Darwin’s theory and asks students to discuss its controversy regarding religious beliefs, but the description of the theory in the text does not address this key feature of the controversy, that of intelligent design. The assessment activity includes the creation of a collage explaining Darwin’s theory of evolution. But how this activity would contribute to historical skills of critical thinking, interpreting a multiplicity of voices, or understanding socio political system in society, remains unclear. This kind of activity is not likely to transform students’ thinking in any academically productive way, since it is not about historical understanding, and not even about formations of values, which in turn could be constructing new identities in students.

Figure 2: sample History textbook p. 174-175

What were the guiding principles of Social Darwinism:

- Social Darwinism is most associated with the writings of Englishman Herbert Spencer. In *Progress: Its law and cause* Spencer wrote:

...Whether it be development of the earth, in the development of life upon its surface, the development of society, of government... This same evolution of the simple into complex... holds throughout.

From the above, he meant that all aspects of life become more advanced with time.

- Another supporter of the philosophy of Social Darwinism was Malthus who in his work *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, argued that as the increasing population would outgrow its food supply, this would result in the starvation of the weakest.
- Some of the followers of Social Darwinism believed that white Protestant Europeans evolved much further and faster than other races. Some took this idea further by claiming that human society is always in a kind of evolutionary process in which the fittest - which happened to be those who can make lots of money were chosen to dominate.
- The unfit and poor could not compete and just as nature weeds out the unfit, an enlightened society ought to weed out its unfit and permit them to die off so as not to weaken the racial stock.

These ideas eventually led to a variety of practices and beliefs such as:

- Nordic racism, used by the followers of Nazism. The Nordic people were those who came from the countries of north western Europe, especially the Scandinavian countries and Iceland. Their typical appearance was considered to be tall, blonde, fair-skinned and blue-eyed. Nazis believed that the Nordic people were a 'pure' race.
- Eugenics, a movement which believed that the unfit transmit undesirable characteristics to their offspring and that this process should be prevented. The wealthy male European industrialist was placed at the apex of evolution that is such an individual was regarded as the most highly evolved. Another belief was that any attempt to provide welfare for the poor was a mistake. Feeding or housing the poor would simply permit them to survive and transmit their unfitness to their children who, in turn, would pass it on to their children. Industrialists held the view that it would be undesirable for government to support any plan that would promote racial weakness.

Source 6A: In this extract from the *Mein Kampf*, Hitler attempts to justify his racist policies.

Survival of the fittest

Mankind has grown great in eternal struggle and only in eternal peace does it perish....Nature puts living creatures on the globe and watches free play of forces. She then confers the master's right on her favourite child, the strongest in courage and industry The stronger must dominate and not blend with the weaker, thus sacrificing his own greatness. Only the born weakling can view this as cruel

(Adolf Hitler in his *Mein Kampf*)

Did you know?

The phrase, "survival of the fittest" was coined by Herbert Spencer, who was widely recognised as the father of Social Darwinism.

Activity 6.3 LO2 AS1; LO3 AS3/4

Refer to the information in Source 6A and answer the following questions.

- Individual** : What is your view of the idea of "the survival of the fittest"?
- Pair** : How logical are the arguments put forward by Hitler in Source 6A?
- Group Debate** : The theory of evolution has proved conclusively that human beings are not God's creation.

13 WHY DID THE EUGENICS MOVEMENT ORIGINATE?

Let us examine in more detail the core beliefs of the Eugenics Movement.

- The word Eugenics was coined in 1883 by English scientist Francis Galton, to promote the pseudoscientific idea of perfecting the human race by getting rid of its 'undesirables' while multiplying its 'desirables'.
- Eugenics is characterised by two widespread beliefs:
 - The human species was 'perfectible'.
 - Science was the most reliable form of knowledge.
- Modern Eugenics has its roots in, but differs from, Social Darwinism:
 - Social Darwinism was characterised by a laissez-faire (non interfering) attitude. Followers of this theory believed that by just allowing nature to take its course, the worst elements of society would be eliminated.
 - Modern Eugenics, on the other hand, is based on the notion that proper intentional breeding is the key to improving society.
 - With the birth of modern genetics in 1900 the idea of improving the human species was transformed into an institutionalised movement called the Eugenic Movement.
 - There were two main aspects to this movement:
 - Positive Eugenics: which focussed on increasing the breeding potential of "fit" individuals.

This is a craniometer used in the 19th century to measure skulls, in support of race theories.

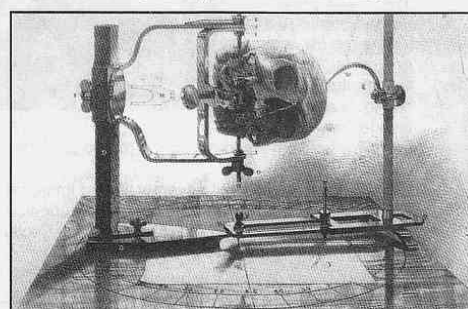


Figure 2 illustrates a typical double page spread in the sampled textbook. I will highlight only a few features of this text: the three primary sources lack proper referential details. Furthermore, they are not interrogated or questioned but are rather interpreted for the readers in one specific way. No room for discussion or multiple interpretations is given. One of the reasons is that there are no other/conflicting/alternative voices or sources that readers are exposed to. This could have been achieved through the use of multiple narratives, each told from a different perspective. As is, there are no stories at all. Furthermore, we are not given the contexts surrounding the people who are mentioned; that is Herbert Spencer, Malthus, Hitler and Francis Galton. The (truncated) primary source by Hitler appears to be "thrown in" to illustrate Social Darwinism but this is done in a decontextualised, isolated manner so that no story or debate unfolds. Although there is a debate activity, this again focuses on Darwinism and the religious question within it when in fact this lesson is supposed to be about the origins and impact of race theories.

The photograph of the craniometer is there almost for “good measure”, matching the crammed and scattered layout style of this text – there is no explanation of it, other than that it was “in support of race theories” – a phrasing that shows a lack of attention to language detail and thus also to precision of utterance. Surely the caption was meant to read something like “in an attempt to prove race theories”. Other tell-tale signs of poor attention to language can be seen in the misspelling of Francis Galton’s name, which is spelt “Gallon”, as well as using “it’s” and “its” interchangeably to mean “its”. Moreover, the bulleted style of information sometimes relinquishes the use of full sentences, which could negatively influence students’ extended writing skills.

There are certain homogenous groups of people who are identified here as perpetrators of racism. They are: “the followers of Social Darwinism”, “white Protestant Europeans”, and “the wealthy male European industrialist”. These images of “the other”. Du Plessis (2002:98) stresses that empowerment through education can help students to “de-learn” racism. I argue that de-learning racism is going to be difficult if the textbook chapter which is meant to teach about the origins and consequences thereof employs an “us” and “them” stance by using generalised and indiscriminant collective labels of the historical perpetrators and by doing away with the narrative style and its nuances. Moreover, it is going to be difficult to un-learn racism if the words “racism”, “racists”, “superior/ity” and “inferior/ity” are repeated 86 times in space of 23 pages.

A study of history cannot be called that unless makes use of *some* story-telling. The above illustrations are examples of non-narrative texts that have no actors/agents, no plot and no narrator either. Books employing such methods of History teaching are ultimately genre-less and fail to accomplish both the values-driven and scholarly aims of the curriculum. From the skills-driven perspective, it is impossible to study different interpretations if only one is given. Neither is it possible to think critically and rigorously about society if the narrative form is replaced with preachy bulleted doctrine. In terms of the values-driven aims of the curriculum, one of the main aims is to empower students with a sense of capacity to make a difference in this world. If textbooks omit the narrator and a story, they can hardly aspire to fulfill that aim, since they strip the whole discourse off the very thing they intend to instill in students: a sense of agency. This way of using signs and proposing meaning-making goes directly against the flow of the development of new learning environments, which see the *agency and the responsibility* of the learner as the most important (Kress, 2008, emphasis added). It would be much more fruitful to tell stories and to include stories with real-life, personal, individual heroes (and villains), complete with context, who can act as examples for students for their “personal empowerment” or for “advancing democracy” instead of telling who “the other” is and by implication telling students to judge them.

I noted two exceptions to this trend in this book: there are two narratives in this chapter. The one I am reproducing below nonetheless mirrors the same type of rigid ‘black’ and ‘white’ discourse discussed until now. It shows two different (‘white’) perspectives about racial segregation in the USA. It is notable that the two accounts

are not about the same event. Also notable is the “pre-interpreted” heading of each story, one “condemning” and the other “justifying” such segregation; echoing to the reader the simplistic “us” and “them” discourse employed until this point in the previous texts. Here would have been a good opportunity to allow readers to come to their own conclusions but the text disallows it (again). The table comparing the two letters is summarised as follows:

Racism in the USA : White perspectives (views)	
<p>Source 6 C: In this account by Agnes Smedley segregation is condemned.</p> <p>The treatment of Negroes in the south has humiliated and shamed me so deeply that my blood runs cold in my veins. Travelling by bus, with the rain pouring, the driver ordered a dozen Negroes to step back and let two handsome white women aboard first. They came on, then the driver saw they had Negro blood in their veins - perhaps their hair showed it. The driver slapped his leg and bawled with laughter and said to the white passengers: "Now ain't that a joke! I thought they was white and they are Niggers." The faces of the two women and of all the colored passengers were frozen. Mine froze too. Some of the white passengers broke into a laugh at the joke... Now when I heard this, I should have stood up and killed the driver. But I sat there petrified, sat there like a traitor to the human race. I kept thinking of what Jesus would have done, and knew that he would perhaps have allowed Himself to be killed. I didn't. I didn't do a thing for many reasons: because I was warned a dozen times by white people that if I did anything it would be the colored people who suffered for it.</p> <p>Agnes Smedley Letter to Aino Taylor (7th December, 1942)</p>	<p>Source 6D: In this account by James Eastland segregation is justified.</p> <p>The southern institution of racial segregation or racial separation was the correct, self-evident truth which arose from the chaos and confusion of the reconstruction period. Separation promotes racial harmony. It permits each race to follow its own pursuits, and its own civilization. Segregation is not discrimination. Segregation is not a badge of racial inferiority, and that it is not is recognized by both races in the Southern States. In fact, segregation is desired and supported by the vast majority of the members of both races in the South, who dwell side by side under harmonious conditions..... Mr. President, it is the law of nature, it is the law of God, that every race has both the right and the duty to perpetuate itself. All free men have the right to associate exclusively with members of their own race, free from governmental interference, if they so desire. Free men have the right to send their children to schools of their own choosing, free from governmental interference and to build up their own culture, free from governmental interference. These rights are inherent in the Constitution of the United States and in the American system of government, both state and national, to promote and protect this right.</p> <p>James Eastland Representative from Mississippi, speech in the United States Senate (27th May, 1954)</p>

Figure 3: sample History textbook, p 194

The “activity questions” after these two stories appear to be fairly engaging by asking learners to a) tabulate the differences between the two points of view; b) asking why Agnes Smedley did not stand up for her beliefs; and c) by asking them to write a response letter to the second story. However, when consulting the teacher’s guide, the subtext in it is fairly clear: the take-home lesson is that the ‘white’ perspective’ is that of justifying segregation and racism, whereas the ‘black perspective’ is to condemn it. For example, before reading the letters, the pupil is informed that these are ‘white’ perspectives, assuming that Agnes was therefore white. If this were true (which seems unlikely), then it would be interesting to discuss why she appears to be showing compassion and kindness towards the coloured woman being unjustly treated. But this is not the position of the textbook, or its guide; they do not provide the space for alternative interpretations:

a)

Agnes Smedley claimed	James Eastland claimed
● Blacks humiliated	● Segregation promoted harmony
● insulted	● segregation not inferior
● made resentful	● segregation supported by all races
● left feeling hopeless	

b) She was threatened that any action on her part would lead to further problems for Blacks.

c) Learners may have the following response:

- racist views
- enforced segregation does not promote racial harmony
- government intervention was needed
- justification for racism
- misinterpretation of constitution

Figure 4: sample History textbook “Educator’s Guide”, p. 160

By the time the reader reaches the end of the chapter and the conclusions, a crucial question around curriculum interpretation resurfaces: what do “human agency”, “empowerment” and “advancing democracy” mean to different textbook authors? It appears that, apart from the slight deviation of the single discourse style exemplified in Figure 3, this textbook’s understanding of those concepts has to do with painting a clear picture of “the enemy” or the “perpetrator”. It does so by ensuring that students grasp that racial hatred is synonymous with European (white) colonialism, Nazism, eugenics and Social Darwinism in an uncomplicated way with a singular causality implicated. The conclusion of the chapter is an example of how a complex and highly contestable history such as this one can be reduced and simplified to an image of “us” and “them”:

When European colonists applied their pseudo-scientific racist theories across the globe, they created new misguided ideologies which resulted in gross violations of basic human rights. These ideologies led the rich and powerful to believe that they more morally justified in exploiting the

resources and destroying the cultures of people who were other than white. While some were motivated by blatant racism others were driven by imperialism and capitalism. (p 193)

This kind of text steers towards a closed reading and leaves little room for learners to make up their own minds. The above conclusion seems to fit with Du Plessis's (2002:92) argument that the new school curriculum should particularly concentrate on African history and culture, viewed from an African perspective. However, the question to ask is what "the African frame of mind" or "an African perspective" means. If it means that indiscriminant categories such as "the Europeans", "wealthy industrialists", "white male Protestants" etc. must be pitted against the "African" (or 'non-white' in general), then surely this would go against the spirit of the curriculum's call for empowerment which is about the establishment of the dignity of each person. If it means that students of history must be constantly told what judgements to make about "the racist other", they will be denied the opportunity to discover for themselves how to make such judgements. An alternative would be to present narratives (with a story teller, real characters and a plot) that tell the same story from different perspectives instead of using generalized categories. Then, even when the aim is to develop certain citizenship values, this does not necessarily have to happen at the expense of historical scholarship.

Another approach to un-learning racism would be, possibly, to consider the matter not only from the victim's (e.g. Africa's) perspective, but also from that of the "perpetrator". Stern-Strom (1994: 531) notes that in times of political, social or economic stress, many people look for someone to blame; someone to hold responsible for their troubles. As a result, such people are often attracted to groups that offer simple answers to complex questions who end up harbouring racist ideas and ideals. Textbooks such as the one shown above could explore this side of racism by considering that "behind the gleaming ranks of those who seem totalitarian robots stand men and women, various and diverse, complex and complicated, some brave, some cowardly, some brainwashed, some violently idiosyncratic, and all of them very human" (Stern-Strom, 1994:xxi). This would be in line with the South African History curriculum's skills-driven motive of wanting learners to be able to "explain why people in a particular historical context acted as they did." (Department of Education, 2002:19). As is, this textbook's answer is simple: because they were racists; or "white males"; or "European industrialist"; or "protestant Europeans".

By this textbook's own admission, the values and attitudes that this chapter intends students to "appreciate" are, the consequences of an attitude of racial superiority; the need for a society free of racial hatred and discrimination; the humiliation of being discriminated against; and the need to make society aware of the different forms of racism (p 171). Based on the self-assessment check list below, I argue that the culminating aim of this chapter is to get students to appreciate that all races are inherently equal, as shown by item 10 below, and that this is supposed to be achieved through an extensive listing of various forms of racism in the world. While this aim is

commendable, it is questionable whether it can be achieved through such means. Perhaps what would be more effective is to explore particular, contextual histories of people personally involved with such forms of racism. This way, students could become aware of the risk of anachronistic impositions of their own, twenty-first century worldview upon the world of the past (Seixas and Peck, 2004:113).

Self Assessment Checklist

Use the following grid to check if you understand this chapter.

		YES	NO
1.	I understand the concepts Social Darwinism, Darwinism, racism and Eugenics.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I can explain the origins and impact of racism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I can explain how the theory of Eugenics was implemented.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I can understand and explain Nazi racist theories.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	I am aware of the impact of Nazi Racism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	I can explain the extent of racism in the United States.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	I understand the relationship between colonialism, imperialism and racism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	I can identify the factors that led to the condemnation of racism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	I am aware of the extent of racism in the Australian society.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	I am fully aware that all races are inherently equal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 4: sample South African textbook, p 194

My point is that even if students could honestly answer all the above questions in Figure 4 in the affirmative, they would have to, firstly, base their answers on some form of judgement of “the other” – those that are defined as someone *other than* the victims of oppressions and racism. And secondly, affirmative answers would be unlikely to develop in students a sense of agency or personal empowerment, other than that they can point fingers and count themselves fortunate not to be part of such a history (anymore). Or they can feel empowered in the assurance, which appears to be the value-lesson of this chapter, that everyone is equal. But how this leads to a sense of agency that would motivate them to want to “change the world for the better” still remains unanswered.

Conclusion

The South African History curriculum is broadly defined and textbook authors and publishers have considerable leeway to interpret it in different ways. The core

curriculum ideals are that of valuing democratic citizenship, personal empowerment and a sense of agency. The textbook interpreted these values in the sampled chapter as those wanting learners to “appreciate” the consequences of an attitude of racial superiority; the need for a society free of racial hatred and discrimination; the humiliation of being discriminated against; and the need to make society aware of the different forms of racism”(p 171). This sounds like a lifetime’s achievement, somewhat over-ambitious for a 29 page textbook chapter to achieve. It was thus not surprising that the sources and texts reproduced in this chapter largely failed to achieve such high ideals. This was the result of a number of factors that, instead of allowing a negotiated reading, steered learners towards a closed or dominant one – that of “appreciating” that all races are equal and that society needs to be free of racial hatred. With this “mission” in mind, this text tended to require learners to be accepting and uncritical of the text’s dominant ideas (Hall, 1973). A powerful reminder of this was the self-assessment check-list.

The real and difficult task of schools and their curricula is to “convey not only a sense of value but a means of showing its significance in ways that connect with the lives of the young” (Kress, 2008:261). Instead of creating a distance between readers and the group homogenously portrayed as ‘the perpetrators of racism’, as was often done in this textbook, an alternative would be to involve students (and teachers) directly and personally in the historical drama and by allowing them to come to their own conclusions. It would foster critical literacy, which, among others, demands going beneath the surface impression, steering away from pre-interpreting the readings for learners, and rather trying to get readers to understand the social contexts of the subject matter by applying the meaning of the texts to their own lives (Shor, 1992). Very little of this was done in this textbook. Another factor that obscured the possibility for developing this kind of critical literacy was the crowdedness and “interrupted-ness” of the layout of the book. It produced an effect of scattered or broken-up thoughts and messages, taking away flow or continuity. The book seemed to want to convey many messages with urgency, at the expense of focus, depth, and reader-friendliness.

It could be argued that when something uneasy or controversial is required (by the curriculum) to mediated by textbooks, such as the teaching and learning about the history of race and racism in post-apartheid South Africa, the source of this unease is not so much the textbook’s message as the inherent limitations of the textbook medium to contain it (LaSpina 1998:180). It is certainly true that textbooks as educational media have many limitations. Yet they are not about to be replaced at this time in this country. Moreover, there is a certain creative space within which authors are free to move, even within the bounds and limits of the politico-economic constraints of textbook publishing. The problem with this creative space to interpret the curriculum freely is not that it does not exist, but “that only a few textbook authors and publishers avail themselves of this freedom or have enough imagination to move off into a new direction” (Hellern, 1988, quoted in Johnsen, 1993: 303). This is a great challenge to the writing and publishing of South African History textbooks, a challenge

that authors and publishers respond to with varying degrees of imagination and innovation, as the broader study of the set of 10 History textbook is beginning to show.

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