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# Scholarly and Values-driven Objectives in Two South African School History Textbooks: An Analysis of Topics of Race and Racism

*Katalin Morgan*\*

**Abstract:** »*Wissenschaftliche und wertbestimmte Lernziele in zwei Südafrikanischen Schulbüchern: eine Analyse der Themen Rasse und Rassismus*«. This article reports on findings that are part of a larger study of the 10 official (meaning approved by the government education department) grade 11 history textbooks and their respective teacher guides. Using two case studies, selected by maximum variation sampling, and applying exploratory content analysis, it will map out some aims of the history curriculum and assess whether the way each book presents the topics for study is actually achieving those aims. By doing so, the article, will also draw on some international literature on history benchmarks as applied to the South African textbooks. One of the central findings of this study is that the textbooks vary vastly, not only in the way they interpret and apply the curriculum, but also in the way they present the topics and assessments activities, the kind of sources they draw on, the forms of narratives they employ and ultimately in the kind of discourses they provide for the enabling of historical thinking and understanding. By highlighting these stark differences, the article also shows how some textbooks emphasise the value-driven development goals of the curriculum, whereas others tend to concentrate more on its scholarly outcomes.

**Keywords:** historical understanding, history textbooks, South African history curriculum.

## Background to the Study

The transformation of the school history curriculum in the 1990s in South Africa presents a particular context for studying history teaching in this region, but this paper will not document this again since it has been extensively done elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. Suffice to say that South Africa's overall curriculum has had a major overhaul and that history as school subject within it is beginning to show

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Chisholm: 2008, Tibbitt: 2006, Siebörger: 2006, Weldon: 2005, Polakow-Suransky: 2002, Bam: 2001, Bam & Visser: 1996, Siebörger: 1992 and Van Jaarsveld:1990.

some important developmental signs. These signs mark a path away from what some have implied or argued were indoctrinatory syllabi of apartheid history education (Bozzoli, 1983 in van Jaarsveld, 1990; Polakow-Suransky, 2002 and Walshe, 1985.) With the analysis of two examples of textbooks, it is possible to broadly gauge the stage of this development. The focus of this paper is on this developmental moment, addressing the question of how these textbooks could contribute to shaping history education in the transformed and transforming South Africa.

According to Giroux (1992, 26), the study of history textbooks involves “challenging, remapping and renegotiating those boundaries of knowledge that claim the status of master narratives, fixed identities and an objective representation of reality.” From this perspective it is possible to imagine that sometimes textbooks induce ways of learning that do not explore such boundaries, that is, when textbooks “present knowledge as something dogmatic and [...] undermine the exercise of a critical understanding” (Wain, 1992, 39). Wain also argues that it is impossible to take an ideologically neutral stance towards the past and that therefore textbooks must be evaluated as ideological tools. While accepting this position, it is not to say that therefore all textbooks are worthless for historical scholarship because of their ideological bias. In this article I will show, through two exemplars, how textbooks can be understood to be positioned in this continuum of achieving historical scholarship and dogmatic or doctrinal presentation of knowledge.

### Trends in South African Textbook Research

In South Africa the field of history textbook research is deeply embedded in the wider discussion of curriculum transformation of the 1990s in the overall new project of educational transformation. Much has been written on the nature and importance of history as a school subject and its role in the transformational process of the national politico-educational structure and environment, (see Engelbrecht, Trümplemann, Kapp, van der Merwe, Lombard, Vermaak, Garson, Gunning, Kallaway, Mohlamme, Nieuwenhuis, Oberholtser, Pillay, Siebörger, Spies, Stemmet, Taunyane, van Niekerk and Van der Ross in “The Teaching of history in the RSA” [HSRC, 1992]; Pingel 2008, Polakow-Suransky, 2002; Engelbrecht, 2005; the report of the History/Archaeology Panel to the Minister of Education, 2000) as well as the place and purpose of textbooks within the new socio-political context (Bam & Visser, 1996, Siebörger, 1992 and 2006, Dean & Siebörger, 1995, and Nishino, 2006).

Weldon (2006, 2) notes that “there is a gap in the literature surveyed that makes links between memory, identity, history and construction of curriculum” and that international research has focused on the debates generated by conflicting narratives rather than locating these debates within a wider context of curriculum change in transition societies. Hence the current study emerges

from this gap by aiming to look specifically at textbooks and their implication for curriculum design in a post-conflict society like South Africa.

There are some, albeit few, recent studies that also deal specifically with South African history textbooks. One such study is an analysis of the topic of globalism and national narratives in Grade 12 history textbooks (van Eeden, 2008, 34) which found that

recently published Grade 12 textbooks in South Africa, as based on the revised history curriculum, do not sufficiently live up to this requirement in their content, their language style, and their assessment tasks.

Another study by Chisholm (2008) examines discourses of the nation in history textbooks with special reference to xenophobia and explores the uses of these in specific classrooms in urban schools.

What makes the current study different is that it does a micro-analysis, using two new textbooks (instead of generalizing across all textbooks) that can be seen to represent two ends of a continuum of “successful” and “less successful” when mapped against the curriculum’s aims. Moreover, this study aims to contextualize these South African books by assessing them not only against their own curriculum criteria but also by invoking some criteria for historical understanding from research-based literature (such as “The Benchmarks Project<sup>2</sup>”). In short, the study is distinguished from others in that it locates the analysis of the textbooks in a wider context and juxtaposes the two texts where they would illustrate significant difference.

### The Significance of Textbooks

Chisholm, (2008, 356), a leading South African researcher at the Human Sciences Research Council argues that textbooks do not necessarily transform values and attitudes, and that new textbooks with new national values may not mean that their messages are internalized. I would argue that textbooks do matter very much because they bear immutable authority, together with the teacher, on the pupils/young readers for whom they are written (see Bain: 2006), especially as many young readers in South Africa have little access to other sources of historical information. This authority is often accepted by students with no questions about the trustworthiness of sources or the authors’ intent (Paxton, 1999, 321). In most South African schools textbooks play a crucial role in the classroom and are extensions of both the teacher and the curriculum because they are simply the only text artefacts around in many schools. It is thus important to analyse these artefacts and to see how they

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<sup>2</sup> This project “combines the research of historians and educators with the experience and skills of classroom teachers to create practical ways of encouraging historical thinking in realistic classroom settings” (Historica and Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness, 2009).

present themselves and whether the aims they make prominent, and which are also often verbatim renderings of the aims of the national curriculum, are achieved in their discourse.

### The South African History Curriculum

The purpose of studying history is defined in the South African (Department of Education, 2003) curriculum document as learners' using their potential to influence the societies they live in. The document spells out at length how the study of history supports democracy and acts as a vehicle for human rights, using terms such as "advancing democracy", "personal empowerment" or "changing the world for the better" (South African National Department of Education, 2003). Thus the history curriculum can be considered to contain elements of citizenship education. However, what differentiates this curriculum from some other, apparently similar ones (such as "Facing History and Ourselves"<sup>3</sup> or FHAO), is that there is no clear and purposeful reference to the roles and responsibilities of students within this transformation. By contrast, FHAO deliberately makes this connection by aiming to "help students realise how hatred, indifference, denial, and opportunism, little by little, shaped [the period of Nazi Germany] in history and [to] consider how these same human dynamics can shape any period" (Barr, 2005, 147).

In addition to instilling certain citizenship values, the purpose of the South African history curriculum is also supposedly achieved by a rigorous process of historical enquiry. Such enquiry is said to consist of at least three elements. They are: a constructive debate through careful evaluation of a broad range of evidence and diverse points of view; a critical understanding of socio-economic systems in their historical perspective and their impact on people; and the view that historical truth consists of a multiplicity of voices, expressing varying and often contradictory versions of the same history (Department of Education, 2002, 9).

The study of history, according to this curriculum thus serves two roles: a vehicle for democracy and human rights on the one hand (a values-driven role), and developing academic skills such as for example becoming aware of multiple perspectives (a skills-driven role). Weldon, a member of the provincial Western Cape Department of Education (in Tibbitt, 2006, 47) stresses that the design of the curriculum is intended to allow for engagement with history without imposing a single dominant narrative. This is supported by the South

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<sup>3</sup> FHAO, an international organization established in 1976, approaches the study of history in a way that tries "to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of forms of intergroup conflict (racism, prejudice, anti-Semitism, etc.) in order to foster perspective taking, critical thinking and moral decision making and to help students develop into humane and responsible citizens (Strom & Parsons, 1982 quoted in Schultz, L. H., Barr, D.J and Selman, R. 2001, 5).

African Department of Education's *Manifesto On Values, Education and Democracy* (2001, 9), which states that the purpose of education "is not to drum a series of 'values' into children's heads in the style of the Christian Nationalist schooling of the apartheid years" because "we have learned, from the past, the dangers of legislating a value system and turning it into an ideology".

This curriculum has certain aims and ways of assessing whether they have been achieved. These are referred to as "Learning Outcomes" (what students are supposed to achieve or be able to do at the end of a unit of study) and "Assessment Standards" (ways of assessing or measuring whether the outcomes have been achieved and to what degree of competence) respectively. Elsewhere these are sometimes referred to as "standards" and "benchmarks" – the knowledge, skills and values that students are meant to master or develop and also to articulate for purposes of assessment.

The South African Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards developed for grade 11 history students are academically demanding. In fact, I would agree with Center (2004) who, commenting on them, says that

I find this statement to be absolutely ideal, yet rather ambitious. Just from studying the projected outcomes and assessment criteria of the learning area [of history], it almost seems to me that the expectations of this new curriculum are completely unattainable.

These expectations can be found on the Department of Education's website in the section, "Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards" (chapter 3): <<http://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/SUBSTATEMENTS/History.pdf>>.

I will thus not reproduce them. The ones that I will be focusing on in this paper are outlined in the next section, although they can and should not be seen in isolation from the others since they interrelate.

## The Analytical Framework

The first difference I noted between the textbooks that I looked at was the way each interpreted and applied the curriculum structurally. I wanted to know whether they followed the curriculum closely or whether they applied their own interpretation and sequencing. This was motivated by Carlson's finding that an important implication for this line of research is a better understanding of whether or to what extent curriculum predetermines interpretations of socio-historical reality presented to students, or conversely presents students with an opportunity to go beyond simplistic, ideological interpretations of social phenomena Carlson (1989).

Second, for the purpose of this study, I singled out some of the curriculum expectations: students should learn how to *think critically*; and they should be able to compare and contrast interpretations and perspectives of events so that they can *draw independent conclusions*. As mentioned, these curriculum expectations imply others too. I am also going to use three outcomes criteria of

the Benchmark Project to supplement the South African curriculum expectations in the analysis since they are closely related. These benchmarks are: *using primary source evidence* for historical arguments, *taking a historical perspective*, and *understanding the moral dimensions of historical interpretations* (Seixas, 2006).

The close relationship between the two sets of benchmarks or outcomes criteria can be explained as follows: firstly, through using primary sources students learn to explain multiple interpretations. Secondly, taking a historical perspective, which is about understanding different socio-cultural contexts, closely corresponds with the ability “to explain the various interpretations and perspectives of historical events and why people in a particular historical context acted as they did” (South African Department of Education, 2003). It can be regarded as a skill developed for overcoming presentism, which is the tendency to interpret the past in presentist terms (Hunt, 2002). Thirdly, taking a historical perspective is thus related to critical thinking in that it can help students to question statements of fact using judgements and criteria of not current but of contextual thinking. And this leads to the final tenet of the analytical framework, that of understanding the moral dimension of historical interpretation, which in turn relates to presentism. Seixas (2006) defines presentism as the *unwarranted* imposition of present ideas on actors in the past (Seixas, 2006, 10, emphasis mine). The word “unwarranted” is key, since there are times when such impositions are justified and times when they are not. These are the times when we consider the transformative aims of the curriculum vis-à-vis human rights, democracy, unity and social justice. And this is when historical understanding becomes problematic since matters of judgement tend to be highly subjective and controversial. Interesting to note is that in the South African curriculum this benchmark (of understanding the moral dimension of history) is not explicitly stated in the history Learning Outcomes or Assessment Standards, yet it lies at the heart of a “transformative” curriculum; one that is intended to lead students to becoming “responsible citizens”.

Taken together, these dimensions of the analytical framework add up to “disciplinary literacy”, which in history includes “the ability to evaluate materials and information in relation to their context and their source, and to integrate this and other information into written historical discourse” (Paxton, 1999, 323). Such literacy also “involves the permanent reconstruction and reinterpretation of past events so that our knowledge is always going to be uncertain and controversial” (Rouet, Favart, Britt and Perfetti, 1997, 86). According to Paxton (1999, 323), this kind of disciplinary knowledge is rarely touched upon in history textbooks; a position that shall be tested in this analysis.

## The Grade 11 Curriculum

The content or knowledge focus of the grade 11 curriculum can be summed up as an examination of what the world was like after 1850 in terms of imperialism; responses to colonialism in Africa; the challenges and crises of capitalism; pseudo-scientific racism; competing national identities in Africa; and apartheid in South Africa. I wanted to focus on how ideas of race and racism are taught and thus I paid special attention to the story of Nazi Germany, which features twice in the grade 11 curriculum's content: first as part of "*Crisis of capitalism: the Great Depression in the USA and its wider impact in terms of the emergence of fascist economies and states (e.g. Nazi Germany and Japan)*" (South African Department of Education, 2009, 26), which looks at the economic aspects. Secondly, it features in the section, "*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)*", which focuses more on race and racism.

## Sampling and Methodology

I chose grade 11 textbooks because they contain a chapter on race and racism, which is of particular interest in a post-conflict society such as South Africa, whose conflict was exactly about race and racism. I wanted to know how such a topic could be articulated in history textbooks, seeing that it is not quite a thing of the past.

To select the textbooks for investigation, I used maximum variation sampling, which is a type of purposeful sampling with the aim of understanding heterogeneity (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). The idea was to select a few cases that maximize the diversity relevant to the research question of "how does the treatment of the topic of race and racism in some history textbooks fulfill the guidelines in the history curriculum?" This is fitting since "case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined" (Tellis, 1997), the system here being that of senior secondary history education.

These text samples were then analyzed, using a framework consisting of five dimensions. These dimensions were derived from the South African curriculum criteria or outcomes and were linked to some indicators from the literature. Thereafter I chose a few examples in each relevant chapter of the two textbooks that would illustrate strong variation in the way each book interprets and applies these curriculum criteria or outcomes. These five dimensions are the following: The first looks at the extent to which a textbook follows the structure of the curriculum or whether it chooses to apply its own interpretation thereof. The second is the use of primary sources coupled with examples of



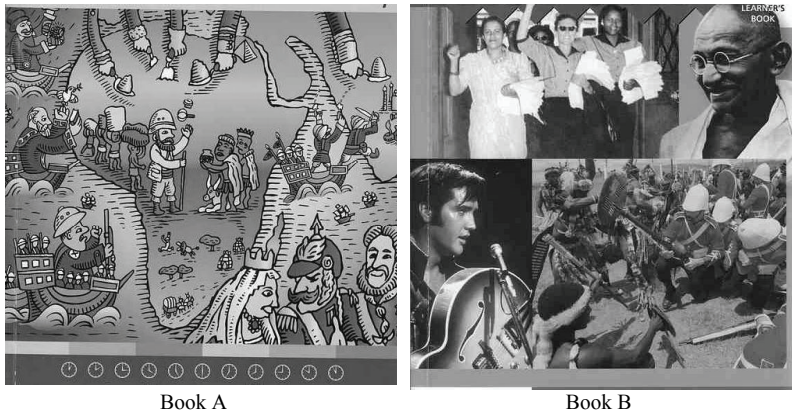
language use. The third dimension comprises skills of critical thinking and comparing and contrasting varying interpretations for drawing independent conclusions. The fourth is that of taking a historical perspective. Finally, the moral dimension of historical understanding was analyzed. All of these dimensions speak to discursive trends in the texts.

## The Two Cases

### 1. Interpreting the Curriculum

The two books I selected are both 2006 publications. I refer to them as “Book A” and “Book B”.

Figure 1: Textbook Cover Illustrations of the Two Books in This Study



Regarding the first dimension, which is the way each book interprets the curriculum’s structure, I noted the following: Book A follows the curriculum closely. The chapter on “Crisis of Capitalism” contains a unit on “Germany and the emergence of a fascist economy”. The second knowledge focus in the curriculum is also replicated exactly in the book: a chapter exploring “the impact of Social Darwinism and racism”. Book B, by contrast, does it differently; it deviates from the order and structure suggested in the curriculum. For example, the book is divided into four parts as opposed to the eight (disjunctive) lists of items in the curriculum. Part two is about the “crises of the industrial world between the wars”. One short chapter in this part focuses on Social Darwinism, eugenics and modern research about race. Thereafter a whole chapter is devoted to exploring how fascism challenged democracy in the 1920s, 30s and 40s, using Nazi Germany as an intensive investigative case study to illustrate the concepts in the previous chapter. The result is that a contextual narrative

unfolds with chronological and conceptual continuity between social, economic and political factors.

This is different from the pattern of the other book, which, following the curriculum closely, splits the story into an “economic-” and a “racist” component, without showing the linkage. This split could inhibit, or even preclude, an understanding of a particular history because it diminishes the unity and the continuity of the story as narrative text. It would be a challenge for students to get a solid grasp of the topic of Nazi Germany if authors separate this theme from the topic of the economic depression that set part of the stage for Hitler’s authority. This case study shows that Book B, by deviating from the curriculum, actually offers students a more balanced perspective of this history. Of course this comes at the expense of covering breadth, since Book A has a much wider selection of content, but is lacking depth. Thus Book A typically exemplifies the problem that the content of social studies books is often divorced from serious historical scholarship because it tries so hard to satisfy the dictates of outside imperatives (Sewall, 1992).

In quantitative terms, the chapters in both books take up 12% of the total space. However, when considering the topic content on Nazi Germany in particular, Book B spends 75% of the 12% on it, whereas Book A only awards 40% of the 12% to this topic. Effectively, it means that students using each book will have a different exposure of the topic.

## 2. Primary Sources and Use of Language

A study of history cannot be called that unless it is based on the interpretation of factual data, which are to be found more readily in primary sources. “Without primary sources and the stories that are told about them history cannot exist” (Drake et al, 2009, 22). Through making extensive use of primary sources, the curriculum goal of “critical thinking and drawing own conclusions” can be achieved. As Cuban explains: “citizenship is best cultivated when students learn the critical skills of historical investigation and draw their own conclusions supported by evidence drawn from primary sources” (Cuban, quoted in Drake & Nelson, 2009, 13).

Based on a brief quantitative analysis, the study found that the number of primary sources each book uses within the two sections of the curriculum differs vastly. Book B uses 31 primary sources, compared to 6 in Book A. It is not only that the rest in Book A are secondary sources (in one chapter the same author’s source is used three times), but also that the rest of the text contains the “historical” information in reductionist and staccato, passive form discourse that also negates the narrative style that could make reading of history more enjoyable (figure 2).

Figure 2: Extract from Book A, p 131

<p>The working-class were said to waste money, unlike the middle class. It was thought the lower your position in society, the less worthwhile you were. It was said that the British Empire had been built on temperance and <b>thrift</b>. Children were encouraged to learn from this 'fact'. It was thought that women who drank alcohol would produce criminals for children. Through schools, the state tried to counteract working-class behaviour, which was thought to be at the root of all racial and social problems.</p>	<p><b>thrift:</b> being careful with money and not wasting.</p>
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The passive form of expression is used repeatedly so that the narrator remains anonymous, along with the responsible actors (perpetrators). These non-narrative texts have no actors/agents and there is also no narrator, essential components of narratives, which can be “simply defined as any text that includes two characteristics: a story and a story-teller” (Scholes & Kellog, 1966, in Paxton, 1999, 219). Selander (1988), quoted in Virta (2007) found that, based on an analysis of history textbooks from 1840s up to 1980s (in Sweden), “modern textbooks have abandoned the narrative style altogether.” Books employing such methods of history teaching are ultimately genre-less and fail to accomplish their curriculum aims.

Figure 3: Extract from Book B: p113

The new Nazi commissar wasted no time .... He immediately announced that Jews would be forbidden to enter university premises and would be dismissed without salary on March 15; this was something no one had thought possible despite the Nazis' loud anti-Semitism. Then he launched into a tirade of abuse, filth, and four-letter words such as had been heard rarely even in the barracks and never before in academia. He pointed his finger at one department chairman after another and said, "You either do what I tell you or we'll put you into a concentration camp." There was silence when he finished; everybody waited for the distinguished biochemist-physiologist. The great liberal got up, cleared his throat, and said, "Very interesting, Mr. Commissar, and in some respects very illuminating; but one point I didn't get too clearly. Will there be more money for research in physiology?"

The meeting broke up shortly thereafter with the commissar assuring the scholars that indeed there would be plenty of money for "racially pure science." A few of the professors had the courage to walk out with their Jewish colleagues, but most kept a safe distance from these men who only a few hours earlier had been their close friends. I went out sick unto death – and I knew that I was going to leave Germany within forty-eight hours.

“Several weeks after he took power, Hitler appointed Nazi heads at each university. This is an extract from the autobiography of Peter Drucker, a lecturer at Frankfurt University at the time.”

By contrast, Book B makes extensive use of primary sources, such as those in Figure 3. This is a true narrative in that there is a narrator (P Drucker) and

there is a very distinct story. In addition, the textbook narrative employed is presented without paratextual interruptions. Space is used maximally and the reader's attention is held by the actual text and not the pictures, boxes or side panels containing a glossary of terms, which may interrupt the flow of reading and could destroy narration. Evidence of writing that is not oversimplified, or "dumbed down" (Herlihy, 1992) can be detected also in other parts of narrative text in this book through clearly focused and coherent use of language, interspersed with deliberate "power-words/phrases" (words/phrases that are condensed in meaning). Examples are "extermination camps"; "recruited auxiliaries"; "liberated by Allied soldiers"; "gained at the polls"; "charismatic leadership" and "economic chaos and political instability". Young readers are challenged to appropriate the discourses of the historical text genre.

### 3. Critical Thinking and Drawing Independent Conclusions

In Book A (p. 107) the chapter dealing with the emergence of a fascist economy in Germany starts with a fragmented, oversimplified and again reductionist exposition of what happened in Germany after WW1, focusing on Hitler's Munich putsch and his plan for Germany's recovery after the war. Source 22 is a table showing Nazi party membership from 1929-1932. Source 23 is another table by the same author showing the international industrial production from 1928-1931. There is a third source by the same person (from the same book) describing how Hitler promised to every German what they wanted to hear and that "a helpless, ever present scapegoat for all their [the Germans'] errors and mistakes and suffering in the form of the Jews! [had to be found]". The assessment question reads: "Why was it important to Hitler to have a scapegoat?" It would be difficult, if not impossible, to answer this question, given the nature of the sources and the descriptions. The only clue the reader receives about the scapegoat issue is the one quoted above. The sources do not discuss any reasons for this.

The Teacher Guide of Book A talks about the Reichstag fire and how it was construed by the Nazis as a Jewish conspiracy. But the Learner (student) Book does not mention this until later and when it does, all that is said is that "after a fire destroyed the parliament building or Reichstag in February 1933, Hindenburg issued an emergency decree allowing Hitler and the Nazis to ignore the constitution, abolish trade unions and political parties, and make new laws" (p109). It is not easy to understand how this explains why it was important to Hitler to have a scapegoat. Based on the information this textbook provides, it is problematic to develop critical thinking skills or the ability to draw independent conclusions.

Reconstruction and reinterpretation of past events (Rouet et al, 1997) can be achieved by "doing investigations", as is the case in Book B. An example illustrating how this happens is the presentation of 4 sources dealing with the fail-

ure of democracy in the Weimar Republic. Source 1 is an expression of the feelings of a German citizen about the inability of the government to control inflation. The second source is a graph showing unemployment in Germany between 1925 and 1933. Source 3 is by Albert Speer, Hitler's architect and Minister of Armaments from 1942, describing why "both he and his mother joined the Nazi party in 1931" (p 111) (figure 4).

Figure 4: Extract from Book B, p 111

**Source 3**

In this source, Albert Speer, Hitler's architect and Minister of Armaments from 1942, describes why both he and his mother joined the Nazi Party in 1931. Speer, then a lecturer in architecture at the Berlin Institute of Technology, had just heard Hitler's speech to the students.

Here it seemed to me was hope. Here were new ideals, a new understanding, new tasks ... The perils of Communism which seemed inexorably (relentlessly) on the way, could be checked, Hitler persuaded us, and instead of hopeless unemployment, Germany could move toward economic recovery. He had mentioned the Jewish problem only peripherally. But such remarks did not worry me, although I was not an anti-Semite; rather I had Jewish friends from my school days and university days, like virtually everyone else ... It must have been during these months that my mother saw an SA parade in the street of Heidelberg. The sight of discipline in a time of chaos, the impression of energy in an atmosphere of universal hopelessness, seems to have won her over also.

Noteworthy is the contextualization of Albert Speer – who he was, where he worked, why he was influential, that he was not a “born racist” and why he found Hitler’s message appealing. Finally, source 4 is a reprint of a Nazi election poster with English translation of the German content. It shows a working class Aryan strong-muscled man holding a linen cloth over his shoulders (like a sling) with bread in it. The caption on the poster reads “Work, Freedom and Bread! Vote for the National Socialists”. Two out of the 4 sources have a proper reference at the back of the book.

The assessment question reads: “Use sources 1-4 to explain what you think was the most important factor contributing to the failure of democracy in the Weimar republic. Explain why you think it is the most important reason” (p 111). Given the 4 sources the student has something to work with and has to consider each one critically and in relation to each other in order to answer the question. S/he will have to think beyond the simplistic, non-dimensional explanation that “the Weimar Republic democracy failed because Hitler was a racist and used Social Darwinism to influence the people” (for example).

The Teacher Guide provides some examples of how students could go about answering this question, presenting a possible answer in a 4-column table format, showing political reasons, economic reasons, Hitler’s appeal and the message in the poster. A quote from the Teacher’s Guide, showing its flexibility but at the same time its disciplined approach, reads:

There is not only one correct answer to Question 1. Allow learners to discuss their opinions in groups or with a partner. Learners need to support their opinions by referring to evidence from the sources. They might not be able to decide on one specific reason, assuming that all were important contributing factors. This is an acceptable line of argument but they do need to be able to prove why one reason is not sufficient.

Thus by presenting a variety of primary sources, students have the materials that can scaffold critical thinking and the ability to draw independent conclusions.

In Book A “the impact of Social Darwinism and racism” is presented in 6 units that progress from “the years of change” to “the idea of race”, to “Social Darwinism”, to “eugenics,” to “eugenics in England and Australia,” and ending with “the eugenics programme of the Nazis”. Each unit has a particular focus and contains text as well as snippets from various sources in the form of text, tables, drawings and photographs. There is also a side panel containing definitions of words that are bolded in the text.

An example from Book A, illustrating an attempt to teach critical thinking, is an activity based on 2 sources. Source 1: Frans Boas (1858-1942) “If we were to select the most intelligent, imaginative, energetic and emotionally stable third of mankind, all races would be present”. Source 2 is from Kevin L. Thomson “Race and Technology at the end of the 20th century” and states that “...Racism is an historical construct, not a biological fact...racism is a creating of humans, not an immutable (unchanging) law...”<sup>4</sup> Activity 1 refers to these two sources but is given *before* the printed sources and students may therefore already have a biased orientation when reading them. This pattern is typical for the rest of the chapter and may impede critical thinking by patterning students’ thinking in a particular way *before* the work of critical engagement even begins. One of the (two) assessment standards of the activity reads: “The learner

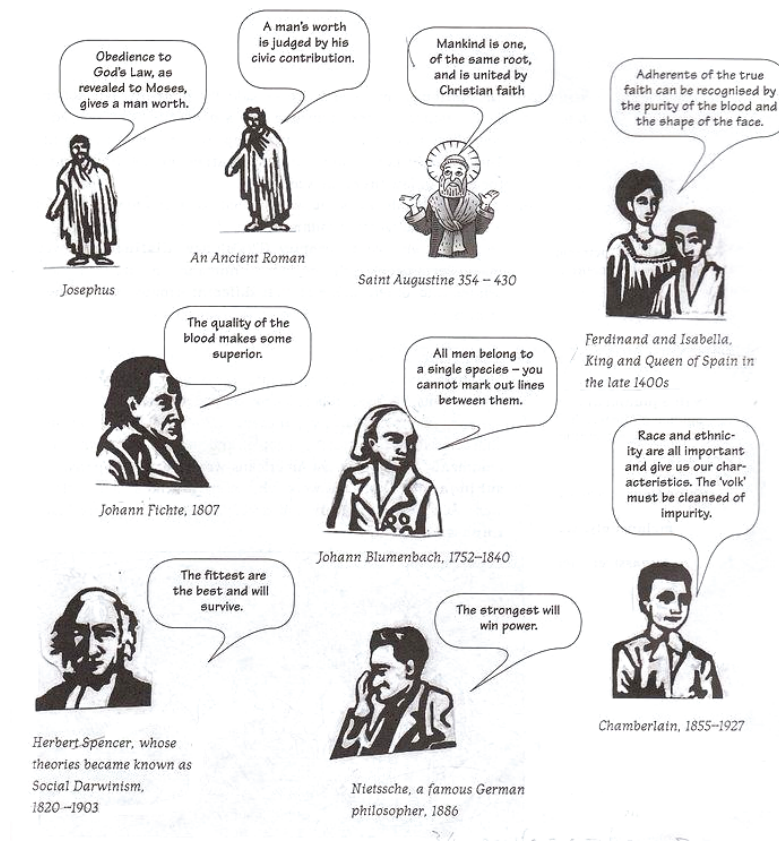
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<sup>4</sup> The omissions (...) are part of the textbook quote (p 117); they are not mine.

is able to identify issues within the topic of study and ask critical questions about it". The activity is a discussion around the question "do you think that each author would agree with the other on the subject of race?" But the snippets of texts are so small that it would be almost impossible to have a meaningful discussion, unless students already know much more about the source material. Moreover, nothing is said about the authors of these sources, such as that Boas was an anthropologist. One of them also has no date; there is no context whatsoever. The Teacher Guide simply paraphrases these sources but does not answer the question of whether the two authors would agree with each other on the subject of race. Possibly the teacher must make up her/his own mind. There is not enough information to assist students to resolve the matter.

Another example that highlights issues around critical thinking and independent conclusions is figure 5 which is part of the unit on "the idea of race":

Figure 5: Extract from Book A, p 119



Activity 3 on page 118 refers to this set of pictures, which is said to “summarise ideas on race as they developed through the ages”. Although “an understanding of this development is very important” (p118), there is no explanation of why this may be so. The assessment question reads: “Study each picture carefully and discuss each person’s ideas. Does each thinker describe the qualities of a worthwhile human being? Explain why you think so.” According to the Teacher Guide, this question leads to students’ “being able to evaluate the usefulness of sources, noting subjectivity” as well as “compare and contrast interpretations and perspectives of people’s actions and events”. Thus the element of critical thinking and drawing independent conclusions is contained within these two outcomes. It is difficult to see how students are going to achieve this because the complexities of different historical contexts are ignored by piling together images and blurbs almost randomly, leaving young readers to ignore the full background of each “thinker” so that they are unable to appreciate what was said. In order to develop critical thinking skills and the ability to draw independent conclusions, the full context of historical actors is necessary, together with the presentation of conflicting and contrasting interpretations of such sources, a matter I will turn to next.

#### 4. Taking a Historical Perspective

Taking a historical perspective is “the cognitive act of understanding the different social, cultural, intellectual, and even emotional contexts that shaped people’s lives and actions in the past” (Seixas, 2006, 10). It is closely related to the ability to “explain the various interpretations and perspectives of historical events and why people in a particular historical context acted as they did” (South African National Department of Education, 2002). Figure 5 can also be used to analyse this assessment standard. Understanding historical texts requires that we understand them in their contexts, or their “texts *with* texts” and attempts to locate the meaning with which they were charged when they were written (Virta, 2007, 18). But it is impossible to take a perspective if there are none to choose from. What we see here are simplicised or dumbed down utterances coming from cartoon-like figures. Taking a historical perspective demands an overcoming of presentism but this example shows that this is unlikely to happen in these cartoons, which are devoid of narration and of setting. They appear more like part of a timeless comic strip; the characters of which are assumed to be known by readers (who may not even recognize them remotely).

Book A’s source and assessment task further illustrates problems relating to presentism: It is not clear on what basis these sources were selected. This seems a central issue to a historian, yet is left ignored by the textbook. This way students are not introduced to the problems historians face in establishing what happened in the first place (Osborne, 2004, 30) or of explaining various



interpretations. This extract could be an example illustrating that “the basic weakness of history textbooks is that they do not provide adequate opportunities for learning historical and critical literacy, and understanding the very nature of history and its epistemology” (Virta, 2007, 21). This in turn would lead to a case of “constructing legitimated ideologies” (Crawford, 2004) more than developing historical understanding. Compared to this is an example from Book B (figure 6) below:

Figure 6: Extract from Book B, p. 105

In 1879, Gustave Le Bon, a French student of anthropology, wrote the following about women:

In the most intelligent races, as among the Parisians, there are a large number of women whose brains are closer in size to those of gorillas than to the most developed male brains. This inferiority is so obvious that no one can contest it for a moment; only its degree is worth discussion ... Without doubt there exist some distinguished women, very superior to the average man, but they are as exceptional as the birth of any monstrosity, as for example, of a gorilla with two heads, consequently, we may neglect them entirely ... A desire to give them the same education, and as a consequence to propose the same goals for them is a dangerous [illusion].

The author of this extract is clearly identified, together with the date of writing. It uses gender issues to illustrate those of race. It does so by showing readers, through a primary source, what the mindset of the day was regarding gender. What makes this link effective is that by showing how taken-for-granted such beliefs about women were in the 18th century, and by implication showing how ludicrous they seem to us today, the book demonstrates (instead of “tells”) how any other stereotype (in this case racial stereotype) is just as absurd and unfounded. So instead of telling students that “racists have unfounded beliefs about other races” (for example), the authors use a primary source in an attempt to get students to come to this kind of conclusion themselves through the investigation. This extract also gives an idea about the underlying motives and reasons for propagating such outrageous beliefs. Thus the inseparability between author as narrator, text as story, and context as setting (Wineburg, 2001) is left intact. Moreover, a source like this can give rise to multiple interpretations and a contextual understanding of the history/story of ideas, which in turns allows for historical perspective-taking.

## 5. Moral Dimension of Historical Understanding

Historians attempt to hold back on explicit moral judgments about actors in the midst of their accounts. But, when all is said and done, if the story is meaningful, then there is a moral judgment involved. Thus, we should expect to learn something from the past that helps us in facing the moral issues of today (Seixas, 2006, 11).

The topic of eugenics and Nazism obviously has implications for moral development and here I discuss how each book approaches this criterion for historical understanding.

The last unit in Book A's chapter on race and racism is the "the eugenics programme of the Nazis". It consists of a staccato set of expository descriptions, sans narrative, of "inferior" and "superior" races as discussed by various authorities (other than Hitler), as well as a sterile description of Anti-Semitism and mass murder. There are no primary sources except for a few photographs right at the end. An example of the descriptive text is that

Anti-Semitism had a long history in Germany, where for centuries Jewish people had been treated badly. This was partially due to the fact that the early Christian Church encouraged the belief that the Jews had crucified Jesus. Although this belief was not true, it enabled centuries of discrimination (p132).

The reader is left to wonder on what basis this judgment about true or false beliefs was constructed.

Even though this example shows a link between Anti-Semitism and negative eugenics, the clarity of this relationship is weak when contrasted with Book B, which uses the investigation of "How did Hitler apply 'negative eugenics'?" For this investigation three substantial primary sources are used, showing a range of attitudes and behaviours: Source 18 is an extract from the first German eugenics law, which was passed just 6 months after Hitler had come to power. Source 19 is a chilling calculation by a T4 doctor of the "amount of money and foodstuffs that could be saved from the 'disinfection' (a euphemism for murder) of 70 273 'useless' mouths (persons)." Source 20 is a directly contrasting extract from a sermon delivered by the bishop of Münster, Clemens August Count, protesting against the T4 killings: "*It is impossible to imagine the moral depravity, of general mistrust that would then spread even through families if this dreadful doctrine is tolerated, accepted and followed*" (extract from the much more detailed source, p 119). The assessment questions, or "doing history" as they are called, demand that students engage with these sources. For example, "what moral and ethical questions are raised by these sources", or "what reasons does the Bishop of Münster give for condemning the T4 killings?" One of these activities also requires that students make a link to modern times. It does so by asking students to debate the renewed interest in "mercy killings".

Book A allocates three pages to the same topic, describing the laws that were passed in Hitler's attempt to "protect the 'Aryans' from 'racial enemies'".

The book then traces the history of Anti-Semitism in Germany and concludes plainly that “the many stereotypes of Jews, when examined, are not valid.” There is no evidence, no discussion, no narrative. It would be obvious that this statement is true of any stereotype. Here is a perfect opportunity to explore the moral dimension of historical understanding, but the book misses it. By contrast, developing the moral character of students could be achieved by elevating such a discussion to a more sophisticated level through questions like “is hate innately a part of human behaviour and experience? If so, how can we change that within ourselves?”<sup>5</sup> (Tibbitt, 2006,11).

Book A’s focus on this topic also gives a basic (sanitary) listing of who was killed, when and by what numbers. In an attempt to show that Jews were not the only target group, the text mentions that “Poles and Russians were also killed because of their supposed inferiority. This was the biggest, state-organised mass murder of people for who they were (sic) in history”. It would be surprising if students, based on these teaching materials, developed a moral dimension of historical understanding or became “moral philosophers who are able and willing to think about tough moral and ethical dilemmas in surprisingly sophisticated ways” (<<http://www.facinghistory.org/about/who>>, accessed 6 June 2009).

Book A puts a big gap between the student and the study of the past by the way the activity is presented, implying that students have no responsibility with regard to racism and stereotyping – it is a thing of the past. The text tends to lean towards presentism, which, at its worst, “encourages a kind of moral complacency and self-congratulation. Interpreting the past in terms of present concerns usually leads us to find ourselves morally superior” (Hunt, 2002). This is not to say that it is wrong to make moral judgment, or that students should not apply lessons from the past to their current reality, only that when doing so, they should not see themselves as morally superior and that they should try to understand historical actors in the context of their own time, hopefully leading to some understanding of themselves in their own time.

This chapter ends on a negative note by showing a set of photographs and an extract from a poem “It happened” by Dan Klein (1996) (p 134) which in poetic discourse captures the gruesome conditions in the gas chambers. Another possibility would be to end a chapter with more positive examples of icons – rescuers or heroes – who could be a good example for students’ own lives. Drake et al (2009, 34) would agree that one important goal of history teaching in schools is to provide worthy characters for children to emulate.

Learning about history could be more meaningful if there were lessons of hope to take home, as Book B does. It ends the chapter by narrating, through

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<sup>5</sup> Eve Shalen, a grade 8 pupil remembers her school days and her need to belong: “Differences between us did not cause hatred; hatred caused differences between us” (Eve Shalen, in Stern-Strom, 1994:29).

primary sources, the story of the rural French Town of Le Chambon, which conspired to save the Jews during the German persecution. Pierre Sauvage, a Jew who was born while his parents were in hiding there, concludes:

If we do not learn how it is possible to act well even under the most trying circumstances, we will increasingly doubt our ability to act well even under less trying ones. If we remember solely the horror of the Holocaust, we will pass on no perspective from which meaningfully to confront and learn from that very horror. If we remember solely the horror of the Holocaust, it is we who will bear the responsibility for having created the most dangerous alibi of all: that it was beyond man's capacity to know and care (p.127).

Chapters such as these could thus end by instilling hope and exemplifying the triumph of the human spirit.

## Conclusion

I have looked at of one theme in two varying examples of grade 11 history textbooks. Obviously one cannot generalize from this brief analysis and more research is needed to see how these textbooks are actually used in history classrooms. Nevertheless, it stands that the South African curriculum, in addition to wanting to further the democratic aims of the Constitution, also wants to develop historical scholarship. Textbooks have a crucial role to play in achieving this. I investigated how this operationalization happens by selecting five dimensions from the South African curriculum documents as well as some international scholarly literature that could be applied to South African textbooks. These selected dimensions were used as an analytical framework for looking at some cases that exemplify how the standards and curriculum aims are translated in history textbooks.

The first matter that textbook authors and editors need to decide is to what extent they will stick to the guidelines of the curriculum or to what extent they will use their own thinking to arrive at the overall aims and purposes thereof. Book B tended to take its own stand by reinterpreting the curriculum in such a way that enabled it to write narratives that were structured, logical and coherent. By contrast, Book A tended to allow the curriculum to predetermine how it will be translated into a textbook. The result was as Carlson (1989) predicted: a more simplistic and ideological interpretation of social phenomena. Authors should thus be encouraged and given room to explore their own creative thinking and imaginations which in turn could lead them to produce an educationally sound tool for historical understanding. This could be promoted through a transparent and accountable process of providing each textbook chapter with the names of authors and editors.

The second dimension of the analytical framework looked at the use of primary sources. A conclusion can be drawn that a heavy reliance on primary source as well as presenting contrasting and conflicting evidence through them

would enable the aims of the curriculum to be realised. To do this, textbooks must also give proper contexts for their sources and adequately reference the authors who wrote them.

The third dimension of the analysis looked at skills of critical thinking and comparing and contrasting varying interpretations for drawing independent conclusions. The study found that a textbook must give its readers the option of choosing from various interpretations firstly by providing sufficient information, and secondly by exposing contrasting and contradictory evidence in sources, on the basis of which students could come to their own conclusions.

The fourth dimension concerned itself with taking a historical perspective. Book A showed that by not giving contextual sources and by taking out tiny snippets from various authorities' voices, students would end up with presentist interpretations. Book B, by contrast, showed that by looking at a related but not direct matter of gender for example, issues of race can become easier to understand because their place in the historical development of ideas becomes clearer. It also helped to contextualize the author of the primary sources and to reproduce more than just a phrase or a sentence of what that author said or wrote.

Finally, the moral dimension of historical understanding showed that in order to achieve the citizenship aims of the curriculum, a textbook should involve the reader in more personal and responsible ways rather than to make sweeping statements like "this was not true" or "those people who hate Jews do not know what it is they hate". It can also not simply make distanced judgement about "human rights violations" without a sense of personal responsibility. Moral understanding should help students realise that "hatred, indifference, denial, and opportunism not only shaped a particular history in the 20th century, but that they can also shape any period since these elements are part of ordinary human experience" (Barr, 2005,147).

The overall conclusion is that textbooks can significantly contribute to shaping history education in the transformed and transforming South Africa. The ones I looked at can achieve both scholarly and value-development goals of the curriculum. However, this study has shown that textbooks do this with varied degrees of success when assessed against the curriculum's and other research-based criteria. The onus is on the authors and editors to interpret the curriculum carefully and to be willing to invest the time into finding and presenting the materials so that the textbooks they produce shape history education in a way that balances scholarly and doctrinal outcomes.

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