

# **Beyond cause and effects in the teaching of history: Examining human relevance and importance in the classroom through personal stories**

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## ***Abstract***

Cette recherche appelle à la reconnaissance des différentes façons dont les étudiants en Afrique du Sud ont connue l'histoire dans les salles de classe et la nécessité de confronter les questions délicates qui en découle en raison des croyances. La pédagogie de l'histoire, dans cet article, n'est pas conçu en particulier en tant que 'théorie de cause et conséquence' par rapport au racisme. On le voit comme multidimensionnel impliquant une série infinie de combinaisons et d'expériences.

Les professeurs de sciences sociales et d'histoire ont entrepris le défi de faire usage des riches et de l'enrichissantes textures des voix personnelles en examinant le programme d'études ainsi que la situation actuelle de la discorde raciale et ethnique. A travers un examen des attitudes, des valeurs et du message. Nous espérons qu'une conscience critique se consolide, et qui reconnaisse, détruisse des" perspectives silencieuses. "

En tant que professeurs d'histoire et d'études sociales nous sommes appelés à engager les étudiants à travers un programme d'études constructif, qui reconnaisse un changement du coeur et l'esprit de tous, ce qui permet aux étudiants de se comprendre eux-mêmes et de comprendre le monde qui les entoure.

## **Introduction**

As my daughter neared the completion of her undergraduate programme,

she found herself one course short of graduating. As one keenly interested in the subject of history, I couldn't help but suggest to her the possibility of taking one such course as a means of further developing her world view as well as her critical thinking skills. From the immediate look appearing on her face in response to my suggestion, alerted me to our divergent views on the subject. "No way! I'm not going to spend my last term, memorising all kinds of facts, dates and people with little or no relevance to the here and now. It's so boring" Although we had just talked past one another, her perspective on the matter, was hardly a new revelation to my ears. To be honest, for many people history classes are synonymous with the encyclopedic memorization of historical knowledge, fixed and embedded in time and place.

This common understanding tends to be reinforced by the demands placed on history and social sciences teachers to continuously process and disseminate larger and larger quantities of information with each passing year; the on-going pressure of attempting to cover an entire syllabus- persons, events and periods of history in a chronological, cause and effect way<sup>1</sup>; and a nagging concern that when exploring so many issues, there is the possibility that omitting any will give rise to the suspicion of some unjustified bias. Rosenzweig & Weinland (1986) describe history teaching as nothing less than a "mad dash to the present."<sup>2</sup>

It is so easy to fall into the trap (however sincere and well meaning one may be) of disassociating history and social sciences from the lived situations and contexts that have helped shape a democratic South Africa; of allowing it to become a storehouse of generic knowledge, devoid of the "personal." This paper challenges teachers to empower their students and themselves to become agents of history rather than passive recipients of events. Giroux (2001) states:<sup>3</sup>

Unless the pedagogical conditions exist to connect forms of knowledge to the lived experiences, histories, and cultures of the students we engage, such knowledge is reified or 'deposited' in the Freirian sense, through transmission models that ignore the context in which knowledge is produced and simultaneously functions often to silence as much as deaden student interest.

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1 See H Kellner, "Narrativity in History: Post-Structuralism and since", *History & Theory*, 26 (4), 1987, pp. 1-29.

2 L Rosenzweig & T Weinland, "New directions for the History curriculum: A challenge for the 1980s", *The History Teacher*, 19 (2), February 1986, pp. 263-277.

3 H Giroux, "Pedagogy of the depressed: Beyond the new politics of cynicism", *College Literature*, 28 (3), 2001, pp. 1-32.

## **Pedagogical choices**

To kick start the possible inclusion of “narratives” (stories) in the teaching of history and the social sciences, would most likely involve giving up a degree of efficiency, productivity and comfortableness which comes when making use of the familiar and traditional approaches that have served us in the past. Making use of “personal voices” in the teaching of the subject, should be seen as one technique amongst many that could be used for enhancing teaching as a whole. This usage of personal memories also comes with the understanding any “curriculum or an instructional approach can’t be standardized and remain effective.”<sup>4</sup> In a postmodern era, the classroom becomes plural, local and immanent.

This researcher believes that whenever teachers have formed clearly defined goals and vision of the subject area, they allow themselves the freedom of determining “when” and “where” to use a particular methodology or in combination with another- including those promoting historical knowledge as linear and chronological, those featuring historical knowledge as de-centered, fuzzy and multidimensional; and of freely using lectures, discussion or “narratives” (in particular- first person stories) whenever deemed appropriate. Because history and the social sciences are oftentimes influenced by changing interests, shifting conceptual understandings as well as by individual interests the task is made harder. Abel (1976) has correctly assessed that the:

past is a steady process of imaginative reinterpretation and reconstruction, and in attempting to be meaningful to us in the present.<sup>5</sup>

If we are honest about our teaching, it will most probably always involve juggling between academically preparing students for end-of-the-year exams as well as helping them to see historical content and analytical concepts as somehow impacting on their lives. That challenge reasserts itself again and again during our teaching careers.

South Africa’s Outcomes Based Education (OBE) Curriculum 2005 correctly mandates that teachers should be made to “help learners to develop their knowledge as well as their skills, values and attitudes” as well as to nurture those skills that would facilitate the building of a more democratic

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<sup>4</sup> S Ohanian, “Huffing and puffing and blowing schools excellent”, *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 1985, pp. 316-321.

<sup>5</sup> R Abel, *Man is the measure*, (New York, Free Press, 1976), p. 165.

and socially responsive nation.<sup>6</sup> OBE like any other educational model, has had its share of critics. A commonly heard criticism of OBE in South Africa has been that it is overly weighted on the outcomes of education, and has marginalised educational knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Blaine (2007), nonetheless reports that even amongst OBE's detractors, most would admit that it has helped in transforming a discredited and authoritarian apartheid educational system to one promoting praxis- theory and practice; academic knowledge and a commitment to democratic principles.

Waghid (2007) believes that OBE has the capability of enabling both educators and students to move "outside the lines" of instrumental thinking and a technicist teaching styles. He calls for placing particular focus in OBE in "educating for friendship," and where people learn from one another through mutual engagement and sharing.<sup>8</sup>

Royster (1996) calls such exchanges "contact zones" or "areas of engagement." According to Royster, such encounters disallow ourselves and others from being locked into tunnels of our own visions and particularistic experiences. She advocates for the creation of an environment where sharing and academic learning are not seen as mutually exclusive. She also calls for the construction of new histories and theories that arise from shared stories engaged in transformation.<sup>9</sup>

### **Shared perspectives**

Most people prefer sameness, predictability and common interests. As a result, if and when someone thinks differently than ourselves, wears different clothes, maintain different cultural customs, we become nervous. This would appear to be true in a classroom setting as well. The idea of promoting the usage of shared perspectives, first person narratives and dialogue might seem threatening to some. But if pursued, this researcher believes it can enrich those who participate- providing them with hundreds of fresh ideas and insights. It can challenge, amaze, anger and even "prick" us to act in pro-active ways.

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<sup>6</sup> J Bottaro, P Visser, L Wilson & M Monteith, *Oxford: In search of Social Sciences: Grade 9, teacher's book*, (Cape Town, Oxford, 2006) p. v.

<sup>7</sup> S Blaine, "Outcomes education 'undermines knowledge'," *Business Day*, 13 September 2007, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Y Waghid, "Education, responsibility and democratic justice: Cultivating friendship to alleviate some of the injustices on the African continent", *Educational Philosophy & Theory*, 39 (2), 2007, pp. 182-196.

<sup>9</sup> J Royster, "When the first voice You Hear Is Not Your Own", *College Composition and Communication*, 17 (1), February 1996, pp. 29-40.

Being together in the same place, and talking amongst ourselves doesn't necessarily mean that we are engaged in meaningful dialogue from a shared perspective. According to Jones (1999), "...simply talking within groups, among ourselves while others talk among themselves"<sup>10</sup> is not a part of liberatory and democratic education. She calls for an educational style rich in transparency, communication, and accessibility.

Like most other educators, this researcher can recall particular teaching occasions at the Lesotho College of Education where I worked for several years, where potentially important dialogue was diverted by several disjointed conversations taking place at the same time in the classroom- I lecturing in the front, two students in one corner of the room discussing a private matter; a couple staring out the window and oblivious to all, four people actively taking notes, and a few appearing unduly focused on "exams" and asking,

"Yes, I know there are many sides to the issue, but what exactly will be on the test? What should I write down as notes? What will the scope of the test be? "

Paulo Freire identifies certain key factors needed by both students and teacher engaged in revolutionary and transformative education. These factors are 'the ability to perceive and clarify reality critically in oppressive and dehumanizing situation...[and] the ability to arrive at an effective action to change the situation as part of a pedagogical praxis."<sup>11</sup>

In the context of the history and the social sciences classroom, Paulo Freire calls us to disengage ourselves from a "banking model of education," where teachers serve as experts and pour knowledge into the empty heads of the students and the students give back information to the teacher in an unadulterated form. Freire call for non-oppressive and dialogic teaching styles.

Baum (2000) particularly challenges South Africans to reawaken a historical consciousness suppressed by the chains of colonialism. "Historical understanding remains undoubtedly important and relevant for Africans in asserting themselves in the new global order." She draws support from the words of critical theorist Henry Giroux in claiming that "history is irrelevant if it does not involve itself in the critical engagement of issues." According

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10 A Jones, "The Limits of Cross-Culture Dialogue: Pedagogy, Desire, And Absolution In The Classroom", *Educational Theory*, 49 (3), Summer 1999, pp. 299-316.

11 B Goba, B (1988) *An agenda for Black Theology: Hermeneutics for social change*, (Johannesburg: Skotsville Publishers, 1988), p. 16.

to her, a historical consciousness can never be a singular activity. It always involves the development of a collective critical consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

Transformative education, according to Nieto (1999), awakens a “consciousness;” it will not remain localized. She speaks of a “deep transformation on a number of levels- individual, collective and institutional.”<sup>13</sup> See also (Bleich 1995)<sup>14</sup> and (Thayer-Bacon 1995).<sup>15</sup>

According to this researcher, whenever a classroom teacher brings together people of divergent views and allows them to dialogue, experiment and build on those shared perspectives, the mixture is potentially dangerous for interested in maintaining hegemonic control. Chomsky has said, “Part of the genius of domination and control is to separate people from one another so that it doesn’t happen...As long as we can’t consult our neighbors, we’ll believe that there are good times. It is important to make sure that people don’t consult their neighbors..... If they’re together, they’ll start having thoughts, interchanging them and learning about them....”<sup>16</sup>

### **The rich and enriching texture of personal voices**

Perhaps one of the critical challenges facing schools today is the urgent need for collaboration between educators, students and the community. Most of the time, however, true collaboration is rarely achieved. To work collaboratively would require acknowledging that a sense of equality, mutual respect and gifted abilities exists amongst all concerned. For some educators, such an admission would be a stumbling block. According to this researcher, however, whenever schools foster such an atmosphere of true collaboration and partnership, wonderful things can happen. In particular, the usage of first-person narratives and oral histories are a specific means of being in partnership with the community interested in historical mapping. See also (Axtell 2001)<sup>17</sup>

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12 J Baum, “Negotiating history, truth and reconciliation and globalisation: An analysis of the suppression of historical consciousness in South African schools as case study”, *Mots Pluriels*, No. 13, April 2000, <http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP1300jb.html>, as researched on 14 September 2000.

13 S Nieto (1999) *The light in their eyes: Creating multicultural learning communities*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), p. xviii.

14 D Bleich, “Academic Ideology And the New Attention to Teaching”, *New Literary History*, 26 (3), Summer 1995, pp. 565-590.

15 B Thayer-Bacon, “Constructive thinking: Personal voice”, *Journal of Thought*, 30 (1), Spring 1995, pp. 55-70.

16 N Chomsky, *Propaganda And The Public Mind*, (Delhi, Madhayana, 2001), p. 28.

17 J Axtell, “The Pleasures of Teaching History”, *The History Teacher*, 34 (4), August 2001, pp. 433-446.

Hudson & Santora (2003) specifically refer to first person narratives or oral histories as “stories that are told by common and uncommon people who were present at or keenly affected by key events in history.” Hudson & Santora see the usage of these “voices” as “opportunities for dialogue between teachers, their students and the communities in which they teach.”<sup>18</sup> They also believe such activities facilitate a historical praxis where theory and practice come together. See also (Elbaz-Luwiasch 1997).<sup>19</sup>

According to Hudson & Santora, whenever students are finally made to see history as “populated not simply by quasi-mythical figures, but by three-dimensional human beings, the famous as well as the forgotten, who live in and act in a real world that is always changing,”<sup>20</sup> history takes in new meaning for the students, their families as well as the community.

This researcher has found the use of first-person narratives in varied classroom activities, as radically impacting on the lives of his students as well as himself. Guest speakers or personal narratives can and do help to “fill in the black holes” observant in certain textbooks. According to Conde-Frazier (2006)

...it is the oral that carries the knowledge of the people. Orality permits knowledge that comes from passion and experience and expands the space of dialogue that brings possibilities of empowerment through agency. It does not permit the academy to abstract and dilute the power of the narrative.<sup>21</sup>

While teaching a course on contemporary issues to third year diploma students at the Lesotho College of Education, one of the units to be covered related to issues of “race, ethnicity, culture.” At the same time, I was also engaged in research, in preparation for writing a chapter in textbook on the subject of “inclusion and exclusion.” Assessing the work that laid ahead, this researcher attempted to initially research “racial exclusion” as practiced in Lesotho during the time of British colonial rule. To my surprise, I found little or nothing in the nation’s libraries. This researcher then turned to the students in the contemporary issues class for help. I proposed that they help by

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18 L Hudson & E Santora, “Oral History: An Inclusive Highway to The Past”, *The History Teacher*, 36 (2), 2003, pp. 206-220.

19 F Elbaz-Luwiasch, “Narrative Research: Political Issues & Implications”, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 13 (1), 1997, pp. 75-83.

20 L Hudson & E Santora, “Oral History: An Inclusive Highway to The Past”, *The History Teacher*, 36 (2), 2003, pp. 206-220.

21 E Conde-Frazier, “Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology For Social Justice”, *Religious Education*, 101 (3), Summer 2006, pp. 321-329.

interviewing Basotho who had lived under British rule in the nation's capital of Maseru. They were asked to use a "first-person narrative approach- allowing individuals to share insights on the subject, unfiltered. As expected, after making the proposal to the students, they bombarded this researcher with a flurry of questions- "Will our efforts be rewarded with a mark?" "How many people must we interview?" "Whom should we ask?" "How are we suppose to record the interviews?" "What kinds of questions should be asked?" "Will we get paid?" Their questions consumed two class periods. Countless informal gatherings, also took place amongst the students prior to, during and after the interviews took place. It was a wonderful exercise, and it uncovered some interesting information as a result of their efforts, i.e.

During British colonial rule, racism was commonly practiced in Lesotho in a number of ways. For example, in the capital of Maseru neighbourhoods were segregated. Some areas were designated for whites or Europeans and others for Africans. Maseru West, for instance, was exclusively reserved for Europeans. In public places like the post office or bank, separate cues existed for both Europeans and Africans. And when it came to drinking in a pubs, Europeans had no restrictions, whereas Africans were required to show a special "exemption" letter from government indicating that they were entitled to do so. Establishments like Lancer's Inn (a local hotel) and Maseru Preparatory School (an international school) were all white establishments.<sup>22</sup>

The students, as a result of their efforts, forged new alliances in the community and gained a greater sense of self-confidence. They also discovered some of the problems that pertain to such research- the unreliability of certain witnesses, conflicting interpretations regarding the same event by interviewees, the periods of "silence" and the apprehension of certain people to talk publicly on any matter. This experiment with "oral histories" served as a catalyst and spawned other narrative research projects on the part of the students- including another pertaining to "xenophobia and immigrants." First person narrative projects involving local participants, according to this researcher, allows students opportunities to see history come to life and to reconnect with their cultural roots in important ways.

Stroobants (2005) believes that through oral histories "learning comes both in the process of interviewing as well as when someone tells their life story." According to him, all parties are actively giving and receiving.<sup>23</sup>

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22 M Jappie, A Mohloboli & J Wilson, (2004)Co-author, *Diploma in Education (Primary): Religious Education Year 4, Distance Education programme (DTEP)*, (Maseru, Lesotho College of Education, 2004), p. 6.

23 V Stroobants, "Stories About Learning In Narrative Biographical Research", *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 18 (1), 2005, pp. 47-61.

Fennes & Hapgood (1997) believe that using people from the community enables students and the teachers to make use of “experiences and knowledge available outside the classroom.”<sup>24</sup>

Actively engaging people from the community also serves another purpose. It is very clear that young people need role models to look up to; people to use as an example; individuals to guide them in their quest for identity and life’s meaning. Some guest speakers or interviewees, have the potential of sending a message of hope and reassurance to the world. They can remind young people that individuals and small groups working locally in a pro-active way can make a difference. The power of one person’s voice is great regardless of whether they are famous or someone out of the limelight. Stories create conditions for empathy free of ideological or political interference. They allow us to be inducted into another person’s world.

History and social sciences remains “too departmentalized”- an intellectual exercise between teacher, student and the textbook. Even when examining issues that come in response to local needs, it still tends to remain isolated. Rarely, if ever, does the teacher, students and the community come together, to understand such issues better.

Moulder (1997) believes that whenever students and educators come “face to face” with people from the community who might share their “personal voices”, much is done to dispel stereotypes about issues and allows students to see real people as struggling for change right there in their own community.<sup>25</sup>

For example, a classroom lesson pertaining to the issue of poverty- can sometimes fall flat as reams of statical data are used to highlight individual countries and communities falling under the veil of poverty in a “cause and effect” manner. To counter this approach, Puthenkalam (2004) calls for understanding poverty as multidimensional- dealing with the human person as something more than an economic unit.

Poverty is hunger. Poverty is the lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not being able to go to school, and not knowing how to read. Poverty is fear of the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water, poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom. Poverty has many

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24 H Fennes & K Hapgood, *Intercultural Learning In The Classroom: Crossing Borders*, (London, Cassell, 1997), p. 104.

25 F Moulder, “Teaching About Race And Ethnicity: A Message of Despair, Or A Message of Hope”, *Teaching Sociology*, 25, April 1997, pp. 120-127.

faces.....<sup>26</sup>

On a practical level, teaching about poverty in the social sciences and history classroom, might include among other activities: interviews with people and communities in the grips of poverty and who are pro-actively resisting its effects; profile organizations at work in the local community. Become experts on the history of a particular community or communities. Create a message of hope.

### **Confronting controversial & touch questions**

Generally speaking, most people would do almost anything to avoid grappling with issues of controversy. Ignoring it, however, only multiplies the underlying problems. Consider for a moment, the issue of racism. For someone to believe that racism is a dead in South Africa would have their head buried pretty deep in the sand.

Although the nation's newspapers don't always gage what its citizenry are thinking, this researcher came upon an unusually high number of "race related" articles since the beginning of 2007, i.e. "Education for inclusion: faint hope or false promises" (see Osman & Lloyd 2007)<sup>27</sup> ; "Anger brewing among blacks" (see Oakley-Smith 2007)<sup>28</sup>; "Skills gap a result of history" (see Quinta 2007)<sup>29</sup> ; "Affirmative action is dead-Erwin" (see Pressly 2007)<sup>30</sup>; "Bok World Cup Threat" (see Modzuli 2007)<sup>31</sup>; "Don't lose vision of non-racial state, says De Klerk,"(see Bevan 2007)<sup>32</sup>; "Land reform must be speeded up" (see Webb 2007)<sup>33</sup>; "We must delve deeper into new wave of Afrikaner siege mentality" (see Makhanya 2007)<sup>34</sup>.

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26 J Puthenkalam, *Empowerment: Sustainable Human Development Strategy for Poverty Alleviation*, (Jaipur, Rawat Publications, 2004), pp. 130-131.

27 R Osman & G Lloyd, "The ABC of Learning: Part 7. Education for inclusion- faint hope or false promises," *The Star*, 23 May 2007, (Inside) p. 13.

28 T Oakley-Smith, "Anger brewing among blacks: Comment," *The Star*, 15 May 2007, p. 12.

29 C Quinta, "Skills gap a result of history," *The Star*, 14 March 2007, p. 10.

30 D Pressley, "Affirmative Action is dead," *The Star: The Business Report*, 15 July 2007, Front page.

31 K Moudzuli, "Bok World Cup Threat," *The Citizen*, 16 July 2007, Front page & 2.

32 S Bevan, "Don't lose vision of non-racial state, says De Klerk," *The Sunday Independent*, 11 March 2007, (Forum) p. 7.

33 B Webb, "Land reform 'must be speeded up,'" *The Star*, 21 May 2007, p. 6.

34 M Makhanya, "We must delve deeper into new wave of Afrikaner siege mentality," *Sunday Times*, 4 February 2007, p. 28.

The day to day situation, in the nation's schools appear to be no different.

According to Dolby (2002)

...race is produced and reproduced in multiple sites throughout a school: in the hallways, in the teachers' lounge, the principal's office, on the playing fields, at recess or break time, in the cafeteria. This production is of course uneven and sometimes in conflict: a school can, for instance, adopt a fiercely antiracist policy, while an individual teacher or student can hold and perpetuate racist views. Or, the institutional and structural apparatus of a school can reinscribe racism, while pockets of teachers, students and parents try to forge new practices.<sup>35</sup>

Newspaper columnist Khumalo (2003) believes that South Africa is "littered with many other examples of racism- real or perceived, overt or subliminal..... We cannot deny that a country that has undergone centuries of colonial bondage and racism- racism later put into the statute books by the apartheid oligarchy- can we become nonracial and egalitarian in just a decade."<sup>36</sup>

In South African society, the majority of whites, according to Mkhondo (2007) "have come to believe that racism is no longer a serious and widespread problem. But racism continues to exist even though our constitution proclaims this country to be non-racist and non-sexist."<sup>37</sup>

As mentioned earlier in this paper, one of the objectives of OBE in South Africa is to help students develop their values and attitudes. Thus, such issues of controversy come to the forefront, what should be the response of history and social sciences teachers? According to this researcher, the only reasonable response would be- "How can we not address such socially relevant topics? As teachers, "seizing the moment" and "maximizing the situation" sounds like a better option than waiting until an issues slowly makes its way into the textbooks in sanitized form. Some issues, of course, are transitory in nature- but it doesn't stop it from being a concern for some. Attempting to allocated such ventures, doesn't necessarily imply diverting every lesson over a long period for such activities.

This researcher, while teaching at the Lesotho College of Education during 1998, was forced to make certain pedagogical choices based on what was happening at the time in that country. During that particular period, the

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35 N Dolby, "Making White: Constructing Race in a South African School", *Curriculum Inquiry* 32, 32 (1), 2002, pp. 7-29.

36 F Khumalo, "Betwitched by racism," *This day*, 13 November 2003, p. 11.

37 R Mkhondo, "Racism is alive and kicking in SA", *The Star*, 22 March 2005, p. 14.

country descended into a period of anarchy; people witnessed an incursion by the South African military, and were affected by a perpetual shortage of basic commodities. Within a certain window of that time, the College remained opened and classes went on as scheduled. Nonetheless, the teachers of that institution including myself, were made to ask what would the responsible thing to do in that situation- follow the syllabus or seize the moment? On that occasion, this researcher chose to seize the moment and confront controversial and touch questions.

The renaming of South Africa's cities, towns, highways, streets, buildings and townships appears to conjure similar feelings. The newspaper have headlined- "South Africa's cities, towns, highways, buildings and townships are being renamed rapidly" (Tolsi 2007)<sup>38</sup>; "'racist anarchists' blamed as street signs end up in river: Potchefstroom name changes stir emotions" (Ndaba 2007)<sup>39</sup> "Stop distorting issue of names: Comment (Memela 2007).<sup>40</sup>

One letter to the editor of a Johannesburg newspaper, captured the mind of this researcher in particular. A white man complained by asking why government chooses to spend so much money on changing the name of Grahamstown, but appears uninterested about spending money on public services like electricity (Drakes 2007).<sup>41</sup> The writer's cause for anger, it would seem lies deeper than the problem he had chosen to write about. Thus, questioning the ways in which knowledge has been organized or how someone makes claim to authentic knowledge, can be threatening. Nonetheless, such "stories" need to be heard so that we see and feel the consequences of absolutist views and change.

Addressing a controversial issue in the classroom can sometimes lead to highlighting the wrong concerns, especially without greater use of shared perspectives. Attacking the wrong problem never resolves the real problem. We are called to look deeper! Reporting on "name changes" in South Africa, Memela (2007) has said, "No one has the right, even in the name of freedom or self-expression, to abort the programme to rewrite the history of this country in a manner that projects and carries the names and legacy of people

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38 N Tolsi, "Renaming History: South Africa's cities, towns, highways, buildings and townships are being renamed rapidly," *Mail and Guardian*, June 29 to July 5 2007, p. 12.

39 B Ndaba, "'racist anarchists' blamed as street signs end up in river: Potchefstroom name changes stir emotions," *The Star*, 26 June 2007, p. 6.

40 S Memela, "Stop distorting issue of names: Comment," *The Star*, 21 May 2007, p. 8.

41 H Drakes, "We need service more than we need name": Letter to editor, *The Star*, 5 September 2007, p. 37.

who paved the way for ‘the age of hope.’”<sup>42</sup>

In situations like this- every effort should be made to create a pedagogical environment that strives to make the classroom “safe” for the exploration of conversation (amidst biases, deep-seated feelings and vulnerabilities). It should become an opportunity as social science and history teachers to profile those people who’s legacy is now being remembered (Oliver Tambo, etc.); examining the “changing of names” in other countries like India (Bombay to Mumbai) and undertake a study on the significance of “stone blessings”, “remembrance” and museums.

Do people intentionally beat around the bush intentionally? According to Geschier (2005), “human beings universally have the tendency not to think about or to build an emotional wall against painful experiences, also when these experiences are not theirs.” According to Geischer, “laws and policies have changed post-1994 but changing practices and attitudes remains a daily struggle.”<sup>43</sup>

According to Njobe (1990)

The decolonisation of the thinking of formerly colonised societies through education needs to be complimented by a similar decolonisation of the minds of the former colonisers. Such double edged decolonisation process might more likely bring about better understanding between formerly colonised nations and their former colonised nations.<sup>44</sup>

How do we prepare young people to deal with racism or any other major issue that come to the forefront? As educators, our primary responsibility should be to teach about it and how to handle it in a pro-active way.

Apple (1999) would say, “By placing race squarely in front of us, ‘we can challenge the state, the institutions of civil society, and ourselves as individuals to combat the legacy of inequality and injustice inherited from the past’ and continually reproduced in the present.”<sup>45</sup>

According to Ramsey (2005) once we are able to define racism as an interlocking system of advantage based on race functioning at all levels- as

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42 S Memela, “Stop distorting issue of names: Comment,” *The Star*, 21 May 2007, p. 8.

43 S Geschier, “Beyond Experience: The Mediation of Traumatic Memories in South African History Museums”, *Transformation*, 59, 2005, pp. 45-65.

44 MW Njobe, *Education for Liberation*, (Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers, 1990), p. 54.

45 M Apple, *The Absent Presence of Race in Educational Reform* [1], *Race, Ethnicity & Education*, 2 (1), 1999, pp. 9-16.

an individual, group, institutionally, and culturally, a veil is dropped. She says that in such environment, we are made to examine the many way such a thing impact on a person's life. We are all affected by race and must remain decentered.<sup>46</sup>

Margonis (2003) reports that honesty and openness in dealing with war crimes committed in South Africa were critical steps towards avoiding a crippling amnesia. According to him, Desmond Tutu rejected the arguments that Afrikaners suggested that the country should simply forget the past and move on after its painful decades of violence. "...the past, far from disappearing or lying down and being quiet, has an embarrassing and persistent way of returning and haunting us unless it has in fact been dealt with adequately."<sup>47</sup> (see also Laurence 2007).<sup>48</sup>

### **The way forward**

- First, look within. Ideas are incubated! Chandra (2004) calls for a Gandhian style of self examination which would make everyone in the classroom (teacher as well as students) to examine their own morality.

...Academic analysis for far too long has tended to be concerned with the external world without simultaneously being turned inward. It has, thus grappled to understand the recent resurfacing of hatred and violence that we had innocently believed lay buried in the past. It has, almost invariably located the problem in a guilty 'other, rarely, if ever, in the "self." <sup>49</sup>

- Attempt to understand the issue in a multitude of ways; place a 'human face' on it. Acknowledge oppression and celebrate resistance. When appropriate, make use of "personal voices"- first person narratives, oral histories, and interviews. As teachers of the social sciences and history, make use of pedagogies which grow and expand because of the contributions made by all people as a community of inquirers. No person is an island.

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46 NJ Ramsay, Teaching Effectively In Racially and Culturally Diverse Classrooms, *Teaching Religion and Theology*, 8 (1), 2005, pp. 18-23.

47 F Margonis, "The Path of Social Amnesia and Dewey's Democratically Commitments", K Alston (ed), *Philosophy of Education 2003*, (Urbana, Illinois: Philosophy of Education Society, 2004), pp. 296-304.

48 P Laurence, "Mbeki's notion of what constitutes racism skewed," *The Sunday Independent*, 25 March 2007, p. 5.

49 S Chandra, "Self and Multiculturalism", J Jain (ed), *Dislocations and Multiculturalisms: Essays in Homage to Professor RK Kaul*, (New Delhi: Rawat, 2004), pp 1-9.

Kincheloe & Steinberg (1992) indicates “that any education worth its salt must cause us to grapple with the critical issues of any society- including race, class, and gender in a democratic society.”<sup>50</sup>

- Speak forthrightly, and be willing to dialogue. Communication involves a sincere desire to understand and be understood. Giroux (1989)<sup>51</sup> rightly calls upon educators to do more than prick their student’s conscience as a part of transformative action. They are also called to dialogue and social action.

Amongst the Basotho, when a person dies, the family is made to tell and retell the story of how that loved one died to everyone who comes to the house till the time of the funeral. In so doing I suspect, it helps both the listener and the speaker to remember the past as well as to prepare for the future. That is good historical thinking! As social sciences and history teachers, we too need to keep telling the story.

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50 J Kincheloe & S Steinberg, *Changing Multiculturalism*, Open University Press, (Buckingham, Philadelphia, 1992), p 58.

51 H Giroux, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers And The Politics of Education*, (New York: Routledge, 1989), p 79.