

Juliana Smith & Agnetha Arendse

South African Curriculum Reform: Education for Active Citizenship

Abstract

The changing societal context in South Africa (SA) has necessitated curriculum reform to deal with the challenges of education, from apartheid to democracy, with the aim of promoting active citizenship education. The aim of the paper is thus to illuminate to what extent the Grade 11 Life Orientation (LO) curriculum prepares learners for active citizenship in a democratic South Africa.

The research on citizenship education adopted a qualitative interpretive approach and a case study as the research design. The findings suggest that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of concepts relating to active citizenship which constrain effective preparation of learners for active citizenship in a new democracy. Recommendations refer to a focus on curriculum development and a framework to inform active citizenship policies and structures applicable to the education system.

Introduction

Prior to 1994, the South African education system was racially divided into 19 racially segregated education systems (Carrim, Pendlebury & Enslin, 2000). Since 1994, the transition from apartheid to democracy required the need for a more non-racial education system encapsulated in one national curriculum (Daun, Enslin, Kolouh-Westin & Plut, 2002). The Constitution of SA provides the basis for transformation since it is the cornerstone of democracy in SA (Constitution of the Republic of SA, 1996).

From the onset of the first democratic elections, the South African education system has undergone many curriculum changes through conscious efforts to include citizenship or human rights education in national school policies (Schoeman, 2006) including an Education White Paper 6 (DBE, 2011a; 2011e).

Drawing on the study of Arendse (2014), this paper explores aspects of curriculum reform in SA during democracy particularly with reference to the emergence of citizenship education in the LO curriculum.

South African curriculum reform

Introduction

The Bantu Education Act, passed in 1953, resulted into apartheid education which was used as one of the strategies to maintain the racial imbalance (Phillips, 1999). Uprising in 1976 against the oppressed system, and school boycotts in the 1980s (Kallaway, 1986) brought about the framing of alternative conceptions of education which included key features and principles of citizenship or human rights education (Cooper, 1998).

The first non-racial national curriculum was introduced in 1997, namely Curriculum 2005 (C2005) and was considered to be the uniting vision for

transforming apartheid education in SA (DoE, 1997). The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) were introduced in 2001 and 2003 respectively for the General Education Band and the Further Education and Training Band. For improved implementation of the curriculum, the NCS was amended and the Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS) Grades R – 12 was developed. It serves the purpose of equipping learners, irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability, with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment, and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country (DBE, 2010).

Life Orientation curriculum

The LO curriculum (DoE, 1997a; 2000; 2002) became a compulsory subject after 1994 when SA became a democratic country (Sedibe, Feldman & Magano, 2014). LO is defined as the study of the self in relation to others and to society which addresses skills, knowledge, and values about the self, the environment, responsible citizenship, a healthy and productive life, social engagement, recreation and physical activity, careers and career choices (DBE, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d). LO is constituted to play a fundamental role in education for human rights education and is regarded as the advancement of human rights based principles (Rooth, 2005; Carrim, 2006).

LO promotes civic participation, gender equity, non-discriminatory and democratic behaviour, and opposition to stereotyping, discrimination, bias, prejudice and racism. The LO curriculum aims to develop the learner holistically and to empower the learner to optimally participate in a just society (Wasserman, 2014).

Education for active citizenship

The transformation of the education system included the promotion of fundamental principles of citizenship education which promotes equality, non-sexism, non-racism and non-discrimination (Arendse, 2014).

A national curriculum was introduced which promoted the values of non-racism, non-sexism and democracy, and one which was based on a human rights framework (DoE, 1996). Each subject would thus address issues relating to human rights with its aim to infuse a culture of human rights within the curriculum (Roux, 2012) which focuses on the nature of change together with the need to participate in the process of social transformation (Volmink, 1997).

Conceptual framework

The study provided a conceptual framework which investigated the following concepts:

Citizenship education

Citizenship education can be defined as educating children, from early childhood on, to become clear-thinking and enlightened citizens who participate in decisions concerning society (UNESCO, 1998). It generally involves enjoying rights and responsibilities in various contexts and emphasises the notion of participation in

various activities including political participation in a democracy (Pinnington & Schugurensky, 2009; Butts, 1988: 187; Barber, 1992: 36).

Citizenship education aims to instil respect for others and recognition of the equality of all, and attempt to combat all forms of discrimination by fostering a spirit of tolerance and peace. It includes educating people in citizenship and human rights through an understanding of the principles and institutions; learning to exercise one's judgement and critical faculty; and acquiring a sense of individual and community responsibility (Meyer, 1995).

Human rights education

Human rights education is viewed as the basis for a universal human rights culture so that individuals and groups learn to respect their own rights and dignity as well as that of others (Hodgson, 1998). Human rights education is a way to deal with transformation and is an empowering process enabling people to take control of their lives (Tibbitts, 2003) and participate meaningfully in a democratic society. Holistically, human rights education should entail knowledge, skills, values, behaviour, feelings and attitudes, as well as development (MacKinnon, 1993: 83-109). Finally, human rights education should aim to educate equip and empower citizens to use their human rights to improve their lives.

Democracy education

Democracy education promotes the notion of encouraging the people's voices to be heard and supports the notion of agreement and representation (Carrim, 2006). Ideally learners within the education system should be targeted because there is an assumption that schools prepare learners for life, and this must be reflected within the school curriculum (Council of Europe, 1987). Educational sites are ideal since it represent the most populated social space in the country (Carrim & Keet, 2006). Young citizens should be educated and nurtured to become democratic citizens who are able to contribute to and enhance a democratic society (Linington, Excell & Murris, 2011).

Inclusive education

Inclusive education, with its roots in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), states that everyone has a right to education that shall be directed to strengthen human rights and freedoms (UNESCO, 2005). It is generally viewed as a context within which ordinary schools include a diversity of learners, or as a system that ensures that learners with disabilities are accommodated within mainstream education (Clark, Dyson & Millward, 1995: 78-95; Uditsky, 1998). In SA inclusive education is viewed as a learning environment that accommodates and promotes diversity unconditionally and without discrimination of any kind which acknowledges, accepts and respects the idea that all learners can learn and that they are diverse, and strives to maximise learner participation and potential (DoE, 2001).

Global perspectives

Citizenship education has different meaning in different contexts including the related domains such as democracy, human rights and inclusivity. It is referred to as

aspects of education at school level intended to prepare students to become active citizens, by ensuring that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to contribute to the development and well-being of the society in which they live (European Commission, 2012).

Civic education in America is dominated by the study of democracy, the Constitution, democratic values and citizens' rights (Cogan & Morris, 2001). Mexico emphasises the development of democratic citizenship skills and habits (Levinson, 2004: 269). Mexico looks to the school to engender democracy in learners. In Japan, citizenship education is used to build on and enhance a democratic society and is nurtured in the school curriculum through various school activities (Otsu, 2001). Taiwan, with similar objectives, aims to develop good citizens and encourage students to live responsibly, peacefully and in harmony with society (Pitiyanuwat & Siyiva, 2001).

Australia aims to prepare their youth to become active citizens through an understanding of its democratic system of government, as well as by keeping to the values required to participate actively in civil life (Print, 2001). In New Zealand, citizenship education aims to enable learners to participate in a changing society as informed, confident and responsible citizens (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1997).

Research methodology

The study, on which the paper is based, adopted a qualitative research paradigm and a case study research design with an interpretive approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of citizenship education in a democracy.

Participants were drawn from 5 secondary schools in the Western Cape, SA. The participants included 461 Grade 12 learners who completed the Grade 11 Life Orientation curriculum and 7 Life Orientation educators. The case study provided the opportunity to closely examine the data in its specific context over a period of time (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Zainal, 2007).

Data was collected mainly through document analysis, focus group interviews and semi-structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were used to gather large amount of data from a large sample and the focus group interviews elicited rich in-depth data from the perceptions and experiences from the learners and educators. Documents from the Department of Education were readily available and also provided relevant information about the phenomenon. The research instruments were specifically used to answer the research question: "To what extent does the Grade 11 LO curriculum prepare learners for active citizenship in a democratic South Africa?". The data collected from different sources using different instruments was crystallised to validate the responses to the research question (Tracy, 2010; Ellingson, 2009).

Discussion, results and findings

The transition from an apartheid system to a democratic system required radical interventions which required, amongst others, transformation in education. New policies and mechanisms were put in place to address the inequalities of the past. The education system has therefore introduced the infusion citizenship, human

rights, democracy and inclusivity into the curriculum, and in particular the LO curriculum in the NCS. The rationale for introducing these in schools was to develop a nation of competent and caring citizens who can participate meaningfully in society and achieve their full potential (Rooth, 2005). The LO curriculum has thus been given the responsibility to include citizenship - democracy - inclusive - and human rights education in order to fundamentally promote and encourage active citizenship in a democracy (Arendse, 2014).

Arendse's (2014) study demonstrates that the lack of knowledge, skills, values and understanding of 'active citizenship' and related concepts including 'human rights', 'democracy' and 'citizenship' was due to the marginal infusion of content relating to active citizenship in the LO curriculum.

The findings illustrate that the curriculum provides insufficient guidelines, infusion, content and time for the teaching and learning of active citizenship in a democracy. Learners are not being exposed to practical activities to empower them to become active and responsible citizens in a democratic society.

Despite the inclusion of human rights education, democracy education, inclusivity and citizenship education in the curriculum, there was thus a deficiency of information, specifically about these aspects of the curriculum as they relate to active citizenship in a democracy. This is evident that learners are not being effectively prepared and equipped for active citizenship through the curriculum.

Recommendations

The following recommendations pertain to the curriculum as a mechanism to optimally educate, equip and nurture learners and educators for active citizenship in a democratic SA:

There should be collaboration between democratic structures (participatory institutions) and the DBE when developing active citizenship education curricula in South Africa in order to nurture citizens who become active and responsible in society.

A paradigm shift may be required within the DBE, including districts and schools for LO as this subject is pivotal to the facilitation of the holistic teaching and learning of active citizenship in a democracy.

Curriculum development policies should classify the significance of active citizenship in the curriculum by designing explicit topics relating to active citizenship. A citizenship education curriculum should be more explicit in the content and information presented to learners from as early as Grade R.

The curriculum plays a pivotal role in creating a society that embraces active citizenship in a democracy and should thus be designed in such a manner that learners are effectively prepared to become responsible and active citizens in a democratic society.

More time should be allocated to the teaching and assessment of human rights education, democracy education, citizenship education and inclusivity.

Active citizenship training for all educators is essential since aspects relating to active citizenship are integrated across all subjects.

Conclusion

Education is the key to cultivate active citizenship in a democracy and therefore curriculum reform be taken seriously. Citizenship education as it relates to active citizenship in a democracy should aim to educate, equip and empower citizens to use their human rights to improve their lives as active citizens in a democracy.

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Prof. Dr. Juliana Smith, Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, University of the Western Cape, South Africa, juliana@worldonline.co.za, jmsmith@uwc.ac.za

Dr. Agnetha Arendse, Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, South Africa, abba@vodamail.co.za, aarendse@parliament.gov.za