

# RECONCEPTUALISING HISTORY TEACHERS' IDENTITIES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGING CURRICULUM<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

Teachers are considered by most policymakers and school change experts to be the centerpiece of educational change. Therefore, it is not surprisingly that many current educational reform efforts in South Africa are directed at teachers, and their involvement in educational reform is seen as critical. Reforms must address the core processes of teaching and learning if they are to markedly change what happens in schools. Yet teachers respond to educational reforms in a variety of ways: some teachers push or sustain reform efforts, whereas others resist or actively subvert them. The question of addressing curriculum change in our schools has recently become a matter of contention. Teachers are finding it difficult to adjust to the changing educational policies that seek to coerce teachers into addressing curriculum change in their classrooms.

In response to the changes in educational policy in the new dispensation, the teaching of history, a subject that had already experienced numerous transformations in the past, was once again faced with the challenges of a renewed curriculum framework. This paper aims to capture the complexities and contradictions that are associated with a transforming educational system. More specifically the question of how history teachers see themselves within this transformation process and the impact that it has on their identities to curriculum change.

Identity formation theories were used as a lens to understand the various forces that influence the identities of teachers. A number of theories were examined in order to unfold identity development from various approaches to allow for a more holistic understanding of a teachers' life career. The main question that guided this investigation was how history teachers construct their identities within the context of curriculum change.

In attempting to unpack the messiness of the curriculum transformation process and at the same time to capture how history teachers are negotiating their roles and identities in post apartheid South Africa, this research study employed a qualitative method of data collection based on a life history research tradition. The richness of information

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<sup>1</sup> This article was not presented at the SASHT Conference in September 2005 in Durban.

that was obtained from lengthy, open-ended interviews with six history teachers from the Kwasanti circuit, provided a sound platform on which to respond to the critical questions of the study. The data was collated to develop narrative stories with the intention of understanding teacher thinking and experiences within a broad social and historical context. The wealth of information provided by the interviews enabled the researcher to examine how these teachers were constructing their identities within the context of curriculum change.

An analysis of the findings indicated that the conceptions that history teachers have about the changing curriculum are influenced by their past experiences. The study revealed that some of the major forces of influence that shaped the teachers' understanding of the changing curriculum were pragmatic and educational. Teachers come with many realities into the profession often reconstructing and creating their context based on past experiences and perceptions. Evidence from the data reveals that the plethora of policy initiatives seeking educational transformation in South Africa are to a large degree not congruent with existing teachers' beliefs. Teachers have to redefine and renegotiate their roles and identities, which is problematic because they come embedded with experiences gleaned during the apartheid era.

The study concludes with a synthesis of the findings, and it makes recommendations for addressing the present needs of history teachers in South Africa. The reconceptualisation of education through new policy initiatives therefore has to refocus and look more closely at teachers' understanding of their day-to-day realities in the work environment. Teachers need to 'own' the process of change, and reform efforts need to be grounded in an understanding of teachers' professional lives and development. Teachers must see themselves as experts in the dynamics of change. To become experts in the dynamics of change, teachers must become skilled changed agents.

## **Introduction**

The transition from apartheid to democracy in the South African context led to several changes in the education system and society as a whole. There was a proliferation of education policies by the government with the hope of addressing the inequalities of the past. However, De Clercq (1997) argues that most of these new policy proposals were actually borrowed from the international comparative experience and from the various policy literatures, which were then interwoven in the local South African context to address issues of equity and redress. 'Policy borrowing' was evident from the first world industrial countries and this

was a serious problem because policies did not match the transforming South African context. It is evident that most policy proposals were not developed from extensive research at grass-roots levels or practice-based knowledge that should reflect the South African educational landscape. Therefore, my paper argues that we need to take cognizance of the effects of educational policy change on history teachers' notion of their developing identities within the context of curriculum change.

## **The Research Study**

South Africa started a period of transition from an apartheid society to a democratic one since 1994. The transition affected all sectors of the South African society. These larger processes of change, i.e. transforming the South African society towards democracy, inevitably affected the entire education system. There were a number of educational policies such as the introduction of the Outcomes-based Education, Curriculum 2005 and the Developmental Appraisal System that aimed to improve the education system. Curriculum 2005 unlike other curriculum reform in South African education, which not only marked a dramatic departure from the apartheid curriculum but also represented a paradigm shift from content-based teaching and learning to an outcomes-based one. It also marks a departure from fundamental pedagogics (a racially-based prescribed set of learning objectives) to progressive pedagogy and learner-centred teaching and learning strategies.

In the post apartheid South African the contemporary educational and political language is one of 'change', 'reform', and 'improvement'. Scarcely has one set of reforms been formulated, let alone properly implemented and another is in genesis. These 'changes', 'reforms', and 'improvements' impact primarily upon teachers. They are the people who have to implement them, even though in the current educational situation they are unlikely to have been involved in their formulation. Further teachers are in the rather strange position of being simultaneously both the subject and the agent of change (Dale, 1988:44; Walker & Barton, 1987). They are required to change themselves and what they do to meet specifications laid down by the policy makers who neither knows them or the contexts in which they work. They may even be required to make changes which they believe, on the basis of their professional experience,

to be inappropriate or impossible and, inevitably, the very fact that they are required to implement these imposed changes means that their professional freedom and autonomy is further curtailed. Apple (1981, 1987) refers to this as the 'proletarianization' of teachers.

Teachers are continually required variously to alter their administrative and organization systems, their pedagogy, curriculum content, the resources and technology they use, and their assessment procedures. What do these imposed changes mean for teachers, for their perceptions and experiences of teaching? And what are the implications for the realization of the changes themselves?

My study is unique since I am focusing on the practitioner/teacher identity as it relates to policy and curriculum change. Fullan (1982: 24) notes that educational change depends on what teachers think and do – it's as simple and as complex as that. Thus in order to gain some understanding of what the curriculum and educational change means to teachers and their inclination to reject or adapt to (or accept or be motivated towards it) it is necessary to find out how they see and experience their work.

### **Critical Question**

It is often misconstrued that policy formulation and curriculum reform is the total responsibility of the policy makers or academic researchers. It is believed that the policy implementation process is a simple technical and administrative activity, i.e. from policy to practice. My paper argues that teachers have varied life experiences when they engage with a policy. The things that happen to us throughout our lives have an influence on the sort of people we become, upon our perspectives, understandings and attitudes, our beliefs and values, and the actions we take. Obviously, life experiences influence the sorts of teachers people become, and the sorts of teachers they want to be and be seen as beings (Lortie, 1975; Denscombe, 1985).

In the light of the above, the following critical question is addressed in this paper:

### ***How do history teachers construct their identities within the context of curriculum change?***

This key question will be addressed through the following sub-questions:

- What factors contribute to the construction of this identity?
- What is the place of history teachers in the new curriculum?
- How did history teachers engage with the new integrated learning area of Human and Social Sciences?
- What are history teachers' experiences of?
  - (a) Coming to understand the expectations of Curriculum 2005?
  - (b) Attempting to engage with Curriculum 2005 in practice?
  - (c) Did these above processes (a) and (b) influence history teachers' understanding of their pedagogical roles?
- Do history teachers face a daunting task of transforming their identities?

Given that the nature of South African education has changed dramatically over the past decade, the above questions attempt to explore some of the complexities of the processes and mechanisms through which history teachers' construct, experience and define their identities and pedagogical practices within the context of changing curriculum.

### **Rationale for the Study**

On 24 March 1997 the Minister of Education, S. Bengu, announced in Parliament the launch of Curriculum 2005, which not only marked a dramatic departure from the apartheid curriculum but also represented a paradigm shift from the content-based teaching and learning to an outcomes-based one. Underpinning Curriculum 2005 is also the integration of education and training. The sources of integration can be associated with the inadequacies of the separation between mental and manual work or academic and vocational education in the old curriculum and concerns with the job placement needs of learners in the context of globalization.

A tailored version of Outcomes-based Education and Curriculum 2005 is unarguably the first curriculum in South Africa which attempts to integrate our previously, incoherent and discriminatory education system in a way that places learners and their needs at the centre of the educational experience. Curriculum 2005 attempts to rid the education system of dogmatism and outmoded teaching practices and to put in place values and attitudes for democratic nation building (Bhana, 2002).

Yet, despite the widespread support that underpins the new Curriculum 2005 (Mohammed, 1997:9), its implementation has been criticized from various quarters, i.e. teacher unions, educators and academics (Rasool, 1999; Potenza & Monyokola, 1999; Jansen, 1999). As Christie (1997:65) observes, the 1995 White Paper had almost nothing to say on implementation process. Perhaps this policy was intended to serve as a post-apartheid framing educational policy. Critics have had a lot more to say about implementation than the bureaucrats, Jansen's (1997) courageous broadside "Why OBE Will Fail" being the best-known example.

The new curriculum brings with it an almost new educational discourse and a range of new demands in terms of teaching and learning practice, with which most teachers are unfamiliar. The rearrangement of school subjects into eight learning areas and the introduction of the new forms of assessment have hampered the implementation of the curriculum. The integration of knowledge into learning areas means a collapsing of the traditional boundaries and subject disciplines. In the apartheid education system, school subjects enjoyed hallowed status. In the new system teachers are expected to work together in teams and to promote co-operative culture of learning amongst pupils, encouraging a problem-solving and project approach to curriculum. Teachers have reported (Report of Curriculum 2005 Review Committee:2001) that the necessary teacher training and support to assist them in their new tasks have not been adequate. Jansen (1997) alluded to the view that educators are certainly not coping well with the sudden changes in the curriculum. There is a danger that the effect of frustrated and confused teachers will no doubt be seen eventually in our learners.

Hence, according to Parker (1999) OBE and the new curriculum have redefined teacher identity in the classroom. Curriculum 2005 requires

that teachers become curriculum developers, classroom managers and learning mediators in the context of a discourse that is unfamiliar, perhaps even unrecognizable. Similarly, Jansen (1997) in his thesis states that Curriculum 2005 posited the notion of the 'disappearing' teacher or particular construction of 'the teacher'.

In the OBE classroom, the teacher disappeared into a facilitative background role while the learners emerged as the initiators and creators of learning. The teacher faded away so the learning displaces teaching; constructing meaning among learners takes priority over dispensing information by teachers.

Curriculum 2005 identifies eight learning areas. The traditional subjects are accommodated within eight learning areas: Arts and Culture; Language, Literacy and Communication; Economic and Management Science; Human and Social Sciences; Life Orientation; Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics and Mathematical Science; Physical and Natural Sciences; and Technology. These are regarded as a way of breaking away from strict boundaries between traditional school subjects and to ensure integration within and across the different disciplines as well as developing and organizing the core curriculum. It can also be linked to the debates around the changing mode of knowledge production (Cloete, 1999:35), which emphasizes the shift from Mode 1 (disciplinary knowledge) to Mode 2 knowledge (allied, interdisciplinary knowledge). A major concern with the integration of history into the Human and Social Sciences learning area is that teachers are no longer 'pure' or disciplined history teachers but rather facilitators in a new learning area consisting of geography, home economics, ethics and values.

Although there is a body of work on the impact of apartheid or conceptions of teachers' competing professional and unionized identities (Hyslop, 1999; Chisholm, 1999) very little is known about the way history teachers currently view themselves and how issues of teacher identity influence teacher practices in the classroom. The forces have tended to be on the impact and political dynamics of restructuring on discourses of race, gender, diversity and equity (Carrim & Soudien, 2001; Vally & Gilmour, 1999; Cross, 2002; Cloete, 1999). There are several new studies on teacher identity in South Africa (see Samuel, 2001; Carrim, 2001; Mattson and Harley, 2001; Soudien, 2001; Reddy, 2000). However, most of these studies are not related to any particular learning area of

## Curriculum 2005.

Most educational reforms are based on a particular conception of teachers. Policy makers generally assume that teachers are somewhere between workers and professional. On the one hand, educational policy makers may regard that teachers are closely supervised workers, bound to implement the prescribed curriculum. The view of teachers as mere 'pedagogical clerks' (Popkewitz, 1987). On the other hand, they may assume teachers have considerable autonomy, the notion of teachers have considerable autonomy, the notion of teachers as 'agents of transformation' (Davidoff & van der Berg, 1991). The majority of teachers in South Africa may fit none of these assumed identities.

Preliminary research on the impact of Outcomes-based Education has already begun to suggest this (Jansen, 1999).

I chose to focus on the process of how history teachers learn to become facilitators in the Human and Social Science learning area. The study around this sub-theme is an attempt to probe how history teachers understand their roles and identities in the changing curriculum and how these teachers (now known as facilitators) understand what and how the new history content is being taught. According to Samuel (1998) research in South African tradition focusing on the teacher as an agent of teaching and learning is sadly under-explored. Educational research has neglected to focus on how teachers have to grapple with the new roles and identities in a changing South African educational arena.

The literature surveyed in this study draws heavily on research on educational policy process in post-apartheid South Africa. The understandings from the literature survey crystallize the gaps and silences that exist in current research agenda. Educational research post 1994 focuses in general terms on the process of developing teachers' conceptions of their identities and roles as teachers. It consciously overlooks how the changing history curriculum policy influences history teachers' understanding of their identities and their pedagogical roles. Recent studies (Mattson & Harley, 2001; Soudien, 2001; Carrim, 2001; Samuel, 2001) at a more generic level attempt to 'get inside the minds' of teachers to understand how teachers develop conceptions of themselves (identity) and how they understand their actions, duties and responsibilities (roles). However, at a particular level (discipline: history), no or little research exists in South Africa on how history



teachers develop conceptions of their identities and roles as a result of curriculum change. Hence the present paper provides an alternative vantage point from which to view the process of teachers developing conceptions of their identity as teachers of history.

Like Pillay (2003:10), I too want to focus on history teachers' who teach in Durban, and to generate stories of their lives, and to learn from their lives what it means to think and work within curriculum reform. As Singh (2001:iv) adds that the plethora of policy initiatives seeking educational transformation in South Africa is to a large degree not congruent with existing teachers' beliefs. This study shows how identities are produced, appropriated and contested within teachers' lives as daily-lived experiences within specific historical and educational contexts. My work thus focuses on history teachers redefining and renegotiating their roles and identities in the context of curriculum change, which is problematic to a large degree because they come embedded with experiences gleaned during the apartheid era.

## **The Research Design**

The study is largely qualitative in nature within the tradition of life history research method. As advocated by Lather (1986), I have attempted to operationalise a research method, which emphasizes collaboration, reciprocity and reflexivity. The goal of this research is to encourage self-reflection and deeper understanding on the part of the researched. This goal was achieved by privileging teacher voices (narratives) throughout the study. This paper proposes that the analysis of teachers' narratives can be used as an innovative methodology to study such questions of teachers' identity, culture, experience and beliefs.

## **Participants**

The study participants were six history teachers from six public secondary schools in the Kwasanti circuit in Pinetown, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. These schools are located in a suburban working class area. A sample consisting of African, Indian, Coloured and White history teachers, aged between 21-50 years participated in the study.

Experience	Names	Name of School	Race	Gender	Historical Context	Geographical Context
Novice	Anna	Jupiter Secondary	African	Female	Ex DET	Peri-urban
	Anisha	Mercury Secondary	Indian	Female	Ex HOD	Urban
Middle Career	Leslie	Venus Secondary	White	Female	Ex NED	Urban
	Beauty	Neptune Secondary	African	Female	Ex DET	Urban
Veteran	Moreen	Mars Secondary	Coloured	Female	Ex HOR	Urban
	Patsy	Earth Secondary	African	Female	Ex KZED	Peri-urban

## Pulling Together the Data

Many truths were uncovered from exploring the life histories of the history teachers. Smith (in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998:211) suggest that truths refers to the multiplicity of ways in which a woman's life story reveals and reflects important features of her conscious experience and social landscape, creating from both her essential reality. In my sojourn at this point, I present my insights, conclusions and implications to fellow diggers or archaeologists who would perhaps use these findings to pull together the scatterings as they dig ahead. However, it must be noted that I am using the metaphor archaeology to describe this aspect of data analysis and not as a concept to work throughout the insights.

Privileging the life histories' of the participants has facilitated an understanding of teacher identity through their perspective. The critical focus for life history work, is to locate the teacher's own life history alongside a broader contextual analysis. In the words of Stenhouse

in Goodson (1992:6), ' a story of action, within the theory of context'. One of the most significant features of work on teachers' lives is that it provides insights into teaching as a 'gendered profession' (Goodson, 1992:14) as well as the production of a feminist teachers' pedagogy within a particular socio-political context. Studying teachers' lives provide new insights into how teachers might approach reform and change to cope with the challenges of the post modern world since, ultimately, knowledge can only be produced through an intimate interrogation of individual experience (Griffiths, 1995). To date much of the educational research employed in teacher education has been developed from a foundational discourse with its philosophical, psychological, historical, sociological components - far removed from educators' personal knowledge and experiences. The process of recalling and reuniting one's history is a pedagogical tool for self and professional development. It allowed me to document the teachers' reflections of the range of influences and experiences on their own identities and roles, tracing back to the teachers' home and family environments, their own primary and secondary schools, their decision to enter into teaching as an occupation, their teacher education programmes and their induction experiences as newly qualified history teachers.

## **Data - Based Approach to Identity Development**

The findings from this study concludes that the process of identity formation embeds a complex intersection of various complex and asymmetrical shifting valences of power, knowledge, culture, economics and self (see Soudien, 2001; Carrim, 2001; Samuel, 2001). Teachers are constantly 'in movement', displaying discontinuities, contradictions and compliance making it difficult for researchers to truly know them. Indeed, as Samuel (2001) argues, the research context of developing teachers in post-apartheid South Africa is characterized by the rich intersection of several layers of complexity, complementarity and contradiction. Policymakers have continued to frame teachers as objects of gaze, objects of manipulations. They have attempted to impose on teachers their 'preferred identities and roles' that fulfill the goals of their policy agendas.

Whilst these policies might profess to be aimed at reversing oppressive

interpretations of the teachers, the opposite is often achieved. Samuel (2001) adds in a world where more and more the market-related issues infuse all levels of society; teacher educational policy has its agenda crafted in the imperatives of economists and agents of cultural assimilation to a globalized discourse. However, the analysis of the data for this study reflects the contrary. The participants do show some evidence of being able to develop and work with the new history curriculum change. The evidence for this assertion derives from the positive discussions that history teacher present about the teaching of history as a result of the curriculum change. Their tentativeness and preparedness to engage in the process of curriculum change is noted in their pedagogical practice.

The paper suggests that policy for curriculum change cannot be directly translated within the educational institution without recognition of the complex biographical heritages that teachers bring with them to the school. These biographies rather than being a hindering force should be embraced by policy makers as the initial theoretical understanding of teaching and learning that teachers bring with them into the institution. Curriculum change programmes should be constructed as 'critical discursive spaces' (Samuel, 2001) within which the varying dialogues of the personal, political and policy expectations about teaching are negotiated. Teachers need to 'own' the process of change, and reform efforts need to be grounded in an understanding of teachers' professional lives and development (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). If teachers are involved in planning and implementing reform, they are more likely to assume responsibility for it, rather than attributing it to others (Sarason, 1996). Rather than condemning the teachers' past, curriculum planners must allow for a richer debate about the kinds of identities that teachers themselves wish to negotiate. This does not simply mean abandonment to the personal level. Teachers must give the latitude to develop their personal spaces of identities as a deliberate response to the various forces they encounter. This is also recognition that teachers be given the freedom to negotiate constantly their own sense of self and their roles within a framework of curriculum change. Fullan (1991) suggests that teachers who find that their ideology, which is rooted in their life experiences and interactions, are consistent with the proposed reform typically support change. On the other hand, teacher resistance to change results when teachers feel that their vested interests or taken-

for-granted beliefs and values are threatened by the reform agenda (Muncey & McQuillian, 1996).

Participants' sense of identity is a product of their experiences of their own teachers who executed their sense of self within the racialised and classed contexts of the apartheid education system. The white participant, Leslie commented positively about her teachers as role models, but that these role models rarely offered her with the desire to want to become teachers, given that the career options that were potentially available were broader than just teaching. For the Black participants, like Moreen, Anna, Beauty and others the teachers tended to be more influential: participants wanted to be like their teachers, perhaps notably because they represented an access to the lifestyle of the middle class that the teacher represented. This approach is often referred to as modelling approach. Black and white participants both reflected good teachers as those who displaced a charismatic presence and were able to show their mastery of the subject within the specific contexts of primary and secondary schools and the process of induction that the participants experienced contribute to the shaping of the teachers' identities and roles.

The study also recognizes that teachers are not necessary averse to alternative approaches to their pedagogy as expressed in policy. However, their own training as teachers has not sufficiently prepared them to embrace these roles. For example, teachers are expected to promote a cross-disciplinary / inter-disciplinary approach to enacting Curriculum 2005 learning areas. Many of the under-prepared teachers still, however, have to grapple with the basic foundational knowledge base of the disciplines, which they previously taught as discreet subjects for example geography, history, biology. Teachers seem to be suggesting that their professional development is welcomed as a contribution to reconstructing the educational system. But how these professional development interventions are designed, and how it frames the teacher in the process of its curriculum design is an important factor. Mattson & Harley (2001) argue that teachers develop a "strategic mimicry" of policy expectations that are counterforces to the traditional conceptions of teaching/ learning that teachers themselves believe. By trying to 'look modern' (Fuller, 1991) the teachers offer semblances of the expectations of new regulatory policy, yet reflect only superficial understanding of

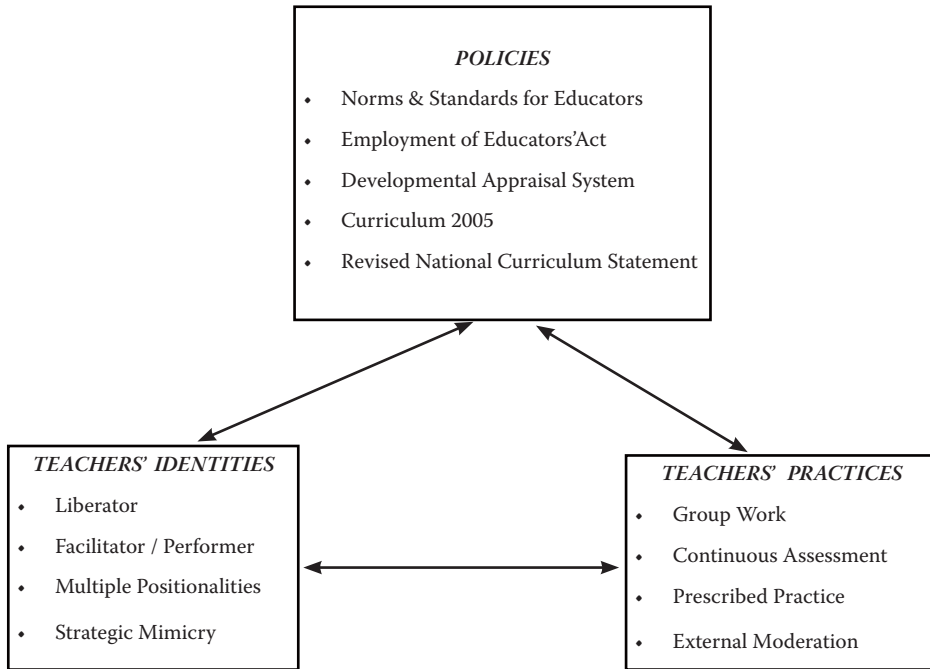
the proposed shifts being dictated.

This research has provided evidence for the uncoerced and voluntary engagement of teacher identities. Using the concept of engagement, recasts teacher identity as a process, rather than as a fixed set of characteristics. This, then means that as a process, there are possibilities and space for negotiation (Reddy, 2003:189). The process of negotiation is often between competing forces such as biographical, programmatic, contextual and curriculum changes. In this study, the data suggest that the participants engage with the new history curriculum in an uncoerced and voluntary manner.

Reddy (2003) further adds that identity construction is an active process on the part of those involved and struggling to acquire a means to represent oneself to self and others in part of ones development. This process exists under socially given conditions, which include structures of power and social relations, institutional contests and opportunities as well as the available cultural expectations.

The conjunction between policy discourses and teachers identities provides insights for curriculum theories and identity theories into how teachers experience their developing identities and practices, and the meaning that they have made of policy.

My analysis suggests that teachers actively interpret and re-interpret their life experiences, creating their identities as teachers. It is evident that educational and curriculum changes in post apartheid South Africa has in many ways led to a change in the ways in which teacher identities are produced and experienced. As teacher identities and teacher practices shape each other, they form a background against which policy is experienced. Policy in turn impacts on the construction and reconstruction of teacher identities and practices. The triad relationship between educational policy, teacher identities and teacher practices is evidenced in the data from this study. This relationship between, and shaping of the three domains: policy, teacher identity and teacher practice, which I refer to as “*uncoerced and voluntary engagement*” is shown below:



### Interrelatedness of policy, teachers' identity and teachers' practices

## Interrelatedness of Policy, Teachers' Identities and Teachers' Practices

Throughout this research I have been especially concerned with the triad relationship between “policy”, “teacher identity” and “teacher practice”. Why is it that across different countries and variable research contexts, the problem persists that what policy claims and what practitioner’s experience, remain dislocated from each other?

This in itself is neither a novel nor interesting finding, but it nevertheless remains a vexing one to change theorists. Some suggest that this distance between policy and practice might be inevitable, and that ‘mutual adaptation’ of intentions and outcomes is what happens in real-life schools (McLaughlin, 1998). Others suggest that the problem of distance is highly treatable, if only we inject the same logic into policy reform that guided the campaign to rid the planet of smallpox (Pratt, 1999).

My research has shown the ‘policy images’ of teachers make demands that engage with their ‘personal identities’ as practitioners. Every education policy document contains powerful images of the idealized teacher. Whether explicit or implied, whether conscious or unconscious, policymakers hold preferred and cherished images about the end-user of an education policy, i.e. about the teacher. Sometimes the policy image is explicit, contained in normative statements like ‘the teacher should’. More often, however, the policy image is conveyed through drastic role changes for the teacher without addressing the practitioner directly.

Reddy (2003:181) states that we require a response to the curriculum changes that includes changes in policy and practice to accommodate identities and diversity within these experiences and knowledges. It is evident that there are multiple ways in which teachers respond. We need to take these varied responses into account and place interventions that acknowledge this diversity. It is necessary that interventions articulate with the realities of the teacher taking into account their confusions and contradictions. The strategic task, therefore, is to create dialogues of meaning between policy, politics and practice in transforming education in developing countries.

## **Methodological Reflections to Identity Development**

The following critical question was interrogated in this study: How do history teachers construct their identities within the discourse of curriculum change? I use the metaphor of pulling together the scatterings, in the critical postmodernist sense to illustrate that there are no dead certainties in life or research (Hargreaves, 1995). The great question is what is to be believed? Are there any answers? I do not claim to know all the answers. In my quest for the truth I found that a rigorous search for empirical evidence is imperative in research. There is a need to develop a theory to understand the making of lives in transitional times (Samuel, 2001). How do teachers develop a sense of identity in a rapidly changing political, social, economic, cultural and educational context? It is within this context of understanding teachers’ lives in transitional times that I present my research method insights.

The various factors, which shape teachers identities and roles, are neglected as one policy after another is introduced making new



demands and expectations as teachers. The seriousness of this agenda necessitates the obligation from researchers and policy makers to seek-emancipatory and innovative approaches and to be critical in both their epistemological and methodological undertakings. As a researcher I had to examine the impact that the change in the curriculum had on their life world. In this study I conducted in-depth life history interviews of six practicing history teachers. Tuckman in Cohen & Manion (1986:292) succinctly describes the interview as providing access to what is 'inside a person's head' it makes it possible to measure what a person knows, the 'knowledge or information' that a person likes or dislikes, values and preferences, and what a person thinks.

There are many reasons that make life history approach so fascinating. First of all, I believe that many of our explicit actions have their roots in our own life histories and previous experiences. I believe that we have implicit values and beliefs that guide our thinking and everyday action. Furthermore, life history research concentrates holistically on teachers' life experiences and the meanings they attach to their work.

I documented the teachers' reflections of the range of influences and experiences on their own identities and roles, tracing back to the teachers' schooling experiences, their decision to enter into teaching as an occupation and their experiences as history teachers. In life history research I engaged in the history teachers' story telling in such a manner that I became aware of their multi-layered contexts and to discover the insights of 'the figure under the carpet' (Edel cited in Dezin & Lincoln, 1998:95).

This mixed metaphor aptly illustrates how the researcher (re) constructs a pattern from the data one has of the life of the person studied and written about. In this study the history teachers' who are under the carpet are not so much found as constructed. Since life history is my major tool, the concern is for the history teachers in this study. Recent life history research has underlined the importance of listening to the voices of the study subjects, especially subjects who belong to the marginal groups. Narrativity aims to penetrate deeper than traditional research by letting the subjects tell their stories and present their views, including people whose voice is generally not heard in the stories of the majority population (Lensmire, 1998; May, 2001; Wengraf, 2000).

Life history research has become very popular in teacher research,

and its highlights subjective interpretations of teachers. According to Goodson (2000), the project of 'studying teachers' life and work' represents an attempt to generate a counter-culture that will resist the tendency to overshadow teachers. Moreover, this research approach aims to place teachers at the center of action and seeks for the 'teacher's voice' (Goodson, 2000:16). Generally speaking, it can be said that life history research explores the narrator's experience and the meanings he or she attributes to these experiences (.Kelchtermans, 1993). In the interpretative approach the researcher begins with the individual and sets out to understand her or his interpretations of the world. This method relies upon the subjective verbal expressions of meaning given by teachers studied, which are like windows into the inner life of the person. By using this approach I was able to have a clearer understanding of the history teachers' world in co-constructing their life histories.

Furthermore, it gave research participants an opportunity to take responsibility to do their own thinking in the area. The life history interviews offered the teachers the space to be reflective; it allowed them the discursive space to delve deeply into issues of identity, early childhood, political and educational experiences. It also helped to explore their feelings as teachers and to talk about their dreams and aspirations for the future. The narrative opened a window for me as the researcher to look into the subjective world of the teacher. An impact study of this type is incomplete without delving into the consciousness, 'looking into the invisible' (Samuel, 2001), i.e. teacher's mind and emotions. Designing methodologies i.e. instruments to probe into these aspects of the human psyche is complex and challenging. Using a critical feminist postmodern perspective in this research, I have demonstrated that educational research is a non-linear and complex activity because there is no tangible reality out there. The methodological insights cited provided a more adaptable way of dealing with multiple realities because the methods exposed more directly the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

In constructing teachers' life stories, it becomes imperative to make use of methodological tools that will reflect and reveal a teacher's life story in a multiplicity of ways. My task in using life history was to engage in teachers' telling their story so that the truth emerged. But truth is an elusive concept and difficult to attain because each individual constructs

reality from their perspective and this depends on where the reality is being constructed. Smith in Denzin & Lincoln (1994:292) articulates this tension: "Virginia Woolf was half-right: Writing lives is the devil. But a strand of intellectual excitement, approaching ecstasy, also exists. If one is fortunate to find a heroine or hero from another time, place, and culture, the biographical activity takes on a strong cast of ethnography". Although not a perfect instrument, the life history methodology provided me rich data to make trustworthy pronouncements. The narrative inquiry that focuses on personal narratives is intended to be emancipatory (Gough, 2001:21). Gough (2001) finds that reflecting critically on stories that one reads, writes, hears, lives and tells may help one to understand how one uses them more responsibly and creatively and frees one from constraints.

As a pedagogical tool, the narrative in the form of life histories has enormous possibilities for the teacher. In this study the narrative became a vehicle for consciousness-raising, self-reflection and emancipation of the mind. The narrative was also cathartic for the teachers as it gave them the space for an outflow of suppressed, marginalized voices. Patsy adds:

My participation in support of the Soweto uprising lead me branded as a political activist and I was threatened by the Education Department of being dismissed as a teacher.

Through their narratives they demonstrated their ability to articulate the often invisible, marginalized, female voice.

I use feminist research methodology because it gave voice to the experiences of women who have long been oppressed, repressed, ignored or denigrated. It is in feminist philosophy that women's experiences are highlighted and used as material for philosophical discussion (Code, 1988). Walford (1994) explains that the subjects of inquiry are usually the forgotten and less privileged, which are often women. The distinctive power of feminist research is that it generates its critical issues from the perspective of women's experience. The purpose of feminist research has an emancipatory goal, where research and analysis should provide useful information that will empower people so that they can challenge and fight their manipulation and exploitation. Beauty summed up her feelings about being a history teacher:

The critical experience for me occurred at the point where I was able to examine myself and consider the type of contribution I could make as a history teacher, instead of sitting back and passively accepting information from others. I wanted to be the innovator, to go out and try out new ideas, new techniques and whatever.

In this study, the teacher's life histories encompass the multiplicity of ways they reveal and reflect important features of their conscious experiences and social landscape, from both their essential realities. Prell (1989) cites Myerhoff's life histories where she talks about the reflexive nature of culture. She was interested in finding out about cultural settings where people created their identities. According to Perumal (2004) citing Prell (1989), the human/cultural process of finding stories within stories was an example of reflexivity, which is the capacity to arouse consciousness of ourselves as we see the actions of others and ourselves. Reflexivity allowed me to understand persons as active and self-conscious narrators of their own lives. In life history, people talk about their lives. They lie, sometimes, forget, exaggerate, become confused and get things wrong yet they are revealing truths. The teachers in this study show how their identities are complex, contradictory and shifting within the teacher positions, circumscribed and organized within normative frameworks in which they think and work.

## **Implications for Further Research**

This study has opened up several sites for future research. The following are suggested areas.

The first major area of future research should attempt to explore the convergence and divergences of teacher preparation programmes within different societies undergoing rapid changes in the social, economic, political and educational environments. Such research should attempt to address the growing global concern amongst teacher educators about the relationship between these macro-educational concerns and the day-to-day design, delivery and implementation of teacher preparation programmes. Issues around exploring for more useful models of ensuring quality teacher education may emerge from this kind of research.

Research into teacher thinking in the South African context has been

an under-researched area. Teachers have usually been on the receiving end of educational research. Future research should be engaged in order to reveal the sophisticated and complex process that are involved when dealing with teaching process in the context of a rapidly transforming society. Teaching involves the teacher making decisions all the time during the process of engagement with the learners. More detailed analysis of the thought process needs to be conducted to reveal how teachers make sense of the act of teaching their pupils. This research study has presented a creative methodology accessing teachers' thinking, and of analyzing the data produced during the data collection processes. Future research should extend these methodologies of data collection and analysis by looking at practicing teachers within school site. Besides elevating the status of the voice of teachers themselves in the educational research area, it will provide insightful perspectives on how teachers make sense of the intended policy initiatives that are characteristic of a transforming educational context.

A more deliberate investigation needs to be conducted exploring the nature of the relationship between the teacher education institutions and their school partners. The process of setting up more democratic partnerships is a valuable area for future research, which will benefit both the teacher education institutions and the school sites.

The school is no doubt a significant arena where teacher's identities are negotiated and acted out. This study importantly foregrounds teachers' voices in the production of data. An important area for further research is that of the structural components of the education department, policy maker's conception of teacher identity and their influence on teacher identity constructions.

Curriculum issues are certainly deserving of ongoing attention. Given the teacher identity struggles that the findings of this study demonstrate, teacher development programmes focusing on curriculum changes in education is an important research area. How are teachers being prepared for Curriculum changes?

More research needs to be conducted on the effectiveness of the national education department in supporting and supplementing the implementation of the Revised National Curriculum Statement.

Much has been written about the advantages (or disadvantages) of

OBE but not much research information has been offered to teachers to deal with its practicalities in the South African classroom.

The narrative in the form of life history writing provided a rich data source. This source allowed me to peep into the minds of history teachers. Since there has been paucity of life history in the field of education and the effects of curriculum change in South Africa this opens up another avenue for further investigation.

In a country as diverse as South Africa, especially noting its apartheid history, racial and cultural differences influencing teacher identity production is another interesting area that deserves further research.

### **Closing Comments**

I used the metaphor of an archaeologists excavating the life histories of history teachers. Archaeologists work like detectives in an ‘unearthing’ process (Foucault, 1970) and that the artifacts and ecofacts they find as clues to the lives of the people who used them. I privilege the use of the concept archaeology in this chapter to summarize the insights in an executive way. Everything that archaeologists investigate from the most magnificent building to the tiniest pollen grain helps them to form a picture of ancient societies. Archaeologists look for information about how, where and when cultures developed. Like other social scientists, they search for reasons why major changes have occurred in certain cultures.

Some archaeologists try to understand why ancient people stopped hunting and started farming. Others developed theories about what caused people to build cities and to set up trade routes. Extending the use of this metaphor in this study enables one to understand the relationship, the complex interaction between life and context, self and place. It is about comprehending the complexities of a teachers’ day-to-day decision making and the ultimate consequences that play out in that life so that insights into broader, collective experience can be achieved. Cole and Knowles (2001:11) add that every in-depth exploration of an individual life-in- context brings us that much closer to understanding the complexities of lives in communities.

This paper explores an under-researched area within educational

research in South African context. It focuses on the crucial area of teacher development and identity during the era of reconstruction of post-apartheid context and curriculum change. This context is marked by rapid changes within the society and this had an important impact on the process of conducting research.

This study attempts to present insights into the ways in which history teachers experience the teaching and learning of history during various periods of their lives: within the primary and secondary schooling, their university or college experiences during the teacher preparation programme and during the period of their engagement as teachers during the school-based practicum. The research study employs the methodology of life history research in order to gain insight into history teachers' thinking of curriculum change as they engage in the process of teaching history.

The study presents the argument that teachers' development is a complex process, which involves developing critical perspectives of one's biographical experiences of teaching and learning. In particular, this study looked at how the history teacher develop perspectives of teaching and learning history through the lens of their life history experiences. Various forces compete for dominance during the course of this process of development: the internal forces of teachers' biographical experiences, the forces of the teacher education institution and school environment, and the macro-forces of the rapidly transforming social context.

The study extends the constructs around developing identity as teachers of history into an analysis of the process of identity formation within the context of a rapidly changing social, political, economic and educational environment. My analysis suggests that teacher identities are negotiated processes and are produced in many different contexts, often with competing intentions and representations which include all aspects of everyday life as well as all the discourses and interactions with educational demands and changes. It is evident from the data in this study that teacher identities are accomplished or rejected as individuals interact in local situations that are powerfully influenced by broader educational patterns of expectation and restriction.

The study has particular relevance for teacher educators, policy makers and educational practitioners in their united quest for improving the quality of teaching of history.

In exploring the framing of teachers' identities as 'educators' in current South African legislation, teachers are positioned as purveyors and 'reproducers' of human rights, democracy and citizenship, whilst, ironically, their rights as subjects of human rights tend to be ignored. Through Curriculum 2005 particularly, South African teachers are to be reprofessionalised with a greater sense of professional autonomy and decision-making powers. However, data from the research I conducted and of the report of the Review Committee of Curriculum 2005 indicate that contemporary teachers are caught in anxieties of transition feeling caught in ways of the 'old' and wanting to work in 'new' ways. They also lack professional autonomy and competence to fulfill what is officially expected of them. In addition, as agents of human rights, teachers experience ongoing forms of discrimination in their daily routines, mainly in terms of gender, age and freedom to teach in a school of their choice. Significantly, though, South African teachers do not currently see themselves as 'owning' the transformation of education in South Africa but as subjects of it.

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