

# The history of education in south africa

[Parts of the World](#), [Africa](#)



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## **Introduction**

Why is our history so important? History tells us where we come from, what happened and what worked and did not work in order to understand why we are where we are at this point. History has a profound influence on our present and future.

The below discussions highlight some of the crucial events that took place in the development of your education system and the influence it has on our current system.

## **The Christian National Education Committee**

The start of the Boer-War in 1880 forced the Boers to open concentration camp schools to ensure that the people were educated (Booyse et al., 2011: 7). Between 1901 and 1902 the British government under the leadership of E. B. Sargant also opened government schools in school to ensure the

conditioning of children to the British ways and education was done in the English language only (Booyse et al., 2011: 7). Camp schools were established in all four provinces then know as Cape, Transvaal, Natal and the Orange Free State. Some prisoners were used as educators and some established the schools themselves (Booyse et al., 2011: 7).

The Afrikaners were unhappy about the forced ways of the British and called in financial aid from the Netherlands. Six teachers from Transvaal created the “ vriendekring” and with support from Louis Botha, Jan Smuts and Christiaan Beyers and they formed the Christian National Education Committee (Booyse et al., 2011: 7) they opened private schools in resistance to the British government. This way they could ensure the survival of their language, culture and traditions. By ensuring that their curriculum was on par with that of the British government, they could uphold the standard of the education at the same time.

Another important occurrence during this time was the closing of camp schools and Lord Milner’s efforts to destroy Afrikaner dominion by ruling that no Afrikaans will be used in the new schools established after the war. In the Cape Thomas Muir implements the Cape School Board Act which stated that white and non-white children must be separated (Booyse et al., 2011: 7).

All new schools that opened or old schools that reopened after the war were for whites only and education took place in English or Dutch (Booyse et al., 2011: 7). It goes to show that the separation due to race started many years ago.

## **The Change in British Government**

Booyse et al. (2011: 9) highlighted that Sir Campbell-Bannerman from the Liberal Party in Britain became Prime Minister. The hope was that the conservative hold on education could hopefully be more lenient. This meant that provinces like Transvaal and Orange River Colony could appoint a representative of their own on their education board. The Selborne Memorandum on Education by Lord Selborne gave representatives more authority to at least give advice on the school boards. A big win was the ruling that mother tongue (first language) could be used in schools while children were still young and only once these children could master English, it was to be used as medium of instruction (Booyse et al., 2011: 9). During this time the CNE kept opposing the ruling as they wanted parents to have a say in the schooling of their children. They also wanted the instructional method in schools to be in their mother tongue and to keep religious decree with the support of the dutch churches.

With South Africa still being under British reign L. Botha, J. Smuts and CH Beyers established their own Dutch party called Het Volk in Transvaal and JBM. Hertzog, A. Fischer and CR. de Wet founded the Orangia Unie in the Orange River Colony (Booyse et al., 2011: 9). These parties started to oppose and fight against the British order. When Het Volk won in Transvaal and Orangia Unie in Orange River Colony (Booyse et al., 2011: 9) education in South African took a turn. The CNE was convinced to merge with government schools and the goal was to reconcile Brits and Boer.

Most of the change happened in Transvaal first by means of the Jan Smuts Act of 1907 (Booyse et al., 2011: 9). This paved the way for the other provinces to follow suit each with their own Ordinances and purposes.

### **The Establishment of the Union of South Africa**

The British Parliament implemented the South African Act in 1909 and in 1910 it created the Union of South Africa from the colonies that the British formed in the Cape, Natal, Transvaal and Orange River Colony (Booyse et al., 2011: 9). Each province could appoint a Chief Executive Officer of their own of the Union Government, but they had limited legal rights and although they could hold onto control of primary education, higher education fell under the Central Union Government (Booyse et al., 2011: 9).

Five authorities came to be: the Central Department of Education, and a department in each of the provinces. The four departments did mostly the same in their respective provinces which made control of education across South Africa, easier. At this point Dutch was also declared an official language equally to English. As Booyse et al. (2011: 9) stated this brought about the establishment of English or Dutch schools or the option of parallel or dual medium schools.

During this time, not only was it a great step forward with regards to language of instruction, teaching in mother tongue and Afrikaans being allowed back into schools, the content of teaching was thoroughly reviewed (Booyse et al., 2011: 9). Booyse et al. (2011: 9) specifically highlights that Transvaal developed a brand new curriculum that covered all existing subjects for all levels from Standard 1 up to 10. Many other crucial events

took place during this time such as the start of Form Schools, free and compulsory education for whites up to St. 8 and beyond in all provinces, centralization of schools that also came with transport and hostel schemes, joint matriculation boards, the introduction of agricultural subjects, to name a few (Booyse et al., 2011: 9).

## **The Differentiation of Education**

South Africa has and will always come with diverse educational needs. This means that in schools we would have to tailor many aspects of teaching to suit the different needs of pupils. This includes but are never limited to diversification of teaching techniques and in this case, differentiating in terms of subjects taught at what level. Many enquiries were completed in the different provinces looking at the medium of instruction or focussing on technical and vocational education and how to group students (Booyse et al., 2011: 8).

What is learned from this time is that there was a need for basic or core subjects to be taught to everyone. Basic academic and perhaps language skills, and there were some individuals perhaps with special aptitude, specific interests or goals who needed more specialized education. To this day some individuals are more practical than academic. Some enquiry commissions did research abroad to get ideas regarding the split between primary, junior or high school programs, when to implement differentiation if at all and which criteria to consider before differentiating (Booyse et al., 2011: 8).

It became clear that it was imperative that all provinces should use the same criteria when differentiating in education (Booyse et al., 2011: 8).

In the end The National Differentiations Policy established a four phase schooling system with each one being 3 years long. One of the key aspects was that Standard 5-7 were to be basic schooling after which differentiating could take place.

## **The Soweto Uprising**

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 was accepted and the intention was that all students receive an education (Bobby-Evans, 2017). At the same time the Apartheid regime wanted to impede the advancement of Black Children. The Act was implemented but black and white children were being educated separately.

In 1973 it was found that there was a lack in skilled labour and black labourers formed unions and organized strikes that affected many industries country wide (Booyse et al., 2011: 8).

As in (Bobby-Evans, 2019) white children's schooling was paid by the government where black children had to pay for schooling and also buy their materials such as books etc. Black students were not allowed to receive education that might educate them too a level that they could hold jobs they were not allowed to hold, which were jobs equal to or higher than white people (Bobby-Evans, 2019). Black students could only be skilled to serve their own people or receive labouring skills training in order to work under whites (Bobby-Evans, 2017). When it was approved that Afrikaans was to be

the main medium of instruction in black schools and also compulsory high school students started protesting for better education and education in their own languages and not the language of the oppressor (Bobby-Evans, 2017). This led to many young people losing their lives due to police responding to the protesting. It is now known in South Africa as Youth Day in honor of the students who lost their lives struggling against apartheid and also the Bantu Education (Bobby-Evans, 2017).

## **In Closing**

The history of South Africa from 1988 at the start of the Boer-war repeated itself again during the Apartheid years. What was most interesting is the fact that even during a war and major oppression people knew how important education was. Schools were established even in the worst of conditions to ensure the survival of their language, culture and traditions.

Lemmer & Van Wyk (2010: 3) refers to the fact that history and our view of it shapes the way we respond in the present or in the future. It seems that the idea of Apartheid was exactly that, our history shaping our future and how we decide to solve problems. The British rule meant oppression of South Africans and the indoctrination of the SA education system to the British ways (Booyse et al., 2011: 7). This was followed by the creation of the Christian National Education Committee (CNE) in 1901 who kept fighting for parental say, mother tongue education and religious instruction (Booyse et al., 2011: 8).

When the National Party came into power the Bantu Education Act was implemented and just like in the concentration camps where schools were



created to ensure values and cultures are upheld, and the CNE came to be in 1901, the Bantu movement ensured that blacks were educated and their values and cultures were not lost (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2010: 3).

One invisible line that can be drawn throughout the course of the history of education was the purpose and goal of education. Our views of education are influenced by our history, our own schooling experience, our type of exposure, our parents or guardians even the socio-economic status we grow up in (Knight, 1989: 3-13). There were so many changes throughout history to the outcomes of education in terms of the levels (primary, secondary or high school), when to implement differentiation, or even if differentiation should be implemented, should there be more practical subjects or vocational schooling and less academic focus (Booyse et al., 2011: 8)? To this day there is no uniformity in terms of what our education system and curricula is trying to achieve. Languages used in instructional methods are still negatively influencing some children in white-dominant schools and some black pupils do not have the fortune of being taught in their mother tongue.

Seems that South Africa still has a long way to go in overcoming the scuff marks our history left.