

June Bam
Coordinator: Social Sciences
Streamlining and Strengthening Curriculum 2005

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Dear June

The Promotion and Protection of Human Rights through the Social Sciences Learning Area

As discussed in yesterday's meeting of the MPC/TT, the Human Rights and Inclusivity Working Group (HRI WG) will make written submissions to all the other working groups with regard to the infusion of human rights in the framework documents and the learning outcomes and assessment standards.

The MPC TT and the HRI WG raised concerns that the "Geography" section of your learning area does not exploit the vast opportunities inherent to the learning area to infuse human rights. A few points on this:

- a) The creation of the HRI WG was intentional and based upon the various submissions received during the review process. The point of departure is our Constitutional framework and the founding principals of the Constitution which sets out a vision for our society. In essence, these principals represent the consensus view of the people of this country and not the government. In fact, these principals protect citizens from abuse from the state.
- b) The education system is viewed as a potent vehicle to achieve the objectives of our constitution and that of social and environmental justice. The curriculum is at the heart of our education system with regard to schooling and as such must play a crucial role to align education with the principals of our Constitution and human rights. Stated differently, the curriculum has a "constitutional mandate" to promote human rights and this understanding has prompted the review committee and the MPC to set up the HRI WG to provide guidance for the infusion of human rights issues in the interest of social justice. Against this background the brief from the MPC to the Learning Areas WGs is inter alia, to infuse human rights and inclusivity issues into the learning area statements.
- c) Promoting human rights through the curriculum does not mean that the nature of learning areas should be re-engineered. It simply means that learning areas must re-think their role to align it with human rights. In fact, the agenda of human rights requires that learning areas open up various opportunities for our learners and position them equally to attain and enjoy human rights.

- d) Social Sciences has a particular role to play in promoting human rights as noted by Oliver and Boyd¹ “Geography must take a principal responsibility for human rights education” ...since it has the advantage of being interdisciplinary with a global vision, spatially and thematically. Suitable themes include development, militarism, resource management, land distribution, redress, socio-economic rights (environment, water, food, etc), unequal patterns of distribution, trade relations, mortality rates, poverty, hunger, famine, unemployment, population movements, refugees, forced removals, economic systems, etc (please refer to HRI guidelines document p 49-50 and the separate submission on social sciences). It is evident that these issues fall “naturally” within the framework of Geography and dealing with them will enhance and not take away the integrity of the area.
- e) Through it is heartening to note references to human rights in the broad statements in the framework document it loses its momentum with regard to the stated aims of Geography. Similarly, the second learning outcome refers to social justice but the associated assessment standards are totally de-linked from social justice issues leading to an internal inconsistency. This creates a sense of “neutrality” which is both impossible and untenable since Geography (as teaching and learning for a better world) must clearly reflect what it is for and what it is against. For example, the assessment standard for LO2 in grade 1 refer to identification of places and not “social problems” and refer to participation in activities to “care for places” and not people. Notions of “helping” disabled or disadvantaged people in grade 3 smacks of a “charity” approach without aiming to assist learners to develop respect, compassion, altruism, empathy, etc for people who suffer and do not challenge learners with regard to social and individual responsibilities. Geography should be both about understanding and action. Identification of “relationships between nutrition, hunger and society” does not develop an understanding within learners to view them as human rights issues which is partially brought about by historical factors or present economic, political and social arrangement. In fact, it might lead learners to believe that people suffer because they are “weak” or because of their own inability to provide for themselves. No mention is made to apartheid, present day discrimination, systemic and structural poverty, unequal patterns of distribution, trade relations and treaties, exploitation. etc, as factors impacting of “access to resources” and as such the enjoyment of human rights. **In summary, the assessment standards are very much detached from the learning outcome and it is clear that the guidelines provided are not informing the phrasing of these standards. A proper and more detailed submission will be handed over to the learning area (History and Geography) and in due course which will include comments on the framework and the other learning outcomes.**
- f) We recommend a slight rephrasing of LO2 to include a reference to human rights which then in turn might assist in redrafting and guiding the assessment standards. We also urge the working group to use the guidelines in drafting the assessment standards and the comments made by Dr Wagiet (Advisor on Environment: Minister of Education). The HRI WG is also ready to provide

¹ Teaching Geography for a Better World, 1986

guidance and the group can either link up with Suren Govender or André Keet. Reference group members can also be of assistance.

We hope on a speedy resolution to the concerns raised and would like to reiterate the importance of Geography in the promotion of human rights...a Geography that can guide our learners as good and skilled geographers with an understanding social, economic and political arrangement and how these can be challenged individually and collectively to create a better world.

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cc. Suren Govender