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Title of the thesis :

An investigation into how history learners view history as a subject in the secondary phase of schooling.

Date of defense : April 2017

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Key words : history, learners, views, subject, school

Summary

This study investigates how history learners view history as a subject in the secondary phase of schooling in a South African context. The study was guided by two research questions namely: how do history learners in the secondary phase of schooling view history as a subject and; why do history learners in the secondary phase of schooling view the subject the way they do? Although history is perceived as a subject with great value in a democratic South Africa, twenty-one years after the apartheid system was dismantled; South Africans seem to be faced with a scenario where the number of learners taking history at secondary school level is declining. Understanding how school history is viewed in the secondary phase by history learners can lend to an investigation into the declining history learner population in a democratic South Africa.

The research methodology that was adopted to explore this topic was qualitative. To guide this qualitative inquiry I decided the most suitable paradigm for the investigation was ‘interpretivism’ from the epistemological stance of constructionism. This linked well with the theoretical framework for the study which was ‘symbolic interactionism’ which guided me as the researcher as I moved from theory to data and from data to theory. The sample for the study consisted of four chosen schools and seventeen learners within the schools. Learners involved in the study fell between the ages of 16 to 18 years old and were grade 11 learners who chose to do history as a subject at secondary school level.

The methods used to collect data were creative arts-based research in the form of collages. Other related methods revolving around the collages included presentations of the collages in the form of a gallery walk, group discussions and field-notes. The research data for the study was analysed on two levels. The first level of analysis was based on analysing individual collages using an ‘open coding’ method. The second level of analysis was conducted using an instrument based on six

benchmarks which I devised to further analyse the collages and the related methods used in the research study.

The major findings that emerged in an inter-textual manner from the study included broad ideas about the content such as school history is viewed as being about South African political history; school history is more than a South African story; school history is about people and school history is about war and violence. Additional findings that emerged were related to school history being about the conceptual and pedagogical idea of the subject and school history is viewed as having an affective/emotive side.

Findings revealed that the learners' participating in this study, as per the theory of symbolic interactionism seem to be very idealistic by dint of their age and way of thinking. Thus, grand ideas of love, and critical views of school history were demonstrated. These participating learners related school history assertively to 'big truths'. This kind of thinking can be attributed to the fact that as 16-18 year old learners of grade 11 are so-called philosophical thinkers, according to Egan (1997).

Overall, the study has contributed to the literature on how history learners view history as a subject in the secondary phase of their schooling as well as why history learners view the subject the way they do, therefore contributing to filling the gap in the literature for the particular context in which it was conducted.