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Citizens of the future: South Africa

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Editor's Note

Hilary Claire has been involved in CiCe activities from soon after our inception in 1998. She was an enthusiastic and inspired teacher educator, with a deep passion for human rights education, springing from her work as a member of the ANC resistance in South Africa in the 1960s. Hilary presented this paper at Montpellier in May 2007. She also launched her new book (co-edited with Cathie Holden): *Teaching Controversial Issues* (Trentham Press). Just a month after the conference, she fell from her horse, and died of her injuries shortly afterwards. This article is her last piece of writing. She will be missed by her many friends and colleagues in the Network.

Abstract

This study identifies children's hopes and fears for the future and the role of education in South Africa. These children were concerned about violent crime, (including child abuse), drug abuse, HIV/AIDs, continuing poverty and unemployment. They wanted justice to be done to rectify the evils of apartheid and wished to be part of the solution but had few realistic ideas about how this might be done.

In 2005 I explored hopes, dreams and concerns with some young South African children in three primary schools - one in Johannesburg and two in Cape Town.

The background

For 350 years South Africa, a country of black and brown people, was ruled by settler whites – with increasingly bitter resistance against the harsh injustices of apartheid in the C20th. In 1991, Nelson Mandela, the imprisoned leader of the African National Congress walked free from Pollsmoor Prison and shortly afterwards became the first Black president. Former dissidents were unbanned and a democratic constitution was painfully negotiated with the leaders released from their gaols or returning from exile.

Brought up and educated in South Africa under apartheid, I had become a political refugee in 1964. I finally returned in 1992 – to visit but not to live. Since then, I have returned to South Africa several times, to work and on holiday. In 2005 when I did the research reported here, South Africa had experienced only ten years of democracy, after the breakdown of civil order, the violence and injustice that had marked the final years of apartheid.

The economic, social and political legacy of apartheid is immense. Nevertheless, although, 90% of the population has only recently gained the right to vote and had been systematically oppressed economically and with prisons, tanks and guns there is a

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vibrant concern with democracy and justice. Whether they had lived through and resisted apartheid, or were born into the new democracy, all are impatient of the continuing inequalities. However, violent crime which had been rampant for generations in the black townships has spread rapidly into the white areas – still not integrated. And an unexpected curse has befallen the fragile new democracy – HIV/AIDS. One in four women between 20 – 29 is now infected; 18% of the total population currently has HIV; within three years, almost a quarter of a million South Africans will die of AIDS each year and this figure will have risen to more than half a million by 2008 (http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Health/health037_aids_sa.htm accessed 1.3.07). Still, South Africa is also a land of hope. Black South Africans have shown, on the whole, an extraordinary capacity to forgive. Some whites may grumble and prepare to emigrate, but most, to their credit, have turned their backs on the institutionalised ideology which divided them from fellow South Africans of a different colour.

The following chart shows the demography of South Africa in 2001 (<http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/html/RSAPrimary.pdf> accessed 1.3.07)

African Black	78%
White	10%
Coloured	10%
Indian	2%
TOTAL	100% = 45 MILLION

The main African languages are isiZulu and isiXhosa, but there are many more. Afrikaans is the first language of about 60% of the white population, and of the majority of the coloured population but English is the international language for communication for everyone. Average life expectancy is 44.6, and the infant mortality rate is currently 5.4% (Source: <http://web.worldbank.org/>, 2005, accessed 3.4.07).

What of the children? Equality and integration are nowhere near reality, though schools are integrated, and curricula have been completely rewritten. Rich white children still go to private schools. Some black children may travel miles to the integrated schools in the cities but the majority of black children are still in huge classes, in poorly resourced schools in the townships and rural areas, taught by teachers who are themselves the products of inferior Bantu education. Dedicated people are doing all they can to redress this, but you can't turn round 350 years of history in 10 years.

My research – the schools and the children

I was unable to go into schools which are typical of the majority population – the all-black schools in poor townships or rural areas, nor did I go into Afrikaans-speaking white schools. The three schools were all urban. Two were 'Model C', previously all-white schools which still benefited from the resources of the past; now they have an integrated intake. In the third, in Cape Town, originally a coloured church school, the intake is still predominantly local coloured (typically Muslim rather than Christian). It also has many isiXhosa speaking black children who come long distances by train from the townships – Mannenberg, Guguletu, Khayelistsha – all notorious for crime, poverty and drug abuse. There are no white children.

In all 176 children – 82 boys, 94 girls - completed the interview schedules and I interviewed 31 children from six classes in small groups: three Grade 3 classes (8-9yr olds) and three Grade 5 classes (11-12 yr olds). The ethnicity of the classes and the groups roughly reflected local demography. The teachers selected children who were articulate and would be able to manage the small group discussion. Though some children did come from very disadvantaged areas, none were experiencing special educational needs or English-language difficulties. For these interviews I used the questions from the schedule as my starting point, and their own responses and drawings which I had on the table for us all to share.

The data

Although the schedules separated personal, local and global hopes and fears, detailed analysis of the responses shows that in the children’s minds, these divisions were very blurred. There are many responses in the local and global sections which clearly relate to personal lives.

In each table below N=176; the percentage indicates children in the whole sample who included a particular item in their written schedule. Older and younger children are combined. Though their responses were analysed separately, I only note interesting differences:

Personal futures

Table 1: Hopes

	Girls	Boys
Job aspirations	70	56
Ambitions	50	69
Relationships	49	54
Material possessions	41	56
Health	16	10
Education	12	15

Here, the priority given to jobs reflects the serious unemployment in South Africa. ‘Personal relationships’ probably reflects the strength of traditional family values in much of South African society as well as concern with breakdown in families. Though marginally decreasing for girls as they get older, this increases for boys. The emphasis on material possessions is probably less to do with consumerism than material deprivation - the socialist South African government has recognised the importance of improved living standards to counter historically unequal resource allocation. Why is education so low? We can only wonder.

The following quotes from the interview transcripts, implying altruism rather than self centred materialism, give a flavour of how these children’s ambitions were connected not just to personal futures, but also to the well being of their communities. (Note: South Africa is trying to move from its racialised past. However, I am giving the ethnicity of the children to show the range of views.)

Joshua (b. 11, white) 'I want to be famous soccer player. I can be rich and help poor people and sick people by paying them money'.

Kgotso (b. 12, Black) 'I would be the deputy President of South Africa. I'd like to help disabled people and with my salary, I'd donate half to hospitals and children's homes'.

Abongile (g.12,Black) 'People can't pay for funerals, cos they don't have..... I'd like to have a job. It's hard to get a job. There's not so much new businesses'.

Luyanda (b. 11, Black) – 'I'd like to have a job. There are so few jobs. You can't get a job easily. Maybe there'll be more. A decent job, get a salary and live comfortably and normally. I'd give 10% of my salary to charity and church. They donate to other charities'.

Kezia (g. Coloured, 11) 'Even if my children don't wear name brand, as long as they have education, and don't go to bed hungry and have a roof over their heads'.

Table 2: Fears

	Girls	Boys
Health	58	51
Crime and violence	47	35
Relationships	32	24
Success and failure	24	17
Poverty	17	29

While *hope* for future health does not come high on the list in Table 1, it is the largest personal *concern* for boys and girls, increasing as the children get older. 'Dying' and 'being ill' are their descriptors, with some children specifically mentioning HIV-Aids. In the crime and violence category, children mention being attacked/raped/mugged. Children's concern about poverty (the corollary of hoping for material possessions) reflects anxieties about unemployment and being homeless.

Local futures

Responses to the questions on local issues must be interpreted in the context of communities which are coping with massive drug and crime problems, as well as the legacy of apartheid. The wealthier suburbs are still mainly white; people live behind high walls protected with electric fencing with 'armed responses'; men patrol the streets day and night against intruders. In contrast, tarred roads, proper sanitation or electric light are not universal in the black townships. In Table 3 the categories compress meanings which need explanation. *Crime* is an amalgam of children's fears about all the following: 'bad people'/gangsters, violence, guns, rape, child abuse, houses getting burned, being bombed, becoming a war zone. *Poverty* includes homelessness and hunger. Fears for the *community* include: people fighting, arguing or 'being unhappy', racism, lack of respect/kindness, places that are broken down and falling apart. *Politics* – mentioned by more boys than girls, reflects concern that apartheid will return.

Table 3: Fears for the local area (N=176)

	Girls %	Boys %
Crime and violence	85	71
Health	23	26
Community Issues	17	12
Environment	13	15
Poverty	11	19
Politics	1	10
Traffic	1	2
Disasters	1	-

Table 3 highlights the impact of drugs and gun crime on community wellbeing. Gun crime has spiralled in recent years: South Africa is believed to have the second highest gun crime rate in the world, much of this because of illegal gun ownership. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gun_politics_in_South_Africa accessed 5.3.07). A potent cheaply made drug called 'Tik' is rampant among unemployed, marginalised youth. It is clear from the transcripts that children are making links between crime, violence and drug abuse. Their knowledge and concern about gun and sex crimes is worrying, revealing children's fear of being the victims of random violence. The qualitative interviews reflect a mixed picture: some children's knowledge comes from widespread sensationalist media reporting of child kidnapping, rape and murder which does not necessarily reflect the extent of such perverted behaviour, even if the horrific details are accurate.

Below, 8-9 year old Cape Town children speak about their fears and knowledge about local violence.

Chelsea (g, 8, Coloured): 'I am frightened that someone may shoot or kill me. There is lots of shootings going on and people getting killed'.

Raffika (g, 8, Coloured): 'It will be much better if the people stop drinking and using drugs and abusing other people...stop shooting and robbing'.

And older ones, also from Cape Town:

Masibulele (g, 12, Black) 'I would like to say that the people should stop raping children and the children should go to school andthey must stop violence and stop being racistAnd if people want guns they're supposed to get a licence and then they get guns but they mustn't shoot at people for no reason, and stop the violence'.

Imaad (b, 12, Coloured) 'Ok, the people who does drugs are the people that hurt the children. In my local area there are people who does drugs, they come fast into the road [in cars] and the small children are playing there the people are also stealing other people's cars ...they go to our area and then the police can't catch them and that whole cycle is very bad ... children are playing on the street and if they get killed then the people are going to want to kill the person who killed his child'.

For other children, personal experience is at the root of their fears, as the following transcript from Johannesburg children reflects, despite the apparent privilege in their school:

Abongile (g.12, Black) 'My Mum is boss of a company. It's an expensive company. The cars were stolen. There was a huge robbery. The lights outside in the street were stolen. I fear that crime gets worse. I hope it doesn't'.

Kezia (g. 11, Coloured) 'My fear is that in my community there is a lot of crime. Some other guys wanted to use the public phone. They started to stab him (sic). Nothing was done. No this was not a racist attack'.

Kgotso (b.12, Black) 'I live by Soweto in Rockville. Some people are scared to go there because of crime – there's lots of children run after trains and they get hurt. A train sliced a child's foot. There's a park, but they don't play there. The police were running after a child or the robbers. They were running away. People smoke drugs or weed (*marijuana*) and they chase people off the swings. We've had a lot of meetings but nothing is stopped. There's guards. My mother's friend was mugged on a Sunday morning. They threw the baby on the ground and it has brain damage now'.

The Global context

In the combined data from the six countries, South Africa, like the other national groups, scores high on concern for war and conflict; however, violence and crime rank much higher than for other countries. This may reflect a tendency to extrapolate incorrectly from local/national concerns to the global context, suggesting that these children are not well informed about comparative global issues.

23% of the total believes that global environmental problems will deteriorate, while 49% believes they will improve. However, compared with the younger children, older children are considerably less optimistic (31% - older; 54%– younger). The statistical data suggest that South African children are optimistic about their future impact on global issues (with younger children more optimistic than older). However, the statistics reveal that though they can identify problems, their current involvement is poor – 26% of younger children, reducing to 23% of girls and only 5% of boys as they get older. Moreover, what they currently **do** (mainly 'environmental work' e.g. pick up litter, and some unspecified fund raising) suggests their ideas about future impact may be limited to personal action, rather than interventionist projects. The following well meaning but vague aims are typical:

Namedi (g, 8, Black) 'I can be a boss and help people get jobs and that would make the world a better place'.

Tiara (g, 8, Coloured) 'I would help poor people. Maybe if I could get a job to help, if I become a teacher...'

Abongile (g, 12, Black) ‘I hope the world will be a better place. We should understand each other better and don’t make a fuss of who’s famous. People’s lives should improve. There’s war in other places’.

Luyanda (b, 11, Black) – ‘The world should have peace. Criminals come because there’s no jobs. We must make sure there’s jobs to keep them employed and with salaries’.

Children claim to learn a lot at school about global issues, but, as in many places, a bit of probing reveals that much work is around pollution and global warming and does not address the children’s real concerns with terrorism and conflict.

Implications and Conclusions

The South African data confirms that primary children are knowledgeable about issues that are in the media and part of the discourse of their adult communities. They are very much part of their local world, with all its concerns, expectations and celebrations. They recognise that apartheid has legally gone, but *de facto* racism lives on in some people’s minds and actions. They are neither innocent nor uninformed about crime, child abuse, drugs and violence. Their knowledge about HIV/Aids and sex startles readers in the North.

Though environmental issues are being addressed in the curriculum, often very effectively, (e.g. climate change and endangered species) one might argue that this is ‘safe’ education, which does not challenge major prejudices and clashes of ideology in the local and global context.

However, the primary curriculum does not cater for their concern with **political issues** - contemporary global conflict - nor does it do justice to their interest and incipient understanding. Witness Nina (g. 12, mixed heritage):

‘Like Ethiopia... they have debts to other countries and I’m happy that it’s off, because they can’t expect the country to be able to pay them back and they don’t especially even need the moneyso instead of trying to concentrate on paying them back, they concentrate on helping their own country’.

The consequences are that children are left with half-knowledge and fears, and virtually no constructive ideas to match their idealism about what people might do. It would seem that:

- They need to be helped to move from specific examples (typically sensationalised in the media) to consider the real prevalence of such behaviour (mathematical prevalence and probability);
- Their fears about the possible impact of violence, crime and the spread of conflict need to be addressed through the curriculum
- They need opportunities to consider how to address the political and economic dynamics of the future – whether in their local areas, or more widely.

The South African evidence challenges our mindsets about childhood and what we address in the classroom. Even quite young South African children experience a curriculum which addresses HIV/AIDs so that they do understand how far sex, sexual mores and fatal illness are related. Their graphic descriptions of sexual crime stagger English readers who don't expect this discourse from young children. One might deprecate such loss of innocence, or take a view that there are lessons for British sex education, suggesting it could well become much more robust and effective, in a situation where teenage pregnancy is the highest in Europe. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4584175.stm>: accessed 3.4.07).

In contrast, South African children are not regarded as having the maturity to handle issues of global conflict. There are parallels elsewhere. Why is this? Perhaps we all need to heed the children's developing knowledge and concerns, acknowledge that modern communication technology means that children everywhere are part of the adult world, and rethink how we 'teach for tomorrow' (Hicks et al, 1995) in the primary and early secondary sector.

References

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