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Citizenship education in South Africa : a critique of post-apartheid citizenship education policy.

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ABSTRACT

It is widely agreed that effective citizenship, whether in well-established democracies or in those in transition to democracy, require some educational preparation. In post-apartheid South Africa, education policy and subsequent curriculum development placed participatory democracy and active citizenship at its centre. Although South African education policy documents have a maximalist tone in places, they collectively reflect a minimalist conception of citizenship and of citizenship education. The focus of my critique of citizenship education policy is the tendency manifest in the state policy documents to undermine democratic participation and active citizenry, conceptions first developed and put into practice in the Greek city-state of Athens.

The conception of education for citizenship does not guide the practice in terms accessible to the school's democratic community. State policy's concept of students' democratic participation and representation does not reflect a representative model of democracy in South African schools. Furthermore, extant policy does not envisage democratic citizenship education that is enjoyed by a significant proportion of the South African learners. This minimalist conception of citizenship and of citizenship education is not appropriate for the South African context.

This thesis, further, mounts a defence of compulsion, arguing that within the theoretical framework of current theories of the Athenian prototype of democracy, deliberative and representative democracy, compulsory schooling and compulsory citizenship education can be justified on the grounds that they promote individual autonomy and build social cohesion — towards the common good in South Africa. The recently proposed compulsory citizenship education programmes are not compatible with compulsory citizenship education that is designed to promote active, critical and inquiring South African citizens. These value-based education documents promote obedience, if not unquestioning loyalty, to the South African government. Moreover, neither the Bill of Responsibilities nor the School Pledge offer possible strategies for getting from where we *are* to where we *ought to be*. In the final analysis, post-apartheid citizenship education policy's lack of conceptual clarity, coherence and consistency can be attributed in large part to the conflicting forms and conceptions of citizenship in South Africa. The goals of citizenship education in South Africa would be

better served by cosmopolitan ideals, that is, preparing South African learners to act in a local, national and global scale.

Keywords

Citizenship, citizenship education, community, compulsory schooling, democracy, education policy, participation, representation.