

Institutionen för pedagogik och specialpedagogik

**Education for Democracy?**  
Life Orientation: Lessons on Leadership Qualities and Voting  
in South African Comprehensive Schools

av

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## Abstract

Title: Educating for Democracy?

Life Orientation: Lessons on Leadership Qualities and Voting in South African Comprehensive Schools.

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This study takes as its starting point how teachers understand, interpret and teach social development aspects of Life Orientation in South African comprehensive schools. The specific focus is on lessons on leadership qualities and voting for third grade learners in four schools, each dominated by either Black, Coloured, White or mixed groups of learners.

Field work with an ethnographic approach and a qualitative strategy was used to gain access to empirical data. Policy and curriculum documents, guidelines and textbooks were used. Classroom observations in four classes and interviews with 14 third grade teachers were conducted.

Theoretical concepts of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction are applied. Ulf P Lundgren's Frame Factor Theory is used to study school organization. Basil Bernstein's Pedagogical Devices are considered when examining the different levels of pedagogical activities.

To be a teacher in South Africa one needs to attend at least two years of teacher education after completing high school. Teachers in the classes studied underwent their teacher education during apartheid years. Due to limited in-service training, they sometimes experience problems of understanding and interpreting the learning area, which they usually tackle by consulting documents, colleagues or school authorities. The learners' understanding varied based on their family background and type of school they attended. There were enormous differences in material, financial and organisational resources between classes and schools. The resources for teaching leadership qualities and voting were not, however, different between the classes.

The lessons were teacher dominated and direct transmission was used as a method. The way teachers facilitated the lesson on leadership qualities and voting varied but all showed some democratic shortcomings. Apart from answering questions, learners were neither invited nor encouraged to participate to further their understanding of the theme. Limited aspects of leadership qualities were discussed, individual leaders' roles were emphasised and the teachers picked candidates for class leaders in three of the classes. It was also evident that the class environments were not suitable for critical or creative thinking and democratic upbringing.

The schools reproduced norms, values, languages and cultures of the different groups. Officially, teachers emphasised the common national South African identity. This emphasis on national identity could disguise the injustice some groups experience in society.