Education for minority groups: a case study

Desmond Mochwanaesi, Hendrik Steyn and **Johannes van der Walt**
dopfjcl@puknet.puk.ac.za

Minority group interests have resurged since the middle of the 20th century. Minorities are re-discovering their identities. In South Africa the question has arisen whether government can provide in the educational needs of minorities in terms of own schools and own languages as media of instruction, especially as there appears to be global recognition of the rights of minorities. The problem of how the educational needs of a minority group could be met was investigated by focusing on the characteristics and the (educational) needs of the Griqua community in South Africa. It was found that, although the members of this group insisted on the preservation of their cultural identity, they did not wish to be isolated from broader South African civil society. Three scenarios are put forward, in terms of which their educational needs could be accommodated and provided for, within the existing constitutional and legislative framework.

Introduction and statement of the problem

The rights of minority groups in nation-states have been the focus of ongoing debate in educational circles since the middle of the previous century. Are minority groups indeed entitled to rights, such as to be educated at their own institutions? (*cf.* Steyn & Vanderstraeten, 1998: 13). Similar discussions took place in South Africa during the apartheid years (1948–1994). After 1994, the debate has continued, now in the context of a Constitution containing a Bill of Human Rights (Oosthuizen, 1997:21).

In culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse societies, minority groups may perceive an education system, which is protected by such a Bill of Human Rights, to be favouring the values of the majority group. They would tend to regard such education as subversive of their own culture (religion, language) unless provision is made for education at their own institutions (Watson, 1985:73).

How can education systems be made more responsive to the histories, heritages, life experiences, cultural value systems and day-to-day life situations of minority groups whilst still recognising the fundamental human rights entrenched in a Bill of Human Rights? This question is not only relevant for South Africa. Other nations have been struggling with the same problem — the Basques (Spain), Tamils (Sri Lanka), Protestants (Ireland), the Darfur minority (Sudan), Hutus and Tutsis (Rwanda-Burundi), and Kurds (Turkey) are a few of the minorities clamouring for recognition. South Africa provides a useful case study of minority group needs and aspirations. It is a state governed by a party that gained a landslide victory in the 2004 elections. Its population of 46.7 million consists of various minorities that have come together under a new national identity, with 11 official languages. Despite the degree of unity displayed by the people, discussions about providing education in own institutions for minority groups have not abated.

Research method

The first step was a literature survey on the rights, including provision of education, of minority groups in nation-states (*cf.* Soer, 1997:127). The next step was to conduct field research among a minority group in South Africa, *viz.* the Griquas. Unstructured interviews were conducted in 2001 by trained moderators with four focus groups of not fewer than 10 members each, selected on the basis of purposive and 'snowball-sampling'. The focus groups covered the 'homeland' of the Griqua people (*cf.* Folch-Lyon & Frost, 1981:443; Ferreira & Puth, 1988:127-130; Morgan, 1993:37; Wellman & Kruger, 1999:196; Krueger, 1994:61-63). Use was also made of a structured questionnaire that provided for open-ended questions and answers (Steyn, 1997:8). Triangulation was effected by comparing the information obtained from the questionnaires and discussions with the results of the literature survey, and sending the findings to two representatives of each focus group for verification.

For the purposes of the focus group interviews, the research question was broken down into two sub-questions: (a) How should the education system be organised for optimal provision in the needs of the Griqua community? and (b) How should schools and other institutions be conceptualised and organised for the Griqua community to accept ownership of them?

Results of the literature survey

Definition of 'minority group'

'Minority group' can be defined in terms of age, sexuality, sexual preference, gender, religion, culture, race, or ethnicity. According to Gwinn, Norton and Goets (1990:17), the term refers to culturally, ethnically or racially distinct groups living within a larger society. Because race should be avoided as an identifier of a minority group, Lerner's (1993:79) definition is more appropriate: a minority is a group that is numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state and, therefore, in a non-dominant position. Its members possess characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and they, if only implicitly, maintain a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, tradition or language.

According to Watson (1985:11; 72) the terms 'minority' and 'majority' should not be conceived as necessarily related to numbers in a given society. They can also refer to relative political and economic position. Whilst agreeing that numbers can play a role in defining a 'minority', Claasen (1996:9) supports the idea that a group can be regarded as a minority if it lacks political and economic power (*cf.* Watson, 1985:75).

Resurgence of minority group interests

Since the beginning of the 20th century, when people began migrating from the 'old world' to the 'new world', and especially after World War II, when people began migrating from poorer parts of the world to the more affluent (northern) parts, diversity has become a contentious subject, especially in (comparative) educational circles (Phelan & Davidson, 1993:1).

In the period before World War II, people, especially in the 'old world', could be persuaded to accept that their nation was the best guarantor of their hopes, aspirations, identities and security. Education for citizenship promoted nationalism and forged nation-states. Nationalism was reinforced by language and cultural education and by policies that endorsed a national culture transmitted through a single official language. Language homogeneity was a main policy dimension of the educational strategy of all major European powers (Lynch, 1992:10).

In the period since World War II, a process of defining the rights of citizens in terms of supra-national criteria has begun, thus providing political security for rights beyond the nation itself. According to Lynch (1992:10), the internationalisation of human rights and freedoms, through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) and the establishment of national and international courts of justice, started a process of making the nations themselves, and not only their citizens, accountable for the upholding of human rights (Hughes, 1993:144).

There has been a resurgence of ethnic identity since the 1990s, to

such an extent that not only is there increased awareness of ethnic and cultural diversity throughout the world but, as events in eastern Europe, China, Africa and the former USSR have show n, there has also been an increase in ethnic conflict. According to Scholtz (2004b:6), Europe is currently 'discovering the importance of identity'. Maguire (2004:3) reports about renewed attention to Irish as a medium of instruction. In South Africa and Zimbabwe, racism in schools has come under fire (*cf.* Sunday Times Foreign Desk, 2004:2; Sedres, 2004:14) and the debate about the status of minority languages as medium of instruction is continuing (Hartle, 2003:10; Malan, 2004:6; Rademeyer, 2004:5; Randall, 2004:5). Ethnic groups in several countries, that have for generations been regarded as politically quiescent and assimilated into the mainstream of national life and the majority communities, have begun to protest against their inferior status and to demand the right to receive education in their own cultures and languages (Darbon, 1992:36; Watson, 1995:241).

At the same time, societies in western Europe and north America have continued encountering problems with cultural diversity as they struggle to accommodate or assimilate large numbers of immigrants in the post-War period. Demographic changes have thrust cultural pluralism to the fore, and forced governments and communities to re-examine their fundamental cultural values, not least of which are those embedded in their institutions of cultural transmission, such as schools and universities.

In a multicultural society, values differ because of religion, culture, language and political views. Conflict is often inevitable because it stems from competition for the same goal or resources (Van der Linde, 1994:357) and from the belief in a group that its culture is being perceived as inferior to others (Mokoena, 2000:9). According to Darbon (1992:37) and Lynch, Modgil and Modgil (1994:2), conflict should be considered the norm rather than the exception in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies. Similar tensions exist in education (Hughes, 1993:144).

Issues such as these have sparked a debate on the (educational) rights of minority groups (Watson, 1985:72). Should government policy in general, and educational policy in particular, seek to eliminate, modify or encourage cultural diversity? In some societies (*cf.* the United States of America, the Netherlands), the majority group may be prepared to allow a degree of cultural or educational autonomy for minority groups. In others (*cf.* France, South Africa), however, the majority find it more expedient to impose a common education system and medium of instruction on the grounds that such a policy encourages national unity. Educational policies depend on a range of inter-related factors: political, economic, administrative, cultural, social and religious. Ultimately they depend on the way the majority view their economic, political and / or cultural position *vis-à-vis* minority groups, and on how minority groups view their position in society (Hughes, 1993:16).

Internationally recognised rights of minority groups

The right to existence is protected in the United Nations' Declaration on the Right of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (United Nations, 1992, article 22) which emphasises that all states shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic culture as well as the religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories, and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.

According to Sachs (1995:59), the right to non-discrimination is the most powerful principle to have emerged in relation to the protection of minorities. This right is so central to international human rights law that all but one of the major instruments prescribe it as an article of general application. It is central to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), especially article 7: 'All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.' The Charter of Paris for a New Europe (European Community, 1990) declares:

We affirm that the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious iden-

tity of national minorities will be protected and that persons belonging to national minorities have the freedom to freely express, preserve and develop that identity without any discrimination and in full equality of the law.

These views are confirmed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations, 1966, articles 2(1), 3 and 26).

The right to equality encompasses more than merely the right not to be discriminated against. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948, article 1) states: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.' (Also *cf.* art. 7). The right to equality goes hand in hand with the equality of languages in a pluralistic society. In this regard, the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages (United Nations, 1992, article 7(2)) declares:

The parties undertake to eliminate ... any unjustified distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference relating to the use of a regional minority language intended to discourage or endanger the maintenance or development of it.

The right to develop autonomously within civil society is also protected. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations, 1966, article 27) declares:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

(Also *cf.* the African Charter on Human Rights and People's Rights (United Nations, 1979, article 22(i) and Europe: Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (United Nations, 1995, article 5(1)).

The right to affirmative action is covered in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (United Nations, 1965, articles 1(4) and 2):

Special measures must be taken for the sole purpose of securing adequate advancement of certain racial or ethnic groups or individuals requiring such protection as may be necessary in order to ensure such group or individuals equal enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms. (This) shall not be called racial discrimination, provided, however, that such measures do not, as a consequence, lead to maintenance of separate rights for different racial groups and that they shall not be continued after the objectives for which they were taken have been achieved.

Claasen (1996:12) notes that although race is normally rejected as an element in identifying differences, race does serve, in some instances, as a differentiator for special provision (also *cf.* Sachs, 1995:64).

Internationally recognised educational rights of minority groups

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948, article 26) stipulates that everyone has the right to education. This right is confirmed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations, 1966, article 13). The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992, articles 29, 30) reaffirms the right of the child, including children belonging to minority groups, to receive education according to their religious or cultural needs (Detrick, 1992:ix).

By adopting the Convention against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO, 1960, articles 1, 2, 3, 5), UNESCO accepted the responsibility of furthering the universally accepted respect for human rights and equality of educational opportunity. Articles 2 and 5 are important with respect to the right of minority groups to education in their own institutions.

The right of parents and guardians to 'choose for their children schools other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum education standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions' is also protected in the United Nations' International Covenant on Eco-

nomic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations, 1966, article 13). Similar declarations can be found in the following documents: the International Convenant on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations, 1966, articles 1 and 2), the Banjul Charter on Human and People's Rights (Organisation of African Unity, 1981, article 17), and the Draft Declaration proposed by Minority Rights Groups to the United Nations' Commission on Human Rights' Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (United Nations, 1979).

In the light of this exposition, it can be asked: Do the Griqua people, a minority group in South Africa, also insist on the preservation of their cultural identity and on the provision of education in their own schools and other institutions as outlined in these documents? And, if so, how do they see this happening?

The cultural and educational needs of the Griqua population in South Africa
Rationale for selecting the Griqua population
The Griqua population in South Africa was selected for two reasons: firstly, it is a relatively definable ethnic group, and secondly, their leaders were quite vocal during the apartheid years and again now in the 'new' democratic South Africa about their right to be recognised as an identifiable group entitled to their own cultural and educational rights.

A potted history of the Griquas
The Griquas are descendants of Khoikhoi and Europeans, though some of their bloodlines can be traced back to Malaysian and African slaves. They trace their forefathers to two basic clans, the Koks and the Barendses, the first mainly of Khoikhoi and the second mainly of mixed European descent (Oakes, 1989:138; Van Gass, 1995:1; Matshikiza, 1999:22). The name 'Griqua' originates from the Khoikhoi word *Grigrikwa*. Their founding father, Adam Kok I, was the leader of a series of migrations in the 17th century. Under his leadership, a group of Griquas moved from the southern parts of the Cape Province to the present Piketberg region, from there northwards to the Khamies Mountains, and then on further to the area around the Orange River. Barend Barends led another group northwards. Being nomadic hunters and traders, the two groups roamed the area around the Orange River until 1804 when they were persuaded by missionaries to settle just north of the Orange River.

Already as far back as 1975, Nurse (1975:6) (also *cf.* Scholtz, 2004:7; De Vries, 2005:VI) blamed the poverty of the Griqua people on the mismanagement of their wealth by their ancestors as well as on their inability to resist the pressures brought to bear on them by more sophisticated peoples. One of their leaders, Engelbrecht (1999, interview), felt that if they had been given self-governing status in Griqualand West, they could have established their own education system according to their needs. Several organisations exist to represent the interests of the Griqua people to preserve their cultural identity (Van Gass, 1995:17; Van Staden, 1998:3-4).

Results of the focus group interviews
Focus group interviews were held at Campbell, Douglas, Prieska, and Daniëlskuil.[1] The interviews yielded the following views about Griqua minority status and education:

The focus of education
1. The role of the learner as a member of a family
The son as a future father must be equipped to work and care for his family and to be subservient to the community. He must be taught leadership and to work peacefully with others. The daughter as a future mother must be equipped to get involved in community affairs, prepare food, teach the Griqua language to her offspring and raise children. Children must be taught to behave, have a sense of duty, obedience, respect and co-operation, thoughtfulness, and to render assistance. Other values to be taught include a sense of duty, loyalty, obedience,

academic training, honesty, respect for authority, responsibility, and pride in being a Griqua.

2. The role of the learner as a citizen of the state
Education should equip the learner to be trustworthy, service delivery-oriented, productive, knowledgeable about the nation's Constitution, have leadership qualities, have knowledge of the cultural diversity of the country, and of human rights, and of respect. Other values to be brought home include reliability, faithfulness, subservience, obedience, participation in the cultural affairs of the community, mastery of the values of indigenous peoples and of their traditions.

3. The role of the learner as a career person
Education should equip the learner for doing scientific, technological and computer work, commercial farming, wine farming, business in general, for participating in sports and recreation, arts and culture, administration and leadership. Other values include productivity, the will to work, a sense of duty, obedience and co-operation.

4. The role of the learner as member of a religious group
Education should equip the learner to become a committed Christian who is trustworthy, who has received training in Bible study, has respect for his or her religion and faith, can be a witness of Jesus Christ, attend prayer meetings, and can take part in community outreach programmes and service delivery. Other values include serving and practising one's religion, obedience and helpfulness to the community, serving and sacrificing in true love, living peacefully with friends, enemies and the community at large, ability to worship together as Christians, and to remain hopeful in a hopeless situation.

5. The role of the learner as member of different societal groups
Learners must be equipped to deal with diseases such as HIV/AIDS and in the use of condoms. They must be empowered in media studies, nature conservation, encouraged to participate in community affairs, and in the traditional and cultural aspects of the Griqua life. Other values include serving the community, trustworthiness, unselfishness and devotion, forgivingness, willingness to sacrifice, diligence and industry, community development, nature conservation, hard work, respect for others and authorities, and responsibility.

6. The role of the learner as user of leisure-time
Learners must be equipped to undertake excursions, maintain and respect the monuments of the forefathers, and to practise the traditional cultural dances. They should also receive sports training, attend youth conferences, read books and magazines, and know how to be creative. Other values include sportsmanship, willingness to help, learning the culture and customs of the indigenous people of South Africa, especially the Griqua people, development of entertainment centres, learning to hunt, learning the language and about ethnicity.

7. The role of the learner as a self-actualising person
Learners must be equipped to believe in themselves, manage themselves appropriately, discover and develop themselves, increase their potential, and possess the ability to resolve conflict. Other values include self-discovery and self-esteem, the ability to communicate, meet objectives, live and use the Griqua culture and tradition, be productive and successful in life, have the will to progress, and be independent.

The role of educational institutions
1. The educational institution is a convergence of educators and learners
The teaching of reading and writing should be through the medium of the mother tongue, especially in the elementary classes. Educators must be objective and focus on the vision of the institution to ensure good quality education. They must be well qualified and preferably be from the same cultural background as the learners, otherwise they must

fully understand the culture of the learners. The learners must respect the educators and the educators must be helpful to the learners.

2.   Education is provided through the medium of mother language
The Griqua language must be the medium of instruction. Other languages such as Afrikaans and English must also be taught, but learners should be allowed to choose the second language.

3.   Effective education is dependent on relevant curricula
The learning content should enable the learner to choose a career and must be relevant and suitable to meet the educational needs of the Griqua people. It must also meet national and international requirements. Economic development, management, business, science and technology should form part of the curriculum.

4.   Effective education requires suitable facilities
Facilities of a good quality should be available. Provision should be made for laboratories, needlework, computer studies and woodwork classes, and sports activities. Schools for learners with special needs are necessary.

5.   Effective management and administration of the educational institution
The Griqua community must take part in the management of the educational institution. Discipline must be strict but fair. The state should support educational institutions financially. All stakeholders must take ownership of the institutions by getting involved. The community and traditional leaders must determine the type of discipline to be meted out to the learners.

6.   The Griquas' position as a minority group
The Griqua community recognises the fact that it is a minority group in South Africa, but also sees itself as the majority group in the Griqualand West area. Some focus group members felt that they were not a minority group *per se* but that they had been relegated to this position by their classification as coloureds in the apartheid era.

Discussion of the findings
The South African Constitution (South Africa, 1996) entrenches all the basic human rights, including the right to associate freely. The rights of groups are, by implication, also protected. The protection of the rights of individuals as well as of groups is important in culturally diverse/multicultural societies because of the fact that individuals belonging to such groups may perceive the culture of the dominant group to be a threat to their own culture and very existence.

The Griqua community in South Africa can indeed be regarded as a minority group. They form a discernible group with a distinct and unique ethnic identity. They are relatively few in number and many of them have been assimilated into the so-called coloured group. Because of their eventful history as a group, they have today a non-dominant position in the broader South African community. On the other hand, they have also succeeded in organising themselves into associations for the protection and promotion of their cultural heritage. They have a relatively strong sense of group solidarity. Belonging predominantly to the Christian faith, they form part of the religious majority in South Africa.

Global attention to the rights of minorities has inspired the Griquas to insist on the recognition of their rights as a minority group. The constitutional dispensation in South Africa, however, has made it impossible for the government to provide in the special needs of minorities. South Africa is one of the countries where the government has found it expedient to govern centrally.

The Griquas are awake to/aware of/have been alerted to the fact that they should also insist on the recognition of their right to education provided in their own institutions. Global recognition of the right to education in the mother language as well as in institutions belonging to and managed by the minority groups has given impetus

to their efforts. Although the South African Schools Act (South Africa, 1996) makes provision for government funding of independent schools, such funding would be withheld if schools and communities were perceived to discriminate against others. A financially independent exclusively Griqua school system is, however, not a viable proposition in view of the economic situation of the Griqua community.

The Griqua parents share the same aspirations, ideals and fears for their children and their education. Despite the fact that the Griqua community has in the past been perceived as being vocal about their rights, the exchanges in the focus groups revealed that they were realistic about what would be possible to achieve in terms of education provision in South Africa. The groups mentioned the importance of the preservation and development of Griqua culture, also in the context of formal education in the schools, but they always sought a balance between their own aspirations and wishes as a community and those of the broader South African community.

Conclusion
This project focused on the question: How can the education system be made more responsive to the histories, heritages, life experiences, cultural value systems and day-to-day life situations of minority groups, in this case the Griqua people of South Africa, while still recognising those fundamental human rights contained in a Bill of Human Rights? In view of the discussion earlier, at least three scenarios can be considered:
- The Government could decide to allow members of the Griqua community not only to enjoy their own culture and language as a separate identifiable group, but also to have their own schools and other institutions, and to fund them with public funds. Given the Constitutional dispensation in South Africa, however, it is unlikely that the present government will follow this scenario.
- The Griqua community has to accept the inevitable, namely, to become part of a non-racial South African civil society. Given the current Constitutional dispensation, this would be a viable option, but would mean the *de facto* disappearance of minority groups.
- In view of the global recognition of minority rights, including the right to education in the mother language in own institutions, and also in view of the fact that the South African Constitution indirectly guarantees the protection of group rights, the Griquas, as well as other minority groups, can be allowed to freely practise and enjoy their own cultures and languages. They can also erect and maintain their own institutions on condition that learners and their parents' right to freedom of choice is recognised and respected (based on the right to non-discrimination and freedom of association) and that appropriate educational standards are maintained.

Given the current Constitutional dispensation in South Africa, the third scenario is the most viable. It not only conforms to the South African Constitution and the legislative framework but also provides the Griqua community with political and cultural space to practise and enjoy their ethnicity, culture, language, customs and religion. The affordability of such own schools will, however, remain an obstacle in the foreseeable future.

Note
1.   Copies of the interview schedule and the reports can be obtained from the authors.

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Hendrik Steyn is Dean of the Faculty of Education Sciences at the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus). His research falls within the field of comparative education and his special focus is on the structure and functioning of the education system. He has taught in comparative education on both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Johannes van der Walt is Professor in the Faculty of Education Sciences at the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus). He is currently involved in specialist research in philosophy of education and epistemology, as well as training projects, and has more than 30 years teaching experience.

Desmond Mochwanaesi is Chief Executive Officer of the Vuselela Further Education and Training College in Klerksdorp. After 23 years of experience as teacher and principal, he is the first CEO of the newly merged college. His research focus is the education rights of minority groups within comparative education.