

Teacher Unionism in South Africa

Presenter: Logan Govender, HSRC

Introduction

- SRPA Unit: research activities
- Some shorthand; may want to take some notes
- Inter-connectedness between teacher unionism and professionalism (distinction between “professionalism” and “professionalisation”); heard about SACE and ELRC?
- Similarity/differences with International context (Mexico, UK, Africa – state support of ‘professionalism’ vs unionism; cooptation as means of limiting union power)

Historical overview

- By the 1960s, separate teacher organisations representing Whites, Coloureds, Indians and Africans; The African Teachers Association of South Africa (ATASA) was formed in 1962 and comprised affiliates from the four provinces at the time, Transvaal, Natal, Orange Free State and the Cape; Teachers Association of South Africa (TASA), with its predominantly Indian membership, and the Union of Teachers’ Association of South Africa (UTASA), whose membership was drawn from Coloured schools, also emerged in the 1960s, soon after the creation of separate education departments for these groups. White teacher organisations had already organised themselves since the 1920s under the banner of the Federal Council of Teachers Associations; and became known as the Teachers Federal Council (TFC) in 1986.
- All of these racially-based organisations espoused a traditional ‘professional’ approach in dealing with the education authorities. Interests of the child- paramount. Focus on both professional and labour issues, but confined to use of strategies of consultation and persuasion rather than strikes and militant action. Because of ‘soft’ approach towards education authorities, over time, perception that professional associations not strong enough to negotiate for better salaries, COS, etc.
- Activities based largely on professional development of members in various subjects, organizing sports activities and music competitions. Strength: provision of services to members: financial (insurance policies, retirement plans; holiday packages); medical advice, etc.
- In the 1980s, several progressive teacher unions emerged; first of these was the National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA) in 1980, and was the first union to organize teachers nationally on a non-racial basis.

Several more, smaller teacher unions emerged during the educational and political upheavals in South Africa from 1985-1990, such as the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU); the Democratic Teachers Union (DETU) and the Mamelodi Teachers Union (MATU).

- Activities centered on unionist and political issues: focus on salaries and COS; identification with COSATU; political alignment important (ANC & SACP); in education, affiliated to the NECC, involved in People's Education projects and campaigns.
- Serious schism resulted between the new generation of progressive unions and the older, professional associations. Latter labeled conservative for prioritizing interests of the 'child' over those of 'politics'; former were labeled radical and regarded themselves as 'workers'; use of strike action.
- Teacher unity initiative of late 1980s; for various reasons, this goal was not achieved. The progressive teacher unions, led by NEUSA, merged into SADTU in October 1990. The racially-based conservative teacher organisations united in a federal alliance under the umbrella of NAPTOSA in August 1991. Two exceptions, TASA & UTASA. 2nd Founding of NAPTOSA in 1994.

Teacher unionism and the transition to democracy

- with the advent of democracy the nature and status of teacher unionism changed considerably in SA. (Teacher unionism not recognized by previous government)
- new legislation: teachers' rights to collective bargaining and strike action were guaranteed in the Labour Relations Act of 1995; the Education Labour Relations Act in 1993 gave birth to the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC). Marked the institutionalization of teacher trade unionism in SA.
- With the dawning of a new, democratic government in SA, SADTU experienced phenomenal growth as more teachers joined its ranks, especially the younger generation of black teachers. From 1993-95 about 80 000 teachers joined SADTU taking its membership to close to 100 000. By 1999, over 200 000 members.
- NAPTOSA also affected by new legislation as cultural tensions and the politics of non-racialism caused them to fragment and restructure. In particular, the withdrawal of its white Afrikaans-speaking teacher organisations in June 1996 to form the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie (SAOU).

- Between 1994 and 1998, NAPTOSA affiliates merged with others to form new unions, under new names, or disbanded so that their members could join other affiliates. E.G. the formation of the National Union of Educators (NUE) in 1997 was a merger involving the white Transvaal Teachers' Association (TTA), the Coloured Transvaal Association of Teachers (TAT), and the white South African Teachers' Association (SATA). This union brought together teachers from the provinces of Gauteng and the Eastern and Western Cape. Today, the NUE has extended its membership to include African and Indian teachers, with branches established in Alexandra, Lenasia, Mamelodi and Soweto.
- In terms of a labour ruling that all references to racial groups be removed, a number of NAPTOSA's affiliates were unable to register as trade unions. Subsequently, these organizations registered under new names, for example, the Natal African Teachers' Union (NATU) registered as the National Teachers Union (NATU) and the Transvaal United African Teachers' Association (TUATA) became the Professional Educators' Union (PEU), both in 1998.
- In summary, by late 1990s 3 national teacher organizations in SA (with NATU possibly as the fourth?); Recent union membership stats.: In 2001, of the 354 201 teachers in the system, approximately 97% (or 344 437) were members of unions.

Table 1: Union membership

	1999	2000	2001	2002
SADTU	218 878	214 247	211 480	210 235
NAPTOSA	84 841	91 375	90 157	95 988
SAOU	46 920	43 878	42 800	41 315

Source: ELRC Annual Report, 2002 & SADTU Congress Report, 2002

- Important development since 1994: recognition of both trade unionism and professional associations; common bargaining chamber, national registration body etc. – greater cooperation among different teachers' organizations. Notion of professional unionism something of a reality. SADTU – greater focus on professional services: insurance policies, funeral schemes etc.; NAPTOSA & SAOU prepared to embrace tenets of unionism (joined SADTU and COSATU for the first time in strike action over salary increases in 1999).

Current debates

- Corporal punishment
- School governance
- Curriculum changes (OBE)
- New policies re: teacher education and development
- Violence in schools
- Physical/sexual abuse in schools
- Impact of HIV/Aids
- Teacher supply and demand

Implications for graduate teachers

- Choosing (or not choosing) a union
- Different ideologies; difference in services and activities