

**Johannes L. van der Walt,
Nicolaas A. Broer and Charl C. Wolhuter**

Navigating pluralism: Implications for citizenship education in the South African context

Abstract: Many contemporary societies are characterised by historical and deeply entrenched forms of diversity, thereby posing challenges for the achievement of national unity and for social cohesion. Challenges such as these are also evident in South Africa, where historical divisions, inequalities and tensions influence relationships among different sections of the population. This paper examines how Citizenship Education could contribute towards addressing such divisions by reflecting on the relationship between unity and diversity. Drawing on a literature study and an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, it develops a philosophical-theoretical framework that approaches unity and diversity as intertwined onticities rather than as opposing or mutually excluding realities. Philosophical perspectives are invoked to contend that unity can be ensured while acknowledging the presence of diversity. It is contended that effective Citizenship Education should be based on an ethical approach that transcends group boundaries (diversity) and promotes (national) unity. The approach should incorporate an ethic of community, of moral responsibility, trust, safety, empathy, inclusivity, virtue and of care. Application of these ethics can promote respect, reciprocity, compassion, responsibility and a sense of belonging among learners and at the same time reinforce their commitment to the national common good. Analysis of South Africa's *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements* (2011) and accompanying *Life Skills* and *Life Orientation* textbooks reveals that they already provide opportunities for addressing unity, diversity, inclusivity, community and morality. They do not, however, provide the systematic ethical guidance required for sustaining a principled balance between unity and diversity. A strong ethical value-driven Citizenship Education programme aimed at acquiring this principled balance is required to instil in learners a shared sense of belonging as well as an affirmation of diversity.

Keywords: citizenship education, community, diversity, education ethics, South Africa

UDC: 37.014

Scientific article



<https://doi.org/10.63384/spB63z863a>

Johannes L. van der Walt, PhD, Professor, North-West University, Faculty of Education, Edu-HRight Research Unit, 11 Hoffman Street, 2531 Potchefstroom, South Africa; hannesv290@gmail.com ©

Nicolaas A. Broer, PhD, Professor, North-West University, Faculty of Education, Edu-HRight Research Unit, 11 Hoffman Street, 2531 Potchefstroom, South Africa; n.a.broer@live.com ©

Charl C. Wolhuter, PhD, Professor, North-West University, Faculty of Education, Edu-HRight Research Unit, 11 Hoffman Street, 2531 Potchefstroom, South Africa; charl.wolhuter@nwu.ac.za ©

Introduction and Problem Statement

All modern societies – and the nation-builders (governments and political authorities, such as ministers of education) within them – are increasingly called upon to address the challenge of achieving unity and harmony amid growing diversity, pluralism, or what some have termed *sectionality*. In recent years, this challenge has been aggravated by a range of global phenomena, including globalisation, cosmopolitanism, internationalisation, the emergence of a planetary consciousness, rapid advances in communication technology, scientific and technical innovation, and the rise of neoliberal economic systems (Reuter 2018). These forces, along with new developments in transport, industrial organisation, and the rise of knowledge-based societies, have further complicated the landscape of diversity (Iwele 2015, p. 135; Watts and Kincaid 2008, p. xi). Additional layers of difference are evident in terms of socioeconomic status, race, spatial divides (such as urban versus rural), and regional disparities (Oomen 2008, p. 22).

While humanity shares a common existence on a single planet, people's lived experiences are embedded in vastly different societal contexts. As Ang (2014, p. 10) aptly observes, the world is marked by »a complex of contradictory multiplicities«, where cultural, social, and political contexts often coexist, overlap, or even collide. Simeon (2008) captures the dimensions of this complexity as follows:

»The diversities that exist in contemporary societies are themselves diverse. They have varying historical origins. They may be rooted in language, ethnicity, religion, culture, or indigenous status, or in complex combinations of these. They may or may not be associated with systematic differences in wealth or political power.« (Ibid., p. 55)

According to Pauer (2015a, p. 192), these phenomena are all »companions of a general crisis of humankind«. We live in an era of cultural pluralism – an age marked by complexity, conflict, and constant social dynamics. The world we inhabit is inherently plural in that it gives rise to what may be called a *culture of pluralism*. Pluralism is not merely a theoretical notion but also a cultural and

a social reality. Every form of plurality also carries with it a degree of ambiguity that stems from hidden interpretations, conflicting interests, and competing narratives, as is evident in contemporary South Africa (Iwele 2015, pp. 131–135).

This is the conundrum that all multicultural societies, states, and nations must grapple with – one for which there seems to be no definitive solution. Kuiper (2025, p. 7), for example, noted a marked increase in diversity within Dutch schools in recent years, largely owing to immigration from non-Western countries (cf. Pauer 2015a, p. 187). Schools have become microcosms of increased societal diversity, and educators are becoming increasingly aware of the range of differences among learners. In addition to distinctions in culture, sexuality, gender, and giftedness, teachers are now more attuned to subtle expressions of identity, manifested in the ways learners dress, style their hair, and carry themselves.

Diversity in a multicultural society creates conditions that are deeply rooted in history and culture. These conditions cannot simply be ignored or altered. Nor can they be addressed by infringing upon fundamental human rights, such as the right to practise one's religion or speak one's home language. Diversity should not be perceived by the majority as a burden to be merely tolerated but should rather be regarded as an enrichment of the polity, thereby bringing added value to the process of nation-building. As long as minorities exist, they will continue to maintain their distinct identities and pursue their own interests (Majeed et al. 2008, pp. 5, 15).

Cultural and other forms of plurality are persistent sources of tension and conflict between ethnic, social, and cultural groups. These tensions are exacerbated by forces such as nationalism, racism, xenophobia, and various forms of fundamentalism (Pauer 2015a, pp. 187, 192), as well as by actions or policies implemented by state institutions (Fleiner 2008, p. 80). As Reuter (2018, p. 58) notes, we can observe two opposing forces at work in society: one seeking integration and homogenisation and the other asserting the right to maintain separation and difference.

The situation in South Africa in 2026 exemplifies the multifaceted nature of diversity. The country is home to a population marked by vast differences. It boasts 12 official languages, at least 10 distinct ethnic groups, and a wide range of cultural and religious traditions. Like many societies, its societal structure is moulded by the dynamics between dominant and marginalised groups. This diversity has a strong historical and social basis (Fataar 2017; Prins 2019). Elements such as culture, tradition, language, and religion are fundamental aspects of human identity (Majeed et al. 2008, p. 5).

The lingering social divides from South Africa's pre-1994 apartheid era have widened further, as Fleiner (2008, p. 80) foresaw, due to several controversial measures enacted by the government towards the end of 2024 and into 2025. These included the *Basic Education Laws Amendment Act* (Act 32 of 2024), the *Land Expropriation Act* (Act 13 of 2024), and the publication of the regulations of the *National Health Insurance Act* (Act 20 of 2023). These legislative actions provoked a significant backlash, especially from conservative Afrikaner organisations, and were further inflamed by the newly elected US president,

who issued an open invitation to white South Africans to relocate to the United States. In response, Van der Rheede, director of the FW de Klerk Foundation, concluded that South African society had become more divided than ever (Van der Rheede 2025). Van Niekerk (2025, p. 10) echoed this view, describing the period as »the most divisive in [South Africa's] history since 1994«.

Public opinion was sharply divided. Some South Africans supported the government's reforms, while others were outraged by Solidarity and AfriForum's high-profile visit to Washington, D.C., where they presented their case against the legislation. Critics accused these groups of narrowly promoting Afrikaner identity and interests, while others went so far as to accuse them of high treason. In contrast, figures such as Eloff (2025, p. 11) defended their actions, arguing that they had a legitimate right to voice their concerns internationally. Eloff further contended that the controversy masked an underlying problem: the African National Congress-led government's alleged agenda to marginalise or absorb nonblack minorities by stripping them of their languages, cultures, and property. He described this as a process aimed at creating a homogeneous African National Congress-dominated nation. According to Majeed et al. (2008, p. 5), this situation exemplifies the way subjective group identities – entrenched in a strong sense of »us« versus »them« – play a central role in social conflict.

Murray (2020, p. 87) describes situations such as the current one in South Africa as part of the »impossible process of perpetual stratifications and deductions« that both citizens and authorities in many countries around the world must constantly manage. Every societal issue, including education, is influenced by an »intersectional (diversity) overlay«, which should be taken into account when striving to strike a balance between national unity and the recognition and preservation of diverse identities and differences. Many governments around the world are confronted with this challenge. The core problem, as seen in the South African context, lies in the apparent inability of individuals across various societal groups to effectively manage and engage with this plurality. This incapacity stems largely from highly personal and subjective understandings of morality, justice, economic systems, and wider social relations. As Pauer (2015b, p. 300) notes, the crux of this difficulty is that people lack a universally accepted set of values that can serve as a common moral foundation. Instead, they oscillate between a desire for collective unity and an insistence on pluralism – two forces that often seem incompatible yet are equally necessary in a democratic society.

The central theoretical problem addressed in this paper is the following: What form of citizenship education should be implemented in schools to help the populace to manage and overcome the prevailing social and political dissensions and divides? To answer this question, we first turn to a more foundational one: How can the tension between national unity and the multiplicity of social, cultural, and other forms of diversity within a nation be resolved in principle? In response, we propose the following thesis: National unity and the diverse elements that make up a society – whether social, cultural, linguistic, or religious – should not be regarded as opposing or mutually exclusive forces but rather as complementary components of a just and harmonious society. Such a

society must be grounded in a shared set of ethical¹ values that transcend group boundaries and encourage collective belonging.

Method of Investigation and Structure of the Paper

Based on a literature study and grounded in an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, we developed a philosophical-theoretical framework for understanding unity and diversity as ontic givens, what we term *onticities*. We argue that unity and diversity should not be viewed as opposing forces but instead as interrelated dimensions of reality. Our framework is constructed through the critical application of philosophical instruments such as Hegelian dialectics, the exploration of perceived paradoxes and antinomies between unity and diversity, and insights drawn from complexity theory and multicultural interaction. In addition, we engage in principled reflection on themes such as inclusion, integration, empowerment, ethics, and morality. By examining and proposing a variety of ethical systems, we establish an ethical foundation for the Citizenship Education programme that we propose. We conclude with practical suggestions for its restructuring as a school subject² in accordance with this theoretical framework.

Unity and Diversity as Intertwined Onticities

We followed Tugado's (2015, p. 101) advice, namely to find the answer to the relationship between unity and diversity in metaphysical (philosophical) principles. Unity and diversity are onticities, cosmological realities or empirical entities (Oomen 2008, p. 23; Pauer 2015a, p. 186), not simply social facts (Oomen 2008, p. 21) or characteristics of nature, mental fabrications, or perceptions (Kuiper 2025, pp. 13, 14). Religious people would refer to them as having been created as part of reality. Diversity in a nation is defined as qualitative collective characteristics associated with language, religion, ethnicity, nationality, culture, gender, class, socioeconomic status, and occupation. The phrases »unity and diversity«, »diversity in unity«, and »unity or diversity« signify that there is a close relationship between these two onticities.

1 Ethicists tend to differentiate between ethics and morality. For them, ethics is a theoretical subject, usually a branch of philosophy, occasionally referred to as moral philosophy (cf. Grayling 2019, pp. xvi–xvii). In this article, we follow the tendency of using the words *ethics/ethical* and *morals/moral* interchangeably (cf. Nkansah-Obrempong 2013, p. 4). We use the term *ethic* to refer to a system of accepted beliefs that control behaviour.

2 Citizenship Education, written with capital letters, refers to a subject taught in schools.

A dynamic relationship exists between unity and diversity in creation.³ If this relationship is not understood well, Strauss (2009, p. 640) cautions, one can be deceived into overvaluing one part of reality (such as one's own culture, ethnicity, race, or gender). This leads to depreciating something else within reality (such as national unity). There is, in principle, no ontic contradiction between unity and diversity. Diversity can give rise to unity; unity need not dissolve diversity into homogeneity. The relationship between unity and diversity is ecosystemic. Diversity is never structureless or chaotic; it is always orderly in that it functions according to the laws of nature. The same applies to diversity among human beings; there are discernible patterns and constants in the diversity of humanity. Diversity tends to manifest itself as variation and difference, occasionally as coherence, connection, and relationship, never as uniformity. Variation and difference both have a place in this ecosystem; both possess an impetus towards coherent sense-making. This explains why we can speak of diversity in coherence or unity. Everything different from every other thing always remains connected to a larger relationship or whole. Without such coherence, communication, cooperation, music-making, jurisprudence, and family relationships would not exist (Kuiper 2025, p. 14).

Given the above, we do not agree with approaches that attempt to resolve the tension between unity and diversity in terms of dualisms, such as unity of diversities, diversity in unity, and unity-in-diversity, or by employing a Hegelian dialectic to connect these two onticities (cf. Iwele 2015, pp. 133–135; Jun 2015, p. 72; Pauer 2015a, pp. 186, 191; Reuter 2018, pp. 63, 64). We agree with Tugado (2015, p. 101) that they should be seen as complementary, as a form of coexistence that is life-giving rather than life-threatening and creative rather than destructive, and we agree with Jun (2015, p. 72), who regards them as relative to each other. Jun (*ibid.*, p. 76) goes so far as to claim that there cannot be unity unless there is diversity. As onticities, they belong together and are ontically intertwined. In a sense, each individual is imperfect in the context of the variety that unity can display (McLean 2015, p. 31).

Because of the imperfections of this world, complete unity is often not obtainable. As Reuter (2018, p. 63) remarked, diversity is an ideal no less worthy of our support than the unity we strive for. One of these ideals should never be sacrificed. They are, as Pauer (2015a, pp. 188, 191–192) concludes, complementary entities; complementarity leads to harmony, reciprocity, recognition, acceptance and appreciation of the other and of difference, the creation of human identity and mutuality, neighbourliness, unity, and a spirit of sharing and participating in this unity.

Given this context, diversity is not a problem but rather an asset to be cultivated in the process of nation-building (Watts and Kincaid 2008, pp. xi, xiv),

3 Despite all the efforts made by philosophers to explain this dynamic (i.e. constantly changing, ever moving, and developing) relationship – much of which is reflected in the discussion hereafter – this relationship remains difficult to grasp and describe. It is for this reason, among others, that philosophers have resorted to complexity theory (e.g. Anderson 1999, pp. 216–218; Barret 2009, p. 111; Dekker et al. 2011, pp. 1–4; Grosfougel 2011, pp. 18, 20; Raworth 2022, pp. 130–138, 157) and chaos theory (e.g. Barret 2009, p. 161).

not a liability to be »managed« (Oomen 2008, p. 25). A culture's vitality is firmly ingrained in its uniqueness; cultural diversity constitutes the rich and colourful fabric of human existence. Diversity requires interaction with other cultures (Jun 2015, pp. 72, 73). It can become problematic, however, when groups or communities within the polity are mistreated, overlooked, or discriminated against. Instead of emphasising the differences between racial and ethnic groups, as is currently being done in South Africa and other parts of the world, such as Israel/Palestine (2026), citizens should be reminded that nation-building is especially important when the social milieu is diverse and all constituent groups seek identity and a voice (Watts and Kincaid 2008, p. xiv). The current tensions and conflicts in many parts of the world can be attributed, according to Kuiper's (2025, p. 15) cautionary note, to the fact that without proper attention to the principle of coherence (unity) in diversity, the situation may deteriorate.

The relationship between unity and diversity also has an aesthetic dimension (Audi 2005, p. 939) – a dimension that has the form of a continuum: from total chaos on the one end to complete harmony on the other. If an object such as a national state displays insufficient unity with no recognisable internal patterns of any sort (such as culture, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, language, gender, or sexual orientation), it appears chaotic and lacks internal harmony; it resembles a loose collection of entities than a single object, specifically as a recognisable national state. On the other hand, if it has insufficient diversity, with few internal differentiations (for instance, consisting of only one race, one culture, one language, one gender, one sexual orientation, one income level, a single economic activity, and so on), it is not only unrealistic but also monotonous. The ideal is to have a state composed of complex parts that differ from one another yet fit together to form a single interdependent whole, to the extent that the character or meaning of the whole changes with any alteration in its parts. Unity without diversity is meaningless because unity based on sameness lacks communication and relational potential. The same applies to diversity without unity.

An Ethical Foundation on Which to Base Citizenship Education

Based on the organic relationship between unity and diversity discussed above, an ethos of equality and unity should emerge in a sphere of interaction among diverse groups within a polity. We thus join Tugado (2015, p. 101) in seeking an ethical foundation of respect and responsibility on which to base the type of citizenship education proposed in the next section of this paper. At the same time, we disagree with the pessimistic conclusion of Awad et al. (2020, p. 2332) that moral⁴ universals are difficult to identify. Research has shown that core ethical principles, although variously formulated, are widely, if not universally, shared. The presence of shared moral precepts (e.g. versions of the Golden Rule) among different religions offers *prima facie* evidence for moral common ground

4 See the explanatory footnote regarding ethics and morality above.

as a reality (Donovan 1986, pp. 367, 368). The Golden Rule is a common-sense principle of basic or natural ethics, because it is explicitly formulated, with minor variants, in most of the great religions, including secularism (Vigil 2008, p. 199; cf. Pinker 2021, p. 68).

We said, in the statement of the problem above, that if the dialogue about individual and group differences in a nation or a society were grounded in feelings of »we« as opposed to »them« as the »other«, the result would most likely be a state of tension and conflict and a lack of national or social unity. On the other hand, if every group, as a distinctive »we«, were to concentrate on behaviour based on a set of shared values that did not exclude but instead embraced the values of other groups, the preconditions for commonalities within a national unity (nation) would be provided (Majeed et al. 2008, p. 5). While we agree with Simeon (2008, p. 55) that there can be no single or universal set of strategies for the successful management of conflicts of diversity, we are convinced that a set of common values is readily available as a principled foundation for citizenship education.

A dissertation could be written about all the ethical orientations (i.e. different views or approaches regarding ethics or morality) that should ideally be reflected in citizenship education as a school subject. However, being good to others requires more than theories about what is right and wrong. Learners must be equipped to become morally wise; according to Baggini (2020, p. 28), they ought to be guided to possess more know-how than know-what. The following insights are useful in promoting learners' understanding of the ontic connection between diversity and unity.

The very first bit of moral wisdom that learners should acquire is mastery of an *ethic of community*. This ethic centres on the idea that people are members of larger entities, such as close and extended families, teams, armies, companies, tribes, and nations, and that such larger entities are more than the sum of the people who compose them. Communities are real; they matter, they must be protected, and their members are expected to play their assigned roles in them. They are called upon to construct moral communities out of shared norms to build institutions for which they are prepared to suffer (Haidt 2012, pp. 117, 240). An ethic of community inspires in- and inter-group loyalty, authority and respect, fairness, reciprocity (reciprocal altruism), and care (Pinker 2012, p. 155). It situates the best interests of the local community as the fundamental principle in decision-making (Bajinath 2017, p. 202). All the other ethical and moral perspectives discussed hereafter should support an ethic of community.

An *ethic of moral responsibility* towards others is important for developing an ethic of community. Others should be treated with respect and dignity as members of the structures built for a common life (Sacks 2011, p. 290). Respect, honesty, and discipline are primary values that should be stressed because they are fundamental tenets that guide behaviour.

An *ethic of trust, safety, empathy, and inclusivity* plays another important role within an ethic of community. It creates in the minds of community members a concern for their own and other groups or communities as well as a loyalty that pre-empts the temptation for a member to become a free rider or a loose cannon.

This ethic generates high-trust societies where enforcement costs are low and adaptability is swift. It helps people develop the wisdom to see that the welfare of others matters as much as their own and that they are connected to others in the community, such as the nation of which they are citizens (Sacks 2011, pp. 155–156). The space in which they, as citizens, would prefer to live, play, and work should be a safe, caring, and humanising one. Each person should find a place in society without feeling vulnerable or exposed (in the sense of, as a member of a minority group, not fitting in); each should feel recognised and included, worthy of trust, at home in a protective environment (Eboka 2022, p. 9).

Trust is a form of social capital built on an implicit social contract (Sacks 2021, pp. 296, 325). Like money, it can be invested, risked, saved, or wasted – and when nurtured, it can yield further trust (Ridley 1996, p. 250). In high-trust societies, the collective »we« matters more than the individual »I«. Trust begins to grow when a person acts with goodwill and follows the principle of reciprocity (Sacks 2021, pp. 19, 268). Empathy is the foundation of trust. By imagining ourselves in someone else's position, we begin to see them as fully human, formed by their own dreams, fears, and thoughts, which may differ from ours but are equally real. This ability to empathise can influence our perspectives and lead to new understandings (Pinker 2012, p. 211). Empathy is not just a feeling but also a form of intelligence. It allows us to move outside the narrow boundaries of our upbringing and social position to explore different possibilities and reflect critically on our own values and those of others.

An ethic of community depends on two further ethics that focus on a person's inward character traits (Frame 2008, p. 14), namely an *ethic of virtue* and an *ethic of care*. Virtue ethics pertains to a person's inner character. It refers to a heart intent on pursuing widely acceptable virtues and doing good works, including caring for others (Frame 2008, p. 326). It says that if you become, or are, good, you will do good and that being good is how you are. A person should strive to become their best moral self and serve others as part of being good. Serving others is a higher calling than simply serving oneself (Baggini 2020, pp. 48, 78, 93, 101). The classic Greek philosophers used the word *arête* (virtue) to indicate that love, as a fundamental ethical principle, finds expression in caring for others, for experiencing joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Schnelle 2020, pp. 324, 326).

An *ethic of care* entails love and support for the weak (Baggini 2020, p. 80). Caring means stepping out of one's frame of reference into another's. One who cares considers the viewpoints of others, their needs, and their expectations. Their attention is focused on the other, not themselves. Their reasons for acting are focused on the other's wants and desires and on the objective elements of their problematic situation (Noddings 2003, p. 24). The emphasis in an ethic of care is on the relationship between the *one caring* and the *cared for* and on the reciprocity for maintaining the relationship or connection. This ethic is compassion-orientated, concerned with, and characterised by virtues such as compassion, understanding, trust (Bajjnath 2017, p. 201), and also connection (Stornaiuolo and Nicholls 2019, pp. 5, 20).

The subject Citizenship Education to be offered in schools, wherever divi-

sive circumstances prevail, should be based on a combination of all the ethics discussed above. Citizenship Education teachers should inspire their learners to prepare themselves for membership in a diverse society and for peace, thereby pre-empting the urge to engage in a Hobbesian *bellum omnium contra omnes*. It is not for nothing that Haidt (2012) states that »happiness comes from between. It comes from getting the right relationships between yourself and others, yourself and your work and something larger than yourself« (ibid., p. 283). According to Sacks (2021, pp. 2, 12, 17), Citizenship Education should teach learners that if one focuses on the »I« and loses sight of the »we«, if one acts on self-interest without a commitment to the common good, focuses on the self and neglects caring for others, one will lose much else, such as lasting happiness and making life better for others. Morality widens one's perspective outside of the self and its desires. It places one in the midst of a collective social order. A peaceful society is based on shared morality; where there is no shared morality, there is no society. It is wise for the members of a highly diverse nation to negotiate a social contract that puts every citizen in a positive-sum game: a situation in which no one harms any other citizen, and all citizens can support and assist others (Pinker 2019, p. 28).

Citizenship Education Aimed at Bringing About a Sense of Belongingness to All

Translating the moral perspective outlined in the previous section into pedagogical practice presents a major challenge (Poirier 2008, p. 37). Nevertheless, this task must be undertaken because education, in the sense of schooling, constitutes a functional subsystem in society that plays a major role in structuring society (Biesta 2025, p. 45). By their very nature, human beings are diverse; however, everyone is also called to become a mature person and a citizen of their polity (ibid., p. 46). Citizenship Education involves teaching morally acceptable civic behaviour. This subject, like all forms of education, aims to instil ethical and moral values in learners, thereby equipping them with the skills and dispositions necessary to enact the values they embrace, not only as individuals but also as members of the wider community (Nguyen 2018, p. 12).

Suggesting that a form of Citizenship Education based on norms and values that are widely shared and supported should be instituted does not imply that this subject should undermine uniqueness and diversity. Diversity remains important, as previously discussed; it enriches politics, culture, legislation, and the judiciary (Majeed et al. 2008, p. 7). A state should not only pursue individual freedom for all its citizens but also strive for harmony among its diverse populations. It is essential for the state, especially its national Department of Education, to endorse the concept of the national state while consciously nurturing and celebrating diversity (Oomen 2008, p. 21). Through the thoughtful implementation of Citizenship Education as a school subject, a sense of »belongingness« should be instilled in learners to create in them a feeling of »we« in the context of »us all« as citizens of a united nation. Citizenship Education should convey to all learners, regardless of whether they belong to minority

groups or the majority, that, as citizens of the polity, they share a common set of values. Exposure to this subject should equip learners with an understanding of how to relate to diverse others and integrate their richness into their own lives (Donders 2015, p. 153).

Citizenship Education should encompass both short-term and long-term goals. Schools face the challenge of mitigating potential tensions and conflicts arising from the increasingly diverse and multicultural makeup of their surrounding communities. Therefore, Citizenship Education should first focus inward by addressing potential tensions and conflicts among learners, and then outward to engage the school community, including teachers, parents, supporters, and sponsors. This dual purpose for Citizenship Education is necessary because, as Kuiper (2025, pp. 8, 11, 16–17) notes, the fragmentation and polarisation of the community can introduce tension into the classroom. Citizenship Education should uphold respect for differences, personal and group identities, and social participation. It is the responsibility of the school to honour diversity, strive for inclusivity as a pedagogical ideal, and promote equal opportunities in life for all learners. Citizenship Education must continuously emphasise plurality; learners should be made aware of the variety and differences in their multicultural environment, encompassing various cultures, ways of thinking, aspirations, ideologies, religions, and more. They should also learn to respect these differences, celebrate diversity, and understand how and why their peers are educated in their unique ways, as well as the values and norms that guide their fellow learners in navigating the world. Apart from encouraging respect for others as individuals, learners need to develop communication and coexistence skills in a pluralistic society. This endeavour is an exercise in increasing awareness of differences, while also achieving coherence and unity within diversity.

Learners should learn and understand what it means to coexist with others (who are different from them) and respect the differences that others display, including their convictions, public preferences, and practices, as well as their sexual orientations. In brief, they should learn what it takes to live in a pluriform society, master democratic values, and live accordingly. As stated in the previous section, such behaviour presupposes the mastery of a caring and loving ethic. It recognises diversity and plurality as realities that people must live with in modern societies and contributes to coherence and national unity (*ibid.*, pp. 21, 41).

According to this view of what Citizenship Education should achieve in schools with learners from a variety of groups, teaching should extend beyond the transmission of universal values such as the rule of law, democracy, and human rights, as these values are too general to be relevant to interpersonal and intergroup relations. Although these values are important and should be internalised by learners, Citizenship Education, as a school subject, should also focus on the ethical principles identified above. We argue that the sharing of values such as loving one's neighbour, reciprocity, forgiveness, tolerance, hospitality, respect for diversity, building trust, participating effectively in public life, promoting group and individual well-being, achieving internal self-determination, protecting minorities and their interests, negotiating and

compromising, including and integrating people, empowering individuals, and showing loyalty will bring and hold the members of various individual groups together, and will help them develop a new sense of »we, as us all« belonging together in a single national unity. This will, as Oomen (2008, pp. 22, 25) contends, provide all kinds of minorities with a stake in nation-building, thereby circumventing the tensions and conflicts currently experienced in South Africa. This is, as Biesta (2025, p. 54) remarks, no »extra« task for Citizenship Education; it is what education is supposed to achieve.

To determine whether the current *Life Orientation* and *Life Skills* programme in South Africa addresses this task, we examined the *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS)* (DBE 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d) and widely used accompanying school textbooks for their focus on the issues identified by the terms examined in this article: unity, diversity, ethics, morality, community, and caring. The analysis of the *CAPS* revealed that the curriculum provides sufficient scope to teach about unity, diversity, and inclusivity in South Africa (cf. DBE 2011a, General Aims 4a and b, para. 8, para. 9; DBE 2011b, para. 8; DBE 2011d, para. 8). The topics of unity and diversity are also covered in the commonly used *Life Skills* and *Life Orientation* textbooks authored by Ebersöhn and Eloff (2008, p. 28) and Nel (2019, pp. 125, 128) but not in the one by Jordaan and Naudé (2021). The terms *ethics* and *ethic* (for instance, an ethic of community) do not appear in the indices of these textbooks. The same applies to the terms *moral* and *morality*. Nel (2019, pp. 88–89) addresses moral development, while Jordaan and Naudé (2021, p. 96) discuss moral lessons. Ebersöhn and Eloff (2008) focus on community and caring (ibid., p. 57), while Jordaan and Naudé (2021, pp. 123–126) discuss caring.

The analysis revealed that, first, although the selected terms do not all appear in the indices and texts of the textbooks, the books provide sufficient scope and teaching-learning material on unity, diversity, community, and morality for teachers to instruct learners on these subjects and issues. Second, it showed that, in its current form, the *CAPS* does not provide learners with concerted, systematic, and principled guidance on the relationship between (national) unity and diversity, as well as the ethical and moral issues involved. This is a shortcoming that should be addressed, given the sociopolitical situation prevailing in South Africa.

Concluding Remarks

Building national unity in a diverse society is an ongoing process. Rather than seeking final or absolute solutions, the focus should be on practical approaches that support the continuous, peaceful resolution of conflicts, especially those affecting minority groups. Confrontational strategies, such as those historically used in South Africa, are unlikely to promote lasting coexistence. One effective way to strengthen unity is through a well-designed Citizenship Education subject or programme. This programme should be based on shared values and aimed at consistently instilling those values in learners from both the majority

and minority communities. This education must be value-driven, and should create classroom environments that function as communities of shared respect and responsibility. Learners would be taught to recognise their duties towards others, show empathy, offer support, respect differences, and help others to thrive as individuals. By cultivating these principles, Citizenship Education can play an important role in promoting a more peaceful and united South African society.

References

- Anderson, P. (1999). Complexity theory and organisation science. *Organisation Science*, 10, issue 3, pp. 216–232.
- Ang, I. (2014). Beyond unity in diversity: Cosmopolitanizing identities in a globalized world. *Diogenes*, 60, issue 1, pp. 10–20.
- Audi, R. (ed.) (2005). *The Cambridge dictionary of philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Awad, E., Dsouza, S., Rahwan, I. and Bonnefon, J. F. (2020). Universals and variations in moral decisions made in 42 countries by 70,000 participants. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 117, issue 5, pp. 2332–2337.
- Baggini, J. (2020). *The Godless gospel*. London: Granta Books.
- Bajinath, N. (2017). Ethical leadership in Higher Education in the era of complexity. In: D. Singh and C. Stükelberger (eds.). *Ethics in Higher Education*. Geneva: Globethics, pp. 187–206.
- Barret, S. R. (2009). *Anthropology*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.
- Basic Education Laws Amendment Act 32 of 2024*. (2024). Retrieved from: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202409/51258basiceducationlawsamendmentact32of2024.pdf (accessed on 22 October 2026).
- Biesta, G. (2025). De mythen van gelijke kansen. In: R. van Putten and T. van der Zee (eds.). *Onderwijs voorbij de meritocratie*. Nijmegen: Radboud University Press, pp. 45–59.
- DBE: Department of Basic Education. (2011a). *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements: Foundation Phase*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.
- DBE: Department of Basic Education. (2011b). *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements: Further Education and Training Phase*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.
- DBE: Department of Basic Education. (2011c). *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements: Intermediate Phase*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.
- DBE: Department of Basic Education. (2011d). *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements: Senior Phase*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.
- Dekker, S., Cilliers, P. and Hofmeyr, J. H. (2011). The complexity failure: Implications of complexity theory. *Safety Science*, 49, issue 6, pp. 939–945.
- Donders, J. G. (2015). Unity and diversity: The challenge of cross-cultural ministry. In: G. F. McLean, G. Iwele and A. F. Tugado (eds.). *Diversity and unity. Cultural heritage and contemporary change* (Series VII. Seminar on Culture and Values. Vol. 34).

Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, pp. 151–165.

Donovan, P. (1986). Do different religions share moral common ground? *Religious Studies*, 22, issue 3/4, pp. 367–375.

Ebersöhn, L. and Eloff, I. (2008). *Life skills assets*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Eboka, T. (2022). Decolonising our pedagogical approach and improving outcomes for all students. *Academia Letters*, article 5304.

Eloff, T. (2025, 11. March). Die water wórd warmer. *Die Burger*, p. 11.

Fataar, A. (2017). *Decolonising education in South Africa: An interview with Aslam Fataar*. Retrieved from: <https://www.litnet.co.za/decolonising-education-south-africa-interview-aslam-fataar/> (accessed on 13 August 2019).

Fleiner, L. R. B. (2008). Can deep differences be accommodated? Work Sessions 1 and 13. In: R. L. Watts and R. Chattopadhyay (eds.). *Building on and accommodating diversities*. New Delhi: Viva Books, pp. 77–88.

Frame, J. M. (2008). *The doctrine of the Christian life*. Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing.

Grayling, A. C. (2019). *The history of philosophy*. London: Random House.

Grosfoguel, R. (2011). Decolonising post-colonial studies and paradigms of political-economy. Transmodernity, decolonial thinking, and global coloniality. *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1, issue 1.

Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind*. London: Penguin.

Iwele, G. (2015). The culture of pluralism: The dialectic of unity and diversity in contemporary Christianity. In: G. F. McLean, G. Iwele and A. F. Tugado (eds.). *Diversity and unity. Cultural heritage and contemporary change* (Series VII. Seminar on Culture and Values. Vol. 34). Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, pp. 131–149.

Jordaan, C. and Naudé, M. (2021). *Teaching life skills in the Intermediate Phase*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Jun, H. (2015). Diversity. In: G. F. McLean, G. Iwele and A. F. Tugado (eds.). *Diversity and unity. Cultural heritage and contemporary change* (Series VII. Seminar on Culture and Values. Vol. 34). Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, pp. 71–77.

Kuiper, R. (2025). *Kwetsbaar Klasse(n)werk. Over diversiteit, inclusiviteit en kansen-gelijkheid in het bijzonder onderwijs*. Utrecht: Expertcentrum Onderwijs en Identiteit.

Land Expropriation Act 13 of 2024. (2024). Retrieved from: https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/Acts/2024/Act_13_of_2024_Expropriation_Act_2024.pdf (accessed on 22 October 2026).

Majeed, A., Elaigwu, J. I., Fleiner, T. and Singh, M. P. (2008). Building on and accommodating diversities. In: R. L. Watts and R. Chattopadhyay (eds.). *Building on and accommodating diversities*. New Delhi: Viva Books, pp. 3–20.

McLean, G. F. (2015). Unity. In: G. F. McLean, G. Iwele and A. F. Tugado (eds.). *Diversity and unity. Cultural heritage and contemporary change* (Series VII. Seminar on Culture and Values. Vol. 34). Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, pp. 11–40.

Murray, D. (2020). *The madness of crowds*. London: Bloomsbury.

National Health Insurance Act 20 of 2023. (2023). Retrieved from: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202405/50664nathealthinsuranceact202023.pdf (accessed on 22 October 2026).

Nel, M. (2019). *Life Orientation for South African teachers*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Nguyen, Q. T. N. (2018). Values education at classroom level in Vietnam: The insider view. In: M. Carmo (ed.). *Education applications and developments* (III). Lisbon: InSciencePress, pp. 12–23.

Nkansah-Obrempong, J. (2013). *Foundations for theological ethics*. Carlisle: Langham.

Noddings, N. (2003). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Oomen, T. K. (2008). Nation building and diversity. In: R. L. Watts and R. Chattopadhyay (eds.). *Building on and accommodating diversities*. New Delhi: Viva Books, pp. 21–36.

Pauer, J. (2015a). Diversity in unity, or contemporary mutual introduction of cultures: Some remarks from the point of view of complementarity. In: G. F. McLean, G. Iwele and A. F. Tugado (eds.). *Diversity and unity. Cultural heritage and contemporary change* (Series VII. Seminar on Culture and Values. Vol. 34). Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, pp. 185–194.

Pauer, J. (2015b). Strife and harmony. Remarks on the democratic culture of the present times. In: G. F. McLean, G. Iwele and A. F. Tugado (eds.). *Diversity and unity. Cultural heritage and contemporary change* (Series VII. Seminar on Culture and Values. Vol. 34). Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, pp. 209–307.

Pinker, S. (2012). *The better angels of our nature*. London: Penguin.

Pinker, S. (2019). *Enlightenment now*. London: Penguin.

Pinker, S. (2021). *Rationality*. London: Allen Lane.

Poirier, J. (2008). Autonomy and diversity. In: R. L. Watts and R. Chattopadhyay (eds.). *Building on and accommodating diversities*. New Delhi: Viva Books, pp. 37–53.

Prins, J. (2019, 2. February). Die oorlog is nog nie verby nie. *Beeld*, p. 20.

Raworth, K. (2022). *Doughnut economics*. London: Penguin Books.

Reuter, T. (2018). The principle of ‘unity in diversity’ as a measured response to resurgent nationalism. *Cadmus*, 3, issue 5, pp. 57–65.

Ridley, M. (1996). *The origins of virtue*. London: Viking.

Sacks, J. (2011). *The great partnership*. London: Hodder.

Sacks, J. (2021). *Morality*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Schnelle, U. (2020). *Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MN: Baker Academic.

Simeon, R. (2008). Managing conflicts in diversity. In: R.L. Watts and R. Chattopadhyay (eds.). *Building on and accommodating diversities*. New Delhi: Viva Books, pp. 54–69.

Stornaiuolo, A. and Nicholls, T. P. (2019). Cosmopolitanism and education. In: K. Hytten (ed.). *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–20.

Strauss, D. F. M. (2009). *Philosophy: Discipline of the disciplines*. Grand Rapids, MN: Paideia Press.

Tugado, A. F. (2015). Non-indifference within difference: Emmanuel Levinas on the sociality of the face-to-face relation. In: G. F. McLean, G. Iwele and A. F. Tugado (eds.). *Diversity and unity. Cultural heritage and contemporary change* (Series VII. Seminar on Culture and Values. Vol. 34). Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, pp. 101–111.

Van der Rheede, C. (2025, 9. March). *RSG Nuuskommentaar*.

Van Niekerk, A. (2025, 11. March). AfriForum praat nie namens my. *Die Burger*, p. 10.

Vigil, J. M. (2008). *Theology of religious pluralism*. Vienna: Lit Verlag.

Watts, R. L. and Kincaid, J. (2008). Introduction. In: R. L. Watts and R. Chattopadhyay (eds.). *Building on and accommodating diversities*. New Delhi: Viva Books, pp. xi–xvii.

Johannes L. VAN DER WALT (Univerza North-West, Pedagoška fakulteta, Južna Afrika)

Nicolaas A. BROER (Univerza North-West, Pedagoška fakulteta, Južna Afrika)

Charl C. WOLHUTER (Univerza North-West, Pedagoška fakulteta, Južna Afrika)

KRMARJENJE SKOZI PLURALIZEM: IMPLIKACIJE ZA DRŽAVLJANSKO VZGOJO V JUŽNOAFRIŠKEM KONTEKSTU

Povzetek: Za številne sodobne družbe so značilne zgodovinsko pogojene in globoko zakoreninjene oblike raznolikosti, ki otežujejo doseganje nacionalne enotnosti in družbene kohezije. Tovrstni izzivi so očitni tudi v Južni Afriki, kjer zgodovinske delitve, neenakosti in napetosti vplivajo na odnose med različnimi skupinami prebivalstva. Prispevek premišljuje razmerje med enotnostjo in raznolikostjo ter proučuje, kako bi lahko državljanska vzgoja prispevala k preseganju takšnih delitev. Na podlagi pregleda literature in interpretativno-konstruktivistične paradigme razvija filozofsko-teoretski okvir, ki enotnost in raznolikost obravnava kot medsebojno prepleteni danosti, ne pa kot nasprotujoči si ali medsebojno izključujoči se stvarnosti. S filozofskih vidikov zagovarja stališče, da je mogoče graditi enotnost in hkrati priznavati raznolikost. Učinkovita državljanska vzgoja bi morala temeljiti na etičnem pristopu, ki presega pregrade med skupinami (raznolikost) in spodbuja (nacionalno) enotnost. Tak pristop bi moral vključevati etiko skupnosti, moralne odgovornosti, zaupanja, varnosti, empatije, vključevanja, kreposti in skrbi. Udejanjanje teh etičnih načel naj pri učencih spodbuja spoštovanje, vzajemnost, sočutje, odgovornost in občutek pripadnosti ter hkrati krepi njihovo zavezanost skupnemu dobremu na nacionalni ravni. Analiza južnoafriških kurikularnih in ocenjevalnih smernic (*Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements* 2011) ter pripadajočih učbenikov *Life Skills* in *Life Orientation* kaže, da ti že omogočajo obravnavo enotnosti, raznolikosti, vključevanja, skupnosti in moralnosti. Vendar ne zagotavljajo sistematičnih etičnih usmeritev, potrebnih za ohranjanje načelnega ravnovesja med enotnostjo in raznolikostjo. Za doseganje takšnega ravnovesja je potreben program državljanske vzgoje, ki temelji na etičnih vrednotah ter pri učencih razvija skupni občutek pripadnosti in hkrati priznava raznolikost.

Ključne besede: državljanska vzgoja, skupnost, raznolikost, etika v izobraževanju, Južna Afrika

Elektronski naslov: hannesv290@gmail.com