

# Kader Asmal

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"Home schoolers should not attempt to impose their loony, paranoid and perverse ideas on the nation"

On 4th October 2001, the day before Leendert van Oostrum was to face Dr Linda Chisholm, mother of the new curriculum on the Tim Modise show on SAfm, she and the then minister of education, Kader Asmal, issued the media statement that follows.

It is the only known example where Mr Asmal issued a media release together with anyone else from his ministry or department.

In the early hours of the 5th October, the Pestalozzi Trust responded with a reply that appears below the Ministerial statement. CHRISTIAN HOME SCHOOLERS' CAMPAIGN AND THE REVISED NATIONAL CURRICULUM STATEMENT

Professor Kader Asmal, MP  
Minister of Education

Prof Linda Chisholm, Chair of Ministerial Project Committee to Streamline and Strengthen Curriculum 2005

4 October 2001

A campaign is being mounted against the Revised National Curriculum Statement. In letters to the press, interventions in radio talk shows and discussions on the Internet, the National Curriculum Statement is presented as an attack on the constitution and a totalitarian imposition of a Marxist-inspired form of indoctrination. This bizarre campaign requires some comment. It emanates from the Pestalozzi Trust: Legal Defence Fund for Home Schooling and requires knowing who the Pestalozzi Trust is and what its main aims and goals are.

The Pretoria-based Pestalozzi Trust Home Schooling movement was founded in 1998. It is supported by the Home School Legal Defence Association in the USA and has links with a range of international fundamentalist Christian groupings (<http://www.pestalozzi.org>).

The main criticisms of the Revised National Curriculum Statement center on the involvement of the state in education and interfaith religious education. The Social Sciences and Life Orientation Learning Area Statements come under particularly sharp attack. The Life Orientation Learning Area Statement requires learners to learn about and compare different religions and worldviews in order to promote understanding of society and its different communities. This the Home Schoolers find objectionable. Why? What do they want instead?

The South African Home Schoolers promote religious rather than secular education. They want schooling to take place at home rather than in state-provided schools. They also promote the use of 'the Theocentric Christian Education System'. In this system, 'the primary purpose of education is to get to know God and His creation, so that we can better serve him. This is in sharp contrast to the humanistic view of education, which is to use education as a tool for social engineering.' (<http://www.grobler.co.za>) In this view, learning about and understanding differences and similarities between religions is the worst abomination.

The Home School curriculum is guided by the goals of the US-based Home School Legal Defense Association. Home schooling is the vehicle through which families will be able 'to teach what really matters: knowing Jesus as their Saviour and obeying Him as Lord?. Home schooling on the foundation of the Word of God will bring blessings to the nations around the world.' (<http://www.kansashomeschool.org>)

The Constitution of South Africa stands for the separation of Church and State. It also stands for the right to education to be guaranteed by the state. Home Schoolers argue against both. They want a theocratic education system based in Christian education regardless of the separation of Church and State and regardless of the reality of religious and cultural diversity in the country and the rights of all religious communities in it. They cannot abide learning about the religious beliefs and practices of those who do not share their own. As such, their aims and goals are unconstitutional.

Little wonder that their views are those of a minority. They are not shared by the major religious organisations and

leaders in the country who have been part and parcel of formulating the approach taken to the education of religion in our schools.

The substance of their critique is as perverse as naming themselves the Pestalozzi Trust. Pestalozzi promoted child-centred popular education. He was a forerunner of basic general education for the poor before, during and after the French Revolution. For Pestalozzi, education was a natural right rather than a religious necessity. It was aimed at serving the ends of social reform, rather than narrow minority interests. His name fits badly on an organisation that stands for the opposite of what he promoted.

The perversity of the critique is found in a strange inversion of the truth. The curriculum is accused of being 'an assault on the Constitution' when in fact the aims and goals that are promoted by Home Schoolers are unconstitutional.

The curriculum is accused of promising freedom but eradicating alternative choices, of promoting critical thinking but imposing a 'philosophical straitjacket on thought,' of indoctrination through the specification of outcomes for education. When we consider what the Home Schoolers want we might well question who wishes to eradicate choice, who wishes to impose a straitjacket and who wishes to eliminate critical thinking. We would say the Home Schoolers.

The curriculum is criticized for being value-based, for promoting human rights and cultural diversity: these broad, humane values all amount to 'imposition' of 'Asmal's values' on the Home Schoolers.

It is unconstitutional and not possible for the state to relinquish responsibility for education. The state has a constitutional obligation to ensure the right of all to education, to promote liberty, equality, dignity and respect for all through its schools and, as such, to promote the broadest understanding and knowledge of all religions in our society and the world. Home Schoolers should not attempt to impose their loony, paranoid and perverse ideas on the nation. Asmal attacks &ndash;

and two professors fail their tests

Statement by the Pestalozzi Trust legal defence fund for home education

5 October 2001

On 30th July Professor Kader Asmal published in the government gazette a notice calling for comments on his proposed national curriculum. In a surprising about turn, he and his right hand, Professor Linda Chisholm, have now launched an attack on citizens commenting on the proposals.

In an anxious statement dated 4th October, the two professors complain that &ldquo;Christian Home Schoolers&rdquo; have launched a campaign against the curriculum.

This, presumably, refers to the awareness campaign initiated by the Pestalozzi Trust at the end of August to draw the attention of the public to the fact that they only have until 12th October to study the 1400 pages of the document and to comment on them. This has, according to the two professors, resulted in &ldquo;&hellip; letters to the press, interventions in radio talk shows and discussions on the Internet&hellip;&rdquo; They fail to mention that it has certainly resulted in many comments, from the public, in letters to the Minister.

Now: there is documented evidence that Mr Asmal's department has been singularly ineffective in informing teachers, schools, students and parents about his intentions. Out of about 100 state schools sampled in Gauteng in the last week of September, only three had even heard about the document while only two had ever seen it. Under the circumstances, one would have thought that his ministry would welcome our efforts to promote awareness of his proposals.

One would also have hoped that the two professors would attempt to address some of the concerns raised in the letters to the department and in the media. In stead, they devote their entire statement to an attack on the Pestalozzi Trust and on the home schooling community, sketching a caricature of religious loonies.

It is well documented that, once before, the Minister has had to apologize for letting his paranoia about &ldquo;Christian Conspiracies&rdquo; get out of hand. It seems, however, that he has now infected poor Professor Chisholm too. A simple enquiry would confirm De Waal's conclusions in her doctoral research last year that the majority of home schoolers choose home education, not for religious reasons, but to provide their children with a high quality education. Only 26.5% of respondents in that study indicated religious reasons as the most important reason for choosing home education. And by no means all of these are Christians.

It would seem, then, that the two professors are thoroughly ignorant about the target of their ire.

In their attempt to divert attention from the matter at issue &ndash; the curriculum proposals &ndash; they even begrudge

us our name, claiming: "The substance of their critique is as perverse as naming themselves the Pestalozzi Trust. Pestalozzi promoted child-centred popular education. He was a forerunner of basic general education for the poor before, during and after the French Revolution. For Pestalozzi, education was a natural right rather than a religious necessity. It was aimed at serving the ends of social reform, rather than narrow minority interests. His name fits badly on an organisation that stands for the opposite of what he promoted."

Pestalozzi himself had this to say:

"The essential purpose of my method here and elsewhere, is to make home instruction possible again&hellip;for people neglected in this respect . . . to raise every mother, whose heart beats for her children, step by step, till at last she can follow my elementary exercises by herself, and be able to use them with her children. To do this, she need in every case be but a little step in advance of the children" (Pestalozzi 1915:126)\*.

Pestalozzi's purpose was nothing less than to phase out primary schools and to replace them with home education as the most effective means to uplift entire communities of the poor and disadvantaged (Pestalozzi 1915:39). He states (Pestalozzi 1915:60):

I raised myself daily more to the conviction, that it might be possible to reach the end which I mentioned above . . . to educate mothers for that to which they are eminently designed by nature; and through it, even the lowest material of ordinary school-instruction might be founded upon the results of companionable motherly instruction. I saw a universal psychological method formed, by which every father and mother who found the motive in themselves, might be put in a position to instruct their own children, and thereby obviate the imaginary necessity of cultivating teachers by costly seminaries and educational libraries for a long period.

And continues in sharp language (Pestalozzi 1915:97):

I would take school instruction out of the hands of the old order of decrepit, stammering, journeymen-teachers, as well as from the new weak ones, who are generally no better for popular instruction, and entrust it to the undivided powers of Nature itself, to the light that God kindles and ever keeps alive in the hearts of fathers and mothers, to the interest of parents who desire that their children should grow up in favour with God and man.

Pestalozzi, in eloquent comment on the arrogant predecessors of our two arrogant professors, reserves his sharpest comments for "experts" who distrust and demean parents (Pestalozzi 1915:128-129):

I will not believe in them, but in the mothers of the land, and in the heart that God has put in their breast. I will declare the wretched talk, in which they throw away the people of the land as if they were the produce of a lower order of creation, a slander against the people, against nature and truth . . . Throughout my whole life, I have seen and known all kinds of such wordy men, wrapped up in systems and theories, knowing nothing and caring nothing for the people; and the individuals, who to-day slander the people in this way about this matter of education are more in this state than any others that I know.

&hellip;I will not open my mouth against the verbosity of their social dogmas&hellip;and the loveless and foolish frame of mind that they must, by their very nature, produce; but, with the greatest man who ever declared the cause of truth, of the people and of love victorious against the errors of the scribes, I will only say, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do". Clearly, our two professors are as abysmally ignorant of the history of their own discipline as they are of the nature of home education - the fastest growing division of the education sector. As they flounder in the numerous half truths, untruths, errors and outright distortions in their statement, one is tempted to shake one's head. It is sad that this spectacular ignorance and these silly propaganda antics should be exhibited by the two most influential policy makers on education in the country. However, it would be a mistake to ignore this. In their statement, the two professors demonstrate four reasons why we should be very sceptical about the claims they make for their curriculum proposals:

In their statement, the two professors fail to address the issues raised by concerned citizens. In Gauleiter style, they viciously attack what they, misdirectedly, perceive to be the cause of their discomfort. Their attack provides an object lesson in one of the stated aims of the proposed curriculum: To use language "to assert and challenge power, to position others". "Propaganda" is the word that Hitler used for these practices.

What the professors achieve, sadly, is to demonstrate also that all their "skills" and "values" come to naught in the absence of plain old fashioned facts.

They are, however, much more effective when they rewrite the history of Pestalozzi. This corresponds directly to the dishonest manner in which their curriculum also subverts history for political expediency.

Finally, what their statement demonstrates is a surprisingly heavy handed intolerance of democracy. The notion that

citizens may exercise their democratic rights to debate and comment on government policy seems quite foreign to our two professors.

When confronted with a real life example of these democratic practices, they resort to conspiracy theories to explain it! One has to ask oneself: What exactly do they mean when they piously propose to teach our children "democratic values"? It remains to reiterate: The Constitutional Court has ruled that the state may not impose orthodoxies of belief systems on the nation. This curriculum aims to do precisely that. The minister himself admits that "values may not be legislated". With this curriculum, the minister proposes to abuse his executive powers to achieve what legislation may not do. In as far as this curriculum requires children to adopt and confess values prescribed by the state, the curriculum is unlawful. The only value that the state may enforce is that of abidance by the law. For further information, see <http://pestalozzi.org> or call Leendert van Oostrum (012) 330 1337