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# Editorial

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## The Editorial Committee

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If the number of enquiries and submissions to *Journal of Education* is any indication, there is clearly a need for a journal catering for the educational research community. No doubt the state's new funding formula has increased pressure for publication. With pressure for publication comes, amongst other things, increased speculation regarding the *modus operandi* of journals. Certain author uncertainties are inevitable, and a degree of scepticism and suspicion is perhaps justified, particularly following the well publicised account of Alan Sokal's successful hoax in having an article intentionally stripped of logic, evidence, and even meaning, accepted for publication in the prestigious cultural studies journal *Social Text*. In citing this incident, Landsburg (1999) argues that:

If a prestigious journal publishes a theory, it's probably wrong. Given two equally plausible theories from equally credible sources that have passed equally strict scrutiny, the one that makes it into a top journal has a smaller chance of being right. Here's why: editors like to publish theories they find surprising. And the best way to surprise an editor is to be wrong.

One wonders if Landsburg would go so far as to provide empirical support for his theory with reference to the publication of the very article in which he outlines this theory. But clearly, in our experience, healthy scepticism of editorial processes sometimes lapses into uninformed critique.

We wish to reaffirm the *Journal of Education* aim of providing a forum for scholarly understanding of the field of education. In respect of the corresponding aim of making this freely available, however, circumstances have necessitated a compromise. Since its inception, the journal has been published at no cost to contributing authors, and it has been freely available to the academic readership. With the volume of submissions and the number of issues increasing, the associated cost of administration and production has also increased. The old policy is now no longer sustainable and has had to be partly revised. As from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2004, a per page fee of R75 will be levied on authors. This is now increasingly common practice, and institutional Research Offices usually pay this fee. This revised policy is outlined in the section "Notes for contributors". While this step has been taken with regret, it does have the positive effect of making possible an increased number of issues per year. The *Journal of Education* will now appear at least three times per year in the form of two 'normal' issues and the Kenton Special Issue, and in all likelihood there will be at least one additional special issue per year as well.

This issue of the journal contains an interesting and significant collection of articles. The first of these is a forceful but gently presented critique of Johan Muller's *Reclaiming Knowledge* (2000). Given the current debates on the issue of subject disciplinarity and the importance of the sequencing and progression of concepts, Elana Michelson's project is an important one. Given Johan Muller's considerable standing, it is also a bold project: even a foremost international curriculum figure like Michael Young (2002) credits Muller with sharpening the dilemma facing curriculum designers, for example with his principles of insularity and hybridity. Michelson credits Muller with raising issues of crucial importance – particularly regarding the common sense knowledge and experience of local culture, and how this relates to the cognitive domain of vertical discourses. However, she critiques Muller's depiction of constructivism, questioning in detail his interpretation of Walkerdine's position regarding the (in)commensurability of experience-based and school-based discourses. From the basis of Muller's adoption of Durkheim's fundamental dualism of the sacred and profane, Michelson questions the South African tendency to embed academic discourse in dualisms and dichotomies.

The next three articles focus strongly on the relationship between theory and practice, and on epistemology, and all operate from the basis of a strong internal language of description (Bernstein, 1996).

Kai Horsthemke, in a field in which arguments easily lapse into the ideological, takes the argument about 'indigenous knowledge' back to where it perhaps belongs: knowledge from a perspective informed by philosophy. He points out fundamental flaws in relativist stances, and argues that despite differences between cultures on the key issues of knowledge and values, there is a good deal of common ground between them. At the end of the day, knowledge must meet the criteria of belief, justification and truth. How then does indigenous knowledge differ, and what makes it a unique category of knowledge?

Horsthemke's work could lead to further sets of interesting questions, such as why the field of 'indigenous knowledge' has generated a passionate debate in South Africa, and whether it could in fact be an ideological artefact rooted in a broader ideology that has popular resonance at this particular moment in time.

Yael Shalem's contribution is an important and richly theoretical contribution to teacher education. The article is necessarily long as it provides data – in the form of student responses – in relation to the tools of analysis and the analysis itself. The article argues that sociological approaches in teacher education are characterised by a weak grammar, and that a stronger grammar would enable student teachers to analyse the specifics of their practice in relation to theory.

More importantly, perhaps, it provides a diagnostic tool that teacher educators could use to analyse student productions as specialised descriptions, with ensuing insights that can lead to productive relationships between the horizontal discourse of the particular and the vertical discourse of the general. But, as we are reminded, the particular can be apprehended only if teacher education programmes employ a meaningful internal language of description. Against the background of Michelson's concern about the South African tendency to 'dichotomise', it is interesting to note Shalem's stress on the logic of differentiation rather than on simple dichotomy.

Ursula Hoadley and Paula Ensor develop the concept of language of description in establishing principles to guide research into classroom pedagogy. At issue here are the ways in which we generate and analyse data collected in classrooms. In a strongly theoretical and pleasantly accessible paper, widely used classroom observation schedules are critiqued for their apparent absence of explicit pedagogical theory. Researchers in the field will empathise with the difficulty Hoadley and Ensor identify – all too often, the criteria used in classroom research are derived from commitment to ideological constructions of 'good practice'. The authors provide useful examples to support their commitment to an alternative approach underpinned by a defensible theory of pedagogy. Their contribution is testimony to the theoretically informed and coherently focused research endeavour taking place in their own institution, and it illuminates some of the difficulties involved in the application of 'language of description', as well as issues around the elusive 'discursive gap'.

The next two articles address challenges for educators arising from the context of democracy and values. The perspective from which they come, and the pointers they provide are, however, very different. Although positioned within a global context, Yusef Waghid's starting point is local: the close link between education policy and the Constitution and Bill of Rights of 1996, manifested in the slogan *Tirisano*, and the Working Group on "Values, Education and Democracy". Given the imperative of developing a responsible and accountable citizenry, how do we best proceed? Waghid provides a case study of his own teaching course informed by the quest for new educational approaches needed to promote active citizenship. From the argument that compassion is a precondition for the effectiveness of citizenship education in South Africa, he demonstrates a path for linking compassion with *ubuntu*.

Mike Kissack, on the other hand, starts not with imperatives for educators and curriculum developers, but with a more pervasive concern that courses aimed at developing approved values with respect to cultural diversity might themselves



be prescriptive and impositional, thus in fact violating an individual's democratic right to develop his or her own views. After a fascinating tour through Greek and Roman ethics, developed through the work of Foucault, we are led to the key argument: the educator's role is to promote an ability for self formation without prescribing an impositional outcome. The key concepts in this process are those in the title of the article: "Ethical substance, modes of subjection and askesis".

Mankolo Mfusi's article on the merger of two former veterinary faculties has considerable current relevance and interest value. Little published work has appeared on the mergers which have had, and are having, major implications for the higher education landscape. This article provides a useful basis for developing an understanding of this change process. Using the case of the two former veterinary faculties, Mfusi provides an interesting account of the background to policy imperative for mergers, and a detailed description of some of the consequent dynamics lying below the surface of what appear to be beguilingly rational developments. Certainly, we learn that merger effects are not simply mechanical additive benefits accompanying integration and what is often termed 'economy of scale'.

Finally, the last article resonates with the mounting body of research that signals significant tensions and disjunction between, on the one hand, enlightened, well-intentioned South African education policy and, on the other, practice. Ian Moll and Tessa Welsh use the case of the new National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) as a springboard for discussion on the theory, policy and implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Here we have yet another powerful indication that policy implementation can take place in a way that threatens to undermine the aim of the very project itself. Although the focus is on RPL, this reflective article has implications for what is central to teacher development – the issue of educator experience, and the ways in which practitioners reflect on experience. Challenging questions are also asked about those theories on the situatedness and transfer of skills and knowledge that have come to dominate debate in this arena. Both the theoretical and practical issues raised in this article invite further debate on RPL, a development that *Journal of Education* encourages.

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# On trust, desire, and the sacred: a response to Johann Muller's *Reclaiming Knowledge*

Elana Michelson

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The classification of things reproduces the classification of men.  
– Durkheim and Mauss, *Primitive Classification*

The publication in 2000 of Johann Muller's *Reclaiming Knowing: Social Theory, Curriculum and Education Policy* was an important moment in contemporary education debates in South Africa. Published six years after the first democratic elections, it appeared at a moment of controversy concerning the Size and Shape document, Curriculum 2005, and the new acronyms of post-Apartheid education: SAQA, OBET, RPL. Muller explicitly offered his text as an entry into the epistemological, pedagogical, and political fray. "What knowledge is of most worth for the millennial citizen?" (2000, p.41). What should the relationship be between informal and formal knowledge, globalizing and local knowledge systems, "*cultural* knowledge and skills" and "skills and knowledge for *economic* productivity" (2000, p.41; italics in the original)? Muller presents the terms of the discussion as opposing sides of a variety of dualisms, the nature of which is itself part of the controversy.

Muller exemplifies Bourdieu's characterization of *Homo Academicus* as a "supreme classifier among classifiers" (1988, p.xi). His book is an appeal to keep the boundaries between knowledges well maintained, in the interest of furthering a 'good life' that all South Africans can share. In making his case, he presents himself as both a partisan with "accounts to settle" (2000, p.8) and the quintessentially reasonable man who, given his "relatively moderate and modest conclusion" (2000, p.162), cannot understand what all the fuss is about. In this article, I take Muller's point seriously that something important is at stake here, that the future depends on having knowledge we can trust, and that these debates will best be taken forward by civil dialogue. At the same time, it is essential to problematize the way in which Muller represents these debates and to ask what work the emphasis on boundaries is doing, in Muller's work but more broadly in the current debates concerning South African education policy.

Muller begins from the premise that some kinds of knowledge are simply more effectual than others. He casts his description of that more efficacious knowledge in terms of its systemization: ideas – he is drawing on Durkheim here – become knowledge only when connections have been made between them and they have been formed into “*schemes of classification*” (2000, p.1). Nonsystematic ‘knowledge’ (inverted commas in original) includes various kinds of local wisdom, folklore and practical know-how. Muller refers to such knowledge as “crude”, “vulgar” and, again citing Durkheim, “profane” (2000, pp.13, 77). The problem with profane knowledge, according to Muller, is that it is not “transparent to itself” (2000, p.136); because it does not offer the possibility of interrogation or destabilization, it is not open to critique or change. This failure has implications that are political as well as epistemological: “systematic idealization is the only way to project benign possible futures. Without it, no concept of social change is possible. . .” (2000, p.90).

Muller contrasts this view to constructivist approaches to knowledge. He defines constructivism as “a broad anti-epistemological movement (that) has taken a perfectly reasonable set of theses about the social construction of knowledge and has radicalized it into a set of skeptical claims about the constructedness of reality itself, in which reality becomes merely an artifact of our knowledge about it” (2000, p.5). As radical relativists, constructivists see the world as consisting of unlimited models of possible order, each of which is created through autonomous practices. All of these accounts of the world are equally unverifiable and all forms of knowledge therefore equal.

Muller describes the constructivist project as a breakdown between boundaries, between what are variously described as academic and local knowledge, Mode 1 and Mode 2, vertical and horizontal, and, again after Durkheim, sacred and profane. Viewed broadly, constructivism is a form of “excess” (2000, p.5) in that it tries to explode the boundaries between different forms of knowledge.

These commonalities are of at least three kinds:

- between knowledge practices and other kinds of social practices;
- between different kinds of knowledge practices;
- between knowledge workers and other kinds of social actor (2000, p.63-64).

At the end of the day, the attempt to break down these distinctions is “irresponsible” (2000, p.52) because it leads to second-rate knowledge, which isn’t going to do the disadvantaged any good.

Thus, Muller states his case as one of boundary-maintenance. He accurately describes a central debate in contemporary theories of knowledge as being based on distinction between “insularity” and “hybridity”. Insularity is characterized by disciplinary autonomy, purity, fear of transgression, and attention to differences between systems of knowledge and criteria of judgment. Hybridity is characterized by permeability of boundaries and the “promiscuity” of meaning domains. Having no “theory of the boundary”, constructivists fall back on what Muller calls “borderless think”, a “spurious ideology of boundlessness”. Durkheim figures so largely in this analysis because Durkheim is “the exemplary sociologist of the boundary” (2000, pp. 57, 67, 5, 77).

Viewed from the perspective of educational and curriculum policy, “the border in question here is the one between common-sense knowledge and codified curricular knowledge, between ordinary everyday knowledge and codes, texts and canons, the mastery of which is assessed and certified at school”. The hybrid project has to do with creating bridges and bringing students into the exploration of the relationship between school knowledge and the students’ own knowledges. Muller’s concern is with the “limits to this project” and the “unintended consequences” (2000, p.58). Using school mathematics to explore the limits to hybridity and to defend the boundaries between academic and local knowledges, he argues that constructivists are wrong to insist that “any and all everyday experiences are suitable metaphors for mathematical relations” (2000, p.70). Curriculum embodies the values and habits of the group that has won the struggle for symbolic mastery. What the disadvantaged need is access to that cultural capital.

There are a number of issues outlined above that must be interrogated more fully. Nevertheless, Muller articulates what are in fact crucial questions: “How can or should the common-sense knowledge of experience and local culture, indeed of the everyday world, relate to the codified knowledge deemed worthy of inclusion and certification in the formal curriculum?” “How, and under what conditions, can vertical discourse be assessed outside formal contexts of transmission?” What is the proper relationship between world of reason and science and world of “passion and politics, practical activity and everyday life?” (2000, pp.13, 89, 14).

Many of the educational initiatives currently underway in South Africa require that these questions be answered. At a time in which curricular and epistemological assumptions are being revisited, in which the recognition of prior informal learning is underway, and in which disadvantaged groups are

slowly gaining greater access into formal education, it is vital that we explore the relationships among cultures of knowledge and cognitive domains. I am in full agreement with Muller that “a thoroughgoing answer may well contribute to a rethinking of the role of formal educational institutions given the cognitive demands and requisites of late modernity”. And I share his hope that such answers might “help to explicate how sacred practices lie nested, often unremarked, within the routines of the everyday” (2000, p.89).

For that reason, I want to engage several aspects of Muller’s text. I will first interrogate his depiction of the constructivist claim and his extensive use of a text by feminist mathematics educator Valerie Walkerdine, whom he offers as a counterpoint to constructivism. I then will explore the implications of some of Muller’s terminology, a terminology which is suggestive of a number of anxieties that typify contemporary South African academic life.

## Muller’s representation of the constructivist view

Muller’s misrepresentation of the social constructivist school is considerable, even at times baffling. The vast scholarly literature that school has produced has consistently distinguished itself from the kind of epistemological relativism that holds all accounts of the world as equally valid. In opposition to idealist versions of relativism that deny any access to a reality on the other side of language, social constructivist theory in the main draws on a nuanced materialism: different social and historical locations lead to different knowledge precisely *because* the world is concrete. Drawing on Marxian and, ultimately, Hegelian standpoint traditions, constructivism utilizes postmodernism, not to deny the material foundations of knowledge, but to allow for a more careful account of the ways in which knowledge is created, legitimated, and used. It sees the object of knowledge as produced by the material bases of existence, to be sure, but also by human cognitive paradigms, physiological and technological tools of perception, linguistic structures, and social organizations – and by the interaction among all of these things at a given moment of social and intellectual history.

There are, of course, significant differences among those who can be called social constructivists and lively contestations concerning the relationship between language and material existence, the possibilities for and limitations of objectivity, and the relationship between rationality and other ways of knowing. In the main, however, constructivists take the position that an

epistemology must account for both the availability of material ‘truths’ and the social, linguistic, and cultural lenses through which human beings inevitably access the world. It is possible and, indeed, necessary to have “*simultaneously* an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own ‘semiotic technologies’ for making meanings, *and* a non-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a ‘real’ world”. . . (Haraway, 1991, p.187).

Thus, far from arguing that objectivity must give way to a chaos of unverifiable truth claims, constructivists argue that what is usually taken for objectivity in Western knowledge practices is not objective or rigorous *enough* (Harding, 1991). Because they fail to take researchers’ own social locatedness into account, conventional Western knowledge-practices do not provide the objectivity to eliminate systematic biases shared by an entire community of inquiry. Far from abandoning any hope of understanding the material world, constructivism seeks to understand the relationship between materiality and our representations and perceptions of it. To quote Valerie Walkerdine, whom I will discuss at length below, “Although materiality is central, there is no simple ‘I’ who sees or does not see the world as it really is. Materiality is always made to signify” (1988, p.200).<sup>1</sup>

To make the distinction between epistemological relativism as defined by Muller and the social constructivist claim that all knowledges are enabled and

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<sup>1</sup> Donna Haraway is one of a number of prominent ‘social constructivist’ scientists who has challenged the accusation of relativism.

This is not a relativist position, if by relativism one means that the facts and models, including mathematical models, of natural scientific accounts of the world are merely matters of desire, opinion, speculation, fantasy, or any other such “mental” faculty. . . Reality is eminently material and solid, but the effects sedimented out of technologies of observation/representation are radically contingent in the sense that other semiotic – material-technical processes of observation would (and do) produce quite differently lived worlds, including cognitively lived worlds, not just different statements about worlds as observer-independent arrays of objects. . . Obviously, neither I nor any other science studies person, feminist or otherwise, whom I have ever met or read, means the “laws of physics” get suspended if one enters a “different” culture. That is a laughable notion of both physical laws and cultural, historical difference. . . I am interested in how an observation situation produces quite “objective” worlds, worlds not subject to “subjective” preference or mere opinion but worlds that must be lived in consequence in some ways and not others (1997, p.301-2, n.12).

As was pointed out by a reviewer, Muller’s use of relativism, and Haraway’s definition here, equates relativism with philosophical idealism. Other definitions of relativism, such as that reflected in Haraway’s own position, are perfectly consistent with materialism.



legitimated within social practices, let me use an example from the tragedy of HIV-AIDS in South Africa. The debate concerning disparate knowledge claims is particularly fraught in the case of HIV-AIDS, partly because some understandings have led to horrific results such as the wide-spread rape of children and partly because of the highly controversial position of the South African government. Among the examples of what Muller might call local folklore is the belief that AZT and other anti-viral drugs do not stave off HIV-related illness and death but actually lead to heightened symptoms and death. The fact that informal observation seems to suggest as much can be interpreted as evidence of the limitation of knowledge unmediated by Western scientific understandings and the need for “theories or metanarratives as telling us something common sense can’t tell us” (2000, p.136). But the interpretations of this phenomenon from a social constructivist versus a ‘relativist’ perspective are fundamentally different.

As defined by Muller, a relativist account of the above paragraph would argue that, indeed, there are no standards for adjudicating knowledge claims concerning HIV-AIDS causes and cures. Since reality is simply, in Muller’s words, “an artifact of our knowledge about it” (2000, p.5), no accounts of the material and biological bases of disease can be privileged. Because representations give rise to the world, the world can be changed – or HIV-AIDS cured – simply by deciding to change our representations of it. The urbane postmodernists quibble; the poor continue to die.

A social constructivist account, on the other hand, would take as a given that retroviruses and antiviral drugs interact in particular, quite material ways and that some accounts of their interaction, such as those of Western science, have far greater explanatory and predictive power than others. A social constructivist might, however, go on to point out that, according to that same scientific discourse, anti-viral drugs are likely to work only in the earlier stages of HIV-AIDS and that, indeed, at the later stages, they often do make symptoms worse. Thus, while truth claims concerning the benefits of AZT have a high level of validity and usefulness, they only obtain in a particular material and cultural setting, one in which the medical infrastructure is such that HIV-AIDS is diagnosed early, in which the culture is supportive of HIV-AIDS diagnosis and treatment, and in which HIV-AIDS education is functional and effective. In other words, social constructivists are not making claims about the insubstantiality of the material world. To the contrary: their point is that a specific material – and cultural, and physical, and discursive – world always mediates the ways in which knowledge is created, understood and used.

It is possible that Muller would have little trouble with this latter view of AZT as a treatment for HIV-AIDS. Indeed, Muller makes his own case for what he refers to as “mild constructivism” (2000, p.59). He knows that we live in a post-positivist world in which former claims to absolute certainty and objectivity can no longer be sustained. He fully accepts what he considers “a perfectly reasonable set of theses about the social construction of knowledge” (2000, p.4): that knowledge is inherently social; that any and all ways of identifying, classifying, and communicating information about the world are culturally, materially and discursively specific; that the observer is an active participant in the reality being observed; and that structures of meaning are always in flux.

In a chapter called “Reason, Reality and Public Trust,” Muller states his position as follows:

The institution of science has changed; notions of ‘useful knowledge’ have left us in little doubt that ideas of absolute certainty, objectivity and neutrality can no longer be supported. For all that, and accepting most of it, it is still possible, and more important than ever, to maintain that there is a real social world *relatively* independent from our ways of viewing it, about which we can make assertions of whose veracity we can reliably judge. Just because there are no universal rational values or norms does not spell the end of the enterprise of rational knowledge and research. The naked truth might no longer be attainable but a modestly clothed one surely is, and to be prized all the more highly (2000, p.145-6; my italics).

I have italicized the word ‘relatively’ in the above quote because it points to what makes Muller’s quote contentious; the degree and form of that independence are the crux of the debate. That said, the problem here is that what Muller is calling the ‘mild’ constructivist position is the position of social constructivists generally. Against his accusation of runaway relativism is a now-vast literature that has explored the organization of knowledge in disciplines, professions, and curricula from precisely to point of view Muller articulates here.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to what I am arguing is a serious misrepresentation, there are a number of problems with Muller’s position. First, by representing extremist constructivism as on the offensive and himself as the embattled voice of modesty and reason, he ignores the entrenched power of conventional academic constructs of knowledge and their still-authoritative claims to objectivity and universality. Second, he avoids engaging with the historical

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<sup>2</sup> Among many representative texts, see Longino (1990), Alcoff and Potter (1993), Levins and Lewontin (1985), and Hess (1995).

context within which the constructivist position has emerged. The critique of Western, metropolitan, and masculinist knowledge practices has importantly focused on the ways in which such practices produced categories of greater and lesser human worth, typically around dualisms concerning moral virtue, free will, and rationality. Muller cites only one specific case, namely the critique of Levy-Bruhl's characterization of African thought as 'irrational', a critique that Muller terms "a gross oversimplification" (2000, p.4). He does not, however, engage the complex claims concerning the 'rational' and the 'irrational' or the 'universal' and the 'local', nor does he explore the value- and power-laden social institutions given form by those claims, one of which, as Muller himself argues, is schooling.

Third, while Muller portrays himself as finding it "sometimes hard to credit, let alone account for, the vituperation and bile" (2000, p.162) with which constructivists state their case, his usurping of the densely populated middle-ground between positivism and idealism is hardly encouraging of a more collegial dialogue. "It may," he says – and it is hard not to read this as a sneer, "seem surprising to enthusiastic anti-positivists, but there is very little in this critique that is controversial" (2000, p.150). Similarly, "(o)rdinary people in the everyday sensuous world believe in that world as precondition for acting in it" (2000, p.81). This stance is unfortunate, it seems to me, precisely because there is a vital social imperative common to the well-meaning on both sides of this debate.

Finally, Muller elides one crucial distinction at the heart of the constructivist case, namely, the distinction between asserting that all cultures of knowledge are equally compelling and insisting that the relationship between them should be explored. He characterizes constructivism as emphasizing "commonalities, or even identity" among different knowledge practices (2000, p.63-4). The slippage here between 'commonality' and 'identity' is central to Muller's case. But there is a huge difference between seeking commonalities as part of a larger project of understanding the relationship among different cultures of knowledge and blithely insisting that all distinctions are simply the by-product of social inequality. Muller's lack of precision in drawing the ways that constructivists make that distinction allows him, as I have argued, to usurp the mainstream constructivist position. But it also allows him to close down precisely the inquiry he purports to further, namely the question of how to understand the relationships between them in a way that allows for dialogue across formal and informal discourses and with it, both more equitable economic and social arrangements and more effective curricula.

Thus, Muller does not move forward the exploration of how knowledge is produced on the two sides of the dualism, why formal knowledge systems matter, how formal and informal knowledges both contrast and blend, and how we can negotiate the continuities and discontinuities between them. Muller's failure to engage that issue means that the book stays at the level of polemic, standing guard on a boundary that it might otherwise have helped to chart.

## Muller and Walkerdine

It is in regard to a number of the issues discussed above that Muller presents maths educator and feminist scholar Valerie Walkerdine as a highly favorable counterpoint to the constructivists. "For her, the existence of exclusive domains of discursive activity is a sine qua non: the problem is how to travel from one to the other" (2000, p.68). Rather than attempting to blur the distinction between formal and informal discourses in mathematics, Muller says, Walkerdine asks how to theorize the recontextualization so that the formal discourse can be made accessible to the widest possible group of learners, including, indeed especially, learners from disadvantaged groups. Muller's central use of Walkerdine is emblematic of a number of points explored above, namely his usurping of the mainstream constructivist position, his too-quick dismissal of the power-effects of formal knowledge systems, and his failure to contribute to the important exploration of how to "travel" from one system of knowledge to the next.

Muller's lengthy discussion of Walkerdine's *The Mastery of Reason* (1988) contrasts her highlighting of the boundary between knowledge domains with the constructivist flattening of those boundaries. He correctly represents her as "recognizing that everyday practices and school tasks are separated by a sharp disjuncture" (2000, p.68), but misrepresents the relationship between his argument and hers. His misrepresentation focuses specifically on the efficacy of drawing on "everyday practices" in the classroom and on the nature of the cognitive empowerment to be gained from "the kind of abstract reasoning entailed in a school situation" (2000, p.68). At a deeper level, it misrepresents Walkerdine's relationship to Western and masculinist knowledge claims that both separate abstract intellectual reasoning from emotion and desire and privilege the former over the latter. It is necessary to review Walkerdine's position in order to identify Muller's distortions and tease out the implications for his argument.

In her epigram to *The Mastery of Reason*, Walkerdine evokes Octavio Paz to the effect that “the dreams of reason are intolerable”. In opposition to Piaget’s claims for universal rationality, she argues that ‘Reason’s Dream’ is invested in a “fantasy of symbolic mastery”, a dream of an ordered universe amenable to rational control. That dream is “central to the bourgeois order” (2000, p.190), and its emergence is ultimately tied to “a specific set of historical conditions when the concern about producing a self-regulated citizen was paramount. . .” (Walkerdine, 1988, pp.192, 190, 7).

Walkerdine locates the primacy of mathematics in the Western and masculinist philosophical tradition that values abstract reasoning, symbolic control, and uncontested factuality. Mathematics gained this position as “queen of the sciences when nature became the book written in the language of mathematics and when mathematics held out the dream of a possibility of perfect control in a perfectly rational and ordered universe” (1988, p.187). It has kept that primacy because of the claim to a universal applicability: the metaphoric content of what is being measured drops away, so that mathematics can be used to measure anything. ( $3+4 = 7$  whether we are adding apples or elephants.) This ‘forgetting’ of metaphoric content in mathematics is the same ‘forgetting’ of the constructed nature of thought that produces the universalized bourgeois subject. Thus, the seeming decontextualization that mathematics promises is itself a context – a context has everything to do with class, race, gender, sociality, desire, the unconscious and historical locality.

Walkerdine explores the power-laden context of mathematical understanding in her discussion of the words ‘more’, ‘less’, and ‘no more’ in family-based and school-based discourse. She challenges cognitive theorists who, noting that children use the word ‘more’ before they use the word ‘less’, conclude that the concept of ‘more’ comes earlier in cognitive development. She argues, rather, that they are the product of class- and generational power inequities and relate to other material aspects of life such as family income (1988, p.31). According to Walkerdine’s alternative account, children use the word ‘more’ before the word ‘less’ because of their position within power relations, specifically the regulation of consumption within a family context where parents have the authority to withhold desired goods and within a culture in which consumption – i.e. ‘more’ – is valued.

It is difficult to see how this differs from a constructivist position that insists on the historicity and power-ladenness of knowledge. Muller’s use of Walkerdine’s text, which begins so explicitly in a constructivist view, is difficult to explain, or explain away. Muller consistently cites Walkerdine’s

data as supporting his position, namely, the incommensurability of experience-based and school-based discourse. (The opposite of ‘more’ is ‘less’ in school mathematics and ‘no more’ around the family dinner table, for example.) He uses those data to argue for the inappropriateness of bringing students’ experience into the classroom, presenting them in such a way that Walkerdine appears to be making that same point.

Walkerdine does, indeed, maintain that there is no direct correlation between family-based and school-based mathematical practices. To have epistemological access to school maths, students need to learn formal relations of signification and begin to recognize the rules and purposes of what is going on. The goal of research should be pedagogy able to help the widest possible group of children negotiate the shift into mathematical discourse. To do this, according to Muller, however, the profane world of learners’ informal practices must be kept outside the classroom. To Walkerdine, that boundary is always already breached.

According to both Walkerdine and Muller, the gradual suppression of metaphoric content is key to the transition between informal and school-based mathematical practices; children must gradually understand that the physical properties of the objects being measured are unimportant to their function in math. This is achieved through a string of signifiers that increasingly detach from the object itself by suppressing the metaphoric content. Walkerdine’s example, cited by Muller, is of a middle-class mother helping her daughter move from planning a garden picnic to understanding the written numeral as a symbolic signifier. In each step, each signifier becomes the signified for a new signifier at a higher level of abstraction.

Muller, however, also presents a counter-example, namely, the study by Carraher *et al.* of Brazilian street children selling coconuts, which he cites as the kind of intuitive but “highly idiosyncratic” mathematical practice that is distinct from school-based algorithms (2000, p.60). This, to Muller, is precisely the kind of content that does not belong in school-based mathematics because it does not lead to abstract reasoning. By keeping the attention on the metaphoric content – i.e. the coconuts being sold – rather than the logical relationships on which mathematical discourse is built, such content would deny the disadvantaged mathematical reasoning, access to higher education, and cultural capital.

Muller presents the case of the coconut-sellers as of a piece with Walkerdine’s argument, consistent with her notion that there is no direct correlation between

informal and formal knowledge-practices. While Muller lauds her point that “the problem is how to travel from one to the other” (2000, p.68), his argument, in opposition to hers, however, is that the informal learning of the poor is no place to start. Walkerdine would also argue that there is a path to be walked between selling coconuts on the street and the distributive axiom of multiplication over addition, but it isn’t clear why planning a picnic is a way to begin that path but that selling coconuts is not.

The operant difference, in pedagogical terms, is that the planning of the picnic was being used by an educated parent as learning opportunity, while there was at least no visible comparable adult among the street urchins selling coconuts. But that argues, surely, for a pedagogy in which the teacher substitutes for this educated parent, not that such profane content does not belong in a classroom and that it does those children a disservice to say it does. Walkerdine is critical, not of the use of experience in the classroom, but of pedagogy that, under the guise of teaching children the discourse of formal mathematics, is actually teaching them something else. In other words, her argument is that we are currently managing the ‘hybrid project’ badly. Muller’s is that we should not be doing it at all.

Walkerdine’s example of a poor use of students’ informal knowledge is the “shopping game” through which young children are taught to subtract from 10. At the start of the game, working class children are given cards representing small amounts of money with which they can play at purchasing goods. An airplane can be purchased for 5p, a basket for 2p. After each purchase, the children are helped to subtract the amount they have spent. The children studied use the game to act out a fantasy of being rich while regularly evidencing the knowledge that, in the ‘real world’, airplanes and baskets cost far more. The assumption behind the pedagogy is that children learn arithmetic processes through the handling of small amounts of money at a time in which they are developmentally unable to conceptualize numbers or money in larger terms (1988, p.139).

Walkerdine makes a number of points about the shopping game. Her first point is to affirm the validity of the kind of the informal knowledge disparaged by Muller, in this case the children’s sophisticated knowledge of the ways in which quantifiable resources have power in the world. She challenges such educational theorists as Williams and Shuard for saying that a young child can manipulate small amounts of money but that “the idea of money as meaning the exchange value of goods will be beyond him (*sic*) for a long time to come.” She says, rather, that what appears to theorists to be a difficult and

highly abstract concept, namely the relationship between labour, money, and the purchasing of goods is understood “all too well” by quite young working class children as a concrete element in their lives (1988, p.140). Working class children don’t typically have experience using the very small sums in the shopping game, but “they are constantly surrounded by other, more sophisticated relations which have *concrete* and *material* effects on their lives and those of the people around them” (1988, p.144). Their knowledge includes an understanding of exchange value, a realistic assessment of how much something will cost, and insight into the relationship of money to ongoing domestic life. Where Muller cites the informal learning of poor children as less than useful, Walkerdine follows Varnava-Skouras in concluding that the life experience of poor children gives them a privileged standpoint from which to understand the economic system and its effects.

Walkerdine’s second point is that the difference between working and middle class children’s education in mathematics must be seen, not in terms of cognitive development, but of differing desires. While working class children exposed to the shopping game are acting out a fantasy of wealth that they know is utterly fanciful, middle class children are being initiated into a dream of mastery that is pleasurable because it allows for the illusion of control. Walkerdine’s criticism of the shopping game is not that it brings experiential learning into the classroom but that it encourages the wrong kind of fantasy of power. It is the fantasy, and not the arithmetic, that remains at the level of metaphoric content; the children are playing, not at mathematics, but at being rich. The two differing forms of desire differentially encourage internalized forms of privilege and disadvantage that help to maintain social inequity.

There is a curious and telling overlap between Walkerdine’s argument and Muller’s. To Muller, the empowerment gained from formal schooling is based on the ability to think systematically. Broad problem-solving and research skills, he argues, have the most long-term market value. Proficiency in formal mathematics is important because it is an entrance requirement for access into many post-graduate fields. “Learning what counts” (2000, p.65) is thus put in terms of symbolic capital, a means of entry rather than something worth knowing for its own sake. “‘(R)real’ chemists,” to use Muller’s example, “do not actually do the things that schoolchildren have to do to learn school science, but it is on the basis of the latter that chemistry ‘competence’ is constructed, evaluated and rewarded in the school system. This recontextualization is clearly a result of, and will in turn exercise, considerable symbolic power” (2000, p.63).



What is missing from this argument is any exploration of what school-based practices give us that is helpful for their own sake rather than as forms of cultural capital. What is actually being learned at school that gives children the habits of mind and activity to function as productive, thoughtful, fulfilled members of a viable society? Muller's claims rest on a somewhat circular argument: what is taught in, say, school chemistry may have nothing to do with what chemists do, but since educational success is predicated on mastering school chemistry, it is what students must learn. But if the power of school learning is only "symbolic", then perhaps Muller's purported extremists are correct that "the boundary between the mathematics curriculum and everyday knowledge is artificially exclusionary, epistemologically unjustified and must be removed" (2000, p.65). Let me say at once that this is not my argument. But I do believe that it is incumbent upon us to ask: what is it about the learning that "matters" besides – and I do not underestimate the importance of this factor – the symbolic power of an academic degree?

Walkerdine has a forceful answer to this. Education in formal maths and science is empowering because it is part of an initiation into social and intellectual entitlement; what is being developed in middle class children is a certain kind of self as much as a certain kind of intellect, an identity based on as much on a hierarchy of prestige as on a habit of mind. Central to the ways in which children are taught differential claims to epistemological agency are "relations of fantasy, power, and desire, . . . lived relations of power and powerlessness" (1988, p.198) in which gender and class are re-inscribed. Conventional middle class schooling is an education in social authority, and it is certainly arguable that education should provide poor children with the intellectual and attitudinal mind-set to succeed in those terms. But, as Walkerdine puts it, this "is a long way from the dream of reason" (1988, p.201). It is also a long way from Muller's claim that "systematic idealization is the only way to project benign possible futures" (2000, p.90). And it both problematizes and embitters his equating of formal knowledge systems with the reflexivity to dream a more equitable society.

## Mathematics, desire, and the sacred

As Walkerdine points out, conventional discussions of maths education have often been put in terms of desire, specifically the adjudicating of proper versus improper forms of pleasure.<sup>3</sup> According to this discourse, children are to be encouraged to feel “(j)oy in discovery, pleasure in order; not pleasure in other less rational matters, but love and pleasure in ideas. The goal has been to produce children who would become adults without perverse pleasures” (1988, p.6) in “a world freed from clouding emotions” (1988, p.186). It is here that Walkerdine locates Piaget’s vision of education as the “triumph of reason over emotion” in which “the animal passions would be left behind” (1988, p.5).

Walkerdine, as we have seen, locates the privileging of mathematics in the West in the Enlightenment, and ultimately Platonic, dream of Reason as social control (1988, p.187). What middle class children are being taught is a fantasy of playing God, with God as “‘the Divine mathematician’, the fantasy inscribed in the Cogito, the Ratio” (1988, p.199). This dream of Reason holds that the world, as “God’s epistle to mankind”, is “written in mathematical letters” (Shapin, 1994, p.311). But the importance of mathematics is less that it helps us measure and know the world than that it helps us to transcend it. Indeed, the lack of direct correlation between mathematical procedures and the material domain is seen as an important part of its contribution to a moral, well-ordered society; as a means of verifying knowledge without recourse to direct experience, it carries the promise of protection from the defilement of the everyday.

In beginning this exploration, I pointed out that Muller’s evocation of the “sacred” grounds his terminology in a religious metaphoric. Some aspects of this should be clear by now, specifically the use of the moral vocabulary of modesty versus promiscuity applied to theories of knowledge, the relationship

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<sup>3</sup> As an example, she cites Harold Fletcher’s once-popular *Mathematics for Schools* (1970): “children will derive pleasure from the purity and order which they discover” (cited in 1988, p.189).

of mathematics to desire, and the notion of mathematics as language of God.<sup>4</sup>

The distinction between the sacred and the profane is a major theme in Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1947). Profane knowledge includes the material world of everyday sensual experience in which meaning comes directly out of social and interpersonal engagement. Sacred knowledge, on the other hand, is characterized by a symbolic order of conceptual relationships and representations (2000, pp.77-8). According to Durkheim, the distinction between the sacred and profane is "absolute".

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<sup>4</sup> Muller characterizes his position as 'modest' at a number of points in *Reclaiming Knowledge*. He portrays himself as a reasonable man who is startled at the outraged response to his "relatively moderate and modest conclusion" (2000, p.162). And he portrays the truth left available to the post-positivist world as, if no longer "naked", then at least "modestly clothed" (2000, p.145-6).

Modesty as an epistemological descriptor has a quite specific social history; it has its origins in the writings of seventeenth century English experimental science, most specifically in the paradigmatic figure of Sir Robert Boyle. Claiming authority only in "matters of fact"; writing in a "naked" style in explicit contrast to the "promiscuous experiments" and "florid" style of "others", and surrounding himself with "diligent and judicious" men as witnesses to his experiments, Boyle coded the "modest" and "diffident" gentleman as the new epistemological ideal. Unmindful of personal gain or advantage, the genuine "natural philosopher" would be content with bracketing the incontrovertible facts he discovered from the speculations of less modest men (Boyle 1965, pp.306-307; Shapin and Schaffer 1985; Shapin 1994).

Modesty as an epistemological claim is thus historically located within the two contradictions of its origins. First, the claim of modest witness is producible only within high social ranking; Boyle himself, son of the Earl of Cork, personifies a modesty that was understood by his contemporaries to be a form of noblesse oblige. Second, the form of modesty being enacted here is the other side of what Donna Haraway (1997) has termed a dizzying conceit. In separating 'matters of fact' from causal explanations, Boyle could display modesty concerning the latter while at the same time claiming that his 'matters of fact' are unassailable mirrors of reality, unopen to debate or interrogation.

A lifelong celibate, Boyle identified mathematics as a means of "disciplining the mind" and, in the process, contributing to the "Practice of Vertu". Boyle maintained he could control his "raving tendencies" through the use of "Geometricall Speculations". Using mathematical exercises to avoid importunate desires, he could "fix" his thoughts – and the verb is significant – through the "Extractions of the Square and Cubick Roots, with those of other more Difficult and Laborious Operations of Arithmetick and Algebra" (Shapin, 1994, p.320). Read with twenty-first century eyes, this assertion of Boyle's is not without its humor, and I do not suggest that the present issue is the use of mathematics to keep children's hands from straying under the desks. Still, the image of Boyle finding the cubic root of numbers as a way to ignore the desires of the flesh echoes oddly with Walkerdine's theme of mathematics as promoting the wish for control over a rational and ordered universe.

In all the history of human thought there exists no other example of two categories of thought so profoundly differentiated or so ... opposed to one another ... .The sacred and profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two distinct classes, as two worlds between which there is nothing in common ... .The mind irresistibly refuses to allow the two corresponding things to be confounded, or even to be merely put in contact with each other; for such a *promiscuity, even too direct a contiguity*, would contradict too violently the disassociation of these ideas in the mind (1947, p.38-40: my italics).

Muller's use of the notion of the sacred to characterize formal school-based knowledge is consistent with this rhetoric. His discussion of Migiel Hendriks, an unschooled farm worker charged with making wagons, is a case in point. Muller takes his account from the work of Gibson (1996) on the cognitive practices of formally illiterate workers. In interviews with Gibson, Hendriks explains how he calculates based on an understanding of the distribution of weight, the heaviness of the construction materials compared to the likely heaviness of the load, the optimum placement of jack and axle, and the required amount of building materials. In the process, he shows an understanding of the principle of leverage, two- and three-dimensional constructions, and spatial thinking. Hendriks explains that he calculates all of this in his head. "I may not be able to read or write," he tells Gibson, "but I use something I have learnt in one case and adapt it a bit to fit in another case" (1996, p.55).

Gibson's project is to explore the use of higher-order and abstract reasoning among formally illiterate workers. Her argument, which draws on work by O'Connor, Gee and Scribner, is that "Migiel Hendriks's competencies typify those of workers who perform complex cognitive tasks on a regular basis and reveal what Scribner calls 'intellect at work'" (1996, p.53). She argues, further, that, "according to Gee's (1990:153) definition, Hendriks has mastered a secondary discourse involving 'a great many of the same skills, behaviours and ways of thinking that we associate with literacy'" (1996, p.55). He is, in other words, an example of an overlap between knowledge domains characterized by 'promiscuous' combinations of abstract and concrete thought. Hendriks, moreover, is like many farm workers who recount that they have been taught their skills by co-workers on the job. Thus, Gibson's discussion emphasizes a number of specific elements concerning Hendriks' knowledge: that it involves the ability to construct a product mentally before building it physically; that it requires an understanding of principles of what we call science; that it exemplifies cognitive border-crossing; and that it participates in the collective culture of knowledge that workers share. This is not far from what Marx defined as the crux of what makes work "exclusively human":

“A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality” (1974, p.174).

For much of his discussion of Hendriks, Muller follows Gibson’s lead. He recognizes that Hendriks can perform abstract calculations, extrapolate, shift three-dimensional objects in his head, and use formal measurement and quantification. But he diverges from Gibson’s discussion on two revealing points. First, while he agrees that Hendriks has advanced metacognitive skills, he insists that Hendriks has developed his “rather sacred form of common sense” as “a style of reasoning evolved all by himself” (2000, p.88) rather than as part of a collective culture of workplace knowledge, as Gibson contends. Second, Muller wonders how Hendriks “stumbled, uninducted as it were, into the realm of the sacred, into vertical discourse” (2000, p.89). Muller posits an exposure to vertical or protovertical discourses available through television, Bible study, the reading aloud of newspapers, and the literate people on the farm.

Thus, even a clear case in point of a worker’s high level of ‘sacred’ knowledge becomes, in Muller’s hands, an argument for its absence. Far from being typical or even one of a number, Hendriks becomes a solitary phenomenon who must somehow have learned to think through a hidden interaction with formal knowledge systems and who can only communicate what he knows to those adept at those formal knowledges. Drawing on Gibson’s evidence but using her material to make the opposite claim, Muller presents Hendriks as an exception that proves the rule and confirms that the “the manner in which this passage is effected, when it does take place, puts into relief the essential duality of the two kingdoms” (Durkheim, 1947, p.39).

## Boundary-maintenance and the South African discourse on education

It is important to problematize the work the fixation on boundaries is doing in the current South African context. Why is it so frightening that an unschooled worker has the cognitive and social context within which to design a wagon? Or that selling coconuts can serve as well as planning a picnic as an entry into formal maths? Walkerdine, Gibson and constructivists generally assume that different knowledges are produced within different social domains and that

there is no obvious or transparent way to transfer from one to the next. Rather than concluding, however, that only some activities can produce ‘higher order thinking’, they conclude that people develop and utilize such thinking at different occasions and for different reasons depending on culture and circumstance.<sup>5</sup> Thus, they allow us to ask different questions about – and to – a thinker such as Hendriks. Rather than wondering how he had absorbed forms of cognitive thought through hypothetical exposure to formal discourses, we might ask how he developed them *in the absence of* such exposure. If he did not develop his cognitive abilities through formal discourse, how did he develop them? If he is not utilizing schooled thinking in exercising his creative intelligence, what is he doing instead? Answers to those questions can inform a pedagogy that builds the kinds of bridges Walkerdine proposes. They can begin a process that is based neither on the insistence that insularity “should never be in question” (2000, p.48) nor on a hybridity that denies that some forms of knowledge are particularly advantageous in accomplishing particular things. Rather, it can be based on precisely the exploration that Muller proposes but does not further, an exploration of the relationship between knowledge of the everyday world and the formal curriculum. And it will allow us to ask what it is about that formal curriculum that leads to more equitable forms of intellectual empowerment, the terms under which it both authorizes and erases, and what all of us need to learn from both formal and informal knowledges.

While Muller is particularly focused on the purity of boundaried formal knowledge against the promiscuity of knowledge domains, he is not atypical of a particular stream in the current writings of South African academics on the subject of curriculum. One of the most salient characteristics of the current South African discourse on education is the consistency with which cognitive issues are framed in terms of incommensurability.<sup>6</sup> The discourse both recruits explicit dualisms such as abstract/concrete, formal/informal and academic/local and draws on implicit ones such as mind/body, thought/emotion, head/hand. Recent South African academic discussions of the recognition of prior learning, for example, are regularly grounded in a variety of dualistic taxonomies: vertical and horizontal (Bernstein), formal and practical (Bourdieu), context-dependent and context-independent (Vygotsky),

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<sup>5</sup> See Cole *et al.* (1971) for a classic statement of this position.

<sup>6</sup> For helpful discussions of this point, see Osman (2003) and Breier (2003).

generalizing and localizing (Dowling), and Mode 1 and Mode 2 (Gibbons *et al.*).<sup>7</sup> Muller's own contribution, of course, is Durkheim's sacred and profane.

As I argue above, it is a mischaracterization of the mainstream constructivist position as to see it as denying that any such distinctions exist or that there is nothing to be gained from thinking broadly and carefully. I know of no serious educational theorist who opposes teaching learners to be more at home in vertical, textual, and formal categories of thought. Like Walkerdine, however, they do typically argue, first, that such categories are not innocent of either history or power and, second, that complex relationships of overlap and complementarity have often been hidden by and through those power-effects. While I do not have the space here for a full exploration, two points need to be made concerning the currency of dualistic argumentation in the current South African context: that they *are* a specifically South African phenomenon<sup>8</sup> and that they cannot be separated from their own history.<sup>9</sup> It is important to ask what work such dualisms do in contemporary educational debates: What policies do they suggest? What curricula do they hinder or enable? What assumptions do they reinscribe concerning the nature of thought and the relationship between thought and social categories?

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<sup>7</sup> See Bernstein (1999); Vygotsky (1978, 1986), Dowling (1998), and Gibbons *et al.* (1994). For examples of the use of dualisms in South African academic discourse on education, see Shalem and Steinberg (2000), Harris (2000), Breier (2002), and Breier (2003).

<sup>8</sup> As Osman (2003) has noted in terms of RPL, the attention to epistemological dualisms in the literature of experiential learning and the preoccupation with gate-keeping are a specifically South African phenomenon. They are not present in the extensive international literature that has come out of the US, Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, and their presence in the South African context itself has to be problematized and explained. They may be explained to some degree by the fact that the historical inequities of the educational system are more extreme in South Africa than in other white settler societies and that entry into both the neo-liberal global economy and democratic government has been foreshortened. But the attention to gate-keeping and the insistence on the purity of knowledge-domains may also reflect a defensiveness that is a product of the historical moment in which South African academics find themselves, in which the movement for a more just South Africa in which, to their credit, many of them participated, has, as it were, moved closer: out of the halls of government and into the classroom in ways they are not fully able to control. One of the ironic results of this is that, in many cases, the dualist categories are taken from theorists, such as Bernstein and Bourdieu, whose own use of them is epistemologically nuanced and politically progressive but who are used in South Africa to point to far more conservative conclusions. Muller's use of Walkerdine here is another case in point.

<sup>9</sup> There is no denying that the use of such categories in Africa has a long and unlovely history. They were utilized consistently within colonialist anthropology to represent Africa and Africans as the less-than-fully-human Other. For discussions of this, see Masolo (1994) and Mudimbe (1988).

Progressive white academics such as Jo Muller have an honoured place among the white South Africans who opposed apartheid. They long ago committed themselves to justice and to the use of education in the service of more equitable participation and prosperity. As a progressive white academic from New York who came to South Africa for the first time in 1995, I have nothing but respect for the role that Muller and others played. Yet there is something about his discussion of Hendriks that seems an erasure of that history. I have no quarrel with Muller when he laments the denial of the benefits of formal education in the past, and certainly none when he advocates access to formal education in the future. But there is something disturbing in the argument that the cognitive worlds of black South African workers do not allow for envisioning a better world. Surely, the vision of a post-apartheid future was carried most deeply in the minds of those who fought and resisted – and learned and taught – their way into a future based on a richly seen “concept of social change” (2000, p.90).

Muller, of course, is ultimately correct that knowledge must be based on trust. We manage our lives based largely on what other people tell us is true and depend deeply and always on the trustworthiness of that knowledge. Muller’s book is a reminder of how vital it is to practise good faith among scholars, to be trustworthy in representing the arguments of our adversaries and our allies, and to take each other’s cautions seriously. While I take issue with his belief in dualistic insularity and while I believe that hybrid knowledges have always been the norm, Muller is also correct that the mutual demonizations across post-positivist epistemologies have failed us. The trustworthiness of knowledge is predicated on the wisdom to understand which kind of knowledge best suits a given purpose: when it is that science can put needed knowledge into our hands; when we must listen to other forms of knowing. There are overwhelming problems facing South African education, so many that faith in either formal or informal knowledge can appear a kind of nostalgia. But if South African history has proven anything, it is that people dream a better future within – and across – many social and cognitive domains.

Who will be given social agency is both an epistemological and political question. Whose experience of the past and whose vision of the future will be considered credible? Whose modest testimony will be allowed to contribute to a shared understanding of the nature of the world? If we are to dream a better future, we will have to attend to practical knowledge and local wisdom. We will have to give many more people access to formal knowledge. And we will have to learn to live in a world in which both those things are true.



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# 'Indigenous knowledge' - Conceptions and misconceptions

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## Abstract

'Indigenous knowledge' is a relatively recent buzz phrase that, amongst other things, constitutes part of a challenge to 'western' education. Apologists of indigenous knowledge not only maintain that its study has a profound effect on education and educational curricula but emphasise its significance in antiracist, antisexist and postcolonialist discourse, in general, and in terms of the 'African Renaissance', in particular. In this paper, I argue the following: (1) 'indigenous knowledge' involves at best an incomplete, partial or, at worst, a questionable understanding or conception of knowledge; (2) as a tool in anti-discrimination and anti-repression discourse (e.g. driving discussions around literacy, numeracy, poverty alleviation and development strategies in Africa), 'indigenous knowledge' is largely inappropriate. I show, further, that in the development of 'knowledge', following some necessary conceptual readjustments in our understanding of this term, there is considerably greater common ground than admitted by theorists. It is this acknowledgement, not lip service to a popular concept of debatable relevance, that has profound educational and ethical consequences.

Spirituality in an Aboriginal sense is. . . the starting point that requires no demonstration or proof; it exists and all truths begin and end there. This is the fundamental difference between what is seen as scientific truth and spiritual truth in contemporary society. To look for objectivity in the Aboriginal world is to question one's identity and one's sense of being. Objectivity as a notion is culturally inappropriate. . . One does not look for something that is not there (Scott Fatnowna and Harry Pickett, 2002b).

The *tokoloshe* is real – it does exist. . . When Africans fear the *tokoloshe* they are not fearing a figment of their imaginations. . . I have personally fallen victim to *mantindane* – not once, but three times – and I still carry the scars on my body to testify to the truth of what I say (Credo Mutwa, *Isilwane – The Animal*).

Traditionally, education proceeded along colonialist lines, with virtually total disregard for indigenous knowledge systems (William Makgoba, in a lunchtime talk on *Africanisation and education*, co-presented with Console Tleane in the Department of Education/ University of the Witwatersrand, 23-09-1998).

## The idea of indigenous knowledge

Although the manifestation of what is taken to be indigenous knowledge could presumably be traced back roughly to the origins of humankind, the idea of indigenous knowledge is a relatively recent phenomenon. It has arguably gained conceptual and discursive currency only during the last twenty-odd years. Especially in recent years it has been the subject of congresses, conferences, meetings, as well as countless papers, articles and reports. What, then, is 'indigenous knowledge'? What is the emphasis on indigenous knowledge meant to achieve?

'Indigenous knowledge' is generally taken to cover local, traditional, nonwestern beliefs, practices, customs and world views, and frequently also to refer to alternative, informal forms of knowledge. Although some writers reject this contraposition, 'indigenous knowledge' is commonly contrasted, implicitly or explicitly, with 'knowledge from abroad', a 'global', 'cosmopolitan', 'western', 'formal' or 'world' (system of) knowledge (*cf* Hountondji, 1995; Cresswell, 1998; Semali and Kincheloe, eds, 1999 *passim*; Odora Hoppers, 2002a; Odora Hoppers 2002 *passim*). Rather perplexingly, while a lot has been said and continues to be said about the idea of indigeneity, I have yet to come across a writer or author willing to furnish an explanation of their understanding or concept of 'knowledge'. Although (or because?) the terms 'knowledge' and 'epistemology/epistemological' are used in liberal abundance, no account is given of the actual meaning/s of the terms. Thus, there is a general failure among theorists to appreciate and engage with the ramifications of these concepts. Instead, 'indigenous knowledge' is

unquestioningly employed as an umbrella concept to cover practices, skills, customs, worldviews, perceptions, as well as theoretical and factual understandings.

With regard to the second question, as to what the focus on indigenous knowledge is hoped to achieve, there are several related ideas that appear again and again (*cf* Semali and Kincheloe, 1999 *passim*; Odora Hoppers, 2002 *passim*): reclamation of cultural or traditional heritage; decolonisation of mind and thought; recognition and acknowledgement of self-determining development; protection against further colonisation, exploitation, appropriation and/or commercialisation; legitimation or validation of indigenous practices and world views; and condemnation of, or at least caution against, the subjugation of nature and general oppressiveness of nonindigenous rationality, science and technology.

Before I go on to critique the notion of indigenous knowledge, I want to state that I am in principle in complete agreement with what underlies many indigenous knowledge projects. Firstly, western knowledge, science, technology and 'rationality' have led to, or have had as a significant goal, the subjugation of nature, and so far have been devastatingly efficient. The pursuit of nuclear energy, wholesale deforestation and destruction of flora and fauna, factory farming of nonhuman animals for human consumption, vivisection and genetic engineering are deplorable and – indeed – *irrational*. Secondly, the inferiorisation of indigenous peoples' practices, skills and insights has, to a large extent, been arrogant and of similarly questionable rationality. Thirdly, current attempts by industrial and high-tech nations to (re)colonise or appropriate for commercial gain these practices, skills and insights are exploitative and contemptible.

Having said this, however, I consider appeals to the concept of indigenous knowledge, and its 'legitimation' or 'validation', as a remedy or countermeasure to be completely misguided. Any such appeal is inadequate, not least because of a general lack of appreciation of the semantic and logical problems involved in employing and applying the concept of 'knowledge' beyond the sense of practice or skill, while still referring to the knowledge in question as 'indigenous' and – as such – as 'fundamentally different', 'unique' and 'incommensurable' or 'incompatible' with 'modern' knowledge (Prakash, 1999, pp.160, 167, 168; Reynar, 1999, p.301, fn. 2). As I have mentioned earlier, there is almost a complete absence of definition, even of working definitions, of this crucial idea in the various papers that have been written and published over the years. In what follows, I will attempt to indicate what such

a definition might look like. This will serve not only as conceptual clarification but also as the basis for my misgivings about indigenous 'knowledge'.

## Towards a definition of 'knowledge'

If we consider how the terms 'know' and 'knowledge' are commonly used, we are able to recognise and distinguish between three main kinds: *knowledge-that* or *factual knowledge*, *knowledge-how* or *practical knowledge* and, lastly, *knowledge of persons, places, or things* or *knowledge by acquaintance*. If discussion of the uniqueness of indigenous people's knowledge interprets it in the third sense, it is fairly uncontroversial. Acquaintance with states of affairs, geographical terrain etc. differs from individual to individual, society to society, culture to culture – take Afghan familiarity with their own mountainous regions, something not shared by American or Russian soldiers.

However, in the discussion that follows, I will concentrate primarily on the first two as the kinds of knowledge that are relevant here. It is my suspicion that many, if not most, indigenous knowledge projects focus on the second. The understanding of 'indigenous knowledge' as 'indigenous practice, skill or know-how', too, is reasonably unproblematic. It makes perfect sense to say that (different individuals in) different cultures or societies possess skills or know-how not shared by others. Of course, there is often a close connection between practical and factual knowledge. A traditional healer *knows how* to cure people – and this implies that she presumably *knows that* certain roots, berries or barks have the requisite disease-curing properties. The Inuit who *knows how* to distinguish between several shades of white as well as several different types of snow will be able to orientate himself accordingly, will *know that* an animal is at a certain distance from him and that a certain stretch of snow or ice will support his weight. The problem arises when the two kinds of knowledge are treated as if there is no distinction between them, or at least as if they are mutually dependent. In order to establish why this is problematic, I need to provide a definition of factual knowledge, or *knowledge-that*.

Traditionally, this kind of knowledge (often also referred to as *propositional knowledge*) has been argued to have three necessary and logically independent components: belief, justification and truth. In order for a person to know something (*p*), she has to *believe that p*, she has to be *justified in believing that p* (i.e. she has to be *in a position to know that p*), and *p* has to be *true*. Each of

these components has been considered essential. In isolation they do not amount to knowledge, but in combination they are considered sufficient for knowledge. This definition has been challenged in recent years, mainly with regard to the sufficiency of the three conditions (Gettier, 1963). In principle I think the objections can be met, perhaps by adding a fourth condition: a person's *justification for believing that p must be suitably connected to the truth of p*. Now, even if these conditions are jointly sufficient for knowledge, there remains considerable room for debate over what precisely the justification condition involves – what degree of justification is required, what kind of justification is appropriate etc. (Horsthemke, 2001). However, for present purposes this (amended) definition should suffice.

I consider this conception of factual or propositional knowledge to be not only plausible but indispensable for clearing up some of the confusions in the debate around indigenous knowledge. In other words, the philosophical account of the nature of knowledge may be used as a yardstick. Thus, the onus will be on anyone who is opposed to the analysis presented here to propose not only an alternative but a more feasible definition, one that is sufficiently unambiguous and comprehensive to meet the challenges raised in this paper. To assert, as I expect some theorists may do, that the philosophical definition presented here is itself an instance of an oppressive, formal, nonindigenous system of thought, would be to shirk the issue and to attempt to employ the very concepts that are problematised in a tacitly self-validating manner.

## Problems: superstition, relativism, etc.

The way I see it, in cases where 'indigenous knowledge' is taken to refer not to practical knowledge and skills but to *knowledge-that*, and where it is contrasted with nonindigenous or cosmopolitan knowledge, problems are rife. One needs to be clear about what the notion of indigenous knowledge implies in such cases. Current usage by theorists generally suggests several things, all equally problematic.

In some instances, 'indigenous knowledge' is taken to cover all kinds of beliefs, with little or no reference to truth or justification. This elevates to the status of knowledge not only mere assumption and opinion, but also superstition, divination, soothsaying and the like (as Semali, 1999, p.98, and Crossman and Devisch, 2002, p.117, attempt to do). In the absence of any explicit mention of truth, then, the applicable idea would be that of



‘indigenous beliefs’. Given the philosophical definition of knowledge, belief – even justified belief – does not amount to knowledge.

A recent article by Philip Higgs constitutes a case in point. He argues that “African philosophy, as a system of African knowledge(s), can provide a useful philosophical framework for the construction of empowering knowledge that will enable communities in South Africa to participate in their own educational development” (Higgs, 2003, p.5). There is in Higgs an unacknowledged quantum leap from “traditional African world-views” to “indigenous African knowledge system” (p.11). The ‘quantum leap’ in question concerns not only the move from (a multitude of) ‘world-views’ to a (single) ‘knowledge system’ but that, implicit rather than explicit, from ‘*belief* systems’ to ‘*knowledge* system’. In a related sense, a major problem concerns what Higgs identifies as a major contribution of African philosophy, namely the struggle of establishing an ‘African identity’ – frequently contrasted with a ‘Western Eurocentric identity’ (Higgs, 2003, pp.6, 8-11; this fallacy of applying the collective singular is also committed in Makgoba, 1997, p.199: “Africanisation is the process of defining or interpreting African identity and culture”). Coupled with this idea is that of “a distinctively African epistemic identity”, an “indigenous (African) epistemological framework”, a “unique African order of knowledge” or “distinctively African knowledge system” that challenges “the hegemony of Western Eurocentric forms of universal knowledge” (Higgs, 2003, pp.5, 7, 8, 16, 17).

Just as there is no (one or single) African knowledge system, and certainly not one that subsumes the various African world-views, the notion of a single, homogeneous, readily identifiable ‘African identity’ (or ‘European identity’, for that matter) is mistaken. There is a multitude of heterogeneous, contradictory, frequently incoherent and inconsistent, and occasionally overlapping African identities, sometimes even within one and the same person. Failure to recognise this is not only to fly in the face of common experience but to undermine endeavours of addressing the challenges of multiculturalism (such as responding to diversity and differences, often profound) in theory and practice. While there may exist “commonalities in the African experience” (pp.13, 16), these are arguably shared by all small-scale societies.

Finally, Higgs’s references to “a distinctively African epistemic identity”, an “indigenous (African) epistemological framework” or a “unique African order of knowledge” are highly problematic (*cf* also Moodie, 2003, p.7). Just how ‘indigenous’ or ‘African’ can an epistemological framework be? Furthermore,

to speak of 'the hegemony of *Western Eurocentric* forms of *universal knowledge*' (which may well be a contradiction in terms), coupled with the claim that the challenge to these comes from 'a distinctively African knowledge system', points to a thorough-going epistemological relativism – with all its problems.

To sum up, then: Higgs's project of enlisting the help of "African philosophy . . . (to) provide a useful. . . framework for the construction of empowering knowledge that will enable communities in South Africa to participate in their own educational development" (Higgs, 2003, p.5) is doomed to failure. Ben Parker has commented that Higgs's "failures are useful insofar as they raise interesting questions about philosophical and educational discourses and the ways they are embedded in communities" (Parker, 2003, p.23). Briefly, Parker's problems with Higgs stem from the consideration that the pedagogies and values enumerated by the latter are 'distinctively' or 'particularly African'. Parker also doubts that these stem from a "deep socioethical sense of cultural unity" among Africans (Parker, 2003, p.29). It follows, he says, that without "a clear understanding of what makes values into *African* values, we cannot give a clear meaning to an 'activist African philosophy of education'" (Parker, 2003, p.30).

Parker is somewhat uncritical *vis-à-vis* Higgs's identification of 'traditional African world-views' as 'philosophy', and their purported challenge to "the hegemony of Western forms of universal knowledge" (Higgs, 2003, pp.5, 17; Parker, 2003, pp.26, 27), as well as in his implicit acceptance (with Makgoba and Higgs) of, and lip service to, "*an African culture and identity*" (Parker, 2003, p.31). Yet, he rightly cautions against the negation of universalism within (some) African philosophy: "There is a danger that this form of 'Africanism' becomes isolationist and exclusionary of the non-African". He asks, tellingly, "If one rejects all Eurocentric values, does one also reject human rights?" (Parker, 2003, p.32) The problem, I submit, resides with the basic irrationality that underlies the sort of name-calling Parker seems to be referring to here. The idea of human rights, whatever its origin, cannot by definition be anything but a universal value. (This consideration will prove to be significant later in this paper.) Similarly, there is an important sense in which knowledge – in order to be knowledge in the factual or propositional sense – is necessarily universal.

Writers often also refer to the (need for) 'validation' or 'legitimation' of indigenous knowledge, or to 'warranted' and 'valid' knowledge (*cf* Semali and Kincheloe, 1999, p.35; Rains, 1999, p.328; Odora Hoppers, 2002a, p.7; Odora

Hoppers, 2002c, pp.7, 12; Fatnowna and Pickett, 2002a, p.75; Moodie, 2003, p.8). All these references are tautologies. Considering the centrality of justification, knowledge is necessarily valid, legitimate, warranted. There simply could be no *other* knowledge, i.e. knowledge that is invalid, illegitimate or unwarranted. It would not be *knowledge* then. This is not to deny that knowledge can be and often is subjugated. A pertinent consideration here would concern the impact of the first significant astronomical discoveries on a flat-earth, geocentric worldview, or of the theory of evolution on an orthodox, deity-fearing mindset, and the subsequent suppression of these views. But here the emphasis has changed, subtly, to incorporate *truth*. (It should be noted that reference to ‘true knowledge’, too, involves a tautology.)

In other instances, reference to truth is explicit, the underlying assumption being that there are multitudinous truths, that with a multiplicity of indigenous cultures and subcultures there exists a multiplicity of truths, none of which are superior to any other (*cf* Semali and Kincheloe, 1999, pp.27, 28; Abdullah and Stringer, 1999, p.153; Odora Hoppers, 2002c, p.14; Fatnowna and Pickett, 2002b, p.214). This kind of view leads directly to epistemological relativism and to relativism about truth, with all their attendant difficulties. Why is relativism problematic? Briefly, to be a relativist about knowledge is to maintain that there is no objective knowledge of reality (or better: of *realities*) independently of knowers from relevant social groups. The difficulty for relativists is to avoid the inconsistent claim that the relativistic thesis is itself an item of objective knowledge. To be a relativist about truth is to maintain that there is no universal truth, that there is only a multitude of truths. The difficulty for relativists is to avoid the inconsistent claim that the relativistic thesis is itself universally (transculturally) true.

As a pertinent case, in the latter regard, I want to cite Elza Venter who states that the “creation of a non-racial, non-sexist democratic South Africa presents a challenge to everybody in the country” (Venter, 1997, p.57). Educators not only “need to learn to accommodate different value systems and to place them within a framework of common human values” but “as significant change agents in a diverse society. . . should (also) be educated to accept that there is no absolute, universally uncontested truth” (Venter, 1997, p.57). This is a point Venter makes repeatedly: “There is no absolute truth endorsed by every scientist and educational practitioner through all time” (Venter, 1997, p.59) and, “People need to accept that there is no one unique truth which is fixed and found, but rather a diversity of valid, and even conflicting, versions of a world in the making” (Venter, 1997, p.62). Throughout, Venter seems to be unaware of the inconsistency of advancing these statements as truths. Apart

from endorsing a problematic relativism about truth, her lip service to value pluralism frequently assumes the shape of cultural or moral relativism. Given a pluralism of value systems, and the purported absence of a vantage point from which truths (scientific or normative) could be established, her rejection of former South African philosophies of education, Christian National Education and fundamental pedagogics, is similarly inconsistent. In South Africa, Venter claims, there “should not only be an emphasis on similarities within differences, but also on the differences *per se*, to get the whole picture” (Venter, 1997, pp.61-62). Again, this presupposes the possibility of a vantage point from which one can get and evaluate ‘the whole picture’ – which her own position does not appear to yield.

A related and similarly problematic view implicitly concerns the idea of certainty and, therefore, the justification condition in the definition of knowledge given above. It is a view that has been gaining currency since the introduction of the new education system in South Africa. Unlike the old approach that regarded knowledge as fixed, outcomes-based education or OBE – we are told – regards knowledge as uncertain and changing. (For a similar view, see Crossman and Devisch, 2002, p.110.) The obvious difficulty is, of course, to avoid advancing the proposal that ‘knowledge is uncertain and changing’ as a knowledge claim, since this would lead to paradox. If this *is* knowledge, then it is itself subject to uncertainty and change – which contradicts the initial statement. It may at some point turn out to be no longer true (meaning that knowledge may at some point turn out to be *certain* and *unchanging*). If, on the other hand, this piece of knowledge is itself certain and not subject to change, then there is *some* knowledge that is *not* uncertain and changing – which, again, contradicts the statement.

The implications should be obvious now. If something is referred to as ‘indigenous knowledge’ in the sense of factual or propositional knowledge, it must meet the requisite criteria: belief, justification and truth. If it does, it is on a par with nonindigenous knowledge in a particular area or field. Thus, the *sangoma*’s (traditional healer’s) knowledge would be on a par with that of a general medical practitioner, like the knowledge of a naturopath or homoeopath. The insights into climate change, animal behaviour and plant life cycles of a Bushman or South American Indian would be on a par with those of western biologists or climatologists. In fact, both could arguably learn from each other. It is important to bear in mind that there is no question here of different truths (different beliefs perhaps, different methods of justification almost certainly), no question of (radically) different knowledges. Truth and reality are essentially *not* in the eye of the beholder.

What Tony Moodie, in a recent paper, describes as “alternative ways of knowing” and considers to characterise a “participatory epistemology” (Moodie, 2003, pp.7, 20), encompasses intuition or intuitive modes of consciousness, “matters of ‘spirit’” (Moodie, 2003, p.19). Leaning as it does heavily on trends emanating from Romanticism, Moodie’s argument is in essence a somewhat uncritical tribute to ‘non-western intellectual traditions’, a eulogy of the uncorrupted ‘natural condition’ of the ‘noble savage’. The latter idea is *implicit*, of course – given that it is hardly ‘politically correct’. Yet, the modern heirs of this conception of human beings are *inter alia* Afrocentrism and the African Renaissance. On the other hand, Moodie’s idea of a ‘participatory epistemology’ is very useful and can conceivably be pursued and applied *without* embracing relativism or a questionable romanticisation of the indigene.

## Attempts to establish common ground:

### *Cosmic Africa and Where The Green Ants Dream*

In what follows, I wish to review two filmic suggestions – one explicit, the other less overt – for resolving the apparent conflicts regarding culture and cognition with which my paper is concerned. The film *Cosmic Africa*, by South African brothers Craig and Damon Foster, documents the journey of South African astrophysicist Thebe Medupe, who has just completed his doctorate. His mission is stated at the very beginning of the film: “I need to discover whether my science has a place in Africa, and whether Africa has a place in my science.” His journey leads him to the Ju’hoansi in Namibia, the Dogon in Mali and to what is conceivably the site of the first observatory in Egypt.

During his visit to Namibia, Medupe learns not only of Ju’hoansi reliance on the stars as to when to plant and to harvest but many of the stories connected to the sun, moon and stars: “Where I see two giant stars, they (the Ju’hoansi and their shaman Kxao Tami) see two sons, lions, eland horns and giant furnaces.” His visit to the Ju’hoansi coincides with a total solar eclipse. He worries about whether he should tell the people about what is going to happen but decides not to: they would want to know how he knows. Instead, he sets up his equipment. When the eclipse happens, people talk about the return of winter and blame the intruder and his equipment: “The telescope is eating up the sun.” After the eclipse and subsequent reconciliation, Medupe says, “For

the first time I see how the stars affect the way people live. My science and my Africa are beginning to come together.”

This impression is deepened with the visit to the Dogon, whose knowledge of the stars is legendary. Their daily and seasonal activities, routines and customs are guided, for example, by the appearance of what we call Venus, the Pleiades etc. One of the elders, spiritual leader Annaye Doumbo, claims, “In our Dogon way, the man who makes technology is the sorcerer of the sun”. Given the harsh conditions under which they live, to the Dogon knowing the stars can mean the difference between life and death. Does the elder know that human beings have walked on the moon? “There is no gate to the moon”, is the reply, “It is not possible for anyone to go there, unless they are the little brother of God.”

The last leg of Medupe’s journey is what is presented as the origin of astronomy, Egypt. (There is no mention of the innovations and discoveries of the Maya and Aztecs.) In the southern Egyptian desert, near the border of Sudan, he discovers what is conceivably the first observatory, countless stones emanating from a centre, in order to trace the rising and setting of the sun during the year: “The origin of astronomy, its measuring and predicting, is in Africa. . . Stones took the place that my computer takes now.”

It is unfortunate that, throughout the film, Medupe and the Foster brothers never explore any of the tensions between traditional, indigenous and scientific world views. They seem satisfied with just noting the different perceptions and appear to assume that there is no problem of reconciliation of myth or legend with scientific fact. At the end of the film, Medupe states that he has come “full circle”, that his journey has served to (re)unite “his science” and “his Africa”, without so much as an attempt to account for the contradictions he has encountered between spirituality and astronomy.

In contrast to this kind of bald assertion, German film maker Werner Herzog’s film *Wo die grünen Ameisen träumen* offers a tacit suggestion how apparent cultural, cognitive and epistemological impasses might be resolved. A huge international mining corporation wants to do some excavations and subsequent land development, mining in a particular region in rural Australia. The region targeted turns out to include a sacred site for indigenous Australians. Wanting to keep everything legitimate and above board, the company offers the Aboriginal people generous recompensation. The latter, through their spokespersons, refuse to accept the offer. When asked for the reason for their refusal – after all, the sum offered is perceived to be able to make a major

difference with regard to the general upliftment of the community – the company representatives are offered a simple but cryptic answer: “Because the green ants are dreaming, and their dreams may not be disturbed.” Irritated by this apparent stubbornness and irrationality, the corporation transfers a certain sum to a bank account opened especially for Aboriginal purposes and sends in bulldozers, trucks, tractors and the like. On their arrival in the region, company workers find Aboriginal people blocking the way, seated in silent protest, refusing to allow any of the vehicles through.

This scenario appears to offer a classic example of the kind of impasse mentioned above: western technology, science and development projects versus indigenous knowledge and spirituality, with neither side being able or perhaps even wanting to comprehend the other’s rationale. Yet, examined carefully, the Aboriginal response may also be taken to allude to ecological disaster. While its spiritual element may be inaccessible to western developers, the warning concerning devastation of the environment certainly is not. Thus, *over and above* the blatant immorality of the disregard for indigenous cultural and spiritual heritage, there are cogent objective reasons for resolving this impasse one way rather than another.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the emphasis of indigenous knowledge is held to be significant with regard to antiracism, antisexism, and postcolonialism, in general, and in terms of the ‘African Renaissance’ (Odora Hoppers, 2000; Ntuli, 2002), in particular. If I am correct in having diagnosed ‘indigenous knowledge’ as involving at best an incomplete, partial or, at worst, a questionable understanding or conception of knowledge, the questions that remain to be answered are: What *is* an appropriate tool in terms of anti-discrimination and anti-repression? Is the study of indigenous knowledge irrelevant in terms of education and educational curricula in South Africa?

## Educational and ethical consequences

Recognition, protection against exploitation, appropriation, counteracting wholesale subjugation of everything that is deemed subjugatable is best achieved not on the basis of appeals to the validity of ‘indigenous knowledge’ and ‘indigenous knowledge systems’, but by locating the pleas for recognition etc. in a rights-based framework. The latter has potential for the necessary educational, ethical and political clout to effect lasting changes. Insofar as human rights are anchored in as well as responsive to human agency, rights

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are essential for the protection of human differences. In essence, taking rights seriously implies taking individual, social and cultural identity seriously.

What are the implications for education? Which aspects of so-called 'indigenous', 'local', 'alternative', 'informal' and – in our case – African traditional knowledge should be taught or included in the curriculum? Which should be left out? On what grounds? The question as to what should be left out is fairly easily answered. Not included in the curriculum, i.e. not under the guise of 'knowledge', should be mere beliefs or opinions unanchored by reason/s, bald assertions, superstitions, prejudice, bias – in fact anything that involves myth, fabrication and constitutes an infringement on the rights of learners. However, it may be pedagogically and epistemically useful to teach these *qua* beliefs, opinions, assertions, superstitions, prejudice and bias.

The question as to which aspects of, say, African traditional knowledge should be included probably requires a more comprehensive response than I am able to provide here. Briefly, skills and practical knowledge are worthy of inclusion, as are traditional music, art, dance, and folklore (*qua* folklore). Moreover, it follows from the account provided above that anything that meets the essential requirements for *knowledge-that* could in principle be included, traditional African knowledge of agriculture and environment, insights into conflict-resolution and the like. Naturally, the context and environment of learners should be taken into account here. That is to say, learners should be taught only what is appropriate to their age or, more correctly, to their cognitive and affective capabilities. Similarly, they should be taught primarily what is relevant or what is likely to be relevant to their lives.

A *sangoma's* insight that one should only use a limited amount of bark from a given tree, or that one should harvest no more than one-tenth of a given natural resource (i.e. harvest a plant only if it is one of ten such plants growing in the vicinity), constitutes an insight that may not be shared by many, but it has universal value and application. There is a staggering amount of common ground between cultures, not only in terms of factual knowledge but also in terms of values. A rapprochement between so-called 'indigenous' and 'nonindigenous' insights is not only possible but desirable – on educational, ethical, as well as political grounds.



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# Sign, frame and significance: studying student teachers' reading of the particular

Yael Shalem

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*The orientation of the grammar of vertical discourse is  
Towards the future on the basis of an invisible past,  
And the invisible past is a whole re-contextualising apparatus. . .  
So there is a vast invisibility behind  
Any sentence in vertical discourse, vast invisibility.*  
(Basil Bernstein, Cape Town, 1997).

Bernstein uses the logic of 'oppositional forms' to describe the various ways in which pedagogical practices can work. According to Bernstein, his specialised conceptual tools help to generate descriptions of how 'power and control relations' constitute educational practices inside and outside the classroom. He calls these tools "internal language of description" (1975, 1990 and 1996). Power and control relations are key concepts in Bernstein's internal language of description. 'Power relations' refer to the form of boundaries between educational structures in the school, between its social agents (management, teachers and learners), between the various teaching subjects transmitted in the school, and within a teaching subject between the contents of the syllabus. Bernstein uses the notion of 'classification' when he describes the strength of a boundary. Relations of power in education are determined historically by various types of social struggles (political, economic, and epistemological). These struggles create dominant forms of power relations. The challenge to and the maintenance of dominant forms of power relations in a social environment are enacted through different kinds of interactions which are structured by what Bernstein calls "relations of control". Bernstein uses 'frame' to describe the form of control that regulates the mode in which social agents, located in a classified domain of activity, are able to communicate socially.

What intrigues me about Bernstein's internal language of description is the notion of 'oppositional forms' with which he describes how to connect opposites to each other. Bernstein draws a distinction between reading

‘opposites’ via the logic of simple dichotomy and reading them relationally, via the logic of differentiation. In a (very) few places in his work (1975, pp.3-4; 1996, p.4 and p.26; 2000, p.156) Bernstein stresses that he does not relate the poles in a binary (e.g. implicit/explicit, intimacy/distance, visible/invisible, positional/personal) through the logic of simple dichotomy, but rather through the logic of differentiation. A reading through logic of differentiation can show how a highly ritualized communication between teachers and learners (i.e. the discipline form in the school environment is highly controlled and so the relation between teachers and learners is very formal) can co-exist alongside a fairly open approach to, for example the pacing of the content taught in the classroom. And so a highly *stratified* learning environment (with clear status boundaries, clear demarcation of content knowledge, and positional forms of control over learners’ behaviour) could require teachers at the same time to recognise differentiation of learners’ needs and to relax their pace accordingly (so that learners can influence the pacing of their expected acquisitions). This kind of description is a relational reading of opposites; it allows for co- existence of oppositional forms – a *personal* form of control over acquisition time alongside a *positional* form of control over social behaviour.

In 2001 I gave my post-graduate school-based students a portfolio task which required them to select a school practice and use Bernstein’s analysis (*Ritual in Education*, 1975) of different learning environments to describe the ways in which their school constructs a culture of learning and teaching. Although I thought that my teaching emphasized an alternative mode of description to the common binary mode of description, I found that students largely remained within the binary mode of description. Clearly the students found it very difficult to specialise their texts. My specific aim in this paper is to examine how 4 student teachers selected ‘contextually specific meanings’ (or meanings that they acquired during school practice, in tacit relations of acquisition) and generalised them into an academic text, characterised by specialised, discipline-based criteria. My broad aim is to understand the difficulties which school-based student teachers’ experience in acquiring educational theory. Linked to this is my aim to contribute to current thinking on alternative modes of teacher education.

The central claim that I want to make through this investigation is that school-based teacher education programmes need to take seriously the discursive gap between disciplinary knowledge (the general) and experiential knowledge (the particular). I see the main pedagogical project of teacher education programmes in ‘filling up’ the discursive gap with generative languages of

description. Without doing this, I believe, it is quite likely that school-based learning will function as undifferentiated social spaces from which student teachers will produce descriptions with a very weak grammar and with not much educational significance.

The paper investigates how 4 school-based student teachers interpreted the mode of interrogation that informs Bernstein's theory of the social (1975); how they used it to produce a specialised text in which they describe an empirical object in their school. My investigation employs Bernstein's conceptual tools of 'recognition' and 'realization rules' (1990). These are key conceptual tools in Bernstein's internal language of description of educational evaluation. In short 'Recognition' refers to the student's ability to classify legitimate meanings, that is, to know what goes with what and what may not be put together. 'Realisation' refers to the student's ability to produce what counts a legitimate text (Bernstein, 1990, pp.29-32).<sup>1</sup> I use these notions to evaluate the extent to which the students managed to grasp Bernstein's mode of interrogation – his logic of 'oppositional form'. So my investigation is informed by Bernstein's internal language of description, in particular, his notions of classification and frame, his logic of description ('oppositional form') and his notions of 'recognition' and 'realisation'. But, in order to describe the quality of the students' productions, I needed to develop an external language of description or a coding scheme. My external language of description draws heavily on what Bernstein calls the discursive rules which frame the instructional context of teaching ('selection', 'sequence', 'pacing' and 'evaluation criteria'). My use of these rules to construct my coding scheme could create confusion between the theory (Bernstein's internal language of description) and the tool of my analysis of students specialised productions (external language of description). I am aware of this. Nevertheless, I decided to use Bernstein's discursive rules (with a slight difference and more specification) with a subtle turn. Bernstein offers the discursive rules to describe the specialisation of a teaching practice. I use these rules to describe my students' acquisition and production of a specialised academic text, with special reference to their recognition and realisation of the conceptual challenge embodied in the logic of description of 'oppositional forms'.

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the excellent examples of external language of descriptions and their relationship to internal language of description in Morais et. al. (1992); Morais and Antunes (1994) and; Morais and Neves 2001. I also learnt a lot from Ensor's recent work on pedagogical modalities in teacher education (2002).



My analysis aims to respond to three questions:

- Does the student recognise ‘oppositional forms’ and if not, what form does the student recognise instead?
- Are all the discursive rules of framing equally important for the production of a specialised text?
- Can the coding scheme be used to measure degrees of recognition and realisation?

Although the analysis can be used indirectly to map backwards the success of the course to provide access to the recognition and realisation rules, this is not its main purpose. The data that reported here is used mainly to demonstrate the instrument of description I developed for my investigation of students’ production of specialised text. The investigation here is not conclusive. It does, however, offer implications for some of the problems which school-based teacher education courses, learnerships in particular, can run into.

I begin the analysis by looking at some of the pedagogical difficulties that emerge in educational courses that draw on disciplines of knowledge with ‘weak grammar’ (Bernstein 1996). I use this part of the discussion to reflect on my attempts to transmit the criteria of ‘oppositional form’ in my course. I then move on to examine the task that I gave the students as part of their portfolio-work for the course. I believe that the difficulties the students experienced are also related to the complexity of Bernstein’s analytical style. I therefore decided to examine how he introduces ‘oppositional forms’; this being the main conceptual challenge of the specialised knowledge I am trying to transmit in the course. In this analysis (third section) I try to clarify Bernstein’s logic of description but also to suggest that the concept operates somewhat invisibly in Bernstein’s internal language of description. The last two sections of the paper describe the coding system (external language of description) and demonstrate how I used it to evaluate the students’ recognition and realisation of the task, analysing six examples of the students’ work.

## On the ‘Particular’ and the ‘General’ in teacher education

Recent studies on teacher education which have investigated the complex conceptual base of teaching (Darling-Hammond et. al., 1999; Darling-

Hammond and McLaughlin, 1999; Shulman, 1992; Ball and Cohen, 1999) insist that teacher education programs should give students access to “the codified and yet-to-be-codified maxims and understandings that guide the practices of able teachers” (Darling-Hammond et. al., 1999 p.32). Ball and Cohen, for example, argue that teaching practice “cannot be wholly equipped by some well-considered body of knowledge, as teaching occurs in particulars – particular students interacting with particular teachers over particular ideas in particular circumstances” (1999, p.10). Hence the need to add new discursive contexts of acquisition like ‘internships’ and ‘extended cases’ to discipline-based formal knowledge of teaching (Darling-Hammond et. al., 1999; Shulman, 1992; Doyle, 1990; Liberman and Miller, 1990; Teitel, 1997). Internship, Darling-Hammond et. al., argue, “will offer prospective teachers the opportunity to put theory into practice and to exercise complex decision making under the supervision of experienced expert practitioners” (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 1999, p.126). The method of extended cases or narratives, Doyle suggests, will expose student teachers to ‘stored meanings’ or to the knowledge that is “richly imbued with the specifics of the contexts in which teaching occurs” (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, p.33).

Explored largely from a psychological perspective, these studies attempt to bridge the gap between principled knowledge and experiential knowledge or between what I call specialised texts and contextually specific meanings. What the studies, ignore, however, is that each type of text is acquired in a different site of acquisition (university and school internship respectively) and is structured, conceptually, very differently. What is missing therefore is a sociological engagement with how students transfer educational knowledge from one site to another. More recently, Ensor conducted intensive sociological investigation into the ways in which knowledge about teaching gets “disembedded from one social context and inserted into others” (Ensor, 2001, p.298) e.g. from a pre-service course into its context of application. With specific reference to a secondary mathematics teacher education method course, Ensor’s examination maps what Bernstein calls the process of recontextualising (Bernstein, 1975, 1990 and 1996). She does that by looking at how the pedagogic discourse of the course is structured, transmitted and acquired. The investigation in this paper attempts a modest version of this kind of sociology of teacher education.

Recent research has shown that the horizontal structure of the discipline of sociology with its weak grammar presents conceptual difficulties for students (Bernstein, 1996, 2000; Moore and Maton, 2001; Moore and Muller, 1999, 2002; Moore and Young, 2002, Shalem and Steinberg, 2002). Very often

students of sociology fear that they do not know when they are speaking sociology and when they are speaking common sense. In Bernstein's words,

. . . If the social sciences are considered, then problems of acquisition arise particularly where the grammar is weak. The acquirer may well be anxious whether he/she is really speaking or writing sociology (Bernstein, 2000, p.164).

These studies show that students struggle to position themselves pedagogically. Courses in teacher education are located in regions like philosophy and sociology of education which have been re-contextualised from relatively weakly classified disciplines (philosophy, sociology, anthropology etc.) or from a mix of them (e.g. cultural studies).<sup>2</sup> This web of re-contextualised weakly classified knowledge makes it very difficult for students to access criteria of selection and organisation of knowledge. This difficulty is compounded in a school-based teacher education program where students move, regularly, in and out of their sites of practice. In these pedagogical contexts there is pressure on the pedagogue to attune the focus of the instructional discourse of the course on to what the text can say to students in her/his specific sites of practice ('reading for') and to create opportunities for them to share experiences ('reading in the context of'). In my experience I found that students often do not know what is appropriate to say, when and at what level of detail; they often struggle to demarcate between issues of interest to them and the specific message of the text.<sup>3</sup>

Let's look at this more closely. In her analysis of the relays of specialised knowledge, Ensor shows how variants of knowledge and pedagogical resources (teacher expositions and tasks) are selected at different points of the pedagogical process, and how the ordering, pacing and the transmission of evaluative criteria construct a privileged teaching repertoire (Bernstein, 2001, p.300; 2002) which is aimed at supporting learners' acquisition. A teaching repertoire, Ensor says, is "the set of symbolic and material resources that teacher educators (and teachers) select and configure in order to shape their classroom practice" (Bernstein, 2001, p.300). the repertoire is 'privileged' because teacher education courses select and combine knowledge that is

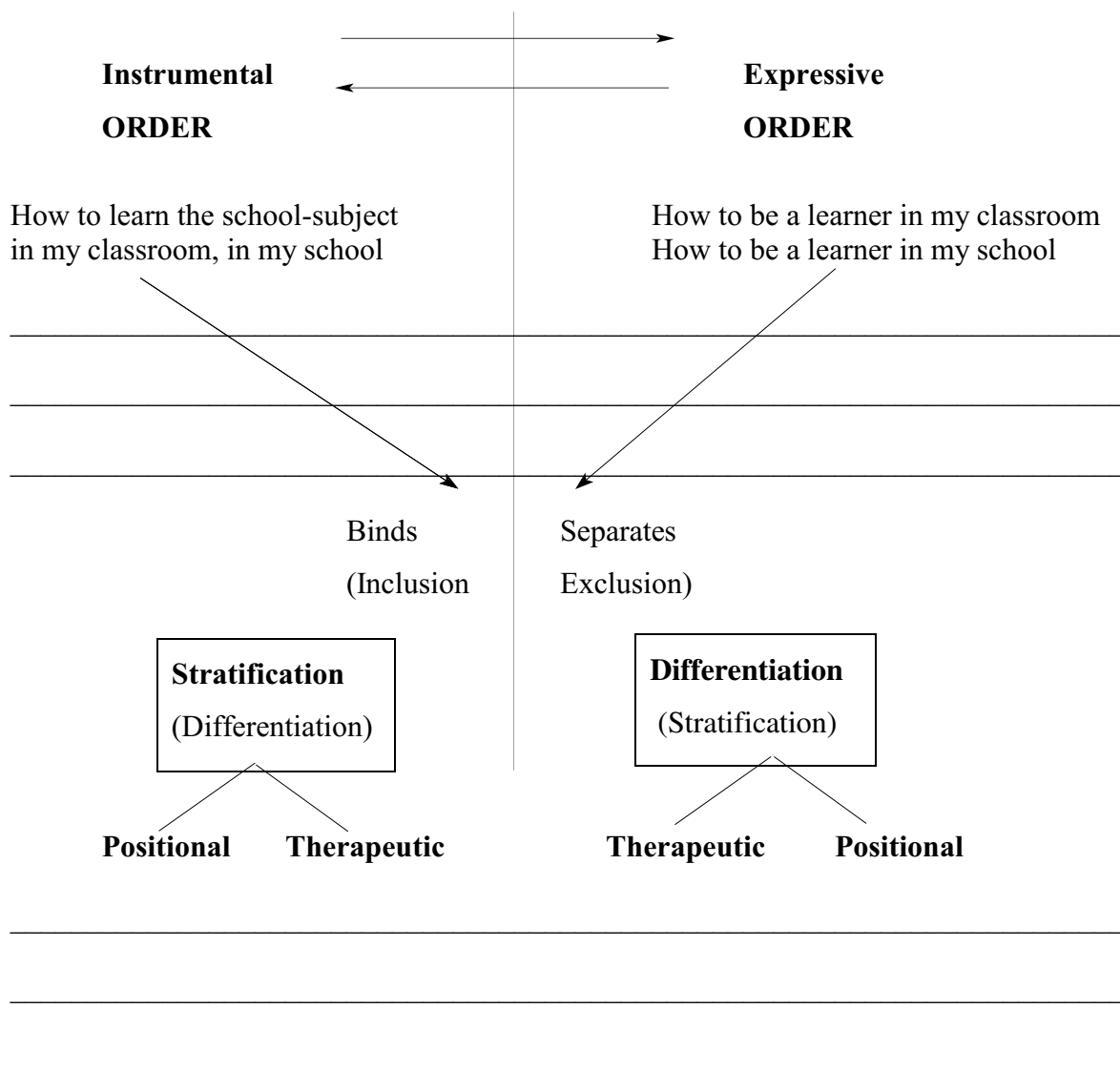
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<sup>2</sup> Or what Bernstein calls horizontal knowledge structures with weak grammar.

<sup>3</sup> In addition, many student teachers in South Africa enroll in teacher education courses with very little familiarity with the rich sociological tradition that informs current educational debates and the rules that specialise reading such texts. Their undergraduate studies concentrate predominantly on topics within their teaching subjects. This tradition includes specialised languages that inform current debates in teaching, including the relation between structure and agency, the relative autonomy of the symbolic, the constitutive role of class relations, forms of determination of power, etc.

drawn from various fields of specialization, and ‘project’ (Bernstein, 1996, p.68) it on to “something other than itself” (Ensor, 2002 p.2). In a school-based Theory of Education course, the pedagogical resources that make up the instructional discourse (models of explanation, tasks and forms of assessments) are embedded within a regulative mode of communication that projects knowledge specialization on to a specific site of practice, which is familiar, mainly, to the student. In dealing with this challenge and in trying to cope with students’ complaints that ‘Bernstein’s language is difficult to decipher’; I combined in my course two kinds of pedagogical resources – diagrams that represent opposites and conceptual narratives. Here is an example of a diagram used in my course:

**Table 1: School Culture: The construction of social order in the school**



I use this diagram to foreground key sets of opposites discussed by Bernstein and their inter-relations (inward text orientation). I use these kinds of diagrams to help students understand elements of their school culture with greater subtlety and detail (outward text orientation). The narratives included matters like 'organization of time in relation to hierarchical roles', 'modes of engagement with the moral order of the school', by teachers and pupils with different 'role positions' (Bernstein, 1975), and 'fixed and differentiated social relations' between teachers and learners, with reference to conceptions of ability. The points about diagrams and narratives is that they provide pedagogical resources of strong classification of procedure (logic of opposites in description of social order), and strong framing of rules of selection (the narratives) and evaluation criteria (how to put texts together, that is elements of school culture in a narrative arranged by sets of opposites). Nevertheless, having these pedagogical resources in a school-based context of teaching very often triggers discussions in which the students appear to have more control over the instructional discourse.

When discussing problems such as 'coping with discipline in the classroom'; 'dealing with mentors and with other teachers in the school'; 'coping with classes that do not co-operate', and 'maintaining a tenuous balance between being a friend and being a teacher'(weak framing of selection), students would select a focus from the text and arrange it in a sequence of concepts that make sense to them even if it does not carefully adhere to the specialisation of the text represented by the diagram. The focus exemplifies a very anecdotal level of engagement (e.g. 'what troubles me', 'a racial incident that happened in my school'). In these cases the relation within the instance, between consensual and differentiating rituals (or between other opposites) is weakly framed (weak frame of criteria). During such pedagogical time it is very difficult to hold positional authority ('I do not want you to judge this now, just describe to me what is going on'). The role of the pedagogue foregrounds a therapeutic function of listening to assertions of beliefs and to expressions of objection to perceived injustices (weak frame of hierarchical rules). The inclusion of weak frame pedagogies and the segmentation that structures localised contexts of acquisition such as school-based experience weaken the voice of the course.

## The Task - 'Let the Sprit Fly'<sup>4</sup>

With a view to examining the differences and similarities between the schools in which the students of the 2001 programme were placed, I gave them a task in which they were required to engage with the distinction that Bernstein makes between a stratified and a differentiated school culture. The students read *Rituals in Education* (1975). The aim of the task is to see how students specialise a description of the ways in which schools construct a culture of learning and teaching. In my instructions to the task I used 'distinctions' to refer to structures of authority. I specifically referred to distinctions used by Bernstein in *Rituals in Education* (1975), including instrumental/expressive orders; stratified/differentiated types of organization of learners; and positional/therapeutic modes of control. The task instructions begin with the following paragraph:

Through this exercise we aim to get to know the differences and similarities between the schools in which the students in our class are working. We want you to paint a portrait of your school, to describe the ways in which your school constructs a culture of learning and teaching. There are many ways a school can be described, depending on what one wants to emphasise. Following the central distinctions made by Bernstein, we want to understand the sense of the social project or socialisation developed by/in your school.

By central distinctions we refer in particular to: *Instrumental/expressive* orders; *marking off* between groups/*binding*; *stratification/differentiated* types of organisation of learners; *positional /therapeutic* modes of control. . .

In looking at the classification and the frame design of the task it is important to note two things. Firstly, the distinctions above act selectively on the empirical referent both in terms of 'what to focus on' and in terms of 'what kind of information to collect about it'. They are formulated at a high level of generality, which means that the student cannot substitute the meaning of a category with common sense meanings, or simply match texts.<sup>5</sup> This suggests strong external classification. At the same time, the instructional discourse of the task does not order the distinctions in any particular order of importance and significance. It does not classify them into core and supportive types and their 'oppositional form' is not made explicit. This suggests an invisible

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<sup>4</sup> The name of the task was borrowed from a motto of a school that participates on the programme.

<sup>5</sup> In Bernstein's language of description the empirical referent and the conceptual are kept at a significant distance. The relation between them can only be reconstructed through recontextualisation.

recognition rule. Secondly, the framing of the task appears to be strong. The next (2<sup>nd</sup>) paragraph of the task instruction specifies clear conceptual boundaries – it provides the specialised meaning of concepts like ‘social project’ and ‘transmission of order’ (strong framing of criteria).

By ‘social project’ we refer to the ways in which the school creates **order** in the school or continuity of patterns of legitimate behaviour between teachers and learners and among learners, and between the school and its outside environment. In order to create order, the school transmits both a common identity as well as particular ones for different learners. The school transmits a common identity in order to bind the learners. The school transmits particular identities in order to mark off groups within the school. In these two ways the school maintains collective authority – a social order.

There are two things to remember about this:

- 1) Every school promotes a common as well as a particular identity but, it does so in different ways.
- 2) Transmission of order (socialisation) does not happen explicitly. It occurs symbolically. This means that when a teacher says to a child ‘sit straight because you want to have a straight back as you want to be a tall and proud boy’ she sends a message to the learner about his individual worth. In this little remark she contributes to a construction of a view of himself as an individual who has important needs and thus power to meet those needs. In the same way the pictures and figures placed on the walls in different (very particular) places of the school are pictures of important people in the tradition of the school. They are there for a reason and not simply for a decorative purpose. They are there to send a message about what does it mean to be a good, modern, responsible, person.

Through this exercise we want to understand the ways in which your school transmits messages about education, most importantly about ‘professionalism’, ‘teaching’, ‘learning’, ‘knowledge and citizenship’.

The strength of the frame is strong too with regard to the lists of specific empirical referents from which students can select (strong framing of selection). The next (3<sup>rd</sup>) paragraph of the task instruction reads:

In your thinking of these issues you need to consider the following:

- The school’s motto
- The aesthetics of the buildings (get in touch with the sensual experience of walking through the grounds of the school)
- The assemblies
- Ceremonies (religious, sports, prize giving etc)
- Dress code for teachers and school uniforms for learners
- Pictures, signs, symbols and plaques for preserving the school’s particular tradition
- Modes of address (learners to teacher/principal; teachers to management leaders)
- Modes of co-operation between teachers
- Forms of punishment and rewards used in the school/modes of winning learners’ co-operation

- Forms of differentiation between learners (age, gender, ability, house membership)
- School's routine (e.g. a way of settling the learners at the beginning of the lesson etc.)
- Modes of communication between teachers and learners, including teaching styles
- Phrases used by a teacher, principal.

The last (4<sup>th</sup>) paragraph of the task includes a conceptual guide on how to go about the selection and the organisation of the meanings.

Here is a conceptual way to guide the construction of the portrait (discipline order)

1. Identify a practice. You need to work across a few examples of practices – taken from the instrumental order of the school and the expressive order of the school.
2. Describe the object (e.g. observe and describe an assembly, including the form in which it is managed and the message/content that is addressed).
3. What messages (about 'professionalism' and/or 'teaching' and/or 'learning' and/or 'knowledge and citizenship') is the practice aiming to symbolise/transmit?
4. Do you think that all learners (and teachers) can relate to the meanings (or to what you think the meanings are)? Who (from teachers and learners) might not be able to identify with these meanings?
5. Can the meanings be negotiated and are they negotiated? How?
6. In what ways does the practice contribute to a stratified order? In what ways does the practice contribute to a differentiated order?

The conceptual guide describes the sequence of moves. It specifies what counts as skilful selection of school practice (asking students to focus on few examples), the level of detail to be selected (the form and its content), the preferred organisation of meanings (relation between practices, drawing implications about the message of a practice), and its analytical level (differentiation and generalisation as in 'In what ways does the practice contribute to a stratified order? In what ways does the practice contribute to a differentiated order'). The description is phrased openly, which invites idiosyncratic use of the social space (the essay the student has to produce). Thus, on the discursive level the regulatory strength of the frame is opened for conceptual negotiation – depending on the selection and organisation of the practice the student focuses on, she/he can produce a relatively free variety of narratives. This is also suggested in the statement 'there are many ways a school can be described, depending on what one wants to emphasise', as stated in the opening paragraph of the task.

In short, through 'central distinctions', 'core educational idea', 'definitions' and the 'list of empirical referents' the instructional discourse of the task demarcates, in invisible as well as in visible ways, the social punctuation of the task – its classification, its "special quality of otherness" (Bernstein, 1996, p.24). This punctuation demarcates what should and can be included in the text and what should not and cannot be included in the text. The conceptual



guide creates social punctuation *in* the text – or frames for realisation of the social space. This dual social punctuation functions to legitimize certain levels of idiosyncratic use of the social space, mainly the internal sequence of ideas and their specific level of detail as well as the internal weighting of the issues that are offered for discussion (what should receive importance as symbolised by narrative space). Before I move on to my assessment of my students' specialisation of their experiential knowledge, I would like to engage more deeply with Bernstein's logic of description – the logic of 'oppositional form'.

## 'Oppositional forms' - the theoretical act of Bernstein's reading of the social (internal language of description)

In Bernstein's terms, 'methodology' is primarily a theoretical act which is concerned with two sets of concepts (Bernstein, 2001). The first consists of the principles and theoretical assumptions, 'internal language of description', that guide the researcher in identifying the text, in recognizing it as the relevant empirical phenomena sought for selection and analysis. Bernstein calls this theoretical act an act of recognition – "what is to be recognized is the result of a theoretical act which may vary in its degree of explicitness and level of generalization" (Bernstein, 2001, p.31). The internal language of description guides acts of recognition which primarily sort out relations between concepts; it forms the logic of specialized texts (Bernstein, 1996, p.136). The specific form in which an empirical referent is described is a theoretical act, which is guided by a second set of concepts referred to by Bernstein as the "external language of description" (Bernstein, 1996, p.136).

Bernstein's relational thinking of 'oppositional forms' is a constitutive recognition rule for reading the social. I read it as key to understanding his internal language of description. Bernstein's work on the social specialises a sociological analysis of the relation between the material base of society (its class relations) and the forms of relay of 'symbolic controls' (discursive ways which structure our social experiences). Bernstein prohibits treating 'oppositional forms' as a form synonymous with 'simple dichotomy' (Bernstein, 1975, pp.3-4; 1996, p.4; 2000, p.156) or with 'ideal types' (Bernstein, 1996, p.126 and p.164; 2000, p.156). In these passages he confirms the view that the structuring logic of his theory of power and control relations construes discursive forms such as positional/personal and stratified/differentiated as oppositions. Nevertheless he insists on a non-reductive reading of the relation between them. A symbolic structure that is generative,

he says, cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy. A reading of the symbolic structure as a simple dichotomy reduces it to a simple representation, a 'relation to' a social text (gender, race or class), without dealing with its differentiated structure, its 'relation within', its voice. Bernstein admits that his attempts to show this have had little effect (Bernstein, 1996, p.4; 2000, p.156).

According to Bernstein, a simple dichotomy assembles all the features of a phenomenon that are similar and separates out those that are different, and thus evaluates the phenomenon by looking at the presence and absence of certain features of the assembly. This kind of identification uses the triple discursive actions of match, exclusion and reduction. Let's take an example of a change of the forms of power and control in a school when shifting from a stratified to a differentiated order. A simple dichotomy typification begins by *sorting* its empirical features. So when looking at authority relations, for example, it divides the features associated with the social relations in the school and then matches them to a polar opposite discursive order of authority – positional/stratified versus personal/differentiated. In this pattern any empirical feature that does not cohere with its counterparts gets excluded. A description of a stratified culture of authority would include 'strong boundaries between teaching subjects in the curriculum', 'highly ritualized set of behaviours demanded from learners', 'a strict sequencing of contents in lessons' etc. Implied absences are 'authentic pedagogy' or 'teaching across curriculum boundaries', 'open relationship to everyday knowledge' etc. The epistemic effort in this kind of description aims to exclude opposite features. One cannot have 'a strong regulation of school behaviour' along side 'collaborative open learning in the classroom'. In this way, all the relevant distinctions (fixed categories of school subjects/integrated categories of subject; insulated teaching role/co-operative teaching roles; solution giving pedagogy/ problem setting pedagogy) are reduced to their representative pole within the broader distinction (stratified/ differentiated structures of social orders).

As Bernstein says, the logic of simple dichotomy can also lead to another kind of misrecognition: reading one pole of the oppositional form as the ideal type of 'its other', the pole that typifies absence and is thus treated as lesser. Bernstein calls this "romanticism" (Bernstein, 2000, p.206). In South Africa, the politics of transition did precisely that. When the new curriculum (Curriculum 2005) was introduced in 1998, conceptions of knowledge and teaching were distributed along a binary continuum – group work and minimum teacher talk were imbued with the ideals of learner-centered

pedagogy; teacher transmission, discipline knowledge and text were associated with teacher-centred pedagogy. This binary view became very entrenched among teachers, to the extent that in the name of ‘democratic curriculum’, teachers, particularly the weak ones, stopped formal teaching and replaced it, inappropriately, with group work (Taylor and Vinjevd, 1999; Adler, 2002). But even theorists like A.D Edwards, in his work on classroom talk (Bernstein, 1996) conflated the logic. Bernstein criticizes the grounds on which Edwards evaluated the positional form of control used by the teachers he investigated. Edwards’ critical evaluation, Bernstein says, is misguided because it fails to recognise the multiplicity of forms in which elaborated code can be realized, a key feature of elaborated code (Bernstein, 1996). Instead, Edwards selectively sorted (“rummages”, p.161) “attributes of restricted or elaborated codes to show that he can find, empirically, indexes that prove teacher and students are using restricted codes” (p.161). “Selectively sorts/rummages”, because Edwards imposed a “model of ideal pedagogic practice” on the classification of the features he identified (p.164):

Edwards clearly has a concept of an ideal pedagogic act which includes ‘frequent opportunities for disturbing and changing a body of received knowledge’. This concept he uses to judge classroom talk. And when he fails to find such talk he concludes the code is not elaborated (Bernstein, 1996, p.165).

The act of match, exclusion and reduction homogenises the social order and constrains the generative potential of the analytical gaze. It prevents conceptual permutations and hence is not generative. A generative gaze shows that the accent of one category is present in its opposite, albeit in a different form, for example as a latent, potentially disruptive voice. In one of his later works, Bernstein refers to this as “differentiation” (Bernstein, 2000, p.156). Examples of relational logic of ‘oppositional forms’ as ‘differentiation’ can be found in claims like “Control may vary when a teacher is addressing the whole class, a small group, an isolated student, from class to class, from one social class of students to another” (Bernstein 1996, p.159); the performance/competence oppositional form gives rise to “three modes of competence models, three modes of performance models *and* the appropriation of competence for the purposes of performance” (Bernstein, 1996, p.4 and p.64, my emphasis); “horizontal knowledge structures partake of verticality but still embed features of horizontal discourse” (Moore and Muller 2002, p.12); and “degrees of decontextualised language use may be identified in contextualised language use” (Cloran 1999, p.37). In its constitutive power, then, ‘oppositional forms’ is a relational logic that describes the composition of any social phenomenon. “Pathologies”, Bernstein says, following Durkheim, “inhere in different discipline regulations” (Bernstein, 2000, p.206). This

means, for example, that although visible pedagogy was found to present a disadvantage for the children of the working class, one cannot conclude that an invisible pedagogy, which arose in opposition to visible pedagogies, has cleared the pathology (Sadovnik, 1991).

Bernstein's theorisation repeats combinations of distinctions, particularly the key ones, at every level of abstraction; it does not mirror them upwards (Moore and Muller 2002). Repeating 'oppositional forms' at different levels of abstraction is a discursive action, which aims to explode the homogeneity of a category of a social phenomenon. This action fuses opposite features within the same category and accounts for their antagonism in their mode of interaction, in their mode of expression or in the social interests that structure particular contexts of application. So a differentiated view of 'boundary' recoups 'autonomy'. From seeing a person's autonomy or creativity as potentially suppressed by boundary (as in a simple dichotomy following an ideal type), the logic of repetition re-embeds the relation between boundary and creativity as one potential form of varying degrees of boundary rather than as its direct 'other':

There is always a boundary. It may vary in its explicitness, its visibility, its potential and in its manner of its transmission and acquisition. It may vary in terms of whose interest is promoted or privileged by the boundary (Bernstein, 2000, p.206).

To sum up, Bernstein's logic of 'oppositional forms' requires readers of the social to recognise that the stratified and differentiated modes of authority coexist, each with its specific pathology. They coexist inside a social space or across different ones, they exert their power in varying degrees of visibility and they frame communications between agents in varying degrees of control. Recognition of 'oppositional forms' entails therefore a relational reading of social meanings. This means that a student's text is fully specialised when the evidence about power and control is constructed, relationally, by 'oppositional forms', partially specialised but misrecognised when it is constructed by 'simple dichotomy', and non-specialised when it is constructed without relevance to structures of authority. These degrees of recognition are grounded in Bernstein's theoretical assumption (internal language of description) that reading the particular through a modality of simple dichotomy counts as an act of misrecognition.

<b>'Oppositional forms'</b>	<b>Simple Dichotomy Simple Dichotomy + Ideal type</b>	<b>Simple Dichotomy (One) Simple Dichotomy + Ideal type</b>	<b>Non Specialised</b>
Student identifies both structures of authority (stratified and differentiated). The structures are identified inside a social space or across different ones, in the school. They are shown to exert power and control which vary in visibility and manner of transmission of authority. They are identified in a relational way, each with its specific pathology.	Student identifies both structures of authority. The structures are identified inside a social space or across different ones, in the school. One is shown to signify forms of 'constraints'; the other is shown to signify forms of 'freedom'. In addition, if one is marked as 'negative' and the other is marked as 'positive', the recognition then is also of Ideal Type.	This is a sub sample of the one above. Student identifies only <b>one</b> structure of authority. If it is identified as 'stratified', it is shown to signify forms of constraint. If it is identified as 'differentiated' it is shown to signify forms of 'freedom'. In addition, if the structure is also marked as 'positive' or as 'negative', the recognition then is also of Ideal Type.	No structure of authority is identified. The particular remains non-specialised. When the student provides a simple description of the concrete way in which the practice formally works, the recognition is positional. When the student interprets the concrete by means that are not specified theoretically or contextually, the recognition is therapeutic.

I now turn to the analysis/evaluation of the six segments.

## Six Examples of Recognition and Realisation

Initially, when I was reading the students' work I felt submerged in the specifics of their data descriptions. I struggled to see the general rule that guided their descriptions. I often found myself giving very fragmented feedback. So, in order to examine realisation more systematically, I decided to look for a set of codes that would guide me similarly to the way in which assessment criteria guide criterion-referenced assessment. To this end I adapted Bernstein's discursive rules of framing and slightly modified them according to the demands of the data. The coding scheme used is outlined in the Appendix at the end of this article. I used 'selection' to code the students' selections of a relevant empirical object of analysis. I changed 'pacing' to 'weighting' and thereby I replaced time (of pacing) with 'detail', referring to the amount of detail the students' description of the particular provided. I used 'sequencing' to code the linking between a generalisable educational idea and particular descriptions. With regard to 'criteria', I used the accent of the

coding to mark the epistemic means that a student used to transmit the reasoning behind the description, with specific reference to the way she/he associated between opposites.

Here are the four codes I devised for my analysis of the segments:

<b>Discursive Rule of Selection</b>	<b>Discursive Rule of Weighting</b>	<b>Discursive Rule of Sequence</b>	<b>Discursive Rule of Evaluation Criteria</b>
The focus of realisation here is on the selection of the empirical referent – is it from the list which was provided with the task and if outside the list, is it appropriate for the type – ‘stratified’ vs. ‘differentiated’ opposite structures of power and control.	The focus of realisation here is on the amount of details included in the description of the particular.	The focus of realisation here is on signification as constructed by the sequence between the description of the specific aspects of the empirical referent and a generalisable educational idea.	The focus here is on epistemic means by which the student signals her/his reasoning of the relations between structures of authority in the description of the empirical referent.

The six examples analysed in this paper are selected from the work submitted by the 17 student teachers on the 2001 programme. I divided each student’s work into segments. ‘Segment’ stands for a section in the student’s work, which portrays one specific school practice. In this way the integrity of idea is kept. Furthermore, dividing the student’s work into segments allows comparison between segments. A comparison between segments enables one to count the number of segments in a student’s work that signify a particular recognition and thus establishes degrees of success in the student’s specialisation of the particular. The segments were edited for grammatical errors that interfere in the reading of the segment. All names of schools and of students are pseudonyms.

**Example 1**

**Student M: On two message systems in the school (Private, High School, Girls).**

**Segment A ‘Oppositional Forms’:**

Student (female) identifies both structures of authority (stratified and differentiated). The structures are identified inside a social space or across

different ones, in the school. They are shown to exert power and control which vary in visibility and manner of transmission of authority. They are identified in a relational way, each with its specific pathology.

The powers that be at St C's want the public to understand that this tradition will mould their daughters into strong, law abiding citizens, the kind that have the potential to be world leaders. The most recent advertising campaign flier says it all [enclosed]. It shows a young girl who is working independently sitting half way up a spiral staircase on the way to the top, with an almost heavenly light above her. There is an order and serenity about the photo, the square stairs create an orderly pattern and the harmonious warm colours the serenity. The girl is wearing her school uniform, which shows she belongs to the school even if she is alone. She is also a sweet looking blond girl, perhaps reflecting the type of learner in St C's traditionally white girls, which shows a distinction between the type of affluent school St C's is and a government school. This advert conveys both the stratified and the differentiated orders in the school. It conveys a stratified order message about the school's community being founded on Christian principles and the framework of tradition. This is an order that is separated from the outside world. The differentiated order is conveyed by showing the girl doing independent work with wispy pieces of hair around her face, not perfectly groomed, as if she's been playing.

<b>Discursive Rule of Selection</b> ++	<b>Discursive Rule of Weighting</b> +	<b>Discursive Rule of Sequence</b> +	<b>Discursive Rule of Evaluation Criteria</b> -
The student selects an appropriate empirical referent outside the list of empirical referents provided by the task { <i>advertising campaign flier</i> } and builds relevant descriptions around the distinction between stratified and differentiated order, foregrounding specific aspects { <i>young girl</i> } { <i>spiral staircase on the way to the top</i> } { <i>heavenly light</i> }	The two orders are identified by selecting details that seem to signal co-existence between: a pattern of fixed order { <i>a spiral staircase on the way to the top, with an almost heavenly light</i> }; { <i>the square stairs create an orderly pattern and the harmonious warm colours the serenity</i> } { <i>school uniform</i> } and the idiosyncratic – { <i>doing independent work with wispy pieces of hair around her face, not perfectly groomed, as if she's been playing</i> }.	The educational message prefaces the description { <i>mould their daughters into strong, law abiding citizens</i> }. The educational message (the strong socialisation role of the school, indicated by the term <i>mould</i> ) can be (seems to be) advocated by the flier produced through <i>patterned order</i> as well as through <i>independent work</i> .	Although the distinction is explicitly stated { <i>this advert conveys both the stratified and the differentiated orders in the school</i> } the use of interrelated metaphors like <i>heavenly light/play</i> could be misleading; it could suggest a reading of a simple dichotomy where some parts of the school are heavily regulated and others are free. More segments are needed. This is one of the examples in the study (see also example 4) that shows that weak realisation of criteria can conceal the recognition.

## **Example 2**

### **Student M: On the different forms of regulation of the teachers and the learners in St C's.**

#### **Segment B 'Oppositional Forms':**

The student identifies both structures of authority in the segment. Each structure is presented with its special pathology: Both exert power and control, each in a form oppositional to the other.

I find the ringing of the bells between periods a fascinating concept. One of the staff members who has been at St C's for a long time told me that they used to have a bell ringing between periods, but stopped this because the noise destroyed the ambiance of the school. This is very ironic. The sound of a bell tells us that something is about to happen or should happen. It is a conditioned response. Taking the bells away gives the teachers more responsibility, they are not governed by outside control and are thus themselves held accountable for the learners in their class making it to the next one on time. Each teacher relies on other teachers and they all contribute to the continuity of the day's lessons in a therapeutic manner. This creates a type of binding between teachers of different disciplines. However, this seemingly differentiated type of order is masking a stratified order. The bell disturbs the ambiance and unspoken order in the school. The community of the school know the rituals and do not need to be reminded, because after all that is why they have been accepted and kept here. Another irony is that while there are no bells between lessons [or indeed at the end of the school day], there is a bell to indicate the start of the day and the end of break/lunch time. This is because whilst the teachers are responsible enough to know when to let their class go to the next lesson, the learners may not be as loyal, or responsible enough to come in from break at the correct time. The bell ensures at these times that the learners remember it is the school that is in control as they move from the freedom of break into class, as one school. This keeps the learners 'in check' in a stratified manner [the school in control], which is very different from the differentiated and therapeutic mode of control they experience from their teachers when coaxed from lesson to lesson.



Discursive Rule of Selection ++	Discursive Rule of Weighting +	Discursive Rule of Sequence ++	Discursive Rule of Evaluation Criteria ++
<p>The student identifies an appropriate empirical referent that is not on the list and refers to particular aspects of it {<i>The sound of a bell tells us that something is about to happen or should happen</i>} {<i>The bell disturbs the ambiance and unspoken order</i>}.</p>	<p>The vertical relation between the two orders is analysed for the form of power and control they exert on the relevant agent. The analysis uses more conceptual means than specific empirical descriptions<sup>6</sup> to describe different types of controls. With conceptual descriptors {<i>Each teacher relies on other teachers</i>}; {<i>binding</i>}; {<i>unspoken order</i>}, the student demonstrates internal mode of regulation for teachers {<i>they are not governed by outside control and are thus themselves held accountable for the learners in their class making it to the next one on time</i>}; {<i>type of binding between teachers of different disciplines</i>} and external mode of regulations for learners {<i>this keeps the learners 'in check' in a stratified manner [the school in control]</i>}.</p>	<p>The description is condensed to an educational implication about the identity projected for the relevant agent. For teachers, it is about being a member of the community {<i>relies on other teachers</i>}; {<i>ambiance and unspoken order</i>}; {<i>they have been accepted</i>}; {<i>teachers are responsible enough</i>}. For the learners, it is about becoming a member of the community {<i>the learners may not be as loyal</i>}; {<i>the learners may not be responsible enough</i>}; {<i>learners in check</i>}.</p>	<p>The two oppositional orders are announced explicitly as 'a vertical relation between' {<i>this seemingly differentiated type of order is masking a stratified order</i>}; the form of its operation is framed much more implicitly. The student describes each form and refuses simple dichotomy: the teachers and learners are regulated through different forms of control, within which both teachers and learners experience forms of constraints. This is indicated for teachers through references to {<i>held accountable for the learners in their class making it to the next one on time</i>}; {<i>unspoken order</i>}; {<i>kept here</i>}, where the order of time creates interdependence among teachers, which is regulated in an unspoken manner. Learners are controlled in a differentiated way: The learners are 'in check' outside the classroom (explicit form of control, indicated through a disturbing mechanism, the bell). In the classroom the learners appear to feel freer under the hand of a therapeutic mode, but they are regulated in fact, albeit, in a different form {<i>coaxed from lesson to lesson</i>}.</p>

<sup>6</sup> The student could have gone into detailed description of examples of teachers' experiences of binding and students' experiences inside the classroom. The point was made without this potentially laborious work.

**Example 3**

**Student D: On boundaries between social agents (Private, High School, Co Ed.).**

**Segment A ‘Simple Dichotomy’:**

Student (male) identifies only one structure of authority in the segment. The student identifies it as ‘stratified’, with a weak signification {*pyramid*} of the form of constraint.

The school pyramid is structured in a hierarchal order. This is because it has got a board of trustees which is the highest body, then follows the principal and parents, the teachers, followed by learners and at the bottom of the table are the general workers. This pyramid showed that there are some stratified principles in the social order of the school. This is because the fixed attribute is taken as a basis for ordering relationships in the school.

Discursive Rule of Selection -	Discursive Rule of Weighting -	Discursive rule of sequence --	Discursive rule of evaluation Criteria -
<p>The particular appears to be specific. The description does not privilege a focus. The hierarchy is described at such a high level of generality {<i>This pyramid shows</i>}, which does not foreground specific aspects that could show if the hierarchy keeps the agents apart all the time and on all/some issues or not. That there is a hierarchy in the school does not discern the strength of the boundary between agents (as stratified/ differentiated). {<i>Some stratified principles</i>}, is, potentially a device for further particularization.</p>	<p>Equal space for the particular and the general. Each set remains intact. The meaning of each set can be recovered independently of the other (no recontextualisation). In the case of the particular: a commonsense observation of the hierarchical relation that makes up the management structure of a school. In the case of the general: the reasoning for the identification (<i>‘stratified’</i>) is formulated externally to the observation, through another {<i>This is because</i>} theoretical selection {<i>Fixed attribute taken as a basis for ordering . . .</i>}. No reference is made to the specific aspects of the particular that can be shown to signify stratification.</p>	<p>No educational implications are signified. ‘The general’ is tagged on ‘the particular’. The details describing the particular developed separately from any generalisable educational message.</p>	<p>The student’s reasoning of what the pyramid actually shows, by reference to one pole of the distinction between stratified and differentiated order, suggests a view of simple dichotomy imposed from an ideological place of an ideal type, but the description is too thin to have a firm conclusion that this is the view. The notion ‘some’ in {<i>some stratified principles in the social order to the school</i>} could suggest co-existence of two message systems. To establish use of distinction more segments are needed.</p>

**Example 4****Student D: On the boundaries between teachers and learners in the school.****Segment B ‘Simple Dichotomy + Ideal Type’:**

The student identifies only one structure of authority in the segment, as ‘stratified’, with signification of ideal type.

The school learners’ representative council is made up of standard 10 or grade 12 pupils only. The main purpose of this council is to help with management of the school and facilitate relationship between learners and teachers. Members of this council are voted to their position by learners but the final decision on their position is taken by teachers. This is because teachers are entrusted with the responsibility to select them on the basis of their conduct in the school despite number of votes they might have won. Their elections conduct seems not to be democratic because of teachers’ influence and that made me to see the council as a stratified approach.

<b>Discursive Rule of Selection</b> ++	<b>Discursive Rule of Weighting</b> -	<b>Discursive Rule of Sequence</b> -	<b>Discursive Rule of Evaluation Criteria</b> +
The student selects an appropriate empirical referent { <i>school learners representative council</i> } outside the list of empirical referents provided by the task and builds a relevant description around ‘stratification’, foregrounding a specific aspect; { <i>the final decision on their positions is taken by teachers</i> }.	The student provides more details of the empirical referent (until the words <i>teachers’ influence</i> ) than of the general. The detail do not show how the central features of ‘stratification’ are demonstrated in the workings of the particular: What criteria do the teachers use? In what case does their say override the learners’ opinion? Do all council’s activities stratify the relations between the teachers and the learners in the school?	The student follows up the description in a segment with some kind of generalisable educational idea { <i>their election conduct seem not to be democratic because of teachers’ influence</i> }. Nevertheless, the idea is not supported; it is ‘hanging’ and thus is not significant.	The notions ‘ <i>But</i> ’, ‘ <i>only</i> ’, ‘ <i>despite</i> ’ suggest a collection of features into a simple dichotomy view: { <i>is made up of standard 10 or grade 12 pupils only</i> }; { <i>Members of this council are voted to their position by learners but</i> }; { <i>teachers are entrusted with the responsibility to select them on the basis of their conduct in the school despite the number of votes they might have won</i> }. The view is associated with an ideal type of democracy: minimum boundaries between ages and between functions; social base of criteria is defined by the dichotomy between ‘the marginalized’ and ‘the dominant’ (learners should have the equal voice). This thin positional description of the particular might have been recovered from a populist discourse { <i>their election conduct seems not to be democratic</i> }.

**Example 5**

**Student T: (possibly) on boundaries between social agents in the school and mode of control (Public School, High School, Co Ed.)**

**Segment ‘Non Specialised’**

The student does not identify any structure of authority in the segment. The particular is non-specialised. The student provides a simple description (**positional** type) of commonsense knowledge regarding the workings of the empirical referent.

Assembly is the top ritual at the school. Northern High School holds assemblies three times a week. They are held on Monday, Thursday and Friday. The assembly brings the school community together, learners, teachers, and the principal. This binds everyone into a moral community with shared values. The assembly gives the school an identity and assists in internalising the values and expressing them as a unit.

The assembly takes less than 30 minutes, depending on the announcements of the day. When the learners gather in front of the hall they are expected to keep quiet. To maintain that level of discipline, the school monitors and the prefects scatter around the learners, checking and making sure that the learners are not talking. The principal will then ask the monitor to open the assembly by reading from the scriptures. After the reading, then the principal will lead the assembly with the prayer and after that he will settle the learners down and begin making announcements and giving other teachers time to make their announcements.

The announcements cover every matter relating to the school. For example, they announce the sports results, new appointments on the part of the staff, welcoming of new members of the school, student teachers and the various school meetings. After the announcements the principal will close the assembly with a prayer and thank the members of staff for coming. Then the teachers will leave the assembly, leaving the learners behind. The principal will give the school monitors an opportunity to make their own announcements to the learners.

Discursive Rule of Selection --	Discursive Rule of Weighting -	Discursive Rule of Sequence -	Discursive Rule of Evaluation Criteria --
The student selects an empirical referent from the list (assembly) and builds a detailed description without any reference to a relevant structure type.	The student treats the empirical referent with details that could, with more analytical work, be referenced as an example for positional form of control in a stratified structure. The student, however, does not give any lead on their signification.	Although the description is prefaced with an analytical point { <i>this binds everyone into a moral community with shared values. The assembly gives the school an identity and assists in internalising the values and expressing them as a unit</i> }, the details that come after that are not marked in any way in relation to this analytical referent. Each part of the description is treated as self contained. The educational message does not produce significance.	The description ignores forms of stratification or modes of control and thus any significant reading. The student’s reasoning of the description does not disclose its link with authority type and thus leaves the information not specialised.

**Example 6****Student L: A therapeutic reading of a school's motto (Private, High School, Boys only):****Segment 'Non Specialised'**

No structure of authority is identified. The particular remains non-specialised. The student interprets the referent by means that are not specified theoretically or contextually. The recognition is **therapeutic**.

The motto 'take courage and be a man' has a plethora of implicit meanings. Firstly I want to look at where courage should be taken from. I would argue that it should be from God, from each other and finally from one's self in this school context. There is a fair amount of emphasis placed on prayer and brotherhood as well as self-respect. Secondly I think we need to examine what is implied by 'be a man'. In the Christian sense it could refer to qualities such as humility, modesty, kindness and goodness that are achieved through respect for God, others and self. In a capitalist or modern sense it could refer to bravery, success, wealth, position, power, authority, rationality, logic and even superiority. Finally in a post-modern or New Age sense it could refer to sensitivity, responsibility and accountability. There is an assumption that because we are men, we are brothers. I think this helps to eradicate prejudice within the school but it sets up ideas about what men are and this could also set up ideas about women.

<b>Discursive Rule of Selection</b> --	<b>Discursive Rule of Weighting</b> -	<b>Discursive Rule of Sequence</b> --	<b>Discursive Rule of Evaluation Criteria</b> --
The student selects an empirical referent (the school's motto) from the list. Although it appears that the reference to 'be a man' offers a specific aspect, the interpretation that follows constructs decontextualised possibilities that are left 'up for grabs'.	The opening up of the empirical referent defies any relation to a type of structure or even to any aspect of the empirical context of the school. Even the reference to {pray} defies specificity, as it is nested in a chain of signifiers without pulling specific aspects that can account for a specific type of power and control.	The segment appears to be structured logically and coherently. Two concepts are singled out: <i>courage</i> and <i>man</i> and interpretations of these are given. Nevertheless, the sequence lacks directionality, as it is not connected to any school practice that can help to tighten the plethora into a preferred direction.	The segment appears to be specialised, as discourses are recruited (religion, economic, spiritual). Nevertheless, none of the discourses is hooked on to empirical evidence, none are linked to an authority type and so their meaning is constructed independently of external signifiers. This is a case of a therapeutic identity that defies any external criteria. It constructs an open narrative by following "internal making sense procedures of the external segmentation" (Bernstein, 1996, 78)

## Analysis

This study examined student teachers' modes of orientation to 'oppositional forms', the form of recognition required by Bernstein's specialised language of description. The findings show forms of recognition that range in degrees of strength of realisation:

"oppositional forms" → Simple Dichotomy → Simple Dichotomy/Ideal Type → Positional, Non-Specialised → Therapeutic, Non-Specialised.

The examination of the 6 segments suggests that all four students struggled with both the recognition and realisation rules of 'oppositional forms'. Student D recognises simple dichotomy. Students T's and L's recognition is not specialised. Student M, clearly a good student (the best student in the 2001 programme) demonstrates (in one of the two segments better than in the other) recognition of 'oppositional forms'. But, even in her case this is not a clear case. Only analysis of all the segments in her work can establish that with more confidence. Examples 1 & 2 and 3 & 4 show that within a student's work, one can find segments with different strengths of recognition. The study also demonstrates that the students battle with realisation rules as much as they struggle with recognition rules.

Example 1 Student M	Example 2 Student M	Example 3 Student D	Example 4 Student D	Example 5 Student T	Example 6 Student L
Oppositional Forms (?)	Oppositional forms	Simple Dichotomy (?)	Simple Dichotomy+ Ideal Type	Non-Specialised (Positional)	Non-Specialised (Therapeutic)
<i>Dsel</i> (++)	<i>Dsel</i> (++)	<i>Dsel</i> (-)	<i>Dsel</i> (++)	<i>Dsel</i> (- -)	<i>Dsel</i> (- -)
<i>Dw</i> (+)	<i>Dw</i> (+)	<i>Dw</i> (-)	<i>Dw</i> (-)	<i>Dw</i> (-)	<i>Dw</i> (-)
<i>Dseq</i> (+)	<i>Dseq</i> (++)	<i>Dseq</i> (- -)	<i>Dseq</i> (-)	<i>Dseq</i> (-)	<i>Dseq</i> (- -)
<i>Dcrit</i> (-)	<i>Dcrit</i> (++)	<i>Dcrit</i> (-)	<i>Dcrit</i> (+)	<i>Dcrit</i> (- -)	<i>Dcrit</i> (- -)

The analysis here proposes a case for further investigation: the case of weak realisation that leads to concealment of recognition. The reading of the segments shows (even in the case of the 'strong' student, M) that when asked to recontextualise the particular, students' descriptions do not enclose clearly how the epistemic means is used (discursive rules of evaluation and criteria, *Dcrit* ++). None of the students saw it necessary to discuss the authority relations explicitly or to reason their description explicitly by reference to the logic through which the distinction between a stratified and differentiated social order demarcates a practice. The evident weakness of their realisation

can be traced, I argue, to this particular realisation rule. For a tight hold over the particular, a student needs to gaze at the specialisation of the language she/he uses to organise the particular. Students will control the “yet-to-be codified” (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 1999, p.32) object of inquiry better if they use epistemic means to organize the specific aspects selected in terms of, focus, level of detail and sequence. Lack of this engagement leaves too much room for projection. For the student weak or partial treatment of discursive rules of evaluation and criteria has a ripple effect. In the absence of explicit conceptual engagement with the epistemic means used to specialise the particular, control over details and sequence are clearly affected. Descriptions foreground aspects of the particular either with a far too high level of generality (examples 3 & 4) or with too many details, the relevance of which begs a question (example 5) or through internal projection (example 6). In these cases the specific descriptions have been left to their own device as if self-transparent and the educational idea in the message (if at all mentioned) loses its significance. Example 4 is a case where the ideological voice of the knower over-determines the epistemic means. When ignoring criteria, as in example 6, the student recruits discourses from other discursive fields, constructing an object that is totally idiosyncratic. Example 6 is a case of ‘hijacking’, where the space of the particular is evacuated only to let in other discursive desires. When, on the other hand, a student like student M recontextualises concrete details into conceptual descriptors, the description (particularly in example 2) is held more accountably and requires, in fact, very little of the context specific “stored meanings” (Darling-Hammond, *et. al.*, 1999, p.33). Rather, the tight hold on the logic which constructs meaning selects conceptual descriptors such as {*each teacher relies on other teachers*}; {*binding*}; {*unspoken order*} to control the amount of the specific aspects and to work them into the generalisable educational idea.

As for the assessor – weak treatment of evaluation criteria (in all of the examples), makes it very difficult to establish, beyond doubt, whether a student treats the authority structure of the school as consisting of a mix of opposites which together constitute the pedagogical space of education per se. In example 2, the decision that this is a case of recognition of ‘oppositional forms’ can only rely on the reading of {*coaxed from lesson to lesson*} as a signifier of pathology within the apparent differentiated order of the classroom (equal to the pathology of *the bell* in the outskirts of the classroom), a reading of recognition that the assessor recruits into the description. Similarly, in example 4 ‘*But*’, ‘*only*’, ‘*despite*’ are foregrounded in an effort to account for interpretation of student D’s recognition of opposites as a case of simple dichotomy.

## In Conclusion

Bernstein's constitutive relation of 'oppositional forms' presents a complex degree of invisibility. Models, which present categories in a form of simple dichotomy, get operationalised relationally into a matrix of combinations of 'oppositional forms'. For Bernstein, then 'oppositional forms' is a discursive tool that sorts social phenomena methodologically into oppositions that look like dichotomies but are, in fact, kept together, relationally, at each analytical level.

The analysis of the six segments of 4 students' work can be used to show that specialisation in a sociological reading of the particular can be assessed with an achievable degree of explicitness. The analysis shows that the use of a language of description can equip teacher educators with a better diagnostic tool with which to understand, firstly, the difficulties student teachers experience in recognizing the central feature of the principled knowledge they acquire and, secondly, the strategies they use to produce texts that draw their empirical descriptions from highly segmented contexts of learning. This diagnostic knowledge can help to produce productive relations between two very different discourses, between the horizontal discourse of the particular and the vertical discourse of the general.

The study draws attention to the importance of having a pronounced internal language of description if teacher education programmes wish to take the particular more seriously. While sociological research in teacher education employs recognition rules to construct models of description of various educational entities, rarely does it reflect on these rules directly as an object of study?<sup>7</sup> This of course has direct implications for acquisition; particularly in view of the heavy recontextualisation that characterises vertical discourses in school-based programmes of teacher education. In these courses the pedagogy is oriented, predominantly, towards 'something outside' itself and so the matrix of recognition rules and their roots in specialised languages is often backgrounded.

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<sup>7</sup> In their recent work (2001) Moore and Matton have argued that too often pedagogic concerns overshadowed epistemological ones and that we should pay more attention to the epistemic device employed in different languages within the social sciences – to conditions and procedures of productions, recontextualisation and reproduction of knowledge . See also Moore, 2001.



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## Appendix

### Discursive rules of selection

++	+	-	--
The student selects relevant empirical referent outside the list, foregrounding specific aspects to describe power and control.	The student selects empirical referent from the list, foregrounding specific aspects to describe power and control.	The student selects relevant empirical referent outside the list, foregrounding theoretical, non specific aspects to describe power and control.	The student selects an empirical referent from or outside the list, foregrounding specific/theoretical aspects, with no reference or relevance to a structure type of power and control.

### Discursive rules of weighting

+	-
The student describes the particular with sufficient detail needed to show how the central features of the authority type are demonstrated in the workings of the specific aspects of the empirical referent.	The student describes the particular with too much or too little detail for what is needed in order to show how the central features of the authority type are demonstrated in the workings of the specific aspects of the empirical referent.

### Discursive rules of sequence

++	+	-	--
The student follows up the description with an elaborated generalisable educational idea.	The student follows up the description with a generalisable educational idea.	The educational idea is not supported by a relevant description.	The student does not follow up the description with an educational idea.

### Discursive rules of weighting

++	+	-	--
Student uses terms relationally to show differentiation of power and control in the school.	Student uses binaries to show dichotomies in the operation of power and control in the school.	Student uses both epistemic means. Transmission of the type of relations of power and control in the school is not clear. More segments are needed to evaluate criteria.	Student uses no means of description that suggest any type of structure of power and control.

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# Developing languages of description to research pedagogy

Paula Ensor and Ursula Hoadley

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## Introduction

How do we make trustworthy claims about pedagogy? How do we, in both small and large scale studies of classrooms, gather and analyse data in such a way as to make confident claims about teaching and learning? This is an issue of ongoing concern for educational researchers, and perhaps more urgently now in the current context in which interventions are proposed to bring about, and measure, school improvement. 'Looking into classrooms' has become the preoccupation of those who want to measure pedagogic variation over time, and/or establish the link between pedagogic practice and learner performance. It remains the focus of those with an ongoing theoretical interest in pedagogy and symbolic control. Whatever the interest, the ways in which we generate and analyze classroom data has implications for the kinds of claims we can make about pedagogy.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it highlights some of the complex issues involved in researching pedagogy and the sense we make of how teachers and learners go about the business of negotiating school knowledge in classrooms. Secondly, it demonstrates how some of the difficulties identified might be addressed through developing languages of description (Bernstein, 2000).

## Two approaches to observing classrooms

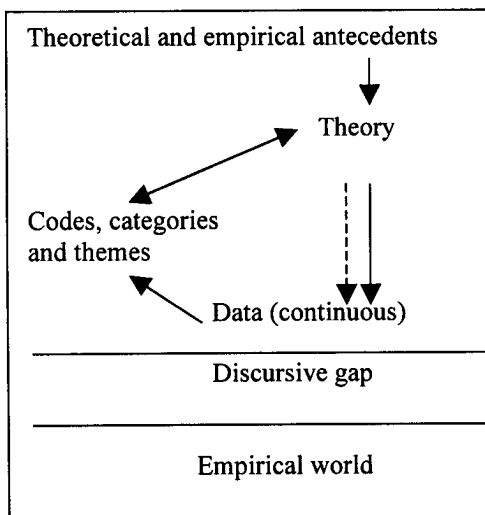
Two broad approaches to observing classrooms have emerged in the research literature. *Inductive approaches*, often described as classroom ethnography (Delamont and Hamilton, 1993; Galton and Delamont, 1985; Hammersley, 1993), and often but not always associated with grounded theory, call for the generation of the fullest possible records of classroom life from which theoretical frameworks can be inductively derived. Inductive approaches are usually but not always associated with exploratory, small-scale studies

involved in theory construction. A notable exception is the TIMSS video study (Stigler, 1997; NCES, 1999) which adopted an inductive, theory building approach but which was relatively large in scale (and hence very costly). *Deductive approaches*, in the past often referred to as systematic observation (Croll, 1986), operate deductively from theory to the development of categories and subcategories which are used to sample aspects of classroom life. Deductive approaches are more commonly used in large-scale studies and tend to be more concerned with theory testing than theory development.

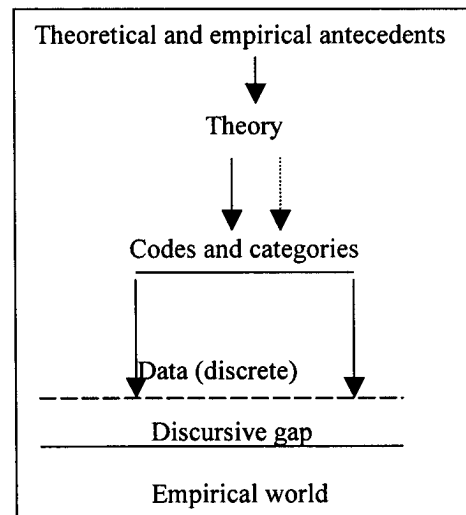
We can represent these two approaches as two ideal-types, bearing in mind that very often classroom research incorporates both of these approaches.

Figure 1: Ideal-typical approaches to classroom observation

1a. Inductive approach



1b. Deductive approach



In the inductive approach depicted in Figure 1a, data are collected as a continuous narrative, using *open instruments* such as field notes, video recordings, a combination of field notes and audio-recording and so forth. By continuous here we are referring to the attempt of researchers to capture as complete a record as possible of classroom life over time. We are not asserting that this aim for completeness can ever be fulfilled, as invariably continuous data must constitute a selection from classroom life. Field notes, for example, cannot capture everything that is said and done, and video cameras inevitably capture some details and not others (focusing only on the teacher, for example, rather than students).

Data are unlikely to be complete, and it is unlikely that data can ever be collected independently of theoretical orientation. Theory inevitably shapes the collection of continuous data, guiding what the researcher foregrounds and backgrounds. The theoretical framework used may be well-developed in advance of the study (reflected by the solid arrow) or more tenuous (reflected by the broken arrow), but in both cases there is a relative openness in the way in which theory will be developed to read the data. Data analysis is an iterative process that brings theory and data into dialogue with each other in order to generate categories and claims.

The deductive approach depicted in Figure 1b uses theory to generate a network of categories prior to the process of data collection. Again, this theory may be strong and well-developed (depicted by the solid arrow) or less so (depicted by the broken arrow). Categories are used to develop classroom observation instruments in order to select and record aspects of classroom life. Such instruments may be interested only in one aspect of classroom life, such as teachers' questioning techniques, and therefore focus only on instances in the classroom when questioning is used. Because classroom life is sampled in this way the diagram depicts the data set as discrete rather than continuous. Sampling classroom behaviour is usually undertaken using category systems which incorporate categories, signs, checklists and rating scales (Evertson and Green, 1986). Closed systems may or may not explicitly aim to record events in time, for example recording the occurrence of particular events, of particular behaviours at pre-determined times (noting, say, every 30 seconds what the teacher is doing/saying), or particular behaviours over pre-determined intervals.

Careful attention to sampling from classroom life is a concern *a priori* in the use of closed schedules. Researchers are required to decide in advance of data collection what aspects of classroom life they will record, about and from whom, and how often. In the case of open schedules, the issue of sampling emerges in data collection in that the researcher needs to decide what to focus on. Sampling emerges as an issue also in the process of analysis, as the researcher attempts to address issues of trustworthiness in terms of how exhaustively he/she treats the collected data texts. Whether one uses codes, categories, themes or critical incidents, one is expected to demonstrate the extent and range of their presences and absences in the data in order to make robust claims about pedagogy. Analysis and findings need to be presented in such a way that the reader gains access to the method of analysis as well as a sufficiency of data to satisfy the requirements of validity and reliability. Silverman (1993) warns us against the "anecdotal" incorporation of data and



the need to provide what he terms “a sense of the flavour of the data as a whole” (op. cit., p.163). As Bryman argues:

There is a tendency towards an anecdotal approach to the use of ‘data’ in relation to conclusions or explanations in qualitative research. Brief conversations, snippets from unstructured interviews, or examples of a particular activity are used to provide evidence for a particular contention. There are grounds for disquiet in that the representativeness or generality of these fragments is rarely addressed (Bryman, 1988, p.77).

‘Exhausting the data text’ is a challenge for researchers working with either closed or open instruments. For those using a deductive approach with closed instruments, ‘exhausting the text’ means providing an appropriate sampling frame to select data which are in some way representative of the slice of classroom life defined. For researchers working with open instruments, collecting continuous data in the form of field notes or video recordings, exhausting the text arises at the stage of data analysis rather than of data collection. Whether one develops coding systems, extracts themes, or focuses on critical incidents or cases, these need to be positioned against the data set as a whole in order to specify to what extent these foregrounded elements make sense of the section of classroom life selected for analysis.

It might well be argued that the approach we sketch out above is but one in a range of research possibilities, which vary according to the theoretical commitment of the researcher. We want to suggest, though, that these imperatives for data collection and analysis apply regardless of the epistemological position of the researcher, which we illustrate towards the end of the paper through a discussion of the discursive gap. Before turning to this, however, we wish to discuss some of the key issues which arise in classroom-based research.

## Problems in classroom observation

Classroom observation requires selection at a number of levels:

- a research question
- the setting which we wish to observe (e.g. which classrooms, how many)
- the aspect of classroom life which is to become the focus of enquiry (teachers' questioning techniques, forms of classroom interaction)
- tools to record and store this data for study and analysis (observation schedules, video recording etc.)
- procedures for observing (where to sit/stand, when to observe)
- the subjects or events to be observed (individual, group, behaviour type, strategy)
- the analysis procedures appropriate for the question and data collected
- the method of reporting the data collected

All of these aspects are important, but in this paper we focus primarily on the last five points which we discuss in relation to the study of a sample of observation schedules which have been used both inside and outside South Africa. In South Africa, we studied 18 schedules developed for the President's Educational Initiative (PEI) Project.<sup>1</sup> The 18 projects from which these schedules were drawn were for the most part relatively small scale qualitative studies. In addition to these schedules, we also considered instruments which we gathered via an internet search and those that we had assembled over time from different studies. Of the total of 30 schedules that we studied, 24 were closed schedules, three were open, and three were mixed.

Two key issues emerged from an analysis of these instruments which affect the kinds of claims we are able to make about what goes on in classrooms.

1. *Very few studies appear to be driven by a theory of pedagogy (or any other related theory). It is usually difficult to establish the main features of the conceptual framework from which the indicators set out in the schedule were derived.*

In very many cases, classroom observation schedules, whether open or closed, were driven by uninterrogated views of what constitutes 'good teaching practice'. Relating this to the diagrams in Figure 1 above, we suggest that the

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<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to the Joint Education Trust for giving us access to these schedules.

theory of pedagogy in both inductive and deductive approaches was weak, and research was driven by common-sense notions of teaching, or ideologically driven commitments to ‘good practice’. Group work is considered a good thing; teacher exposition is not. Many of the PEI observation schedules were preoccupied with the pacing of lessons, variety in the selection of teaching resources and language used, drawing on everyday knowledge, sequencing (linking previous with new knowledge) and aspects of the moral order of classrooms (empathy, respect for dignity of students, etc). Far less emphasis was placed on conceptual development, except that a few instruments asked the researcher to note whether the teacher demonstrated sound knowledge of subject content, communicated clearly, involved students in problem solving activities and used appropriate questioning skills. Most of the PEI schedules reflect a concern with the aims of Curriculum 2005. While the kind of information which these schedules attempted to collect is not unimportant, the schedules, whether open or closed, were largely normative in that researchers entered the field with strong views about what constituted good teaching practice. Because of this, these instruments would be unable to capture information about what teachers might have been doing that fell outside of these categories.

The apparent absence of an explicit theory of pedagogy, a theory which guides the exploration of classroom life, has in our view resulted in many schedules which are unarticulated assemblies of classroom features with little or no in-depth description of any particular aspect of classroom activities. As such they do not readily suggest a research problem, and the unit of analysis – whether this be the teacher, the learners, the materials, tasks, utterances, or subject knowledge – is not always clear. In studying these assemblies of classroom features, we found that in very many cases the instruments focused on what we, following Bernstein (1990) refer to as the regulative discourse, the social relations and moral order of the classroom. Focusing on the regulative discourse foregrounds features such as teacher-learner relations and the degree of intimacy and distance entailed in these. Few instruments concentrated on instructional discourse, the knowledge and skills transmitted to learners, and only two of the PEI instruments made reference to the actual subject area under investigation. For example, in a project that aimed to explore best practices in mathematics and science, no reference was made to either subject area and the schedule called rather for observations about “Learners use of highly interactive materials” and “The creation of a conducive learning environment”. By focusing on these two aspects, the instrument foregrounded regulative features, and, we fear, may have resulted in attempts to “read” the instructional through the regulative discourses. In other words, data collected

by means of a schedule asking for evidence of how learners are seated in the classroom (groups or rows), or about the availability and variation of 'interactive' learning materials and activities might be used to draw conclusions about 'learner-centred' or 'innovative' classrooms, without saying much at all about the quality of the pedagogic discourse which learners are offered.

The absence of a theory of pedagogy also means that criteria for what is to be grasped by the observer are not made available, and reliance on commonsense understandings and the judgment of the observer is increased. For example, one schedule exhorts the observer to "write down your own comments on the use of materials in this lesson. Be very honest", and another asks observers to "Please comment on values and attitudes displayed by the teacher in the lesson". We return to these issues below.

2. *In many instances there appear to be threats to both reliability and validity.*

Closed and open classroom instruments are associated with different kinds of threats to reliability and validity. In the case of open instruments, issues of reliability (the soundness of the data collection process over time) are addressed by specifying precisely the ways in which data are to be collected. The TIMMS video study (Stigler, 1997) for example provides careful detail of decisions taken about when video recording took place, by whom, and what aspects of classroom life were focused upon. Validity, in the case of open instruments, arises largely at the stage of analysis when relationships are set up between the theory, the categories and themes developed inductively, and the data.

In the case of closed instruments, issues of validity and reliability arise most significantly at the time of instrument design and data collection. Closed schedules, which approach classroom life with a set of pre-conceptualised categories, can be either high or low inference measures (Evertson and Green, 1986), both of which have implications for validity and reliability. A low inference measure might ask a question such as "How many desks are in the classroom?". Such a question calls for little inference or judgement on the part of the observer, and reliability is potentially high. However, low inference measures are not necessarily valid, and in this sense reliability and validity tend to operate orthogonally with each other.

We can illustrate these concerns in relation to an HSRC instrument used to evaluate the implementation of C2005. We have selected this particular instrument because it is in the public domain, and because the HSRC, as a publicly funded institution, expects to have its work open to scrutiny. Having said this, this instrument has much in common with other instruments we have perused which were designed for studies funded under the PEI.

This instrument was designed in three parts: one collected brief information about the school and class observed, the second collected information about “learning programme attributes”, “learner activity”, “learning environment”, “motivation”, “learning support materials” and “assessment procedures”, and the third collected information on “critical incidents”.

The second part of the instrument, an extract from which is presented in Figure 2 on the next page, is an example of a high inference measure. It relies on the judgement and skills of the fieldworkers (and hence upon significant funding for training). For example, how does one gather data on whether the learning programme “develops critical thinking skills”? How do “critical thinking skills” manifest themselves in the classroom? What does one look for? What does rote learning look like? We do not deny the existence of rote learning, but because it has tended to become a term of evaluation rather than description, we cannot assume that all researchers mean the same thing by it. Is attending a lecture a manifestation of rote learning? Is the learning of the times tables in the junior school rote learning, and if so, is this necessarily a bad thing? This extract from the observation instrument is an example of what for us is an uninterrogated view of good practice, and hence an untheorised view of pedagogy. The emphasis in the schedule as a whole is upon the regulative features of classroom life – only one item is concerned with instructional discourse in that it indexes the development of higher order thinking skills.

**Figure 2: HSRC instrument used to evaluate the implementation of C2005**

NATIONAL FORMATIVE EVALUATION AND MONITORING OF CURRICULUM 2005

**SECTION B**

		30-minutes blocks of observation						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
Time started:								
Time completed:								
<b>A. Learning Programme Attributes</b>								
1. Learning programme is outcomes driven.								Learning programme is content driven.
2. Outcomes for the learning activity are clear.								Learning activity is taken because it is part of the syllabus or for interest.
3. Programme develops critical thinking skills.								Emphasis is on rote learning.
4. Prior knowledge of individual learners is accommodated.								Teaching aimed at the whole class.
5. Programme is learner-centred.								Programme is educator-centred.
6. Learning facilitation is evident.								Traditional teaching methods are used.
7. Learner activities are sequenced.								Learner activities are not sequenced.
8. Identification and diagnosis of learning difficulties are built into the learning programme.								There is no attempt to identify learning difficulties.
9. Learning support for individual needs is evident.								Individual needs are not accommodated.
10. Enrichment is provided according to individual needs.								There is no enrichment according to individual needs.
11. There is immediate acknowledgement of the responses.								Immediate acknowledgement of the responses does not take place.
12. Learners are actively involved in their own learning.								Learners are passively fed information.

Another example of a high inference measure used in a large-scale study is that used in the evaluation of the United Kingdom numeracy strategy (Brown, Askew, Rhodes et al, 2001). In this large-scale study, data were collected using a high inference, closed instrument which was concerned with *mathematical tasks*, (evaluated according to three criteria: “mathematical challenge”, “integrity and significance” and “engage interest”); *talk* (“teacher talk”, “teacher-pupil talk”, “pupil talk” and “management of talk”); *tools* (“range of modes”, “types of modes”); and *relationships and norms* (“community of learners”, “empathy”). These criteria, taken together, constitute a particular view of good practice, and the instrument is concerned to record the extent of presences and absences in classrooms. The criteria of mathematical challenge under tasks is illustrated below.

**Figure 3: ‘Mathematical tasks’ item in the UK Numeracy Strategy schedule**

**Tasks**

<b>Mathematical challenge</b>			
All/nearly all pupils are appropriately challenged mathematically, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• most of pupils, most of the time appear to be doing mathematics which challenges them to think mathematically</li> <li>• pupils have some control over level of difficulty</li> </ul>	About half the pupils are appropriately challenged all of lesson/all pupils appropriately challenged for a part of the lesson, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good differentiation in main part of lesson, plenary/intro. not adequately differentiated</li> </ul>	Some pupils are doing appropriately challenging work for some of the time.	Some pupils are doing appropriately challenging work for some of the time.

On the face of it this seems like a reasonable request for data. Being able to comment on mathematical challenge, integrity and significance is something mathematics educators want to be able to do. But there are a number of problems with this item, which affect the reliability and validity of the research results. Firstly, what does one mean by “mathematical challenge”? This is not a trivial matter, and requires judgement by the researchers. What forms of behaviour, modes of communication and utterances does one look for

as indicators of mathematical challenge? In our review of classroom observation instruments we found this to be a common feature – it was not apparent to us how the categories would be used to collect data. This is not in itself an insurmountable problem, but in large-scale research we need the assurance that field workers have been adequately trained (as described, for example, by Galton, Simon and Croll, 1980).

Both of the instruments above are high inference, and both pay attention to the issue of the recording of observations over time. However, of the sample of 30 instruments we analysed from the PEI study and elsewhere, only nine specified timing of observations, that is, specified who and what should be observed, and how observations should be spaced over the duration of a lesson. Is the appearance of mathematical challenge, for example, something one expects to see across a lesson, or only isolated instances? In this regard the numeracy instrument guides the data collector in terms of frequency. Many instruments do not do this, however, which undermines their reliability and validity. The following is an example from a PEI study interested in “best practice” amongst underqualified mathematics and science teachers.

**Figure 4: Item extracted from observation schedule used in a PEI study**

**2. Teacher makes the meaning clear**

1. Teacher uses a variety of examples, simplification strategies aimed at enhancing learners’ grasp of meaning and understanding
2. Teacher uses some strategies to make the meaning clear
3. Teacher uses few strategies to make the meaning clear
4. Teacher focuses on content with slight reference to meaning and understanding
5. Teacher teaches in a manner that does not relate to meaning and understanding

Comment.....

This extract illustrates our concern about the lack of specification in high inference schedules: how does one recognise “meaning and understanding” in the classroom, and how does one recognize these notions in relation to specific subject areas such as mathematics or English? Furthermore, the extract illustrates the difficulties of under stipulating how the data should be sampled. What is the difference between “some strategies” and a “few strategies” and over what period these data should be collected – at five minute intervals, at the end of the lesson? Is the fieldworker to make a general assessment of the lesson at its end, or in relation to the different activities that make up the lesson?



The foregoing discussion has raised some of the difficulties we have identified in studying classroom observation schedules used both in South Africa and elsewhere. In the next part of the paper we discuss how we have attempted to address some of these issues through our own research and in particular how we bring data collection and analysis together through Bernstein's notion of languages of description.

## Generating and analyzing data using languages of description

A language of description denotes the vocabulary and the syntax, the concepts and the ways in which these are woven together, which enable empirical data to be both produced and read. Bernstein describes languages of description as follows:

Briefly, a language of description is a translation device whereby one language is transformed into another. We can distinguish between internal and external languages of description. The internal language of description refers to the syntax whereby a conceptual language is created. The external language of description refers to the syntax whereby the internal language can describe something other than itself (Bernstein, 1996, pp.135-6).

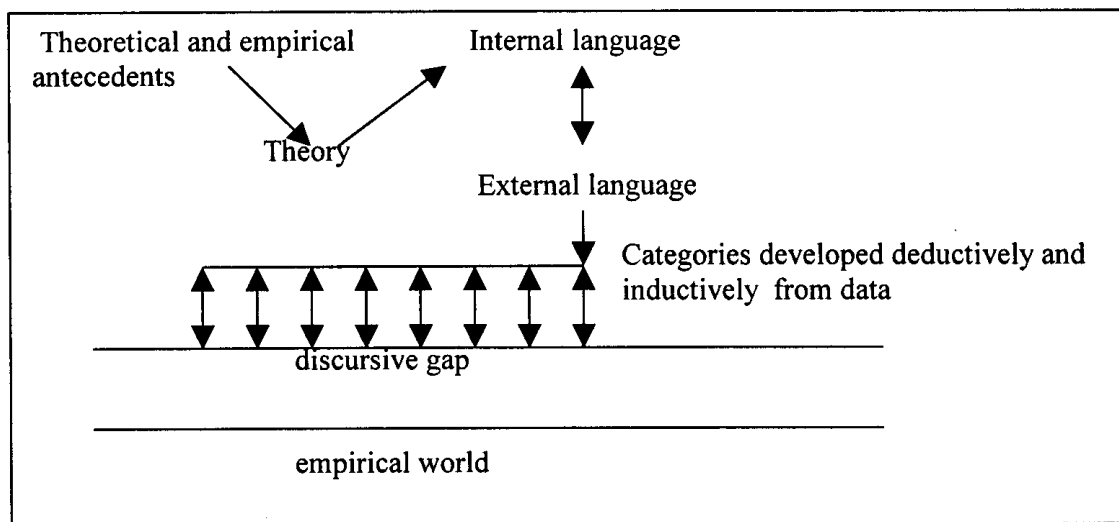
We can illustrate the relationship between the two languages by considering in the first instance the relationship between a theoretical framework (internal language of description) and classroom data (language of enactment). For the theoretical language to be able to both produce and read data, it requires a layering of categories and subcategories which allow the theory to speak about the empirical world: what is to count as data and how these data are to be read. As Dowling (1998) suggests, an external language of description develops on the basis of deductive and inductive analysis, moving interactively between the internal language and engagement with empirical data. The language of description thus developed provides the basis for establishing what are to count as data and provides for their principled reading.

Bernstein stresses the importance for external and internal languages to be loosely articulated so as to allow the external language, developed in conversation with the data, to challenge the internal language and promote its change and development. Furthermore, this loose articulation allows the researched to insert their own voice, and challenge the claims produced by the research. In this sense the idea of a language of description has both a theoretical and ethical imperative.

In our own work we use Bernstein’s sociology as a theoretical framework to research pedagogy. Using any such framework inevitably introduces a systematic ‘bias’ into the research in that it acts selectively upon classroom life in order to answer certain specific types of questions. In our case we are interested in the processes of apprenticeship – how, in the course of pedagogic interaction, students come to master knowledge, be it knowledge of mathematics, or of the moral order of the school and how to comport themselves as learners. We are interested in two dimensions of variation: classification, which is about specialisation of discourses, spaces and agents (the ‘what’ and ‘who’ of pedagogy); and framing, which is about the relative control teachers and learners have over selection, sequencing, pacing, evaluation and hierarchical rules (the ‘how’ of pedagogy). These are high-level concepts and to be able to set them to work in generating and analysing texts from classrooms, they need to become more fine-grained and brought closer to the data.

This approach can be represented in the following diagram.

**Figure 5 : Languages of description**



An illustration of how this process is achieved can be provided using aspects from Hoadley’s research on teachers’ identities and pedagogic practices in diverse social class school contexts (upper middle class and lower working class). Hoadley is conducting her research in Grade 3 classes, and is interested in the teaching and learning of mathematics and literacy. She has developed an external language using the work of Morais and Pires (2002) and Morais and Neves (2001), and more generally the work of the Sociological Studies of the

Classroom project at the University of Lisbon. A coding instrument has been designed to orient the collection of continuous classroom data using video recordings, as well as to analyse the data this generates. The instrument has been developed *a priori* and will be brought into dialogue with data in order to refine and develop it. While the instrument presented here is used as a tool to guide data collection and analysis, it is possible to use this instrument strictly deductively, as a closed instrument, as in the case of Figure 1b, with the associated threats to validity and reliability discussed earlier.

Following Bernstein (2000) the instrument seeks to assign values in terms of framing to the discursive rules of pedagogic practice: the selection, sequencing, pacing and evaluative criteria of educational knowledge. It also examines the hierarchical rules (the extent to which teacher and learner have control over the order, character and manner of the conduct of learners). The instrument also considers discourse relations in terms of the strength of classification (or boundedness) between different subject areas (inter-discursive), between school knowledge and everyday knowledge (inter-discursive), and within the subject area (intra-discursive). The instrument also looks at the classification of spaces and agents. In considering the content knowledge that is transmitted the instrument assigns ‘high’ and ‘low’ values to the level of conceptual demand and instructional density (the number of ways in which a concept is represented in the instructional practice of the teacher in order that the learner may grasp a concept). The schedule contains a set of forty indicators for the following conceptual categories:

Figure 6: Conceptual categories for researching pedagogy

<b>Framing</b>	Discursive rules	Extent to which teacher controls <b>selection</b> of content
		Extent to which teacher controls <b>sequencing</b> of content
		Extent to which teacher controls <b>pacing</b> of content
		Extent to which teacher makes explicit the <b>rules for evaluation</b> of learners’ performances

	Hierarchical rules	Extent to which teacher makes formal or informal the social relations <b>between teacher and learners</b>
		Extent to which the teacher controls interactions <b>between learners</b>

Instructional density (the range of ways in which a mathematical concept is represented in the instructional practice of the teacher in order that the learner may grasp the concept)

	Relations between discourses	<b>Inter-discursive</b> (strength of boundary between mathematics and other subject areas)
		<b>Inter-discursive</b> (strength of boundary between school mathematics and everyday knowledge)
		<b>Intra-discursive</b> (strength of boundary between different topics within mathematics)
	Relations between spaces	<b>Teacher – learner</b> (strength of demarcation between spaces used by teachers and learners)
		<b>Space for learning</b> (strength of between space used for learning)
<b>Classification</b>	Relations between agents	Teacher – learner (strength of demarcation of pedagogic identities)

Conceptual demand (the level of conceptual demand of the mathematics introduced in the classroom)

One of the forty indicators is presented below to illustrate how the instrument has been designed.

**Figure 7: Indicator 20 (Discursive relations)**

<b>Inter-discursive relations</b> (Between school mathematics and everyday knowledges)						
20. In the contents that are used in mathematics teaching	C <sup>+++</sup>	C <sup>++</sup>	C <sup>+</sup>	C <sup>-</sup>	C <sup>--</sup>	C <sup>---</sup>
	Extremely high level of abstraction	Predominantly high level of abstraction	Some high level of abstraction	Mostly low level of abstraction	Predominantly low level of abstraction	Extremely low level of abstraction
	90 – 100 % of the content introduced is at a high level of abstraction. Specialised terms and language predominate. All content is different from the everyday experience of learners.	70 – 90 % of the content is abstract and specialised and is different from the local, personal knowledge of the learners. Specialised vocabulary is emphasised.	50 – 70 % of the content is abstract and specialised and more local, personal content is introduced. Some specialised vocabulary is introduced.	50 – 70 % of the content focuses on concrete, local knowledge familiar to the learners, such as me, my body, cooking, shopping, with little introduction of specialised terms and operations.	70 – 90 % of the content focuses on concrete, local knowledge familiar to the learners with very little introduction of specialised terms and language.	90% or more of the content familiar to the learners in their everyday lives is introduced. There is very little or no introduction of specialised terms and operations.

A scheme of this kind has a number of advantages. Firstly, it starts from a clearly stated theory of pedagogy, which is used to develop coding categories. Secondly, and following on from this, it is transparent and relatively open to interrogation. Teachers and fellow researchers can access the criteria by which we analyse classrooms, and can challenge our findings on the basis of these. Thirdly, it provides a language whereby we can look at classroom life in a non-evaluative way. We expect variation in classification and framing relations (what knowledge is transmitted, and how) but we do not set out with a pre-conceived of what constitutes good practice and then go out into classrooms to find it. This allows the theory to go beyond the data collected, and detect both presences and absences. Fourthly, and linked to this, we can use this language to define predominant forms of pedagogy. Rather than allowing terms such as ‘learner-centredness’ to circulate in a fuzzy and undefined way, we are able to provide a definition using a particular combination of framing relations, usually involving weak control by teachers over micro-sequencing, selection, pacing and hierarchical rules, and sometimes strong framing over the evaluative criteria. This helps us to get away from rather crude equations such as that set up between learner-centredness and group work. Finally, because the schedule is used as an analytic rather than a data collection instrument, the scheme can undergo refinement and change in dialogue with the data.

The charge has been made against those working with Bernstein's work in South Africa that the use of a strong *a priori* theory such as his removes the possibility for the theory to undergo change. It would appear, from the criticisms made, that we enter the field with categories shaped rather like containers, into which we scoop our data! In the final part of this paper, we discuss the notion of a discursive gap, to show the potential for avoiding circularity in research.

## The discursive gap

There are two ways (at least) that the notion of a discursive gap has been used by Bernsteinian researchers. Although they appear to be saying different things, they both, in different ways, point to the loose articulation of three moments of the theory-research process – the internal language, the external language and the language of enactment. Moore and Muller (2002), for example, describe the discursive gap as lying “between the internal language of the theory and the language that describes things outside it” (p.634) suggesting thereby a gap between internal and external languages. Dowling, in contrast, uses the discursive gap to point to a gap between the external language and the empirical world. In spite of differences in interpretation, all three authors set out to illustrate Bernstein's point that theoretical frameworks such as that developed by himself are capable of going beyond the data collected, and hold the potential for data to bring about changes in theory, thereby avoiding circularity and ossification.

The notion of a discursive gap was first raised by Bernstein in a mimeo, *Codes and research* which was subsequently reprinted as a chapter in his final book. In this chapter, Bernstein provides his account of the relationship between theory and research. Theory, he suggests, produces models which provide the means to decide what is to count as data, and how these are to be analysed. Bernstein notes:

When the model is referred to something other than itself, then it should be able to provide the principles which will identify that something as falling within the specification of the model and identifying explicitly what does not so fall. Such principles we can call *recognition rules* for identifying an external relevant something. However, this something will always generate, or have the capacity to generate, greater ranges of information than the model calls for. The *realisation rules* of the model regulate the descriptions of the something. They transform the information the something does, or can put out, into data *relevant* to the model. However, if the realisation rules produce descriptions which are limited to transforming only that information into data *which at that time* appears consonant

with the model, then the model can never change and the whole process is circular. Nothing therefore exists outside of the model (Bernstein, 2000, pp.125-126, emphasis in original).<sup>2</sup>

Bernstein goes on, with our comments in parenthesis:

Thus the interface between the realisation rules of the model and the information the something [transmission] does, or can produce, is vital. There then must be a discursive gap between the rules specified by the model *and* the realisation rules for transforming the information produced by the something [transmission]. This gap enables the integrity of the something [transmission] to exist in its own right, it enables the something, so to speak, to announce itself, it enables the something to re-describe the descriptions of the model's own realisation rules and so change. Thus the principles of descriptions of the something [transmission] external to the model must go beyond the realisation rules *internal* to the model (Bernstein, 2000, p.126).

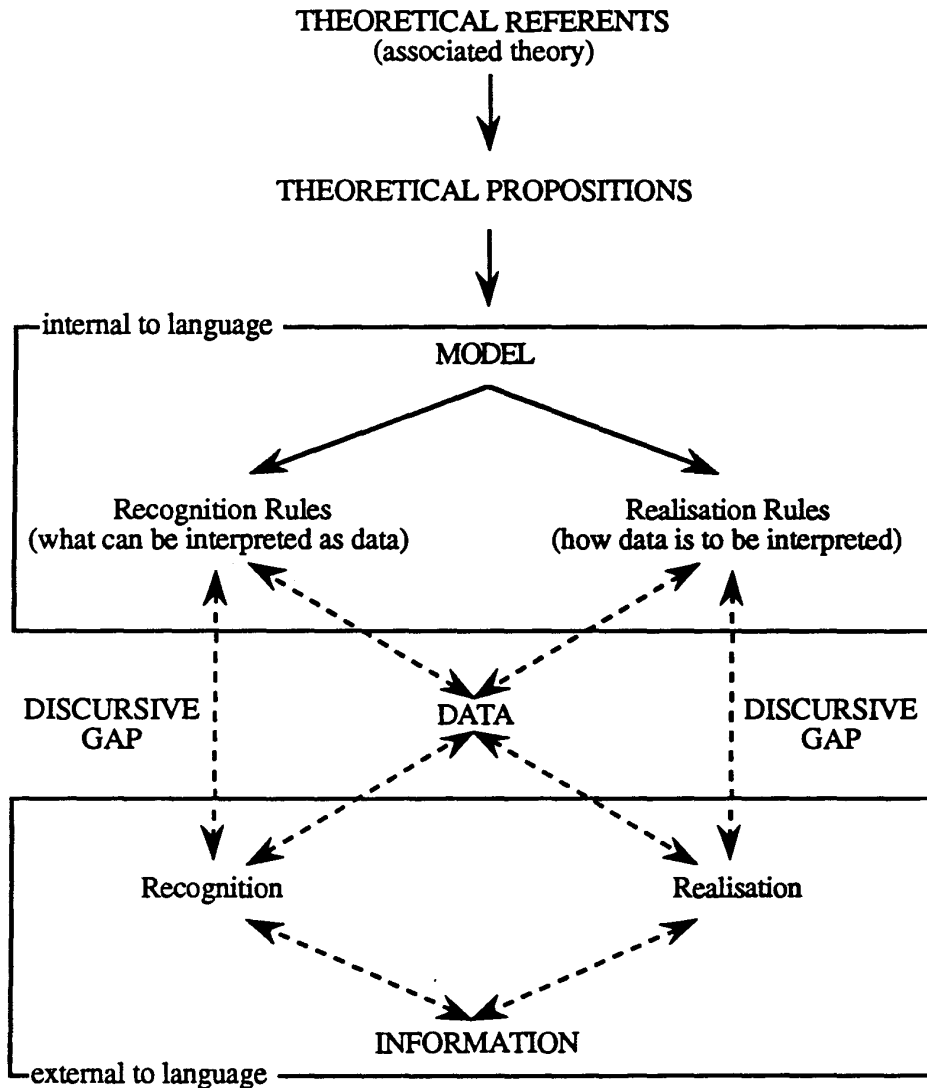
Paul Dowling provides an interpretation of Bernstein's notion of the discursive gap in a PhD thesis which he produced under Bernstein's supervision. This diagram does not reflect the distinction Bernstein makes between internal and external languages of description as Dowling's PhD was produced before this distinction was fully developed.

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<sup>2</sup> Bernstein's comments are somewhat elliptical, and we have attempted to illustrate what he means by allowing his comments to speak to our present interest, namely the observation of transmission practices in classrooms. We can paraphrase the above quotation thus:

When Bernstein's model is used to analyse pedagogic transmission in classrooms, then the model should be able to provide the principles which will identify what aspects of transmission fall within the specification of the model as well as identifying explicitly what aspects does not so fall. Bernstein describes transmission as varying along two dimensions, classification and framing. Aspects of classroom life that cannot be captured using these descriptors therefore fall outside of the model. Such principles, classification and framing relations as illustrated in Hoadley's schedule shown above, can be called *recognition rules* for identifying transmission practices. However, transmission practices on the part of teachers will always generate, or have the capacity to generate, greater ranges of information than the model calls for. The *realisation rules* of the model regulate the descriptions of transmission. These realisation rules transform the information that transmission practices produce, into data *relevant* to the model. In other words, realisation rules indicate how the data collected by an instrument such as Hoadley's shown below, is to be analysed. However, if the realisation rules produce descriptions which are limited to transforming only that information into data *which at that time* appears consonant with the model, then the model can never change and the whole process is circular. This means that as Hoadley uses her instrument to orient the process of data collection, and as a basis of analysis, it will undergo transformation. The model, because it is theoretically generated, has the potential to go beyond the immediate data to describe other modalities of transmission, which may be present or absent.

Figure 8: Structure and Application of a Language of Description (Dowling, 1995)



The solid lines in this diagram show lines of deductive argument. In Dowling's interpretation of Bernstein's commentary, he notes

the 'discursive gap' is between that which is internal to the language of description and that which is external to it. Data is shown within this gap. Data can be understood as the product of the recognition and realisation rules of the language, but there will always be an excess in terms of possible interpretation. The 'discursive gap' is the region of the 'yet-to-be-described' (1995, p.88).



Dowling notes further that with the methodological inclusion of the notion of the discursive gap, “it is not necessary to introduce a formal condition for reflexivity” (1995, p.88) such as that used by Bourdieu.

Our use of the discursive gap has much in common with Dowling and we invoke it here in order to signal two crucial aspects of our work. Firstly, ‘the gap’ signals an acknowledgement that the empirical world can only be grasped via theory, and that the empirical world is, as Bernstein emphasised, ‘always ideologised’. In both diagrams of Figure 1 above a gap is indicated between the theoretical framework and the categories this gives rise to, and that which is termed the empirical world (in this case classroom life). This gap suggests that we can only get at classroom life through a theory about it, and different theories potentially generate different descriptions. These theories are cultural arbitraries in the sense that they are historically and contextually contingent, and our knowledge of the world stands removed from its “objective” materiality.

Stating the problem in this way commits us, like Moore and Muller, to a “sociological realist” position (Moore and Muller, 2002, p.635), one which admits that the world is unknown but potentially knowable, and that the material, the social and the cultural worlds are dialectically interlinked. As Moore and Muller comment: “against constructivism it [sociological realism] acknowledges the ontological discipline of the discursive gap – reality ‘announces’ itself to us as well as being constructed by us” (p.636).

Positivists and postmoderns might suggest that they can dispense with the notion of a discursive gap; the first because the world is deemed to be unproblematically graspable through data collection and analysis, and the second because the world is deemed to be as we construct it through the production and analysis of texts, where any artifact at all can signify as a text. All researchers ultimately are called upon to resolve the question of the status of their data texts, as to whether they reflect unproblematically and transparently upon a ‘real’ world (as positivists would argue), whether they should be regarded as ‘events’ produced by social or psychic structures, as (post)structuralists might argue, or whether they should be regarded, as postmoderns would have it, as nothing but text, so that our interest is not with what the text means but how it means, and how it constitutes rather than reflects a social or psychic world. Our argument here is that while these commitments are different, and important, they do not alter the requirement for the rigorous collection and analysis of texts, the issues with which this paper is concerned.

One reason we invoke the notion of a discursive gap, then, is to signal a particular epistemological commitment but at the same time to suggest that the requirements of making strong claims about pedagogy stand somewhat independently of such a commitment. An additional reason we invoke 'the gap' is to recognize the hiatus that inevitably occurs when developing theoretical constructs are brought into conversation with data and the potential for theory development.

## Conclusion

In this paper we set out to address the question: how do we make trustworthy claims about pedagogy? We set about addressing this issue in the first instance by scrutinising classroom observation schedules used both in South Africa and abroad, in both small and large-scale studies. From this study we highlighted two key issues which for us potentially threaten our ability to make robust claims about what goes on in classrooms. Firstly, many of the studies which have been undertaken do not emerge from strong theories about pedagogy, either in general or in relation to specific subject areas. Secondly, and related to the first point, many of the schedules we studied exhibit difficulties in relation to both validity and reliability. To highlight these difficulties, and at the same time to provide a productive way forward, we have suggested an alternative approach. This approach draws on a strong theory of pedagogy and attempts to address some of the threats to validity and reliability through the development of an external language of description from the internal language constituted by Bernstein's sociology. An analytic device designed by Hoadley to analyse pedagogy was introduced to show how a valid instrument might be developed from a robust theory of pedagogy.

The charge has often been made of those using strong theoretical frameworks such as that of Bernstein, that research becomes non-reflexive, circular and incapable of change and development. We have invoked Bernstein's notion of the discursive gap to index the hiatus that inevitably arises as theoretically driven descriptors are brought into dialogue with data, and the redescription and development that should arise from this. The discursive gap signals the potential for the theory to incorporate reflexivity.

We acknowledge that the notion of a discursive gap positions us as sociological realists, but want to suggest further, that irrespective of epistemological commitment, the challenges we face in making robust claims

about pedagogy remain shared. At issue are the steps we take to produce and analyse classroom data in order to make trustworthy claims about pedagogy. Trustworthiness ultimately is a matter of rigour, and the establishment of clear criteria of worth, rather than taking up epistemological positions and asserting that particular data collecting strategies or modes of analysis necessarily fall into line behind them.

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# Citizenship education as compassion

Yusef Waghid

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## Abstract

In this article I explore how instances of liberal and communitarian conceptions of citizenship theory underscore citizenship education in South Africa. My contention is that citizenship education as it evolved through “Values, Education and Democracy” policy discourses seems to resemble instances of liberal and communitarian conceptions of citizenship theory. Yet, aspects of such a citizenship education also seem to be at odds with liberal and communitarian conceptions. My contention is that a communitarian conception of citizenship education, which invokes compassion, has the potential to enact educational transformation in institutions. Consequently, I argue that citizenship education initiatives in South Africa need to take seriously the notion of compassion so that students may become serious about the suffering of others – a precondition, as I argue, for educational transformation to occur.

## Background

Since the establishment of the country’s new democratic system of government in April 1994, every education policy initiative has been linked to democratic principles enunciated in the Constitution and Bill of Rights of 1996. It is not surprising that the national Department of Education (DoE) initiated the *Tirisano* project (*Tirisano* meaning “Working together”) in 1999 with its strategic goals being to ensure that the country’s new outcomes-based education system (OBE) could be successfully implemented commensurate with a spirit of democracy, respect for human rights, justice, equality, freedom, nation building and reconciliation – key features listed in the Preamble of the Constitution (1996).

After the second democratic elections in 1999, Minister Kader Asmal was appointed Minister of Education to confirm and accelerate the transformative work done by his predecessor, Professor Sibusiso Bengu. The year 1999 also welcomed in the new President, Thabo Mbeki, whose “watchword” was “accelerated delivery” (DoE, 1999, p.7). In his State of the Nation address to

Parliament on 25 June 1999 the President identified education and training as a critical priority for meeting the broader challenge of creating a democratic and prosperous society (DoE, 1999, p.11). On 27 July 1999, after vigorous discussions with the major stakeholders in the educational arena, the Minister of Education launched what he termed a national mobilisation for education and training under the slogan *Tirisano*, “Working together”, where he calls upon all South Africans, in the spirit of *Tirisano*, to join hands with the Ministry to tackle the most urgent problems in education. More specifically, the *Tirisano* project announced as its goals: establishing co-operative governance in educational institutions; making schools “centres of community and cultural life”; attending to and preventing the physical degradation of schools; developing the professionalism of teachers; cultivating active learning through OBE; creating an education and training system which could meet the socio-economic demands of the country; reconfiguring higher education in line with the imperatives of a global market economy; and dealing purposefully with HIV/AIDS (DoE, 1999).

In essence the *Tirisano* project’s goals stressed the Ministry of Education’s commitment to produce “good” citizens who, on the one hand, can contribute towards achieving the political stability and peace necessary to ensure the growth of a competitive labour market economy and, on the other hand, can combat the crime, corruption and moral decadence endemic to South African society.

## Two *Tirisano* moments of citizenship education

In the modern era, interest in citizenship has been sparked by a number of political events and trends throughout the world – increasing apathy and long-term welfare dependency in the United States, the resurgence of nationalist movements in Eastern Europe, the stresses created by increasingly multicultural and multiracial populations in Western Europe, the failure of environmental policies that rely on citizens’ voluntary co-operation, disaffection with globalisation and the perceived loss of national sovereignty (Kymlicka, 2002, p.284). These events indicated that the stability of modern democracies depends not only on the justice of their institutions – for instance, in the case of South Africa on its Constitution, Bill of Rights, Constitutional Court and multi-party democratic system – but also on the quality and attitude of its citizens: e.g. their sense of identity and how they view potentially competing forms of national, regional, ethnic or religious identities; their

ability to tolerate and work with others who are different from themselves; their desire to participate in the political process in order to promote the public good and hold authorities accountable; their willingness to show self-restraint and exercise personal responsibility in their economic demands, and in personal choices which affect their health and the environment. Without citizens who possess these qualities democracies become difficult to govern, even unstable (Kymlicka, 2002, p.285).

The point I am making is that South Africa's democratic education system would not necessarily function effectively in the absence of an especially responsible and accountable citizenry. Individuals cannot just pursue their own self-interest without regard for the common good, neither would procedural-institutional mechanisms such as a Constitution, Bill of Rights and multi-party democratic system of government be enough. Citizens also require what Galston (1991, p.217) and Macedo (1990, p.138) refer to as some level of civic virtue and "public-spiritedness". In other words, effective education policy implementation relies on responsible citizenship. For instance, the state would be unable to provide a basic education if citizens do not act responsibly with respect to their own education in terms of attending school (both teachers and students), eradicating the vandalising of school buildings, and fostering communal involvement in school activities. Attempts to implement policy would flounder without the co-operation and self-restraint of citizens, that is, the exercise of civic virtue – citizens' willingness to participate, ability to trust, giving expression to their sense of justice (Kymlicka, 2002, p.286).

In South Africa two strategic moments spearheaded by the DoE sum up the country's commitment to implementing citizenship education: (1) The Report of the Working Group on Values in Education (DoE, 2000), which culminated in the Saamtrek Conference on Values, Education and Democracy (DoE, 2001a); this in turn generated (2) the Manifesto on Values in Education (DoE, 2001b). This brings me to a discussion of the main aspects associated with these moments.

Firstly, following the 1994 elections the transformation of the education system became the top priority of the new government. According to Minister Asmal, the democratic values as enshrined in the Constitution had to be developed and internalised by South Africans, and schools were the most convenient point of embarking upon this project. As stated earlier, President Thabo Mbeki identified education and training as a critical priority for meeting the broader challenge of creating a democratic and prosperous society. His position was that the transformation of the education system required a



fundamental reassessment and rethinking in order to prepare people for “citizenship” and “nationhood”. Therefore, small wonder that Minister Asmal, in his *Tirisano* Implementation Plan, focused on “developing people for citizenship”. Minister Bengu announced on his appointment in 1994 that all schools and education institutions were open and without racial barriers of any kind, as promulgated in the 1993 Interim Constitution. The South African Schools Act of 1996 created the nation’s first national and non-racial school system (DoE, 1999, p.63). On the one hand, however, a South African Human Rights Commission study on racial integration in schools found that racism was still extremely prevalent, in some schools. On the other hand, another question being debated was whether the DoE should focus on “race” alone as a form of discrimination: “Race may be the most obvious and historically potent of the issues on which discrimination occurs, but racial intolerance is commonly associated with other forms of prejudice and bigotry, towards women, gays, foreigners, the disabled, and other religious traditions” (DoE, 1999, p.66).

It was during an informal discussion on religious education for the *Tirisano* Plan that the idea of a “Values, Education and Democracy” project, following the international trend of “education for democratic values and social participation”, was born. Out of this broader concern for social solidarity and cohesion, the practice of peace, and civic participation in democratic institutions, Minister Kader Asmal requested that a working group on “Values, Education and Democracy” be established in February 2000 (DoE, 1999, pp.66-67).<sup>3</sup>

Under the auspices of the Working Group a school-based research project was conducted in October 2000 by a consortium of research organisations led by the Witwatersrand University Education Policy Unit to explore the ways that teachers, students and parents think and talk about “Values, Education and

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<sup>3</sup> The members of the Working Group on “Values, Education and Democracy” were appointed by the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal in their individual capacities. Headed by Professor Wilmot James (ex-Dean of Humanities, University of Cape Town), the other members were: Dr Frans Auerbach (retired educator; South African Jewish Board of Deputies); Ms Zubeida Desai (Chairperson, Pan South African Language Board; senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education, University of the Western Cape); Dr Herman Giliomee (former Professor of Political Studies at the University of Cape Town); Dr Z Pallo Jordan (Minister of Parliament); Ms Antjie Krog (author, poet and journalist); Mr Tembile Kulati (Special Advisor to the Minister: Higher Education); Mr Khetsi Lehoko (Deputy Director-General in the DoE); Ms Brenda Leibowitz (Director: National Research Centre for Curriculum Research in the DoE); and Ms Pansy Tlakula (Member of South African Human Rights Commission) (DoE, 2000, p.53).

Democracy”. Ninety-seven schools across five provinces were chosen by provincial officials to represent the range of schools in their province. Questionnaires were administered to all the teachers and principals. Three-hour participatory workshops were conducted separately with teachers, students and parents in thirteen schools (DoE, 2000, p.4). After a process of research and debate, this working group presented a report on its findings and recommendations entitled, “Values, Education and Democracy: Report of the Working Group on Values in Education”, in April 2000. According to the Report of the Working Group (RWG), the democratic Constitution and Bill of Rights accepted in 1996 provide the frame of reference for a democratic educational philosophy. The RWG outlines the importance of achieving the following in education:

- developing the intellectual abilities and critical faculties of students;
- establishing a climate of inclusiveness in institutions whereby students do not feel alienated and excluded;
- equipping students with problem-solving abilities (DoE, 2000).

The Working Group proposed the promotion of six “values” in institutions which they contended would contribute towards producing an inclusive critical student population capable of problem solving. These “values” include: equity, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability and social honour (DoE, 2000). A brief analytical summary of these “values” and their purposes as understood by the Working Group now follows:

- **Equity** is considered as a means to eradicate the inequalities in education, experienced mostly by Black students and teachers;
- **Tolerance** is considered as a priority in cultivating in students the capacities for mutual understanding, reciprocal altruism and the recognition of difference, particularly in managing and supporting the linguistic, religious, cultural and national diversity of the South African community of students and teachers (DoE, 2000, p.22);
- **Multilingualism** seeks to equalise the status of 11 official languages as announced in the Constitution of 1996. These languages include: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Afrikaans and English. Two values are promoted in the area of language: firstly, the importance of studying in the language one knows best, or as this is popularly referred to, mother tongue education; and secondly, the fostering of multilingualism, that is, since South Africa is a multilingual country students are encouraged to be at least bilingual, but preferably trilingual (DoE, 2000, pp.30-33);

- **Openness** is considered as a direct challenge to rote learning and the slavish repetition of information which characterised the apartheid system of education, where asking questions was discouraged and where an authoritarian attitude to learning and social conduct was expected of teachers. Cultivating openness principally has to do with engendering in students the capacities to be open and receptive to new ideas such as the ability to ask good and penetrating questions, and being willing to debate to arrive at quality decisions (DoE, 2000, pp.36-39);
- **Accountability** aims to foster in teachers and students a capacity for diligence, commitment to teaching and learning, and responsibility so desperately lacking in many dysfunctional Black schools (DoE, 2000, pp.42-45); and
- **Honour** is aimed at instilling in students and teachers a sense of “common loyalty” to the state or to national symbols, which was lacking before 1994 (DoE, 2000, pp.48-50).

The understanding of citizenship education as espoused in the aforementioned six “values” seems to resemble a liberal conception of citizenship as propounded by Rawls (1971), which places an emphasis on people possessing a set of rights and obligations they enjoy equally as citizens, for instance, having a right to personal security and freedom of speech. Certainly the attainment of equity<sup>4</sup> implies that everyone has a right to education, whereas the promotion of multilingualism recognises the right of people to communicate in the language of their choice. Moreover, “values” such as tolerance, respect, openness, accountability and social honour can be related to the liberal view that people need to uphold the rule of law and generally not to interfere with others’ enjoyment of their rights. In other words, a liberal conception of citizenship aims to inculcate in people a sense of moral virtue or “public spiritedness” to respect the rule of law, to cultivate socio-economic

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<sup>4</sup> According to figures supplied by the Department of Education, 4,3% of young adults and 17% of youths are illiterate (45% of adults are functionally illiterate); 4 407 schools are in “poor” or “very poor” condition; close to half of South Africa’s schools have a shortage of classrooms (almost 65 000 classrooms are needed); 2,3 million students attend schools without water within walking distance; 6,6 million students attend schools without toilets; and only some 10% of primary schools and around a third of secondary schools have recreational facilities (Christiansen, Cawthra, Helman-Smith and Moloji, 2001, p.88). Moreover, the South African Statistics Income and Expenditure Survey of 1995 showed that: the poverty rate for Africans was slightly above 60% compared to 1% for Whites; 60% of female-headed households fell under the poverty line compared to around 30% of male-headed households; and the poverty rate in rural areas was some 70% compared to almost 30% in urban areas (Christiansen, Cawthra, Helman-Smith and Moloji, 2001, p.80).

justice and to promote commonality amongst themselves (Miller, 2000, p.83). Hence, the RWG seems to be aligned to a liberal conception of citizenship education.

However, having a closer look at Rawls' ideas, the value of "equity" as espoused by the RWG does seem to be at odds with a liberal conception of citizenship. In presenting Rawls' ideas, I shall first expound on his "general conception" of justice: "All social primary goods – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favored" (Rawls, 1971, p.303). Rawls ties the idea of justice to an equal sharing of social goods, but he adds that by treating people as equals does not mean that one has to remove all inequalities (as suggested by the RWG), especially when the presence of such inequalities favour the least advantaged. For instance, if giving poor citizens a better pension allowance than wealthy citizens actually promotes the welfare of the poor without disadvantaging the living conditions of the wealthy, then inequality is allowed.

Rawls breaks down this "general conception" of justice into two principles:

First Principle – Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.

Second Principle – Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:

- a. to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, and
- b. attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (Rawls, 1971, pp.56).

According to these principles, equal liberties take precedence over equal opportunities, which take precedence over equal resources. But central to both principles is the idea that an inequality is allowed if it benefits "the least advantaged". In contrast to such a Rawlsian idea, the RWG suggests that inequalities in education be eradicated. If the distribution of resources in South African schools favours the least advantaged, then the unequal resources of advantaged schools could be allowed in a Rawlsian sense.

In his more recent work entitled, *Political Liberalism*, Rawls still endorses his two principles of justice: the liberty principle which guarantees every citizen equal basic liberties; and the difference principle which requires an equal distribution of resources except where inequalities benefit the least advantaged people. Yet, it is his argument for the liberty principle which has changed.

Rawls' conception of liberty is no longer merely limited to providing equal basic liberties to individuals, but that liberty (freedom) must be interpreted in terms of an individual's capacity to form and revise his (her) conception of what it means to do good. "As free persons, citizens claim the right to view their persons as independent from and as not identified with any particular conception of the good, or scheme of private ends" (Rawls, 1993, p.30). For instance, according to this Rawlsian idea of "political liberalism" every individual affiliated to a particular religious group has the right to exercise his (her) rights and in so doing attempts to restrict or eliminate group-imposed hindrances that would nullify such private individual rights. In other words, groups cannot limit the basic liberties of their individual members, including their right to be non-religious or to question and revise inherited conceptions of the good (Kymlicka, 2002, p.238). What Rawls' "political liberalism" involves, is not only giving to individuals certain formal legal rights to revise their understandings of what it means to do good, but also knowledge of these rights, as well as the educational and legal conditions required which would enable individuals to exercise such rights in an autonomous way (Kymlicka, 2002, p.239). What seems to be at variance with such a Rawlsian idea of political liberalism is the RWG's emphasis on cultivating "honour" in students. Instilling "a common loyalty" in students would certainly restrict or nullify students' private individual rights, including their right to be non-loyal or to question and revise the RWG's and DoE's conception of "honour".

Secondly, the resolutions of the VED conference<sup>5</sup> related to implementing a discourse of citizenship education that had three dimensions:

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<sup>5</sup> The publication of the Report of the Working Group on "Values, Education and Democracy" was made possible by the Royal Netherlands Embassy in 2000 and presented for public deliberation. The issues raised by public debate in newspapers, academic journals, letters and submissions to the Ministry culminated in a national conference at the National Botanical Institute, Kirstenbosch, Cape Town on 22-24 February 2001, called "Saamtrek: Values, Education and Democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". More than 400 of South Africa's leading education specialists, researchers, politicians, intellectuals and members of non-governmental organisations, gathered to deliberate the issues in an attempt to formulate a "Values, Education and Democracy" policy and its implementation in schools. The following were the conference themes and discussions: rooting the new patriotism in the Constitution; the role of teachers; the question of equity; governance and institutional culture; the question of language; infusing schools with the values of human rights; the oral tradition as a carrier of values; the value of history; the value of arts and culture; religion education vs. religious education; the role of sport; values and technology; the role of the media; sexual responsibility and HIV/AIDS; and gender and schooling (DoE 2001a).

- 1) promoting anti-racism through the teaching of a new history curriculum which requires that teachers be upgraded appropriately;
- 2) integrating the aesthetic performing arts subjects and African languages into the curricula; and
- 3) incorporating civics education in the curricula with an emphasis on people engaging critically in intersubjective deliberation (DoE, 2001a).

Certainly the anti-racist agenda propounded at the conference resembles a liberal conception of citizenship whereby people's rights irrespective of race, colour, belief and ethnicity cannot be violated. Yet the resolutions of the conference, which culminated in the generation of the MVE (2001), put a great deal of emphasis on citizens engaging actively with others in shaping the future of South African society through deliberation – an idea which seems to be attuned with a communitarian conception of citizenship espoused by Macedo (1990), Galston (1991) and Kymlicka (2002). Put differently, a communitarian conception of citizenship emphasises people's commitment to public participation, respectful dialogue, or critical attention to government, that is, "the need for people to be active citizens who participate in public deliberation" (Kymlicka, 2002, p.293). Such an understanding of communitarian citizenship education is aptly supported by Nussbaum<sup>6</sup> (2002, pp.293-299), who offers a threefold account of what it means: firstly, communitarian citizenship education engenders the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions; secondly, it urges that people should see themselves as human beings who need to respect diversity; and thirdly, to imagine the "Other", that is, the ability to imagine what it might be like to be in the position of a person different from oneself. Thus one finds that the MVE announces the achievement of the following ten communitarian "values" in educational institutions: democracy, social justice and equity, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, *ubuntu* (human dignity), an open society, accountability, the rule of law, respect and reconciliation (DoE 2001b). I shall now explore these ten "values" announced in the MVE, specifically focusing

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<sup>6</sup> My potential critic might refer to Nussbaum as a prominent liberal. I agree. However, considering that communitarianism is in fact a variant of liberalism it would not be inappropriate to refer to Nussbaum as a communitarian as some of her most recent writings suggest. Liberal communitarians among whom Martha Nussbaum is a distinguished representative in recent political philosophy, holds that there are many valuable ways of life which people may choose to pursue in an autonomous way after reflecting on alternative ways of the good life. Although this sounds very much Rawlsian, the communitarian twist occurs when Nussbaum argues that both the availability of a plurality of ways of life and the capacity for autonomous choice depend upon a communal background and by restricting certain individual rights (Nussbaum, 2001).

on their resemblance with liberal and communitarian conceptions of citizenship education.

First, to my mind, being democratic necessarily implies that in deliberation with others one not only becomes critical of one's own position, but also through openness begins to respect that there are others who are different from one. In this regard, Quane (2002, pp.316-319) argues quite correctly that people need to develop competencies such as communicating, being able to live together, critical thinking, being able to change and adapt to change, and creativity in nurturing "citizenship and participation in community life". And, for the reason that both liberal and communitarian conceptions of citizenship aim to achieve a sense of deliberative democracy, the MVE's reference to the "value" of democracy seems to resemble such conceptions of citizenship. Barber's (1984, p.219) argument in defence of strong (deliberative) democracy through citizenship and Young's (1996, p.121) notion of communicative deliberative democracy whereby citizens come together to talk about collective problems, goals, ideals and actions, vindicate liberal and communitarian moments of citizenship.

Second, if one begins to imagine what it might be like to be in the shoes of someone different from oneself, then the possibilities for becoming socially just, equitable, egalitarian, non-racist, non-sexist, respectful, law-abiding, accountable and reconciliatory could be enhanced, since one invariably exhibits a sense of human dignity (*ubuntu*) towards the "Other" – what Nussbaum (2002, p.301) refers to as having a "cultivated humanity". What follows from this, is that a strong case could be made for a communitarian view of these "values" as they unfold in the MVE since these "values" demand strong communal participation in societal matters. If we truly wish to accommodate communitarian conceptions of the self, then we must be willing to provide some exemption for communitarian groups from the rigorous enforcement of individual liberties (Kymlicka, 2002, p.240). The point is that people cannot just engage in societal practices (family life, religious observance and educational discourse) and political institutions (Parliament and voting), unless there are groups of people in society who engage in such practices and institutions. Moreover, as Miller (2000, p.102) asserts, the individual's capacity to exercise his (her) autonomous choice and to reflect critically upon any particular way of life is not something that people are natively endowed with, but a capacity that is nurtured by "autonomy-supporting practices and institutions whose existence cannot be taken for granted". Put differently, people cannot be socially just, equitable, egalitarian, non-racist, non-sexist, respectful, law-abiding, accountable, reconciliatory and

dignified without engaging with others in society – a matter of being socially situated.

## Towards compassion in citizenship education

The question arises: Can educational transformation be enacted in institutions according to the DoE's "Values, Education and Democracy" *Tirisano* agenda? In responding to this question I shall discuss two views. The first is the view that a liberal-communitarian conception of citizenship education can enact educational transformation; and the second is the view that compassion as an extended liberal-communitarian conception of citizenship can bring about meaningful change in educational institutions.

With reference to the MVE, one can have little doubt that cultivating in students the "values" of democracy, social justice and equity, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, *ubuntu*, openness, accountability, respect and the need for reconciliation, and recognition of the rule of law, can produce a heightened awareness of what it means to be a "good" citizen. It is difficult to imagine that a student who has internalised the "values" of social justice, equality and *ubuntu* could in any way not be considered as having achieved a worthwhile moral outcome, which would invariably position her favourably to deal with issues of democracy, accountability and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. And, bearing in mind that educational transformation aims to engender in students a deepened awareness of and appreciation for mutual respect, disagreement, justifiable criticism, critical judgement, rational deliberation and nation building, it follows from this that democratic "goods" as announced in the MVE can in fact bring about transformation in education. The point about educational transformation as achieving some form of moral "good" cannot be separated from achieving this without common, shared and agreed-upon democratic "values" as proposed in the MVE.

But then, as I have already indicated, educational transformation also involves cultivating in students the capacity for nation building. To my mind, nation building cannot just occur if students are equipped with skills of practical reasoning such as critical judgement and rational, intersubjective deliberation. Nation building also requires that students be taught to have respect for human suffering and to be serious about the suffering of others, particularly after the majority of South Africans have been subjected to decades of racial discrimination and political exclusion that resulted in abject poverty and



human suffering.<sup>7</sup> It is here that I propose that the liberal-communitarian citizenship education agenda which resembles the DoE's MVE in South Africa, particularly the notion of *ubuntu* be explored in relation to compassion in order to bring about substantive transformation.

It is my contention that students should become morally just persons. The MVE highlights the importance of teaching students to become democratic, socially just, equitable, egalitarian, non-racist and non-sexist, dignified, open, accountable, respectful, reconciliatory and law-abiding. Yet, it does not specifically mention the necessity for students to become trustworthy, generous and compassionate – “values” which focus greater attention to those who suffer and are oppressed and less attention to students' self-interests. Both Gyekye (1997) and Nussbaum (2001) make an argument for compassion, which they contend can invoke in one a sense of generosity towards others such as solidarity with and respect for human suffering, kindness by seeing that no particular harm is done to others, listening to and alleviating the day-to-day suffering of others, and evoking remorse towards those on whom harm was inflicted – a matter of prompting in students an awareness of the misfortune or suffering of others which might have occurred through no fault of their own. The point I am making is that “values” as announced in the MVE can result in students developing the capacities for rational argumentation, deliberative engagement through which they can build relations of trust and mutual respect. However, these “values” alone with perhaps the exception of *ubuntu* cannot cultivate in students the virtue of being compassionate towards others. And this is what educational transformation requires.

Enacting *ubuntu* does open up possibilities for students to become compassionate. Why? First, *ubuntu* presupposes a particular way of interacting with people on the basis of mutuality, thus invoking the integrity of all people in the social group, community organisation, family, and so on. Second, *ubuntu* in an African humanist sense implies that people develop the capacity to reach out to others, being committed to one another without having to declare such commitment (Teffo, 1999, p.155). Consequently *ubuntu* demands that individuals in the first place have to commit themselves in solidarity with

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<sup>7</sup> I recall having done field research in the Northern Province area (one of the nine provinces in South Africa) inquiring about the implications of drought in farming communities. One of the workers' sons (a boy of 10 years old) opened the front door of his tiny cottage and collapsed in my presence and that of his mother. Her response was that “It was not his turn to eat tonight, but his sister's”. This gives some indication of the poverty-stricken conditions South Africans experience.

others and through which they can develop sensitivity to the aged, the handicapped and the less privileged (Teffo, 1999, p.154) – a matter of being compassionate. Third, moral goods such as social justice, human rights, equality before the law, quality of life and democratic transformation of education are not practised in isolation but are interdependent and can only be realised in community. Pityana (1999, p.148) posits that the idea of *ubuntu* is logically connected to the preservation of human dignity, the achievement of equality, the enhancement of human rights and freedoms, and the enhancement of the common good – compassionate virtues of *ubuntu* which can be related to “values” announced in the DoE’s MVE.

I want to locate the notion of *ubuntu* within the interdependence between individual persons and the community. Human interdependence places a strong emphasis on achieving solidarity *through* individual persons’ engagement with other people. Mokgoro (in Pityana, 1999, p.144) states that the value human interdependence “has been viewed as the basis for a morality of co-operation, compassion, communalism, concern for the interests of the collective respect, respect for the dignity of personhood, with emphasis on virtues of that dignity in social relationships and practices”. Although the emphasis of human interdependence seems to be tilted towards “co-operation”, “communalism”, “collective respect” and “dignity in social relationships and practices”, my contention is that the afore-mentioned practices cannot be achieved without the significant compassionate will of the individual to live a sense of community from the “inside”.

In the final part of this article, I shall deal with some of the principles I used in teaching a Philosophy of Education course to final-year postgraduate Certificate in Education students at my institution related to educating prospective educators about compassionate citizenship education. In this section I shall attempt to answer the question: Can compassion with its concomitant link to *ubuntu* be taught?

## Educating for compassionate citizenship: a case study

Why should students become democratic citizens in the first place? Democratic citizenship requires that people attend to mutual respect, warmth, friendship, trust, self-respect, human dignity, generosity and compassion towards fellow-human beings. Virtues such as mutual respect and trust link with the notion of practical reasoning, whereas generosity, respect for human

dignity and compassion towards one's fellow-persons are virtues not necessarily associated with deliberative argumentation and rational persuasion. One can rationally and persuasively articulate an argument with the aim of building relations of trust among participants, but this does not mean that one is actually compassionate towards others. Compassion is not a virtue which can merely be cultivated through practical reasoning only. A compassionate person pays greater attention to those who suffer and are oppressed and less attention to her self-interest. In this sense, one would not be considered as morally just. Gyekye (1997, p.74) makes the point that moral justice "requires us to look beyond the interests and needs of our own selves, and that, given the beliefs in our common humanity – with all that this concept implies for the fundamental needs, feelings, and interests of all human beings irrespective of their specific communities – our moral sensitivities should extend to people beyond our immediate communities". It is this notion of extending our "moral sensitivities" to others from different communities which constitutes the basis of what compassionate citizenship means.

It would be difficult for students to learn about compassionate citizenship if their teachers are not skilled appropriately. I agree with Walters (1999, p.575), who posits that in South Africa "new educational approaches are needed to promote active citizenship". As a university teacher I incorporated the notion of compassionate citizenship into the Philosophy of Education course for final-year students about to become teachers in schools. I now offer an account of this course and how its underlying principles offer possibilities for teachers to cultivate compassionate citizenship in South African schools.

From the beginning this course was informed by three decisions. The first was to put practical reasoning at the heart of the matter, which would awaken critical and independent thinking about values such as deliberative democracy, citizenship, equality and freedom, human rights, and socio-economic and political justice in relation to education in public schools – "values" related to those announced in the MVE. Students engaged in a lot of serious discussion of issues related to these themes. The course's clear focus, its emphasis on lively debate and argumentation among students rather than simply the acquisition of facts, and deliberation on the above-mentioned themes in group discussions whereby students report to the whole class, all make this a reasonable course to elicit active critical engagement.

The second decision was to focus on an area of diversity by selecting a non-Western culture from among three African countries, namely, Ethiopia, Kenya and Mozambique. Students had to raise critical issues about race, gender,

ethnicity, social class and religious sectarianism. While critical discussion of cultural diversity in an African country enhanced students' awareness of difference, it also ensured that they reflected dialectically on the beliefs and practices of their own culture, while exploring a foreign culture.

The third decision was to focus on a theme called "Poverty, Famine and Hunger". Students learned to think about the relationship of poverty, hunger and famine to distress, undeserved misfortune, suffering, injustice, disability and disease on the African continent. They were also encouraged to teach at least for a month at an African school, say in countries such as Mozambique and Nigeria (ravaged by civil wars), Angola, the Congos, Sierra Leone and Burundi (in continuing turmoil), Rwanda (suffered genocide), Ghana and Namibia (subjected to liberation struggles with colonial powers), Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia (experienced drought and famine), after having qualified as teachers (educators). Prospective teachers would in this way become obliged to encounter features of African life and one of their tasks should be to find ways to give voice to the suffering of people on the continent – a matter of listening to the voices of those who suffered the injustice perpetrated by the people who abused power and inflicted harm on the African continent.

When education institutions become intensely concerned about what Nussbaum (2001, p.403) refers to as "tragic predicaments and their prevention", such institutions embody compassion, since they rely on compassionate students and teachers to keep alive the essential concern to attend to the well-being of others – a matter of seriously enacting educational transformation. In South African classrooms (universities and schools) diverse students of advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds (Black and White) are beginning to deliberate about matters of public concern such as crime victimisation, homelessness, job discrimination, unemployment, domestic violence and abuse of women, poverty and lack of food, political alienation, alcoholism and drug abuse, absence of good prospects, and so on; this means that certain practical judgements have to be made by students about these instances of their public and personal lives. Invariably judgements to be made will be based on students' perceptions of other's distress, undeserved misfortune, suffering, injustice, plight, disability, disease and HIV/AIDS. It is in this regard that compassion becomes a necessary condition for adequate deliberation about such matters, since it not only prompts in people an awareness of the misfortune or suffering of others, but also "pushes the boundaries of the self" outward by focusing on others' suffering which might not be any fault of their own.

In conclusion, as university teachers we will need to cultivate compassion as an appropriate response to the well-being of others; this is a quality that deserves recognition in the education of students and the democratisation of our society. Good universities not only teach students practical reasoning, but also a sense of generosity and appropriate concern towards others, which invariably will inform any compassion that they need to enact. My potential critic might argue that teaching students to attend to the concerns of others subjected to suffering and injustice is to treat them as victims of life's ills rather than to respect their dignity in the sense that they are quite capable of improving their own lot. When we see people as victims, we do see them as people upon whom harm was inflicted. But this recognition should give us sufficient reason to bring relief to the afflicted. Nussbaum (2001, p.408) aptly makes the point: "The victim shows us something about our own lives: we see that we too are vulnerable to misfortune, that we are not any different from the people whose fate we are watching, and we therefore have reason to fear a similar reversal". Teaching university students to show compassion means inculcating in them the value of learning to oppose undeserved conditions of living which are an affront to human dignity such as socio-economic deprivation, racism, inequality and poverty – conditions which are rife in South Africa and on the African continent. Our universities owe disadvantaged communities a chance to develop and prosper, especially considering that the gap between White and Black students in South Africa has increased considerably.

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# Ethical substance, modes of subjection and askesis: 'Techniques of the self' and ethical tuition in multicultural education

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## Introduction: addressing the issues of values in a democratic society

If permitting and fostering diversity, respecting and tolerating individual differences while resolving disputes without recourse to violence is a definitive feature of modern democratic culture, the daily realities of this ethos present the practising teacher with a formidable array of challenges. Many educational theorists focus on the need for practical, market-orientated subjects within the contemporary curriculum, privileging mathematics, science, information technology and economics. While acknowledging the priority of such concerns and academic foci, curriculum planners are also concerned with more intangible, less 'practical' subjects, which explore history, society and the issues of ethics. However, located within either established democratic societies such as Britain or the United States, or emergent ones such as South Africa, curriculum planners and teachers are wary of the problem of prescription for others. In understanding the historical conditions of violence, exclusion and intolerance which have been countered by the emergence of democratic society, and appreciating that intolerance is often located in particular people's intransigent prescriptions for others, curriculum planners and teachers are often diffident when considering the content of courses on values and ethics. They fear that in a liberal democratic society, whose formal policy is respect for multicultural diversity, the introduction of such courses will be seen as prescriptive and impositional, a violation of the democratic individual's right to determine his/her own views and future. Given the history of religious bigotry and imperial arrogance, both of which have been pursued with persecutory zeal in the history of many countries and empires, the modern curriculum planner and teacher, who is also a committed liberal democrat, fears any programme in ethics and values which may be remotely reminiscent of such prescription, arrogance and imposition. While acknowledging the need for an ethical component in the modern curriculum, the planner and teacher frequently do not know how to proceed in a democratically influenced legacy,



which denounces historical practices of indoctrination, ideological and religious manipulation, and peremptory imposition.

Confronted by such anxieties and dilemmas, planners and teachers can often only resort to the recommendation that courses on ethics and values should focus on the nature and merits of the liberal democratic society within which we live and which we wish to perpetuate. The result can become a self-congratulatory paean to liberal democracy, an enunciation of its general characteristics and merits, and a vague commitment to the principles of tolerance and the incorporation of the views of all. Many may see this as ritualistic and perfunctory, insipid or sentimental, avoiding the realities of the substantial and critical differences which democratic tolerance engenders. How can modern curriculum planners and teachers confront the issues of substantial conflict in democratic societies, while averting the charge that they are illegitimately partisan or proselytizing, abusing their position as educators as they structure and direct the thinking of their captive audience in the classroom, the students themselves?

This paper focuses on the difficulties confronting multicultural educators today as they grapple with the issue of teaching courses on values and ethics. Multicultural education espouses a respect for the views and values of diverse cultures, and deprecates any attempts by educators to impose a particular ethical and cultural perspective on heterogeneous groups of students. The practical problem for the multicultural educator is how to negotiate this controversial and sensitive terrain. How does he/she address the substance of different and often-conflicting value systems without offending some of the students and appearing to privilege one perspective over the other, thereby incurring the charge of partisanship and possibly of indoctrination?

In addressing this quandary, and seeking to suggest some practical responses to it, the paper explores the later work of Michel Foucault, which focused on a reassessment of the nature of Greek, Roman and early Christian ethics. Foucault is selected because of the way in which his reevaluation of ethical conduct in these diverse societies stressed the inextricable relationship between thought and action, a synthesis of theory and practice that is imperative in any search for an articulation between the work of academic research and educational conduct today. His work also commends itself because it inserts itself into domains of controversy without assuming that the differences can be satisfactorily resolved – there is no assumption that if we persist with our discussions and adhere to the logic of inquiry, then we will reach consensus about our assumptions and agreement about their practical implications. The

diversity stimulated by the practice of contemporary democracy seems to intensify one's conviction that the convergence of perspectives (implying a consensus about premises and practical conclusions in our collective normative deliberations) in modern society will remain elusive indefinitely. This does not imply that ethical reflection is futile, or that ethical conduct is arbitrary. The absence of hope for convergence can still accommodate a concern for the relationship between particular assumptions and their attendant actions, a respect for the internal logic of any particular ethical conviction – if one concludes that an axiological system is cardinal, what are the consequences for the life of the individual or community embracing it? In particular, what is its potential for conflict with, and harm for, those who do not share it?

Without assuming that the reflections and prescriptions of the past can be transferred into the present, Foucault's reevaluation of the ethical deliberations of former societies offers some valuable orientations for ethical education today. Immersed in detail, sensitive to subtle distinction, respectful of historical specificity and, above all, cognisant of the interminable dialectic between thought and action, Foucault's study of the dynamics of former ethical considerations offers us a way of proceeding through many of the ethical dilemmas presented by the pluralism of contemporary society. This paper suggests that his work can offer today's educators, particularly those involved in the humanities, with their conspicuous axiological and ethical concerns, an approach to the substance of difference and a way of addressing it, which does not incur the reproach that they are being prescriptive and insensitive to the right to dissent, one of the fundamental rights upon which modern democratic society is erected and sustained.

## Foucault's final concerns

In his final years, Foucault devoted attention to Greek and Roman understandings of ethics. This focus emerged as part of his enduring concern with the notion of the subject, present in the more methodological and epistemological explorations of his early work, as well as in his concern with the problematic relationship between power and knowledge. If, in his earlier work, Foucault had explicated how the subject is constituted within the matrix of language, which itself is inseparable from the exercise of power in society, the issue which preoccupied him in the last years of his life was the ways in which such a constituted subject, or individual, might relate to himself. It was in his re-examination of the complexities of Greek and Roman philosophy that

he developed a particular understanding of the self's relationship to itself, indicating how such an appreciation might have an impact on our self-understanding today.

One of the consistent features of Foucault's work seems to be his concern with the relationship between thought and action. His methodological and epistemological enquiries focus on the relationship between language and truth, and how these inextricable phenomena construct a particular knowing subject's relationship to the object of investigation. The complex relationship between the knowing subject and the object known is mediated by the language deployed, which permits one to assert the veracity of claims. The knowing subject does not assert and verify discursive claims in isolation, but lives and operates within the confines of the shared language or knowledge domain (captured in Foucault's notion of the 'episteme'), and is constrained by the actions which such knowledge directs. Societies generate knowledge about the natural and social worlds, and this knowledge guides investigation, action and the structuring of society. The impact which our epistemic and ethical claims have on one another, as well as our identification of truth and error, right and wrong, all indicate how these claims exercise power over us. The multiple forms of knowledge are the precise and structured medium through which people exercise power over one another. Our language, thought, truth claims and ethical asseverations all structure our social co-existence, indicating that there is an intimate relationship between thought and action.

Pierre Hadot, who held the Chair of the History of Hellenistic and Roman Thought at the College de France during and after Foucault's tenure at the same institution, argues convincingly (1995) that Greek and Roman philosophy's main concern was with the thoughtful transformation of the self. He has reviewed the context and concerns of Platonism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Cynicism and Scepticism, suggesting how these currents in Greek philosophy (and incorporated into Roman culture after the establishment of Roman control over Greece) all displayed a central focus on 'spiritual exercises', on ways of living.

Spiritual exercises can be best observed in the context of Hellenistic and Roman schools of philosophy. The Stoics, for instance, declared explicitly that philosophy, for them, was an 'exercise'. In their view, philosophy did not consist in teaching an abstract theory, but rather in the art of living – It raises the individual from an inauthentic condition of life, darkened by unconsciousness and harassed by worry, to an authentic state of life, in which he attains self-consciousness, an exact vision of the world, inner peace and freedom (Hadot, 1995, p.83).

According to Arnold Davidson (1994), Foucault was influenced by Hadot's re-evaluation of the nature and import of Greek and Roman philosophy. Having sustained a detailed explication of the relationship between language, truth, power and the subject in his earlier work, Foucault developed an interest in the constituted subject's relationship to himself, and Hadot's focus suggested a profitable and illuminating line of enquiry.

Setting the proper intellectual context will help us to understand better the contours and emplacement of Foucault's own writing on ancient thought, and thus help us to see how his conceptualization of ethics relates to, derives from, and modifies a set of considerations that were not his alone (1994, p.116).

For Foucault, Hadot's work reflected a concern with the relationship between thought and action, indicating how this rich philosophical tradition concentrated on the ways in which the individual subject (in Foucault's terms, constituted by his own language and culture) became the particular subject he was. The traditions of Greek and Roman philosophy disclose how the subject, inevitably immersed within a nexus of linguistic and cultural influences, nevertheless reflects upon and modifies his heritage, refashioning himself according to the conclusions of his philosophical deliberations. Such a perspective was obviously interesting for Foucault because his focus on the exercise of power through the constraints of language led him to consider the meaning of freedom in the modern world. Greek and Roman philosophers, too, were concerned with the nature and possibility of the individual's freedom.

Foucault did not adopt Hadot's expression, 'spiritual exercises' (which have a long lineage in Western, particularly Christian, thought), but referred to this deliberative and transformative activity as 'techniques of the self'. In one of the last interviews conducted with Foucault before his death in 1984, he reviewed his understanding of what is involved in the 'techniques of the self'. Foucault identifies four basic components to this process.

- A concern with the *ethical substance*, which is that part of myself relevant to the domain of ethical judgement.
- The *mode of subjection*, which is the way in which the individual establishes his or her relationship to society's moral obligations and rules.
- *Askesis*, which is the self-forming activity or ethical work one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself into an ethical subject.
- The *telos*, which is the kind or mode of being to which we aspire when we behave in an ethical way (Foucault, 1984, pp.361-362).

Foucault makes the cardinal point in this interview that he is not concerned with a genealogy of morals, which is defined as the relatively stable codes that have been established and consolidated over time in any particular society. These are the very general prescriptions of society, such as the Ten Commandments, which regulate social conduct and with which each individual is expected to comply. They constitute the kind of moral conduct which any programme of socialization would strive to inculcate. Rather, Foucault alleges, he is concerned with a genealogy of the subject as a subject of ethical actions, the genealogy of desire as an ethical problem (1984, p.356). This distinction seems to imply that the real focus of ethical enquiry is not conducted at the level of the rationale for, and the internal consistency of, general moral codes, prescriptions for all, with which all are expected to comply. The genealogy of ethics, the genealogy of the subject, is a much more demanding process, which explores the individual's reflective response to him/herself, as he/she confronts the immediacy of his/her own affective and desiring existence, his/her own inclinations, and makes thoughtful decisions about how to manage these. Inevitably, this involves reflection upon the expectations of society, but the ethical subject is one who focuses upon his/her interaction with these expectations, exercising judgement in a sustained practice of free evaluation, deciding what is appropriate for him/herself, and subjecting him/herself to a rigorous programme of self-discipline. Freedom is in no sense a relinquishment of obligation and control, a submission to whimsical inclination, but a reflective and disciplined relationship to oneself, a compliance with the convictions and prescriptions which one has forged for oneself in the process of deliberating upon the relationship between thought and action. Throughout, there is a sense of effort and struggle. Foucault identifies such concern at the centre of ethical reflection in the ancient world, and he explores this to illuminate what is important and substantial for our ethical identity today.

What interests me in the Hellenistic culture, in the Greco-Roman culture, is a precept for which the Greeks had a specific word, *epimeleiam heautou*, which means taking care of one's self. It does not mean simply being interested in oneself, nor does it mean having a certain tendency to self-attachment or self-fascination. It is a very powerful word in Greek which means working on or being concerned with something; it describes a sort of work, an activity; it implies attention, knowledge, technique (1984, pp.359-360).

One's *ethical substance* is central to this mode of reflection and action. It consists of each individual's passions and inclinations, the experience of affectivity, which really precedes any reflective intervention and conscious control. It is the basic impulses that each individual must direct as he/she develops a sense of mature freedom. The most intense of these inclinations are

the sexual ones, and Foucault explores this through his examination of the issue of homosexual relationships between men and boys in the ancient Greek world. What is interesting for Foucault is that the inclination itself is not condemned; one does not deplore an impulse or an attraction. Such responses of denunciation and disapproval are part of the legacy of Christian analysis, which views certain preferences as inherently wrong or 'sinful'. Instead, one confronts the desire, reflects upon it, and makes a decision about how to direct it; one subjects one's inclinations to a regulated form of expression or control.

This process of regulation is fundamental to the techniques of the self, and is captured by the idea of the *mode of subjection*. This in no way implies the suppression of desire or inclination, but a deliberative control of its expression – in what form of action should my inclinations manifest themselves, or to what forms of restraint should they be subjected? What is significant about these concerns is that the individual is submitting to a form of regulation that has been chosen by him/her. This regulation and controlled expression is part of the practice of freedom. Subjection does not imply the elimination of freedom, but a definition of its specific substance and expression.

Such deliberations inevitably involve the management of dilemmas. In the case of the desire for young boys, Foucault explains that reflective Greek men faced a particular problem. Young boys were prospective citizens, who as adults would be the equals of the desirous men, enjoying the same rights and status as the latter. The act of penetration in the process of sexual gratification was seen as a form of subordination and subjection which was incompatible with the boys' potential as citizens; one does not subject a potential citizen to the humiliation of subordination to another man's desires. One's respectability as a desiring man consists, not in the denunciation of the inclination, but in the exercise of restraint in the interest of preserving the boy's dignity as a prospective equal in Greek society. Such restraint also ensures the possibility of pursuing an enduring friendship with one to whom one is attracted, a friendship which is predicated upon a relationship of equality and respect, impossible if the boy has been subjected to a sexual act of subordination. The *mode of subjection* consists of this form of self-control and self-restraint, this thoughtful submission to a form of conduct that one adopts for oneself. It is an exercise in a particular practice of freedom (1984, pp.344-345).

The subjection of one's *ethical substance* to a particular kind of control and expression requires an arduous process of work upon the self. Central to the 'spiritual exercises', to the techniques of the self, was the notion of *askesis*. This Greek term is the origin of the English word, 'ascetic'. *Askesis*, however,

does not simply imply an abstemious life, but connotes a rigorous commitment to self-discipline, self-reflection and thoughtful practice. It requires that one pay close attention to one's thoughts and practices, one's relationship to oneself and others, in a continuous dialectic in which thought directs action, and action modifies thought. Although one is paying close attention to oneself, this does not imply a self-indulgent egocentricity, for the contemplative aspects of one's life manifest themselves in particular attitudes and modes of conduct towards others.

In Foucault's explication of the notion of *askesis*, he examines some of the concepts of the self that were explicit not only in the Greek and Roman worlds, but also in the early years of the development of Christian thought. This is important, for if one is to pay attention to the self, cultivate the 'techniques of the self', one has to proceed with some substantial concept of the goal, or *telos*, towards which the self aspires. Such goals are complex, because they are not simply defined by the individual. The individual inherits the understandings of the tradition into which he/she is born, and it is often tradition that conveys to the individual the kind of ambitions that are considered commendable. Individuals inducted into a Stoical way of thinking adopted and modified a particular conception of the self, its responsibilities and possibilities. One's *telos* becomes a state of eudaimonia, a certain equanimity in the face of adversity secured by the rigorous examination of what one can be expected to control. The latter focuses on one's responses to the circumstances and events of one's life, given that one can have very little influence on these developments. Eudaimonia, often rendered as 'happiness', does not refer to a condition of contentment, but rather to a sense of fulfilment, a satisfaction that one has secured control over one's responses and related one's general philosophical reflections to the particular circumstances of one's life, synthesizing thought and action. For the Christian, however, the *telos* is the attainment of salvation and eternal life. All *askesis* is directed towards subordination to the will and instructions of God. All activities and reflections are performed under the aegis of eternity, are a prelude to a superior spiritual condition. One understands the self, and works upon it accordingly, in the light of these fundamental notions of the appropriate *telos* and what is necessary for its attainment.

For Foucault, the Stoical examination of the self provides an interesting contrast with the later Christian understanding of the self, and an integral component of it, namely conscience. Stoical thinkers, such as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, who adopted the practice of ceaseless vigilance, considered the daily examination of conscience as a reflection combining 'meditation' and

‘gymnasia’. Meditation is an exercise in imagination, the contemplation of possible events, usually of a distressing nature, such as the constraints of mortality like sickness, accident and death, the fragility of friendship and loyalty. It is also a consideration of how one might respond to them. Such a meditation is complemented by gymnasia, which is a test of independence with regard to the external world, an exercise in applied thought to ascertain whether one is capable of practising the intentions and resolutions formulated during the meditative process (Foucault, 1988b, pp.35-36). The Stoical sense of self, and of work upon the self, is based on two key concepts. The first is that it is important to distinguish between what depends upon the individual and what does not. One cannot control or influence many of the events, occurrences and actions which one encounters in the world; all one can do is attend to one’s responses to these. The ‘techniques of the self’, the combination of meditation and gymnasia, are focused on this control of the individual’s responses. Foucault’s colleague, Hadot, expresses this concisely when he writes:

Attention (*prosoche*) is the fundamental Stoic spiritual attitude. It is a continuous vigilance and presence of mind, self consciousness which never sleeps, and a constant tension of the spirit – Thanks to his spiritual vigilance, the Stoic always has ‘at hand’ the fundamental rule of life: that is, the distinction between what depends on us and what does not (Hadot, 1995, p.84).

The second central idea is that of the self’s relationship to existence itself, and this constitutes a Stoic metaphysic in the sense of a set of basic assumptions about the nature of reality. These assumptions appear to be basically optimistic ones, declaring that the universe in which we find ourselves is directed by a rational process, which integrates all of its components for the best. We are consoled in our personal misfortunes by this assurance of the benevolent and rational nature of reality.

For the Stoic, then, doing philosophy meant practising how to ‘live’: that is, how to live freely and consciously. Consciously, in that we pass beyond the limits of individuality, to recognise ourselves as a part of the reason-animated cosmos. Freely, in that we give up desiring that which does not depend on us and is beyond our control, so as to attach ourselves only to what depends on us: actions which are just and in conformity with reason (Hadot, 1995, p.86).

Stoical contemplation, then, does not involve the self in a process of continual self-reproach and chastisement. One reflects upon the rules of action, thinks about how to respond to the experiences of life, and assesses the extent to which one has been successful in passing ‘beyond the limits of individuality’ and living in ‘conformity with reason’.



The Stoical attitude, with its conception of the self, is interestingly contrasted with the Christian notion of the self. The Christian concept has always evolved against the metaphysical foil of Creation and the Fall from grace. The self is consistently and continuously defined as being in a state of imperfection and sinfulness. Foucault refers to the Christians' sense that their self is something to be rejected. He writes that the early Christians understood themselves in terms of *exomologesis*, the recognition of the fact that one is a sinner, and that one must conduct one's life as a penitent. This must be demonstrated publicly, and conducted in the company of others who acknowledge the same status. Such an acknowledgement was then accompanied by the emergence of a spiritual literature, *exagoreusis*, which expresses and analyzes one's thoughts as a sinner and penitent. What is significant about this is that it is conducted under the supervision of a spiritual superior, to whom one is continually obedient. The self is eclipsed, subordinate and continuously involved in a process of restoration, ultimately dependent on the merciful grace of God (Foucault, 1988b, pp.43-48).

Foucault's historical review of aspects of Greek, Roman and Christian concepts of the self discloses for us some of the rich variety of the 'techniques of the self'. An individual's work of the self upon the self is profoundly affected by his/her idea of his/her place within the general scheme of things. This affects his/her understanding of his/her *ethical substance*, his/her attitude towards his/her own preferences and inclinations, and the way in which he/she should direct and control these. Sexual desire, for instance, is considered by certain Greek reflections, as an immanent, amoral inclination; one's ethical concern is with the expression of the desire, and the compatibility of this with other convictions about the status of other people and how they should be treated. For Christians, the very presence of sexual desire is often seen as a symptom of a fallen nature, an impulse which separates us from the purity of the divine, and submission to which can increase our distance from the holiness of God.

These historical illustrations are important for us today for two reasons. Firstly, they indicate the kind of detail that renders the notion of *modes of subjection*, *askesis* and *telos* substantial and credible. Secondly, they alert us to the fact that different epochs generate varied concepts of the self, concepts that are often divergent but co-existent. A viable multicultural strategy has to take cognisance of this diversity, and explore the possibilities of *modes of subjection*, *askesis* and *telos* in relation to such plurality. Only then might the educator accommodate the heterogeneity confronting him/her and evade the appearance of projecting standardized value systems onto his/her students.

He/she would simultaneously be respecting his/her students' autonomous pursuit of their selected goals and their attendant forms of self-discipline.

## Ethical tuition in multicultural education

In an interview entitled, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", Foucault was asked, "Do you think that the Greeks offer an attractive and plausible alternative?" (to the way in which we live now). He replied:

I am not looking for an alternative; you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people. I would like to do the genealogy of problems. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous – If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to hyper- and pessimistic activism. I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger (Foucault, 1984, p.343).

I think there is no value in a period which is not our period – it is not anything to get back to (1984, p.347).

If one is to consider Foucault's reflections upon ancient Greek and Roman ethics, as well as his observations about the Christian ethical life, as a guide to the teaching of ethics and values in a multicultural society, it is clear from the above comments that one cannot anticipate a simple transference of these ancient perspectives into the modern environment. How, then, can these reconstructions and analyses of former ethical systems illuminate the pedagogical task of axiological tutelage in a modern, multicultural situation?

Firstly, the notion of spiritual exercises, or techniques of the self, is one that the contemporary educator could adopt in a multicultural context. The individual citizen in a multicultural, liberal democracy is one who obviously has an *ethical substance*. Individuals have a complex combination of desires within their general matrix of emotions and inclinations. These encompass, for example, desires for personal wealth, professional status and recognition, a need for sexual and emotional fulfilment, the dignity of independence and self-sufficiency, and a concern with enduring health. There are also those who are attracted to the serious pursuit of religious vocations. Combined with such inclinations are particular dispositions, such as intolerance and impatience with those who do not share the same preferences and goals, or ways of conducting life.

Such a multitude of orientations within modern democratic society, a society whose liberal individualist ethos promotes the emergence and consolidation of difference and diversity, can only intensify concerns with issues related to the *mode of subjection*, focusing on the key questions of how shall I live and what shall direct my aspirations and conduct? The individual's concatenation of desires, inclinations and dispositions inevitably raises matters concerning regulation, expression and restraint, self-discipline and self-reflection. People aspiring towards professional success (measured in terms of personal wealth and recognition) must confront the questions of professional identity and conduct. What are the approved ways in which to proceed with the attainment of one's goals? How are the activities of doctors, lawyers, engineers and teachers conducted? Here, issues of compliance, acceptable and unacceptable deviations from established norms (the exercise of reflective freedom) all become pertinent. Familiarity with legal procedures affecting patients', clients' and students' rights and duties, as well as knowledge about the appropriate methods available for the resolution of conflict, are all part of one's *mode of subjection*.

In the private domain, the gratification of sexual desire and the fulfilment of intimate relationships are also subject to particular forms of regulation. In recent years, homosexual inclinations have been decriminalized, and gay activists have insisted on society's acceptance of these inclinations as a normal option in the individual's search for emotional fulfilment. Such campaigners have had to contend with decades of accumulated social prejudice against such perspectives, and have striven to prevent such prejudices from interfering with the personal lives of gay people. Legal regulation prohibiting such interference has been introduced in many countries. At the same time, participants in gay relationships are themselves regulated by the more general notions of individual rights and duties that constitute modern democratic ideas of equality.

On a less complicated plane, those who are focussed on issues of personal health are aware of the self-discipline and nutritional imperatives required if they are to succeed in their aspirations. Personal resolution, dietary and physiological knowledge are necessary for the participant in sport and personal health issues. Within such a domain, ambitions differ, as do motivations. Some seek a comfortable and functional level of personal fitness, others seek the status of physical perfection or the glory of physically arduous achievement. These ambitions, too, are subject to different kinds of methods and evaluations, ones that proliferate as people's understandings of physiology and physical possibilities are enhanced.

Given the eclipse of traditional religious values by secular ones, Christians have had to rethink their relationship to their encompassing political, economic and social environments. What is the nature of their moral obligations now? Should they focus on matters of personal salvation, or devote themselves to the substantial, material needs of others, even if the latter are not Christians? How does one translate the broad ethical injunctions of the Bible into concrete, culturally contextual, practice? How does one deal with the incompatibility between alleged Biblical prohibitions (against homosexuality and abortion, for example) and tolerance (together with its legal sanction) for these orientations and practices in secular, democratic society?

The management and regulation of desires, inclinations and dispositions (the constituent features of our *ethical substance*), the submission (through necessity, preference or obligation) to *modes of subjection* to channel these, all point towards the contemporary relevance of *askesis*. It is upon this that contemporary programmes in multicultural values and ethics may concentrate, focusing on the individual's work of the self upon the self, his/her techniques of the self. This is the dimension of freedom or autonomy to which the student devotes attention as he/she seeks to relate his/her *ethical substance* to the *modes of subjection*, and to understand the complex interaction between them. The relationship between thought about oneself (one's inclinations and desires, one's rights and duties, one's preferences and priorities) and the actions one undertakes to pursue ambitions and goals, gratify desires and lead a fulfilling life, are all part of the continuous process of *askesis*.

Foucault's comment that the ancient world is "nothing to get back to" implicitly directs our attention to an important and distinctive characteristic of the modern self. As indicated above, the self presupposed by the Stoics was one that could ultimately position itself within the integrated scheme of the Whole; there was a sense that one was fortified in one's endurance of adversity by the conviction that the cosmos was a rationally ordered and benevolent entity. For centuries, too, Christians have lived with the assurance that the world is directed and regulated by the auspices of a personal and caring God. The individual conducts his/her life within the parameters of divine attention and concern, believing that compliance with the injunctions and teachings of Jesus Christ will ensure a meaningful and constructive life, and guarantee an eternal life with God Himself.

Part of contemporary life retains some of these convictions; the Christian faith endures in many parts of the world. However, a powerful current in modern, secular reflection repudiates these notions, subscribing to the idea that there is

no such regulative and benevolent entity as a personal God, nor an inexorably integrative force such as universal reason. This perspective can be seen as a source of anxiety or as an opportunity, and is explored as both in debates about individual freedom and in concerns with the development of the self. The self is seen as an entity that is susceptible to multiple possibilities and crystallizations. Such apparent indeterminacy fills some with dread, and others with excitement at the open-endedness of self-exploration and personal transformation.

These are complex and controversial issues, and ones that cannot be addressed here. The pertinent point in this context is that the diversity inherent in such perspectives is fraught with the possibility of conflict that, in the absence of any Divine or Rational arbitration upon which the individual can depend, has no guarantee of resolution. As individuals and social collectivities, we do have rationality to depend upon, in the sense of expedient and functional recourses that can establish provisional agreements and compromises in the regulation of our collective existence. These are, however, temporary and mutable recourses, and we live with the permanent possibility of changes and revisions that result in reorientations and the re-emergence of conflict. There is no supervising arbitrator, of a Divine or impartially Rational kind, who can resolve our differences and conflicts in a final and mutually satisfying manner.

It is such a depiction that leads a contemporary writer like Foucault to emphasize the prevalence of a sense of danger in modern society. A multicultural society is characterized by the presence of multiple ways of seeing and acting, by numerous correlations between thought and action, and these are often not compatible. Political, social and economic organizations assume definite forms in particular locations, and these often constitute a danger and disadvantage for some members of society. Some define liberal individualism as antipathetic to the values of collective solidarity and altruism, promoting loneliness and material avarice. Others denounce the myth of equality in a capitalist society, arguing that it is inherently exploitative and ruthless, concealing the reality of its brutality behind the rhetoric of equal opportunity and the importance of individual responsibility and initiative. People contest bitterly the 'right to life' of those who are as yet unborn, pitting this against the right of women to decide to give and sustain life. Disputes over the 'right to life' are also central to the issues of retributive justice, epitomized by capital punishment.

Immersed in a cacophony of controversy, curriculum planners and teachers find that the persistence of dispute is one of their only certainties. Courses on

values and ethics are directed to students whose selves are formed within such an environment. The teachers' obligations as educators in a multicultural environment preclude the presentation of a single, 'correct' perspective, as this appears as offensive, presumptuous and impositional. However, against the background of ineluctable diversity, courses in multicultural values and ethics can encourage students to concentrate on the 'techniques of the self.' Many formations of the self are possible, forged in the interaction between the individual's *ethical substance* and the *modes of subjection*, accompanied by the appropriate forms of *askesis*. Reflection upon these, and the adoption of particular dispositions and values by the students themselves, is the very substance of the exercise of freedom. If an educator is to take seriously the relationship between thought and action, part of his/her pedagogical obligation is to alert students to the practical consequences of beliefs and convictions. He/she indicates the kinds of conflicts in which they are likely to be embroiled in the lived experience of their decisions, in the practice of their particular mode of *askesis*. He/she also suggests the kinds of dangers and dilemmas to which the individual is exposed, and to which he/she may be seen to contribute.

Such an approach may successfully combine the discharge of the multicultural educator's duty not to impose values with a substantial consideration of the role of values in the individual's life. It makes possible a careful reflection on the relationship between *ethical substance* and the *mode of subjection* in the life of the individual, constituting a particular practice of freedom, embodying respect for the individual's autonomy. It does not presume that this is an easy process, divorced from the realities of conflict and incompatibility. It does not ignore the constraints exerted in the practice of reflection, choice and self-formation (*askesis*), since the dimension of social influence and the limitations upon the exercise of freedom become apparent in any consideration of the cultural and political context in which this individual formation is practised. The multicultural educator assists the individual student to consolidate a sense of self in its difficult relationship to its own interior and other people's presence. The educator promotes an ability without prescribing an outcome, leaving students with the informed task of continuing with the process of self-formation, and making decisions in the conflictual context of their own particular lives.

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# The merging of the only two veterinary science faculties in South Africa

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## Abstract

In South Africa, the education sector, like other sectors of the community, was divided along racial lines during the apartheid era. Hence, the veterinary faculty at the University of Pretoria was established for whites, whilst the Medical University of Southern Africa's faculty was established for blacks. This article discusses the merger between these only two veterinary science faculties in South Africa. This merger was first of all contemplated in the early 1990s under the apartheid regime. And even then, the running of the two faculties was not cost-effective. From the evidence available, this merger was motivated solely on the basis of costs: given the internationally acknowledged costs of operating veterinary science training faculties, managing two state subsidized faculties within a 20 kilometre distance of each other was not cost effective. As a result, after 1994, when the new government began to work on reconfiguring the higher education landscape, this merger was inevitable.

This article maps out the policy context which led to mergers of higher education institutions, the history of the two faculties and the effects of the merger on the curricula, efficiency, and equity, as well as on the staff. According to the results obtained from the data collected, until 2002/2003 financial year, this merger had not achieved cost savings. Instead, it has become even more expensive for the University of Pretoria to run the merged faculties. Also there have been negative repercussions as far as staff and students are concerned, especially on the issues of equity and students' orientation into the new arrangement. Overall, the merger resulted in more losses than gains.

## Rehearsing the policy context

In the few years following the demise of the dominance of the decades-long apartheid education model, the higher education system in South Africa has undergone a policy-driven restructuring of higher education sector. The founding policy document on higher education after apartheid is the Report of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) entitled *A Framework for Transformation* (1996). The NCHE report laid a foundation for the 1997 Education White Paper 3 on Higher Education named *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*. The White Paper for Higher Education (1997) was subsequently followed by the promulgation of the Higher Education Act of 1997 which first legalized the issue of merging higher education institutions in South Africa.

After the second democratic elections in 1999, the newly-elected second post-apartheid Minister of Education, Kadar Asmal, in his *Call for Action: Mobilising citizens to build a South African education and training system for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* announced that:

The shape and size of the higher education system cannot be left to chance if we are to realise the vision of a rational, seamless higher education system. . . The institutional landscape of higher education will be reviewed as a matter of urgency in collaboration with the Council on Higher Education. This landscape was largely dictated by the geo-political imagination of apartheid planners (July 27, 1999).

The Council on Higher Education (CHE), a statutory body that advises the Minister of Higher Education, was duly approached to provide advice on the reconfiguration of the higher education system. In December 1999, the CHE responded with a memorandum to the Minister entitled *Towards a Framework and Strategy for Reconfiguring the Higher Education System in South Africa* and in which a Task Team was proposed to deliver on this “reconfiguration” exercise.

In July 2000 the CHE Task Team presented its report, *Towards a New Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development Imperatives of South Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The Task Team took the bold step of listing “examples of possible combinations” (p.60), warning that: “These examples are not meant to be exhaustive. They must also not preclude the Minister identifying other possible combinations” (p.63) that could achieve the national goals for higher education.

On 5 March 2001, and in response to the CHE Report, the Minister released a *National Plan for Higher Education* that essentially agreed with the Task Team recommendations. Later, in March 2001, the Minister appointed a National Working Group (NWG) consisting of eleven persons from business, labour, higher education and government “to advise on the appropriate arrangements for restructuring the provision of higher education. . . including institutional mergers. . .” (Department of Education, December 2001, p.4). In December 2001, the NWG released its report, *The Restructuring of the Higher Education System in South Africa*, and recommended the reduction of higher education institutions from 36 to 21 through the specific mechanism of mergers, listing the specific institutions in various provinces to be targeted for merging.

Several research questions arise from the policy decision to merge specific institutions. For instance, why was veterinary science – of all disciplines – singled out for merging? How did the merger deal with differences in curriculum and focus given the divergent communities and needs served by the two Faculties hitherto operating independently? Did this merger – motivated primarily on the basis of costs – in fact lead to a more financially viable, new Faculty of Veterinary Science (FOVS)? And was this really a ‘merger’ in the first place, given the powerful position of the University of Pretoria FOVS compared with the smaller and less well-resourced FOVS at the black Medical University of South Africa (MEDUNSA)?

## Methodology

This article is a part of a broader study which was conducted in 2002 by a group of doctoral students, including the author of this article, from the University of Pretoria, South Africa. The research team started with a broad sweep of policy documents and institutional documents such as media reports, official speeches, and minutes from meetings. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with top management structures at both institutions, academics, technical and support staff. Since students formed a crucial part of this cross-racial merger, their perceptions were elicited in focus group interviews and questionnaires. This article discusses the findings of this study in an attempt to highlight the implications of a merger in terms of equity, finance and human resources.

## Introductory history of the two faculties

On 20 December 1998, the first post-apartheid Minister of Education, Professor Sibusiso Bengu, formally announced the merger of the Faculty of Veterinary Science at MEDUNSA and that of the former white Faculty of Veterinary Sciences at the University of Pretoria (UP). Behind this simple announcement lies a story of one of the longest running and most complex merger deliberations in the higher education literature. The complexity of this merger was influenced by numerous factors. The UP Faculty began operations in the 1920s, while the MEDUNSA Faculty was only established in 1982. The UP Faculty, as a result of its long established operations, as well as being a white university Faculty through the apartheid years, enjoyed world class facilities such as its impressive animal hospital. The history and origins of the MEDUNSA Faculty of Veterinary Science were very different, being established for black students and with a golf club house converted into an animal hospital. Indeed, until the 1980s, veterinary education in South Africa had been available only to white students with the result that the profession was not well established in black communities.

Attempts to admit blacks to UP in the 1960s and 1970s were frustrated by the government of the day, the weak academic preparation of black students to meet the stringent entry requirements, and a lack of interest, knowledge and information regarding veterinary sciences as a profession in black South African communities.<sup>1</sup>

Another barrier to entry and success at the UP Faculty was the fact that Afrikaans had always been the medium of instruction, while MEDUNSA had used English in matters of teaching and administration. Another dividing line between the two Faculties was the practice and ongoing perception of a difference in curriculum emphasis; historically, UP focused on companion animals since its clientele were whites with a traditionally strong passion about pets, and from which community students typically aimed to practise veterinary science in an urban-setting. The MEDUNSA focus, on the other hand, was more towards production animals, and most of its community projects were based in the rural areas with rural, subsistence farmers. As one MEDUNSA lecturer put it:

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<sup>1</sup> This state of affairs has made it difficult even today for veterinary sciences to be able to attract students from black communities. This has been echoed by the Director of Higher Education as a factor which makes it difficult to attract black students.

... blacks are more interested in animals which can produce food, be it milk, meat or eggs, not just animals that you feed expensive food and take them to doctors, and you gain nothing in return. If my dog is sick in the village, I start negotiating with my neighbour whose dog has just had puppies to give me one puppy as soon as the puppies are big enough to eat 'papa' (porridge) not dog food.

With these differences in mind, the purpose of this article was to unravel such complexity by describing the origins, process and outcomes of the only merger in the history of South Africa involving two academic Faculties from different Universities.

## Merger effects

### **Curriculum effects**

The new curriculum contained courses and modules from both MEDUNSA and UP curricula, balancing the needs of veterinary science within different communities, and to make a versatile qualification in which all kinds of animals were catered for. The names of some courses were changed. In some cases, the content of the course stayed the same depending on the importance of such a course, while in other cases, the content was added to or decreased. The merged institution has clearly made progress with its curriculum integration. But how do students experience the curriculum of the merged institution? Both MEDUNSA staff and students interviewed experienced the curriculum as alien to their own academic and linguistic backgrounds; in their view, the curriculum privileged both the majority of white students and the minority of black students from well-endowed 'ex model C' schools. One of the main reasons for these experiences of curriculum alienation among black students was the language problem. Previously, the MEDUNSA curriculum had offered first year students a course in the English language and study skills to assist black students from rural areas and poor schools to cope with the language demands of the veterinary programme. Such a facility no longer exists.

To illustrate the challenge of language, a former MEDUNSA lecturer, originally from the United States of America, pointed out that when he first taught at MEDUNSA, he was surprised by the way the students were slow to compose notes as he taught; they also took their time in responding to his questions. So he decided to check the notes of some of these students, and found that:

Some students were actually writing notes in Zulu or whatever African language, not in English. In the same way, when he asked a question, some students would translate the question in their mother-tongue and formulate the answer likewise, then translate their answer into English (Interview records, 18 March 2002).

Related to this experience, one of the main concerns for MEDUNSA students and lecturers has been the apparent lack of understanding from the new Faculty that black students are not from advantaged schools or advantaged families that use English on a daily basis. For this reason, black students continue to feel alienated and disadvantaged within the new curriculum. As one student put it:

If we had the same type and level of primary and secondary education with the white children, we would be able to compete or to be compared. But for now, there is no competition nor a comparison between us because this place is so foreign in many ways to us – in technology, language (some Afrikaans-speaking lecturers still use Afrikaans) and the method of teaching (Interview records, March 2002).

### **Efficiency effects**

For three reasons it is difficult to assess the *efficiency gains* in the case of this merger. First, the Faculties of Veterinary Sciences are expensive entities to maintain in a university environment given the unusually high operational costs resulting from the low student-staff ratios, and high costs of hospital facilities; in practical terms, this means that FOVS will always operate within the context of financial deficits. Second, from 1998 to 2003/4, the FOVS merger was heavily supported by a time-limited *ad hoc* grant from the State through the Department of Education (DOE) as a facilitative measure for the merging process. This has offset the extent of the deficit within the merged entity. Third, the planned staff reorganization (retrenchments, retirements, redeployment, etc) in the new Faculty will be finalized only within the next two years, and it is therefore unclear as to the magnitude of real 'savings' due as efficiency gains as a result of this merger. It is possible, however, to begin sketching possible efficiency outcomes based on trends in the flow and direction of efficiencies from the period before the merger (1998) through to 2002, as well as efficiencies based on fairly rigorous projections by the University of Pretoria.

In 1996, the cost of training a veterinary science student at MEDUNSA was in the order of R150 000 per annum, and at the University of Pretoria, about R50 000 per annum. In Full Time Equivalent (FTE) terms, the State subsidy for MEDUNSA was approximately R20 million per annum for 90 FTE

students, implying a cost of R220 000 per FTE student per annum – in these terms, representing a student to staff ratio of less than 1:1. At that stage, the corresponding student to staff ratio of the UP Faculty of Veterinary Sciences was approximately 5.5:1. By the year 2000 (that is halfway through the merger process) the ratio of student FTEs to academic staff stood at 5:1 – a favourable ratio given that international benchmarks require a ratio of less than 7.5:1.<sup>2</sup> In order to facilitate the merger, and especially the costs associated with MEDUNSA salary levels, leave gratuities, overhead and operating expenditures, the Department of Education granted *ad hoc* allocations per financial year as follows:

Table 1: Department of Education's *ad hoc* allocations from 1998/1999 – 2002/ 2003

Financial Year	Amount
1998/1999	R32.0 m
1999/2000	R29.0 m
2000/2001	R16.5 m
2001/2002	R16.5m
2002/2003	R18.5 m

Notwithstanding the slight increase in 2002/2003, these figures show a significant reduction in Department of Education allocations over time (R12.5 m). The Faculty has accordingly planned strategies to further reduce staffing expenditure:

- a. the planned reduction of mainly C1 staff, with an expected reduction in expenditure from R29.1m in 2001 to around R22.3m in 2004, i.e. a 25% reduction in real terms.
- b. the re-organisation of eight academic departments into five, a plan already realized by 2001. This step is expected to reduce operational expenses associated with more streamlined departmental structures.
- c. the planned increase in second year enrolment from 90 to 120 (33%) without increasing the teaching staff complement so that the student to

<sup>2</sup> The European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) of the European Commission for the training of veterinarians has set a benchmark of less than 7.5:1.



staff ratio will stand at 10:1 by 2004. This will increase the subsidy income substantially.

- d. the planned review of operational strategies and expenditure of the veterinary hospital and laboratories, in part to increase efficiencies in this area.
- e. the planned reorganization of the BVSc qualification involving a new three-year general degree that precedes the new four-year professional qualification. The new structure is also expected to enhance efficiencies in the current training model.

Despite all the planned strategies underway, and the reduction in inefficiencies after the merger, at the end of 2001 the Faculty still operated at a deficit of R26.1m even after the *ad hoc* allocation of R16.5m had been taken into account. Furthermore, despite all the recorded efficiency gains since 1998, and the planned efficiencies for 2004<sup>3</sup>, the deficit without further *ad hoc* allocation would increase from R26.1m to R28.7m in 2004.

In the assessment of efficiency gains in the merged Faculty it is evident that the character of veterinary science means that deficits will continue to exist under the current funding regime, and this cannot be attributed to the benefits or otherwise of mergers. Second, that institutional cross-subsidisation of veterinary science is inevitable even with substantial increases in the state funding formula for the discipline; the issue in question is what levels of cross-subsidisation would be regarded by the institution as acceptable, given its overall position. Third, that efficiency gains in the case of veterinary sciences would therefore have to be measured in terms of the scale of the reduction of overall operating costs of the merged institution. On the basis of evidence, the new FOVS has definitely reduced the overall costs of operating a veterinary science faculty in South Africa; in other words, the merger has generated efficiency gains.

However, it is also clear that such efficiency gains could in fact be lost if the levels of state subsidisation are not increased over and above the *ad hoc* allocation provided in the transition period from two to one Faculty of Veterinary Science. It is this nuance in terms of the nature of the discipline (veterinary science) and the peculiarities of state funding that must be taken into account in reporting on efficiency gains in a merger of this kind.

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<sup>3</sup> The University of Pretoria estimated a reduction in expenditure from R 64.4m (2001) to R57.6m (2004) and an efficiency improvement of 10%.

### Equity effects – staff

Before the merger (1999), the MEDUNSA Faculty had 76 members of staff, and this number included academic staff, technical staff and support staff. The categorical divisions of the staff are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Categorical Distribution of MEDUNSA staff before the merger

Group	Blacks	Whites	TOTAL
C1	6 (19.35%)	28 (62.22%)	34
C2	12 (38.71%)	17 (37.78%)	29
C3	13 (41.94%)	-	13
TOTAL	31	45	76

**Key:** C1 = Academic staff  
 C2 = Technical staff (secretaries)  
 C3 = Support staff (cleaners)

As is evident from the above representation, white staff is mainly employed in the professional or academic category (C1) and black staff mainly in the lower categories. What is not evident is that of the 6 professional black staff, only 2 are South Africans. This data is not inconsistent with other merger data involving at least one former white institution i.e., black staff appear in the lower categories of employment, and white staff in the upper or academic-professional categories of work. What is striking about the MEDUNSA data, however, is that white staff dominated in the upper professional categories despite the fact that this was a historically black institution. The explanation no doubt lies in the fact that mainly white students have occupied veterinary science training much longer than in most other professions since the 1990s.

The University of Pretoria data shows a similar racial distribution of staff in the year preceding the merger (1998):

Table 3: UP Staff Distribution by Race before and after the Merger

Staff	Before merger (1998)	After merger (2002)
African	88 (29.24%)	109 (36.95%)
Coloured	1	1
Indian	1	4
White	211 (70.10%)	181 (61.36%)
Total	301	295

The 'before' and 'after' merger distribution of staff is most interesting. In general terms, the number of African members of staff increased by 21 (7.12%) while the number of white members of staff decreased by 20 staff (6.78%). In addition, there were only 5 black South African lecturers in the new Faculty out of 98 lecturers or C1 staff. Despite vigorous efforts by the University of Pretoria to change the racial distribution of staff, it is not going to be easy. As one lecturer put it:

It will take at least 20 more years before the issue of equity can be fully addressed by this Faculty judging by the fact that this year (2002) there are only 4 black students whom one cannot tell if they will finish their first degree within 6 years, do their Masters and PhD degrees before they become lecturers here (that is, if they are good enough to proceed to postgraduate level, and if they are interested in the teaching field).

The current (2002) distribution of staff by race and gender amplifies the need for increased black student enrolments in the veterinary sciences as the basis for changing the *status quo* in terms of staffing in the only Faculty of this kind in South Africa.

### **Equity effects – students**

There have not been student equity gains as a result of the merger. Before the merger, and taking 1996 as baseline, MEDUNSA had very few students, with no white and Coloured students enrolled between 1996 and 1999.

Table 4: MEDUNSA FOVS Student Headcount Enrolments, 1996–1999

<b>Year</b>	<b>Blacks</b>	<b>Whites</b>	<b>Indians</b>	<b>Coloureds</b>	<b>Total</b>
1996	6	-	2	-	8
1997	10	-	3	-	13
1998	11	-	1	-	12
1999	12	-	2	-	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>47</b>

The University of Pretoria, on the other hand, had large numbers of mainly white students, and small numbers of black students. However, there were more black students trained at UP in the period 1996-1999 than at MEDUNSA, even though the absolute number of black students at UP were marginal in relation to the large numbers of white students.

Table 5: UP FOVS Student Headcount Enrolments, 1996-2000

Year	Blacks	Whites	Indians	Coloureds	Total
1996	22	621	7	7	657
1997	24	579	11	6	620
1998	27	574	17	7	625
1999	80	556	42	10	688
2000	77	553	41	12	683

In this context, the merger marginally increased the student numbers. However, there were only 80 (11.63%) black students in 1999, as opposed to 556 (80.81%) white students. The numbers decreased slightly in 2000 for all groups (for instance 553 whites and 77 blacks). But this decline continued so that in the 2002 academic year, the data depicts a noticeable decrease in black student enrolments.

Table 6: UP Student Numbers after the Merger

Students	Before merger (1998)	After merger (2002)
African	27 (4.36%)	20 (3.93%)
Coloured	7 (1.13%)	8 (1.57%)
Indian	11 (1.178%)	28 (5.51%)
White	574 (92.73%)	452 (88.98%)
Total	619	508

In order to attract more black students, the Faculty has developed a new marketing strategy focused mainly on townships and rural schools. There have been reports from the Faculty Administration of an increased interest in veterinary sciences on the part of Indian students. But there is no evidence at the moment that the racial distribution of students will change dramatically in the near future.

### Organizational integration effects

According to the senior management of the Faculty and the University, the merger led to the development of a new institutional identity. First, the Faculty developed a new academic mission. Secondly, the Dean, Deputy Dean and Director of Veterinary Clinic were appointed as new leaders of the Faculty in 1999. Thirdly, a new curriculum was developed and implemented in 2000.

Finally, the issue of the medium of instruction – which was one of MEDUNSA's main points of concern – is now English only. Although the University of Pretoria as a whole is a dual medium institution, the Faculty of Veterinary sciences decided that, in the light of the merger, English would be the only medium of instruction since MEDUNSA had been a predominantly black, English language Faculty. This shift in language policy did not go unchallenged by the Afrikaans-speaking students who formed almost 90% of the student body. While Afrikaans students were provided with notes and other learning materials in Afrikaans, the language used in classroom instruction was English. While there was thus clearly a strong integration of the two Faculties in terms of vision and structure, the integration was weak in terms of people and values, as the evidence in this article has shown.

### **Physical integration effects**

Given the small contingent of MEDUNSA staff and students, the only physical demands on the new Faculty were minor additions to the physical plant. There were no legal concerns or issues involved with respect to property claims. As the Department of Education's legal advisor put it, most of the agreements were made on the basis of consensus since there was no legal framework to support mergers at that time. When the Higher Education Act of 1997 was promulgated, most of the issues regarding this merger (facilities, personnel, finances, etc) had already been dealt with through the use of sub-committees. Furthermore, the Labour Relations Act of 1995 was already in place; some of its clauses were invoked to ensure that all the staff were treated fairly, and that there would be no unfair dismissals. This was the only legislation which was used in the management of this merger.

### **Staff and students perceptions of the merger**

Before the merger began, both Faculties established Committees to take care of the concerns and fears of staff, including job security, salaries, the retention of senior posts, and other matters. After the merger, all the academic, technical and support staff remained in their jobs with the same benefits they had held at MEDUNSA or UP – except for those who took retirement or early retirement packages. In the meantime, UP organized through the Department of Human Resources that there should be counselling and support personnel available to assist members of staff through the merger process. The staff who were able to use this facility found it to be of great value. However, the access to

professional support and counseling was based on the means of the staff concerned. For example, the academic staff who had time and the means to drive to the Main campus – 20 kilometres away – enjoyed easy access. As far as the technical and support staff were concerned, the picture was a little different for their working hours were not flexible enough to allow them to leave the workplace and return within the given time. Indeed, during interviews with C3 staff, some of them were unaware of this facility. Clearly, staff experiences of the merger varied according to race and level of appointment. These differentiated responses are described below.

### **Academic staff perceptions**

The academic staff from both institutions were delighted to work together, and to share their expertise and the new workloads. This group of staff felt that the added pool of resources and expertise promoted the training and research in the merged Faculty. Staff even spoke of positive competition, especially in terms of research activities and outputs required in the Faculty's commitments.

MEDUNSA staff, in particular, felt that coming to UP was an advantage to their academic careers. One lecturer said

Coming here has made us feel more professional than before – the facilities here are excellent and the quality of teaching is easier as we do more of lecturing than actual teaching. We are also able to embark on more research since there are excellent facilities and opportunities, and more time since students are more likely to work on their own here than at MEDUNSA.

For black lecturers from MEDUNSA, however, the picture was not completely positive. All the black lecturers from MEDUNSA and UP were concerned that although they were equal to their white counterparts, from time to time they felt subtle pressure from both white colleagues and students that they might not be 'good enough.' For example, there have been direct challenges from white students to black lecturers in the merged Faculty. As a result, these lecturers have had to work more diligently and to be on the alert for white students who – in their experiences – literally "harass" black lecturers. In this case, senior black lecturers seemed to be more capable of handling the situation compared to their inexperienced counterparts. This situation was particularly frustrating for junior lecturers who did not know what to do.

On the other hand, the white staff of the University of Pretoria pointed out that their main concern was that the standards for veterinary science training in

South Africa would decline as a result of the merger. As far as the former MEDUNSA staff were concerned, their main problem was the dwindling student numbers and the rather inconsiderate treatment of the few who registered.

Summarised, most MEDUNSA staff voiced the following concerns:

- a. the high failure rate of black students and the high entry requirements which could not be met by ordinary black students who come from rural or township schools; the exception was the few black students from former white schools;
- b. the declining numbers of black students being admitted to the new Faculty each year. Twenty black students were admitted in 2000, ten in 2001, four in 2002; and
- c. the perceived “neglect” of black students’ academic needs within the new institution. As one MEDUNSA lecturer put it:

We used to work extra hours with students and we helped them like primary school children. But here there are many students, and all of them – regardless of their background – are expected to know and use self-study methods which black students are not familiar with. Some of them even struggle to understand the English language written in the books.

### **Technical and support staff perceptions (black)**

The technical and support staff had much more to say about the merger. The persons interviewed used their mother-tongue (Zulu and Pedi) in an effort to deliver their message clearly. They felt that their grievances had fallen on deaf ears since the merger occurred. The MEDUNSA staff had more complaints than the UP staff, who kept quiet and nodded repeatedly at what was being said during most of the focus group interview sessions. The staff felt that they had problems which nobody was prepared to sort out. For instance, the use of Afrikaans for almost all forms of communication left them with no option but to learn the language. In some cases, unclear job descriptions made some of them “Jack of all trades” – one person doing messenger services, gardens, maintenance and anything else required. In the experiences articulated by these staff members, the merger did not bring any benefits.

The MEDUNSA staff claimed that at first they were consulted and briefed about the merging process. But as time went on, they heard less and less about the formal process as decisions were made by what they saw as “the white

authorities”. Suddenly they were told that they were to move to *Onderstepoort* on the 1 July 1999. For UP staff, information and messages were sent through the Internet and mostly written in Afrikaans. Accordingly, those staff who had no access to the Internet, or who could not read Afrikaans, felt left out in the process.

### **Technical staff perceptions (white)**

The white technical staff (since there were no white support staff in this case) did not have much to say; they were only concerned that the merger had brought more people into their particular jobs (especially secretaries) and therefore raised questions about job security. However, they believed that those who remained with the Faculty would be the ones who deserved to continue in their work. They did not have the same anxiety over their jobs like their black colleagues. One secretary was particularly confident that her Head of Department would not allow her to be retrenched because “it is difficult to get a good and experienced secretary”.

### **Student perceptions**

During the merging process, the University of Pretoria organized an informal mentoring system through which MEDUNSA students were divided into groups of five, each one led by one of the senior students from UP. The new students received an orientation with regards to facilities, rules and regulations in the hostels, hospital laboratories and other places. This system pertained for almost two years during which time these voluntary mentors assisted MEDUNSA students in order to make them feel welcome and to know where to find help if necessary. It was somewhat difficult for MEDUNSA students since UP had numerous rules and regulations governing hostels, laboratories and other shared facilities. However, even before the merger, some of MEDUNSA’s students were using UP facilities such as the hospital, so some of the students were not totally new to the campus. And they were able to help the new ones to acclimatize much faster by showing them around and allaying their fears on a number of academic and campus issues. Despite these efforts, the MEDUNSA students expressed continuing problems experienced during and after the merger.

The seven MEDUNSA students (there were 15 remaining MEDUNSA students in 2002) who responded to the questionnaire said that the merger was



“an outright failure” which had either no impact, or negative impact, on their academic and social lives. Their major concerns were the use of Afrikaans in teaching and the display of administrative notices, and a general feeling of alienation on the campus. For one student, “we were swallowed not amalgamated as MEDUNSA Faculty”. On the other hand, the 11 original UP students who responded to the questionnaire expressed a range of feelings about the merger and its effect on their lives. Some claimed ignorance about the merger and its influence on the new institution; others felt that the merger was positive; and a few expressed concerns about the lowering of standards and possible threats to the international status of the BVSc degree.

## Conclusion

The merger of the Faculties of Veterinary Science was the longest running merger deliberation in South Africa. It took almost ten years to complete, spanning two governments (apartheid and democratic governments) and three Ministers of Education. The advent of a non-racial government in 1994 simply accelerated an inevitable process of merger between the two Faculties.

This merger was in fact the incorporation of a weak (in terms of staffing, infrastructure and resources) historically black Faculty into a strong historically white and privileged Faculty. The staffing, curriculum, culture and infrastructure of the stronger entity – the University of Pretoria – therefore dominated the merger process and its outcomes. The student effects were mixed, following racial patterns of response. Black students experienced language and social alienation in a new and demanding majority culture; white students felt indifferent but held concerns about so-called “standards” being lowered as a result of the merger.

The staffing effects were varied, but can be classified on the basis of race and level of appointment (academic, technical-administrative, support staff). Since the merger transferred a largely white staff from MEDUNSA (most of whom had studied with or worked at UP before) to an equally dominant white staff (UP), this group experienced minimal problems in the process compared to the technical and support staff, who were mainly black.

The efficiency gains can be tracked more closely in this merger than in the other cases, given the longer history of the process. The University of Pretoria clearly managed the process in ways that reduced inefficiencies. But clearly,

the attainment of long-term and sustainable efficiency gains was dependent on further state subsidization and deliberate rationalization on the part of the merged Faculty. Neither process can be taken for granted, and therefore no firm claims can be made about efficiency except that it is contingent on both external decisions (the state) and internal operations (the institution). Neither set of decisions is devoid of politics, for government funding of the veterinary sciences at higher and sustained levels of subsidization will almost certainly mean the diversion of funds from other institutions and priorities; and retrenching staff will mean making decisions based on the unequal racial distribution of staff and informed by vigilant staff unions.

The single most important challenge facing the merged Faculty will be the volatile business of increasing staff and student equity. The dearth of black students frustrates institutional recruitment efforts; declining black student numbers mean a declining pool of qualified graduates from which future academic staff can be recruited. It remains a vicious cycle, and failure to change the *status quo* risks negative political exposure of this state-subsidized programme.

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# RPL in teacher education: lessons being learned from the National Professional Diploma in Education

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## Introduction

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is now a formal part of the assessment and development policy landscape that has grown up around the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa. In all sectors of the economy, the notion is that a diversity of training, educational or life experiences can, *in principle*, provide learners with the required knowledge and individual development necessary to enter more advanced learning programmes when they have not been able to acquire these prerequisites in the mainstream. RPL is envisaged as the mechanism whereby this recognition of diverse learning experiences will be carried out. The education and training system is now very much at the point where it must develop and implement the mechanism in concrete ways in a vast range of different education and training contexts.

The aim of this paper is to try to deepen our understanding of the problem of implementing the RPL of teachers and teaching in relation to these very important imperatives. It takes as its focus the first offerings of the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) by various higher education institutions in South Africa. SAIDE's involvement with the process has been in working with the national Department of Education in developing the NPDE plan, as an active support agency in two of the institutions offering an extensive NPDE programme, and as a research organisation engaged in ongoing conceptualisation and evaluation of RPL in teacher education. What follows is related to our extensive ongoing research on and engagement within the emerging practices of RPL in the NPDE.

The structure of this paper is as follows: first, it briefly describes the character of the NPDE and the envisaged role of RPL strategies within it. Following that, it sets out a general account of the RPL research literature in South Africa, and some of the crucial theoretical, policy and implementation

questions that arise within it. Here, problems in the actual ‘rolling out’ of the NPDE are highlighted. The paper goes on to consider the issues that have arisen in RPL for teachers in the three different areas of concern:

- It suggests that particular theories of the situatedness and transfer of skills and knowledge have come to dominate the debate, and questions whether or not this should be the case.
- It explores the widespread tendency to view RPL as a mass access mechanism rather than as a strategy for individual development, and suggests that this is counterproductive and inconsistent with the very nature of RPL.
- It argues that the technical implementation requirements of RPL have tended to dominate institutional contexts offering the NPDE, at the expense of its human and social development imperatives.

## The National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE)

In national educational planning, the need for this qualification emerged from the phasing out of certificates, diplomas, higher diplomas, and further diplomas in teacher education. Many educators are still in possession of such certificates, and, for those whose qualifications are classified as REQV 12 or lower, there is a need to provide alternative access routes into the new qualifications framework.

The NPDE, which is envisaged as an interim qualification, is designed to provide this access for teachers. It is pitched at level five on the NQF, and is a 240 credit qualification. Since it is meant for upgrading of educators in schooling, it assumes knowledge and skills gained from experience. It also assumes that educators will have knowledge of two languages and at least four other school subjects up to a Standard Eight or Ten level, as well as some professional training. The qualification is made of four groups of exit-level outcomes, which together reflect the work of a professional educator. These are:

a. *Component One: Competences relating to fundamental learning*

The focus in this component is on the role of the scholar, researcher, and lifelong learner. However, there is some reference in the application of the

communicative and numerical competence to the roles of learning mediation, assessment, and management/ administration.

b. *Component Two: Competences relating to the subject and content of teaching*

The focus in this component is on the role of interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials, the role of learning mediation, as well as on the specialist role.

c. *Component Three: Competences relating to teaching and learning processes*

The focus in this component is on the roles of the specialist, the learning mediator, assessor, manager/administrator/leader, interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials, as well as the pastoral role.

d. *Component Four: Competences relating to the school and profession*

The focus in this component is on the role of manager/administrator/ leader, as well as of the community, citizenship and pastoral role.

Of particular interest for our purposes here is that the NPDE qualification documentation states that learners on the NPDE are entitled to assessment for recognition of prior learning and experience. There are two forms of RPL for NPDE programmes:

- a. Exemption from credits on the basis of qualifications already achieved; and
- b. Achievement of credits towards the NPDE through assessment and recognition of prior learning and experience.

A maximum of 120 credits in the qualification may be credited through RPL – either through exemption or assessment. The first form will be available for teachers whose qualifications are evaluated at REQV 12. The second should be available for teachers whose qualifications are evaluated at REQV 11. The NPDE qualification gives guidance about the way in which this RPL should be done:

Providers are required to develop structured means for the assessment of individual learners against the exit-level outcomes of the qualification on a case by case basis.

Crucially, there are no nationally established RPL<sup>1</sup> procedures or instruments, the official position being that higher education institutions should each develop their own autonomous programmes in the NPDE.

In June 2002, JET Education Services, supported by SAIDE, ran a workshop on RPL for NPDE providers. Participants went through a series of role plays modeling the stages of the RPL process – drawing up a profile of the RPL candidate, developing appropriate assessment tools, supporting the candidate through the assessment, and moderating the assessment. There was considerable discussion of three types of tools to RPL that could be used across providers – classroom observation schedules, portfolios, and challenge tests. A set of guidelines emerged from the workshop setting out the process to be followed to help providers implement satisfactory RPL approaches in the NPDE.

In March 2003, this time under the auspices of the ETDP SETA, a further workshop took place, in which national providers of the NPDE inter alia grappled further with issues and problems related to the implementation of RPL in their programmes. A set of minimum standards for RPL was set up at that workshop. The ETDP SETA ETQA has become formally involved in the rollout of the NPDE, which is one of the qualifications delegated to it for quality assurance by the Higher Education Quality Committee of the Council on Higher Education. It is responsible for checking whether or not the minimum standards for RPL are being met by the providers. In addition, however, the ETDP SETA's Board has agreed to support an NPDE and RPL research and development project to further the development of best practices in relation to RPL and integrated assessment.

Between October 2003 and May 2004, the Centre for Education Policy Development commissioned by the Education Labour Relations Council, carried out a curriculum evaluation of the NPDE, which involved site visits to all 17 providers. The interim findings of the RPL section of the evaluation were presented at a workshop for NPDE providers in March 2004 (Buchler, in Welch and Francis, 2004, p.23). Buchler's general conclusion was that RPL within the first cohort of teachers has been inadequately conceptualised, funded and implemented.

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<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, SAIDE's view is that there is a place for a common national challenge test for level 4 literacy and numeracy, in the interests of quality control and comparative national policy research.

The major issues are:

- Insufficient assessment methods
  - Inadequacy of the portfolio
  - Blurring of current/new and prior learning
  - Inadequate training of staff
  - Insufficient time for advising students
- (Buchler, in Welch and Francis, 2004, p.23).

The purpose of this paper is not to explore these issues in detail. Rather, what we are concerned with here is to highlight some of the contradictions that are evident in the RPL terrain in teacher education, and to point out examples of how these are being engaged by various of the providers. As we will go on to suggest, there are various factors in the NPDE and in teacher education more broadly that make the implementation of RPL problematic.

## The growth of local research

There is a broader research and policy context in South Africa against which we need to consider these moves to establish a viable approach to RPL in teacher education. As is now well documented in South African research, RPL originated in the United States of America shortly after World War Two. A concept and set of practices closely connected to workplace education and training, its aim is to assist learners who have acquired knowledge and skills through life and work experiences to receive credits for this work. In South Africa, the concept has come to acquire growing significance nationally through the establishment of the NQF, which is likewise based on the principle of providing formal recognition to appropriate skills and knowledge, regardless of how or where they have been acquired. As a policy lever, RPL is of particular importance because it holds out the promise of redressing historical injustices and deprivations caused by the apartheid education system. Further, it promises to provide cost-effective mechanisms for speeding up the acquisition of skills and knowledge, a process that is critical to accelerating economic growth in the country.

Despite its potential, RPL has a limited history of implementation in South African education and, as a quick scan of available research illustrates, an equally limited research history. As the body of local research grows, however, it is emerging that implementation of RPL is fraught with intellectual and logistical challenges. The concept and its potential to deliver on its promise are subjects of intense debate, a debate that easily polarises participants based on



their vested interests. Although RPL is a national education and training policy imperative, it is new and remains an untested policy. Where there has been research, the findings suggest that there is still a “lack of clarity about the nature, value and purpose of RPL” (Ralphs and Motala, 2000, p.3), and that institutional reluctance and inexperience, rigid curriculum, and the absence of expertise in the assessment of experiential learning remain constraining factors for implementing RPL (Buchler et. al., 2000, p.2).

Recognizing the importance of the concept and challenges associated with its implementation, JET started the Workers Higher Education Project (WHEP) in 1995 to inspire, initiate, and fund new RPL projects in the workplace and in higher education. Since that time, WHEP has fostered a series of projects, papers, publications, and seminars to promote RPL. This work was presented in the public domain in 2000, particularly through two nationally coordinated research projects and a national conference in October. That conference established a set of new priorities around RPL, which reflected a more strategic approach to both RPL and experiential learning in South Africa.

There is now a growing literature on the subject in South Africa. This paper, and the longer-term research project that it is related to, conceives itself as forming part of the abovementioned research agenda. It will seek to build on existing research in South Africa, which to date, has focused on such issues as conceptualising RPL (Gawe, 1999; Breier, 1998a, 1998b), the potential of RPL for social justice and redress in education (Michelson, 1999; Harris, 1999, 2000), epistemological issues in RPL (Shalem, 2001), case studies of RPL in institutional settings (Osman and Castle, 2001) and institutional policy development (Geysler, 1999).

A brief scan of existing research into RPL in South Africa quickly reveals that there are many questions still unanswered around both the theoretical concept and implementation of RPL in the country. In considering what these are more precisely in relation to teacher education and development, a number of issues come to the fore. The purpose of setting them out here is not to undermine the importance of particular lines of enquiry, but rather to try to define the ongoing research questions that SAIDE faces in its own engagement with RPL in the NPDE.

## RPL issues emerging in South African teacher education

### The growth of work competence in and across content domains

When RPL is considered in the context of the NQF, then the question arises as to how it contributes to achieving the goal of *the portability of qualifications, knowledge and skills* across work and learning domains. There is a great deal of current educational research which suggests that knowledge and skills are *situated* in a context of particular activities or practices, and that they do not transfer straightforwardly into other contexts. For example, a high level of skill as a political orator and strategist does not necessarily entail the ability to teach well, and competence as a history teacher does not necessarily entail the ability to teach biology. On the other hand, there is a strong indication from contemporary psychological research that the knowledge and skills that people acquire become *embodied* – that is to say, as human beings, they carry certain kinds of competence with them across the different life and work contexts that they act within. In this sense, it is perfectly conceivable that particular teachers, through systematic engagement with general ideas about teaching and learning in a theoretical context and/or through their own development of a range of pedagogic strategies related to the alternative structures and constructions of knowledge, might acquire generic teaching competence that would transfer across different subjects or levels.

From the point of view of teachers, the heading of this subsection might be translated as ‘the growth of teaching competence in and across subject domains’. An RPL strategy for teachers must engage with the question of what teacher knowledge is subject- or domain-specific and what is generic to teaching across different subject domains. It cannot simply declare in advance that RPL can only be concerned with the recognition of one or other kind of competence, on the strength of unresolved questions about the nature of the subject knowledge or the pedagogic knowledge of our existing teaching personnel. This would beg the crucial RPL question at stake in programmes like the NPDE: how much of each kind of knowledge do teachers seem to have acquired in ‘on the job’ learning?

## Developmental versus transformational models of RPL<sup>2</sup>

A crucial area of debate has focused on the differences between developmental and transformational models of RPL. In brief, certain protagonists have argued that, although some developmental forms of RPL help to develop the student – rather than simply assessing existing levels of competence – they are still flawed because they do not engage with the need for institutions to transform their academic programmes and curricula to take account of ‘other’ knowledges such as culture-, gender- or class-specific experiential knowledge and learning which are usually invisible in an academy. Thus, transformational models of RPL seek to recognize non-formal and experiential learning for itself rather than attempting to articulate and match such knowledge and learning with knowledge prevalent in the receiving institution.

The ideas raised by transformational models of RPL are a critical component of reflecting on the validity of curricula in general, and pose important debates about what is and is not considered valid knowledge. In regard to teacher development and upgrading, they pose the question as to whether schools should be engaged with indigenous or ‘local’ knowledges rather than with the classical school subjects, and indeed, whether such a distinction makes any sense in terms of the needs and global interests of Africa.<sup>3</sup>

## The attainability of equivalence

Another clear theme in debates around RPL relates to the attainability of equivalence. In brief, some commentators – locally and internationally – have questioned the extent to which it is possible to claim different learning experiences in different contexts as equivalent. Often, this line of questioning

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<sup>2</sup> The terms ‘developmental’ and ‘transformational’ are taken from Osman (2001).

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that research based on such assumptions may ultimately force a review of the entire norms and standards and competence framework constructed nationally for teacher education programmes. This poses particular difficulties for research on what is an already existing programme like the NPDE. SAIDE’s view is that, while such research may be valuable in its own right as a mechanism for reviewing the teacher education outcomes, it is important first to allow implementation of NPDE and other programmes before beginning such a review. We operate on the assumption that the nationally defined outcomes for the NPDE – having been broadly agreed by a range of constituencies – are not in urgent need of transformative review. Ultimately, though, we think that research on RPL may be used to open such further debate.

comes from people within the higher education sector, who argue that the academic experience is, by its very nature, different from other types of learning, whether they be formal or experiential. The issue is often construed as one about the epistemological assumptions of the RPL enterprise – can it be assumed that the way one comes to know and the cognitive character of one’s knowledge is the same across different life and work contexts? In teaching, for example, what kind of learning in what kinds of social domains of practice can we take to be predictors of the ability to teach well? It is no exaggeration to suggest that the whole enterprise of RPL is related to this issue, since the limits of the equivalence of learning constitute the real constraints that will determine what counts as appropriate RPL.

As with the previous issue, this continues to be an important theme for educational research, and encapsulates many concerns central to the ongoing development and transformation of education in South Africa. However, we suggest that, for purposes of practical teacher development, this ‘epistemological’ debate is not necessarily the most incisive starting point for the establishment of any RPL programme. In regard to teacher education, the hypothetical case for RPL seems to rest on lots of *prima facie* evidence that skills and knowledge learned in any number of ways, formal or experiential, in and outside the classroom, can be equated. In regard to the NPDE, a national diploma, it would seem that our starting point for investigation should be the assumption that there are certain kinds of experiential learning, acquired ‘on the job’ in the classroom, that contribute to the development of teacher competence. The key question then becomes one of whether or not formal and/or experiential learning have led to the acquisition of the skills and knowledge defined by the NPDE curriculum.

### The challenges of credit transfer

As has been noted above, two forms of RPL are being made available to educators taking an NPDE programme. The first, targeting educators on the REQV 12 level will be to offer the opportunity of transferring credits from other qualifications into the NPDE. This is a process which will no doubt face many challenges. In particular:

- RPL of this nature will have to grapple with the long-standing problem of how to standardise the ways in which institutions recognise the formal learning experience of learners from other institutions.

- At a national level, it will be important to consider the problem that historical acquisition of teaching diplomas – particularly on courses and programmes developed as part of the apartheid system – has unfortunately not always equipped the recipients with the level or kind of learning achievements articulated for the NPDE. Most importantly, the historical legacy of *fundamental pedagogics* in many programmes often runs counter to the kinds of competence outlined for the NPDE. This introduces several logistical challenges for national teaching qualifications, which are often simply not dealt with by credit transfer systems.

Finding solutions to the above problems, as well as others associated with credit transfer, will be critical to RPL within the NPDE.

### The question of finance

A theme mostly absent from research papers on RPL is the question of cost, and particularly who will foot the bill. Unsurprisingly, case studies of RPL suggest that the more rigorous and learner-focused the process, the more expensive it becomes. In relation to the NPDE, the national Department of Education (DoE) funds the students' tuition fees, but obviously within certain budgetary limits (we return to the implications of this issue below). The University of South Africa has attempted to outline a formula for budgeting for RPL more generally, where the cost of RPL is borne by the student. It is apparent from these cases that the costs of different methods of RPL have not yet been worked out accurately. Given the importance attached to RPL in the NPDE and more generally, questions need to be raised about how much different methods of RPL cost, as well as the appropriateness of using fees to sustain RPL within programmes.

The above review of emergent issue and question in regard to RPL for teacher education in South Africa highlights many crucial questions being thrown up by the NPDE programme. This paper now goes on to examine some of the underlying tensions in more detail, in regard to the theory, policy and implementation of RPL.

## Theory: the issue of transfer

Kraak (1999) captures well a particular notion concerning learning and its transfer that has become very influential amongst policy makers in South African education. It has enormous resonance for RPL:

a. . . powerful criticism of OBET. . . is that outcomes models assume that learning acquired, assessed and accredited by OBET – specifically core or generic competencies – can be transferred and applied across differing knowledge and societal contexts. . . This central proposition flies in the face of recent theories of cognition and learning. . . [that] stress that generic competences or capabilities are acquired in specific contexts. . . and, as a consequence, are not applicable in other knowledge or occupational contexts. (Kraak, 1999, p.47)

Now there is a central flaw in this formulation, which, simply put, is that it should say ‘*some* recent theories of cognition and learning’. The theorists that Kraak names – Gee, Bernstein, Lave and Wenger (to the extent that they are indeed theorists of *cognition and learning*) – certainly do hold views akin to this formulation, but it would be a naïve theorist indeed who would suggest that such views are dominant in cognitive development and learning theory generally, especially with regard to the ontological stratum<sup>4</sup> of psychology, as distinct from the social relations of learning. There are profound implications of this kind of slippage in relation to the way we think about RPL.

There are two kinds of *prior learning* that the NQF has wanted to bring into the assessment frame since its inception as a policy tool of the emergent and new South African government. These relate closely to what psychologists and educationists term *domain-specific* and *domain-general* learning:

- a. The specialised knowledge and skills that persons acquire ‘on-the-job’ within a particular domain of practice, but that have been ignored owing to a lack of appropriate assessment mechanisms and human development policies. Such knowledge and skills have executive<sup>5</sup> bearing on a person's ability to perform a job at a much higher level of sophistication and responsibility within that same domain. Failure to recognise them:

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<sup>4</sup> Perhaps *strata*?

<sup>5</sup> The word ‘executive’ is used here in its psychological sense, that is referring to a person’s embodied ability to carry out (execute) a particular task successfully.

1. denies individuals the possibility to further their careers and learning capacity, and
  2. deprives the economy of a recognised level of skill, as it is available in the work force in each sector of the economy.
- B. The generic knowledge and skills that persons acquire in early basic education, in broad everyday life domains and/or in both formal and non-formal ‘on-the-job-training’, but that have not been recognised as education and training proper owing to the very rigid, compartmentalised certification that characterised the formal apprenticeship and schooling systems of the past. Such knowledge and skills have executive bearing on a person's ability to transfer across domains of work specialisation, to learn new skills quickly in a new domain (i.e. to be ‘re-skilled’), and to re-enter formal education pathways. Failure to recognise them:
1. denies individuals (in particular, members of the current generations of adult workers) the right to take advantage of new educational and training opportunities opened up by the dismantling of apartheid, and
  2. deprives the emergent ‘information economy’ of the ability to recognise, formalise and continue to train a more flexible, adaptable workforce that will arise with it.

The difficult task that the NQF set out to achieve entailed both of these aims. While each is emancipatory and developmental (as the characterisations above make clear), they can only fully ‘address the visible and invisible barriers underpinning transformation of the education and training system’ (SAQA, 2002) in concert with each other. It is at least arguable that to concentrate only on A will mean that the single most historically emancipatory vision of the NQF, the principle of *the portability of qualifications, knowledge and skills* within and across domains will be stillborn.

However, there has been an unfortunate recent trend in discussions of RPL to suggest (along the lines of Kraak’s comment about ‘recent theories on cognition and learning’) that learning cannot *in principle* be transferred and applied across different knowledge and task domains. This is evident, for example, in:

- moves to restrict RPL activities only to SETA contexts, and not to establish principles, guidelines and mechanisms for the RPL of

knowledge and skills that can enable movement across sectors of the economy (SAQA, 2002);

- the characterisation of RPL as exclusively a comparison of previous learner experience against learning outcomes for a specified qualification, rather than (also) against a particular level of expertise common to a range of qualifications at a particular level of the NQF ‘ladder’.

One implication is ostensibly that RPL related to ‘generic competence’ is misguided, and that knowledge and skills can only be developed *for a particular domain of practice in that domain of practice*. Notions such as ‘communities of practice’, ‘activity system’, ‘situated knowledge’, ‘situated literacy’ and ‘distributed cognition’ – which may all be captured for purposes of this commentary by the notion of *situated knowledge* – are taken to imply that knowledge and skills are only domain- or context-specific.

There can be no question that any knowledge is always *situated*. Most immediately, this implies that one's consciousness is always bounded by external space-time co-ordinates – for instance, “I know what year it is, what place I am in, what time of day it is, the season of the year”, etc. (Searle, 1995, p.28). More expansively, it entails that one operates in thought always in relation to a specific, distinctive set of cultural artifacts and practices, that one's knowledge is at all times necessarily embedded in cultural practices. However, this does not mean that the individual does not learn things that are unique to him or her within these cultural domains, that tend to become embodied in him or her as familiar practice, and that can be carried by him or her to other more or less unfamiliar domains of practice and become the basis for initial participation in such domains.

To suggest that ‘situatedness’ implies the non-transfer of an individual's knowledge across domains is a rather narrow view of the theory that could inform RPL, for a number of reasons:

- If *situated knowledge* constitutes a new or recent paradigm within the broad terrain of cognitive and learning theory, then it does so alongside a whole range of other newly emerging theoretical traditions, including *embodied knowledge/learning* and theories of *connectionism*. Both of the latter perspectives pose an understanding of RPL that suggests that *embodied* knowledge and skills certainly are carried across contexts of practice, and in some way or another must constitute the conceptions and habits on the basis of which individuals can or cannot engage in any



new, unfamiliar practice. In fact, situated learning theory is intimately connected with notions about the acquisition of *embodied* knowledge, as any review of its theoretical origins and parameters will demonstrate. It does not necessarily follow that to adopt the view that knowledge and skills are situated is to hold that there is nothing about them that is embodied and transferable across contexts.

- With regard to the *transfer* of learning, the dominant view in the psychology of cognition and learning is not that there is no knowledge or learning whatsoever that can transfer across contexts. Even amongst 'situationists', there are many who accept that certain kinds of transfer are possible. Despite Lave and Wenger's claim that transfer of learning cannot exist because knowledge cannot be de-contextualised, most theorists recognise that such transfer can be socially mediated and, particularly, that certain forms of knowledge enhance the likelihood of transfer across tasks and contexts (see, for example, the special issue of the *International Journal of Educational Research* on the question of transfer: De Corte, 1999).

In teacher education, the questions of transfer are open questions at this stage. Whether or not the knowledge and skills that teachers acquire in training to teach a specific discipline or a particular phase, or those that they construct on the job in teaching an initially unfamiliar discipline, can be the subject of a more 'generic' RPL process remains an open question. It should not be curtailed or constrained by the dominance of a particular theoretical notion of *situated learning* at this stage in the policy process. These questions can only be resolved ultimately by much more detailed theoretical work and by the attendant concrete research. Once it has been defined exactly what kinds of knowledge and skills might be expected to transfer and what to be acquired only in specific contexts, then only ongoing empirical scrutiny of them could prove or disprove these expectations. Such research is a vital part of the establishment and ongoing benchmarking of RPL mechanisms.

In the NPDE terrain, there is little indication at this stage that providers are engaging with the detailed research and assessment requirements in regard to this issue. A scan of the available RPL plans of the different institutions (which were submitted to the NPDE SETA as part of the workshop process during March 2003) reveals that all, either implicitly or explicitly, acknowledge the possibility of teachers having taught in learning areas for which they are not formally qualified being eligible for RPL. However, the RPL mechanisms that they envisage are still, at this stage, too general to engage with the questions of generic subject knowledge transfer.

## Policy: the recognition of individual prior learning

In teacher education, RPL is focused in the first instance on a question that has been posed for a long time, not only in the post-apartheid transition in schools, but also in struggles against the racially defined, severely under-resourced schools of the past:

- How are we to define and recognise the teaching competence that has been acquired by teachers, whether they were unqualified, underqualified or differently qualified,<sup>6</sup> who have taught for a substantial period of time in classroom contexts for which they are not formally qualified?
- What means exist to differentiate those who have coped with and developed the necessary knowledge and teaching skills to succeed in these roles from those who have failed to teach effectively and to enhance their competence?

This two-part formulation of the question is important. A false assumption inherent in much RPL discourse is that simply anyone who has been through the motions of teaching has automatically acquired related teaching competence. At the same time, the developmental potential of RPL is to recognise the apparently many individuals who have indeed acquired new teaching competence substantially beyond anything they were formally trained or qualified to do. The challenge to RPL in the teacher development terrain, just as in any other human resource development terrain, is to come up with assessment mechanisms that can identify and assure such quality, in the interests of both social and individual growth.

Related to this is a second question, which emerges in the specific context of a rapidly transforming overall school curriculum. How are we to recognise competence, acquired ‘on the job’ by teachers, to teach effectively in the new progressive environment, despite their training many years ago that failed to equip them with appropriate subject knowledge and teaching skills? There is a massive national effort underway now to re-train and upgrade teachers in order to facilitate the effective implementation of the ‘paradigm shift’ in schooling. RPL is deemed an essential part of this overall strategy.

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, a teacher trained in biblical studies and guidance who has been deployed to teach mathematics for ten years owing to the non-availability of qualified mathematics teachers.

It is in this regard that a severe danger creeps into RPL practices in the terrain of teacher education. There is the tendency to treat any experience of teaching – or, one might say, the experience of standing in front of a classroom and making utterances of whatever kind – as the required experience of teaching needed to fulfill the outcomes criteria of a particular teaching qualification. This is related to a major fallacy that abounds too often in the RPL terrain, that merely having an experience of something or participating in something means that we know that something. On the contrary, it is well established, both theoretically and actually, that *experiential learning* should not be equated with the mere having of experiences. Rather, it necessarily entails the deliberate reflection on (Kolb), or reflective abstraction of (Piaget) or voluntary attention to (Vygotsky) the salient details of any experience as they relate to some or other overall framework of knowledge.<sup>7</sup> The point is that RPL mechanisms, in order to be able to recognise whether or not the appropriate knowledge and skills have been acquired previously, must attend to whether or not particular individuals have acquired the ability, through experience, to reflect on their own experience in a manner that is somehow removed from that experience in time and space. RPL is an assessment of individual growth and development, in that it seeks to understand the nuances that different individuals bring to, and acquire from, apparently different experiences.

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<sup>7</sup> *Experiential learning*, following the originator of the concept, (Kolb, 1984), entails learning thorough a deliberate process of reflection on one's experiences of everyday life, including experiences in the workplace, at home, in community organisations, in local politics, etc. Crucially (especially with regard to RPL issues), *experiential learning* is not to be equated with the mere having of experiences, no matter how rich and diverse these may be. It is deliberate reflection on experience that constitutes the crucial learning process in regard to experience. Only then can *new understandings* emerge, which break with the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life and constitute the emergent properties of what we in South Africa term new knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. There is a long history of discussion of this bottom-line requirement in 'experiential learning', associated not only with researchers who have developed the insights of Kolb, but with the earlier works of cognitive developmental theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky. Piaget (1976, 2001) spoke of the importance of *reflective abstraction* from experience, and Vygotsky (e.g. 1930, p.35; 1931, *passim*) of *voluntary attention* to the salient details of experience, in order to account for the development of new knowledge in learners. There is too often a tendency in RPL discussions to assume that evidence of having had particular experiences in the past necessarily means that a learner has acquired the systematised knowledge associated with them.

RPL is not a mass access mechanism<sup>8</sup> – it is not a process which can be used to identify a class of people who, on the basis of some kind of disadvantage, underpreparation or disability, should be given access to an educational programme of a particular kind. Its very rationale is to differentiate between individuals in cohorts of this kind, to recognise that some will have learned certain things in non-formal or informal or everyday ways while others will not. One of the most difficult problems being encountered in the implementation of RPL in the NPDE lies in coming to grips with this issue. There is an enormous amount of pressure within the structure and rationale of the qualification *to seek to 'rpl'* all the REQV 11 teachers as having attained the necessary competence for the award of the first 120 credits and to do so within the minimum period of study for the qualification i.e. two years. This pressure arises simply by virtue of the fact that they have had many years of teaching experience. Of course, the problematic nature of credit transfer means that this issue is ducked completely – but in an equally implausible way from the point of view of what RPL is intended to identify in individuals – in relation to the REQV 12 teachers on the programmes.

To their credit, the majority of service providers in the NPDE seem to be taking this issue very seriously in the development of their RPL planning and implementation. A range of perspectives on the matter is emerging. UNISA puts its position strongly:

The guiding principle for evidence to be acceptable is that educators demonstrate not just that they have experience, but rather that they have *learned* from that experience. For example, most will have attended several workshops regarding the implementation of OBE and C2005. So they must let us know that they have attended this training and then *show* us how these workshops have affected the way in which they teach (UNISA, 2003, p.2).

UNISA has developed a complex set of outcomes on the basis of which they will be able to determine which educators have met the required standards and which have not. The University of the Free State (UFS, 2003) has put in place a continuous RPL system that recognises that some educators will not have achieved the required outcomes on entry into their programmes. What it seeks to do is to identify learners who are not yet competent, to put in place a support

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<sup>8</sup> This should not be taken to mean that we think that mass access mechanisms are necessarily inappropriate in education. Indeed they are appropriate in many circumstances. Compulsory schooling, and its associated school funding norms, is a mass access mechanism that we would defend vigorously. Our point here is simply that RPL, by its very internal logic, is not such a mechanism. Where policymakers in education are determined to implement such a mechanism, they should look elsewhere for the means.

system whereby learners can be assisted to develop the required knowledge and skills during their period on the programme, with a view to them being successfully 'rpl-ed' by the end of the programme. Similarly, the University of the Western Cape (UWC, 2003) has an orientation programme in which its NPDE candidates are taught to understand RPL and to prepare learning portfolios which will allow them to meet required outcomes, and in which they are supported by individual mentoring and counseling. However, the UWC's programme seems more oriented to the kind of mass access that we are attempting to problematise here:

Since the . . . NPDE is targeted at under-qualified educators with years of experience in the teaching profession, it is assumed that these educators have acquired additional skills and knowledge associated with . . . teaching (UWC, 2003, p.13).

Similarly, the programme of the University of the North and the University of Venda (Limpopo NPDE Project, 2003, p.15) has set up mechanisms to enable "REQV 11 educators who do not achieve enough credits. . . through the credit exchange system. . . to develop portfolios", which will be developmental in that they will "develop learners in their respective fields of specializations". However, although training was provided to tutors, and educators were given three support workshops, the portfolios produced demonstrated that neither the tutors nor the educators had developed a sufficient understanding of the difficult task of matching evidence with NPDE outcomes. The portfolios are being re-done, and there seems to be the recognition that there will be some educators who, despite apparently relevant experience, have not or will not demonstrate the necessary competence to receive RPL accreditation.

There is something of a continuum here, with some providers being clear that RPL is not an automatic access route into the NPDE and others seeking in some way to facilitate access through it, albeit with the recognition that there are certain minimum outcomes standards to be achieved. Our contention in this paper is that it cannot operate as a blanket access mechanism, a tendency which all the providers seem to be resisting. Nonetheless, the tendency is, as we shall see, exacerbated by the problems of implementation that seem to be being experienced in regard to the NPDE.

## Implementation: the imperative to deliver

In SAIDE's experience, the delivery imperatives associated with the NPDE seem to take on a life of their own, leading to the conceptions and implementation of RPL measures which are remote from both the broader policies established to guide RPL and the theoretical concerns and insights which supposedly guide them. Reflections on concrete examples from NPDE providers will make this point quite starkly:

- There are two groups of teachers doing the NPDE (those with M+1/REQV 11 and those with M+2/REQV 12), but because of practical issues, the RPL process was not done before the teachers started the programme. In addition, both groups of teachers tend to be doing the same modules in years one and two.
- Technically, the only difference between the two groups of teachers in the NPDE is that those with M+1 do not have a senior certificate (their qualifications are Std 8 and a two year Primary Teachers Certificate, whereas the M+2 teachers have Std 10 and the two year professional qualification). In real terms, the difference between these two groups of teachers is negligible. But, as we have pointed out, and because of the numbers of teachers involved, the decision was taken to arrange RPL for half of the qualification by credit exchange (existing qualifications simply recorded – no additional assessment required). This means that, even though there may only be a technical difference between the two groups of teachers, the one group will have to be assessed for RPL, and the other group will not.
- The NPDE is a 240 credit part-time qualification, which means that the full qualification, without RPL, would be four years in duration. However, M+2 teachers will need to do only 120 credits – 2 years. This means that some of the teachers will be finishing in two years, while others will require a maximum of four years – though this could be reduced if they were successful in gaining credit through assessment of their prior learning and experience. However, in around April 2002, it became clear that the Department and the ELRC do not have the funds to provide bursaries for teachers beyond two years, and so are tending to put political and bureaucratic pressure on providers to ensure that all teachers complete in two years.

These factors mean that:

- the real purpose of the approach to RPL in the SAQA policy – to give *individuals* a chance to get credit on the basis of what they already know and can do, and to help them select the new learning that they need from the programme – has already been lost;
- since there is little real difference between the two groups of teachers, and the results of the assessment will not affect their programmes of study in any real way, there is little incentive for providers to do the RPL in any but a technical way;
- RPL assessment for M+1 teachers will need to be squeezed into the two year programme of study, and there will be no funding of additional modules the teachers may require. So the temptation appears to be strong for providers to adopt a ‘pass one pass all’ approach.

The upshot of all of this is a picture of implementation imperatives that increasingly drive the nature of the programme, at the expense of policy and theoretical imperatives. In this landscape, most providers are finding it extremely difficult to implement the NPDE programme. The provincial process of selection of teachers has been cumbersome and inefficient, most providers are dealing with much larger numbers of teachers than they are accustomed to, many providers have no experience of material-based, mixed mode, distance programmes, and there have been many uncertainties at a national level. To add to all of these difficulties by requiring a case-by-case RPL process within the already full two year minimum period of study seems to be unreasonable.

## Tensions between theory, policy and implementation

This paper has explored difficulties associated with the implementation of a coherent, systematic and efficient RPL process for teacher education in South Africa. In doing so, it has highlighted a central problem in the way that such a system might be conceived and implemented, namely a tendency to treat RPL as a rite of passage of sorts, in which all practising REQV11 and REQV12 educators can be given access to higher level qualifications as a cohort rather than on a case-by-case basis. This, we have suggested, runs against the logic of RPL, which is to recognise real experiential learning that often transfers across disciplinary domains, when it has occurred, but also when it has not occurred. RPL is a mechanism to recognise and facilitate ongoing individual

development. Our contention is that when it is conducted as if it were a mass access mechanism, it substantially loses this potential. In the NPDE, at the moment, the theoretical issues that must be articulated in relation to RPL, the official policy positions emerging from government and the practical realities of implementation are pulling in contradictory directions. How these tensions are resolved will determine whether or not the programme is able to realise its potential to generate quality in teacher development.

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