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# Mapping the pedagogical performances of school principals in a Cape Town township

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## Abstract

This article combines the lenses of ‘space’ and ‘performance’ to analyse the pedagogical practices of three principals in a South African township. Based on qualitative approaches, it discusses the principals’ entry into the township, and their navigation of their schools’ surrounding social dynamics. The article suggests that their reflexivity as principals has been established in light of a range of engaged pedagogical performances. These were enacted on the basis of nuanced readings of their discursive environment and strategic practices that gave them an authoritative platform for their principal roles.

Bheki, Edward and Richard (pseudonyms) are principals at primary schools (Grade 1 to 7) in a township twenty-five kilometres from the Cape Town city centre. They are examples of pedagogical adaptation at the crossing points of the township and its schools. The article’s analytical spotlight is on the relation between the schools and this township’s social dynamics. I set out to explain how the principals have gone about establishing their pedagogical identities as they engage with their schools’ surrounding dynamics. I will suggest that they have enacted a number of *spatially-inspired performances*, in reference to the pedagogical practices that they have established in this terrain. This article focuses on the nature of these performances and the impact they have on the subjective identities that the principals have assumed in their daily work. It thus provides a conceptual understanding of their professional identities as they are adjusted in the context of this township.

The article’s conceptual starting point derives from Riseborg’s view that “teachers have subjectivities which accommodate, appropriate, colonize and resist and which make them co-producing agents in the social production of schooling” (quoted in Maguire, 2005, p.429). By focusing on the interaction between social context and the principals’ identities, this article goes beyond the academic fixation in South Africa on the way policy impacts the work of teachers (see Soudien, 2001). Carrim (2000) called attention to the social location of teachers in South Africa when he suggested that “there is a consistent tendency in discursively projecting teachers in homogenized and

generalized ways' which cannot 'speak'" (Carrim, p.45) analytically to the situated realities of teachers.

Extending on this position, I am concerned to understand the principals' subjectivities as arising out of the broader societal processes referred to by Riseborg in the quotation above. Coldron and Smith (1999, p.711) suggest that "identity as a teacher is partly given and partly achieved by active location in social space". Underscoring the impact of environmental dynamics on teachers, they point out that the quality of relations among teachers is conferred partly by inherited social realities and categorizations, while partially also chosen or created by the individual. Court (2004), in turn, discusses how principals adapt to personal disruptions that arise out of their work in schools in different areas, and of how they have to adapt to a range of different material and discursive contexts that structure their work. Another example of a location – sensitive analysis is Maguire's (2005) work on the impact of class on the shifting sense of self as experienced by one teacher in a working class school in England.

The emphasis of this article is thus on the impact of environmental or spatial dynamics on the pedagogical subjectivities of this group of principals. This article combines the conceptual lenses of 'space' and 'performance' to analyze the principals' subjective processes in this township. I want to suggest that the notion of 'space as a social construction' is useful in understanding the compositional relationship between localized dynamics and schooling processes. This refers to the production of material and symbolic practices in localized contexts. Space in this sense does this not simply refer to an empty landscape which architects or builders fill up with built structures. It refers to the relational or human dimensions of space, i.e. lived space, or as Lefebvre (1971/1991) suggests, the relational appreciation of space as actively produced in and through every day human practices. Smith (1991) explains that the social construction of space implies "that social practices and (physical) space are internally related in that each entails the other" (p.70, my parenthesis). Space should thus be understood as the active interaction between the physical environment and people's uses of and practices in it, such as the social practices people such as principals establish in them.

By developing their professional or occupational roles in this spatial context, the principals have been contributing to the texture of this township. They have been fashioning their identities reflexively in response to its social spatial flows. By reading their reflexivity as 'performance', I am attempting to

understand the nature and extent of their pedagogical practices in Rustvale (a fictitious name for the township of the study). Gregson and Rose (2000, p.434) highlight the productive relationship between geography and subjectivity by suggesting that “space needs to be thought of as brought into being through performances and as a performative articulation of power”. The notion of performance assumes that pedagogical practices are multiple, radically contingent and open. It draws on Butler’s construction of performativity in reference to acts of repetition that are socially validated and discursively established in everyday processes (in Gregson and Rose, p.436). Performance-based reflexivity refers to a situation where human beings “reflect back upon themselves, their relations with others. . . and those sociocultural components which make up their public selves” (Turner, quoted in Gole, 2002, p.181). Their social practices are based on an acute reading of the discursive delimitations in their environment. Their behaviour can be understood as creative adaptation and reflexivity. As Hennessy (1993, p.36) suggests, their practices constitute a critique “enacted in the disruption and re-arrangement of the pre-constituted categories on which the formation of subjects depend”.

Conquergood (1989) avers that a performance paradigm prevents the reification of culture into variables to be isolated, measured, and manipulated. Culture is never a given, but rather alive with the unpredictability associated with social actors making decisions such as whether to perform a familiar narrative or to disrupt it. The performances of the principals can be regarded as adapted and repetitive actions plotted within fluid power relationships and social norms in the context of the schools in the township. The neighbourhood, school and classroom become sites of practice in which diverse beings come together in order to engage and negotiate knowledge systems, systems of understanding and ways of being, seeing, knowing, and doing. Principals, teachers and parents reconstitute the culture of the school as they navigate the unfolding social terrain. Their publicly negotiated social performances can thus be understood as engaged practices of relations and interrelations. By combining performance with space, I am suggesting that the principals’ practices, their engagement with the sociality of Rustvale, can be understood as an outflow of the on going social spatial processes in the township. It is thus suggested that the nature and theory of their performances must be accounted for in view of these processes.

Methodologically, the article is based on my ongoing ethnographic research project in Rustvale. The project is founded on an attempt to understand the institutional and pedagogical practices and identifications of schools and

teachers in this urban context. It aims at portraying the ways the township's social dynamics flow into and help shape school practices. The research is based on extensive observations and informal and semi-structured interviews carried out over a five-month period. The observations were accomplished in and around Rustvale's thirteen schools. I had extensive interview sessions with the principals of all the schools and with a number of teachers and parents. I interviewed a range of civic and community actors and public servants such as police persons and health and welfare officers. I also interviewed senior city and educational planners who played a direct role in the design and planning of the township. The interviews and observations provided textured depictions, inductively analysed, of the ways school practices and identities were influenced by broader environmental dynamics, and how educational reform processes in the schools played out in light of these dynamics.

In addition, for this article, I specifically drew on in depth interviews with each of the three principals discussed here. These interviews concentrated on aspects of their professional biographies including their upbringing, teacher education, and teaching and management experiences. I also interrogated them extensively on their managerial perspectives, and their management and pedagogical activities in and around the school. In addition, I had interviews with a number of teachers and parents, which provided a verifying basis for the principals' views. Key to the research for this article was to understand: (1) how, and on what basis the three principals negotiated the township's specific social and educational conditions, and (2) the adaptations and adjustments they had to make to their own professional and managerial identities in this context. The interviews were thus informed by an attempt to understand the intersection between their unfolding professional pedagogical identities on the one hand, and their specific practices in substantiating their management roles in this environment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I labelled the principals' spatially engaged practices in this township as 'pedagogical' practices in reference to the need for a contextually located understanding of their work. Pedagogical, on this view, is not meant to denote the narrower focus on pedagogical processes associated with learning and teaching in the classroom. Instead, it refers to the intersecting practices that arise out of the principals' engagements with the spaces of their work. Pedagogical thus refers to the ways their professional reflexivities have been constructed in creative intersection with the social dynamics of the township's schools. I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for requesting clarification of my use of the concept pedagogical.

## The spatially inscribed pedagogical context of Rustvale township

This section focuses on the principals' entry into the township and their initial sense making of its social character. It provides a basis to understand their adaptations to a space where they initially felt, as McConaghy (2006, p.325) suggests, "out of place", in reference to moving into an unfamiliar geography, which induces feelings of professional displacement and discomfort. Cape Town has taken on the features of a typical post colonial city with many diverse and materially uneven spaces. Wilkinson (2000, p.195) describes the city as "located in a spectacular setting at the south west tip of Africa. . . and accommodates a culturally and linguistically diverse population". Spatial planning during the apartheid years was based on hierarchical racial segregation. The best spaces were cleared up and reserved for Whites, while Coloureds, i.e. people of mixed race, and Indians from the subcontinent who settled in the city from the turn of the nineteenth century, were forced to live in harsher environments. Black Africans were regarded as temporary sojourners and lived in the city's poorest parts. The city's lived spaces were marked by rigid racial division. A mix of fluid race and class arrangements currently characterize this post apartheid city. A striking feature is the wide ranging and heterodox material contexts in which its inhabitants live, from opulent first world living along the Atlantic seaboard, to middle class suburban living, and the myriad of townships and informal settlements dotted on its landscape.

Rustvale township acquired its demographic character from its racial origins as a Coloured area established in 1989. Its expansion after the democratic transition in 1994 was based on racially integrated town planning. Black African citizens began to settle in the desegregated northern parts of this township after 1994, and more slowly in its former Coloured parts, providing uneasy dynamics of racial mixing and re-racialization (see Fataar, 2007). While inflected with racialized associations that citizens brought with them from older parts of the city, and elsewhere, I have argued that one of the primary identification markings of this township is the nature of people's livelihoods. In the context of an unemployment and single parent rate of 65 per cent and 70 per cent respectively (Fataar, 2007), it is tactics of adaptation and survival that mark its social make up.

Life in this township is ephemeral and desperate. Here inhabitants daily cultivate tactics of survival by *putting together* different types of social

practices, encounters and experiences which require the use of all available capital, and human and symbolic resources. As Simone suggests, social cohesion and pursuing social and economic opportunities in a complex city space such as townships like these, require “cultivating tactics which maximize a flexible and wide ranging use of its diverse spatial make up and human resources” (2002, p.297).

I have coined the term, a ‘township on the move’ (see Fataar, 2007), as an attempt to capture a key aspect of its social dynamics. Rustvale is characterized by incessant fluxes and flows. A large percentage of its residents are forced to move around in the township, or in and out of the township in search of living space. Movement is most acute in and out of the myriad of wooden and shack dwellings in the backyards of established homes. Schools are at the processional end of these settlement flows. Coterminous with fluxes in living space, children move continuously between township schools, or to and from schools outside the township. The schools never officially close their doors to these children. This attributes to the schools an incessant enrolment flux throughout the year, which impacts negatively on school and classroom processes. It seems that the schools can never settle into a stable and consequential set of routines, always having to contend with the impact on them of a township and children on the move.

Edward makes the following telling remark about life as he experiences it in his school:

Things are on the move here all the time, move here all the time. Parents coming for a place for their children kicked out of another school . . . a mommy complaining about the absent father beating the kids, . . . people moving from one backyard to another, or people selling stuff, coming with some or other money making scheme, or looking for work at the school. . . on the go here all time, sir, never a dull moment, tiring, damn tiring, but never dull.

Edward’s view above portrays the link between movement and flux on the one hand and social pathos on the other. Siphon, in turn comments on the impact of the size of the houses: “The houses are extremely small. . . People have endless problems with the housing. And that in itself has an impact on the area”. Richard points out the contrast between the spacious brick schools on the one hand, and the uncaring attitude of some of Rustvale’s inhabitants thus:

. . . another thing about the people in Rustvale and its children specifically which struck me was that they were tremendously vandalistic. They vandalized the school, and that was very disturbing. And I just wondered, where does it come from, the fact that they acted like that. It was a developing area, getting beautiful schools, but then the schools are being vandalized. I had a feeling that children just want to be outside on the street because there’s no space in the house.

Continuing with the theme of recalcitrant children, the principals expressed an intricate discourse about the deviancy produced in this impoverished and spatially limiting environment. Siphso commented that:

. . . the other problem was also sometimes when our children were absent and I drove around in the area, I discovered afterwards that they were watching blue movies, for instance. But, you know, size of housing played a big role in the sense that there was no privacy for children.

Similarly Richard explained with exasperation that: “boys have touched boys in the school. . . And that I attribute to the fact that the small space in which people live, rob people of the privacy they deserve. And how do you deal with that?”

The combination of poverty and the largely informal settlement dynamics, of families desperately attempting to survive, has had an effect on the broader social processes in the township. The meaning of citizenship in such a context is under dispute. In this particular environment initial settling took place under generally ephemeral living conditions. Survival here generally depends on making alternative livelihoods in the absence of formal employment. The ability, for example, to evade payment for services, and assume indigent status, determines people’s survival, making the township difficult to manage (see Simone, 2004). The various bureaucratic apparatuses of the state have a tenuous hold on social life in this context, making citizenship discourses such as those normally generated by schools difficult to take hold.

As state institutions the schools have been struggling to play their normative role of reproducing the democratic and reflexive conceptual capacities that productive citizenship would entail. My interviewees suggested that the educational function of the schools, of providing the children with a pedagogical context for learning, has been modified purposefully by the teachers. While the schools are committed to providing a climate for the children to learn, they are reconciled to what they regard as the negative impact of the social and domestic environment on their children’s learning performance. The schools seem to be impacted by the absence of cultural capital and difficult domestic circumstances. As a primary organiser of their identity the socially responsive approach they adopt to service their children’s welfare needs is the result of pressures to respond to the challenges of the environment. In the case of Rustvale the schools are an acute example of how these pressures can define their character. On the one hand, as I have suggested elsewhere, the schools refract “the social pressures of the township,



becoming part of its sociality, while on the other hand, they actively serve to ameliorate the worst consequences of poverty and hardship” (see Fataar, 2007, p.608).

## The lineaments of pedagogical space hopping

The principals’ movement from relatively settled spaces into a less regulated, settling space, a process that I label *space hopping*, was accomplished on the basis of a number of disjunctural identification processes that left them unprepared for their new principal roles. Giddens’s (1991) views on the reconstitution of daily life in late modernity are apposite in understanding the principals’ subjective alignment to their work. He alerts us to the reconstitutions of daily life where people are disembedded or lifted out of social relations. When the individual moves from a situation of familiarity with familiar roles and routines she has to confront the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life, which entails the erstwhile “high level of reliability of familiar contexts of day-to-day social interaction, and the ontological security of the self” (Giddens, 1991, p.234). The individual is then forced to reconsider her beliefs, values, roles, and ambitions. Woods and Jeffrey (2002) argue that educational subjects have to confront their ‘fragile self’ unmoored from their rootedness to a familiar place. When they enter new spaces or qualitatively different professional arenas these subjects are “hard at work trying to manage the contradictions of their own multiple subject positions within these arenas” (Whitehead, 1999, p.201).

Bheki, Richard and Edward entered Rustvale with anxiety and caution as they confronted an entirely different set of social spatial dynamics. They did this on the basis of a relatively narrow pedagogical identity, with very little managerial experience or training, and in the full glare of a community that came to view them expectantly as representatives of the new democratic state. As I show below, hopping into this township space took place on the basis of their “fundamental lack of management capacity to be a successful principal in this God-forsaken place” (Edward), having to “learn on the hoof” (Edward), and having to “justify our appointments . . . while everyone was watching us, . . . waiting for us to make fools of ourselves” (Bheki).

The three principals are first generation educated who grew up in rural areas of South Africa, one in an African Xhosa speaking village, and the other two in Coloured Afrikaans speaking towns. They spent their childhood in



impoverished and racially enclosed surroundings. They chose to become teachers as a result of a lack of other professional options. The availability of government bursaries for precocious young adults to study to become teachers presented a viable route into middle class living. By offering bursaries the apartheid state intended to secure a ready pool of professionals who could work in the various racially-based bureaucracies and institutions that began to mushroom from the 1960s. Their pre-service teacher training took place in Colleges of Education where they were fed a staple of transmission mode pedagogical and subject content knowledge. Driven by the requirement to produce docile, racially inscribed educational subjects, the College system intended to produce teachers who could serve narrow ideological interests.

Bheki, Richard and Edward questioned this educational approach at points throughout their training and early teaching careers. They were able to discern the ideological intent of their teacher training. They spoke in the interviews of the political opposition they developed against the apartheid educational system. Bheki and Richard were, for example, active in anti apartheid youth education groups and Edward belonged to a church that had a critical stance towards the state, viewing apartheid as heresy. To them a resistance-focused educational approach was a “necessary weapon against the apartheid government . . . and its school system” (Edward). This position is similar to the discourse that informed the popular uprisings by students and teachers during the 1970s and 1980s (Lewin, 1991).

They, however, pointed out that their political opposition did not translate into adopting a more open ended and flexible pedagogical approach. Their teacher training and subsequent political activism did not provide them a conceptual platform to construct a more child centred and constructivist approach. This, for example, made it difficult for them to adapt to the current school curriculum which is based on such an approach (see Fataar 2006). What they succeeded in doing very well was to teach in a narrow and circumscribed way, marked by their students’ success in year end rote examinations. Bheki, for example, won an award three years in a row for producing students with excellent high school scores in History.

They developed their professional identities in the closed environments of racially based schools, while teaching an ideologically circumscribed curriculum. They explained that they were caught up in schooling processes that reproduced racialized identities. Without implying stasis, I would argue that they made sense of and mapped their schools’ social spatial coordinates with comparative ease which made their pedagogical navigations straight-

forward. They conveyed the comfort with which they established their pedagogical identities in these spaces. Their pedagogical personas were thus founded against the backdrop of familiar and relatively 'locked -in' social spatial processes.

Developing their subjectivities as teachers occurred on the basis of performative processes that gave them some entry into the management roles they would play later. As Richard explains, he was very young when he was appointed in a temporary capacity as a middle manager at his school. As with Bheki and Edward, Richard was a hard working and committed teacher who involved himself in most aspects of the school's functioning, coordinating activities such as fundraising, sports management and teacher union work. Richard explained how his commitment to racial equality and justice provided him a moral context to "be the best teacher he could be . . . inside and outside the class". Bheki explained how his "extra classes into the evenings . . . led to the kids improving their marks" and of how he gained respect from his "fellow teachers and parents . . . for my hard work".

Developments in the teacher education market during the mid-1990s propelled them into officially appointed senior management positions for which they had very little formal training. Having to contend with a financially circumscribed environment, the post apartheid government, who came into power in 1994, chose to adopt prudent fiscal policies. The government decided to cut teachers in areas where they were in over supply and redistribute them equitably to schools with high student-teacher ratios (see Soudien, 2001). One debilitating consequence of this plan was the loss of management capacity in schools with high ratios. Many senior teachers and managers opted to leave the profession, enticed by large severance pay outs and employment opportunities elsewhere. This opened a gap for younger teachers to take up senior positions. They explained that they were persuaded to apply for management positions by colleagues who convinced them that their work ethic, moral standing and community support made them suitable for such positions. They all seemed to have applied for these jobs with some reluctance. Edward and Bheki were appointed as senior Department Heads, a jump of two hierarchical categories, and Richard to the lofty position of deputy principal, jumping three categories. Richard was slightly older and had served with considerable success as a temporary stand-in Head of Department for 18 months. Their appointment to management positions was, however, not accompanied by substantial formal management training, except for short two-day courses run by the Department.

They were appointed as principals at schools in the Rustvale township during the late 1990s, after spending a couple of years in management positions at their previous schools. Richard and Edward explained that their appointments were abrupt, rushed and unprocedural. Richard was simply informed by the Department of Education that he was being considered for a principal position elsewhere. He had to present himself for an interview by departmental officials who questioned him about his willingness to take such a position. Their inclination to refuse the principal jobs was countenanced by what they came to view as an opportunity to “contribute to and make a difference . . . in poor communities, only still now rising up from underneath the crushing weight of oppression” (Bheki). Edward, the religious activist, viewed himself in redemptive terms as “the chosen one . . . God must be having a plan for me . . . to do His work”.

A combination of youthful appointment, limited management experience, and lack of formal training set them up for their very challenging new roles. It seemed that much would turn on their moral and political commitment to serve and make a difference. It provided them a motivational basis for their new occupational roles. A close reading of their work in Rustvale suggests that they adapted reflexively to the township’s spatial attributes, based on transacting a range of pedagogical performances. As explained below, their work in this new space is a compelling account of *active locational engagement* (Coldron and Smith, 1999).

## Pedagogical performance and the tentative navigation of space

The previous two sections respectively focused on the social spatial nature of the township and the identification basis on which the principals moved into this space. The next two sections discuss the reflexive basis on which they established their pedagogical identities. Space hopping was characterized by perplexity and anxiety that arose out of a sense of dislocation as they moved from a racially enclosed to a spatially fluid township. I apply the analytical category of ‘performance’ to describe active engagement, at first tentative, then with greater assertiveness and confidence, as they navigated and domesticated the dynamics of the township. As referred to earlier, it is the radically open and contingent character of their performances against the backdrop of the interactive social dynamics of the township that will provide an understanding of their pedagogical identities. Following Turner (quoted in Gole, 2002), they have neither succumbed to the discursive limitations

operating in the township, nor have they entirely resisted or disavowed their imposed identities. Their successful performances depended on a strategic embrace and active reading of what is possible, of adopting and incorporating certain practices and challenging and modifying others.

A performance-based analysis employs the notion ‘citational practices’ to refer to those performative acts that reproduce, create or subvert discourse. Citational practices, according to Gregson and Rose (2000, p.434), are “intrinsically connected through the saturation of performances articulated in space”. Citational practices can be understood as strategic performances or behaviour that the principals enact in the daily course of their work in this township. This section discusses a number of practices that indicate their initial tentative encounters and engagement, of familiarizing, settling down, and establishing their presence in their schools and the township. This section thus shows how they settled into and established their presence and authority in and around the schools.

It emerged from the interviews that the principals transacted a number of relational connections with individuals and community associations that facilitated their knowledge of and entry into the township. These connections helped familiarize them with the township’s fluid and informal character. In turn, it provided the residents an opportunity to assess these new governmentally marked authority figures. It can be said that the principals had entered the performative stage of the township as state actors in the full glare of expectant spectators. They had to endure a low level type of surveillance by community members who tried to figure out how their lives will be affected by these new entrants, while also ascertaining how to appropriate the opportunities the principals bring to the township. Edward commented with a comic touch: “Oh sir; I felt the spotlight on me all the time, all the time, never a private moment, being watched, troubled, . . . ` watched to see what their principal will do next”.

Richard was somewhat more irritated at this type of surveillance:

When I pull my car out to go to the department office or somewhere else, the people come out of their houses, stop me, . . . speak about all sorts of problems, opportunities, . . . they come to school actually just make idle conversation. I have to spend time listening, give advice, money, sign an affidavit.

This type of use of principals by the residents was underscored by Bheki and Edward who highlighted the small tasks they have to do daily for the residents such as typing and printing letters, reading and interpreting official

documents, filling in forms, and counselling bereaved families. It seems that much of their credibility among residents has been generated by servicing requests such as these.

Having been drawn by community members into their domestic affairs, the principals swiftly became familiar with the social dynamics in the community. They figured out very quickly that there would be value in striking up strategic alliances with the different networks in the community. They were able to win over the trust of various religious, sport and cultural groupings with relative ease based on making the school premises available for cultural shows, sport, and religious services. As many as ten church congregations hold church services at each of their schools on a Sunday, while the small Muslim community has their religious classes for children at Edward's school three afternoons per week. These relationships allowed the principals to consolidate their acceptance in the area, and provided them a ready network to access community assistance in school fundraising, protecting the school from vandals, and in cultivating loyalty among families to keep on sending their children to their schools in the face of competition over enrolment at newer schools.

Greater shakiness was displayed in their links with their area's political and civic groups who lay claim to determining accessibility and what is possible in the township. Fighting for political turf and patronage spills over into the school. Because the political groups view control over the school as an entry point to voters they constantly target the school to address civic and political concerns that connect to party political interests. They always attempt to use the school, and the principals and teachers to leverage political support among the parents. Edward was requested to campaign among parents for a political party and Richard was branded as racist for banning a party from putting posters up on his school's fence. Bheki had to fend off attempts to use his school as a local party's elections headquarters. He also spoke of having to berate an openly party aligned member of his school governing body for punting his party in governance meetings.

The principals have had to observe an official department position of political neutrality. Bheki and Richard found this very hard at times because of their former anti apartheid activism expressed in their membership to a party associated with black liberation. Their natural inclination for party involvement, however, is balanced against the need to be seen to be neutral and above factional disputes. All three principals, though, have found a political outlet in their participation in the township's development forums, in

areas such as community policing, housing, and sport. Bheki is the chairperson of the soccer association in Rustvale, while Edward is frequently consulted to give advice on housing and settlement issues. Richard does motivational seminars on community safety in the area. These types of involvement project them as caring, responsive and hard-working people willing to sacrifice time after school. Community members whom I spoke to tie the enormous respect these principals command in the community to their visibility and willingness to participate in community processes.

The links they cultivated with both licit and illicit associations and networks point to an acute and strategic reading on their part of their positioning in the social flows of Rustvale. Each of the principals established working relationships with the various social service agencies. They have healthy and beneficial relations with the health clinic, the school nurse, police service, and the social work office. A responsive relationship with them is necessary to deal with the inordinate demand for these services caused by unemployed and single parent families, hungry and under nourished children, high rates of mortality and sickness, and the impact of high criminality in this under-policed township. Links to these licit social services, with their record of slow and uneven service delivery, have to be personalized. A phone call by the principal in an emergency or desperate situation has to leverage a rapid response. The school's image as caring and responsive to the area's social welfare requirements depends on its ability to respond to community needs. An observant governing body member at Bheki's school remarked that Bheki would not have been the successful principal he is if he was unable to provide a caring and rapid response to the social demands of the children at his school. Edward has succeeded in extending his responsiveness beyond being a conduit for social services. He organizes tea afternoons at the school for the parents and unemployed members of the community every three months, where he either gives a short motivational talk on the latest innovations in education, or asks a priest or university lecturer to speak about something topical. I personally observed how the tea afternoon provides flamboyant Edward the ideal stage to rehearse and display his performances

On the other hand, the strategic engagements by the principals with the illicit flows in the neighbourhood – the drug lord, the gang boss, and the shebeen (informal bar in the backyards of residents) owner – have paradoxically provided a mechanism to ensure the school's relative safety in the absence of an effective and visible policing system. A large amount of the money that circulates in Rustvale is either generated by, or come through, these illicit flows. Gang and drug running activity is ubiquitous. My interviews with two



policemen revealed that drugs are always involved in gang turf wars and cause violence and criminality. Unable to address the root causes of crime, an understaffed police service's work is limited to managing the more violent crimes and eruption of gang warfare. Bheki, Edward and Richard understand this. Their concern is the safety of their children on their way to and from school, securing the school during school hours, and preventing vandalism over weekends. This is the principals' most important and difficult priority. They have over the years set up strategic links with the gang bosses, striking up cordial relations with them and giving special attention to their children's school progress. Bheki explained how he pays personal attention to one such child:

Sir, I made sure the child was in a good teacher's class . . . I tracked her progress, I communicate with the father so that he knew when there are problems. No sir, I made sure he doesn't blame me or the school when the child had problems. . . I've had no problems with that family, and that's so important for my school, sir.

Edward pointed out that the well-being of these children is important because of their fathers' control of the illicit drug-based economy in the areas contiguous to his school, and their impact on the behaviour of the youth gangs in the area. Richard highlights the danger of such cordiality when he described how one powerful gangster with a child at his school continually offers the school enormous donations, which he always refuses because of not wanting to accept illicit money. Richard, though, always sends twenty tickets per fundraising event to this person, who "can afford to buy it. I don't have to worry about taking hot money; . . . he's buying a service . . . and then he sends people from the area to the concerts for free" (Richard). These associations with the illicit networks in the township are experienced by the principals as precarious though necessary to ensure the general safety of the children in the school.

Their relations with the department officials compared to their connections with outside educational agencies such as NGOs and educational researchers indicate their ability to read and adapt to the expectations that different associations present them. What is involved here is an appreciation of the possibilities that inhere in specific associations. In this case their interaction with the department is marked by compliance and constraint, in contrast to the open and accommodating reception of outside educational interests. As citational practices, these contrasted performances are governed as much by the careful management of their selves, as by their willingness to enter into beneficial arrangements when they come along. Their relations with the department are marked by routine-like compliance. They are careful to honour



and comply with the department's requirements with regard to curriculum implementation, requests for statistical details, teacher appointments, and other managerial expectations. They feel the pressure to improve test scores on system wide Numeracy and Literacy tests. They implement department development initiatives such as reading periods and safety regulations with diligence. However, in reference to departmental officials and contact with district offices, the principals' views can be read as distanced and depersonalized. Richard tells of routine visits and limited conversations with area managers about routine work. He described the two managers whom he worked with as "strange and cold . . . as if they didn't know what to say beyond the normal run of the mill stuff". When I asked Richard to interpret this behaviour he opined that,

These officials are overworked and exasperated . . . have very little power, look at an area like Rustvale, feel overwhelmed and then decide to cut their losses . . . they rather preserve their energies for other schools in better off places.

Agreeing with this view, Bheki suggests that such disinterest from the officials can be explained by a constricted understanding of their responsibilities, who "have little clue how to be useful at the school . . . struggle to understand our area, and how to process our concerns". Edward, is caustic when he comments that "the officials' view of themselves are shaped by the work of the functional middle class school, not ours". Presumably then, the picture of a 'dysfunctional' school, which schools in a township like Rustvale is discursively projected as, does not inform the bureaucratic culture that marks the work of these officials. Given this view of the department, it seems that the compliant attitudes of the principals in Rustvale are a way of avoiding the intrusive glare of the department, which allows them to operate outside the radar of bureaucratic surveillance; a case of performing beside the stage.

This is contrasted with their open and welcoming attitude to outside education agencies. Regarded by the NGO and academic world as severely impoverished and in need of development interventions, the schools in Rustvale are inundated with requests for access. There are always developmental or research activities in the schools. The principals see these activities as opportunities to access financial and material resources and developmental opportunities for themselves, their teacher and students. These connections also serve as a channel to the outside world. They counter their schools' images as "caught in a hole and left on our own" (Bheki). Bheki, has, for example, set up a real time internet-based teaching link between a school in England and his school. A combination of money from a British NGO and a local ICT company's efforts led to the building of a fully networked and

secured computer room. The constant presence of outsiders is explained by the principals' desire to provide development opportunity for their staff and children and exposure to the outside world.

The principals' strategic performances, their citational practices, have been substantiated in light of the social spatial dynamics of the township. Initially tentative and careful, the principals quickly made pedagogical adaptations based on readings of what is possible in this township. Strategic and nuanced understandings of the pitfalls and opportunities marked their performances, establishing their credibility and authority as engaged community people. They managed to establish their pedagogical performances in the full glare of an expectant community, always observing and respecting community sensibilities. They never hesitated to push beyond these expectations by using the available discursive material in this space to provide productive new pedagogical articulations. The final section discusses two interrelated practical instances wherein the principals could be said to have domesticated the social spatial dynamics in light of these new articulations.

## Pedagogical performances in domesticating space

The exposition provided above of the principals' initial citational practices has corroborated the view that the "public sphere is not simply a preestablished arena: it is constituted and negotiated through performance" (Gole, 2002, p.183). Through their micropractices the principals have enacted *ways of being* that co-constitute the public sphere and what is publicly allowable. I have thus far detailed instances of how they have constructed, following Turner (quoted in Gole, p.183), their *performative reflexivity* in initial encounters with the township. This I argue laid the basis for more enduring engagements which established them firmly as leading interlocutors in their schools' social relational processes.

I now go on to discuss how they have engaged at a deeper level with the social spatial make up of this fluid and informalized township. A discussion of their performances in light of two specific policy framed instances – governance and teacher appointments – will show how the principals domesticated space, and how they acted with greater assurance to construct their pedagogical identities. This involved acute understandings on their part of the spatial flows between their schools and the environment. Their strategic compartments in the application of these school policies, I argue, have been based on engaged readings and greater assertiveness. These definitive performances, while

neither uncontested nor unprecarious, established them both as creators of their own performative scripts as well as lead performers in defining their schools' pedagogical subjectivities.

State policy reform enunciations after 1994 were underpinned by an ambitious set of political objectives. School reform was expected to lay a platform for an inclusive schooling system to counteract years of racially-based inequality. An equity-informed approach to resource allocation was a key plank of school reform. Reform initiatives have had a mixed reception in this township. I argued elsewhere that the outcome of policy reforms in Rustvale in areas such as curriculum, governance and language policy can best be understood in light of the complex ways in which the policies have been 'renovated' in their environments. It has been the impact of the environment and the mediation of policy at schools that have been reworking the normative intent of the reforms (Fataar, 2007).

Government policy in the post apartheid period placed high premium on using education as a productive instrument for cultivating democratic citizenship. School governing bodies (SGBs) are meant to be harbingers of deliberative civic processes in which the involvement and leadership of parents are intended as primary. Policy confers what Bush and Heystek label "sovereignty" on parental participation (2003, p.133). Parents enjoy a majority on the SGBs and only they can be elected as chairperson. Policy intent suggests that the interests of parents to secure favourable learning conditions for their children should trump the interests of the other sectors represented on the SGB.

It has, however, turned out in Rustvale schools that the SGBs have become a prime site for the principals to establish a platform for their authoritative performances. As I've argued, "instead of parental sovereignty it is the principals of the schools in this township who reign over the school governance processes" (Fataar, 2007, p.609). All three principals are sure-footed in interaction with their SGBs and governance aspects such as setting school fees, determining spending priorities, and providing regulatory school guidelines. They have a big influence on governance decision making. The agendas of the SGB meetings are routinely set by the principals instead of the SGB chairpersons. Richard confers regularly with the chairperson and other members of his SGBs in order to apprise them of the latest developments at school and the decisions that have to be made by the SGB. Bheki visits parental governors at home, while the SGB chairperson at Edward's school visits the school at least weekly to drink tea and chat about the latest

developments at the school. These informal interactions are used to lay the basis for deliberations in SGB meetings. This approach was described by one teacher, an SGB member, as a key element of the principals' micro-politics of consensus building on which their leadership styles are based.

It is clear that parents participate minimally in the formal deliberations of their SGBs, mostly ratifying the leadership styles and decisions of the principals. Their passivity in the formal processes of governance can be attributed to their discomfort with the discursive registers of governance processes. Parental members on the SGBs generally possess little formal education. The principals are said to introduce agenda items, elaborate extensively on them and generally provide the options for decisions that are made. Parents rarely present topics for discussion, raise controversial questions or criticise the principal's views. The principal's command of the legal aspects of governance and management seems to be experienced by the parents as sufficient in informing the direction of the SGBs deliberations (see Fataar, 2007).

Despite their disgruntlement with the principal's dominance, attempts by the teachers who serve on the SGBs to challenge the principal or provide alternative perspectives are generally ineffectual. It has been the alliance between the principals and the compliant parent members that has determined the functional character of school governance. The principals take time to cultivate these beneficial relationships with the parent governors. The principals invest in respectful and friendly interactions with them. Crucially, they make sure that the parental governors are provided a conduit for symbolic enhancement at the school by according them ceremonial prominence at school assemblies, functions and parent meetings. The relationship between parental governors and their principals are key to the latter's authoritative performativity. With the parent governors on their side, Bheki, Edward and Richard have positioned themselves as the primary discursive constructors in their schools.

Their authoritative positioning, however, has never been without challenge or instability. As the example of teacher appointments in their schools shows, the township's social spatial dynamics require careful engagement. Nothing can be taken for granted. The permanent appointment of teachers at their schools gave Richard, Bheki and Edward their most complex script to date. They had to marshal their authority in shifting social spatial terrain. Teacher appointments had to be made in light of uncertain flux in enrolment numbers at their schools and the government's policy of implementing a standardized student-teacher ratio in all schools. A complex set of developments involving

objecting teachers in collaboration with community elements, parents or SGB members, informed the permanent employ of teachers at each of the three schools. Each of the principals arrived at their schools with a considerable number of temporary teachers who had insecurities about their job prospects in light of a climate of teacher cutbacks (see Soudien, 2001). Fifty per cent of Bheki's teaching staff was temporary appointees. Edward had to address a similar situation for his younger temporarily appointed teachers who made up about 60 per cent of his staff. The younger teachers formed a lobby block at Edward's school with connections to the community and local political interests. Richard's attempts to appoint teachers were complicated by an active union who represented all the temporary teachers at his school.

The principals gave me the impression that having all the teachers permanently appointed would have been one clear way of resolving tensions on the staff and smoothening interactions with their staff. However, they pointed out they are obliged to properly consider the merits of potential appointments and whether preferred candidates would suit their leadership style. Richard and Edward were clear that they would personally not have appointed a couple of the teachers who hold permanent positions at the school. Bheki was more realistic in his view that preference "doesn't come in it. . . . I had to accept the situation and get on with it despite my choices". The actual appointments at the school reveal a more complex story in which each one of the principals displayed different performative articulations intersected by specific relational dynamics at each of their schools.

Richard's performances were governed by actively engaging the dynamics that surrounded the appointment processes. Having been appointed at his school "over the head of our own person who acted as principal here" (teacher), Richard started his job on the back foot. His teaching staff was initially unco-operative and impenetrable. The temporary teachers formed a power block in opposition to him, questioning his leadership authority. His efforts to cut through the block, by for example, engaging them individually and organising teacher cooperation clusters on the basis of grades, were partially successful in establishing a conversation about the school's progress. Scepticism remained and was most pronounced in the demands by the temporary teachers to be appointed to permanent positions. Richard explained how he seized the initiative in trying to get "the whole bang lot appointed". He believed that it would provide him much needed leverage to imbue his leadership with the necessary authority. He explained how he lobbied departmental officials and the Minister of Education in the Western Cape Province to appoint the teachers:

I camped at the Department's office almost every day. I made a nuisance of myself. . . They must have run out of patience with my pounding, pounding. Sir, I didn't care who saw me. I had to get these guys appointed. . . They had to understand that.

Meanwhile, back at the school the unionized teachers launched their own pressure campaign. Eager not to cede ground to Richard, they too lobbied the department. One teacher explained how they campaigned and lobbied in the school, "made life unpleasant for him, never took to him, to him because of being appointed over the head of Mr X". The pressure by the principal and the teachers, combined with the Department's effort to avoid political embarrassment for the Minister, led to an agreement to appoint all the aggrieved teachers. Richard suggested that this single accomplishment "proved my leadership credentials to all of them", notwithstanding the modicum of scepticism that still remains among some teachers, which has never allowed him to settle comfortably into his principal role. Their appointment by bureaucratic fiat was facilitated by a "hazy appointment process" (Richard) early in the life of the new government when there was no firm appointment procedure.

Edward had to contend with a more complicated set of dynamics which led him to strategically capitulate in the appointment process. The group of temporary teachers struck alliances with civic groups in the area who lobbied for their appointments in public meetings and the community. Influential community groups made it clear to Edward that his legitimacy depended on acceding to the 'will of the community' by appointing these networked teachers. Unlike at Richard's school, their appointments were done on the basis of a new process in which the SGB played the primary role. Two teachers spoke of unproven underhand dealings and bribes that passed between the applicants and parent governors. Edward, who felt isolated at this stage decided to succumb to the dynamics that influenced the process. He calculated that he could not be seen to push too hard for his preferred candidates, instead deciding to use his compliant attitude later as leverage to influence other processes and build relations with the parent governors. Despite his position two of his preferred candidates were appointed without his active lobbying. The main consequence of his acquiescence was the appointment of a block of teachers who did not feel beholden to him as a leader, setting the scene for intermittent confrontations and clashes that have marked his work as a principal.

The appointment process at Bheki's school was more straightforward. He came to the school at a later stage of the school's existence compared to Richard and Edward. By then the governmental process for appointments was



clear and narrowly circumscribed. Bheki replaced a fractious retired principal. He decided to play the process strictly by the rules. Teacher union representatives were part of the process throughout. His teachers competed for the job with outside applicants. Interviews were carried out with short-listed candidates and appointments were made after deliberation in the SGBs. Bheki played the role of facilitator in the meetings, clarifying procedures and reminding the meetings of the requirements of specific positions. While the parent governors found his refusal to favour any candidates perplexing, the teacher governors grew to respect his candour and neutrality. Seventy per cent of those teachers at his school who applied were appointed to permanent positions. Bheki used the scrupulousness of the process to justify why the rest was not appointed. This process established Bheki performative profile on the basis of integrity, fair play and respect.

This section discussed the basis on which the principals established a definitive presence in their schools, based on greater strategic assertiveness. Their governance performances were less contested compared to the engagements in teacher appointment processes. Whilst they had relative free reign in constructing beneficial interaction with parent governors, keeping them close and providing them symbolic status in an impoverished environment, the teacher politicking that they encountered in appointments had to be navigated more carefully. They had to make strategic calculations about how their pedagogical performances would position them in the overall context of their work. These deeper encounters reveal that Bheki, Edward and Richard's subjectivities are based on careful readings of the ways in which their schools' social spatial processes provide the stage for their performative reflexivity.

## Conclusion

The focus of this article has been on the subjectivity processes that shape the pedagogical identities of principals in a post apartheid township. The starting assumption is based on the view that educational subjectivity has to be accounted for in light of geographic location. It is the dynamics of lived space or social space that must be accounted for in an analysis of people's adaptive identities. The article combined space with the analytics of performance, based on the view that performance is always articulated in space. A performance lens placed the analytical spotlight on the radically open and contingent character of pedagogical adaptation and creativity. I have suggested that Bheki, Edward and Richard's performances have to be understood as creative



articulations unfolding in the spatially contingent terrain of Rustvale Township. They have had to adjust to a spatially fluid, open and ephemeral context vastly different to what they were accustomed. Adapting to Rustvale required active engagement with their relative enclosed pedagogical selves. What I label as space hopping, turned on adaptation and pedagogical reinvention. They overcame their initial anxiety and tentativeness on the basis of deliberative connections and associations that inserted them as authoritative figures into the township. They were able to articulate a number of strategic performances, based on nuanced understandings of the surrounding social make up and power dynamics. Their reflexivity involved engaged spatially inscribed practices that pushed beyond expectations. They established their pedagogical performances on the basis of nuanced readings, creative adaptations and strategic practices that provided a productive authoritative platform for their work in this township.

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## Note

A different version of this article, with a different title and a slightly amended substantive focus, is forthcoming in 2008 in a special edition of the *International Journal of Inclusive Education* (non DOE accredited).

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