Transforming identities and enacting agency: the discourses of participatory development in training South African adult educators

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Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which adult education can contribute to increased agency in development and under what conditions. It draws on a study of an educator training programme in the Northern Cape at a time of rapid social change and theorises the uneven realisation of reflexive agency in participants' practices. The analysis of interview data draws on Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, habitus, legitimate language and reflexivity to probe the connections between local discursive practices and broader systemic relationships of power. The findings suggest that a key contribution of the programme was a set of discourses that enabled participants to engage with the processes engendered by new forms of governance and state/society/economy relations. However, the ability to bring about new identities and increased reflexive agency depended on the interaction of five framing factors. In this way, reflexivity emerges as contextual, embedded within differing sets of power relations, and not necessarily transformative.

Introduction

> We want to build a new nation so badly and despite everything there is a little light. We are not in a hurry. As far as development is concerned, people are aware of it. They know what they want. In the past people stood back with their hands on their hips and now it is different, people take on leadership themselves and that for me is one of the biggest results there can be.
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> (Glen Phike, Certificate programme participant, under-resourced rural town, Northern Cape) (trans.)

This paper explores the extent to which a training programme for educators of adults in the Northern Cape province of South Africa enabled participants such as the young man quoted above to become agents of development in a range of community contexts. The programme, a tertiary

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level Certificate for Educators of Adults, was offered to members of previously disadvantaged communities from 1996–1999, shortly after South Africa's transition to democracy. The Certificate was developed and implemented by the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE), an institute in the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape, in partnership with the Northern Cape Department of Education, as part of a plan to build capacity for a sustainable, high quality Adult Basic Education system and to stimulate development processes more broadly.

The paper is based on findings from a DFID-funded impact study of this partnership. It draws on Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, habitus and legitimate language to explore the conditions that enabled or constrained agency in different sites, as well as on feminist postmodern conceptions of identities as fluid, multiple, and overlapping. More particularly, it employs recent perspectives on reflexivity to probe issues of freedom and constraint in relation to changing social structures. Reflexivity here is understood as an "awakening of consciousness" (Bourdieu, 1977a, p.83) which enables reflection on previously unthought norms, rules and habits and may guide social inquiry and action (Adkins, 2003; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). I will argue that the role of the Certificate programme in inducting participants into the discourses of participatory development was central in enabling greater reflexive agency. However, the ability to bring about new identities and increased reflexive agency was dependent on the subtle ways in which these discourses and associated language and literacy practices intersected with and penetrated the particular mosaic of power relations in each context.

Adult basic education and development in post-apartheid South Africa

Development, understood in it simplest form as increasing access to resources and power over choices, is defined by Amartya Sen (1999) as "the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states" (p.1). This definition encapsulates the challenges faced by the liberation movement in South Africa during apartheid and, after 1994, in grappling with apartheid's legacy. The new democratically elected government posited, as Sen does, that people's ability to bring

about their own development is influenced not only by economic opportunities, as in more narrow definitions of development, but also by "political liberties, social powers, and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education, and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives"(*ibid.*). This vision of development became the official policy of the first democratic government in its Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which aimed at "recognising the simultaneous necessity of meeting basic needs, developing human resources, building the economy and democratising the state and society" (RDP W/P, 1994, para.3.1.1), and was in effect an attempt to marry social democracy with the New World Economic Order (Kallaway, Kruss, Fataar and Donn, 1997). This Programme was swiftly overtaken by neo-liberal macro-economic policies but formed the policy framework at the time of the project's conception.

As in many developing countries, adult education and training was seen as a crucial component in all aspects of reconstruction and development (RDP W/P, 1994). A new national education and training policy framework (ANC, 1994) had been researched and prepared during the four years preceding the transition to power by trade unionists, NGO workers, academics and educators within the Mass Democratic Movement. The framework developed for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) grew out of decades of grassroots work and aimed to provide guiding principles for a curriculum which was broadly equivalent to primary and secondary education at key points, but radically different in content and process (CEPD, 1994; Uswe/Cosatu, 1993). The curriculum encompassed far more than 'literacy' education, reflecting the perceived need for a "general conceptual foundation towards lifelong learning and development, comprising knowledge, skills and attitudes required for social, economic and political participation and transformation" (Department of Education, 1997).

This study

The Certificate for Educators of Adults discussed in this paper was one attempt to train practitioners to implement such a curriculum, that is, one that would promote education for political and economic participation and social justice. Within this programme, the development of literacy skills and practices was seen as part of a broader development project.

Integrating literacy[2] effectively with wider development processes remains the central, and significantly undertheorised, challenge for those concerned with literacy as a resource for bringing about change. In this paper, I argue that examining the practices of newly trained adult education and development practitioners may illuminate the kinds of literacy and other practices that could promote involvement in participatory development as well as the contextual factors that may limit their reach. Studies of the impact of adult education programmes in general and of literacy programmes in particular are limited in number, in scope and in the analytical tools used. I argue that revisiting Bourdieu and the notion of reflexivity provides a means of accounting for differing degrees of 'impact' and enables new insights into the relative success or failure of adult education initiatives.

The findings of this study indicate that a set of five factors seemed to enhance or constrain reflexive agency: one of these factors was the acquisition of the discourses of participatory development by participants on the Certificate programme. Through their induction into these discourses at a time when traditional class, race and gender boundaries were beginning to break down and patterns of control over resources were shifting, many participants were able to enter or create new spaces of agency. Before the macro-social and political change changes that accompanied the end of apartheid began, many participants had been taking on power in various ways in a struggle for legitimacy fought from below. However, not all had acquired the discursive, conceptual and procedural knowledge necessary to engage in participatory development and governance.

In the next section, some background on the Northern Cape and the programme is followed by a summary of the main findings on participants' involvement in community development as reported in the initial impact study by Kerfoot, Geidt, Alexander, Cornelius, Egan, Jack, Hendricks, Marais, Matholengwe, Mjekula, Qutsu, Rabie and Steyn (2001). In this summary five key factors in enhancing or inhibiting agency are identified. The findings are then re-interrogated using the conceptual tools offered by Bourdieu's theory of practice and recent work extending

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2   Literacy here is understood as 'ideological', a set of variable social practices which shape and are shaped by community and institutional contexts and interests, rather than as 'autonomous', a neutral technology with invariable and predictable consequences for development and cognition (see Street, 1984).

his notion of reflexivity. An analysis of participants' interviews shows that while adult education can be critical in realising the potential of reflexivity, this reflexivity is not inevitably transformative. Rather, reflexive agency emerges as unevenly distributed across social practices and "dependent on a distinct configuration of power relations" (McNay, 2000, p.163). This configuration includes the relationships between the state, the economy and civil society at local, regional, and wider levels.

Background

The Northern Cape

The project that is described in this paper was initiated eighteen months after the first democratic elections in South Africa in April 1994. On this date the Northern Cape was constituted as a new province and became geographically the largest South African province but with the lowest population, that is, 1.8% of the national population, and the smallest economy. Unless otherwise indicated, demographics in this section are from Statistics South Africa (2003) reporting on the results of the 2001 official census, the year in which the impact study was conducted.

The Northern Cape is one of only two provinces in which the majority of the population is 'coloured' (51.6%), compared to the other seven provinces where Black Africans form the majority population group. Accordingly, most of the population speaks Afrikaans (68%), followed by Tswana (20.8%), Xhosa (6.2%) and English (2.5%).[3] In 2001, 28.5% of the economically active population was unemployed; however, this figure does not take into account large numbers of people who worked only a few hours a week nor the fact that the unemployment rate for the poorest fifth of the population was 53% (May, 2000). There was still extreme inequality in the distribution of income among different races as well as between male- and female-headed households and between urban and rural

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[3] Groups who fall under the classification of 'Other' (0.6%) include members of the earliest indigenous populations of southern Africa, the Khoesan. Students on the Certificate course spoke Nama (spoken by about six thousand people), !Xū (spoken by three thousand people) and Kxoe, spoken by one thousand people).[The non-alphabetic symbols represent clicks in the words].

households;[4] other social and economic indicators follow the same pattern. As elsewhere in the country, HIV/AIDS infection levels had reached epidemic proportions. With regard to formal education, eighteen percent of the adult population had no schooling at all, and, overall, thirty-eight percent of the population had less than a Grade 7 or primary education. Gender differences in education levels were marginal.

After the first democratic elections in 1994, the newly elected African National Congress (ANC) government in the Northern Cape province saw adult education and training as a crucial component in all aspects of reconstruction and development. Accordingly, in 1996, the newly created provincial Department of Education entered into a donor-funded partnership with the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE), at the University of the Western Cape, a thousand kilometres away.

The capacity-building programme: the Certificate for Educators of Adults

The brief for the partnership was to develop sustainable capacity for high quality Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET). Two programmes at different levels were offered. This paper focuses only on the Certificate for Educators of Adults, which was intended to prepare community workers with no experience of tertiary education as Education, Training and Development Practitioners. Educators would teach literacy and basic education in the Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs) and in other sites of provision such as Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), Correctional Services, and Social Services. CACE's broad vision of the adult education project meant that the aims of the Certificate placed great emphasis on the role of adult educators as agents of change and development, with a particular focus on improving the position of women. Key projected outcomes for participants were to conceptualise ABET programmes with development potential and to operate effectively as development practitioners in the field of ABET.

The Certificate was run twice from 1996–1999, each time as a two-year part-time distance education programme of 120 notional learning hours.

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The average annual income of African-headed households was 72% of that of Coloured-headed households, 38% of Asian-headed households and 16.5% of White-headed households (Development Bank of Southern Africa, 1998).

Initial recruitment aimed to ensure representativity in terms of race, gender and urban/rural location. As indicated in Kerfoot *et al*. (2001), overall 43.5% of participants were coloured and 56.5% Black African; 60% were female, and 54% from rural contexts. Seven language groups were represented, including minority languages such as Nama. Most participants had completed their secondary schooling, while a few had only Grade 10 or 11. Ten percent had some experience teaching adults in NGOs. A total of 221 students registered for the Certificate, of whom 67% completed it successfully.[5]

The learning processes on the programme grew out of CACE's long engagement with anti-apartheid struggles, and the theories of education and social change associated with Popular Education, in which "pedagogical choices reflect political context and implement political objectives" (Manicom and Walters, 1997, p.71). The pedagogy aimed to foster 'critical consciousness' (Freire, 1990) and could be characterised as situated, research-oriented and participatory: a 'pedagogy of possibility' (Simon, 1987). This pedagogy was carried through five modules: *Facilitating Adult Learning, Organising Skills, Contextual Studies, Research Methods*, and *ABET for Development* which contained components on *Linking ABET to development* and *Mother Tongue Literacy*. A further component *Training Small Business Developers* was added in 1998 in an attempt to meet the need for sustainable livelihoods.

Together these modules and associated learning processes inducted participants into a set of discourses which, for the purposes of this paper, I have called the discourses of participatory development. Discourses (with a capital D) are understood here in the sense defined by Gee (1996) as socially and culturally formed, but historically changing "saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations, [. . .] ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (p.127).

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[5]   Sixty-seven per cent of those who completed the course were women and 76 % were based in rural areas.

Researching impacts

Participants' ways of acting on and through these discourses were investigated during the course of a research project commissioned by DFIDSA at the end of the four-year funding cycle and reported in Kerfoot *et al.* (2001). Fieldwork for the project took place over six months from 2000 to 2001: this timing was particularly advantageous in that it followed five years of intense social change and stretched either side of local level elections in South Africa in October 2000, which, for the first time, offered the potential for real shifts in power in local government. Blommaert (2005) has drawn attention to the fact that certain discourse forms only become visible and accessible at particular times and under particular conditions: in this case it was possible to gain a window on to some of the effects of 'education for participatory democracy' in real terms. Such an opportunity may never present itself again as, by the time of the most recent elections in 2006, new patterns of social, political and economic organisation might already have sedimented, entrenching new forms of exclusion or inclusion.

Participants' experiences of attempting to implement participatory development in various contexts during and after the programme were explored through interviews and focus group discussions. For the semi-structured interviews, purposive sampling was used to identify groups of participants according to geographical location, year of study, gender, language, and completion of the programme. A team of nine researchers interviewed 74 Certificate participants or 30% of past participants, including nine who had not completed the programme (12% of sample). Sixty-three per cent of this interview sample were women (Kerfoot *et al.*, 2001). Participant interviews were triangulated with interviews with, for example, members of community structures, income-generating projects, state departments, and with data derived from observation and document analysis; some participants were also shadowed through a few days' activities.

Key findings from the initial study:
'We are like ants. [Ons is soos miere]'

The words of this ABET facilitator and community worker in a rural town reflect one of the unexpected findings of the research: the extent and

variety of participants' involvement in development. Also significant was the number of past participants, particularly women, who had moved into leadership positions in local community organisations and income-generating initiatives as well as in local government. As indicated in Figure 1 below, participants were successful in applying skills and knowledge in a wide range of projects and structures, for example, Social Development, Community Health including HIV/AIDS education, small business, and local government. In each case, participants tied their involvement in these projects directly to the Certificate programme.

Figure 1:   Areas of community involvement of some CACE participants in the Northern Cape, 2000–2001
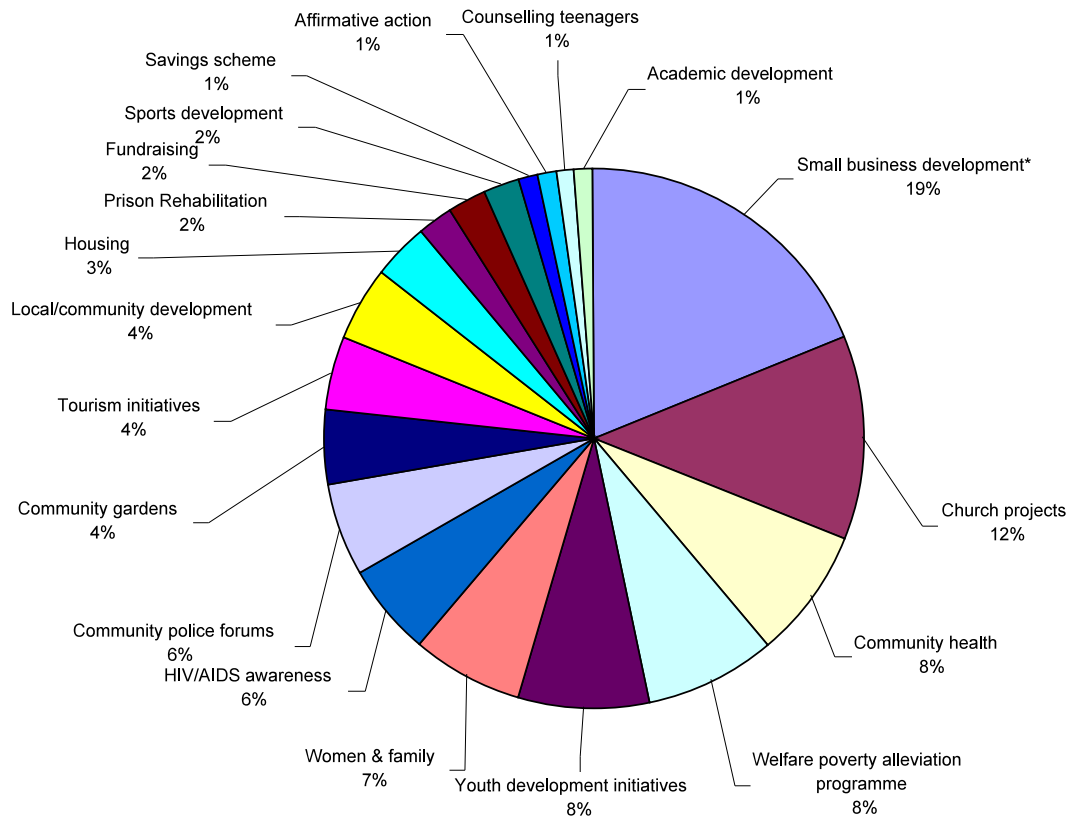
The figure presents data for 36 participants or 49% of the interview sample. It is intended as an illustrative sample of the range of initiatives rather than an indication of each participant's involvement. Overall 84% of the interview sample were involved in community projects. Of note is the largest proportion engaged in small businesses, of whom 65% were women and, of these, 95% were located in rural areas. Examples of community or business projects ranged from very small, for example, collecting 20c from each person in the village to start a community garden, to very ambitious, for example, tourism initiatives, brick-making projects, manufacturing handbags, a chicken pies project, an African hair salon, and telecommunication centres. In turn, each of these small businesses offered a livelihood to between five and fifteen unemployed women and, less often, men, thus significantly extending the reach of the knowledge and skills acquired on the programme. No doubt some these projects are not sustainable but most had been running for at least eighteen months at the time of the research.

The findings of this initial DFIDSA study thus indicate that the programme appeared to have been highly successful in enabling participants to engage in a wide variety of participatory development processes in communities. Despite these positive effects, however, there were many accounts of initiatives which did not succeed. Moreover, 16% of participants were not involved in their communities in any way. The current paper is an attempt to theorise this uneven realisation of reflexive agency in participants' practices.

Re-interrogating findings: factors influencing participants' agency in community contexts

Poststructural perspectives suggest that agency is "socioculturally mediated" and emerges out of "the specific social, political and cultural dynamics of a given context at a particular time" (Ahearn, 2001, p.112). Consequently, the degree to which individuals perceive themselves as agents will depend, in part, on their location within different sets of social and structural relations. Agency is, moreover, frequently co-constructed, located within groups, and involves 'mediational means' such as language and tools (*ibid*.). From this perspective, discourses and associated practices are resources which individuals and groups may draw on to navigate, resist or bring about transformations as they move within and across sites of practice.

The interviews on which this study is based are understood as ideological practices and the narratives emerging from them as constructions of reality. Nevertheless, participants presented a consistent sense of self which they tied directly to their participation on the programme. McNay (2000) following Ricoeur points to the role of narrative in active processes of self-formation: reflecting on experiences through these interviews may have strengthened participants' sense of achievement and reinforced emerging identities. This seemed to be a feature of focus groups in particular, indicating the greater 'epistemological authority' (Skeggs, 2002) imbued by collective agency. Participants' accounts are presented as evidence of reflexive understanding of their positioning and possibilities.

In re-examining these accounts for the purposes of this study, participants' perceptions of their ability to become agents of change can be seen to cohere around five framing factors. These will be summarised below and

then revisited in greater detail using Bourdieu's sociological framework as analytical lens.

The first factor was the enabling effect of the **discourses of participatory development** and associated literacy practices acquired on the programme. Key to this was that participants acquired these mediational tools in situated ways in the service of broader goals, for example, running workshops on topics such as conflict resolution, HIV/AIDS, or domestic violence, setting up small businesses, or participating in various community forums and projects.

The second factor was their location as **'insiders'** in communities and their consequent knowledge of various networks and lines of fracture. This enabled some participants to initiate or strengthen participatory development either collectively or individually on a number of different fronts. In addition, new translocal networks were created. In one under-resourced area in the Springbok region, for example, former participants were active in community centres, local development forums, local government, a spinning and weaving cooperative, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), church councils, school governing bodies, and the ABET Council of De Beers Consolidated Mines.

A further factor was the **strengthening of emotional and moral resources**. Without exception, all respondents reported a substantial growth in self-confidence along with an increased ability to act independently. Women, in particular, seemed to have developed self-confidence and the courage to speak up in meetings, to participate in or initiate new projects. Twice as many women mentioned this impact as men, one going so far as to name her daughter 'Caceline' after CACE.

A fourth factor was the **integrated nature** of the most visibly successful approaches to development. Two health workers on the programme had managed to facilitate the development of a range of inter-linked community-managed projects (AIDS support groups and/or breast-feeding support groups → community gardens → primary school nutrition programmes → bread making). There were several examples of such interconnected processes. Overall, 21% of Certificate participants played multiple roles, either as development activists or within local government structures, strategic sites of struggle for gender and other forms of equity (Van Donk, 2000). One such participant was employed by the Small Miners' Forum but was also a manager of a communications or tele-centre

in her community, the result of a fund-raising initiative. She volunteered on various projects: writing business plans for small businesses and proposals for job creation and poverty alleviation schemes. She was involved in the community policing forum and in a project set up to establish local AIDS centres. Subsequently, in November 2000, she was elected mayor of three districts. Another five women were elected as local government councillors in these 2000 elections: the potential impact of these participants is considerable as they are in a position to influence the allocation of resources to those most in need.

The above example also illustrates the final factor, the **dynamic relationship between macro- and micro-contexts** in the enactment of agency. The ability to take on new identities and new forms of agency was facilitated by broader socio-political and economic changes.

Nevertheless, despite these achievements, not all participants reported similar levels of agency and several reported success in some contexts and not others. Significantly, in the case of participants working as literacy teachers, there was a marked disjuncture between their ability to make things happen in community contexts and in the Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs) (Kerfoot *et al*., 2001). How, then, can we account for the uneven effects that the Certificate programme seemed to have in stimulating participatory development and agency? In the section that follows the differential effects on participants' local practices of each of the factors identified above will be examined.

Analysis

A sociological framework which enables a nuanced exploration of the connections between local discursive practices and broader systemic relationships of power is the theory of practice developed by Bourdieu (1977a, 1977b, 1986, 1991, 1998). Although many have interpreted this theory as overly reproductive, few have explored its explanatory power in situations of rapid social change.

Bourdieu and reflexive agency

For Bourdieu, the capacity of individuals to act in the world is influenced by the quantities of different kinds of *capital* or "forms of power" they

possess (Bourdieu, 1998, p.32). Within this framework, capital includes not only *economic* capital, that is, money or property, but also *social* capital, that is, networks of contacts which enable access to particular institutions, social relations and cultures, and *cultural* capital which includes not only formal educational qualifications or other cultural achievements but also 'embodied competence', ways of standing, speaking, or walking, etc. A further form of capital, *symbolic* capital, or 'recognized power', enables the take-up of other forms of capital and is only available to those with 'legitimate identity' or recognised authority (Bourdieu, 1991).

Bourdieu extends his theory of practice to language: all language interactions are forms of practice which incorporate and reflect relationships of domination and subordination, in turn dependent on the distribution of various forms of capital and resultant symbolic power (Carrington and Luke, 1997). Here Bourdieu develops his concept of '*legitimate language*' as a form of symbolic power: it is uttered by a legitimate speaker in an appropriate situation to legitimate receivers and couched in appropriate linguistic forms (Bourdieu, 1977b).

As individuals move between differentiated but overlapping social *fields* or *markets* such as commerce, politics, or education, their capacity to convert and combine different kinds of capital is dependent on the specific laws of conversion at work within each field. In turn, all these conversions are influenced by larger forces and movements in the conversion of capital, that is, within the '*meta-field*' of the state and economy (Bourdieu, 1986). It follows then that the same kinds and quantities of capital may result in different social positioning within differing fields (Carrington and Luke, 1997). For any individual, the value of particular practices will therefore depend on the field in which they are put to use.

A further element in these interactions is the individual *habitus*, a set of dispositions ingrained in the human body through socialisation and education. The habitus provides individuals with an unconscious or pre-reflexive 'practical sense' of how to act and respond in their daily lives (Bourdieu, 1990). It is both structured and structuring, product and producer of social worlds (Crossley 2003). The habitus is flexible, adaptable and transposable across fields: while it may predispose individuals to act in certain ways, "the potentiality for innovation or creative action is never foreclosed" (McNay, 1999a, p.103).

For Bourdieu, this potential for agency arises when there is a lack of fit between the habitus and one or more fields: the fissures created by such disjunctures allow the development of a critical *reflexivity*, sometimes referred to as an "awakening of consciousness" (Bourdieu, 1977a, p.83). For Bourdieu, this is most likely to occur in times of 'crisis' such as radical changes in the field or increased individual mobility (McNay, 1999a). However, those revisiting this under-explored aspect of Bourdieu's work have argued that crises emanating from movement between fields are much more routine in present-day society than Bourdieu allows (McNay, 1999a; 2000) and that in contexts of almost permanent disruption between habitus and field, reflexivity itself may become habitual (Sweetman, 2003). In addition, reflexivity is implicated in power relations and therefore, contrary to prevailing post-modern accounts, not necessarily transformative (Adkins, 2002; 2003).

In the discussion that follows, I use Bourdieu's notion of practice as produced in the dynamic interactions between habitus, capital, field, and metafield to explore the uneven ways in which aspects of agency and self-formation were realised in participants' development, language and literacy practices. Bound up with this is a notion of reflexivity as a capacity of the agent that is differentially realised.

Emerging relationship between the Certificate programme, agency, and reflexivity

In this section I revisit each of the factors identified in the previous section in order to probe the factors that seemed to support increased reflexive agency. I then apply the same analysis to contexts where participants were not as successful.

(a)   Acquisition of the discourses of participatory development: new cultural capital

The Certificate programme itself appears to have had three key aspects for participants: the acquisition of participatory development discourses and the accompanying learning processes and values. Here, a young woman, recently elected mayor of three rural districts, explains, in her fourth language, the importance of this induction into appropriate discourses:

> *I was very much interested in the course because some of the things, organising skills and contextual studies, are things that we are dealing with in the*

> *community. But we didn't understand them. . . They taught you something that you don't know.* **Maybe you did know about it, but you didn't know how to get into it; how to talk about it and how to participate**. [my emphasis]

<div align="right">(Community worker, mayor, F., Xhosa-speaking, rural)</div>

Although she had not completed her formal schooling (Grade 11), she had worked as provincial secretary for a national civic organisation and attended political meetings for many years and had thus been surrounded by the discourses of participatory democracy. However, it was only once she had the opportunity to formally acquire the appropriate ways of 'saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing' that she felt able to take on a new social identity:

> *. . .as soon as I got the training from CACE, I became very open to everybody. And before I've got this course, I was very shy in meetings. You know, I do wanted to say something, but, again I didn't say it, [even if] I had an opportunity to say it, because I was afraid. But since I've got this course, I was having the power to stand up and say something. [. . .] it also gives me strength for my actual needs because I was having a chance of looking at the Northern Cape as a whole, speaking to a lot of people that I was not knowing, it gave me a strength, a strength of maturity.* (*ibid*.)

This participant's latent reflexivity needed the mediational tools and the safe spaces of practice provided by the programme in order to translate into agency. It seems that the programme provided, in both senses of the word, in which potential agents could "form as well as perform" (Bartlett and Holland, 2002, p.14) .

Key in this process of evolving identities was the learning process, a 'pedagogy of possibility' (Simon, 1987) which invited participants to become change agents in their workplaces and communities, and most importantly in some cases, to reach beyond these local communities, and nurtured values such as 'civic courage'.

> *. . .You sit in your own little world, in your own cocoon, and CACE made things happen to you as a person until you realised but, you can do it, you don't have to let anyone get in your way. . . They made you conscious that you are an individual, a human being, and they also made you aware that you can do what you believe in and you can realise yourself in that way. They gave you the self-confidence not to stand back, to reach heights, to be able to do things that you had doubted you were capable of, they made you believe in yourself.* **They remade me completely, they made me a human being** [my emphasis].

<div align="right">(Member of domestic violence project, school governing body,
community policing forum, F., Afrikaans speaker, rural school) (trans.)</div>

What stands out in many interviews is the variety of metaphors of breaking out into new worlds and ways of being:

> *Well, it affected me powerfully in the sense [that] in the beginning I was rather shy of people. You can ask the others, I sat in this house. I didn't ever really communicate. Why, I don't know. It helped me to climb out of my shell and made me a better person in the sense that I worked with the broader community and I had the openness to communicate with people and to realise that I can offer my help. No, it made my life both outside and inside, in the family, it made me a much deeper person.*
>
> (F., Afrikaans speaker, rural) (trans.)

> *The CACE course has brought something new in me, which was not in me. It has opened avenues in me.*
>
> (Prisoner, M., Xhosa speaker, urban)

These images of 'remaking' are frequently expressed in physical terms such as climbing out of a shell or cocoon: an emergence from one form of embodied existence into another. This appears to be more than just the habitus adjusting flexibly to a new field; rather, it involves shedding some of the limitations on potential unconsciously inscribed on the habitus through processes of socialisation under apartheid. A critical pedagogy which challenges taken-for-granted, non-questioned truths, the *doxic* aspects of the habitus, thus may be able to change "the relation to what is possible" which for Bourdieu (1990) is "a relation to power" (p.64).

A further feature of the programme, central in building the necessary confidence to act, was the insistence on practical learning which grounded the pedagogy in everyday realities. Assignments presented opportunities for real action in multiple local sites as well as interaction with state agencies and institutions:

> *. . .The Research module was also very interesting because you could have to do with so many components . . . we did child abuse. And we could never have gone in to the courts or the police stations or the prison, but the research opened all those doors for us. People still keep doors open . . . when they see us, they remember us. So it brought our self image to the fore. It gave us self confidence enough to be able to conduct an interview with people. We can write out reports now which we never could have done.*
>
> (Focus group, F, Afrikaans speakers, township in mid-size rural town)(trans.)

New embodied cultural capital in the form of research practices was converted into social capital in the form of a prestige research identity and

enhanced participants' ability to challenge social 'givens', a characteristic of critical reflexivity, and reflected in such critical literacy practices.

The final crucial aspect of the Certificate programme appears to have been the underpinning values: adults as 'knowers', an orientation to service, belief in human dignity and social justice, tolerance, and so on.

> *They didn't teach us to go and teach adults, they taught us to go and work with them.*
>
> (F., Tswana speaker, rural)

> *. . . strengthening of values such as honesty, kindness and trust and the courage to stand up for what I believe in and to have confidence and admit if I'm wrong.*
>
> (F., Xhosa speaker, rural)

As Sayer (1999) has pointed out, it is easy to be cynical about claims of morally-guided action but morality cannot be "sociologized out of existence by treating it as a mere effect of the habitus" (p.412): while some participants' actions in the broader community could be seen as containing an element of self-interest, there are numerous examples of engagement based on moral deliberation and a decision to act in the interests of others. The valuing of morally-guided action on the programme could be seen to enhance critical reflexivity by offering a touchstone against which to measure social action in a time of turbulent changes.

The combination of these three factors, discourse, processes and values, could be seen as awakening or intensifying the 'critical consciousness' (Freire, 1990) or reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) of participants on the programme.

(b)   Location as 'insiders'

The location of the participants within specific working class communities, rather than as outside 'experts', also seemed to be central to their increasing agency. New cultural capital combined with their knowledge of the local 'power mosaics' (Curtis, 1995) enabled action to try and heal divisions, alter patterns of resource distribution and bring about change.

Here a participant explains the success of the community policing forum she started and to which she was elected.

> *. . . Look, many people are afraid of the police, they don't want to go straight through to the police or they do not want to say that this person has done something wrong because they do not want to be on bad terms with their neighbours. Now you are in the community and you see these things . . . so you are a bridge [skakel] between the community and the police.*
>
> <div align="right">(F., Tswana speaker, small rural town) (trans.)</div>

It is significant that the majority of participants who became highly active in development were from working class communities.[6] Bebbington, Kopp and Rubinoff (1997) and Putzel (1997) point out that the kind of social capital which exists or is created in communities is critical in local development. While church and school are both relatively rigid and still largely controlled by the middle class, local 'people's' organizations and horizontal networks, often more politically oriented, would seem to be more effective in enabling collective action.

In the year in which this research was conducted, four years after the first CACE Certificate programme began, fully representative local-level elections were held for the first time. In some towns and municipalities, control of the council passed overnight to councillors representing the poorer sections of the community. Many CACE participants were elected into these positions as a result of the high visibility of their efforts on behalf of the community ('she is a household name') and because of their knowledge of the discourses of participatory development and associated practices such as organising and running meetings, researching information, and accessing funds.

Along with the shift to a more inclusive form of local government came a shift in the 'legitimate language' (Bourdieu, 1977b) of public participation which was no longer solely Afrikaans, and a particular dominant variety of Afrikaans, but could be any mix of the home languages of the communities concerned, including Afrikaans, and sometimes English when speakers of different languages needed a lingua franca. Heller (1982) has pointed out that in the context of socio-political change, language norms are no longer shared and "in the place of unconscious, or semi-conscious, use of language in everyday life is an extreme awareness of language, a new way of holding conversations that involves the

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[6]   It is noteworthy that, on a more advanced CACE course run at the same time, participants, whose profiles were more middle class, were significantly less visible as agents of development within their communities, except in more traditional social networks such as church and schools.

negotiation of language in every interaction" (p.109). For CACE participants, it was important that most were able to use at least three languages in these public processes of negotiation; however, this linguistic capital, significant and previously without symbolic or cultural value (in the eyes of the dominant elite), was still not as valuable as the knowledge of the discourses of participatory democracy which they transferred with ease from language to language, sometimes switching among all three in a single discourse event:

> *In Kimberley, we speak all languages, Afrikaans, even it's Griqua[7] or Tswana. We've got a special language in Kimberley so somebody from other places will tell you: You're from Kimberley. Even our Tswana, pure Tswana is mixed with Afrikaans, Xhosa, English, same time. That's how we speak in Kimberley. (laughs) . . . Okay, even if you can't say a thing in Afrikaans somebody will interpret for you in the room and if you don't understand a word, just pick up your hand and they explain it to you.*

<div align="right">(Community health worker, F., Tswana speaker, regional capital)</div>

It was thus not language competence but *discourse* competence that counted (at the local level anyway; at regional level, shifts were slower and dominant languages still important). As Bourdieu (1991) has pointed out, what circulates on the linguistic market is not "language" as such but rather discourses that are "stylistically marked both in their production and their reception" (p.39). Accordingly, symbolic power while embodied in, for example, gestures or posture, is also **manifest in discourse** (Luke, 1996, p.329, my emphasis). The effectiveness of a discourse, "its power to convince", depends on the political legitimacy or authority of the person who utters it (Bourdieu, 1977b, p.653). In this case, the CACE participants used the newly legitimated discourse to assert their appropriacy for the task and at the same time legitimated their audience as appropriate participants in the discourse and ultimately in the processes of participatory democracy. The most successful participants repeated such 'acts of identity' (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985) in many contexts, thus creating a network of practice and contributing to what Fox (1996) calls a 'thickening' of civil society in the communities concerned. Their ability to recontextualise discursive resources between informal and formal, public and private spaces in this way contributed to the deepening of participatory processes.

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[7]   The Griqua people speak a nearly extinct Khoesan language Gri, also called Xri (Traill, 2002, p. 33).

(c)   Emotional and imaginative resources: an ability to 'find a way' where none seems to exist

Those placing their skills at the service of their communities in these ways received

> *. . . a lot of support. . . .People see that we are not playing games, we are creating jobs, you understand, something that can occupy them, so the projects we set up are seen very positively in the community . . . People have begun to change, they say: "These children [CACE participants] went out, they brought something back for us, they teach us, so why can't we do something?"*
> (ABET facilitator and community worker, F., Afrikaans speaker, small rural settlement)(trans.)

It is possible to see the recognition by communities of participants' work as part of an extended 'economy of emotion' (Bell, 1990, in Reay, 2004) where qualities such as expenditure of time, commitment, care and concern constitute forms of 'emotional capital' (Nowotny, 1981, Allatt, 1993, drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual framework, in Reay, 2004) on which families and communities can draw. This kind of capital, often gendered, generally lacks the direct convertibility of other capitals in mainstream markets; however, in the contexts researched here, it frequently seemed to be converted into social and symbolic capital.

Feeding into these stocks of emotional capital were qualities of determination and imagination which emerged frequently in interviews, for example:

> *. . .We don't let anything stand in our way.*
> (ABET facilitators and community workers, F., Afrikaans speakers, mid-size town)

> *. . .CACE has helped me to be myself. By doing what I'm doing now for my own community project without any fear of the Department [of Education] and others' thoughts for bringing me down.*
> (Volunteer church and HIV/AIDS worker,
> F., Tswana speaker, unemployed, isolated rural settlement)

> *. . . To start something on my own, to be able to make something from nothing.*
> (Worker in various community projects, F., Xhosa speaker,
> small rural township, describing an innovative fund-raising project)

These qualities point to the importance of a notion of agency which includes the creative dimensions of action. Bourdieu (2000) argues that action is never purely creative: the habitus changes constantly in response to new experiences, but such changes work "on the basis of the premises established in the previous state" (p.161). However, McNay (1999b), following Joas, stresses that agency is neither "purely rational" nor "normatively oriented" but often

requires "a new and unfamiliar path of action" (Joas, 1996, p.233). She further argues that a notion of imagination proceeding from the unconscious is essential to "an explanation of agency in a post-traditional social order" (Elliott, 1992 in McNay, 2000, p.142; also Bartlett and Holland, 2002). This generative role of the imagination can be seen as an interesting complement to Bourdieu's theory of practice: both emotional and imaginative resources appear necessary for reflexive agency in these contexts of participatory development.

(d)   The integrated nature of participatory development: compatible orders of discourse

Complementing the local and individual factors identified above, is the integrated nature of the projects initiated by the more successful participants. Different aspects of interconnected projects were located within different 'fields', for example, a breast-feeding and nutrition support group within the health field, a related community garden within the development field, and then a bakery to feed school children and generate income in the economic field. Even where projects were not directly linked, they spanned different fields of engagement including various, often intersecting, spaces of civil society and state activity. The most successful participants were able to use the discursive practices acquired on the programme as a set of resources recontextualised in multiple, sometimes overlapping local sites. For example, a health worker travelled between several small towns assisting communities to create inter-related health and livelihood projects and translocal networks. In this way, her expanding network of practice reinforced the acquired discourses of participatory development which became increasingly sedimented as part of her repertoire of actions, gestures, etc., in other words, 'embodied competence'.

A factor enabling this expanding agency seemed to be the changing policy environment which offered participants opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills in a variety of arenas where discourses were also shifting:

> *After the 1994 White paper for Social Welfare, the nature of work changed, the new approach was more development-oriented, there was a move from case work to a drive for poverty alleviation. CACE participants are more assertive, they grab the situation, . . .are more in control of the situation, . . .definitely more successful.*
> (Provincial Head of Social Development, M., Afrikaans speaker)

Similar shifts in policy discourses were evident in Health, Social and Correctional Services, as well as national and local government (ironically not

in Education). As a result, participants were able to carry emergent or revised dispositions across fields with compatible 'orders of discourse' (Foucault, 1971) and to apply new cultural capital in a flexible, socially situated manner where enabling economic and social circumstances existed. Changes in other social fields thus enabled greater transcontextual reach for this cultural capital and facilitated its conversion into symbolic power. For these participants, then, enhanced reflexivity was a resource that they could use to increase mobility across fields at a time when the norms of fields were increasingly uncertain and open to challenge.

(e)   The prevailing socio-political and economic context: macro-micro congruence

Such cross-field mobility was advanced by powerful new discourses in political fields which were dispersed through the media. An example of such changes is apparent in macro-level discourses on gender which began to make it more 'normal' to have women in leadership positions:

> . . . *the first time when I started participating in the civic organisation and so on,. . . I like watching TV and I saw a lot of women, you know, standing out from saying something, in front of the masses. So I started becoming interested and started reading books and so on. That's why I started becoming interested in the politics, you know. Not in politics only, but everywhere. In church I like to stand up and say something to participate in the women's manyano[8] and so on. So I don't want to say it's only CACE . . .*
>
> (Recently elected mayor of three poorly resourced rural districts, F., Xhosa speaker)

Such representations in the media 'field' at national level, along with new role models in regional government, thus increased participants' awareness of the increased permeability of power structures and made it easier for women to present themselves as legitimate candidates at local level. In so doing they changed some communities' perceptions about appropriate roles for women.

> *And they've got this thing of saying: Because we are having a mayor as a woman, then we've got a lot of things.*
>
> (Same speaker)

Interviews indicated that gender relations also began to shift in other sites such as families, workplaces, and school governing bodies, but unevenly so,

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[8]   The Xhosa word 'Manyano' can be translated as 'let's pull together'. The actual term 'manyano', although it is the official Xhosa term for Methodist women's groups, is frequently used of black women's organisations as a whole (Holness, 1997, pp.21–23).

because the overlap with the political field was less pronounced, and new positioning required a greater level of contestation.

Shifting patterns of control over resources and the fragmentations of some entrenched structures of race, class, and gender in the Northern Cape led to an 'intensification of agency' (McNay, 2000) and some individuals were able to enact the previously 'unthinkable' (Bourdieu, 2000):

> *I started recruiting some women, to participate, to say something when we've got meetings and so on. And then the time when I started seeing this women abuses, I realised that it was very important for me to stand up, to speak to the women about domestic violence, men against women at least, and I started asking them to participate also.*
>
> (Community worker, now mayor of a small rural town, F., Xhosa speaker)

In this way, waves of dramatic changes in the broader socio-political structures rippled into local sites, bringing with them new forms of capital and new formulae for conversion. Symbolic capital achieved through involvement in the liberation struggle was often of greater value than formal education qualifications and carried with it networks of social capital, augmented by strong affective ties or emotional capital forged under gruelling circumstances. Economic capital in the form of state resources began to flow in new directions, albeit slowly and not always efficiently.

At the local level, Health and Social Services Departments were mandated to make grants to support livelihood development and Local Development Forums were tasked with participatory development processes and small business development. State and civil society thus interacted in new ways and members of communities with the requisite capacities could enter new spaces of agency and access new forms of capital.

There is evidence, then, of increased individual movement between fields, of the blurring of boundaries between fields, and of fields themselves as subject to rapid and continual change, conditions of ongoing 'crisis' which Sweetman (2003) argues may make reflexive awareness widespread in post-traditional settings. Yet, in the context of the Northern Cape, such reflexivity remained constrained by persistent, if shifting, patterns of stratification. In the next section, I attempt to analyse the effects of the same five factors in limiting reflexive agency.

Incapacitated agency: the limits of reflexivity

While in some areas people were 'still struggling with political empowerment', in others people were 'busy with economic empowerment' (Group interview, Afrikaans speakers, small, under-resourced farming town)(trans.). These two struggles intersected in a variety of ways to block or limit development initiatives. Those attempting 'economic empowerment' through community-based projects or small business initiatives faced a range of structural barriers manifested in a marked **lack of congruence between macro- and micro-levels**. At national level, a shift away from the 'people-driven' Reconstruction and Development Programme towards a neo-liberal macro-economic policy meant that capacity-building for local government and resource flows to those most in need often either failed to materialise or were abruptly curtailed. In many small towns and rural settlements, unemployment was high, transport infrastructure was weak and there was little cash flow or buying power, the mainstay of the local economy being pension and welfare grants. Increased agency in such contexts required participants to connect with resources and markets beyond the local. Those CACE participants who were able to write project proposals or 'business plans' and so access scarce resources from government departments or donors were much in demand. However, in many cases, the lack of channels to resources outside the local community meant that only projects of limited reach and small financial returns could be sustained. For more ambitious projects, the means for converting cultural or symbolic capital into economic capital were hard to find. As a result,

> *You get paralysed by 'How?'. You want to do something, you want to mean something, but the funds are not available.*
> (Volunteer community worker, M., Afrikaans speaker, small rural town)

At the same time, structures of economic control from the previous regime often endured:

> You put in a proposal, you want to set up a project. You also have to go to the bank for credit. And the banks do not recognise people who never had things before. In these things they ask you for a track record . . . You have to be connected somehow. . . . you're still having the same barriers, who you approach, where and when and who are you.
> (CACE programme leader, F., Xhosa speaker)

In this way, the state, in deciding on resource allocation, and powerful national economic interests such as the banking sector operated as a 'meta-field', in Bourdieu's terms, "regulating and constraining the availability, value and use

of capital and its conversions across fields" (Luke, 1996, p.330). At the same time, increased reflexivity was not accompanied by resourcing and thus lacked transformative power.

At the local level, despite participants' **'insider'** status, the communities in which they worked were inevitably permeated with competing interests, desires and agendas, as well as historically shaped flows of power. Local political factionalism thwarted several initiatives: the local development 'field' was a site of intense contestation over the shifting shapes of recognised 'capital'. Even where local government might have been sympathetic to the development needs of the poorest, those acting within these structures or trying to interact with them faced constraints such as an endemic lack of skills and resources and widespread corruption. Although amply demonstrated in interviews, the prevalence of reflexivity thus did not equate with the ability to move beyond the parameters set by local vectors of power.

In addition to the constraints on agency caused by such macro-micro disjunctures, were other forms of disjuncture occasioned by a **misalignment between fields**. Participants working in the Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs), for example, were caught between incompatible orders of discourse: development as improved systems and centralised planning vs. development as people-centred and participatory. In the hybrid space of the learning centres, the transformative political agenda espoused by CACE was overwhelmed by neoliberal institutional discourses driven from national level: autonomous understandings of literacy[9] overrode ideological ones, and the political was separated from the pedagogical, rendering interactions largely devoid of agency (see Kerfoot *et al*., 2001).

Consequently, the **cultural capital** acquired on the programme had little currency within the formal centres. Professional vulnerability was compounded by a lack of symbolic capital: adult educators were generally not regarded by their communities as 'real' teachers. Most facilitators were consequently unable to assert a 'legitimate identity'(Bourdieu, 1991), either within the institutional structures or the wider social arena, and their discourses were correspondingly powerless. As a result, most were unable to facilitate their learners' engagement with new arenas where discourses were shifting and opportunities opening. The few exceptions to this were experienced anti-apartheid activists whose 'embodied competence' and orientation to social

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[9]   As evident in lesson plan formats, outcomes, unit standards, and most literacy learning materials provided by the national Department of Education or organisations contracted by it.

action was sufficiently stable to withstand the 'internal division' (Bourdieu, 2000) generated by trying to hold such contradictory positions within the learning spaces.

The effects of such disjunctures among fields and meta-field were bound up with complex processes of **investment and emotional resources**. Of the small group of participants who were not involved in community development, some mentioned personal problems or illness. Others indicated that their motivation for joining the programme was primarily as a means to employment. When jobs were not forthcoming, they waited for others to get something going: *'If they were to start a day-care centre. . .'* However, the participant just cited also felt that the new 'political elite' in the town excluded others: as Norton (2000) has shown, it is important to understand 'motivation' as socially constructed, closely linked to identity and emotion, and steeped in power relations. Although these participants had acquired the 'legitimate language', they had little social capital and were not perceived as 'legitimate speakers' in the development field. Several in this group were amongst the youngest and, perhaps less determined than others, they were often unable to find creative routes into action. McNay (2004) argues that by analysing emotions as a form of social interaction, it is possible to see how they are "both shaped by latent social structures and also the vehicle through which invisible power dynamics are made present within immediate everyday experience" (p.187).

Overall, then, these findings support an understanding of reflexive agency as fragmentary, contextual and discontinuous (McNay, 1999a, 2000) and dependent in each site on the configuration of power relations at play.

Concluding note

I have argued that Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus provide a sophisticated and non-determinist framework for exploring the differential impacts of the Certificate programme and the uneven ways in which aspects of agency and self-formation were realised in participants' practices. A key enabling factor in these practices was the acquisition of the discourses of participatory development. These discourses and associated language and literacy practices seem to have been crucial in imbuing many participants with the confidence and skills to occupy new discursive positions, to enter and act within new spaces of agency, and to begin to challenge or transform social 'givens'. In this way, cultural capital was converted into symbolic capital, or 'recognized authority'(Bourdieu, 1991), and used to set in motion or invigorate participatory development processes.

The increased agency generated in this manner intersected in complex ways with four other factors: participants' location as insiders in their communities, their ability to mobilise emotional and imaginative resources, the extent of compatibility between different fields of action, and the degree of congruence between micro and macro levels of social action. Consequently, the reflexivity evident in participants' accounts emerges as constrained by ongoing, if changing, patterns of stratification and resourcing and, therefore, as Adams (2006) would argue, not necessarily either personally or socially transformative.

While illustrating this ambiguous and often contradictory nature of reflexive action, this paper has given an account of an adult education initiative which nevertheless managed to stimulate development processes and have some impact on the 'sources of unfreedom' as set out by Sen (1999) at the beginning of this paper. The training offered on this programme, situated, research-oriented, critical, activist, and affective, appears to have been a powerful catalyst in enabling many participants to influence the well-being and enhance the agency of others, particularly those most often marginalised, black rural women. Yet, as programme leaders and some participants point out, a programme of this nature, the equivalent of one year of tertiary education, is necessarily limited in scope and depth. It is not clear to what extent participants will be able to maintain the impetus given them by the programme as they continue to negotiate the increasingly complex terrain of participatory governance and development. At issue will be their ability to anticipate and mediate the effects of rapid shifts in national and global arenas on local government functions, community structures and livelihood initiatives.

Implications for ABET

This account of the factors supporting increased agency in a context of continuing structural inequalities and severe deprivation presents two critical challenges for government and educational providers of ABET. The first is to augment the capacity for effective leadership created by this programme. This would entail offering opportunities for participants such as these to develop increasingly sophisticated planning and management skills, along with more complex, critical understandings of the interplay between local social, educational, and economic possibilities and global capitalism. The second challenge is to acknowledge the importance of broad training for adult educators, in other words, not just focused on literacy and numeracy, and to reconceptualise the roles and functions of Public Adult Learning Centres

accordingly. Drawing adults with little or no formal education into development processes is a cornerstone of participatory democracy. State provision for such adults to acquire new literacies may be part of achieving this goal; however, substantive participation in development is unlikely to result unless this provision is informed by an understanding of how particular literacies and languages might be used productively to shape agency within local and global structures of power. A commitment to ABET for development in this way requires a far more flexible and imaginative form of provision than is currently in place.

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