
Meta-analysis of South African education policy studies: how have we fared so far and what needs to be expanded?

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Abstract

This article provides a critical review of a selection of post-1994 education policy studies in South Africa to propose a slightly different framework with which to study education policies and their evolution over time. It does this by assessing the potential and limitations of political policy analyses rooted in a neo-Marxist paradigm and by questioning their underlying construct of policy powers. Arguing for a multi-pronged understanding of policy powers, it argues that this new policy analysis of educational reforms will have greater explanatory powers to explain why some education policies end up more enabling in their implementation in some locations and not in others. It then applies this framework to an analysis of school evaluation policy studies in the hope of advancing policy knowledge in South African education.

Introduction

With the legacy of apartheid education and the struggle for democratic education changes, there were high expectations that the post-1994 education policies would promote greater quality, equity and redress. Reviewing education policy work and their purpose, Muller (2000) distinguishes two kinds of policy analysts: on the one hand, the intellectuals or critics, usually in academia, who systematically interrogate policies and, on the other hand, the reconstructors or public intellectuals who undertake policy work to assist with more effective policy planning and implementation. Although this article disagrees slightly with Muller's distinction because critical policy analyses can also be used to empower policy implementers and actors to strategise towards more progressive policy outcomes, it confines its critical review to what Muller calls the South African education policy critics.¹

¹ As there is a flurry of post-1994 political education policy analyses, a selection of these was made for this meta-analysis, ensuring the main trends and approaches are represented within the neo-Marxist paradigm.

This article intends to do a critical analysis of how political policy analyses explain how post-1994 education reforms relate to power relations and impact on patterns of social inequality. The critical political analysis conceives of policy as a set of political decisions which involve the exercise of power to preserve or alter the nature of educational institutions or practice. It consists of discourse and text where the discourse frames the policy and acts as a power structure with possibilities and impossibilities while the text creates circumstances, in which different agents, however unequal in terms of power and authority, mediate, interpret, mediate or contest the policy. Policy discourse and text are subjected to ongoing socio-political conflicts and bargaining between different interest groups, which explain why policies are often fragile temporary policy settlements. Power struggles explain many of the underlying ambiguities and tensions in policy development and implementation processes which often open up space which policy agents can use and exploit to promote their agendas.

Thus, critical analysts see education policy as shaped and determined by many complex interrelated factors and influences at its various stages and processes. Policy formulation and implementation are part of a continuum where powers are exercised in different ways, whether through individual or social persuasion, influence, legitimacy, authority and/or coercion. Policy powers refer to the interaction of various influential interest groups within the state and within civil society, as these groups shape policy discourses and texts. The issue this article contends with here is that many political policy analyses work with a problematic and incomplete conception of power and that this conception of policy power should be broadened to improve the understanding of how various interest groups are embedded in and influence policy structures and processes, how these interests manifest themselves and impact ambiguously on the post-1994 education reconstruction.

Powers take different forms according to the neo-Marxist paradigm. As French (2009), in his analysis of SAQA, distinguishes, there are: the exercise of power, the play of power and power-play. He defines the exercise of power as coming from various power structures – political, institutional (bureaucratic, legal, cultural/educational) and coercive (military, police) – which assert the hegemony of the powerful groups. The play of power refers to “how resources and energy are generated, stored, shaped and directed by a multitude of processes and [tangible or hidden] mechanisms for securing consent and even active participation with minimal use of the threat of violence” (French, 2009, p.28). Finally, power-play works on traditional or

delegated authority, class or group position, personal charisma, expertise, persuasion, financial influence, and/or the threat of violence or direct coercion.

These power constructs do not include those referred to by other radical policy scholars, influenced by Foucault, who understand power as embedded in discourses which set the terrain and frame a form of politics in terms of what can and cannot be said, thought and reacted to (Ball, 1993). This post-modern policy view understands policy powers as a network of powers, diffused and all permeating in the various policy processes, which ensure some form of symbolic domination. However, this perspective is not sufficiently strong in South African education policy analyses to warrant their inclusion for the purpose of this article.

In contrast, this article uses French's (2009) power constructs and adapts them for the purpose of policy analysis. It conceives of the exercise of power as what is embedded in policy structures and discourses; the play of power as agencies contesting and engaging with policy texts to further their interests and the power-play as the enabling policy agency or leadership which mediates the policy within contested social domains for achieving some consensus among stakeholders.

Armed with these constructs of policy powers, this article reviews critically how various political analyses of education policies examine mainly power structures and/or power relations between interest groups at a particular moment in time (i.e. the exercise and play of power). However, they do not focus on acts of individual and social power agency or policy leadership which often emerge at various stages of the policy process, whether through policy negotiation or mediation strategies. This is done to argue that political policy analyses are limited in explaining the full dynamics, evolution and impact of policies.

This article clusters these political policy analyses into four groups and shows how their political policy analyses have an incomplete conception of policy powers. The first two groups focus on the content of education policies, with the one exposing their ambitious and symbolic content while the other provides explanations for their contradictory policy content. The third group focuses on how education policies are translated and operationalised by studying the implementation context and processes and identifying the causes for the gap between policy intentions and practices. The fourth group explores in greater depth policy change processes. Because of their slightly different focuses on various stages of the policy process, these analyses could co-exist

and complement one another. For example, analyses in the second cluster could supplement analyses in the third or fourth cluster. However, if these analyses have to be integrated in tracing their meaning at the various stages of the policy process, they have to be based on the same underlying conception of policy powers, which is what this article will demonstrate.

First group: analyses of symbolic unrealistic policy content

The first group, with its focus on policy content and context, is interested in explaining why education policy-makers chose the administrative and legislative route (the policy framework route) to address the apartheid legacy. Jansen (2002) argues that education policy frameworks were meant to forge an alternative vision of a democratic and equitable education system which would move away from the previous system. Other policy analysts agree that policies were ambitious and too often removed from or ignorant of the context and realities on the ground (Chisholm and Fuller, 1996; Jansen and Christie, 2000; Soudien, 2007).

The debate crystallised around the kind of political interests at play behind these ambitious policies. Citing Halpin and Troya (1994), Jansen (2002) contends that newly elected politicians and senior officials were not interested in addressing educational problems and changing practices through detailed policy plans and strategies. However, Bah-Layla and Sack (2003) disagree that ambitious policies are only symbolic because they can be used as tools to build the capacity and status of policy implementers and draw attention to those targeted by the policies. Jansen (2002) disagrees that it was a question of building implementation capacity and resources because it was the opposite as policy makers realise that, with the poor capacity and resources available, there was even more value in policy's symbolism to gain some international legitimacy and settle political struggles.

Fleisch (2002), in his study of the making of the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), agrees with Jansen. He shows that the new bureaucratic incumbents appointed many senior officials on the basis of their political records and loyalty rather than their managerial or educational competences and expertise. Their priority was to gain national legitimacy from the people they had to govern. Fleisch (2002) argues that the GDE struggled with poor capacity in exercising its governing powers and delivering on its mandates and

therefore decided to set up participatory consultative fora with organs of civil society and launched various school improvement and support interventions to gain legitimacy from those it governed. In the early years, the DoE also used consultations with civil society groups to gain as much support from them as possible.

Another constituency which the new government wanted to appease was the international community. Chisholm and Fuller (1996) argue that, because fragile governments need legitimacy by acting and looking modern, they adopted globally competitive policies as ‘signs of modern progress’. The global policy trend at the time pointed to tighter management and efficiency measures while appearing to satisfying competing interests. Another strategy to gain international legitimacy was to undertake international visits, invite international consultants and privilege their policy advice over those of local groups (Jansen, 2002). Spreen (2004) mentions that policy borrowing from other countries, a frequent feature of the global era, was justified on the grounds that countries wanted to be acknowledged as globally competitive. Schoole (2005) agrees that South African policymakers in higher education accessed international policy networks to frame policy changes because they lacked policy literacy, defined as the inadequate policy capacity, expertise and resources.

While important to recognise the lack of policy expertise and the need for international and national legitimacy, policy borrowing is also a national political choice. International consultants do not have ‘carte blanche’ in advising on policy development because they also have to convince local and national interest groups with their policy recommendations. Jansen (2002) argues that some education officials accepted the advice of international experts against those of local consultants and local consultative fora because these fitted in with the interests of the emerging black middle class, with which many department officials identified. He mentions that the controversial international policy advice that public schools be allowed to raise their own funds was adopted (in the 1996 Schools Act) because DoE officials saw it as benefitting the interests of the black middle class.

Other policy scholars, less interested in policy symbolism, agree that the content of much education policy content reflected the interests of dominant groups. Vally and Spreen (1998) argue that education policies did not address the demands of the anti-apartheid education movement because a shift occurs gradually in the balance of forces in favour of international and national capital. This led the state to adopt a market-based globalisation discourse and

neo-liberal policies in education. Chisholm and Fuller (1996) agree that the radical vision of a more socially just educational set up was gradually displaced given the constraints set by discursive practices associated with the compromises of the transition period. For them, the adoption of the neo-liberal 1996 GEAR framework made the goal of social justice recede significantly for the pursuit of efficiency, with damaging implications for the poor (Chisholm, Motala and Vally, 2003; Chisholm, Hoadley and wa Kivilu 2005). Many education policies, in the field of teacher education, curriculum and school governance, were said to favour and promote the interests of the dominant socio-economic groups.

The anti-apartheid goal of democracy and participation also receded as consultative participatory policy-making processes (which took place with civil society in the case of SASA and the Higher Education Act) were gradually replaced by a more centralised top down approach to policy-making, starting with GEAR but also with the 2001 Whole School Evaluation Policy (DoE, 2001), (Motala and Pampallis, 2007; De Clercq, 2007).

Motala and Pampallis (2007, p.370) call for a contextualisation of the limitations of education policies and warn of the danger of “attribut[ing] to education policy powers which lie outside its range of possibilities”. Soudien (2007) agrees that apartheid history and the wider socio-economic inequalities pose serious obstacles for what education policies could do to counter the unequal education provisions and resources. Shalem and Hoadley (2009) point out the pervasive influence and penetration of the education process by socio-economic inequalities which affect significantly and unequally teachers’ work challenges.

Given the time at which these policy analyses were completed, it is clear that their focus of analysis was limited to policy content and context and that policy power was mainly understood as exercises of powers. These analyses do not understand policies as temporary settlements or interactive texts which are bound to evolve as they are subjected to on-going contestations and mediation strategies by various stakeholders. It is therefore argued here that, as a result, they underplay the existence of ambiguities and tensions in these policies as well as the kind of enabling opportunities these create for various interest groups keen to further their interests. Thus, these policy content analyses are problematic in ignoring the play of power and power-play.

Second group: analyses that problematise policy content

The second group investigates the lack of coherence in education policies, whether within a policy or in relation to other education policies. For example, the curriculum policy (and its 2001 review) is criticised for not being aligned with teacher development policies and appropriate curriculum materials and textbooks to ensure effective curriculum implementation (Fleisch and Potenza, 1999). Carrim (2001) points out that education policies, such as DAS and OBE curriculum, are based on a notion of teachers as professionals with relative autonomy while other policies, such as SASA, contradict this by subjecting teachers to tight bureaucratic controls. Jansen (2004) and Soudien (2007) criticise the internal contradictions of outcomes-based curriculum policy with its simultaneous emphasis on progressive constructivist pedagogic principles and detailed prescription of learning outcomes.

Explanations for this lack of alignment differ. Some argue that policy makers lacked the capacity and expertise to develop policy with coherent objectives and content relevant to the realities on the ground. Mamphela (2008) suggests, for example, that many policy makers and senior department officials came from exile and were either in a state of denial about the extent of the underdevelopment or unable to understand the devastating educational apartheid legacy. McLennan (2009) contends that the bureaucratic administration did not grasp the implications of policy implementation on the ground while Sehoole (2005) blames the lack of policy literacy and expertise in higher education as well as the fragmented and poorly capacitated administration which worked in silos.

Others dispute that poor policy coherence or alignment was mainly due to the inexperience of policy makers. They argue instead that policies are awkward outcomes of compromises that had to be made by various parties. Badat (1995) explains how many post-1994 policies differed from those of the ANC yellow book because they were the products of political compromises between strong opposing groups. Jansen (2001) attributes the problematic policy compromises to the negotiated settlement which weakened the post-1994 state while McGrath (2004) agrees that the politically and administratively weak state was fraught with political tensions which did not allow it to bring policy coherence into effect.

Various education analysts explain the development and amendment of education policies such as SASA, Curriculum 2005, the IQMS and the NQF, as the outcomes of on-going contestations between powerful groups which make these policies fragile and temporary political settlements. For example, Sayed (1997, 2002) explains the development of SASA from its inception to the act and subsequent amendments as the outcomes of continuous negotiations and bargaining around school governance. Analyses of the 2001 curriculum revision also reveal changing political and educational alignments which made the DoE admit publicly to the problematic aspects of C2005 for the majority of poorly trained teachers (Jansen and Christie, 2000; Chisholm, 2001; Cross, Mungadi and Rouhani, 2002 and Spreen 2004). De Clercq (2008) shows how the problematic DAS and IQMS assumptions about teachers as professionals led to resistance on the ground which continue to force amendments in teacher appraisal policies. Lugg (2007), Allais (2007) and French (2009) also explain how the ambiguities and awkward mix of NQF neo-liberal and radical assumptions changed over time in response to changes in stakeholders' interests, policy positions and negotiation strategies with various powerful groups dominating others at different times.

While these policy analysts engage with the global and socio-political contexts of influence which shape a specific policy discourse, they do not explain how this discourse frames certain issues (and not others) as substantive problems which the policy addresses and responds to. They do not analyse the significance or relevance of the variables targeted by the new policies: are these real priorities and deep causes of the poor and unequal education quality in 1994? Hopkins and Levine (2000) argue that policies should be directed at variables with a direct impact on teaching and learning. Cohen (1995) also mentions that teaching and learning will only improve through policies if the latter can impact on teachers' knowledge, skills and beliefs. Yet, apart from the new curriculum policy, the post-1994 education policies focus mainly on structural or system variables such as the management, governance and administration of schools (SASA), the qualification framework (SAQA and NQF), teachers' employment conditions, professional development as well as related issues of quality control (WSE and IQMS policy). In that sense, post-1994 policies target what Sergiovanni (2000) calls 'system-world' changes without being accompanied by changes in the schools' 'life world', which are the schooling aspects which need to be enhanced.

On the whole, these analyses of contradictory policy content conceive policies mainly as texts and temporary policy settlements. They show that these are subjected to exercises and plays of power and that their content reflects the on-

going contestations between various interest groups. However, they are unable to explain why the same education policy appears enabling or, the opposite, constraining in other contexts. This is because they do not explore the role of policy agency and how it can exploit (or not) the opportunities created by these conflicts in the policy development process.

Third group: analyses that focus on the policy implementation gap

The third group consists of implementation studies which analyse the reasons behind the gap between education policy intentions and outcomes (Jansen and Christie, 2000; Sayed and Jansen, 2001; Motala and Pampallis, 2001; Kraak and Young, 2001; Chisholm, 2004). These studies explain differently this gap and the uneven impact these policies have on the ground. There are three strands of implementation studies identified here because of their different conceptualisation of implementation and the source and nature of implementation problems.

The first strand identifies explanations for the policy-practice gap at the level of education departments and the constraints of their weak administration, limited or non-existent implementation plans and strategies, poor capacity, expertise and resources (Jansen, 2001; Schoole, 2005). The CEPD's Education 2000+ implementation studies (Kgobe, 2001; 2002) as well as Sayed (2002) and Class Act (2007) cite poor implementation capacity, resources and expertise among districts which impact differently on the ground, with poor schools suffering more than rich schools from rather ambitious education policies.

Some of these analyses conceive problematically of policy implementation as separate from, and unaffected by, policy content. They confine their explanations of the policy-practice gap to implementation without linking these implementation problems to the unrealistic policy content, something which Kgobe (2007), the coordinator of the CEPD studies, acknowledges in retrospect as a problem. In addition, by focusing on the human, organisational and financial constraints responsible for poor policy implementation, these studies do not delve much on what contributes to best implementation practices in schools or districts of similar contexts, resources, capacity and interest groups.

Another weakness in these studies is that, in searching for the sources of implementation problems, they don't engage with change theory and the change management process to understand how and why policy agents respond in the way they do to policy implementation. Yet, as Fullan (1992) argues, policy implementation is crucially shaped by change management strategies. Only a few South African implementation policy analyses deal with implementers' change strategies (see the fourth group).

The main shortcoming of this strand is that it underplays the power relations in the implementation process and the various plays of power between policy agents who constantly contest and negotiate for their interests.

The second strand focuses explicitly on the impact of contestations or conflicts that arise in policy implementation. These analyses conceive of implementation as an integral part of the policy process which is socially constructed and politically mediated by various policy agencies. Fullan (2001) calls it a process of further policy-making and Barrett and Fudge (1981) a part of the policy-action continuum. These analyses attribute the policy-practice gap to the contestations and negotiations taking place in the implementation process. McLaughlin (1990) argues in the famous Rand Change Agent study that policy implementation is about mutual adaptation between policies and the local context where various parties negotiate over the meaning and interpretation of policies. However, she underplays the uneven power relations within and around the state when she argues that the policy success depends on the effectiveness of implementation strategies which require a certain level of local leadership, commitment, expertise and capacity.

South African policy analysts (Jansen, 2001; Sayed, 2002) use a similar but more political approach when examining policy contestations and negotiations which take place at different levels of policy-making. According to Sayed (1997, 2002), conflicts, which already exist in policy development and formulation, are exacerbated in implementation. In their trajectory policy studies on the NQF, Lugg (2007) and French (2009) show how implementation conflicts led to changes in content and implementation strategies, which settled temporarily the conflicts, only to open up new tensions and conflicts. The other finding of these studies is that policy and policy implementation often worsen the already existing education inequalities between rich and poor schools (Sayed and Jansen, 2001).

A third strand challenges indirectly implementation studies to shift their focus away from the policy-practice gap on the grounds that this assumes a causal

link and implies that implementation is a forward mapping process (Elmore, 1979/80). De Clercq (2002) shows how education departments' top down implementation approach prevents districts from facing up to the priority problems encountered by schools and teachers before these can be in a position to implement the new policies. Criticising the top down implementation approach (the state's play of power), Elmore (1979/80) points to the advantages of a 'backward mapping' approach to implementation which expects implementers to understand what schools require in terms of differentiated support strategies to assist with the gradual implementation of the policy changes. As De Clercq (2002) mentions, this approach assumes a substantial change in the hierarchical power relations between education departments, districts and schools.

The backward mapping approach also suggests a different research methodology for implementation studies which will yield better understanding. The idea is to investigate what happens at the level of the actors, the targets of the policy, and trace policy implementation work from the 'bottom up' by analysing what influences policy actors' actions and behaviours. Rogan and Grayson (2003) use this approach to show how teachers of poor and disadvantaged schools are stretched beyond what they can manage by districts' 'one-size-fits-all' implementation approach. This is the reason, they argue, for the negative impact of the curriculum policy on poor schools and their teachers. Based on their research, they devise a theory of curriculum implementation which contends that, because schools have different zones of feasible innovation, "implementation work should be aligned to the school profile of implementation, the capacity to support innovation and the school's access to outside support" (Rogan and Grayson, 2003, p.1195).

However, these policy implementation studies all remain rather abstract in their analysis of the state education bureaucracy as they do not investigate the concrete operations and actions of education officials at specific sites. There is little research on why and how some districts or schools faced with similar contexts, capacity and interest groups manage to ward off some of the worst effects of discriminatory policy content. This usually involves an investigation of *how* policy actors exercise their enabling agency to interpret policy signals, as well as what decisions and mediation strategies they take to make the best out of policy implementation. Lugg (2007) and French (2009) provide the beginning of such analyses by focusing on the leadership of various NQF policy communities, its mediation and implementation strategies. Lugg (2007)

argues that policy leadership explains hegemonic moments of some NQF policy groups at certain times.

Thus, implementation studies tend to ignore an analysis of the different manifestations of policy power (exercise and play of power and power-play) in the policy process. They would be richer if they capture how policy discourse and text are constantly interpreted and contested by agents who exploit the opportunities created by policy to strategise around its implementation.

Fourth group: analyses that examine how change occurs on the ground

The South African government had to be the main driver of education reforms since system-wide changes were needed after 1994 to counter the legacy of apartheid education. This centralised approach to policy work mirrors that of many other countries in the 1990s as state-driven standardised education reforms were introduced. But policy-makers and education departments had a limited engagement with change theory or the change management process. The fourth group deals more directly with change management issues by examining the nature and impact of the change management tools of pressure and support, often embedded in various school improvement interventions or policies.

Fleisch (2002) studies the pre-1994 NGO-led school interventions and their use of support and development to argue that many of these interventions were unsuccessful because they only provided support to often poorly functioning schools with little managerial functionality and/or accountability. His study of the GDE accountability intervention programme with poorly performing schools (the 1999 Education Action Zones programme) welcomes the use of external bureaucratic accountability for aiming at restoring and stabilising these schools' managerial authority. The problem with Fleisch's study is that it does not delve into the quality and balance of pressure and support used by the EAZ nor does it look at its medium-to-long term impact. Yet, a researcher, working on a parallel qualitative case study of the EAZ in a few schools, found that the bias towards pressure (in terms of high stakes external bureaucratic accountability) led to conflicts and demoralisation among teachers who felt shamed by the EAZ but not internally motivated to work for lasting improvement (Mukwevho, 2002).

In his research on the poor success achieved in the 1990s by NGO interventions in poorly functioning schools, Taylor (2007) agrees with Fleisch (2002) that managerial authority is needed *before* support interventions can take place and impact meaningfully on schools. He argues that the problem with NGOs is that they do not have managerial authority over schools and that the department has to develop stronger bureaucratic school accountability, especially in dysfunctional schools. Like Fleisch (2002), Taylor (2002, 2007) does not engage with the quality or relevance of these NGO school support interventions nor does he debate what is an appropriate balance between pressure and support for different kinds of schools.

Shalem (2003) investigates the issue of meaningful opportunities for teachers and school to learn, something she criticises Taylor (2002) and Fleisch (2002) for not addressing. She also accuses them of manipulating selectively the findings of the international change literature and ignoring the work of Cohen and Ball (1999), Hopkins and Levine (2000) and others. Using Elmore's (2001) concept of reciprocal accountability, she argues that the government has the responsibility of building teachers' professional knowledge, skills and attitudes through meaningful support *before* accountability can be introduced and legitimised in schools.

Although sympathetic to Shalem's arguments, this article argues that these three authors neglect to study how change interventions initiated from outside impact on schools' internal capacity and agency. Outside changes only work through the internal school contradictions and if they manage to mobilise some kind of school agency. Thus, change management studies should identify the contradictions and gaps created by ambiguous reforms and their change processes. In doing so, they would have to explore how different policy agents respond, strategise and mediate these change reforms and processes (the power-play), something that is absent of their analyses.

Thus, it has been argued so far that these four groups of policy analyses adopt a political analytical approach with some limitations. These four groups are not all mutually exclusive because they have slightly different focuses of analysis. However, they all have something problematic when analysed with our framework of multiple policy powers: they omit to incorporate the dimension of power-play or policy agency which is vital to explain how policies can be enabling and provide opportunities for some policy agents who know how to use these policies to achieve some of their vision for an improved school system.

Applying the new analytical framework of policy powers to school evaluation policies

What does it mean then to apply the new analytical framework of multi-pronged policy powers to education policy analyses? Let us turn to the example of school evaluation policies? Silbert's (2007) Master study of the 2001 Whole School Evaluation (WSE) policy conceives policy essentially as an exercise of power which frames and excludes certain monitoring performance areas while Lucen (2003) explains the WSE policy as both exercise and play of power by the DoE. De Clercq (2007) supplements these content analyses by delving into the power dynamics and the policy's contradictions, tensions and opportunities these create. An analysis of how these opportunities are exploited at the level of policy (re)formulation or implementation by enabling policy agency by officials and/or school staff would reveal how power-play is exercised to develop strategies which can either divert or build on this school accountability policy for developmental purposes.

A few post-graduate research studies (Pym, 1999; Barnes, 2003 and Gallie, 2007) were done on appraisal policies. Barnes (2003) and Gallie (2007) use a political approach by locating DAS and its implementation within the historical and socio-politically contested context of the time. They identify various educational and political tensions in the policy as well as the compromises reached between education departments, unions and schools (the play of power). Little consideration, however, is given to the problematic DAS assumptions about teachers being professionals and the ambiguous position of the various stakeholders on this. These studies also trace teachers' interpretations and contestations around the DAS implementation process, mentioning teachers' distrust of education departments and their lack of capacity to support schools. They do not study, however, how DAS implementation problems are related to its contradictory content and tensions or how policy agents mediate and strategise around the space and gaps opened up by DAS (the power-play).

In contrast, Pym's (1999) PhD study on a school-based appraisal exercise focuses predominantly on the policy leadership and its inadequate conceptualisation and implementation strategies (or power-play). This critical reflection by the researcher (who, as the school principal, initiated this peer appraisal) explains how the policy's context was not favourable for appraisal given the poor school accountability culture and the lack of continuous teacher support opportunities. Pym also criticises the problematic theory of change

and ineffective change strategies used as no stakes were attached and no attempt was made to root the appraisal in teachers' priority concerns.

Other studies (Mathula, 2004; Class Act, 2007) were undertaken on the IQMS and its implementation. Mathula's (2004) study of the IQMS (as well as DAS and WSE policy) identifies political tensions and contestations around the content and implementation of these policies (the play of power), but does not see their manifestations in the ambiguous and contradictory content of the policies. Being a departmental official, Mathula (2004) prefers to focus on what made departmental implementation strategies ineffective and he cites lack of consensus amongst stakeholders and their leadership. He does not engage with the unequal power relations around these policies and the role of policy leadership in navigating through the tensions in policy content and implementation (power-play).

The Class Act report (2007), commissioned by the DoE, investigates the problematic IQMS implementation through an interpretive approach based on teachers' perceptions and engagement with the IQMS. It reveals that parts of the IQMS instrument are not clear and technically coherent (some performance standards and criteria, poor training and capacity to produce reliable data, etc.) but prefers to mention the technical and not political character of the contestations around the IQMS content and implementation (the exercise and play of power). It also hints that well performing schools, with their collegial culture and professional commitment, are advantaged in engaging with the IQMS while poorly performing schools, with poorly qualified teachers and little access to meaningful support opportunities, are victimised by the IQMS. Like Mathula's analysis, this a-political report can only conclude that more consensus and acceptance by all stakeholders should be achieved. De Clercq (2008) mentions the political character of the IQMS tensions but does not explore the opportunities that these provide for enabling agency or leadership.

This article argues that school evaluation policies, as most education policies, have many other complex and interesting dimensions which need to be fully analysed to understand their development, implementation and evolution over time. Policy scholars should not conceive of policies as all constraining as this underplays the notion of policy agencies and leadership. Policies do also open space for policy agencies. If policy-making has to be captured in its complex contested dimensions and its different implementation and impact on the ground explained, the power-play of policy agencies has to feature in the analysis to understand their different implementation and impact.

Policy agencies are those who enter and constitute the power-play as they mediate the policy within contested social domains. They are crucial especially if they possess the political and educational knowledge to assess the context and contested nature of school/teacher evaluation policies, together with the various needs and interests of various stakeholders. These agencies have to identify the various tensions and ambiguities of these school/teacher evaluation policies for development to find the space to act and power-play within it. It is only then that enabling policy agencies will be able to mobilise resources, decisions and strategies to exploit the opportunities created by these school/teacher evaluation policies and use them in a strategic manner, not to threaten various stakeholders involved but rather to win them over by working out how these policies can be used to benefit them and contribute to the improvement of the school system.

Concretely-speaking, policy leadership at district level, for example, has to understand the tensions provoked among teachers and their unions by teacher appraisal/evaluation policies and work out a way in which these can be managed and/or minimised. For this, it will assess the policy political and educational context, such as the differences between the unions and departments' agendas and interests. It will also identify the policy content ambiguities and tensions as well as the needs on the ground, such as tensions between evaluation for quality assurance and for development and what they require in terms of evaluation performance areas. It will then take decisions, mobilise resources and partners to navigate through the implementation process and secure the buy-in from the various stakeholders to ensure that the appraisal policy can be read and implemented in a way which benefits and improves the performance of teachers and the system. It will work out a way to present teacher monitoring in a non-threatening manner and in a valid form so that the department has a reliable idea of where the problems are, and the teachers and their development providers will understand genuinely on what meaningful developmental interventions have to focus. In that sense, appraisal could become, with policy agencies and leadership, an exercise for quality assurance and for development.

In conclusion, this article shows how policy analyses, which use the two power constructs of the exercise of power and the play of power around school/teacher evaluation policies, will unravel the power agendas of education departments as well as the resistance of teachers and their unions. They will also assess the intensity and evolution of the political and educational contestations as well as the way these manifest themselves in negotiations over policies' formulation and implementation in schools.

However, these analyses cannot explain why, in some areas, appraisal policies are implemented in an enabling, as opposed to constraining, manner. It is only analyses focusing also on the third power construct (power-play) and the actions of various policy agencies which will manage to unravel how policies evolve and are translated on the ground through strategic decisions and activities of policy agencies which manage, thanks to their policy knowledge and actions, to mediate the policy tensions and enable stakeholders to work together and find a way in which they can benefit from the policy.

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