Quality in teacher education: managing discursive change

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Abstract

The paper explores the terms *secularism, democracy, globalisation* and *quality* with particular reference to shaping learners' identities and ascribing quality to teacher education in two developing democracies: India and South Africa.

Key terms are interrogated in order to clarify how quality is subjected to current discursive pressures. The terms are seen as axiomatic to contemporary ideals of whole human development and citizenship. The nature of the contemporary self is explored in terms of Taylor's (2007) juxtaposition of pre- and post modern selves engaging with global discourse where expressivist and rational modes of argument compete for hegemony.

First, the paper deconstructs 'secular'; second, it examines tensions between hegemony and agency in the language of globalisation; third, it uses Bernstein's taxonomy of learners' rights and conditions to locate the democratisation of education in practice and finally, suggests how globalisation and democratic rights may impact on notions of quality in teacher education.

Introduction

The final report of the ministerial committee on a national education evaluation and development unit included the task "to review the international literature on similar school evaluation and development bodies in other countries" (South Africa, 2009, p.10). This article addresses two a priori issues emerging from a reading of the report that beg exploration:

1. The report draws heavily on experiences from countries where developmental contextual issues do not easily resonate with those in South Africa; and

2. The report references its need for reform in terms of a historical legacy and not in terms of contemporary pressures that might militate against shaping learners who "will act in the interests of a society based on respect for democracy, equality, human dignity, life and social

justice . . .who [are] confident and independent, literate, numerate, multi-skilled, compassionate, with a respect for the environment and the ability to participate in society as a critical and active citizen" (Department of Education, 2002, p.3).

Given Bernstein's (1996) proposition that the school system at all levels – the 'pedagogical device' – is ultimately a struggle to shape learners' identities, this article suggests that there are contemporary vectors of pressure in discourse that must be acknowledged in the quest for quality. Furthermore, it suggests that engaging globally with interlocutors that struggle with similar challenges of diversity and development might be generative locally. India's cultural heterogeneity, colonial history, socio-economic crisis of wealth versus poverty, emergence into the global economy and language of learning and teaching dilemmas make it a particularly apposite discursive partner for South Africa. A more detailed comparison of challenges that social and economic conditions impose on education in these countries might be instructive for local researchers. Though compelling, given South Africa's problems with its culture of learning and teaching which can be seen essentially as deontological problems of identity, and global perceptions of its socio-economic place in relation to Brazil, Russia, India and China (the BRIC alliance) as perhaps a junior partner in a space designated 'emergent' and 'developing', such a study is beyond the scope of this article.

Recent education reform initiatives in India have been prefaced by a concept note (Ministry of Education, Kerala, 2008) that proposes that key terms acting as vectors of pressure in education discourse be interrogated, in order to clarify paradigms of quality and current discursive pressures on learners. The terms are:

- *democratic*
- *secular*
- *global*

These terms are seen in the concept note as axiomatic to contemporary ideals of whole human development and citizenship, which in turn, the concept note implies, are criteria for ascriptions of quality coming out of a reform process

Noting that the Indian state with the highest percentage of literacy, Kerala, "has not been able to strengthen a cohesive community life free from hatred, ill-will and alienation", the note envisages that

. . .a qualitative improvement of the human element has to grow and develop within the framework of a new value system emphasising the individuality and personality of the educated who are ready to accept the new challenges being thrown up by the on-going process of globalisation (Ministry of Education, 2008).

The Ministry's inference that a high literacy rate is not the only significant indicator of quality in a reformed system is furthermore evident in its emphasis on the 'individuality and personality of the educated'. The note therefore is explicit in linking the development of the 'educated' human self to ascriptions of quality – 'a qualitative improvement of the human element' – in the education system. Attention to improving 'the human element' must confront educators at policy and implementation levels with the nature of influences on the identity formation of students and novice teachers who emerge from education processes. This article represents a tentative engagement with a discourse of identity formation. It is not an empirical study or a detailed comparative analysis of education systems and conditions.

Firstly, in response to preliminary debates at the International Seminar on Secular and Democratic Education (Kerala, 2008) about proposed curriculum and teacher education reform initiatives in India that resonate with similar developments in South Africa (Table 1), this article explores concepts of secularism, democracy, globalisation and quality with particular reference to their implications for ascribing quality to teacher education practice. The comparative perspective offered by the concept note provides the departure point for a conceptual exploration of key terms.

Table 1:   Comparison of reformed principles of curriculum developments in India and South Africa

Five principles of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 India (Panniker, 2008)	**National Curriculum Statement (NCS): Languages 2002 South Africa (DoE Pretoria, 2002)**
Connecting knowledge to life outside school	Choose topics that are relevant to the learners' lives, and yet also move them beyond what they already know (p.8)
Ensuring that learning is shifted away from rote method	The [NCS] outcomes encourage a learner-centred and activity-based approach to education (p.1)
Enriching the curriculum to provide for overall development of children rather than textbook centric	The curriculum aims to develop the full potential of each learner as a citizen of a democratic South Africa (p.1)
Making examinations more flexible and integrated into classroom life	Continuous assessment is the chief method. . .(p.127). . .[the] model. . . encourages integration of assessment into teaching and the development of learners through ongoing feedback (p.134)
Nurturing an overriding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country	The curriculum seeks to create a lifelong learner who is confident and independent, literate, numerate, multi-skilled, compassionate, with a respect for the environment and the ability to participate in society as a critical and creative citizen (p.3)

Secondly, the article addresses broadly conceptual themes embedded in questions posed in the Kerala concept note. These themes should have remarkable salience in the South African education context, given that the phrase 'our new democracy' and wildly various conceptions of it in popular discourse,[1] indicate that we are far from achieving a national 'common-sense' version of the concept. This situation should concern the policy makers who endorse a curriculum that asserts that it "aims to develop the full potential of each learner *as a citizen* [my emphasis] of a democratic South Africa" (Department of Education, 2002, p.1). The questions taken from the Kerala concept note are:

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[1]   Conceptions of democracy are often expressed on popular platforms ubiquitous in the discourse of popular media, for example, the 'After eight debate' and evening open phone-in programmes on the South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) radio SAFM station.

- What is the significance of democratic education?

- What is the relation between education and democracy?

- What are the nature and depth of social control of education?

- What is the relevance of education in a secular society?

The questions appear to have salience in South Africa because:

- Democratic education would be the antithesis of apartheid education and would therefore represent emancipation in the public's imagination;

- The future viability of South Africa's democracy depends on how it is lived by learners in the processes of their education;

- There is a history of deep alienation that must be healed between society and schooling, the effects of which persist in the present (Pampallis, 2007 in Hoppers, Gustavsson, Motala and Pampallis, 2007; Bloch, 2009),[2] and

- in recognition of the equal rights of diverse cultural communities to freedom of religion, the state has separated itself from official ties to a particular form of organised religion, preferring to inform learners about diverse religious practices rather than promote religious observances in the national curriculum, thereby defining itself as 'secular'.

In the Indian context, secularism has been interpreted as the evolution of a strategy to accommodate diversity and avoid sectarian violence through critical engagement in rational discourse. It has come to be seen as a social good, signifying tolerance and rationality in managing the heterodoxy of faith traditions that characterises Indian society (Sen, 2005, p.16). According to Sen, this version of secularism has roots in a long intellectual tradition of argumentation practised over millennia. Sen's version of secularism appears to be a realisation of the kind of secular state that is envisaged in South African policy when it asserts the primacy of the constitution over the exercise of religious rights:

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[2]   "The situation inherited by the democratic, post-1994 government included negative aspects resulting from the actual struggle against apartheid. . . .The school-based struggle of the 1980s and early 1990s – characterised by school boycotts and a breakdown in discipline – resulted in a school culture in many, if not most, black schools which was inimical to organised learning and teaching" (Pampallis, 2007, p.34). See also Bloch, 2009 *The toxic mix* for a comprehensive description of present effects.

> (2) The rights [to religious practices and associations] in subsection (1) may not be exercised in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights (South Africa, 1996, p.15).

In the South African context however, secularism is often seen as a sign of loss of spirituality, a process of cultural alienation or as the inevitable outcome of consumerism. This notion of secularism approximates a 'western' interpretation of the term, different from its use in Indian intellectual discourse (Sen, 2005). The notion of 'secular' in the South African environment connotes a moral and spiritual challenge to a self vulnerable to discursive pressures coming from global market forces, not the means for an agentic self to construct a usefully neutral discursive space in which to conduct a rational argument. Therefore secularism experienced as an assault on the self, rather than as an enabling space, becomes a destabilising element in current discourse that pits religious or spiritual selves against secular selves and begs a closer look in order to trace its effects on learning identities. An example of the operation of this understanding of secularism in South Africa can be discerned in a small but growing home school movement[3] that seeks to foreground the need for spiritual, not necessarily religious, values to be affirmed in children's education (Moore, 2002, p.5; Wits EPU, 2008, p.17). While a large proportion of the parents opting for home schooling are Christian, the movement is also representative of families for whom 'spiritual values' have non-Christian and even secular meanings.

In the paragraphs that follow,

- first, I deconstruct notions of 'secular' derived from Atlantic discourse in English;

- second, I examine tensions between notions of hegemony and agency in the language of globalisation, neo-liberalism and democracy;

- third, I use Bernstein's taxonomy of learners' rights and conditions for their realisation as a framework for locating the democratisation of education in practice; and

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[3]   Moore (2002, p.3) reports that between 2 000 and 2 400 children were being home schooled in 1997. The Wits Education Policy Unit (2008, p.15) points out that establishing precise statistics of home schooling is difficult because parents are reluctant to register for home schooling, but cites current estimates of between 2 164 learners registered with provincial education departments and 15 000 estimated by Van Oostrum, the director of the Home School Legal Defence Association. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the movement is growing and that the issue deserves more research.

- finally, returning to the critical questions, I suggest how the discourses of globalisation and democratic rights may impact on notions of quality in the evaluation of teacher education programmes.

Deconstructing 'secular'

The discussion that follows links the concept of 'secular' to the development of the human self in order to clarify pressures in discourse that ultimately affect ascriptions of quality in the education system. The NCS (DoE Pretoria, 2002) is shot through with references to its intention to shape a particular kind of self embodied in learners' identities, which begs the question of how the system accounts for the realisation of this intention, because being able to describe the extent to which a system realises its stated intentions is surely the *raison d'etre* of quality assurance. Therefore, in order to discern quality outcomes with regard to the shaping of identities, explorations of notions of selfhood and their effects seem called for.

In a treatise on 'western' secularism, Charles Taylor (2007) juxtaposes notions of a pre-modern porous, communal, 'cosmic' self and a contemporary interiorized, individualised 'buffered' self. Taylor's treatise contributes to perspectives on historical and contemporary pressures on identity formation and ideology that ultimately shape education policy and practices.

The porous self inhabits an outer 'enchanted' world that is fast disappearing under globalising discursive pressures. This self is constructed by and owes its existence to the collective, which in turn is maintained by a consensus about external spiritual forces of destruction or sources of well-being that either threaten or sustain it: that is, forces of 'enchantment'. The porous self is vulnerable to invasion by cosmic forces that are ascribed to powers beyond human control: spirits, demons (Taylor, 2007). In an enchanted world, external sanctions imposed by the forces of enchantment govern moral accountability. These sanctions exert pressure through ritual, art, myth, and language, which are communal, not individual, resources. In pre-modern communities these communal resources take care of social cohesion and assure pro-social behaviour of individuals.

The 'buffered' self that is the creature of modernity and globalisation, is disengaged from the outside world by putting distance and a buffer, or boundary (the 'mind'), between itself and the influence of 'cosmic' forces.

Under conditions of modernity and globalisation in contemporary times, influences of enchanted worlds appear to be too localised, collective and cohesive to be discursively sustainable because globalisation breaks boundaries of time and place, disembeds and fragments knowledge[4] and puts psychic, social, temporal and spatial distance between individual moral subjects and communal practices (Giddens, 1990).

A possible consequence of disembedding belief from local communities of practice in favour of aggregations of ideas encountered in global cyberspace is the reflexive interiorisation by individuals of a self-selected, fragmentary moral order. These individuals would carry various versions of the world with them, constructed in a continuous, reflexive discourse of adaptation with individuated self-regulatory moral codes and self-selected explanations for the outcomes of their choices. The individualised self lives in a version of the world constructed by its own internal reflexive adaptation to pressures that disenchant the outer world. This interiorised version of the world replaces the communal version affirmed by ritual and dogma, practices that represent 'enchantment'. Adaptation, a form of cognitive reflexivity, frees individuals from the imposition of external localised spiritual sanctions, or tradition, that might restrain their ability to act or move by personal choice.[5]

A way modern individuals can free themselves from 'spirits and demons' of enchantment is by applying critique and empirical knowledge – 'proof' – to demystify external pressures of the enchanted world. 'Evil spirits' become 'mental illness'. 'Enchantment' is explained away as an effect of the individual psyche (Taylor, 2007), not a communal experience. Individuals selectively appropriate elements of discourse, whether enchanted or pragmatic, for their explanatory power to interpret, construct and inhabit the individual image worlds they create for themselves.

It would be a mistake to suppose that Taylor's buffered self is an isolated

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[4]   Smyth *et al.* (2000 in Hill, 2003) describe the process of appropriating bytes of incoming knowledge from global space as 'glocalisation'. This refers to the common sense reflexive use of traces of knowledge to perpetuate uninterrogated hegemonic assumptions.

[5]   Giddens (1990, p.109) describes the operation of secularisation: "Religious cosmology is supplanted by reflexively organised knowledge, governed by empirical observation and logical thought, and focussed upon material technology and socially applied codes. Religion and tradition were always closely linked, and the latter is even more thoroughly undermined than the former by the reflexivity of modern social life, which stands in direct opposition to it."

entity: in an earlier treatise his affirmation of the formative power of discursive interactions shows some affinity with social constructionist theorists:

> I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding – and of course, these classes may overlap. A self only exists within what I call 'webs of interlocution' (Taylor in Mulhall and Swift, 1992, p.111).

The 'buffered' self therefore, is constrained and shaped by social interaction to some extent. While nurturing personal agency becomes a prime objective of education, consensual norms that regulate social relations must inevitably emerge. Taylor hints at a relationship between ethics, cognition, critical reflection and self-actualisation in his proposition that "we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation to the good" (Taylor, 1990, in Mulhall and Swift, 1992, p.110). An orientation to the good, by definition the common good defined by morally cognate questions, can only be achieved by developing critical reflective thinking in the school and teacher education curriculum, a cognitive activity different from common-sense reflexive thinking.

Recognition of the significance of reason in directing reflective learning behaviour is implicit in one of the learning outcomes of the home language curriculum in South Africa's National Curriculum Statement (NCS) (2002), namely, 'Thinking and reasoning.' In addition, 'reflective practice' is commonly presented as an ideal professional modality in curriculum planning for teacher education programmes. A distinction is rarely made in programme rationales however, between adaptive reflexivity that inevitably characterises human behaviour in globalised milieux, and deliberate critical reflective processes undertaken in an effort to interpret and understand the self in relation to other selves and social phenomena. Norms governing adaptive reflexivity tend to be transient expressions of a prevailing 'zeitgeist'[6] that produces impulsive conformity to hegemonic forces, while the position of the critically reflective self is often characterised by resistance to dominant voices, and aspirations towards emancipation. This resistance can result from applying a lens of ethical principles in the gaze and arriving at a position that can be argued reasonably in terms of such principles. It is different from

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[6]   Zeitgeist: the defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time (Oxford Dictionary 2nd ed. 2003).

reflexive adaptation to a continuous stream of incoming information. Unlike reflective processes, reflexivity "actually subverts reason. . .We are abroad in a world which is thoroughly constituted through reflexively applied knowledge, but at the same time we can never be sure that any given element of that knowledge will not be revised" (Giddens, 1990, p.39).

On the other hand, in its uncritical conformity to zeitgeist, the adaptive reflexive self could be said to be vulnerable to its shifting 'spirits and demons' that are constructed by labelling and prejudice operating in expressions of uncritical common-sense social discourse.[7]

Taylor (2007) describes a shift from instrumental to expressivist reflexivity in Atlantic societies since the 1960s. This expressivist reflexive process generates belief in individual human beings' inner resources as the origin of 'authentic' creativity. The ideal is 'to be oneself' in order to self-actualise. Taylor sees this process as having generated a prevailing hegemonic philosophical ideal of 'authenticity' according to which what feels right for the individual subject is a moral good (Taylor, 2007). The trajectory of this proposition suggests that those enjoying hegemonic status may assume that the dispensation that feels right for them is right for everyone.

MacIntyre (in Mulhall and Swift, 1992) captures a similar theme in his term 'emotivism', but makes an important distinction between the meaning and the use of moral utterances by the 'emotivist self'. 'Emotivist' moral arguments are essentially manipulative in that an authoritative principled moral discourse inherited from the past is used to persuade others to alter their beliefs, not by means of a rational discussion based on impersonal criteria in the discourse, but by simply interpolating fragments of moral discourse into statements of one's own goals and values:

> By collapsing the distinction between personal and impersonal reasons, emotivism removes the possibility of treating persons as ends, as rational beings capable of making an independent assessment of what they take to be right; no moral debate can be anything other than an attempt to treat one's interlocutor as a means towards one's own goal, namely that of aligning her feelings to ones' own (Mulhall and Swift, 1992).

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7   For example, the common-sense label, 'human resources', connotes exploitable and expendable commodities rather than social beings looking for inclusion and opportunities to self-actualise through their work. The currency of the phrase, as part of the zeitgeist of the era, ensures that insecurity, rather than agency, defines the spirit of the workplace.

Emotivist discourse therefore represents a struggle for ascendancy between individuals. When the more powerful voice in a debate has brought its interlocutor into alignment with itself, 'common sense' is achieved between the parties in the debate. 'Common sense' does not necessarily mean that reason has prevailed in the debate, but that the power struggle has been resolved so that the interlocutor now subscribes to the assumptions carried in the terminology of the stronger voice. More widely applied, emotivist discourse represents contests between aspirant hegemonies in the body politic.

Emotivist discourse is not restricted to the level of the individual, but operates to cause social groupings to cohere and to justify the political goals of hegemonic forces. Dahlström and Lemma (2008)describe how emotivist discourse, in this case neo-liberalism that can be said to dominate the current zeitgeist of globalisation, operates at the level of hegemony:

> The transformative character of neo-liberalism is played out through its invisibility. This invisibility creates an imaginary consensus that gives the impression that we are all talking the same language and that we in principle also want the same things to be accomplished. For example, who can question learner-centred education if by that we discursively mean that the learner is at the centre of education? This consensus gets under our skin as common sense and becomes taken for granted. When the consensus has entered the docile stage the road is open to reduce educational practices into technical formulae easy to measure and manage to create the desired efficiency and control.

Tensions between the language of hegemonic reflexive adaptation to contemporary global neo-liberal imperatives, particularly in management styles, and traces of the rhetoric of emancipatory pedagogy hegemonic in liberation milieux in the 1980s and early 1990s have found their way into curriculum policy in South Africa. These tensions cause incoherence in current education discourse. For example, under the heading 'A vision of emancipatory education', Robinson and Meerkotter assert: "In South Africa, as is the case in other countries around the world, oppression manifests itself at many different levels. These categories of oppression often take the form of gender, race and class discrimination based on particular cultural, religious, economic and political world-views. . .[it] becomes the responsibility of the educator to participate in overcoming these forms of oppression, some of which might, in a very real way, also be the struggle or struggles of educators themselves" (2003, p.448). These concerns are echoed in the NCS: "Issues such as poverty, inequality, race, gender, age, disability and challenges such as HIV/AIDS all influence the degree and way in which learners can participate in schooling. The Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools) adopts an inclusive approach by specifying the minimum

requirements for all learners" (2002, p.2). The notions of 'minimum requirements' and 'inclusivity' seem to be contradictory and the standardisation specified under 'Common Tasks for Assessment' (2002) militates against non-standard entrants, for example, 'over-age' learners, participating in schooling. While acknowledging forms of disadvantage, the wording of the NCS is careful not to commit to unconditional inclusivity.[8]

It is not difficult to imagine how emotivist discourse causes stress for the globalised buffered self who is reacting reflexively to competing hegemonic pressures. Personal agency to navigate dilemmas has become the most obviously desirable modality of post-modern global living, but the compass is not clear. Individuals can find themselves exhorted either to apply 'critical thinking' or to be their 'authentic' selves in pursuit of fulfilment. The truly critical thinker can expect to be lonely if the culture is emotivist because rational thought would tend to be counter-hegemonic in such an environment. Ironically, in performance management protocols, neo-liberal managerial language requires 'authentic' selves to define their 'own goals', set 'personal' targets, carry out 'self-evaluation' and engage in individuated 'reflexive' processes to improve 'performance' for personal 'reward', usually remunerative and therefore extrinsic. While the language of personal self-regulation seems to admit the subject's agency into managerial procedures, all these processes that appear to accommodate aspirations of 'authentic' selves however, are only legitimate if they promote hegemonic action in measurable ways, usually expressed as 'strategic objectives'.

There is also tension between the ideals of reason and of authenticity[9] on a social level. Reason demands the application of rational critical argument based on 'universal' and ethical criteria to questions about value, while authenticity seeks solidarity with like-minded subjects. Reason subjects the

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[8]   See also Randall (1993) 'People's education and "nation building" for a new South Africa'.

[9]   In describing the present 'age of authenticity', Taylor quotes Brooks' description of the US upper class as pursuing ". . .a higher selfishness. It's about making sure you get the most out of yourself, which means putting yourself in a job which is spiritually fulfilling, socially constructive, experientially diverse, emotionally enriching, self-esteem-boosting, perpetually challenging, and eternally edifying" (Taylor, 2007, p.477).

self to rules of logical argumentation; authenticity is essentially concerned with self-display.[10]

Although the liberationist rhetoric of democracy may appear to create conditions in which modalities of reason and authenticity can co-exist, it will not resolve this particular tension, except perhaps to provide the means to de-legitimise physical violence between the contestants, creating the potential for a safe space for participation in the contest. For Walzer (in Mulhall and Swift, 1992) democracy is not about 'truth' or reason but about participation in law-making, even if the law is made 'wrongly'. This view suggests that democracy can only provide a safe environment for discursive interaction; it will not necessarily guarantee emancipation or freedom to exercise personal agency. A remedy for threats to agency however, appears to be available in reasonable discourses of constitutionality and rights that protect subjects from hegemonies.

The tension between the claims of individual agency and hegemony is explored in the paragraphs that follow.

Tensions in the language of globalisation: hegemony and agency

The operation of emotivist argument can be seen to appear in rationales for policy. The manipulative, rather than rational, use of moral signifiers means that the will to power in hegemonic language that exerts the most pressure can invade and distort discourses of morality. For example, the language of hegemonic market discourse is conflated with the language of morality in the vision of the ultimate outcome of South Africa's National Curriculum Statement:

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[10]   Taylor adds fashion to his three forms of horizontal social imaginary, namely, the economy, the public sphere, and the sovereign people, and describes how it operates to produce a sense of 'simultaneity' among people: "I wear my own kind of hat, but in doing so I am displaying my style to all of you, and in this, I am responding to your self-display, even as you will respond to mine. . . It matters to each one of us as we act that the others are there, as witness of what we are doing, and thus as co-determiners of the meaning of our action" (2007, p.481).

> A prosperous, truly united, democratic and internationally competitive country with literate, creative and critical citizens leading productive, self-fulfilled lives in a country free of violence, discrimination and prejudice (South Africa, *Government Gazette,* 31 May 2002, No 23406, p.13).

Market values of prosperity, global competition, productivity and the individual's accountability to oneself are presented as the hallmarks of success in instantiating morally acceptable conditions based on principles of respect for personhood (freedom from violence), equality (freedom from discrimination) and dignity (freedom from prejudice). The language of morality has been appropriated to validate market goals (Hill, 2003), but no rational argument is offered to explain how prosperity, global competition, democracy, productivity and self-fulfilment eliminate violence, discrimination and prejudice.

The chief vector of market-driven morality is a globalising neoliberal discourse of free trade that promotes fiscal efficiency in the distribution of educational resources as a prime value. Strategic measures that result from this discourse include low public expenditure, cost-control rather than demand-led budgeting, privatisation, competition between education 'markets', decentralisation, deregulation to improve chances of profitability, increasingly differentiated provision of services [local and global], selective education, corporate-style managerialism, and a deregulated labour force, for example, short-term contracts and casualisation of teaching input. Globally, neoliberal policies favour untrammelled access to states to set up profitable education institutions. To achieve this access, international capital aims through mechanisms such as the World Trade Organisation's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) to create a 'level playing field' between participating states, but in practice penalties and restrictions of access are not evenly applied to developed and developing economies (Hill, 2007).

The freedom that 'free trade' signifies is more apparent than real however, because it is restrained by a discourse of standardisation and bureaucratisation of education (Hill, 2003) that serves to produce a reliably measurable and mobile skilled global labour force. The specific needs of local contexts are unlikely to be prioritised unless they comply with the global educational norms measured in transnational benchmarking exercises. For example, the South African Schools Act (1996) makes it possible to exclude learners who are older than the age norms for their grades from the school system while making allowance for admitting underage learners. Age-norming in regular public schools has been tightened in spite of lack of progress in setting up age-

blind basic education institutions for learners who have fallen out of sync with norming practices, under-provision of vocational FET colleges especially in rural areas, the increasing number of AIDS orphans and households headed by children whose normal progress through the system is disrupted and the persistence of socio-economic conditions in which migrancy interrupts and delays progress through school.

When we consider the developmental challenges of diversity of every conceivable variation in South Africa, we can see that there are discrepancies between what we believe is desirable, namely, redress (South African Schools Act, 1996) and what we might actually achieve in education, namely, marginalisation of the most impoverished classes through standardisation of, for example, age and grade norms. While standardisation and uniformity tend to eliminate anomalies from the system in top-down processes, developmental approaches tend to be contextual, organic and target particular problems on the ground with unique remedies. This tension begs the question of whether bottom-up developmental imperatives are being overwhelmed by a standardising global hegemony or does the possibility of exercising localised agency to address diverse cases exist in this scenario?

Resistance in the discourse, rights and quality

While Althusser (in Phillips and Jørgensen, 2002) proposed that a dominant hegemonic ideological discourse overwhelms all alternative discourses to produce compliance, Fairclough draws on Gramsci to propose a definition of hegemony as the outcome of a process of negotiations of meaning that produces an evolving ideological consensus. According to Fairclough's view,

> The existence of such competing elements [in the discourse] bears the seeds of resistance since elements that challenge the dominant meanings equip people with resources for resistance (in Phillips and Jørgensen, 2002, p.76).

Fairclough's analysis opens the discourse to the possibility of using discursive resources agentically to resist dominant voices: "individual creative acts cumulatively establish restructured orders of discourse" (Fairclough in Phillips and Jørgensen, 2002, p.17). A paradigm that has re-emerged in recent decades to challenge and resist the neo-liberal hegemony can be discerned in a burgeoning discourse of critical literacy.

Critical literacy, like its antecedent critical pedagogy, legitimises its forms of

activity in terms of a human rights discourse. Fundamental to its ethos is a commitment to the exercise of personal agency governed by critical attention to universal egalitarian ideals dominated by the principle of emancipation from hegemonic social control. Dozier, Johnston and Rogers (2006, p.12) explain the ideal of agency behind a critical literacy approach to teaching and the social impact to which it aspires:

> We want our teachers to understand that through their teaching practice they can have an impact on others: students, teachers, schools, and society more generally. This is often referred to as agency: the idea that by acting thoughtfully, one may actually effect change (Johnston, 2004) . . . Agency can be viewed as essentially a personal narrative in which the self is a protagonist who confronts and solves problems, with associated motives and affect.

While the orientation of critical literacy approaches to human rights is generally recognized, the complexity of the human rights discourse itself gives rise to ideological battles over the distribution of resources and styles of governance, all of which argue their cases in terms of rights (Zafar (no date) in Hoppers, Gustavsson, Motala and Pampallis, 2007).

In 'announcing' his taxonomy of students' rights and conditions for their realisation, Basil Bernstein (1996) makes no apology for his failure to map the principled path that led to his formulation. Echoes of critical literacy and critical legal approaches however can be discerned in his model in its recognition of the student as situated in a set of inter-related discursive practices and subject to pressures in orders of discourse. Bernstein proposes that students' rights operate at three levels: individual, social and political. At the level of the individual, the student has a right to enhancement that is realised through a discourse of assessment practised as initiating the student across boundaries, not as gatekeeping. At a social level, students have a right to be included, but also to be autonomous. On a political level, students have a right to participate in procedures to do with governance. The conditions generated by these rights are described as confidence, communitas and civic discourse respectively. The purpose of the model is to provide a framework against which the distribution of rights in a school can be measured to see how equal or unequal it is. Bernstein claims that he has described conditions for an effective democracy and leaves it to the reader to deduce what he means by 'effective' from the elements of the model.

Conclusion: democracy, globalisation and quality

Teacher education programmes place education reform initiatives on different trajectories according to interpretations of the terminology of discourse, ideal models of practice that derive from these interpretations and most crucially from quality assurance and assessment practices in institutions. The critical questions in the Keralan concept note summarise the implications of the interpretations of key terms in the discussion so far:

● What is the significance of democratic education?

Democracy can only provide a safe environment for discursive interaction; it will not necessarily guarantee emancipation or freedom to exercise personal agency. The significance of democratic education for emancipation lies in rational discourses of constitutionality and rights that protect subjects from hegemonies.

● What is the relation between education and democracy?

Democracy will not determine what value stakeholders in education ascribe to its various processes, outcomes and actors or what kind of person emerges from the education process. Particular values endorsed by democratic processes can differ, depending on participants' qualities of reflection and values inherent in the modalities of education management. A national public education system may represent a reasoned consensus emerging from principled, critical, inclusive discursive negotiation at both policy and implementation levels of the system, or a display of hegemonic 'authenticity' that propagates uninterrogated mantras, for example, 'fit for purpose' and 'outcomes-based'. Left uninterrogated, these mantras operate on learning identities in ways similar to those of 'spirits' and 'demons'.

● What are the nature and depth of social control of education?

The nature and depth of social control depends on the impact of globalisation on local social cohesion.

In globalising conditions, local social control of education is dispersed. The learning individual constructs versions of coherence reflexively, a process often governed by hegemonic common-sense that is carried in virtual orders of discourse unconnected with local contexts and ideologies.

Globalisation is a powerful vector of hegemonic ideology. It fragments and disperses the situated coherence of local worlds, causing the individual to live reflexively to integrate disparate contacts, interactions across the limitations of time and space, disembedded images and messages and incoherent cultural exchanges into theories to live by. Theories could be rational and critical or expressivist and emotivist.

Paradoxically, an ideal secular democratic environment is dominated by the principle of emancipation from hegemonic social control while dependent on individuals' interiorising of universally applicable ethical standards of behaviour. Social control and the stewardship of the common good pass from authoritative communal exterior spiritual forces to interaction between individual citizens to create a consensus about values.

● What is the relevance of education in a secular society?

Personal agency is the defining characteristic of a secular person. This condition has inherent risks: the secular person's behaviour is not constrained by external 'spirits and demons' that protect the social cohesion of the community. Education in a secular society therefore, has to pay attention to the common good explicitly. Fundamental to its ethos is a commitment to developing personal agency governed by critical attention to the idea of universally applicable ethical ideals.

The fragmentation characteristic of the multi-modal globalised environment suggests that the achievement of personal agency in engaging in the quest for coherent meaning-making should be a key quality indicator in the system. Coherence would come from the integrative power of educators' and learners' personal interiorised critical principles to advance the common good. This implies that one of the most important tasks of curriculum reform would be to seek clarity on how to promote agency, reason, coherence, human rights and ethical dispositions in teaching and learning through evaluation and its rewards.

Just as the whole meaning of the pedagogical device is condensed in assessment practices (Bernstein, 1996), the whole meaning of an institution's education discourse is condensed and expressed in ascriptions of quality that play out in the deployment and distribution of resources and rewards.

Governance and quality assurance procedures shape the actual outcomes of teacher education programmes. Critical reflection on quality assurance protocols should reveal whether criteria derived from reflexive adaptation to hegemonic practices have become ends, or whether agentic learning, ethical participation in discourse and affirmation of human rights are likely to be definitive outcomes of teacher education institutions.

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