

Teachers' 'Small Stories' About Curriculum Reform in South Africa: 'Square Peg in a Round Hole'

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ABSTRACT The impact of neo-liberal curriculum reform policies is explored in the narratives of primary school teachers in South Africa. The central canons of critical theory and cognitive dissonance theory frame this study. The findings unveil 'small' stories that teachers tell about their experiences and negotiations with curriculum reform shifts from 1997 to 2012. Globalisation of neo-liberal educational policies has had a negative impact on education systems worldwide and the findings illumine the incongruities teachers encounter between policy and practice and the effect this has on their emotionality and identity. The necessary and crucial role of teachers as guardians of knowledge-power is highlighted amidst their inextricable relationships with globalisation, neo-liberalism, educational reforms and teacher work 'glocally'.

INTRODUCTION

The 'political schizophrenia' of the post-apartheid government is made conspicuous by its inability to plan and deliver a solid, public schooling system which has, to date, been faced with botched curriculum reforms, dismal Annual National Assessment (ANA) results and the failure to provide resource materials; amongst other challenges (Saunderson-Meyer 2013). A startling indicator is that one-third of the pupils who wrote the 2012 matric Maths paper scored below 20% ; more startling is the comment by the Basic Education Minister, Angie Motshekga, that there is an indication of "notable improvements in the education of children and society" (van der Merwe 2013).

An interesting body of research has emerged on recent trends in global education policy reforms, including in South Africa (Spillane 1999; Carnoy and Rhoten 2002; Fiske and Ladd 2004; Bond 2004; Chisholm 2007; Moloi et al. 2009; Chana 2010; Guro and Weber 2010; Priestley 2011). As with the case of many South countries (developing/ underdeveloped countries), South Africa's education reform policies were sourced from the North countries (developed countries) and were greatly impacted on by the neo-liberal-globalisation phenomenon and its processes. Scholarly research indicates that neo-liberal educational policies of Western democracies have a negative impact on countries in the South (Vongalis 2004; Weber 2007; Zajda et al. 2008), the

consequences of which are being increasingly felt in South Africa (Weber 2007; Moloi et al. 2009).

Recent research stirs current thinking around globalisation, its relationship with neo-liberalism and their simultaneous impact on educational reforms in nation states globally. Ideological and economic values are the major forces that shape education worldwide and it is important to analyse globalisation and its ideological packaging since it influences the general delivery of schooling globally (Carnoy and Rhoten 2002). In most instances, teaching is based on the notions of North countries and is cascaded and maintained by the imperatives of neo-liberal globalisation (Weber 2007). It must be noted that the South African education arena is, without doubt, unique and the consequences of apartheid, the inheritance of a fragmented education system, having numerous official languages and the poor socio-economic conditions of the majority are just some of the challenges that are faced.

Globalisation of neo-liberalism (with its special brand of knowledge-power) has increasingly managed to alter the political, economic and educational landscapes of the South. The dominance of neo-liberal reforms have filtered down to the local contexts of numerous nation states and in this way devolved neo-liberal knowledge-power from the 'top-down' through a hegemonic process (Carnoy and Rhoten 2002; Apple 2011). The endorsement of financially motivated educational reforms by international institu-

tions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) would inadvertently clash with equity-driven reforms in many countries.

Any education system must be 'guided by knowledge of that country, by familiarity with its history and unique qualities as well as by recognition of what it shares in common with other societies' (Arnove and Torres 1999: 7). One reason for the failure of neo-liberal reforms in South Africa is the advocacy of the 'one size fits all' approach; compelling teachers to teach according to standardised tests and to implement these reforms in vastly different contexts (Arnove 2005). These trends raise crucial debates about how most teachers experience globally driven neo-liberal reform policies within their local contexts (for example, Chisholm 2007; Costigan 2008; Levin and Nevo 2009; Shkedi 2009; Frempong et al. 2011; Priestley 2011).

Apart from school or 'didactic' curriculum, there exists an 'unwritten curriculum' that, although lacking formality and conscious planning, facilitates the learners' socialization process (Kentli 2009). Bowles and Gintis (1976) in (Kentli 2009: 85) assert that 'through formal and hidden curricula, schools reproduce the social relations necessary to maintain capitalism: competition and evaluation, hierarchical divisions of labour, bureaucratic authority and compliance.' Critical theorists, therefore, would corroborate that capitalism is propped up by a 'hidden curriculum' which legitimises the reproduction of social inequalities such as class. It is necessary, then, to ask: Whose knowledge exists and how did it become 'legitimate'? What type of relationship exists between this knowledge and the possessors of political, socio-economic and cultural capital? Who are the beneficiaries of this knowledge and who are the victims? (Apple 2008).

In restructuring post-apartheid state institutions, South Africa set objectives that were analogous to the globally driven neo-liberal framework and moulded its operational processes to serve global economic interests (Apple 2011). Almost two decades earlier, Apple (1993) had warned that neo-liberal ideology was being discreetly embedded within national curriculum and testing systems globally and the consequences of that would be devastating on the majority of the people. Unless the contextual realities of schools and the identities of teachers and learn-

ers are linked to the more tangible issues of educational policy and practice, a critical and democratic education will not ensue (Apple 2011).

Curriculum Reforms and Teacher Work: What is Research Telling Us?

From 1994, South Africa was burdened with the massive project of dismantling and re-structuring institutions that had survived more than a century of imperialism, colonialism and apartheid. The government had to deal with fragmented education policies and systems as well as the process of reconciliation and nation building (DoE 2001). To reform a highly fragmented and severely discriminatory educational system, various reform policies had to be designed, legislated and implemented.

A legitimate curriculum should seek to provide and promote firm direction as to what teaching and learning should consist of in regard to its pedagogical methods, content, duties of role-players, assessment strategies and so forth. The first curriculum reform initiative was Curriculum 2005 (C2005) in 1997 (Department of Education 2000). The waves of reforms after C2005 did very little to ensure the successful implementation of these policies (for example, Department of Education 2002, 2011). One intention of C2005 and its outcomes based education (OBE) approach was to improve the quality of learning utilising a learner-centred approach together with the principle of curriculum integration (Department of Education 2001). C2005 was criticised as being too complex and was consequently revised (Chisholm 2003). The DoE acknowledged, amongst other criticisms, that the curriculum design and structure was distorted and there was incongruity between curriculum and assessment policies (Chisholm 2003). Additionally, the language used in policy documents was confusing and that any forthcoming documents should be conceptually and structurally coherent (Department of Education 2001).

The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) was revised, becoming the revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) in 2002 with implementation beginning in 2004 (Chisholm 2004). The RNCS retained learner-centredness and curriculum integration as methodologies of practice; as is the case with the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) introduced in 2012 (Chisholm 2004). The RNCS was

expected to be the essential driver of change in the provision of quality education and was expected to be on par with global educational benchmarks (Department of Education 2008). These expectations seem way off the mark since recent research alludes to the many incongruities that exist within policy; and between policy and teaching practice (Weber 2007; Jita and Vandayer 2006; Moloi et al. 2007).

There is evidence aplenty to show that the quality of primary education in schools remains consistently poor (Soudien 2007; Christie 2008; Fleisch 2008; Taylor 2008, 2009; Bloch 2009; National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) 2013). This disappointing fact was highlighted in the grades 3 and 6 systemic evaluation research which showed poor levels of learner performance (Department of Education 2003, 2005).

Scholars have also highlighted South Africa's poor performance in international and regional achievement tests such as The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) tests, and the National Report: The State of Literacy Teaching and Learning in the Foundation Phase (for example, Soudien 2007; Taylor 2008, 2009; Frempong et al. 2011).

The Department of Education (2003: 101) accepted that 'there is considerable evidence that quality of education in South African schools is worryingly low relative to what South Africa spends on schooling'. Money being poured into the vacuous education system is still resulting in disappointing returns (Department of Education 2003; Saunderson-Meyer 2013). 'For what it spends on education – R24 000 per child per annum – South Africa scores among the lowest returns internationally' (Saunderson-Meyer 2013: 8).

The onslaught of neo-liberal education policies affects all countries; albeit in different, mostly negative ways. The pervasive negative influence of neo-liberal educational policies invades small, poverty-stricken states like Nepal where teachers have little, if any, say in policy (Carney 2003). Educational reforms in the Nordic countries have become increasingly managerial in nature (Carlgen and Klette 2008), whilst in India, European capitalism, now in the garb of neo-liberal educational reforms, is being repro-

duced in Delhi schools (Chana 2010). The growing influence of neo-liberal education policies raises crucial questions: What role does knowledge-power play in the devolution of neo-liberal notions from the global to the local? What forms does knowledge-power take whilst 'hidden' in devolving curriculum policy? What are the consequences for nation states, teachers and learners where the agenda is played out?

The key research questions were: How do teachers experience curriculum reform shifts? Why do they experience these shifts in particular ways? What are the ways in which curriculum reforms have positioned and re-positioned teachers at the school and classroom level?

Knowledge-Power in Curriculum

There is an inexorable conceptual relationship between knowledge and power; and schools are the sites where teachers and students should question this relationship (Aronowitz and Giroux 1993). Since schools are sites for the potential transmission of knowledge; and thus power, it should be acknowledged that this makes teachers, necessarily, guardians of this knowledge-power.

What counts as knowledge, the ways in which it is organised, who is empowered to teach it, what counts as an appropriate display of having learned it, and – just as critically – who is allowed to ask and answer all of these questions are part and parcel of how dominance and subordination are reproduced and altered in this society (Apple 1993: 222).

'Education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture [and] the curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation' (Apple 1993: 222). It must be realised that a national curriculum is an instrument for the political control of knowledge and we should question the origins, motives and consequences of it (Apple 1993). It is vital, then, that teachers realise these issues because the promoter of 'legitimate' knowledge is the indicator of who holds power in society (Apple 1993).

Framing of the Study

The study was framed by critical theory and cognitive dissonance theory while globalisation

and neo-liberalism were utilised as theoretical/conceptual tools.

Critical Theory

The main purpose of using critical theory was to investigate existing ideologies and practices embedded within curriculum reform in South Africa. The thrust of the investigation was to induce confrontation with issues of concern so as to highlight their complexities, incompleteness and contradictions, and ultimately to interrogate the social conditions of their existence (Young 1990). Critical theory is premised on the reality that humanity needs to be liberated given that people live in a world that 'accepts' the incongruities and asymmetries of power and privilege (Giroux 1983; McLaren 2007). It sees society as being in constant conflict due to the insidious, 'hidden' structural violence that exists within systems, institutions and processes. In essence, critical theory serves to illumine certain ideologically driven reform policies that underpin teachers' experiences (Giroux 1983, 1988; McLaren and Giarelli 1995).

Further, critical theory argues that a dialectical understanding of education allows us to view schools as sites of both domination and of liberation; where schools are not only seen as instructional sites but also as cultural sites that promote learner, communal and societal transformation and improvement (McLaren 2007). The theory suggests that the present schooling system, almost globally, serves to support an unjust neo-liberal ideology that transmits and maintains the dominant status quo; that being the division of labour in the interests of the capitalist, ruling class (McLaren 2007). Critical theorists seek to expose the rationale which is used to 'protect the positionality of those in economic authority and power, and to unravel the one-dimensional society that harnesses ideological "truths" as a way to outcast marginalised individuals, both psychologically and materially' (Sonu 2009: 90).

Only through the growth of teachers' understandings of the knowledge-power relationship can learners themselves be empowered to understand it and so bring about positive social change (Giroux 1993). At the core, teachers have to realise that school knowledge is inevitably tied in to power relations which produce 'truth' that is distorted: that which is manipulated, and which in turn, manipulates.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

To explore the emotionality and identity of teachers whilst negotiating zones of dissonance in curriculum reform policy and practice, the researchers drew on cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957). Cognitive dissonance is defined as a feeling of uncomfortable tension which arises from the dilemma of having to deal with two conflicting thoughts at the same time. The fluctuation and extent of dissonance is dependent upon the importance of the issue to the individual, how weakly or strongly the dissonant thoughts diverge, as well as the individual's ability or inability to rationalise the conflict (Aronson 1997; Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones 2007).

Festinger (1957) contended that dissonance is reduced by changing one of the dissonant elements, or adding new ones, until cognitive harmony is achieved – a process that is influenced by contextual factors. In the context of policy implementation and change, teachers may change their original thoughts, give strength to the opposing thought, or may let go of the particular policy implementation action or behaviour. A key issue not raised by Festinger is although individuals may aim for consistency between thoughts, attitudes and behaviours, they may not use very rational methods to achieve such harmony. Further, some individuals may be able to cope with dissonance in a range of complex ways and not experience the tensions the theory highlights. For example, Mattson and Harley (2001:293) in their study found that South African teachers reflected through their teaching enactments a "strategic mimicry" of policy expectations that resembled the imperatives of new regulatory policy but a deeper analysis revealed a superficial understanding of policy shifts.

In the study, the researchers explored the following questions: Do teachers experience cognitive dissonance whilst juggling policy directives and contextual challenges; and if so, what forms does it take, and in which zones of policy-practice does it manifest?

Theorising Globalisation

Globalisation, although frequently used as a construct in discourse and research, is poorly conceptualised (Scholte 2002; Ritzer 2007; Zaj-

da et al. 2008). Globalisation could be viewed as the widening, deepening and speeding up of global interrelatedness in all features of present-day political, social, educational, financial and spiritual life (Moloi et al. 2009). Globalisation, as a process, has created a vast network of relationships that involve international, transnational and local actors from diverse political-economies, conditions and circumstances. The socio-economic and political relationships which cut across the borders of nation states definitely command the destiny of people living within each state (Giddens 1998). There should be greater teacher awareness about the globalisation of neo-liberal educational policy since it is creating a crisis where teachers' work is becoming increasingly standardised, controlled and fragmented (Bottery 2006).

Theorising Neo-liberalism

'Neo-liberalism is ... a theory of political-economic practices that propose that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade' (Harvey 2005:2). Neo-liberalism has penetrated all major global organisations either under the direct political-economic pressure of some North countries or through other advocates of the free-market discourse (Stiglitz 1999; Harvey 2005).

Many international organisations are viewed as the main promoters of the neo-liberal agenda in discourse, policies and organisational practices of educational institutions globally. Moutsios (2009) magnifies the World Bank (WB) - International Monetary Fund (IMF) pairing; the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as some institutions that engage in, and manipulate, global policy making. These institutions collude to devise policies which decisively outline the direction and developments of national education systems (Moutsios 2009).

Hence, education policy-making is no longer the exclusive reserve of the nation-state. These international and transnational institutions provide the main frameworks for defining major, global educational aims, largely through non-democratic and doubtful procedures (Moutsios

2009). Critical theorists view neo-liberalism as a force that allows knowledge-power and wealth to be increasingly concentrated in multinational and transnational corporations that prop up such global institutions, resulting in the rise of capitalist economies with its attendant political ideology of a 'thin' democracy (Moutsios 2009).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Research Method

Narrative inquiry, in its broadest sense, means the examination of the stories that people tell since 'narrative is a vital human activity that structures experience and gives it meaning' (de Marrais and Lapan 2004: 104). By using narrative inquiry, rich, complex and holistic experiential data was elicited and this involved not only the examination of consciously told stories but also the deeper, underlying stories that people tell; stories that they are usually unaware of themselves (Bell 2002). Olson (2000) motivates for the utilisation of teachers' narrative knowledge, especially in discovering how curriculum is played out in the classrooms since stories should not be viewed merely as individual constructions but more importantly as cultural and ideological constructions as well (Bell 2003).

The study involved a synthesis of 'big' and 'small' story narratives. The 'big' story approach usually looks at life histories, biographies and similar meta-narratives to glean research data while 'small' stories tend to be brief narratives around specific events or issues (Bamberg 2006). 'Small stories are employed as an umbrella-term that covers a gamut of under-represented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell' (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008: 381). The big-and-small-story approaches complement each other and it is only by combining them that we can tell the full story of 'who we are' (Freeman 2006, 2011).

Research Site and Participants

Six Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6) teachers with more than 14 years of experience (3 female; 3 male) were purposively selected using the following criteria as suggested by Cresswell (2007).

They were available, willing to offer information, experienced in their field of expertise and able to shed light upon specific issues or phenomena under investigation. The voluntary participants were from a suburban, public primary school in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the participants; they being Daniel, Kabelo, Keeran, Oliver, Pauline and Shanice.

Data Generation

Biographical data was captured before the digitally recorded interviews were done and a loosely structured interview guide was used as the key data production strategy. Participants were interviewed at their convenience and the recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts, together with the recordings, were given to participants to verify that the interviews were conducted in an ethical manner and that no information was included, excluded, distorted or altered in any way. This practice ensured the trustworthiness of recorded data.

Data Analysis

A theme could be regarded as a topic or issue, in verbal dialogue or written text, which arises in a recurrent and patterned way. A basic prototype template containing thematic pre-selected or *a priori* categories (template analysis) was devised to guide the research process and was used as a funnelling search tool for thematic units that emerged from the narratives. Template analysis is versatile and allows for the alteration and amendment to the prototype template in the event that any suitable, emerging categories are discovered during analysis. The *a priori* categories were gleaned from an intuitive and methodical analysis of the verbatim transcription of the pilot interview whilst also being guided by the theoretical framework and the literature review. Thematic units (appropriate words and phrases) were lifted from the transcriptions; those that best conveyed the experiences of participants (de Marrais and Lapan 2004). Categorisation of these units revealed common themes. The themes, in turn, endeavoured to answer key research questions. A hybrid of template and thematic analyses afforded an enhanced critique of data through the critical theory lens.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, the researchers begin by discussing some zones of dissonance that teachers' encounter when negotiating curriculum reform policy and realities of practice: methodologies of practice (that is, learner centeredness and curriculum integration); interpretation of reform policy texts and marginalisation. This is followed by an examination of teacher identity and emotionality in the context of their negotiations. Finally, knowledge-power in curriculum is discussed.

Methodologies of Practice

Learner Centeredness: CAPS is intended to be 'a single, comprehensive, and concise policy document...[and] must not be seen as a new curriculum but only as a refined and repackaged National Curriculum Statements' (Government Gazette 2011: 3-4). The call for comments on CAPS was based on the assumption that the methodologies of practice, advocated by previous policies, would be neither retracted nor amended. Guro and Weber (2010) found that such neo-liberal curriculum reform concepts and methodologies, used in South countries such as Mozambique, were being neither properly understood nor properly utilised by teacher trainers.

The primary goal of a learner centered curriculum is to get teachers to guide learners to generate their own individual understandings of different forms of knowledge. Using this methodology, learners are supposed to cease being passive recipients of various knowledge forms and actively create their own meanings. This methodology, however, seems to pre-suppose that all learners possess appropriate prior knowledge and experiences, a pre-supposition that this study finds flawed.

Constructivism advocates learner-centredness with the view that any new knowledge grows through a process of construction and asserts that new knowledge arises from an individual's active construction, drawing on unique prior experience and knowledge as he or she strives to make sense of the world (von Glasersfeld 1989). Learner-centredness does not seem to account for the multitude of contextual factors which exist, commonly and uniquely, in their classes. Hence, the utilisation of learner-centred-

ness, as a pedagogical approach, has not materialised in most classrooms across South Africa (Harley and Wedekind 2004). Four teachers indicated that learner-centredness does not function well in the classes they teach and clung on to the traditional methodology. This is evident with responses such as: *'the older methods [traditional methodology]... (are) rather more suitable for our learners in South Africa'* [Daniel]; *'I felt with the OBE system it was a lot of group work and I couldn't get that working in the class'* [Pauline]. Teachers eventually reposition themselves; usually reverting to the traditional mode of teaching (Wallace et al. 2007).

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) results of grade eight learners in the United States showed that the traditional teacher-oriented methodology could be equated with notably higher levels of learner achievement (Schwerdt and Wuppermann 2011). Kirschner et al. (2006) stress the shortcomings of the constructivist OBE approach given the large class sizes, the demands of inclusive education and the diverse socio-economic and multicultural backgrounds of South African learners. They found that the benefits of guided learning diminish only when learners have adequately high prior knowledge to provide internal guidance. It seems that existing constructivist views have 'become ideological and often epistemologically opposed to the presentation and explanation of knowledge' (Kirschner et al. 2006: 84).

Curriculum Integration: A definition of curriculum integration should include some essentials: inquiry-based learning that draws from across learning areas, group teaching, learner-centredness and elevated levels of interaction between teachers and learners (Marnewicke 2008). Five teachers were unable to clearly define curriculum integration. Half of them believed that curriculum integration should be done incidentally and not specifically. The researchers' findings, resembling Marnewicke's (2008) South African study, reveal that teachers integrated concepts tacitly and unconsciously.

This study, echoing a Korean study, found that teachers lacked a theoretical framework for curriculum integration and tended to adopt a pragmatic approach to integration since the stipulated models for integrative planning were found to be useless or irrelevant (Park 2008). However, both, the Wallace et al. (2007) study,

in Australia, and the Shriner et al. (2010) study, in the United States, found that curriculum integration is a worthy cause that vitalises teachers and learners alike and facilitates interest in future learning activities. A logical compromise would be to encourage curriculum integration but leave it as the incidental work of teachers.

Interpretation of Reform Policy Texts

How did teachers' interpret the aims and purposes of CAPS as textualised in the final draft document? Half of the teachers demonstrated an inadequate knowledge of CAPS whilst the other half felt that CAPS will probably be a barrier rather than an improvement to teaching practice.

One of the most common ways in which structural violence exists in education structures is through elaborately textualised policies. Instead of being simple, clear and concise so as to pass on a singular statement or message, the CAPS final draft policy document tended to be convoluted and intellectually verbose. It seems that societal expectations and aims for education are often lofty, idealistic, incoherent and contradictory (Kennedy 2006). Teachers were asked to interpret two of the most vital statements made in the document: the aims and purposes of CAPS. Were the texts clear and simple to understand? Are textualised policies playing a role in the incongruity between policy and practice?

The first Statement (aims) reads: 'the curriculum promotes the idea of grounding knowledge in local contexts, while being sensitive to global imperatives' (Department of Basic Education [DoBE] 2011: 3). Is there a zone of dissonance in policy-practice when teachers interpret texts in policy? The majority of teachers admitted that the Statement lacked clarity: responses such as *'it sounds good but on probing it...I'm more confused now'* and *'I'm not sure...I'm not going to take a chance (to explain)'* are clear examples of this phenomenon. The teachers found themselves unsure and frustrated as to what the policy aims were actually trying to impart and found that

the way the documents are written by the Department, sometimes it can be very vague and very ambiguous...one has to just fumble around and decipher what is being said and we are taking that into our classes and assuming that this is what it means [Daniel].

All teachers found the second Statement (purposes) problematic to interpret because of the wording. It reads:

The National Curriculum Statement Grades R - 12 serves the purposes of equipping learners, irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability, with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment, and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country. (Department of Basic Education 2011:3)

The long-winded and ambiguous textualised statements contained in policy documents only seem to lead to confusion and misinterpretation. This is evident from the following comments where teachers make visible the linguistic (language/grammar) 'error' in text:

I don't teach try to teach my learners 'irrespective' of their socio-economic backgrounds. [Daniel]

...it says here 'irrespective'... the NCS doesn't serve that purpose. [Pauline]

We cannot say 'irrespective' and then take into consideration that we want to make meaningful participants in society. [Keeran]

Marginalisation

The waves of reforms did not find favour with teachers resulting in feelings of despondency, oppression and marginalisation. Teachers should *'be part and parcel of ... trial policy implementation so that it's done in conjunction with the people who are actually at school level'* [Daniel]. Marginalisation of teachers effectively reduces their role to one of a highly managed, 'semi-skilled, low-paid' administrator (McLaren 2007).

The reality of power and powerlessness seems to exist in the relationship between the Department and the teacher. Teachers' verbalisations clearly reveal the structural violence that exists within the South African education system. The observation of the alleged abuse of power by the Department against teachers leads to another zone of dissonance in policy-practice and eventually manifests as identity and emotional crises for the teachers themselves. Teachers explained that the reforms are carried out *'very unilaterally... it's not consultative... it's exercise of power'* [Daniel] and *'the Department just imposes...'* [Kabelo]. Teachers' subservient positions are evidenced:

Our government just seems to throw things at teachers. [Daniel]

I have serious problems with the way new policies are continuously thrown at the teacher. [Shanice]

We've come from so many [reforms] ... that have been thrown at us. [Keeran]

In summation, the Department is painted as exclusionary and oppressive:

'We're professionals, we're educators, we're critical thinkers [yet] it's just disturbing to me ... to know that I'm not being consulted within the area I feel I have the level of knowledge and competence to have a voice in' [Daniel].

Teacher Identity and Emotionality

Teaching is an emotional activity and emotions usually shape cognitions which may affect teachers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for curriculum delivery consequently affecting learners' emotions and their performance (Vilavicencio 2010). Emotions that arise are inextricably connected to teachers' personal and professional selves; hence, to understand emotionality in teaching one has to understand the lives of the teachers themselves. Cognitive dissonance could result in mental and physical distress such as anxiety, stress, depression and high blood pressure in turn leading to ill health, burn-out and resignation from teaching (Vandenberghe and Huberman 1999; Calderhead 2001 in van Veen and Slegers 2006).

Changing the title of teachers (teacher-facilitator-educator) leaves teachers perplexed as to their identities and their roles; yet *'it's the same person... we're just swapping titles'* [Shanice]. It seems that 'swapping titles' is irrelevant to teachers since policy cannot change the reality of who a teacher is, or what a teacher does.

The inability of learners to cope with the demands of curriculum policy resulted in the teacher being unable to cope with the situation. Most teachers displayed cognitive dissonance when dealing with learners who did not possess the expected prior knowledge and experiences; as well as when dealing with policy, which most found *'confusing and frustrating'* [Kabelo]. The incapacity of the teachers to juggle policy demands and the realities of practice leaves most of them frustrated and confused over their expected duties, their daily practice and their personal and professional identities (Jita and Van-

dayer 2006). This is especially seen when teachers try to 'force' methodologies of practice that are incongruent with realities of practice.

Teachers' emotions and identities have an impact on learner performance in class and their beliefs, values and emotions play a vital part in their decisions, actions and reflections on the various definitions, purposes and methodologies of teaching (Zembylas 2005). It seems that teachers merge their personal and professional identities and their classrooms become the primary location for the fluctuation of their self-esteem and their vulnerabilities (Zembylas 2005). Teachers harbour expectations of both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and if the rewards are seen as worthwhile then teachers' emotional and intellectual needs are fulfilled; alternatively, emotional suffering by the teachers could result in burnout (Zembylas 2005).

Could a teacher's identity be altered in the context of educational reforms? A Netherlands teacher displayed negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, guilt and shame and this influenced his work and negatively affected his moral, personal and social identities and reduced his enthusiasm for reform measures (van Veen et al. 2005). Current neo-liberal policies are inundated with contradictions and teachers' work is usually treated in a technical, 'top-down' manner (Van Veen et al. 2005). The emotional and identity crises faced by the teachers in the study seem to be the result of their vacillation between policy expectations and the contextual realities of their classes.

Knowledge-Power in Curriculum

How do teachers conceptualise knowledge and power? Knowledge is defined by the teachers as '*useful information*' which is acquired from '*experience*' and that which should be '*shared*'. The by-product or derivative of knowledge seemed to be confidence. Teachers saw power as 'authority' or 'the ability to control' with the by-products being independence, and again, confidence. '*Knowledge is power*' [Daniel]. Teachers shared a collective positioning on their definitions of knowledge and power; seeing knowledge as equivalent to, and synonymous with, power.

Critical theory views knowledge, however and wherever acquired, as a social construction that is 'deeply rooted in a nexus of power rela-

tions'; that which is never objective or neutral but historically, socially and interest bound (McLaren 2007: 197). Therefore, schools are sites where teachers and learners should understand and assimilate how, and why, knowledge and power are constructed (Aronowitz and Giroux 1993). Given that teachers transmit neo-liberal knowledge-power, it should be acknowledged that this makes teachers, necessarily, guardians of this 'legitimate' knowledge-power. Being guardians of knowledge-power places teachers in an extremely significant, duty-bound and powerful position. Yet, do teachers critically question their status as guardians of knowledge-power? Do they ponder the origins and legitimacy of the 'legitimate' knowledge-power they transmit?

Is the knowledge that is being disseminated empowering learners? Not all learners are learning and '*one would have to say that, with a level of doubt ... we actually are empowering them as we should be empowering them*' [Daniel]. Contextual factors were cited as the leading obstacles to the empowerment of learners. Some of the obstacles noted were:

lack of resources; large class sizes; money; what is done in the class; the environment they are coming from; lack of parental involvement and mixed abilities in the class.

Policy expectations seem to be based on a false perception that all learners learn and assimilate knowledge in a similar manner. Most teachers observed that learners were seriously lacking in appropriate prior knowledge and experiences:

Our expectation of the learners coming with prior knowledge will not be realised...because of the language barrier and their limited experiences [Keeran].

Teachers have numerous contextual factors to address before, during and after actual teaching and learning takes place. Additionally, the planning and delivery of lessons are not linear processes; the very nature of teaching demands that freedom and agency be given to teachers so that they, in their personal and professional capacities, could enhance their own work. Certain teaching practices and methodologies are considered superior in allowing learners to absorb knowledge yet no knowledge exists that allows for teachers to simultaneously consider all areas of their work (Kennedy 2006).

Curriculum seldom refers to the knowledge needed for teaching but more often refers to the

process of teaching while avoiding the multiplicity of factors that affect teachers' work (Kennedy 2006). Knowledge that is to be taught via curriculum cannot be derived from outcome statements but can only be found and organised according to the values and principles that are available to the teachers delivering this knowledge (Allais 2007). By lowering the status of knowledge to just a vehicle for achieving outcome statements, OBE could actually make an education system worse, especially in South countries (Allais 2007).

CONCLUSION

Admittedly, this was a small scale research study, however, the study has unveiled the 'small' stories teachers tell about their experiences and negotiations with curriculum reform shifts in South Africa from 1997 to 2012. The study illuminates key complexities that emerge when teachers vacillate between devolved neo-liberal education policies and the realities of their practice.

Methodologies of practice, interpretation of policy texts and marginalisation of teachers in the policy development process were detected as zones of dissonance. Globalisation of neo-liberal educational policies has had a negative impact on education systems worldwide. The study reveals the incongruities teachers encounter between policy and practice and the effect this has on their emotionality and identity. The emotionality of teachers is hardly considered in policy planning or implementation yet the mental health and wellbeing of teachers is of vital importance as they are the main distributors of knowledge-power.

The study suggests that teachers' critical awareness of the incongruities between policy-practice could be utilised by the Department to ensure that authentic grassroots feedback informs policy-making. Appropriate forums could be the future arena where critical engagement and negotiation occur amongst the relevant stakeholders, over issues and struggles in areas of policy-practice.

The necessary and crucial role of teachers as guardians of knowledge-power is highlighted amidst their inextricable relationships with globalisation, neo-liberalism, educational reforms and teacher work 'glocally'. The study suggests that teachers need to become more aware of the

ideologies that articulate their work and critically question the origins, purposes and legitimacy of neo-liberal education policies.

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