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Redressing Educational Inequalities: A Classroom Perspective

Makola Collin Phurutse

(Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa)

Abstract

This paper examines instructional strategies of rural teachers in Limpopo Province (one of the poorest province in South Africa). It focuses on how teachers attempt to facilitate access to disciplinary knowledge and builds on the growing literature that indicates that educational disadvantage is partly due to the quality of transactions between the teacher and the learners. The paper concludes that analyzing specific classroom episodes provides an important avenue of improving teaching and the professional development of teachers.

Key words: Educational disadvantage, epistemological access, and teaching

1. Introduction

This paper is derived from a larger study that examined instructional approaches of six rural teachers in three secondary schools. It focuses on how teachers engage with the evaluative criteria of a lesson and by so doing provide access to disciplinary knowledge. The central claim of the paper is that there is a need to examine specific classroom episodes (minute) and establish whether they enable or inhibit access to the disciplinary knowledge. It develops an analytical framework borrowing from Bernstein's language of description of instructional and regulative discourses in examining classroom lesson data and concludes that educational disadvantage can partly be addressed by analysing the quantity and quality of transaction that takes place between the teacher and the learners.

2. Background

A significant number of educational analysts argue that in order to redress and tackle differential educational outcomes, researchers need to focus on the broader socio-economic system (Apple, 1990 and 1996; Graaf, 1993; Deacon and Parker 1993; NEPI, 1992; Gordon, 1999). It is rightly asserted that in families and communities that are economically depressed, unstable, and characterised by gangsterism and

violence, the level of learners' achievement is severely restricted compared to that in middle class communities. For example, Apple (1996) argues that "schools are connected to the larger economic, cultural, and ideological conflicts" and the curricula, teaching, and assessment need to be situated within the wider social context (p.96). He argues that the attempts to build more just models of curricula and teaching are crucial first steps, but that concerted efforts need to be made to comprehend how the unequal economic and social order shapes the daily lives in schools.

On a similar point, Graaf (1993) observed that "The economic and social environments in which children and their families find themselves determine a great deal about their performance before they walk in the school door" (p.229). This points to the need to take into account the conditions in the community before considering what takes place in the classroom around the subject matter. Deacon and Parker (1993) contend that in order to improve schooling, solutions should be broadly conceived to include an analysis of the inequalities in the larger society:

...it would be a mistake to assume that these conditions (educational underachievement in rural schools and communities) can be alleviated and inequalities overcome through quantitative and qualitative changes in education provision. Any attempt to redress inequalities without appreciating that these are a symptomatic consequence of modernity and of power relations that penetrate and permeate schooling is bound to fail. (p.130)

The merits of seeing schools in relational terms, that is, its connection with the larger political, economic, and social set-up, is not disputed here. Notwithstanding, the focus in this paper is on instruction: how teachers open access to disciplinary knowledge and encourage and develop meaning-making in the classroom for their learners. It is the argument of this paper that teachers' inability to open access to the disciplinary knowledge enhances the production of educational disadvantage and inequalities. Classroom practices and the learning environment created by the teacher profoundly shape the learning experiences of learners and constitute an important area of study in the pursuit of educational quality and equality.

Morais, (2002) asserts that there is "a text legitimised and valued by school and by society to be learned and all students should have access to that text". As Morais (2002) contends:

pedagogic practices can be changed in order to obtain better school results, particularly with children of disadvantaged social groups; without such educational innovation, schools institutionalise inequalities in the acquisition of the discourses of power and in access to the power of the discourse". (p.16)

She argues that if some learners are not given access to the legitimised and valued text, often as a result of teachers' classroom practices, the education system will be perpetuating educational inequalities rather than eradicating them. According to Morais (2002), poor pedagogic practices result in low levels of scientific learning and a high differential achievement between learners (p.12). To work towards high educational achievements by all learners, we need to attend closely to pedagogic practices as enacted by teachers in real classrooms. Research results by Morais (2002) indicate that the effect of pedagogic practice can overcome the effect of students' social background, even when students' achievement refers to the development of complex cognitive competencies (p.16).

To further this aim, this paper draws on studies that call for a closer examination of what happens at the 'chalk-face' or the classroom (Knapp 1996; Singh, 2000; Boaler, 2000; Anyon, 1981). These studies illustrate that inequalities in education are often produced and reproduced as a result of the quality and amount of instruction learners receive in school. They attempt to demonstrate that opportunities for higher level thinking are inequitably distributed in schools and this serves to maintain the structural class inequalities that exist in many societies. Anyon (1981) observes that, "schools in poor and working class areas discourage personal assertiveness and intellectual inquisitiveness in students and very often assign work that most often involved substantial amounts of rote activity" (p.203).

For Boaler (2000), teachers' mediation of different curriculum approaches is central to the attainment of equity. Boaler (2000) talks of a pedagogy of poverty in the sense that learners (especially those from working class backgrounds) are denied access to solid disciplinary knowledge because of teachers' classroom practices.

Emphasising the importance of examining what and how teachers teach (in the case of the United States of America), Green (1999) asserts that:

All of the reform rhetoric and ambitious plans discussed in the governor's conferences and in so many policy papers will be of little value unless they lead to changes in the day-to-day instructional practices of teachers in our schools. State and federal policies must be directed toward putting in teachers' hands the tools they need to enable all children to meet the demanding standards required by our society, our economy and our political leadership. (p.4)(emphasis added).

Green's (1999) emphasis on the 'day-to-day instructional practices of teachers' is important for his claim that policies often fail because of the apparent neglect of focus on classroom interactions. A related issue is that in the few studies that examine classroom practices, surveys are used (Rowan, 2000), with less extensive classroom observations. Not only do we need to pay more attention to instructional practices but we need to do so by using methods of inquiry that yield substantive evidence of teachers' instructional strategies.

3. Methodology

In an attempt to capture the classroom practices of teachers in rural schools, this paper used interpretive case study. A number of authors note that interpretive/exploratory research (non-evaluative case study methodology) is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery and interpretation, rather than in testing hypothesis (Stake, 1991 and 2000; Eisner, 1990; Sharon, 1998; and Yin, 1994). The primary aim of conducting a non-evaluative case study is to gain insight into the phenomena studied instead of refuting certain claims and conclusions. The emphasis is on interpretation and discovery rather than on establishing whether a theory is valid or not. This does not mean that testing theories or hypotheses is unimportant, only that it does not constitute the central focus of a case study.

3.1 Data Collection Techniques

3.1.1 Video Recording

The primary data sources in this research were video recorded lessons. Some analysts note that a video recorder (VCR) provides unique potential in data gathering and analysis and enables researchers to leave controlled laboratory settings and enter naturalistic fieldwork (Roschelle, 2000 and Kelly 2000).

Roschelle (2000) argues that one of the strengths of video is that it offers repeated viewing. As he puts it, "watching a rich complex scene many times often can lead to insights that cannot be gleaned from a textual transcript of the same scene" (p.726). Erickson (1986) similarly notes that the video provides the capacity for completeness of analysis. Because of the theoretically unlimited opportunity for revisiting the recorded instance by replaying it, the instance can be observed from a variety of attentive foci and analytical perspectives. This enables a more thorough description than those that can be prepared by a participant observer from field notes (p.145).

The video could also be watched with both research participants and supervisors at the university. Joint viewing with research participants creates an opportunity for getting the participant's point of view about his or her behaviours. Watching the video with university supervisors opened up some of the important points teachers were making that eluded the researcher. The researcher shared video clips with three staff members in the School of Education, and one at the College of Education.

Each school has approximately 600 learners and 14 staff members.

Table 3 Profiles of the Schools

INDICATING RESOURCE ALLOCATION OF THE TWO SCHOOLS		
	Thuto	Lebone
No of classrooms	12	7
Principal's office	None	None
Staffroom	2(classrooms)	None
Water	Mono pump	Tab
Electricity	Solar energy (installed in 2002)	Yes (only one classroom)
Telephone	Cell	Cell
Library	None	None
Laboratory	None	None
Fenced	Yes	Yes
Photocopier	None	None
Computer (admin)	None	None
Television set	Yes	None

School building	Good	Good
Type writer	Yes	Yes
School fees	R50	R50
School clerk	None	None

The material bases of these schools fit the description provided by the recent School Register of Needs (2001) that found most rural schools to be under-resourced and financed, with poor and dilapidated school buildings. The profile of the teacher also fits the general observation that most rural teachers have three year teacher certificates with no postgraduate qualifications and a lack of majoring in the subject they teach. Mr Mahlare did not take economics as his major in his professional training but is presently working for a Bachelor of Arts degree with the University of South Africa majoring in economics and anthropology. He is in the age group of 35-40 and has about 6 years teaching experience. He previously worked as a clerk/administrator at the same school before studying at the local teachers' college.

3.2 Analytical Strategy and Results

Data has been analysed using a number of techniques:

3.2.1 Instructional Discourses

In analysing teachers' instructional approaches derived from classroom observation lesson data, the focus was on issues present within the strategies, that is, instead of focusing on what is missing in teachers' talk, the attention was on presences. In this study it was less important to discuss issues that were not observed, such as why a teacher did not engage learners in group work or why learners were not encouraged to undertake independent work or project work. Rather the emphasis was on aspects of instruction that can be captured via the teachers' actual teaching strategies.

The analytical frame developed in this paper drew from the work of Bernstein (1990 and 1996), wherein he talks of language of description of pedagogical discourses – regulative and instructional discourses. This was used to facilitate descriptions of teachers' moves in their attempt to create epistemological access into the substance of

what they teach. This analytical frame informed data interpretation and the analyst worked out categories that were mainly derived from classroom lesson data to make sense of teachers' instructional approaches. Great care was taken to ensure that the categories were developed sufficiently to capture classroom processes.

The main study identified the following themes as critical in classroom practices, themes also derived from the literature review: Making school knowledge relevant to everyday life by: (a) crossing boundaries and foregrounding specialised knowledge (b) recruiting common stock of knowledge and (c) code-switching.

- Demarcating evaluative criteria.
- Making the objective of the lesson explicit.
- Indicating different ways of reading a text.
- Working with the inputs of learners (over-hearing and under-hearing).

But in this paper the discussion will be restricted to one aspect only, that is, the focus is on how teachers demarcate criteria as a way of facilitating access to specialised knowledge.

Still, the examples provided in the discussion of the one aspect selected from the many do not cover all the sampled teachers, due to the narrow confines of this paper (For detail coverage of the discussion of these issues, see Phurutse, forth coming). It is important to emphasise that what follows is a selection of examples and they illustrate one aspect/theme only, that is, making evaluative criteria explicit.

3.3 Demarcation of evaluative criteria

A number of authors, nationally and internationally argue that demarcating evaluative criteria is critical in teaching. For example, Bernstein (1996) posits that a key function of pedagogy is to transmit the criteria against which any discursive performance is judged as legitimate. Recent research on classroom teaching suggests that transmitting evaluative criteria to learners gives them a sense of what is expected from them (Morais, 2001 and 2002). Morais (2001) argues that demarcating evaluative criteria constitutes a key feature of productive instructional approaches. Building on the work of (Morais and Pires, 2002), Muller and Taylor (2002) also assert the importance of

explicating the evaluative criteria so that learners know the criteria against which their answers or texts will be assessed. As they put it:

Considering the importance of clearly telling children what is expected of them, of identifying what is missing in their textual production, of clarifying the concepts, of leading them to make synthesis and broaden concepts and considering the importance attributed to language as a mediator of the development of higher mental processes, one understands the influence of making evaluation criteria explicit. (p.9)

In essence, Muller and Taylor suggest that, without clear articulated evaluative criteria, learners will find it difficult to produce legitimate and complete texts. Teachers should indicate to learners what is needed and what should be excluded. In this way, teaching will facilitate production of valid texts. It is further suggested that teachers should explain to learners how to go about tasks. The analysis of the instructional approaches the teachers use in this research in (re)presenting the subject matter contains certain key features that indicate some interesting attempts to demarcate evaluative criteria. The evaluative criteria in some instances is demarcated explicitly, whereby the teacher tells the learner(s) exactly what is wrong with their answers/responses while in other instances the demarcation is more implicit.

In their analysis of teachers' classroom practice with a focus on scientific competency, Morais and Pires (2002) affirm the importance of deep conceptual knowledge of the discipline and argue that teachers need to make the evaluation criteria explicit. They point out that in their research the most crucial aspect was explicating the evaluation criteria:

The aspect which is revealed to be most crucial in the research we have carried out is the explication of evaluation criteria, that is, the presence of a strong framing at the level of this discursive rule. Such explicitness, which in our studies was achieved by making clear to children the specificity of a given context and what needed to be added to their textual production for it to be correct in both transmission and evaluation contexts, seemed to help them in acquiring both recognition and realisation rules. (p.12)

Morais and Pires emphasise that "if a crucial condition for efficient learning is a high scientific competence of the teacher, the explicating of the evaluation criteria will only lead to an efficient learning when that competence exists"(p.14). Making the

evaluation criteria explicit indicates to an extent the conceptual understand of the discipline by the teacher.

Demarcating evaluative criteria is one way of facilitating access to disciplinary knowledge. In his analysis of higher education, Morrow distinguishes between two types of access: formal access to education and epistemological access. The former involves primarily admission and registration within an educational institution (being able to pay tuition fees and the physical access to the institution - whether students commute long distances or not), while the latter has to do mainly with initiation into the discourse and practices of the discipline (how to engage students into the knowledge of the course for which they have formally registered). Enormous efforts are being made in South Africa by the National Department of Education and various institutions of higher learning to equalise formal access among the different racial groups. However, by examining epistemological access, analysts are able to tell whether students who enrolled at institutions of higher learning are graduating within the set time frame or not. This problem of epistemological access can be further compounded by the fact that graduation levels can be high but with the learners having inadequate knowledge of the disciplines they enrolled for.

Bak (1998) argues that for epistemological access to be realised, students must be able to construct arguments and see how evidence is used. This implies an understanding of the history of the practices associated with learning a discipline of knowledge, the changes in concepts that shape the practice and the reasons for the changes. Epistemological access deals with issues of competence and success within a discipline. Learners are socialised into the practices of the discipline. Bak points out that the question of epistemological access can be addressed on a number of levels: organisation and the presentation of knowledge so that students can engage with it; organizing the learning practices of the learners; and constructing a specific learning environment for the particular students of the course.

In summary, therefore, the paper argues for an analysis of the quality of transactions between the teacher and the learners and determines whether the instructional approaches teachers use open or inhibit access to disciplinary knowledge. It is argued here that if teachers engage in productive instructional discourses that facilitate access

to the specialized knowledge of the school, they will be directly contributing towards the eradication of inequalities in education - inequalities that are reflected in the differential performance outcomes, where the previously disadvantaged schools and communities continue to lag behind the well endowed communities and schools. While this paper focuses on instructional approaches, it should be noted that important work in teaching also occurs outside the classrooms, such as professional exchange among teachers, and between teachers, principals, parents and others in the community.

3.3.1 Classroom Observation Lesson Data

Extract 1: Indicating misconceptions and fallacies

This extract is taken from lesson 4 taught by Mr Mahlare¹ at Thuto Secondary School. The topic of the lesson is 'productivity' and is part of module 8 in learners' texts that deals with productivity and unemployment. The teacher changed the sequence of the module and instead of starting with productivity decided to start with unemployment (see extract 2 at the beginning of this chapter). In the extract Mr Mahlare explains the meaning of 'productivity' and identifies its key features. He explains that there are misconceptions or fallacies that are associated with productivity. The extract is noted for the attempt the teacher makes to demarcate evaluative criteria. It starts at the beginning of the lesson. The normal rituals of exchanging greetings between the teacher and the learners, and establishing who is present and not, have been left out due to space constraints.

1. *Teacher (T):* Productivity is the relationship between goods and services and the resources used to produce it [productivity] to indicate efficiency.
2. *T:* What we mean is this: on the one side we have goods and services and on the other side we have resources or the factors of production.
3. *T:* Goods and services are on the one side and resources on the other side and we are talking of the relationship between goods/services and resources. And the emphasis is on efficiency.
4. *T:* Right there is misconceptions or fallacies that are to do with productivity.
5. *T:* Where many people think we are looking at where people have to work hard. It does not necessarily mean that if people work hard, they are productive. Do you understand?
6. *Learners:* Yes

¹ Pseudonyms have been used to protect the confidentiality of the research participants and their schools

7. *T*: And the second one being that the number of units that are produced is what is important. It is not correct because by productivity, we are looking at the quality and quantity.
8. *T*: The number of units that are produced are taken into the picture but whether we need the set standard is another thing we take into account.
9. *T*: Quantity and quality are important when we talk about productivity. And to work hard producing goods which are not of good standard is not correct.
10. *T*: We look at whether the goods are of acceptable standard.

Mr Mahlare partially explains the meaning of productivity in turn 1. In turn 4, he states that there are misconceptions associated with productivity, for example, where it is assumed that if one works hard there is productivity. He contends that productivity does not depend on people working hard (Turn 5 and 8) but rather on the quality of the product, indicating that often people think that if they produce many items in a short time, they are productive (Turn 6, line 1). People can work hard and still produce work of questionable standard, which will be unproductive. The time people take to produce goods does not tell us much about the quality of the products. In turn 7 Mr Mahlare asserts that "it is not correct" to think that the number of units produced is all that matters when examining productivity. He points out that "quantity and quality" matter a great deal in assessing productivity (Turn 6 and 8). In turn 9, he again indicates that the products should be of 'acceptable standard'. By identifying key features of productivity - quantity and quality - and how they are related, he implicitly demarcates what does and does not belong to productivity. Working hard and producing goods of low standard cannot be defined as being productive (line 5 and 6). Similarly producing many units of unacceptable standard is unproductive. (Turn 9). In this extract the teacher clearly delineates what is important and what is of less significance.

But it would have been more productive had the teacher explicitly told learners what an adequate and legitimate answer in respond to the definition of productivity would be. By making the evaluative criteria of how we define productivity and what is included and excluded within the definition, gives learners a sense of how to produce valid answer(s). Although the teacher does this by talking about fallacies and misconceptions, it is not overly clear that this is the evaluative criterion that will be used to assess the legitimacy of learners' inputs and answers.

Mr Mahlare also indicates relationships between goods/services and factors of production in explaining productivity (Turn 1). Goods and services are closely related to resources or factors of production and learners should be able to see this relationship. They should treat goods/services and resources/factors as closely related. He emphasise the relationship by repeating it in turn 3, thus implying that if the goods and services are treated as separate from resources or factors of production, there will not be productivity.

Extract 2: Blurring boundaries and explicitly foregrounding disciplinary knowledge

In the following example from Lesson 3, this time on Productivity and Unemployment, the same teacher, Mr Mahlare, situates the example within the learners' common understanding and everyday life in the community. He introduces the topic – unemployment - and outlines the sequence of how it is going to be treated. He says that the class is firstly going to examine the definition of unemployment, that this will be followed by a presentation of its causes and then its consequences. The last aspect they are going to treat are the measures to combat unemployment. Earlier in the lesson, the teacher provided a definition of unemployment and explained that the way it is defined in economics differs from a common sense/everyday definition, for the reason that economists are looking at people who are qualified for a specific job. After explaining the factors that cause unemployment the teacher presents a problematic to the learners. The problematic makes a distinction between everyday understanding of issues and disciplinary understanding. The extract commences where the teacher tells the learners that the percentage of unemployed people in the country is approximately 44%. Now he wants to find out whether a learner who has passed matric ('a school leaver') should be included in this figure of unemployed people. The teacher then gives learners the following 'problematic':

1. *Teacher (T)*: Right, firstly I am going to give you a statement and tell me whether the person is employed or not.
2. *T*: Right, we have a school leaver who has just completed grade 12. He is willing to work as a mechanic at the current salary scale. But he does not find

- employment. Is he unemployed or not? Should we include such a person in this 44% [pointing to 44% on the chalkboard]? How many of you say yes? [some learners chorused "yes" while some isolated voices said "yes"].
3. *T*: Do you say no? I think those of you who say no, must give us a reason(s) why you say no.
 4. *T*: We do not include him when we count people who are unemployed. I remember Thebjane, Magole, Sheila, they said no. Ya, did you say no, Semakane?
 5. *T*: Why do you say no? We must not include him in the list of unemployed.
 6. *T*: Evelyn? You don't know.
 7. *T*: Thebjane, or you just took a guess or you go with the majority.
 8. *T*: Eh I am going to repeat this statement. Listen very carefully. What I said is this. A school leaver has just completed grade 12. He is looking for employment. He is willing to work and willing to accept the current salary scale. He cannot find work. Is he unemployed?
 9. *T*: Okay how many say yes and how many say no? Raise up your hands. I am remaining with, 2, 3 and the others have decided to join those who say yes. Do you agree that he is unemployed?
 10. *Learners*: Yes.
 11. *T*: No [pointing to qualified on the board]. Is he a mechanic? No [emphasised].
 12. *T*: To be unemployed you must have the necessary qualifications. If you do not have the qualifications for the job, we don't include you among the unemployed. *Re a kwisisana?* ["Do we understand each other?"].

The teacher also asks the learners about the different inflation rates in some countries: Brazil 4%, Argentina 24% South Africa 8% and Sweden 3%. Throughout the lesson he continuously explains how each factor influences inflation. At times he asks learners to explain and at other times he provides the explanation himself.

In this example the teacher makes a distinction between an everyday understanding of unemployment and one that is based on disciplinary knowledge. The example of unemployment refers to common experiences of learners and as such it is related to their everyday experiences (a number of learners in the community have passed matric but are not 'working'). The example serves to blur the boundaries between school knowledge and everyday knowledge. In a way the teacher makes the concept of unemployment relevant by drawing from learners' common knowledge of it. For the learners, it makes perfect sense to count this case as of 'unemployment' since the school leaver is staying in the village with work. Most of the learners respond to the question by arguing that the 'school leaver' should be counted as one of the unemployed people (Turn 10). But the teacher points out that the learner cannot be included in the figure of unemployed people (Turn 11). In turn 12, Mr Mahlare

highlights that the learner is not qualified and emphasises that he is not a mechanic. Again, this is an example of teacher control over access: The learners respond to the question using common sense understanding of the issue whereas the teacher asserts the importance of explanations that are valid within the discipline of economics.

In this way learners can become aware that certain explanations make sense only in everyday knowledge and not in disciplinary knowledge, which is the preserve of schooling. The teacher then defines that for someone to be counted as unemployed the person should have the necessary qualifications for the job. In this way the teacher maintains clear boundaries between school knowledge and common knowledge, while at the same time using examples from everyday experience to demonstrate disciplinary knowledge. Earlier in the lesson, Mr Mahlare pointed out that "...the way we define unemployment in economics, differs with the way you talk about unemployment in everyday life. Because in economics we talk about people who are suitable to work, we mean they are qualified" (Lesson Observation, Economics, March 2001). Hence, unlike the example cited in extract 1, this example demonstrates an attempt by the teacher to draw explicit boundaries between disciplinary knowledge and everyday knowledge. The example the teacher provides succeeds in making the distinction between disciplinary knowledge and everyday knowledge clear.

Also of importance to note in the preceding example is that the teacher started the lesson by asserting disciplinary boundaries between school knowledge and everyday knowledge, and now, in concluding the lesson, the teacher reasserts the importance of maintaining those disciplinary boundaries. Learners have to distinguish between an explanation that is valid in economics (qualified and a mechanic) and that which is not (as the one of counting everyone who has matric as unemployed).

It is worth noting that at the same time that the teacher narrows the boundaries between school knowledge and everyday knowledge, and simultaneously foregrounds disciplinary knowledge, he also demarcates evaluative criteria. By indicating that employment is defined differently in economics and everyday life, the teacher makes the evaluative criteria of understanding unemployment in economics explicit. In turn 11, Mr Mahlare clearly points out that the learner who has recently passed grade 12 is not qualified to be a mechanic. For someone to be regarded as unemployed, the

person needs to have gone through the relevant training and possess the necessary qualifications. The teacher further asks if the learner is a mechanic and answers the question by himself, indicating that the learner is not a mechanic.

At the same time that the teacher blurs the boundaries between school knowledge and everyday knowledge, he attempts to work with the inputs of the learners. For example, when some learners say "no" (Turn 2) he invites them to provide reasons (Turn 5). He further asks whether Thebjane "took a guess" or just followed "what the majority" says (Turn 7). The teacher's comments and questions require that learners are motivated to provide the answers they do. The interaction between the teacher and the learners indicates that the teacher does not ignore what the learners are saying. He does not pass learners' answers and when he rejects them he provides explanations.

4. Discussion

The preceding discussion points out ways in which the teacher attempt to facilitate access to disciplinary knowledge. In the first example (and there were many examples from the other five teachers) Mr Mahlare implicitly demarcates the evaluative criteria – what constitutes productivity and that which cannot be regarded as productivity. By making a clear distinction between productivity and the misconceptions and fallacies associated with productivity, the teacher gives learners a sense of the defining features of productivity. It is important to note that the teacher explains that both quality and quantity are taken into account in establishing whether there is productivity or not.

In the second example, the teacher distinguishes between a common understanding of unemployment and an understanding informed by the discipline of economics. The latter could be seen where Mr Mahlare points out that the matriculant should have gone through the necessary and relevant training as a mechanic. As a result of not having gone through the relevant training, the matriculant cannot be included in the number of unemployed.

Questions could be raised about teacher exposition/monologue, that is, learners are given limited opportunities to engage with the issues on their own. There is lack of participation and as such learners are passive. It should be noted that the teacher at least articulated the key features of productivity and unemployment, delineating

evaluative criteria necessary to produce legitimate answers. It would be instructionally less productive to involve learners in discussions whereas the concepts have not been clearly explicated. To engage learners in classroom discussions, while the concepts have not been well explained, would be less productive.

If teachers, either implicitly or explicitly, point out ways of producing legitimate texts, they will be engaging in empowering discourses that open access to the specialised knowledge of the school. Conversely, if teachers do not indicate ways in which valid texts could be produced, it will be difficult for learners to figure out how to come up with credible texts. Without a clear delineation of the evaluative criteria, opportunities are restricted for learners to produce well-constructed and legitimate texts. The point is not whether instructional practices are teacher-centred or learner-centred. Productive instructional practices should facilitate access to disciplinary knowledge. It is also important to note that while resources will make a qualitative difference in the education of learners in poor communities, it is more about how teachers engage with the content, with or without the basic resources. Hence the argument of this paper is that, examining specific classroom episodes provides ways in which teaching could be qualitatively improved and access provided to the discourses of power. This paper thus indicates the importance of a more pointed analysis of teaching than the broad and general description of teaching, such as teacher-centered or learner-centered, participatory and non-participatory. Examining minute classroom episodes will not only assist in working out ways of engaging in empowering discourses but also how to assist teachers in their professional development. The latter will be based on concrete evidence from real classroom incidences. It will indicate what teachers need to know in order to teach well.

Thus, one of the ways in which schools can cease to institutionalise inequalities in the acquisition of the discourses of power is through classroom practices that indicate to learners how to produce credible and legitimate texts. This will also result in narrowing the gap between the educational achievement of learners in poor communities and those in well-resourced and wealthy communities.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding broader structural factors that impact on what happens in the classrooms, this paper asserts the equally critical role of locating educational improvement within particular classrooms – especially instructional approaches used by teachers. Analyzing specific classroom episodes provides insight into teachers' instructional approaches. More importantly it provides a window into how educational inequalities are reproduced. In cases where there is lack of facilitating access disciplinary knowledge (epistemological access), it can be safely concluded that teachers engage in pedagogies of poverty. Such pedagogies are not only disempowering but perpetuate the inequalities that characterise the South African education system.

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