Acquiring Pedagogic Authority
While Learning to Teach

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Abstract

The quality of an education system and the quality of its teachers and teaching are interconnected. Learning to teach and teach meaningfully and equitably is a core priority of education reforms. In this article we reflect on what the process of learning to teach might mean for teachers in an education system. We ask how and to what extent initial teacher education mitigates and reduces education inequities. In particular, we examine the relationship between teaching practice as a core component of initial teacher education and education inequities. The article draws on data examining the nature of student teachers' experiences of teaching practice in the Western Cape of South Africa. We argue that the data illustrates that teaching practice does indeed invest future teachers with pedagogic authority. As such, it does indeed legitimate the position of student teachers in the classroom and within the education system, albeit with varying and differentiated outcomes for equity.

Keywords: Initial teacher education, pedagogic authority, South Africa, teaching practice

Résumé

La qualité d'un système éducatif et celle de ses enseignants et de son enseignement sont interdépendantes. Apprendre à enseigner et enseigner de manière significative et équitable est une priorité essentielle des réformes de l'éducation. Dans cet article, nous réfléchissons aux significations du

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processus d'apprentissage de l'enseignement pour les enseignants d'un système éducatif. Nous demandons comment et dans quelle mesure la formation initiale des enseignants atténue et réduit les inégalités en matière d'éducation. En particulier, nous examinons la relation entre la pratique de l'enseignement comme composante essentielle de la formation initiale des enseignants, et les inégalités en matière d'éducation. Le document s'appuie sur des données sur la nature des expériences d'élèves-enseignants dans la pratique de l'enseignement au Cap occidental (Afrique du Sud). Nous soutenons que les données montrent que la pratique pédagogique investit, effectivement, les futurs enseignants d'une autorité pédagogique. Malgré des résultats variables et différenciés en matière d'équité, elle légitime, en effet, la position des élèves-enseignants dans la classe et au sein du système éducatif.

Mots-clés : formation initiale des enseignants, autorité pédagogique, Afrique du Sud, pratique de l'enseignement

Introduction

It is commonly asserted by policy-makers and in public discourse that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers (Mourshed, Chikjioke & Barber 2010). In this context, then, teachers are shaped by their professional development including their initial teacher preparation. The process of learning to teach is thus fundamental to what is possible within an education system.

In this article we reflect on what the process of learning to teach might mean for teachers in an education system. We ask *how* and *to what extent* mechanisms of teacher education reproduce or disrupt the nature of the South African education system. In particular, we tease out the relationship between teaching practice, a central mechanism within the process of teacher education, and the nature of the South African education system. In so doing, we expand the understanding of how the process of learning to teach or becoming a teacher impact inequality in the education system. Specifically, we draw on data that examines the structure and nature of student teachers' experiences of teaching practice in the Western Cape of South Africa.

The year 2020 marks twenty years since the publication of the *Norms and Standards for Educators* (NSE) in South Africa. The NSE was gazetted by the then Department of Education (DoE 2000) and, subsequently, teacher education providers in South Africa were required to implement the policy, which meant re-aligning and reconceptualising initial teacher programmes (Robinson 2003:19). These programmes, subject to approval, are regulated by multiple statutory bodies including the 'national and provincial education departments, the CHE [Council on Higher Education] and SAQA [South African Qualification Authority]' (Kruss 2009:24).

Alongside the NSE, which intended to provide a framework for teacher education curricula and shift the qualification structures and requirements, there were major alterations to the governance of the sector (CHE 2010:9). These fundamental changes were considered essential to bring about redress, equity, efficiency and quality in terms of teacher preparation for implementing the new [school] curriculum (CHE 2010:9). The transformation process has been described as a 'frenzy of policy documents and acts' (Sayed & Jansen 2001 cited in Sayed 2002:383) and 'seen as being linked to a larger governmental modernising project, the goal of which is to ensure local legitimacy and international credibility' (Mattson & Harley 2003 cited in Schäfer & Wilmot 2012:42).

Currently, it is well established that the learning attainment of learners in South Africa is unequally distributed. By 2017, based on the previous year's Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) assessment, learners who completed the assessment in African languages scored considerably lower than those taking English (372) and Afrikaans (369) tests (Howie et al. 2017:54). Learners writing in isiXhosa (283) and Sepedi (276) scored the lowest (Howie et al. 2017:54). In essence, this means that assessment results for learners are not equal; the talents of all students are not being cultivated equally; and these largely mirror historic patterns of racialised inequality. Racial classification in South Africa remains fraught as a result of its apartheid past. For the purposes of this discussion, we deploy historic classifications (such as black, coloured, Indian and white) as a way of situating the historical context and identifying continuities with the unequal past. However, this is not an endorsement of their application as objective categories. Our usage of this concept is to discuss patterns of inequalities in the South African teacher education system, and we understand race to be a socially constructed and an often problematic means of describing difference.

The article is structured as follows. Firstly, it offers a theoretical framing for the position of teachers within an education system in order to analyse mechanisms of teacher education. The theoretical framing, premised on the concept pedagogic authority (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990), is embedded within a literature review of the history of teacher education in South Africa. We then explain the methodology of the study, followed by the presentation of findings. The data demonstrate that student teachers acquire pedagogic authority during their teaching practice at schools. This acquisition is bolstered by a policy framework which frames teaching practice as a central mechanism in the process of learning to teach or becoming a teacher, as well as the manner in which initial teacher education programmes implement the teacher education qualification policy framework. Teaching practice experiences are therefore a mechanism for legitimising their position in

the classroom and within the education system. In other words, existing conditions in schools are constructed as an accepted social reality for student teachers, at least partly due to their experiences of teaching practice. The implications of this is that, based on the experiences of teaching practice drawn from the participants in this study and the literature on the history of teacher education, the process of learning to teach feeds directly into the social reproduction of class and other inequities in South African society.

Teachers: Pedagogically Authoritative Agents in the South African Education System

In order to analyse mechanisms of teacher education, this section offers a theoretical framing that situates teachers within an education system, drawing on the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1990). In *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Bourdieu and Passeron (ibid.) demonstrate how teachers in positions of pedagogic authority are regarded as a legitimate authority with 'power to exert symbolic violence (power that legitimates meaning and conceals power) which manifests in the form of a right to impose legitimacy' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990:13). Those who receive information from a pedagogic authority recognise the legitimacy thereof, internalising the message (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990:21).

Pedagogic authority is embedded within Bourdieu and Passeron's concept of a pedagogic action. 'All pedagogic action is … the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990:5). While pedagogic action can occur within a national education system, it is not confined to it. Pedagogic action can be associated with a social formation or groups (diffuse education), within families (family education) or within institutions that have an educative function (institutional education) (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990:5). In other words, pedagogic action can be observed in schools, but is not limited to schools.

Pedagogic actions draw on mechanisms that legitimise meaning and conceal power relations. These mechanisms operate in schools, which Bourdieu and Passeron regard as a dominant (though not the only) site of pedagogic action. Moreover, school pedagogic action is recognised as that which reproduces the dominant culture, hence securing 'a monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990:6). Bourdieu and Passeron (1990:x) note that 'the school helps to make and to impose the legitimate exclusions and inclusions which form the basis of the social order'. One of the mechanisms schools draw on while exerting pedagogic action is termed *pedagogic authority* by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990:11-54). Paid teaching, salaried employment of teachers and the establishment of schools

wherein new teachers can be trained are markers of an institutionalised inculcation of pedagogic action (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990:55).

The presence of a pedagogic authority implies that there has to be a process whereby individuals are invested with the legitimacy to exert pedagogic authority. To the extent that teachers exert pedagogic authority, teacher education becomes the process whereby future teachers are invested with the legitimacy to exercise pedagogic authority. A teacher's legitimacy within an education system 'is socially objectified and symbolised in the institutional procedures and rules defining his [sic] training, the diplomas that sanction it, and the legitimate conduct of the profession' (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990:63).

Pedagogic authority, as conceptualised by Bourdieu and Passeron, emphasises the centrality of teachers and, consequently, teacher education within an education system. Although Bourdieu and Passeron proffer that the process whereby individuals acquire pedagogic authority relates to the institutional procedures and rules that define their training and the diplomas that sanction the training, they do not address how the process of teacher education or learning to teach unfolds, and therefore what these conditions mean for maintaining, reproducing or disrupting an education system. Indeed, their assumption is that by virtue of the fact that pedagogic authority is the recognised authority with power to exert symbolic violence, the process ought to, by definition, reproduce the nature of the education system. By paying closer attention to the process of acquiring pedagogic authority or learning to teach, one might be able to enhance understanding of the potential for disrupting the nature of the education system in an effort to cultivate the talents of all more equally.

The way pedagogic authority is acquired can be illustrated within the process of learning to teach and, as such, by the mechanisms of teacher education. A reflection on the history of teacher education in South Africa makes clear the relationship between the nature of the education system and the conditions of acquisition of pedagogic authority. The nature of racial inequality that characterises the education system in South Africa is visible in the manner in which pedagogic authority has historically been acquired within the South African education system. Colonisation and racial segregation inflect the history of teacher education in South Africa. Paid teaching, salaried employment of teachers and the establishment of schools wherein new teachers can be trained have been present within the South African education system since the introduction of mission schools during colonisation.

It stands to reason that the capability of an education system to train teachers would be established later than paid teaching. As such, an education system would have first attained a high level of institutionalisation by the

point at which teacher training is established. The first training institution in South Africa was established in Genadendal in 1839 by a Moravian Mission Society (CHE 2010:6). The first Department of Education established in 1839 introduced the pupil-teacher system in 1842 (CHE 2010:7). Pupil-teachers spent five years assisting in classrooms and receiving an additional hour's instruction after the school day ended before being recognised as qualified teachers (CHE 2010:7). As schools proliferated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so teacher training expanded in South Africa (CHE 2010:7), as teacher training was introduced to the education system by the colonial missions. Mission schools were the first sites of teacher education.

By 1886, there were three official teacher education institutions for white student teachers, located in Cape Town, Wellington and Grahamstown (CHE 2010:7). In 1891, the Battswood School for coloured teachers was established offering a six-year teacher programme. The programme, which required a Grade 6 (at the time Standard 4) pass, focused on academic subjects, religious subjects and practical instruction. There were no dedicated education institutions for black students; secondary schooling was considered 'teacher education' for black teachers (Welch 2002 cited in CHE 2010:7).

The South Africa Act of 1909 divided education into two broad categories, namely: higher education, controlled by the central government; and school education controlled by the then four provinces (CHE 2010:7; Sayed 2002:381). Despite teacher education having been declared a 'facet of higher education', it was placed under the control of the provinces (CHE 2010:7). Delegates from the provinces of Natal and the Orange Free State expressed their concern that centralised teacher education could limit the ability of their individual education systems to achieve the intended outcome: 'cultural preservation' (DBE & DHET 2011:18). By 1930, there were thirty colleges of teacher education, all controlled and administered provincially (Kallaway 2008 cited in CHE 2010:8). Primary school teachers, together with some secondary teachers, were educated at these colleges. Most secondary school teachers were, however, educated at universities (DBE & DHET 2011:18).

Apartheid policies, such as the Bantu Education Act of 1953, necessitated new and separate educational institutions for black, coloured and Indian teachers (CHE 2010:8; Sayed 2002:381). Different departments, such as the Department of Bantu Education and Department of Coloured Affairs, administered the colleges of teacher education for respective race groups. Bantustan policies devolved teacher education so that each '"independent" African homeland took control of teacher education in its own area' (Sayed 2002:381).

By the end of the 1980s, there were eighteen colleges for white and sixteen for coloured students respectively. There were two colleges designated for Indian students and thirteen colleges for black students (CHE 2010:8). In addition, there were more than seventy-eight colleges of teacher education scattered throughout the 'homelands' of South Africa (CHE 2010:8). At the same time, universities continued offering teacher education (CHE 2010:8). The 'difference between the offerings of the colleges and those of the universities was essentially the teacher's qualifications' and the type of knowledge emphasised (CHE 2010:8). 'Universities believed their qualifications equipped students to teach with a strong knowledge base. The colleges, on the other hand, were sceptical of the universities' academic emphasis and insisted that induction into the profession depended on sustained practice' (CHE 2010:8).

University access and admission was regulated racially and ethnically during the period of the apartheid government prior to 1994. White students required a matriculation exemption to gain entrance to a university (CHE 2010:8). Coloured and Indian students predominately attended the University of the Western Cape and the University of Durban Westville, respectively, both founded in 1959, where students were admitted without a matriculation exemption to do a non-degree Higher Education Diploma (CHE 2010:8). Schäfer and Wilmot (2012:42) claim that, for whites, teacher education was far superior to that of their Indian, coloured and black counterparts due to the ease with which white students could attain a university education. It is further reported that many black students were qualified as 'teachers with Standard 8 leaving certificates' (CHE 2010:8) as opposed to attending a college of teacher education or university. Sayed (2002:382) purports that 'most of the graduates from black teacher training colleges were trained in subjects such as religious studies and history' and were underdeveloped in areas of mathematics, science and technology (Sayed 2002:382).

Chisholm (2012) argues that African teachers in teacher training colleges were led to achieve the minimum levels of literacy and numeracy, and low-budget primary schooling for Africans was provided by African women, whereas white teachers with the advantage of secondary schooling were trained in post-secondary colleges of education. She argues that teacher training expanded for African teachers in the Bantustans, but with quality gradually deteriorating (Chisholm 2012). As repression intensified in the 1960s, the proportion of African teachers in secondary and high schools possessing university degrees plummeted (Chisholm 2012). By 1965, only 2.5 per cent of African teachers had university degrees (Chisholm 2012).

The racial stratification of teacher education, compounded with geographical variation, unsurprisingly resulted in a lack of overall coherence in the system, according to Robinson (2003:19). This further translated into different requirements, curricula and qualifications intersected by the race of the student (Robinson 2003:19). As a corollary, teachers in 'African schools particular[ly], but also in coloured schools were poor' (CHE 2010:9). It should be noted, though, that this determination was not based on outcomes of standardised learner assessments. Rather, it was based on the fact that individuals who were learning to become teachers attended teacher education institutions that were unequal in resources and quality. It should also be remembered that, irrespective of the differences in scope and nature of various teacher education providers during colonialism and apartheid, pedagogic authority was acquired by individuals who completed their training at those institutions. In other words, they could legitimately enter school classrooms and teach children.

For Sayed (2002:382), limited 'quality assurance procedures and mechanisms were another characteristic of the system'. This produced generations of teachers, of all races, 'with distorted and deficient understandings of themselves, of each other and of what was expected of them in a divided society' (Essop cited in DBE & DHET 2011:19). Put in relation to the discussion thus far, it is evident that pedagogic authority was acquired in racially segregated institutions tasked to invest individuals with unequal competencies. The intended aim was to institutionalise racial segregation or stratification within the education system. In other words, the way pedagogic authority was acquired became a mechanism for racial segregation and its unequal stratification.

Furthermore, schools were racially segregated, meaning that during teaching practice student teachers were placed in schools based on their race and taught learners who shared the same race, culture and identity. In other words, teachers were also 'acquiring their professional competencies through socialisation in a racialised environment' (Carrim 2001 cited in Sayed 2002:382). At that time, the notion of diversity and racial mixing was a crime. The demand and supply of teachers was based on 'the need to maintain racial and ethnic segregation and [was] not related to an overall national plan' (Sayed 2002:382). By the end of apartheid, teacher education was spectacularly fragmented along racial, geographic and nature of qualification lines (CHE 2010:10; DBE & DHET 2011:20). Essentially, what this meant was that, by 1994, pedagogic authority was acquired within a profoundly unequal education system wherein racial segregation was paramount. Notwithstanding segregation, these teachers were recognised as legitimate authorities with the power to legitimate

meaning in and through education. That legitimated authorities entered spaces which were clearly unequal is likely to have contributed to the durability of inequality in South African.

As noted in the introduction, 1994 ushered in the possibility, and indeed the intention, to equalise the education system. While teacher education occurred in a wide array of institutions segregated on the basis of race and ethnicity, a common purpose prevailed—to prepare school teachers, to invest individuals with pedagogic authority. The new government's transformation plan envisioned major modifications to both the governance and curricula of teacher education, shifts in qualification structures and their requirements (CHE 2010:9). These (so-called) fundamental changes were regarded as essential to bring about redress, equity, efficiency, and quality in terms of teacher education and teacher preparation to implement the new curriculum (CHE 2010:9).

As stated previously, the first policy regulating teacher education in South Africa, the *Norms and Standards for Educators* (NSE), was gazetted in 2000 by the Department of Education (DoE 2000). By 2005, initial teacher education programmes were being offered at twenty-one universities across South Africa (DBE & DHET 2011:21). In 2011, the second nationally implemented post-apartheid teacher education policy framework was legislated in South Africa and later revised in 2015 (DHET 2011, 2015). Teacher education continues to legitimate individuals to enter school classrooms, but these have not changed fundamentally. In other words, the acquisition of pedagogic authority continues unabated although the legislation, regulations and conditions have shifted in some ways.

This section has discussed pedagogic authority as conceptualised by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) within their theorisation of the reproduction of society through education. In South Africa, individuals were invested with or acquired pedagogic authority in a range of racially and ethnically segregated institutions during colonialism and apartheid. Teacher education thus contributed to legitimating and sustaining racial segregation in South Africa. Although these institutions have been formally deracialised and restructured in the post-apartheid period, the fundamental process of learning to teach in schools, conceptualised here as an acquisition of pedagogic authority, has not shifted since the introduction of colonial mission schools.

In the remainder of this article, we further unpack *how* and *to what extent* mechanisms of teacher education maintain, reproduce or disrupt the nature of the South African education system, by presenting data drawn from student teachers' experiences during teaching practice. Two decades have passed since a process to govern teacher education institutions

centrally (together with all higher education institution) began (DBE & DHET 2011:21). Gaining insight from current student teachers regarding their experiences within teacher education programmes would shed light on the efficacy of related mechanisms for how pedagogic authority is currently acquired. The concepts developed in this section frame the analysis of the data. A discussion of method precedes the presentation of the data.

Methodology

For this study, qualitative data was gathered from policy documents, teacher education programme documents and student teachers. Selected education policies were sampled, which together frame the general milieu within which student teachers are being developed and prepared. The education policies were reviewed to understand the formal process that governs how individuals become teachers in South Africa, as the policies represent the formal process of acquiring pedagogic authority within this education system. Teacher education programme documentation was reviewed to determine how programmes implement the legislated process of acquiring pedagogic authority. The details regarding the number and nature of courses within a teacher education programme also determine the experiences student teachers are likely to lack. This experiences are however regarded as critical for them to qualify as teachers and thus place them in a legitimate position in a school classroom.

An open-ended questionnaire was administered to third-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) student teachers. BEd programmes are four-year degree programmes offered at universities in South Africa (DHET 2015). The assumption is that after three years as students, their experiences of the programme would be vital to further understand how pedagogic authority is currently acquired within teacher education programmes. The questionnaire explored their experiences at schools during teaching practice. For example, one question asked them to describe their experience at schools and another to describe the classroom in which they had been placed.

Although the governance of teacher education institutions is currently centralised within the Department of Higher Education, school governance is decentralised (Ahmed & Sayed 2012). The questionnaire also asked participants why they chose to become teachers as well as their views on the purpose of education. The aim of these questions was to examine their views of the process on which they had chosen to embark. The resulting data were analysed thematically with the view to understanding how their experience of teaching practice may enable a deeper sense of what it means

to learn to teach in South Africa and hence how pedagogic authority is acquired. From the analysis, conclusions have been drawn regarding *how* and *to what extent* mechanisms of teacher education maintain, reproduce or disrupt the nature of the South African education system.

Acquiring Pedagogic Authority in South Africa

This section presents data from education policies in the first part, followed by a thematic discussion of the responses in the open-ended questionnaire. Data from the programme documents are drawn from both sections and thus not discussed separately. The data combines to describe how pedagogic authority is acquired in the context of South Africa. The findings inform a discussion of *how* and *to what extent* mechanisms of teacher education and development maintain, reproduce or disrupt the nature of the South African education system.

Education policy establishes the acquisition of pedagogic authority

Education policies relating to teacher education as instituted from 2011 in South Africa comprise the main focus of analysis in this section. The Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) (DHET 2015) provide the overarching legal framing of student teachers' experiences of those selected to respond to the questionnaire. Additional education policies are noted, to the extent that they contribute to framing the experience of teacher education and thus learning to teach, specifically with regards to teaching practice. This analysis contributed to a description of how education policies establish the framework for learning to teach and thereby acquire pedagogic authority.

Similar to the NSE, the MRTEQ (DHET 2015) establishes a policy environment in which individuals who wish to teach in schools are required to qualify as teachers in one of two programmes offered at a higher education institution or university. In South Africa, learning to teach involves registering for and ultimately graduating with a degree, the qualification that certifies competence to teach. A qualification must be school-phase and/or subject-specific (DHET 2015). The phases and subject specialisations correlate directly with the national curriculum, currently the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (see for e.g., DBE 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d). By implication, the only teacher qualifications sanctioned by the state are for school teachers, and to be a school teacher a certification conforming to MRTEQ (DHET 2015) is required. Graduating from a certified programme grants an individual legitimacy to act in a school classroom.

Teaching practice is an integral, compulsory component of teacher education programmes, which MRTEQ defines as work-integrated learning (WIL) (DHET 2015:10). WIL 'takes place in the workplace' (DHET 2015) which is to be interpreted by teacher education programmes as school classrooms. The MRTEQ constructs the classroom as the place where individuals learn to teach: 'Learning in practice involves teaching in authentic and simulated classroom environments' (DHET 2015:10). Presence and experience in classrooms during the process of learning to teach is thus firmly established in teacher education policy.

The MRTEQ requires newly qualified teachers (NQTs) to be capable of effectively managing classrooms across diverse contexts so that conducive learning environments are established (DHET 2015). It is expected that teacher education programmes expose enrolled students to diverse contexts. The expectation is not that diversity be minimised but rather that teachers accept diversity and facilitate learning irrespective thereof. Evidence of large-scale assessments suggests that learning outcomes are far from equal across diverse contexts and wealth quintiles (Sayed et al 2017). From the perspective of the MRTEQ (DHET 2015), diversity is something to be managed and thus accepted, not necessarily disrupted or questioned in the process of learning to teach. This benign discourse of diversity is unlikely to promote transformative practices in the education system to ensure equity.

The MRTEQ's (DHET 2015:62) vision for NQTs is that they demonstrate a positive work ethic, display appropriate values and conduct themselves in a manner that befits, enhances and develops the teaching profession. While the vision of the MRTEQ with respect to NQTs is relatively vague in that it does not spell out exactly what is meant by a positive work ethic, appropriate values or befitting conduct, there is little doubt that these, for the most part, are intended to occur in a traditional classroom context that is raced, classed and gendered. Moreover, the inference is that the teaching profession is a legitimate enterprise. The essence of the MRTEQ (DHET 2011, 2015) discourse is that the legitimate space for a teacher is the classroom, action in that space by a teacher is legitimate, and the teaching profession is legitimate.

Once qualified, most teachers are beholden to Provincial Departments of Education (PEDs) by contractual obligations (DoE 1998). Those teachers who are directly contracted by school governing bodies (SGBs) are no less beholden to organisations for which the classroom is the primary site of work. A teacher's work is not constructed beyond the classroom within education policy. In South Africa, individuals acquire pedagogic authority to legitimate pedagogic action within the classroom by virtue of having learned to teach in education programmes sanctioned by education policy,

currently the MRTEQ (DHET 2015). No person without a qualification sanctioned by the MRTEQ would be acknowledged as legitimate in the classroom. However, those who are yet in the process of learning to teach are considered legitimate for the purpose of completing the requirements of WIL or teaching practice in teacher education programmes.

In the next part of this section, data is presented regarding experiences of those participating in a university education programme. In particular, their experiences with regards to teaching practice are unpacked to configure an explanation of how pedagogic authority is acquired.

Acquiring pedagogic authority during teaching practice

The participants in this study were enrolled in their third year of a Foundation Phase (FP) Bachelor of Education (BEd) teacher education programme in the Western Cape of South Africa. During the four-year programme, these individuals are required to pass courses in Mathematics, Languages and Life Skills, the subjects in the FP Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (see for e.g. DBE 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d). Additional courses in educational theory and professional practice are included as course requirements. WIL, or teaching practice, comprises roughly six months of the four-year enrolment of the individuals in the programme. This is not a continuous span of time in the classroom. In the programme for which the participants in this study were registered, individuals are in school classrooms for four weeks during the first two years of the programme in July/August and eight weeks each year during their third and fourth years of the programme in April (four weeks) and July/ August (four weeks). All the WIL, or teaching practice, experiences reported by the participants occurred in school classrooms.

To fulfil the requirements of WIL or teaching practice in the programme, participants select an FP classroom at a school in the Western Cape for each four-week session. In other words, student teachers in this study would be in a different classroom for each four-week span of teaching practice. During teaching practice, time is spent observing the teacher in that classroom as well as presenting lessons to the learners in that class. In addition, both the teacher in that classroom as well as an appointee of the university evaluate lessons presented by the student teacher during these four-week sessions. Assessment of teaching practice or WIL thus comprises individual lessons taught in the classroom selected for teaching practice.

Themes that emerged from participant responses to experiences in the schools and classrooms in which they conducted their teaching practice included grasping one's place, identifying what works and identifying what does not work.

Grasping one's place

Teacher education policy establishes teaching practice as a compulsory mechanism of teacher education in South Africa. Accordingly, teaching practice is a non-negotiable feature of the learning-to-teach process and hence the process whereby an individual is legitimately positioned in the classroom. Pedagogic authority is acquired during teaching practice. Teaching practice, then, can be viewed as a central mechanism for acquiring pedagogic authority. What can the experiences of teaching practice reveal about maintaining, reproducing or disrupting the nature of the South African education system?

The participants in this study described their experience at schools in ways that resonate with the assertion that teaching practice is a mechanism that legitimates their position in the classroom. In other words, from participants' perspectives, teaching practice is how they experience becoming teachers. The excerpts below offer a general sense of participant descriptions:

> Teaching practice was basically a learning experience. (Participant 5491)
>
> The experience of teaching practice has been an eye opener; where it all [being a teacher] becomes a reality. (Participant 5326)
>
> Teaching practical is a reality check to what is done at university. (Participant 2983)

In a nutshell, participant experience at a school provides each with the opportunity to experience being a teacher, more so than only their time at university would allow. It might be said that what happens in the classroom is legitimate—their 'reality'. The following excerpt suggests that what participants learn at university, while not unimportant, becomes 'real' during teaching practice.

> I have a great time when on teaching practice, it makes my studies way more meaningful and real. (Participant 3397)

Being present in this 'real' setting of the classroom also builds participant confidence, as they express:

> It [teaching practice] also gives me confidence to carry on going. (Participant 5326)
>
> Teaching practice allowed me to build up my confidence in a classroom. (Participant 9851)

These and similar responses from participants illustrate how, over the course of teaching practice sessions in the BEd programme, the constant exposure of individuals to classrooms in different schools combines to entrench them in the school environment as teachers in a classroom. In the process of participating in teaching practice, they come to realise what a school classroom is in 'reality'; they come to apply what they learn at university in particular and specific

ways; and they gain confidence in being 'present' in a school classroom. To this end, there does not seem to be any disarticulation between what teacher education policy intends and what participants experience.

Several responses demonstrate participant comprehension that schools and school classrooms are not exactly the same, as with these example excerpts:

> I have learnt what not to do when I become a teacher. (Participant 8335)

> It [teaching practice] gives me the knowledge about how learners differ from school to school. (Participant 6432)

> I have seen in what type of school I will enjoy teaching more! (Participant 0479).

The responses demonstrate that, according to the participants, learners in schools and schools themselves differ. Teaching practice therefore gives participants opportunities to witness these differences and to be introduced to various learner and school 'realities'.

It should be remembered that the students are evaluated only on a lesson presented in a classroom, together with reflections on how that lesson might have been taught better. Acquiring their legitimacy in the classroom hinges on a solitary moment of lesson presentation, not on shifting 'reality' in any way. Based on the assessment, it could thus be asserted that the format (or pedagogy) of teaching practice does not encourage participants to alter the nature of the education system in any way. The experience of teaching practice allows participants to firmly grasp their place within the existing classroom as well as to identify the differences they would be required to navigate once they have completed their learning-to-teach process, once they have been legitimated to exert pedagogic authority within a classroom.

The following two parts of this section demonstrate in more detail how participants describe the differences in school classrooms experienced during teaching practice. These experiences legitimate for participants a 'reality' of school classrooms as differentiated, and unequally so.

Identifying what works and what does not work

In describing their experiences at schools and classrooms during teaching practice, participant responses coalesced around what worked well and what did not for their development as teachers. The focus of what worked and what did not was similar in many instances. For example, classroom size was noted by some as adequate, whereas not for others. From participant responses regarding what worked and what did not, it is possible to distinguish pronounced differences between school classrooms selected by individual students while registered in this BEd programme.

Excerpts from participant responses of what worked and what did not are discussed in this section. These excerpts highlight the levels of differentiation experienced by participants in this study during teaching practice. The focus of responses was on interactions with learners in classrooms and class conditions.

Interactions with learners

It is not surprising that interaction with learners would form a significant focus of participant responses to school and classroom experiences during teaching practice. What is insightful about the responses are the differences experienced with regards to interactions with learners: participants focused on the number of learners in the classroom, learner disposition, classroom discipline and learner background.

Student teachers often described the number of learners as part of their experience of teaching practice. Student teachers, for instance, divulged that their classrooms were crowded (e.g. Participant 5663); that there were too many learners in the class.

Additional aspects related to the behaviour and/or disposition of learners in their classroom as reported by participants. Student teachers described learners as well behaved and hardworking, for example.

The presence or absence of discipline in the classroom was a common aspect of participant responses regarding interactions with learners. 'The children had good discipline' (Participant 7177). Similarly, other participants also described the discipline of learners as 'good' (e.g. Participant 9056). On the other hand, one participant (5107) disclosed that teaching practice 'was difficult … with no discipline'. Likewise, others admitted a lack of discipline in classrooms (e.g. Participant 6499).

Participants also described learners' background. One participant (1777) mentioned that the learners are from 'good homes', for example, whereas another participant (2668) noted that learners 'had issues at home'.

Classroom conditions

Another unsurprising feature of participant reflections related to the condition of classrooms. Similar to interactions with learners, participant reflections on classroom conditions during teaching practice accentuated vast differences. The common aspect of class conditions that emerged from participant responses included classroom atmosphere, physical size of classrooms, organisation of classrooms and resources available in the classrooms. Student teachers readily described the general atmosphere of the classroom. Positive comments regarding the general atmosphere in

classrooms included phrases such as 'child friendly' (e.g. Participant 2121) and a 'good learning environment'. Negative comments regarding the general atmosphere in classrooms included 'noisy', 'congested' and 'messy'.

Responses related to descriptions of the physicality of classrooms distinct from the number of learners in the classroom. Participants reflected on the physical size of their classroom (e.g. Participant 4930), many indicating that classrooms were small. Moreover, participants noted that small classrooms are a problem, a negative factor of the condition of the classroom. One participant, although reflecting on the small space as negative in a classroom, felt that for her this was a good learning experience. Other participants complaining of small classrooms, however, found that this limited space restricted the learning. Other participants felt the opposite, describing the physicality of classrooms positively. One participant stated, for example, that the classroom was spacious. There were participants who noted that the classrooms were big (e.g. Participant 4930) as well as crowded (e.g. Participant 8369). At a very basic level, one participant stated quite simply that there was a place in the class for everyone. By implication, it is assumable that if this is not stated, this might not always be the case.

Classroom organisation emerged as a common aspect of participant responses. Participants noted that classrooms varied between organised (e.g. Participant 7572) or disorganised (e.g. Participant 0813). Related to organisation, one participant noted that the classroom was always neat (Participant 7948). Whether comfortably sized or organised or not, classroom space was a salient theme in participant responses regarding their experiences of teaching practice. Given the understanding that a classroom is the authentic space for learning to teach in education policy as well as the only space wherein student teachers are assessed for the purpose of meeting the requirements of the BEd programme, it stands to reason that classroom space is significant. What this means for student teachers is that 'space' is constituted as their legitimate 'real' domain during the learning-to-teach process, as they are legitimated to enter this space. Responses in regard to classroom resources add further credence to this interpretation.

The availability of resources (for mediating learning) was commonly noted in participants' descriptions of their classrooms. Many responses in this regard described well-resourced classrooms, with the nature of the resources included in some participant descriptions. For example, a participant described the class as colourful and enriched with fun, interactive posters. The presence of posters was interpreted by one student teacher as creating an educational space (Participant 0890). Other resources mentioned were books, pictures and timetables. A few participants also mentioned the

availability of technology (e.g. whiteboards) as a resource in the classroom they were in (e.g. Participant 1302); others noted the opposite, a lack of technological tools (e.g. Participant 7274). Several participants described the classrooms as under-resourced (e.g. Participant 3399), with one participant (4724) noting that 'there was not enough reading materials'.

Varied responses regarding resources, size, and organisation of classrooms, together with interactions with learners, all suggest that student teachers need to expect any conditions in this space. While student teachers might be aware that the range of conditions are not all equally conducive for facilitating the curriculum, all are constituted as equally legitimate to the extent that the expectations and requirements of completing teaching practice are not thwarted in the face of any classroom condition. The WIL or teaching practice is rendered legitimate under any and all conditions of learner interaction or classroom state.

This section illustrates, based on an analysis of teacher education policy and experiences during teaching practice, how pedagogic authority is acquired in the South African context. The section demonstrates that both from the perspective of teacher education policy as well as participant experience, teaching practice is a central mechanism of teacher education experience and, consequently, the experience through which an individual assumes the legitimacy to enter classrooms for the purpose of facilitating the curriculum. In other words, policy frames the time spent in school classrooms as integral to the process that legitimates an individual in that space. This section demonstrates that student teachers experience teaching practice as legitimating their position as teachers. Legitimacy is therefore an objective policy condition in the education system as well as a subjectively experienced enactment of that policy.

While in school classrooms during teaching practice, student teachers are also acclimatised to differences in this space. Learner, classroom and school difference is established as a 'norm' during teaching practice. During the process of learning to teach, and in teaching practice specifically, the presence of diversity or difference is not presented as something unexpected or needing disruption in order to be legitimated in that space; student teachers need only manage it. In other words, for those legitimised to exert pedagogic authority, it can be contended that differences within school classrooms are constructed as a normal feature of the education system through their teaching practice experience. To this end, based on the analysis of teacher education as a central mechanism of teacher education, the nature of the South African education system is maintained and reproduced in the process of learning to teach.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article has problematised the process of teacher education as a mechanism in maintaining, reproducing or disrupting the nature of the South African education system. The reason for this has emerged from the illustration of inequalities in national assessments decades after the introduction of a transformative education agenda which seeks to cultivate the talents of all people. Based on data gathered from an analysis of teacher education policy, focused on teacher education as well as student teacher experiences during teaching practice, this article demonstrates how pedagogic authority is acquired in the process of learning to teach in a Foundation Phase BEd programme. The article describes how an individual can become a recognised legitimate authority within the South African education system. Specifically, it shows that student teachers model their practices on what they see their mentors do, and later, as professional teachers in their first schools. This grants them pedagogic authority and validates particular ways of teaching. Thus student teachers, in their experiences of teaching practice, become accustomed to accept particular logics of the South African education system that mitigate against transformation.

Individuals are legitimated to enter classrooms as they move through their teaching practice experiences; so too, the classroom, despite differences and diversity, is constructed as the legitimate 'real' domain. Teaching practice, a central mechanism of teacher education, therefore, maintains and reproduces the nature of the South African education system. A limitation of the data collection method is that we were unable to ascertain from the institution or the education department the extent to which they have impressed on student teachers the need to change classroom conditions. What we learned from student experiences, however, is that their teaching practice is valid irrespective of the diversity and differences they experienced therein.

Teacher education in South Africa has its origin in the establishment of schools by colonial missions. Since then, teacher education has focused only on producing teachers for schools emanating from colonisation. To the extent to which schools differ by class, intersected by race from South Africa's colonial and apartheid past, teacher education is a mechanism for maintaining the nature of the education system. Formally qualified teachers in South Africa cannot conceive of themselves in the absence of school classrooms; those wishing to become formally qualified teachers envision the school classroom as their legitimate 'real' abode. In the Western Cape, WIL or teaching practice occurs only within school classrooms and schools.

This means that the process of learning to teach, as it relates to the teacher education programmes in which the study participants are enrolled, does not engage student teachers in any behaviour which might challenge existing social inequalities as embedded in education. However, while this analysis does depress the extent to which social transformation *may* be possible through teachers in education, teachers are not agents of peace and social justice as many hope to be (Sayed et al. 2017; Pantic 2015); they are agents of pedagogic authority who legitimate inequality within the South African education system rather than transform the nature thereof. Critical pedagogies (Freire 1970; Giroux 1988; Apple 2006) do not disrupt the position of teachers as pedagogic authorities because they do not disrupt the pedagogic action of education systems. The aim of critical pedagogies is to expect teachers to undermine the authority with which they have been vested. While this may lead to individuals challenging the values of an education system, it is unlikely to do so in a manner that transforms the education system in South Africa, a transformation that disrupts inequalities.

The analysis of teaching practice in this article illustrates that while the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers, so too the qualities its teachers regarded as legitimate cannot exceed the qualities of the education system wherein they learn to teach. This tautological conundrum has insightful implications for how teaching practice as a central mechanism of teacher education might be reimagined. One has to reimagine the process to circumvent obvious tautological obstructions.

For us, the analysis suggests that, as individuals, teachers would have little hope of systemically shifting the nature of their position. As a collective, however, teachers might be able to force a shift if not completely disrupt the status quo within the education system. Teacher education institutions are well positioned to imbibe a sense of collectivity within the next generations of teachers. Working collectively, teacher education institutions could inject a sense of illegitimacy with regards to the nature of inequality during the process of learning to teach, in order to disturb the acceptance of inequality in contemporary education. For example, if teacher education institutions refused to assess student teachers in classrooms that are overcrowded or at schools that lack fencing for safety, this could potentially delegitimise these conditions. Moreover, teacher education institutions could encourage a greater sense of collectivity among student teachers and inculcate them with the power of 'togetherness' and 'collective action'. For example, when inadequate conditions are identified, student teachers could be encouraged, under the auspices of the institution, to report the conditions to the Education Department or even organise a campaign to address the problem constructively.

Once inequality is delegitimised and student teachers learn to act in concert, teacher collusion may disrupt conditions, which would spark a transformation in the nature of the South African education system. At that point, we might move closer to 'creating a system which cultivates and liberates the talents of all our people' (DoE 1995:2). But as teacher education institutions themselves are circumscribed by teacher education policy, the extent to which these institutions may be able to initiate transformation in the education system of which they are a central part requires careful investigation.

Assessment outcomes are not randomly distributed between classrooms (and by implication, individual teachers), but by schools within the education system. Moreover, the distribution patterns distinguish between class and race. The statistical analysis thus confirms the need for a systemic shift in pedagogic action, similar to the theoretical propositions of Bourdieu and Passeron (1990). The analysis in this article reveals teacher education as a mechanism for maintaining and reproducing unequal differences, not disrupting it. Expecting individual teachers who are legitimated within the system to disrupt the system is disingenuous at the least. Teacher education institutions could, however, work collectively to encourage disruption and consequent transformation. The inherent and widely accepted inequality that the system reproduces needs disruption at its root, in the political and economic processes that maintain the social structure of neoliberal capitalist societies; one such process is learning to teach, in which teaching practice is a central mechanism.

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