

Towards an Empowering Education System in South Africa: Youth and the Struggle for Knowledge

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This paper examines the role of education in producing and perpetuating the social and cultural characteristics of apartheid. Specifically, this paper examines the education of Blacks in South Africa during the years 1948 to 1992, arguing that education mirrored the broader history of enslavement and oppression characteristic of the apartheid era. In its analysis, this paper focuses on the role played by students, and to some extent, by teachers in the liberation struggle. By focusing on students I argue that the role students played in the liberation struggle challenges (he dominant view of youth as war mongers, not sure about their future, and therefore in need of state policies to help reshape and define their lives. That is, youth contribution to the liberation struggle requires they be involved in education policy planning and in other related areas of state and human development. Similarly, this paper focuses on the role of teachers in the liberation struggle, arguing that the notion of teacher as agents of apartheid, merely performing duties given to them by the apartheid government is not a true representation of teachers' roles in the struggle. Teachers, like students, were aware and critical of the education they transmitted to students, and some of these teachers went further and challenged existing relations of power through exploiting the loopholes in curriculum content. However, unlike students, teachers were not necessarily at the forefront of political activities. This paper examines some of the reasons teachers chose to not be at the forefront of events, and argues that this did not mean lack of activity, or of a critical consciousness. Rather, teachers contributed to the liberation struggle by giving students critical tools to “read the word and the world” Freire (1987), a practice that ordinarily was not typical of the Bantu education system.

Issues raised in this paper are substantiated by data collected in two studies. The first is a teachers' study conducted in 1989 in the Pietermaritzburg area, Natal's provincial capital. The second study was conducted irt-1992 with a group of high school students living in one of the townships that surrounds Natal's largest city, Durban. While the two situations described in this paper are limited to a few comparisons within South Africa, one cannot help but hope that generalization about teacher and youth practices can be drawn to influence research on educational policy and practice in South Africa and elsewhere. More importantly, this paper poses a crucial global question worthy of investigating: is it possible to reconcile empowerment pedagogy with a pedagogy that addresses national economic needs?

A Brief Description of Apartheid

The system of separate development, well known as apartheid was formally introduced in South Africa when the Afrikaner Nationalist government captured state power in 1948. Basically, Afrikaner nationalism was built on systematized British divide-and-rule policy which had been in effect since the early years of colonialism. Apartheid was premised upon the nationalist belief that racial, linguistic, and cultural differences should be fundamental organizing principles in society. According to apartheid, different 'types' of people should be kept separate. Each 'group' should have its own national territory and infrastructure (school, government, media, and cultural bodies). Apartheid policy divided South Africa into ten Black 'nations' and three non-Black nations.¹ In short, since whites constituted a minority of South Africa's population, the most effective way to rule was to prevent the 75% Black-African population from cohering into a unified group. A key means of achieving this was an active state-controlled and sponsored encouragement of African tribalism in South Africa. Thus, the focal characteristic of apartheid was the creation of tribal political 'Bantustans', later known as homelands, each tied to a separate Black 'nation' with their own language and bureaucratic structure.

The national languages and the homelands had more to do with geo-political divide-and-rule needs of apartheid than linguistic criteria. Also, apartheid had an economic dynamic. That is, during the first half of the 20th century the British created a stratified and de facto segregated society based on race, culture, gender, and class differentiation. A complex socio-economic pecking order emerged in which white English-speakers were at the top, Blacks were at the bottom, and white Afrikaners, colored (people of mixed race), and Indians ranged across the middle levels. When the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948, it retained the basic outline of the socio-economic structure created by the British, but rigorously codified and entrenched its racial outline, and of course, elevated white Afrikaners within the social pecking order (although English-speaking whites continue to occupy the pinnacle of the economic hierarchy right up to the present).

Given this context, it is safe to say that apartheid emerged out of white Afrikaner desire for cultural autonomy (separateness) from other people in the country, and from a greatly felt need to end economic repression. The aim was to create a society in which Afrikaners would (1) have their separate 'cultural space' (for example, schools, hospitals, etc); (2) separate from white-English speakers and from Black South Africans (ironically, this meant a separation from Afrikaner speaking coloreds); and (3) provide opportunities for economic advancement. On the economic I sphere, this meant job-protection for unskilled white Afrikaners who were sheltered from unskilled Black labor. Thus during its early years (the 1950s), the Nationalist

Party activities included removing white Afrikaners from contact with non-whites. It also embarked on a huge 'affirmative action' program for white-Afrikaners to create public service jobs, and construct a vast new white-Afrikaner education system (schools, technicons and universities).

Under the Bantu Education Act of 1954, the Nationalist Party government also created a separate education system for Blacks to support its philosophy of white supremacy. The Bantu Education Act was summarized by Henry Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs, and later, Prime Minister of South Africa:

There is no place for him [the Black person in the European community above the level of certain forms of labor...For this reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption into the European community...Until now he has been subject to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him, by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he was not allowed to graze...What is the use of teaching a Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it. (cited in Mathonsi, 1988: 12)

In a nutshell, the exclusionary practices of the 1954 Bantu Education Act promoted an education that taught Black children that equality with whites was not desirable and hence created the reproduction of the Black under class. The aims and processes of Bantu education have been documented elsewhere, but for the purpose of this paper, it is important to examine one major aim: the reproduction of cheap labor through inferior schooling.

Framing the Issue: Bantu Education and Social Reproduction

In any given society, education plays an important role in the production of good citizens and in the reproduction of valued knowledge and practices. However, some studies have shown that valued knowledge is often that of the dominant classes who use education institutions to convince the dominated classes that what is produced in these institutions is for the benefit of everyone, and that more education leads to upward social and economic mobility. These studies have also uncovered processes through which relations of power and subordination are produced and supported in education institutions. Some of these theories are important to our understanding of subordinating processes of educating in South Africa.

One of the important works on social reproduction is by Althusser (1971) in which he addresses the role of schools in the reproduction of capitalist societies. In this work Althusser examines ways in which members of a society accept as "real" their class identity and relationship to the means of production. To analyze this issue of reproduction, Althusser uses the concept of ideology and the subject. To him, an

ideology is twofold: first, it serves the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence and second, it has a material existence. For Althusser, the imaginary, or ideological world of individuals, is that which they inherit and is made “real” through their material existence. Within the South African scene, one might argue that Blacks born under apartheid inherited a culture of poverty which forced them to accept subordinate positions in society. A question might be asked, however, as to how it is that individuals find it difficult to examine and understand the ideology which ultimately positions them as lifetime subordinates.

Althusser argues that individuals find it difficult to critique ideologies that keep them lifetime subordinates mainly because of the machinery or apparatuses employed by the states into which individuals are born. According to Althusser, the state operates with two very powerful set of apparatuses: the repressive state apparatus which is made up of the army, the police, the courts and the prison; and the ideological state apparatuses which include the family apparatus, the religious apparatus, and the educational apparatus. All state apparatuses function both by repression and ideology, but the repressive state apparatus functions massively and predominantly through repression, whereas the ideological state apparatus functions predominantly by inculcation of ideology to ensure the reproduction of labor power and the social relations crucial to maintain dominance. The school, as an ideological state apparatus, operates mainly to reproduce the ideology of the state, through making normal state processes of control. This practice of social control might include, for example, the normalization of state ideologies including economic policies such as the minimum wage, which once implemented, cease to exist as ideas worthy of critique and scrutiny. Once implemented, these ideologies become the norm with which to carry out "safe" capitalist means of production through, for example, making it the norm the minimum amount workers are to be paid in order for the owners of production to profit. Certainly within the South African state, the early years of the apartheid regime operated through ideological state apparatus (ISA), and when resistance towards state power became eminent, the state was forced to bring in its repressive apparatuses; the army and police. Like Althusser, Bowles and Gintis (1975) illuminate on the process of social reproduction arguing that what is learnt in schools is what is needed in the labor market:

The educational system helps integrate youth into the economic system, we believe through a structural correspondence between its social relations and those of production. The structure of social relations in education not only ensures the student to the discipline of the work place, but develops the types of personal demeanor, modes of self representation, self-image, and social class identifications which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy

(p. 175).

In short, schools reproduce existing class structures by preparing students to be workers at various levels and various relationships of production. In the South African context, the Bantu education system acted as an ISA in the following ways. First, the period of Bantu education saw an increase in the number of students enrolled in schools and an increase in the number of schools. This increase was done in the absence of a corresponding expansion of higher primary and secondary school facilities. As Troup (1976), points out, two-thirds of all Black African children at school were in lower primary school, and 94% of all Black African children at school were in primary classes (grades 1 to 5). This school structure increased the possibility that all Blacks going to school would at least complete the first four years of schooling in which the basic literacy, numeracy, and communication skills were taught. At the end, of the fifth year, the government conducted an examination to determine whether pupils had made sufficient progress to be able to benefit in the following grade levels. Many Blacks never passed this examination and in this way were forced to accept subordinate positions in the work force. Black teachers usually referred to this examination as the “primary school bottleneck.” Later, when the Bantu education system was undergoing reforms, the Black Matriculation results (state administered examination at the last grade of high school), were used to achieve the same goals.

The ideological dimension of Bantu education was to produce the kind of worker demanded by the mining and industrial factors. Added to communication, literacy, and numeracy skills was the teaching of religion with a focus on moral values, cleanliness, punctuality, honesty, respect, and courtesy became an important part of schooling. In addition, the Bantu education system implemented a policy that replaced men teachers with women teachers in the lower primary schools, contributing to a considerable saving of state funds. The move to replace men teachers with women teachers parallels the effects of industrialization in England and the United States where teaching became “women’s work” (Apple, 1986). In South Africa, as in the United States and England, this move demonstrates the importance of, and complex interconnections between race and gender oppression to the capitalist accumulation process. Thus, the Bantu education system can be characterized as a typical reproduction system as analyzed by Marxists such as Bowles and Gentis.

However, the works of Bowles and Gentis have been criticized for being over deterministic, and for overemphasizing the power the state has over individuals; and for failure to describe the actual processes through which social reproduction is achieved. For this reason, the works of Bernstein (1975), and Bourdieu and Passeron (1975) are imperative to understanding processes of reproduction in South Africa.

Both Bernstein and Bourdieu analyze the process of legitimation of capitalist values and knowledge through looking at the functions of the school curricula and practice. Bourdieu and Passeron approach the process of legitimation through the concept of “cultural capital.” They describe cultural capital as the knowledge and modes of thinking that characterize different classes and groups, with some forms of cultural capital having a higher exchange rate than others. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1975) “Valued school knowledge is in fact, the cultural knowledge of the bourgeois class. Thus the children of the dominant classes appear to be successful in school because of their natural intelligence, whereas, in reality they rise because they already know what is valued” (cited in Weiler, 1988: 10).

Writing within the same theoretical framework, Bernstein examines language use in relation to class reproduction arguing that schools use middle-class language in the transmission of knowledge and that this in turn puts working class children at a disadvantage since they learn in a language that is foreign to them. While Bourdieu has been criticized for suggesting that oppressed groups coerce their own domination and for ignoring practices of resistance that dominated groups might engage in, and Bernstein, has been criticized for privileging the middle-class code in the transmission of knowledge; both theorists can enhance an understanding of the role language played in reproducing apartheid South Africa. For instance, it was through state legitimization of white culture that apartheid was made official, and later, the history, literature and languages of white South Africans were identified as the most “valued” knowledge to be learnt by Black South Africans. Through this stratification, Black South Africans were disadvantaged and disenfranchised from their own languages, history, and literatures. This white domination, especially in the education system, was met with resistance from Black groups. To understand the process of Black resistance towards apartheid, and towards Bantu education in particular, I will draw on the works of Gramsci (1971), Freire (1970), and Willis (1976).

Gramsci (1971) is mainly concerned with the different ways in which dominant classes in any society impose their own conception of reality on subordinate classes and how these subordinate classes can create alternative institutions to establish their own understanding of oppression in order to oppose and change it. Gramsci uses the concept of hegemony to analyze the ideology of social control where various institutions and structures with wider cultural values and attitudes go beyond the conscious control of ideas. Gramsci states that while individuals will serve the institutions that transmit dominant ideologies (hegemony), these individuals have the power to counter hegemonic control. Thus, for Gramsci, hegemony is always in the process of being reimposed (never complete) since it is open to resistance by those historical-subjects. So, while Gramsci agrees that schools are institutions for social

control, he also sees them as institutions through which subjects of various practices are elaborated and liberated. Similarly, Freire is committed to the power of individuals to a critical consciousness of their own being in the world. Like Gramsci, Freire believes in the power of individuals to critique hegemonic ideology and to establish a counter hegemony through “critically reading the word and the world” (1987: 136). Furthermore, Freire calls for a pedagogy in which teachers respect the consciousness and culture of their students and at the same time are able to create a learning situation in which students can articulate their understanding of the world. While Gramsci’s analysis of hegemony is essential for the conceptualization of counter hegemonic measures, Freire enriches the South African situation by providing the actual process through which Gramsci’s hegemonic concept could be applied. Put differently, Freire’s theory of a critical consciousness enhances the understanding of classroom discourses.

Closely related to the concepts of hegemony and a critical consciousness is a theory of resistance as proposed by, among others, Willis (1976). Willis examines the complexity of an individual’s experience of social reality and the production of meaning. Within this theory, Willis shows how actions labelled as deviant can sometimes be viewed as acts of resistance by individuals and groups against a culture that has all along exploited them. Since the concept of deviance is traditionally associated with youth, Willis conceptualizes youth activities in the South African context. For example, the South African government referred to the 1976 students’ demonstrations against the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction as ‘riots’, disturbances, and an outbreak of juvenile delinquency. Yet many, like Willis, argued that these were not just juvenile acts, but rather forms of resistance against a system of exploitation and oppression. Thus, as with the theory of hegemony by Gramsci and Freire, the concept of resistance enables us to view South African youth as “individuals [who] are not simply acted upon by abstract structures but negotiate, struggle and create meaning of their own”(Weiler: 21). At the same time, some theorists have called for a need to distinguish between different forms of resistance, and to not fall into the trap of defining any act of opposition as resistance without a consideration of both the quality and the expression of these actions (see, for example, Geroux, 1981). It is for this reason that this paper examines the patterns of teacher and youth actions in the liberation struggle, and suggests urgent and imperative changes in the education for liberated South Africa.

Students and the Liberation Struggle

The role played by students in the liberation struggle, especially after 1976 has been widely documented (see, for example, Mathonsi, 1988; Christie & Collins, 1980;

Mphahlele, 1986; and Manganyi, 1978). It is not my interest to revisit this history, but rather to examine lessons that can be drawn from these activities and how they can help shape processes for educational reform in independent South Africa. It is a well-known fact that youth were the major force in the struggle where central issues of education and unemployment were in crisis. Youth were also a major force in the rival factions within townships where Black liberatory groups fought for political control in a post-apartheid South Africa. My interest here is to examine these challenges youth placed on the education system.

The most significant challenge which shocked the apartheid government occurred on June 16, 1976, when over 20,000 students marched to Orlando stadium demonstrating against the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. The response from the government was to open fire on these students and it is estimated that over 1,000 students were killed. Furthermore, the government banned over 17 Black organizations as a way of suppressing opposition. For the Black population, the success of this demonstration was that Afrikaans was not implemented as a medium of instruction, and that after the third grade, parents were allowed to choose the medium of instruction for their children. Also, the banning of Black political organization did not mean the end of political activity, for Blacks took the offensive, organized themselves and as a result, in 1979 and 1980, Black students' organization, the Azanian Students Organization (AZASO) and the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) were launched.

The launch of these students' organizations enhanced students' opposition against Bantu education and against the broader apartheid state. In the 1980s; the United Democratic Front (UDF) formed in 1983 as the inner wing of the ANC in exile, adapted a strategy of making South Africa ungovernable through creating chaos in the townships, destroying government property, such as schools, and boycotting government-owned stores, government-controlled means of transportation, and so on. Making South Africa ungovernable was supported by the implementation of slogans such as "liberation now, education later," This slogan meant that students chose to boycott schools as a way of protesting against the quality of education they were receiving, It also referenced the call for students to demonstrate their commitment to the liberation struggle by boycotting all apartheid structures, particularly, schools. Under COSAS, schools saw protest and boycotts over various grievances which were probably less important than the students' determination to participate in a broader political struggle against apartheid. Some schools which did not support this strategy initially stayed open, only to close down later because of fear of reprisal from UDF supporters. Thus, despite prosecution of youth leaders and the banning of COSAS, the 1980s showed the resilience of student opposition to the government.

The disastrous effect of protests and school boycotts by Black students in South Africa as a whole, were signalled by the emergence of the Soweto Parents Crises Committee (SPCC), and other similar committees in other regions in 1985. In December 1985, at a conference in Soweto, it was agreed that boycotting students, some of whom had not gone to school for over three years, should return to school on the condition that certain demands be met by the central government within three months. The demands included lifting the state of emergency, withdrawing troops from townships, unbanning of COSAS, and the recognition of student representative council. A National Education Crisis Committees (NECC) was formed with the SPCC as its base and with representatives from 11 regions of the country.

The NECC pioneered a “back to school” slogan which motivated students to both stop boycotting schools and to work towards the creation of better education, through participating in school structures and forming committees that were to work towards this end. Such initiatives resulted in the formation of student-teacher committees and student-parent-teacher committees that led to the formation of “people’s education for people’s power.” People’s education was essentially about resisting the inferior education and designing a curriculum that was to empower students and allow them to be critical of the system as well as analytical of the forms of subordination and resistance. Thus, the era of the NECC witnessed a revision/modification of UDF strategies, notably that of “liberation now, education later.” There were, however, problems that the NECC could not deal with; problems such as overcrowding which resulted in high teacher-student ratios and of the shortage of books and stationary. Nonetheless, these problems did not hinder the aims of the NECC and the desires of both students and parents to keep schools open, and to have some form of education, limited as it might have been.

The 1990s was an era of more organized student resistance against the broader state which was later strengthened by the state’s unbanning of political organizations including the ANC, and the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. All these activities led to the first ever democratic elections in the country. Throughout the period of resistance, together with some teachers and parents, students demonstrated a critical awareness of the oppressive nature of state-controlled education, and of how education operated as an ideological state apparatus. Students were highly critical of the education system they received and, when the NECC initiated and implemented ‘people’s education for people’s power’, through subcommittees, students contributed to the formulation of policies which shaped the people’s education, and continued to be part and parcel of education debates that engulfed South Africa at the beginning of the 1990s. To develop the point about students' contribution to changes in the education system, I will briefly examine issues in the language of education,

looking at ways that students helped shape and redirect this issue.

Students' Contribution to the Language of Education

One of the policies legislated under the Bantu Education Act of 1954 was the language policy which established the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Like Bantu education, this school language policy was rejected by Black South Africans, as it was viewed as one step further in fragmenting them. Nonetheless, the state went ahead and implemented it. The introduction of mother tongue instruction had negative consequences. First, primary schools were ethnically divided, since ethnic groups speak different languages. This, of course, supported the state's view of the majority of the population as constituted of many minority groups. Furthermore, because of the introduction of mother tongue instruction, the knowledge of English in the community, gradually built up by English medium of instruction in the English' mission schools prior to Bantu education, was eroded.

The Bantu Education Act also introduced a 50/50 language policy for secondary schools. This meant that half the subjects in the school curriculum were to be studied in English and the other half in Afrikaans. The reasons for this move are not that clear, but it is safe to speculate that this move was to safeguard the status of Afrikaans which appeared to have been losing its status as the language of power to English. When in 1975, the state decided to move back this 50/50 policy to the last year of primary education, Afrikaans as a medium of instruction was strongly contested since it was seen as the immediate language of the oppressor, the Nationalist Party. This resulted in the flash point of the Soweto uprisings of 1976 and onward. It also led to a change in education language policy. Since 1976, mother tongue instruction has been the medium of instruction for the first four years of schooling. After these years, parents could choose either English, Afrikaans, or an African language to serve as the medium. For almost all Black communities, English has been chosen as the language of instruction. Reasons for this choice are many. First, as an international language, English was seen as a vehicle to expose the evils of apartheid and to obtain solidarity from other countries. Second, English was seen as a means to attain post-primary/secondary education at home or overseas, and thus access to better material resources. Third, Afrikaans was seen as the immediate languages of the apartheid regime, the oppressor, despite the colonial guilt of English (Ndebele, 1987). Fourth, English was perceived as a unifying language for Black South Africans who spoke numerous African languages and were further compartmentalized through the homeland structures.

During the 1980s, the struggle for the use of English as a medium of instruction became the mobilizing factor for pro-independent forces. The successes gained (for

example, the use of English in all Black schools from grade three onward), were regarded as victories for the liberation struggle. One of the committees formed by the NECC was the “people’s English” committee. This committee dealt with the use and teaching of English in schools. Analysts of “people’s English” mentioned challenges that were evident in the approach proposed for the teaching of English in South Africa. First was the recognition of the political nature of language as subjective rather than neutral. Second, people’s English challenged and redefined the meaning of language competence to include “the ability to say and write what one means; to hear what is said and what is hidden; to defend one’s point of view; to argue, to persuade, to negotiate, to create; to reflect, to invent, to explore relationships, personal structural political; to speak, read, write with confidence; to make one’s voice heard; to read and print and resist it where necessary” (Ndebele, cited in Pierce, 1989: 411-12). Through the teaching and use of People’s English, English attained a high symbolic status as a boundary, in that the use of English in certain context such as political rallies, clearly demarcated a substantial and significant group in the struggle.³ In short, the very efforts of advocating wider use of English, for struggling for the implementation of English as a medium of instruction, of designing and offering English language programs, and of learning English all promoted political solidarity and a common cause. Proficiency in English gained widespread symbolic value as an indicator of a new and different political dispensation. Acquisition of English implied belief in its efficacy as a substantial resource in the new dispensation, facilitating mobility and access to both symbolic and material benefits. Significant and necessary political gains were attained by exploiting the symbolic effect of English, and indeed, by initially generating that symbolism at the expense of rational debate and inquiry concerning the communicative functions of the language; that is, wider implication of using this language in education. It was the functions, and not simply the symbolic value that students in the 1990s started to question and, in this way, initiated a debate about the then existing language policies and practices in South Africa. The status of English in the country was being questioned and English as a medium of instruction in schools was debated. Afrikaans, which had all along been considered an official language, was given the status of African language--despite its Eurocentric history. African languages fought for and eventually gained recognition at higher levels and debates went on about the economic and political volubility of this move.

To illustrate the kind’s of questions that Students raised about the communicative functions of English in a post-apartheid era, I will briefly draw examples from a study I conducted in 1992 in one of the townships that surrounds the city of Durban. Basically, the study investigated ways in which identities were constructed during this era of political transformation from an apartheid state to an

independent one, where Black political groups were in competition for control over this independent state, and where social and cultural practices were the key features of social and political identities. In this study I worked with a group of mature students in their last grade of high school who were preparing for the national examinations known as matriculation which were to determine whether or not they would attend post-secondary institutions, I selected six of these students and observed them inside the school settings, that is, in the classroom and playground; and also outside the school setting which included bus rides from school to their homes, in their homes with relatives, and in other social domains such as in sports clubs and movie theatres. Again, the basic aim was to examine ways in which cultural practices including language use came together and influenced the social identities or subject positions of students at this historical time.

From classroom observations, it was clear that participants made great attempts to use the official language of the school, especially in the presence of adult authority. There are many reasons that might have promoted such an attempt, but one obvious one was the desire to do well in the final examination, which, to a greater extent, is indicative of one's command of the English language. This final examination was to determine whether or not students could access either post-secondary education or jobs, since the language of schooling is also linked to the language of work. In short, it is important to note that students' views about the use of, for example, English occurred in the light of their legitimization of the language as the language of education and social success.

One of the important debates during this era was the issue of a national language. Which language was to be South Africa's national language? In one group discussion held in one of the classes where I conducted this study, participants unanimously said Zulu when asked "which language do you think should be the national language of the country?" The reasons for this choice varied, but all rested in the positive interpretations of the Zulu language. Of the 22 participants involved in the discussions, 75 stated that because that language is spoken by "great" people who fought and conquered during Shaka times (an exact translation would be "big" but the Zulu word they used means both great and many), and also because the Zulu are a brave nation who fought the British without guns. Five other participants argued that Zulu was easy to learn; that other Bantu languages borrow a lot of their lexicon from Zulu; and two participants said they chose Zulu because it is the language of the majority of the population.

To take this issue further, I asked "If you were to choose between English and Afrikaans for a national language, which one would you choose?" Twelve of the 22 participants chose Afrikaans and gave the following reasons: Afrikaans is easy to

learn because its grammatical structure is like that of Zulu; Afrikaans is indigenous to South Africa and therefore unlike English, where the British dictate to us which forms are correct and which forms are wrong; with Afrikaans “we will be the only ones telling everybody what is wrong and correct Afrikaans”;⁴ because Afrikaners are the ones who control the places where they work and therefore it is important to know their language. One of the participants further explained that he had a brother who had been educated in the KwaZulu/Natal region,⁵ and had a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering, but could not find a job in the Transvaal because he did not have ‘good Afrikaans’. Eight of the participants chose English because it is an international language (reflecting the ANC's political rhetoric of the time). Two of the participants refused to choose.

The responses the students offered speak to a number of controversial issues. The first, regards the use of Zulu that positioned people within a positive interpretation of history and culture of bravery and resistance against some forms of domination. In fact, it is possible to argue that Zulu was often a symbol of power used to resist cultural modes of domination such as language. Such an interpretation in the use of the Zulu language is complex if we address the issue that during this period, the poliferised nature of language which marked Zulus from non-Zulus, Inkatha members from ANC members. What these responses signal is that there were moments in which Zulu speakers, regardless of their political affiliation, wanted to draw on symbols in (Zulu) history to positively define themselves and also rationalize future language use. More importantly, the positive interpretations about the use of Zulu in this instance signalled resistance to English as a colonial language. It initiated questions about the liberatory nature of English as opposed to the oppressive nature of Afrikaans which had dominated the 1980s. The second controversial issue raised by these responses is about the relationship between languages and economic resources. By choosing Afrikaans as a language of South Africa, these students were raising questions about the extent to which Afrikaans could be sabotaged as a language of the oppressor (apartheid) and if it also was the language with which to access economic resources.

In addition to the issue of the national language, participants also spoke about ways in which English was viewed outside the classroom. While English was considered the language of education and power, depending on the context, the demonstration of such qualities did not necessarily receive positive responses. For example, the use of English in the township was often interpreted to mean that one wanted to demonstrate uncalled for power, or that he/she was literate and therefore better than the majority of township people who were not literate in English. As one participant put it, “If you use English [in the township], people say you phone

yourself - uyazifonela, uyazitshela. They say you put a feather in your hat.”⁶

The discussions I had with these students about their perception of language use and choice, reveal a complex set of tensions that students negotiated when making choices in language use. For example, one kind of tension resulted from the acceptance and use of English as the language of politics and education; and the simultaneous resistance to this language as colonial and a border marker, demarcating people as ignorant and illiterate in a period of a struggle for democracy and equal rights for the illiterate and literate--however defined.

The other kind of tension resulted from the complex relationship between languages with African languages competing for legitimacy and recognition in a post-apartheid era. But more importantly, the discussions challenged two basic assumptions which had been traditional in South Africa's literature on language planning: that language planning is predominantly the role of the state; and that the state has the potential to act in the interest of the nation. Historically, the trend in South Africa has been that the state and the interests of the general public are very different. For instance, during the years of the NP government, the language boards and the academes responsible for language planning were not accountable to the public, but instead, were key elements in the implementation of linguistic apartheid which led to the presentation of separate ethnic groups and the creation of autonomous nationalities. Their undemocratic nature promoted bureaucratic bodies out of touch with the real needs of the public. Throughout the years of struggle, students insisted that they, through the NECC, be part of the bodies of language planning. Thus, in a broader sense, students' insight into the language issue, their participation in various language debates with friends, teachers, and researchers, suggests that educational planning, including planning for the language of education could no longer be left as the sole responsibility of policy-makers. In other words, students were insisting that as they are the ones primarily affected by the language of education, they should be included in policies that consequently affected their learning. In the following section I further examine other bodies that challenged state assumptions about educational policy and practice; the teachers. I examine the role played by teachers in the struggle, and conclude by an analysis of what both student and teacher activities might mean in the development of an empowering education system.

Teachers and the Struggle

From 1976 onward, a situation characterized by boycotts, uprisings in the townships strikes, demonstrations, mass detentions and stay-aways made the work of teachers frustrating, challenging, and complex. Teachers were directly affected by these crises and continuously faced a number of dilemmas due to their contradictory

position. For instance, on the one hand, after 1976 and more so in the late 1980s at the pick of student uprisings, parents accused teachers of failing to discipline what was referred to as “revolutionary” students. On the other hand, students also attacked teachers to whom they referred to as “sell-outs” or agents of apartheid. Teachers were seen in this light because of their work, which was of control and surveillance, specifically as if they acted as bearers of relations of ideological domination over pupils. Furthermore, teachers legitimized school knowledge by promoting ruling-class (white English and Afrikaner) knowledge, languages and norm-referenced grading accordingly. Unfortunately, the government itself pointed its fingers at the teachers, calling them “bad potatoes” and accusing them of teaching revolutionary “Marxist-oriented” ideologies, thus turning schools into revolutionary institutions.

In a study conducted in 1989,⁷ described the complexity of teachers’ positions, their struggle and concerns within the social context of apartheid South Africa. Teachers responded to the socio-political struggle, and to their relationship with students in two ways. One group of teachers believed in teaching by the book or “teaching it as it is,” and that it was possible to separate politics from education. They believed, therefore, that the role of students was to first achieve academic knowledge before embarking on any other issues, be it politics or otherwise. These teachers interpreted students political activities to mean that students were simply using politics to stay away from their expected duty of going to school. Furthermore, they believed that education was an answer to existing problem’s and failed to consider the political nature of the education they perpetuated. In cases where there was an awareness of the limits of Bantu education, this group of teachers argued that half a loaf was better than no loaf at all. Needless to say, this kind of attitude exacerbated already hostile teacher-student relationships.

The second group of teachers, which was of great interest to me, was critical of the education system, of its exploitative nature, and despite government restrictions on their political activism, continued to teach in a way that challenged existing relations of power. While these teachers also believed in “teaching by the book,” they were more concerned with making education an empowering activity for their students. Through interviews, these teachers voiced concerns about the curriculum they taught, that the textbooks were full of inaccuracies, and that the history books for example, robbed Black children of their own history and worked to inculcate in them an ideology of inferiority and white supremacy. As one teacher stated:

...I mean, standard 6-10 children are taught that the white man is superior. They are taught this throughout their school period. For instance, the textbooks we use start from 1652 when Jan Van Riebeeck arrived at the Cape. The implication here is that South African history which includes us blacks,

starts during this period. This is not true because our ancestors were living here in this country long before Jan Van Riebeeck.

Others, expressed concern that the textbooks they used did not take into consideration the child's culture, being, and setting:

Most of the books are totally useless--irrelevant. Some are just fairy tales and you wonder why they are prescribed to begin with. The children neither enjoy nor develop their minds from reading these books. What makes things worse is that we are forced to teach books written overseas like Shakespeare while we have our own Shakespeareans in Africa. I mean, I wish we could teach books by African writers; writers that describe how the dust smells when the rain falls after a long hot day, rather than to read books that describe how white the snow looks on the ground after a heavy snowstorm something I will not see before going to the grave.

Still, others voiced concern about the medium of instruction as well as about methods of teaching the two languages of commerce, English, and Afrikaans. For example, one teacher commented that there is a lot of emphasis on the written aspect of English and Afrikaans, while students need to be taught how to orally communicate in these languages because in most jobs, it is the spoken and not the written language that is valued. And others were concerned about the economic needs that governed the students' learning processes and the teachers' classroom practices. Overall, this study demonstrated that teachers were, at the very least, aware that there was something wrong with the system and many attempted to change it through different pedagogical practices or through participating in teachers' unions which were, however, banned by the government.

Within this group of teachers there was an attempt to take up and appropriate texts for the urgency of struggle within students' lives. For example, some of these teachers saw the teaching of subjects like English Literature a place where issues of political struggle could be brought into the classroom without fear of being accused of bringing 'politics' into the classroom. For example, some teachers used the teaching of *Julius Caesar* as an opportunity to discuss issues of leadership, trust and betrayal in nation-state situations, while others used *Animal Farm* to analyze the meaning and functions of the capitalist and communist means of production. By framing *Animal Farm* as a book not only concerned about communism, but also about economic systems including the capitalist system, these teachers encouraged students to explore issues of economic exploitation, cheap labor, and so on, thus relating to the students' political lives.

This is not to suggest, however, that this group of teachers did not have problems in their classrooms. On the contrary, many of these teachers spoke of different ways

students challenged their pedagogical practices which they viewed as supporting the oppressive ideology of the state, even if the teacher was engaged in subverting that ideology. One of these teachers narrated an incident that had occurred in her standard seven classroom (grade 9) while teaching a poem, "Dooley is a traitor." This poem is about a citizen who refused to go to the military service required of a young white South, African man of his time. To test the students' understanding of the poem, the teacher gave students a couple of short answer questions, and to encourage critical thinking and writing skills, she also gave them the question: "Would you readily enlist as a soldier in defense of your country? Give reasons for your answer." None of her students attempted this question. The teacher was surprised by the students refusal to answer this question, so she decided to redo it orally and in the students first language. From this oral exercise, she received different responses. Some said they wouldn't enlist because it would mean fighting against their own people. Others argued that they would enlist in order to acquire knowledge about firearms and later use this knowledge to stage war against the apartheid government, and still others said they would not enlist because they did not believe that military force could lead to social justice. They argued that what war does is suppress those with less military power for a particular period, but once the defeated gain power, the cycle of war starts all over again. This, they argued, prolongs rather than solves the problem. Once this dialogue was established, the teacher asked students to talk about their refusal to respond to the initial question. The reasons varied, but one that caught my attention was that some students argued they did not want to write about their 'personal feelings' in English. For me, this again demonstrates the students' ability to talk about practices of language choice especially as they related to schooling.

Through interviews with this group of teachers, some of them were already aware of the things they wanted to see changed in the education of Black students. One of the important suggestions that came out of the study was the need to train teachers in order to develop and sharpen their academic and pedagogical skills. These teachers who had been educated under the apartheid system expressed the need to see the world outside the apartheid scheme of things, to gain new knowledge and develop new modes of thinking; to "de-apartheidizing" their minds. Many teachers expressed a need to learn critical ways of thinking about their jobs instead of merely acting like robots, simply performing tasks that had been set down for them by the government through the department of education and training. While it was clear at that time that the government had very little interest in decolonizing the teachers' minds, the onus under the new government is to actively be involved in the re-education of teachers by providing funding as well as proper teacher education institutions that promote social justice through educational change. But if this is to take place, there is a lot that

education planners can learn through consultation with the teachers who have been involved in the system and are eager to change it.

Conclusion

Many studies that analyzed the South African situation concentrate on the relationship between schools and the social division of labor. They have viewed schools as a mere reflex of economic relations thus undermining the power of resistance to socio-political inequalities. I have argued here that schools are not just mere puppets of the state or the economy. In fact, before the national elections, stable schooling did not necessarily reflect submission to state authority and its unequal forms of education, but rather, schools acted as forums for political mobilization as well as spaces for critiquing and analyzing dominant state discourse.

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that students and teacher were aware of the state's power to govern their lives. Here I am using the concepts 'power' and 'government' as defined by Michel Foucault, in which to govern includes more than just political structures, but rather, embraces the practice of power, of directing people's lives: .

The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcomes. Basically power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of "government." This word must be allowed a very broad meaning which it had in the sixteenth century. "Government" did not refer only to political structures or to the management of States; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick...To govern (in this broader sense) is to structure the possible field of action of others. (Foucault, 1972: 121).

Examples have been drawn that indicate students awareness in the use of language as a mode of governance and as a vehicle for the articulation of .flew thoughts and action. The preceding argument has demonstrated the complexity and inherently political nature of, among others, language in South Africa, historically and materially organized within particular sets of economic, political, and social relations. It was this complexity, a consideration of how forms of language-in-use could enhance changes in relations of power which was examined by students in their everyday practices, and in formal and informal situations. Students' involvement in such issues, and their critical insights to the issue of language and schooling, suggests that they are fully equipped to engage in the planning of educational policies.

In the preceding discussion, I have also outlined how teachers differed about the

forms of resistance students engaged in, and how such differences in opinions influenced teachers' pedagogical practices. Students' political activities together with teachers' political positions most often influenced teacher-student relationships. Some teachers attempted to nurture students' quest for a liberating and empowering education by providing alternative analytic tools, while others believed in teaching "by the book." These pedagogical differences suggest that education in South Africa has to address the issue of inter-group ideological differences that set individuals to compete against each other. Besides the issue of difference, this paper suggests a need for an inclusive curriculum; a curriculum which takes into account different forms of knowledge and of seeing the world. In other words, changes in education policy should include, among other things, changes in curriculum content and method. It has been argued that all along, the education system has promoted textual materials that excluded the history and cultures of Black groups with an aim of instilling in them an inferiority complex and an image of white supremacy. Education in South Africa can no longer neglect the histories and cultures that have coexisted over generations.

Added to curriculum content are new ways of teaching and learning. There is a need for new educational policies to consider new ways of learning that are grounded in the subordinated groups' cultural modes of thinking including oral histories and storytelling. To pursue new ways of teaching and learning, ways that see the students as more than just an empty vessel waiting to be filled with knowledge (Freire, 1983), teacher education is imperative. South Africa needs teachers who are eager to change their 'old ways' and to incorporate in their pedagogy a valuing of students' knowledge. This in itself means de-apartheidizing teachers' as well as students' minds. That is, teachers have to adopt new ways of seeing themselves, ways that position them as sharing power with through facilitating students' ideas while at the same time provide students with new resources and information they might not have. Students on the other hand, need to see themselves as active participants in the learning process with the power to question and analyze what they learn.

There is more that the education in South Africa has to offer to the Black child. The most important however will be the unlearning of relations of power and subordination. Liberation and social justice will be fulfilled if education teaches the white child that it, more than the Black child, is responsible for redressing injuries caused by processes of colonization, oppression, and white superiority.

NOTES

1. The National Party identified 10 Black 'nations'. Each was given its own tribal homeland. The objective of apartheid was to give each homeland independence. This would have ultimately produced a situation in which there were no Black South Africans because all Blacks would have been citizens of another (Black) state. Four homelands were in fact given 'independence'. The rest were 'self-governing' but legally remained part of South Africa. The four which became independent were: South Africa as the TBVC countries. Through granting independence to the TBVC countries, South Africa succeeded in taking away citizenship from over six million people. The six self-governing homelands were KwaZulu (Zulu); Lebowa (Pedi); Gazankulu (Tsonga); KaNgwane (Swazi); Qwaqwa (Sotho) and KwaNdebele Transkei (Xhosa); Ciskei (Xhosa); Bophuthatswana (Tswana); and Venda (Venda).
2. Here, I am indebted to my mother whose teaching experiences under the Bantu education system informed this paper and many others.
3. Reasons for the choice by political organizations especially the UDF at this time were complex. For example, because of what became known as "Black on Black violence" there was a desire to blare ethnic boundaries by not using any of the indigenous African languages since most were associated with one ethnic group and not others. For instance, the use of the Zulu language became associated with the Inkatha Freedom Party, a rival party to the UDF. To avoid being labelled Inkatha, it was believed that UDF supporters resorted to the use of English. Yet the extent to which ordinary supporters of the UDF used English was not clear especially if we consider that most had been boycotting school for years, and were not comfortable with and literate in it.
4. To me, this was an interesting new viewpoint which, however, was not well received by those who were still interested in the ANC's version that students were resistant towards Afrikaans. For example, during the data collection period, I was invited by the linguistic department of the University of Natal, Durban campus, to speak about my research and about the kinds of data I was getting from the townships. When I spoke about this viewpoint, many of the white professors expressed disbelief, and wanted to know the name of the school these students attended, because, as they stated, they themselves had been conducting research in township schools for a number of years, but had never received such viewpoints. It is perhaps my own position as an "insider," that is to be credited for the nature of the data collected in this study. But it is perhaps most likely that the socio-political changes that were taking place in

these townships and in South Africa as a whole were, to borrow from Gal (1988), mirrored in the views that people had about language and also in patterns of language use. Whether or not these views were realistic, as others have rightly pointed out, is beyond the scope of this paper.

5. KwaZulu/Natal is one of South Africa's four provinces, and before the Union of South Africa in 1910, was one of the two British controlled regions. The other was the Cape province. Prior to the Union, South Africa had been colonized by the Dutch and the British. The Dutch owned the two northern provinces, the Transvaal, and the Orange Free State. KwaZulu/Natal is relatively an economically dependent region with most of its Black population working as migrant workers in the Rand (Transvaal) gold mines.
6. This phrase, which was translated directly from Zulu to English, means that a person is trying to show-off by doing the impossible, like phoning oneself. The students translated it back onto Zulu because they realized I had no clue to the English version.
7. This study was undertaken as partial fulfilment for the Master of Arts in the Education Department, Saint Mary's University, Halifax. In this study I interviewed fifteen teachers in the Pietermaritzburg area about their pedagogical practices. My interest was particularly on those teachers with a "critical consciousness" (Freire, 1981), who offered students alternative analytic tools--tools that differed from those handed down by the department of education and training.

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