

The elephant in the room: Power and race at play in art practice in primary schools¹

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ABSTRACT

Pervasive exercising of power in educational institutions and processes could be a contributing factor to the undervalued status of art education in South African primary schools. A case study approach that aimed at gaining insight into power relations that played out in the establishment of an art education programme in a low-income area in the Western Cape, South Africa was employed. The article addresses problems of race, inequality, and exclusion as well as schools as possible spaces for critical transformative dialogue. In order to address the impoverished status of art education in primary schools, teachers should become knowledgeable in the functioning of hidden curricula to be able to work towards unbiased observation of learners. Inequality and exclusion emphasised feelings of discomfort, which relates to language and learning barriers as well as limited material and human resources. It is suggested that dialogue could cultivate within teachers greater understanding of the intersection of class, race and power, and the unfolding thereof in education. In striving for a meaningful way to work towards social justice, schools could become spaces for critical transformative dialogue in role players' detachment from the symbolic forms of meaning that constitute their histories, social constructions, beliefs, viewpoints and preferences.

Keywords: art education, power relations, hidden curricula, conflict, dialogue, primary school, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Power relations, invisibly upheld by hidden curricula³, play an important role in prevailing perceptions of art education. Although policy instructions state art education as important to learner development, evidence suggests that art as classroom practice is regarded as both affordable only to the privileged and associated with whiteness. Consequently, the arts are considered as 'secondary' (Moloi, 2012: 68) to the basic skill disciplines (that is, languages, mathematics and science) and seen as a 'nice-to-have'

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3 The hidden curriculum is described by Afshar and Yazdani (2018: 200) as a peaceful and silent message, implicit, non-explicit and unintentional. It is an operational, unspoken message that is not specifically stated, but consists of unspoken codes, and is inherent in culture and organisational structure. It is conflicting, ideological information that is transmitted by teachers or learners with or without recognition.

activity. Through an analysis of a case study in a low-income area in Delft, Western Cape, South Africa, this article addresses the negotiation of power relations that played out during the implementation of a specific art education programme. The objectives of the study were to gain nuanced insight into the variety of power relations at play in the implementation of the programme and to explore the power relations in relation to one another. It sought to do this primarily through involving learners, parents and teachers in the art programme and through the recognition of possible limitations of cross-cultural research as white researchers in South Africa. By considering the context of social justice in South African education, the study highlights the themes of race, inequality, and exclusion, as well as schools as spaces for critical transformative dialogue, and it raises the question of appropriate teacher training in striving for an inclusive and more just education system.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Although the transformation process since democracy in 1994 has brought about major changes, specifically at policy and curriculum levels, historical disadvantages brought about by colonialism and apartheid are still deeply rooted in South African education. The educational experience for most South African learners has generally not changed significantly, and, specifically, not where the arts are concerned. Prew (as cited in Department of Education [DoE], 2009: 3) refers to education in South Africa as a two-tiered system: 'We talk equality but we implement differentiation.' Although many factors influence the perpetuation of economic and sociocultural ideologies that serve to maintain systemic social injustices, the racial issue is a significant factor underpinning the negotiation of power relations and addressing the complex nature of social justice in South Africa. The study on which this article reports applied the theories of power and power relations by Michel Foucault (1980) as well as Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) framework on cultural reproduction to the South African education context. In addition, education-related material is presented by way of Michael Apple's (1990, 1993, 2004) theories on hidden curricula.

Power relations

It is when we acknowledge how power has been bestowed on us by our roles, the colour of our skin, and the accident of our births and families that we can possibly extend ourselves and are able to understand somebody else's oppression. Then, we own our responsibility to end the oppression and advocate for equity, respect, and justice. (Tuason, 2005: 45)

Power is described by Foucault as not just a mechanism that implies certain persons' exercise of power over others, but as 'manifold forms of domination that can be exercised within society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation' (Foucault, 1980: 96). The term 'power/knowledge' is used by Foucault (1980) to indicate that power is shaped through known systems of knowledge, scientific understanding and 'truth'. These concepts or 'truths' are reinforced through the education system, the media and the continuous change of political and economic beliefs. Power becomes a 'battle' for the status of truth, as well as the carrying out of its economic and political roles (Foucault, 1980: 91). Bourdieu (1986: 471) also refers to power relations as a social order that has been increasingly ingrained in people's minds through 'cultural products' as well as through systems of education, language, judgements, values and classification, and events of ordinary life.

According to Weedon (1987: 164), the education system is central to the way power structures operate in society and, as such, allows for the investment in values, modes and preferences of the dominant social group. This causes an imbalance in power relations. The imbalance in power occurs on all levels and is among the factors that underpin inequality. Addressing inequality entails first asking how social power is implemented and how social relations of gender, class and race are shaped and perpetuated, and 'where we might look for weak points more open to challenge and transformation' (Weedon, 1987: 132). According to Weedon (1987: 35),

[p]ower relations structure all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. Power relations determine who does what and for whom, what we are and what we might become.

In this way, power relations are at the core of the way cultural ideologies and practices are reproduced.

Cultural reproduction

What we assign power to – the symbols, meaning and actions that form the basis of everyday life – are what will be reproduced by future generations. Cultural reproduction refers to a system where norms, values, meanings, symbols and activities are transferred from one generation to another within a specific social body by means of socialisation processes. Although there is disagreement (Gartman, 1991) on the value of Bourdieu's theory on cultural reproduction, it provides a model to explain how education systems seem to play a vital role in the perpetuation of stratification and inequality in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Bourdieu's (1986) position on socialisation implies that all cognitive structures and practical knowledge that have become internalised originate from forms of classification and historical schemes of perception and appreciation. These personifications are seen as common to all agents of society and become accepted and 'normalised', and, in this way, allow for the production of beliefs and structures seen as the basis for a common, meaningful world.

Apple (1990: 32) explains how Bourdieu's focus on the student's ability to cope with what might be called a 'middle-class culture' provides an example of the influence of the power of socialisation. Schools accept the social gift of the 'cultural capital' of the middle class as natural. By implying that all children have had equal access to cultural capital, those who already have the linguistic and social competencies to handle middle-class culture are covertly favoured. Just as economic systems are engineered to favour those who have economic capital, the school system favours those who inherit cultural capital.

Schooling, via both formal and hidden curricula, is used as a mechanistic and socialising filter to process knowledge and people. For example, different sentiments are taught to diverse school groups, influenced by social indicators such as class, gender and race, which could lead to the legitimisation of the limited roles certain populations ultimately play in society (Apple, 1990).

Hidden curricula

Literature on schooling suggests that the production of education programmes reveals two types of curricula (Eisner, 1994). The first type is the formal and official programme, designed by education authorities with detailed descriptions of educational content, objectives and activities. In the second type, the hidden curricula, essentials are not clearly laid out, but are taught covertly via social interactions that deal with attitudes, principles and behaviours.

The way in which hidden curricula covertly function is best described by the concept of 'hegemony', which implies that fundamental patterns in society are held together by unspoken assumptions or rules, economic control, and power. It suggests a web of conventions that, when internalised by learners, becomes legitimatised and normalised knowledge (Apple, 1990). The very fact that these assumptions are unspoken enlarges their potency as aspects of hegemony (Apple, 1990). Hegemony acts as the vehicle through which subtle connections that exist between educational activity and particular economic and socio-political interests become normalised.

Apple (2004: 174) maintains that 'Schools are seen as connected to a marketplace; especially to the global capitalist market and the labour needs and processes of such a market.' Disciplines (subjects)

are either highly 'commodified' (Apple, 1990: 37) by the system or tolerated as a fringe activity in the curriculum. Disciplines on which the capitalist system feeds are those that are kept in favour by hidden curricula. According to this approach, 'schools help perpetuate an unjust social order through conveying beliefs, values, and norms that are effective in political, social, and economic life' (Apple, 2004: 21). In this way, the inattention to art education that prevails in many schools in the country could be linked to the way in which hidden curricula correspond to ideological needs of cultural capital (Giese & Apple, 2006). Henri Giroux (as cited in Palmer, 2001) warns against schools as sites that simply perpetuate cultural reproduction and suggests that schools should instead be environments where critical imagination and discussion can occur as well as where struggles and journeys for the search and imagining of new solutions to the complexities of a current world experience are invited.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ART PROGRAMME AT A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN DELFT, WESTERN CAPE

The current state of inequality of educational opportunities is the issue that lay at the core of the idea of establishing an art education programme at a primary school in Delft. The art programme that became the practical project for this study was run and funded by a partnership between a Western Cape Education Department (WCED) institution, Tygerberg Art Centre, and a non-profit organisation, A Reaching Hand, which collaborated with the University of South Africa (Unisa). The programme provides weekly (during school hours) as well as Saturday art classes to learners (age group 5–13) from the local primary school and the rest of community. The idea of the programme was initiated at a meeting between the stakeholders (Tygerberg Art Centre, A Reaching Hand and Unisa) and a community member in Delft who expressed her need to address the lack of exposure to art education experiences of her own children, as well as of the community of Delft. This idea is in accordance with the intended function of the art centres initiated by the WCED to provide opportunities for learners not exposed to the visual arts. However, despite the fact that art centres are WCED institutions and function within the same governmental and institutional framework as all government schools, engaging in programmes across cultural, class and economic barriers proves challenging.

Art education for learners is clearly indicated in government policies and curriculum statements, but there is a discrepancy between what realises as lived experience of learners with regard to art education and what is promoted by the curriculum. Many principals, teachers and parents perceive art education as not being vital to the education process. The arts are regarded as 'nice but not necessary' (Eisner, 2002: xi). Moloji (2012) maintains that the arts hold a secondary place compared to other subject areas. The emphasis on mathematics and science, brought about by amendments to the education practices of apartheid, has caused many schools to concentrate on the development of mathematical and scientific abilities. This preference may also be caused by lack of knowledge of the educational value of arts experiences as rich opportunities for learning and the potential to facilitate a rich variety of learning opportunities through the arts (Westraadt, 2011). In this regard, Van Graan (as cited in Lochner, 2011: 137) refers to how the 'non-prioritisation of culture and the arts in development' is perpetuated. He refers to the majority of South Africans who experience a lack of artistic skills and resources and relates this lack to the ensuing difficulty of maintaining and finding identity, making meaning of lived experiences as well as finding difficulty in articulating aspirations, fears and ideas. He states that, if development is designed to overcome the historical disadvantages of colonialism and apartheid, then it should be rooted in a philosophy where human beings are seen as equals and observed in a holistic way, rather than seen as self-serving and in pursuit only of economic or political benefits. Westraadt (2015) maintains that transformative teaching is possible through art education in that it allows for cognitive and emotional development of both teacher and learner. Westraadt (2016, par. 3) argues:

Art education can open up avenues for different ways of knowing – for all subjects. These include the aesthetic, scientific, interpersonal, formal and practical modes that can be encountered through

the senses, intellect and emotions. Making and appreciating art involves the emotional and mental faculties.

Research in schools indicates that most teachers do not feel confident about teaching art. Many omit art from their teaching programmes or use prescriptive resource materials and theoretical tasks from textbooks. This approach limits creativity and knowledge acquisition (Westraadt, 2016). In this regard, research (Department of Arts and Culture, 2011) on art education revealed that the way art education is shifted to the periphery brings education inequality in South Africa into clear focus. Likewise, Lochner (2011: 136) states that art is perceived as an 'elitist practice' that tends to alienate many. This brought into focus that art has become interlinked with notions of race, class and economic status, all of which mark the divide between the educational 'haves' and 'have nots'.

The core concerns that shaped and led to the final research question were: How and why is the neglect of art education 'sanctioned' within the framework of schools and government despite the promotion thereof in curriculum statements? In addition, how and why is there an apparent buy-in by parents, teachers and school management in this neglect? In this regard, Gore (1995: 166) contends that the

apparent continuity in pedagogical practice, across sites and over time, has to do with subtle, but pervasive, exercises of power relations in educational institutions and processes that remain untouched by the majority of curriculum and other reforms.

This introduces the main research question of this study: How have power relations been negotiated in the establishment of an art education programme at a primary school in Delft, Western Cape? The objectives of the study were to gain nuanced insight into the variety of power relations at play as well as how these power relations relate to one another.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach, which implies an interpretive lens, was implemented for the purposes of this study, and the case study design was chosen for empirical purposes. This study involved the exploration of a specific issue (the negotiation of power relations) using a single case (the establishment of an art education programme) for the purpose of 'maintaining the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the real-life events' (Yin, 1984: 2) encountered in the research.

The case study was conducted mainly at the physical location of a primary school in Delft (an economically deprived area) by a teacher from the art centre, which allowed for intersection across the racial and socioeconomic divides. Non-probability sampling methods and qualitative data-collection techniques were employed to generate the research sample. Judgement sampling, where 'the researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question' (Marshall, 1996: 523), played a part as possible participants necessarily had to actively be involved in the establishment of the art education programme in question. Although, in total, 250 learners were involved in the art programme, for practical purposes, only 20 parents who attended the art exhibition and their children (20) were conveniently selected⁴ and asked to participate in the study. The research sample further consisted of eight staff members, two collaborators and one volunteer. Qualitative data were collected from interviews conducted with the principal, the deputy principal, teachers, and parents, and were supplemented by feedback forms completed by learners and parents as well as participant observations and written reflections. Data capturing was achieved by means of written notes and voice recordings. Inductive content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data collected.

⁴ Convenience sampling refers to 'the selection of the most accessible subjects' (Marshall, 1996: 523).

In order to ensure validity, data were collected over a period of 18 months and consent was obtained for all recorded individual and group interviews. Although all measures were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, it is recognised that conducting cross-cultural research as white researchers in South Africa may be a limitation to the confirmability of the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE EMPIRICAL EXPLORATIONS

The broader educational aim (social justice agenda) in the establishment of the art programme was to address the issue of inequality, albeit in a small way, of opportunities for learners across the racial and socioeconomic divide that marks the South African education reality. In reaction to the impoverished status of art education in South Africa, this study further aimed specifically to reveal and unpack the mechanisms that lie at the core of the way in which power relations were negotiated in the establishment of an art education programme in a low-income area in Delft, Western Cape.

The elephant in the room

After the data-collection processes were completed by means of interaction with the learners, teachers, parents, collaborators, and the volunteer, who formed part of the art programme, it was found that issues relating to (i) race, (ii) inequality and exclusion, and (iii) schools as spaces for critical transformative dialogue were prominent themes in the negotiation of power throughout the process. The issue of race introduced a challenge in that all the key themes seem to be entangled with the central issue of race. Race was regarded by the participants as simultaneously overwhelming and elusive, ignored and accepted. This brought to mind the image of the proverbial elephant in the room. The elephant became an apt way of thinking about the racial issue: imagining an elephant in a room is to realise how its presence will fill the whole space, how the contrived space will contribute to immobility, and how view and movement will be completely blocked. Because of close proximity, it will also become nearly impossible to have a holistic view of the obstacle from a single point of view – only detailed observations of the obstacle will be possible. While the elephant signifies the theme of race, the themes of inequality and exclusion, and schools as possible spaces for critical transformative dialogue, provided such ‘close-up observations’, and, in a manner of speaking, became the spaces in and around the obstacle that allowed for movement and a ‘bigger picture’ view from which to make meaning. Although the seemingly insurmountable obstacle of race is ever present, government institutions and policies, within a post-apartheid framework, provide the platform from which learners could be introduced to new experiences and activities and where attempts to diffuse the racial and socioeconomic divide can be made. Olneck (2000: 317) argues that learners’ agency could transform the social reproduction process by impacting on their school-based cultural capital, and that teachers could promote both dominant and minority cultural capital in a non-conflictual manner. Teachers are particularly well situated to ‘produce... moments of contestation, challenge, and social inclusion’ (Lareau & Horvat, as cited in Monkman, 2005: 5).

Race

The data revealed that thinking about race in a binary way was still very much embedded in the minds of the participants. The learners and adults mostly referenced notions of race within the framework of white as superior and Black and Coloured as inferior. In an example of this, a teacher observed as follows:

From a general perspective, sorry to put it bland like this, white people are great, children have that idea... that white people give good... once you mingle... that you are in a white school or in a white area – that you are better off – that is the perception, that may be wrong, that may be right, but that is the perception.

This mindset automatically favours institutions, teachers and concepts related to whiteness, and creates imbalances in power relations. According to Gore (1995), power relations have a marked impact on how learners, parents and teachers experience education. Comments such as

They [the parents] know that this [the art classes] are just the best what they receive because the so-called white people are typically the best and the people of colour will typically stay as they are

refer to perceptions of parents where white is regarded as better as opposed to the perception of people of colour being trapped in the cycle of disadvantage. Whiteness was also referenced by learners as a predominant factor: rather than referring to teachers from the art centre as art teachers, a learner referred to 'The friendly white women'. In order to deal with the unease and discomfort of the 'white as better and dominant' notion, the schoolteachers and research team mostly employed a colour-blind approach, as can be seen in a teacher's response:

I do not see you as different from me

and

It doesn't matter to me what colour you are, whether you are white or dark or brown. To me we are just one.

Although there was an explicit desire to move beyond racial issues, the tendency towards colour-blindness seemed to contribute to the way in which the racial issue became the 'elephant in the room'. It seems that the actual difficult and sensitive issues are obscured and, therefore, easily avoided or overlooked – issues of racial stereotyping, inequality, exclusion, and feelings of inadequacy. This is noticeable in a parent's remark that illustrates how racial equality masquerades as equality on all levels:

In the past it was... me in my place. Today we are... all equal... we are still striving towards all being... where we want to be... it will still take time.

Statements such as 'Art is a white thing' by a parent further refer to historically and culturally produced sentiments about art, which are rooted in an apartheid education system that equated art education with white privilege. The fact that the art programme is facilitated by white teachers further contributes to the complexity of negotiating power relations across the racial and socioeconomic divide. A teacher illustrated this imbalance in power pertinently by stating the following:

... that is why our children feel... I am sure that they are even telling the neighbouring schools that we have white teachers teaching us art because they have the perception that they are getting a good thing from white teachers.

A parent further commented on the imbalance in power:

The white people should not think that they can come and take over...

Although the participants' sensitivity to the racial issue seems to oppose the colour-blind approach, these two concepts that present themselves as opposites are in fact revealed as existing simultaneously as embodied paradoxes. 'Whiteness'⁵ as a concept is described by Goldberg (2002) as much more than just implicating skin colour: it refers to those in control or benefitting from patriarchal whiteness, to those

5 'Whiteness' is a term coined in critical race theory and could best be thought of as a 'form of legal or cultural property' (Harris, 1995: 284). Whiteness provides 'material and symbolic privilege to whites, those passing as white, and sometimes honorary whites' (Harris, 1995: 284). Examples of material privilege would include better access to higher education or a choice of safe neighbourhoods in which to live; symbolic white privilege includes conceptions of beauty or intelligence that not only are tied to 'whiteness', but that 'implicitly exclude blackness or brownness' (Harris, 1995: 284).

competing for the benefits, privileges and profits of whiteness and to mechanisms that uphold systemic inequalities. Providing art education as white teachers within the framework of prevailing ideas of art education as a white privilege activity was key to negotiating power relations. The power implicated by 'white as good/great' and the way the art centre unjustly benefits from its association with whiteness are examples of reasons why unease and discomfort were experienced by the role players. It opened a metaphorical can of worms, exposing all the aspects of an education system that is still not capable of delivering the high standard of education demanded by both curriculum and policy to the majority of learners in South Africa. It brought to light the fact that art education is considered a status symbol that is affordable only to the privileged and associated with whiteness, which implies the appreciation of art education as relevant to the notion of the race/class entanglement. Race and power are experienced feelings that cannot be seen or quantified. The 'elephant' (race and power) is often avoided due to its difficult nature. The question could be asked whether the unease experienced by the participants was really about race. Was it not in fact related to aspects of domination, oppression, and privilege, exposed by the negotiation of power relations?

Inequality and exclusion

A social justice agenda would entail that an education system seriously contests the normalisation of education processes that benefit some learners while disowning others. The neglect of art education is an example thereof. The majority of South African learners are not exposed to art education, in spite of the demand thereof in policies and curricula. In this regard, a teacher commented that 'it [art] is being neglected'.

In this study, Creative Arts⁶ was referred to as not only neglected, but also problematic. Many participants (principals, teachers, parents) perceive the arts as not vital to the education process. It was evident that although school management initially welcomed the art activities, they do not consider it as an essential academic subject. They seem to think of the art programme mainly as entertainment and relaxation for learners. A teacher commented:

Also, when music is offered at school, it will give children a break from academics.

Another said that

The teacher that does Creative Arts let them [learners] do something at home – some made something and some did not... this is the only way that the problem of Creative Arts can be solved.

This attitude towards teaching art at school leaves the impression that art activities are not regarded as a vehicle for learning, but considered a soft skill, enjoyment, or relaxation, and not 'really necessary'. It adds to the workload and resource problems faced by teachers.

Inequalities that manifested as exclusions from economic, cultural, and social resources were lack of art material, government's and school management's disregard of art, and teachers' own lack of confidence in teaching art. A teacher mentioned in this regard:

But I think if the art materials were available... sometimes in the Creative Arts book, material like charcoal and other things [are] needed and if you ask the office – they do not have. So at least if we could have some material it would help.

⁶ 'Creative Arts' is defined by the National Curriculum Statement as a study area that provides exposure to and study of a range of art forms, including dance, drama, music and visual arts. The purpose of Creative Arts is to develop learners as creative, imaginative individuals, with an appreciation of the arts. It also provides basic knowledge and skills to be able to participate in creative activities (DoE, 2011: 9).

Similarly, another teacher remarked that

It is also so with technology – if we want to do a project we have to do everything out of our own pocket.

The lack of attention given to student teacher art education/training was mentioned:

I wanted to learn more but not a lot of attention was given to it.

The same teacher also commented on government's disregard of the arts:

So I ask the question: Why is there only two hours allocated for Creative Arts [which includes Life Orientation] in the curriculum as opposed to eight hours for maths and languages? Why is there so little time allocated? Look at the new 21-century plans for the new school against the wall, no art class, no music class; it has been approved by the government without giving attention to the arts.

Teachers also experienced little confidence in their abilities to foster the creative aspects of learners. This is evident in a teacher's remark:

I am not creative.

Art did, however, seem to open new ways of learner observation for teachers:

I notice things about students in the art class that I could not pick up about them when they do schoolwork.

There was recognition and appreciation among the research participants of art as an expressive tool for emotional well-being:

Art makes children relax; makes them feel better about themselves.

Teachers also acknowledged that most learners not only enjoyed art but thrived on it, and specifically mentioned how learners with learning difficulties in other subjects often seemed to do well in their art activities. A teacher observed in this regard:

If one sees the fruits, the results that the art has reaped, then you can only be proud and happy and fortunate. The beautiful things that the children did, how the children achieved, came out of their shells, what the children can do, especially those who cannot write, they can draw, they feel good about themselves, because everything is beautiful, especially if there is colour added.

Teachers observed that the language barrier (the language of instruction is English, whereas isiXhosa and Afrikaans are the learners' home languages) causes a lack of comprehension. As a result, learners are deprived of any further optimal creative experiences, especially because a lack of understanding of tasks due to language barriers promotes imitation and conformity to peer and teacher examples. Alexander (2012: 3) supports this observation when he refers to 'the self-esteem, self-confidence, potential creativity and spontaneity that come with being able to use the language that has shaped one from early childhood' (one's mother tongue). To be prohibited from using one's mother tongue represents the very essence of exclusion and disempowerment. Learner exposure to the arts through the art programme led to a growing awareness that they were deprived of the opportunity to discover and develop possible aptitudes for and skills in the arts as additional to the basic skill disciplines. In this regard, a teacher remarked:

Sometimes they are not good in their schoolwork, but then they are good with their hands. I think it [the art programme] is a very big thing, because if they see they are not going to make it there at the school – with the academics – then they can focus on that which they can do with their hands and through that it can become their work one day.

Inequality and exclusion from cultural capital were further experienced as a result of the apparent lack of administrative and governmental support of and demand for art education. It seems that the low level of understanding of the benefit of art education for child development contributes to the way in which art education is neglected, in spite of policy and curriculum demand thereof. In this regard, Prew (as cited in DoE, 2009: 3) argues on the implementation of policies at school: 'Policies are seen as irrelevant. Those on language and religion, for instance, are largely ignored.' The lack of resources seems further to cover up, legitimise and naturalise the phenomenon of neglecting creative and difficult-to-measure activities in favour of assessment- and test-orientated activities. In light of this marginalisation of art education, Barnett and Coate (2008) refer to hidden curricula, or a curriculum within a curriculum, where what is said on paper and in policy documents does not always correspond with what is happening in actual educational interactions. Likewise, Apple (1990: 43) refers to schools as contributing to inequality by means of hidden curricula that normalise certain kinds of knowledge while disregarding others, thereby 'maintain[ing] and perpetuat[ing] the ideological hegemony of the most powerful economic classes in society'.

Contrary to popular thought, research by Spaul (2013) has shown that resource scarcity might not be the key problem, but that the focus should be on a teacher education approach. In this study, for example, resource scarcity as well as language and learning barriers experienced by teachers all intersect with the issue of race and class in such a complex way that, at first glance, the focus seems to be on 'the elephant in the room'. This emphasis on the race issue masquerades as an inaccurate understanding that prevents unbiased learner observation and obstructs investigation into some of the real issues underlying inequality in education. In light of this, it is suggested that teachers become knowledgeable in the functioning of hidden curricula that subvert education practice and cause teachers to unwittingly become caught up in the micromanagement of everyday schooling to such an extent that little attention is paid to the 'how and why' of teaching.

Regarding inequality and exclusion, by establishing the art programme, a key unease concerned the intersection of moving towards social justice while simultaneously favouring whiteness in subversive ways. How did the programme (even if only in a small way) interrupt cultural reproduction and allow for a more humane and socially just system concerning art education, and did it allow for the construction of equitable and fair distribution of power within society? The next section addresses this controversy on power, inequality, and social justice within the Freirean understanding of dialogue, praxis and conscientisation.⁷

Schools as spaces for critical transformative dialogue

The conflict and unease, but also the possibilities brought about by dealing with power relations as experienced in the establishment of the art programme, brought the realisation that schools in the South African post-apartheid framework should ideally be spaces for critical transformative dialogue from which new possibilities and opportunities for learners can arise. A teacher remarked in this regard:

⁷ 'Paulo Freire was concerned with praxis – action that is informed (and linked to certain values). Dialogue was not just about deepening understanding – but was part of making a difference in the world. Dialogue in itself is a co-operative activity involving respect. The process is important and can be seen as enhancing community and building social capital and to leading us to act in ways that make for justice and human flourishing. An important element of this was his concern with conscientisation – developing consciousness, but consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality' (Taylor, 1993: 52).

Schools and governmental institutions are platforms from which could be worked in the community, even and although we are from different areas in life. The school and the principal are agents from which to do this [start initiatives such as the art programme].

Another teacher mentioned that the art exhibitions that form part of the art programme

[brought] the community together and encourage[d] parents to become involved in their children's schooling. The school also benefit from it because the parents are now encouraged to become involved with the school in other aspects as well.

A teacher further stated that parents are not usually aware of the benefit of art for their children and remarked that

they would never [previously]... [have chosen art] but with the exposure that they have seen... what their children can do... then, definitely they will choose art as a subject.

This changed view on art education could be possible

because they can see their children are doing very well in art. At the end of the day those children can make a living out of it.

The research team experienced a similar shift in awareness. Commitment to the art programme and entrenchment in the sometimes discomfort and unease, but also in the small joys of relationship building while collecting data and doing self-reflection, brought about an interruption of personal cultural reproduction concerning perceptions of race, class, culture and the role of education in a post-apartheid South African context. This brought the awareness that schools could possibly be platforms for critical transformative dialogue that could provide ideal symbolic and physical spaces where contentious/contested issues can be dealt with. In Giroux and Apple's (as cited in Margolis, 2001) view, schools are not just places of domination, but also of contestation, which becomes important with reference to power relations. Teachers and learners actively take part in the system that attempts to socialise them; they are not merely indifferent receivers. The school and hidden curricula should be understood as a 'symbolic, material, and human environment' (Apple, 1993: 144) that is continuously being recreated. Apple (1993) believes the key to uncover the influence of hidden curricula is conflict. Likewise, data from this study revealed that, in negotiating power relations, potential conflict situations that caused discomfort could be dealt with within a Freirean approach to dialogue.

Considering the way hidden curricula allow for the 'normalisation' of the neglect of art education, the dialogue process allowed for appreciation of the different ways in which teachers deal with interpreting curricula and policies. Freire's system of conscientisation (critical consciousness) created a space of connection and empathy where knowledge and 'little narratives' of each individual teacher and parent could be respected and considered as fully legitimate and valuable (Griffiths, 2003). The dialogue process opened such moments of 'truths' (Foucault, as cited in Rabinow, 1991) that could be explored and were not only crucial to the negotiation of power relations in the establishment of the programme, but also key to the continuation of the programme. Although the programme takes place across the racial and socioeconomic divide that signifies South African education, what made it possible was how each role player was able to detach from the symbolic forms of meaning that constitute his or her histories, social constructions, beliefs, viewpoints, and preferences. For Giroux, a 'language of possibility' is the vehicle through which teachers should act as 'transformative intellectuals' to raise learners' awareness of contested issues (as cited in Palmer, 2001: 280). In this way, prevailing beliefs, norms, and attitudes could be challenged and transformed into new paradigms of development and transformation (Palmer, 2001).

CONCLUSION

The study provides a platform for future discussions in the process of seeking solutions to the neglect of art education. Without exposing the hidden structures that underlie the education system, it could be assumed that a two-tiered education system defined by imbalanced power relations, inequality, exclusivity, and segregation will be perpetuated. The study revealed that the influence of hidden curricula is distinctively stronger than actual policy instructions, and that prevailing perceptions of art as a subject crucial to learner development should be addressed. Schools and tertiary institutions can be spaces for teachers and student teachers – across the racial and socioeconomic divide – to engage in critical dialogue and to imagine alternative possibilities. Art education as an agent for social justice can contribute significantly to identity formation and cultural confidence, on both a personal and a national level (Singh, 2012). This could help teachers embrace the change from teaching within a pragmatic and technocratic approach to teaching embedded in reflection and personal transformation.

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