

# Pedagogical justice and student engagement in South African schooling: Working with the cultural capital of disadvantaged students

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*This article is a conceptual consideration of what could be regarded as pedagogical justice for disadvantaged students in South African schools. Combining Bourdieu's social reproduction account of education with elements of Bernstein's consideration of the internal dynamics that constitute the pedagogic relay, the article considers the pedagogical terms upon which these students can meaningfully be engaged in their school going. Such engagement, I argue, has to contend with the cultural resistance displayed by disadvantaged students towards their schooling which they view as being against their class-cultural interests. The article suggests that teachers' pedagogical practices at the site of the school present one key space to leverage the socially just pedagogies necessary for productive school engagement. I consider the conceptual bases upon which such a pedagogical approach can proceed. I advance the argument that student engagement ought to proceed on the basis of a combination of a 'social relations of pedagogies' orientation, on the one hand, and what I refer to as an 'explicit pedagogies' approach to recontextualisation of work, on the other. It is the main argument of this article that pedagogical justice for disadvantaged students lies in providing a pedagogical scaffold between their life world knowledge's and accessing the school knowledge codes. Such an approach supports induction into the vertical logic of the school code as central to students' school success, but it argues for pedagogical incorporation of horizontal knowledge's central to securing active engagement with their schooling.*

**Keywords:** Pedagogical recontextualisation, socially just pedagogies, life world knowledge's, school code, social relations of pedagogy, school engagement, disadvantaged students

## Introduction

This article is a conceptual consideration of the pedagogical bases on which student engagement, with particular reference to disadvantaged or working-class students, can be transacted in the South African schooling context. The key assumption at work here is the view that, in the history of modern schooling, working-class students have made tenuous connections with formal school going. This is aptly captured in Willis's (1977) seminal study on the resistance practices of the 'lads' in a working-class UK context. These male students chose to resist the message system of their schooling, actively opting instead to take on the cultural systems of working-class life which, in effect, led to them turning their backs on the promised meritocratic emergence associated with successful schooling. They chose to align themselves with the message system of their working-class culture, which secured them access to their neighbourhood's popular socialisation, lifestyles and employment prospects. Working-class student failure can be understood in part in the light of the lack of everyday functional engagements with their schooling. These students adopt attitudes and identifications in opposition to the school's disciplining and knowledge-acquisition processes. In other words, they generally refuse to imbibe the message system of their schools which, in turn, has a negative impact on the quality of their school engagement. This consequently prevents them from successfully passing through the school system and into higher education. By opting out, or refusing to opt in, their opportunity to learn is diminished as a result of the ways in which they 'read' the cultural dissonance that they experience during their schooling. In other words, they come to evaluate their school going as fundamentally against their own class interests.

This raises an enduring problem faced by concerns over the relationship between schooling and social justice regarding the necessity of making schools more meaningful places of cultural and intellectual inclusion and engagement for disadvantaged students. A fatalistic approach would have it that there is hardly anything that schools can do to narrow this gap, instead placing the onus for these students' improved school encounters on the amelioration that broader structural processes are meant to ensure. Disadvantaged students would only be properly engaged by the culture of the school when their poverty is addressed and they have acquired the necessary infrastructural, material and symbolic support in stable family arrangements for there to be a meaningful and positive association between their social contexts and their schooling. On such a view, schools have no direct responsibility for addressing the school cultural gap associated with this form of exclusion experienced by disadvantaged working-class students during their schooling.

The literature on the sociology of school development suggests two broad views with regard to this challenge: an optimistic school effectiveness and improvement view, which suggests that schooling could make the difference in leveraging a productive platform for shifting students' cultural registers and engagement attitudes; and a social reproductionist outlook, which suggests that schooling simply reproduces already existing social inequalities and, in the process, legitimates them. These, I suggest, are reductive views about the actual potentialities of schools to address social justice concerns, especially in the way that they consider the potentialities involved in leveraging a meaningful school engagement platform that could connect disadvantaged students to a productive engagement with school disciplining and knowledge-generation processes. I suggest that the reality associated with the impact of schooling in bridging the gap between the working-class culture and school engagement is complex and that only a careful consideration of the conceptual terrain of schooling will provide some space to insert social justice concerns into everyday school processes. McFadden and Munns (2002:359) support this when they suggest that:

*the persistence of culturally supported school resistance [as in the case of the lads in Willis's study] intensifies the challenge for educators committed to opening pathways so that students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds have greater chances of educational opportunity and success.*

This article is a consideration of the conceptual terms on which such a school engagement platform can be founded. Central to this is what Basil Bernstein (1990) labels 'the pedagogic relay' in reference to pedagogical processes established by teachers in school and classroom knowledge practices as a key site for considering a conception of responsive student engagement. It is the pedagogical site of teachers' practices that offers the conceptual space for an alternative approach to the ways in which schools can engage students from disadvantaged background; Bernstein (1990) refers to this as the relatively autonomous curriculum and teaching practices that play out in the Pedagogic Recontextualising Field (PRF) of the school's knowledge message system. Unlike the bifurcation suggested by those who favour a strict separation between horizontal and vertical knowledge discourses (Moore & Muller, 1999), I suggest that establishing a pedagogical relationship between these two knowledge discourses – one which respects the importance of the vertical logic of school knowledge – would provide a useful bridge between the life world contexts of disadvantaged students and the knowledge codes that inform school knowledge. Creating such a bridge provides one way of transacting a more dynamic interactive approach to engaging disadvantaged students in their schooling and the school's codes. In the light of this, Pierre Bourdieu (1973:17), the other key theorist whose work underpins the analytical task of this article, suggests that pedagogies of a particular kind could make a difference to disadvantaged students' experiences and knowledge take-up in schools. He explains:

*If all pupils were given the technology of intellectual enquiry, and if in general they were given rational ways of working (such as the art of choosing between compulsory tasks and spreading them over time) then an important way of reducing inequalities based on cultural inheritance would have been achieved.*

In the next section of this article I consider, firstly, what Hattam, Brennan, Zipin and Cober (2009) refer to as the cultural capital misalignment that characterises the schooling engagement experiences of working-class students and, secondly, the nature of student engagement in the South African urban context as an example of the complex ways in which students in the post-apartheid order assemble their modalities of educational engagement. The suggestion here is that pedagogical recontextualisation in schools and classrooms has to attend to the nature of these subjective constructions if our schooling processes have some chance of leveraging an engaging school platform.

This section is followed by a principled consideration of the nature of pedagogical recontextualisation in the light of the discursive and political contexts of schooling and classroom practice. The argument proffered here is that the South African curriculum implementation field – what Bernstein (1990) refers to as the Official Recontextualisation Field (ORF) – is characterised by what could be described as a ‘thin pedagogical platform’, with reference to the kinds of pedagogies that teachers have discursively been positioned to implement as the consequence of a hegemonic state logic of performance that is more concerned with instrumental results-based outcomes than an acknowledgment, valuing and promotion of an internally referenced commitment to teacher professional development. Such a view, based on a ‘pedagogy of same’ (Lingard, 2007), impedes a socially responsive and just approach to student engagement in the country’s schools.

The final section of the article is a conceptualisation of the pedagogical terms upon which a socially just and inclusive pedagogical platform can be launched. Such a perspective would have to take account of the nature of the subjective engagements that students have with their schooling and its knowledge codes on the one hand, and the need to rescue the pedagogical identifications of teachers from an instrumental pedagogical base and mobilise a deeper professional knowledge engagement orientation.

The argument is made in this article for an explicit or visible pedagogical approach where the teacher is able to take charge of the scaffolding from horizontal to vertical discourse knowledge insertion. It is in this scaffolding where space for engagement with students’ life world contexts can meaningfully be used as a bridge into the school knowledge code. Conceptually, the aim is neither a simple valorisation of everyday knowledge nor an uncritical acceptance of the school knowledge code. The challenge is to provide students with the intellectual tools for taking up and critically interacting with the school code. This is a sophisticated approach which many educational theorists argue has to be pursued on the basis of a long-term vision of pedagogical renewal founded on a vision of teachers whose professional lives are more informed by internal accountability systems than external monitoring and control (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010:93-116). It is clear that such an approach will depend on a vastly improved teacher education platform able to produce teachers who can work across different knowledge forms as a way of engaging diverse students in their classrooms.

## **Cultural capital misalignment and the nature of students’ school engagements**

The starting point for this section is Bourdieu’s insight that people enter schooling from different structural positions associated with different social habits (Hattam *et al.*, 2009:304). They embody distinctive qualities of cultural disposition, or ‘habitus’, acquired through early life immersion in particular contexts. Bourdieu explains that dispositions, in turn, operate selectively in schools as ‘cultural capital’ of stronger or weaker species (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986:20) suggests that the “educational system ... maintains a preexisting social order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital”. Hattam *et al.* (2009:20) explain that in schools “the dispositions of children’s life contexts favour those with alignment to the cultural arbitrary of the ... middle-class schools”. The dispositions of working-class students are, in effect, out of alignment with the middle-class cultural or knowledge capital that guarantees school success. In this sense pedagogical ‘injustice’ refers to the lack of fit between the cultural capital of working class children and the school’s cultural and knowledge processes, i.e. the school code.

Understanding the school code as involving a dispositional receptivity for middle-class capital at the institutional site of the school helps explain why the school’s ability to actively engage disadvantaged

students is circumscribed. As a result, as cultural institutions, schools are unable to provide a productive engagement platform for these students. The key reason for the lack of school success generally manifested by disadvantaged students is not only that they come to school with the ‘wrong’ cultural capital, but also that schools, in their fixation on providing access to the school code facilitated by a narrow institutional culture, fail to provide a conceptual bridge between the diverse forms of cultural capital of these students and access to the school code. It therefore follows that these students’ engagements are impeded by their possession of the ‘wrong’ capitals, which schools struggle to recognise and leverage institutionally and pedagogically.

Teese and Polesel (2003:50-71) provide an explanation of how students whose embodied capital does not match the schooling code miss out on meaningful school engagement. They argue that the curriculum makes no connection with their community contexts, so there is no intrinsic value to engaging students in the school’s educational experience, and secondly, as a result of this lack of connection, working-class students miss out on the extrinsic value afforded by school success that gives access to further education and employment. Through the inability of schools to connect with and engage their forms of cultural capital, these students miss out on the critical knowledge’s that schooling could provide as well as on the opportunity of insertion into the educational and occupational structure beyond schooling. The pedagogical injustice that schools visit on disadvantaged students therefore has pernicious consequences for their ability to value the exchange meritocratic worth of school and the intrinsic use value to inform their critical life dispositions and choices.

The assumption of this article is the view that pedagogical justice has to mean that student engagement with respect to disadvantaged students, i.e. the 80% of children in South Africa’s schools who can be regarded as working class, impoverished and destined structurally for educational disengagement – must focus on a pedagogical engagement platform that connects school-based learning with students’ own life worlds experiences. In other words, the connection between the instrumental exchange value of schooling and its intrinsic use value has to be drawn. Drawing on political philosopher, Nancy Fraser (1996:3-6), I suggest that making a pedagogical connection between life world and school codes is a challenge that moves beyond binary social justice thinking. Commitment to pedagogical justice is based on the imbrications of two types of claim: an egalitarian redistributive claim that emphasises the redistribution of elite capital (read the school code) and a recognition claim that values social-cultural identity formations (read life world code). Such a redistribution versus recognition tension would issue in a classroom pedagogical approach that simultaneously involves knowledge generation and identity negotiation, both of which processes are intimately linked to the inequalities of broader social structures. Lingard (2007:246) explains that “we need to acknowledge the weave between identity negotiation and the production and reproduction of knowledge in the pedagogical encounter and its effects”. In other words, engagement favours neither one nor the other dimension but, instead, insists on working with both dimensions in generating a responsive student educational platform.

Lingard (2007:246) reminds us that teacher pedagogies can be seen to be deeply therapeutic in their care of students, but “indifferent in terms of working with difference and making a difference in academic and opportunity senses”. He seems to be warning against a form of student engagement that lapses into over-compensatory or pastoral behaviour, but fails to work progressively with either the demands of recognition and inclusion, on the one hand, and academic or knowledge engagement, on the other. My own work on subjective engagement by students with their schooling in urban context reveals an almost complete lack of understanding by schools of what I called the ‘educational subject on the move’ (Fataar, 2012), resulting in the lack of a pedagogical reception for these students’ cultural and educational backgrounds, coupled with an inability to work productively with their dispositions and knowledge’s.

As an illustration, I draw on my research in a range of urban sites to exemplify the discursive gap between the complex make-up of student subjectivities in urban South African contexts and their schools’ engagement and educational modalities. My work highlights the geographic, affective and educational contours of their school going as they precariously move across the city space to access their schools of choice. I described the nature of their school interactions thus:

*The children of the black working classes and unemployed poor go to great lengths to access what they perceive as better schools across the city, where they end up receiving a modernist curriculum that strips them of their access to their cultural knowledge and social survival epistemologies, on the assumption that modern middle-class education is what will emancipate them from their parochial cultural identifications. The assumption of cultural assimilation is hard at work in the urban post-apartheid school, albeit with multicultural genuflection to the newer incoming kids' backgrounds. Assimilationist curriculum practices are alive in the city's classrooms, which ostensibly provide the vehicle for their induction into modern life (Fataar, 2012:7).*

The schools in my research deny these students any discursive recognition of their physical and ontological worlds and their epistemic forms, instead inducting them into a one-dimensional, modern racial-colonial canon, i.e. the dominant school knowledge code (Fataar, 2009). These tropes collectively translate into unproblematised pedagogical approaches that conceptualise student learning as a problem in isolation, understood apart from the reconfiguring social forms that swirl around it. The socio-cultural forms of the black working and urban poor, coupled with the everyday deployment of their cultural knowledge's, are not given curricular currency.

Heeding Lingard's view, I suggest that the reception discourses of the wide range of schools in which I did my research indicates that they have not recognised this complex school-going subject in their midst, nor have they provided attenuated inclusive orientations to adjust to these subjects' cultural and everyday knowledge's and identifications. Instead, the schools have discursively positioned themselves as offering culturally assimilationist school experiences and induction into the narrow school code (Dolby, 2001; Johnson, 2007; Fataar, 2007). My research shows how schools go about sustaining this exclusivist culture in which the teachers, often predominantly from racial backgrounds dissimilar to the incoming students, play the leading role in retaining their schools' hegemonic orientations (Fataar, 2009; Fataar & Du Plooy, 2012). The student engagement platforms of these schools play little to no role in recognising and working with the cultural capital and survival and everyday knowledge's of the students, nor have they demonstrably adapted their registers to work with and mediate the cultural registers of these students.

In the ensuing sections of the article I discuss 'pedagogical recontextualisation' as a way of responding to the pedagogical injustice implicit in the lack of interaction between the cultural capital arising from the life world contexts of disadvantaged students and their schools' educational engagements, especially their pedagogical orientations. The task here is to develop a conceptual grounding for a responsive and inclusive pedagogical approach, on the one hand, and academic immersion into the school's knowledge code, on the other. Having worked with a stance that emphasises the importance of understanding the impact of the ever-changing socialities that now co-construct the educational subjectivities of learners and their schools' institutional platforms, the focus on pedagogical recontextualisation takes us into the how of the pedagogic relay, in other words, the conceptual bases on which pedagogical processes are able to combine a focus on life world and the school codes. The cultural capital misalignment that schools and teachers normally operate within has to be addressed and challenged by an incorporation of the life world contexts of their students. There has to be greater connection between the everyday knowledge's deployed by the students and the school curriculum and teachers' pedagogical practices. As Hattam *et al.* (2009:305) suggest: "only when schooling is organised to make this link can the experience of intrinsic value in education become established, and enable scaffolding to success in the mainstream curriculum, leading to extrinsic rewards from schooling". It is to a principled consideration of this pedagogical scaffolding that I now turn.

## **Pedagogical recontextualisation as a site for social justice-oriented schooling practices**

Teacher pedagogy is not the silver bullet for resolving the school engagement dilemma. The ability of pedagogy to leverage an engaging educational orientation to receive and induct students into a critical knowledge orientation is circumscribed as much by the extant professional teaching culture, of which pedagogy forms a crucial part, as it is by the conceptual limitations placed on its ability to challenge the

class culture-school gap. The intractable nature of this gap is extremely difficult to mitigate by classroom pedagogy. Notwithstanding this pessimistic view, pedagogy remains the key leveraging site for providing an ameliorating platform for social justice in education. What has emerged from the school effectiveness literature over the last two decades – subsequent to the Coleman Report in the USA in 1966 that found the impact of context to be the overriding factor in determining schooling success – is that teachers and their pedagogies are the one factor that contribute most to improved student achievement. Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Winefield and York (1966) explain that, of all the schooling factors, it is teachers and their pedagogies which contribute most to better learning outcomes for all, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This brings into view the challenge of conceptualising pedagogy, which is located at the intersection between knowledge production and its reproduction at the site of the school. This intersection could be regarded as a mediating space where knowledge recontextualisation via the implementation of the curriculum takes place through the classroom pedagogical work of teachers – what I referred to earlier as the recontextualisation field of pedagogic discourse. Teachers and their pedagogies are central to this recontextualisation.

As a concept ‘pedagogy’ refers to the process through which knowledge is produced in interactive knowledge production processes between the teacher and students. Pedagogy addresses the how of this transmission and the reproduction of knowledge involved in its production, i.e. the *techne* of the knowledge transfer as well as its knowledge substance. Lusted (1986:3) explains that the concept of pedagogy enables us “to question the validity of separating these activities so easily by asking under what conditions and what means we ‘come to know’”. He explains that, seen through the prism of pedagogy, what we teach is inseparable from what is being taught and how one learns (ibid:4). This perspective brings pedagogy into the realm of cultural production and exchange, opening up the *techne* of teaching for questioning about its implicit assumptions about the nature of the knowledge transferred and the cultural assumptions embedded in these processes.

Pedagogy is part of what Bernstein (1971) refers to as the three-message system of schooling: curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and the complex symbiotic relationship between the three. It is the particular emphasis on aspects of this message system that determines the scope for socially engaging pedagogies. Recent policy developments in education in South Africa and the broader international context have resulted in a preponderance of policy discursivity that has had pernicious consequences for teachers’ ‘relative autonomy’ (Apple, 2002). In other words, the school’s message system has been dominated, and arguably corroded, by the curriculum policy dimension, emanating from the ORF. The restricting curriculum policy orientation (Spren & Vally, 2010), that currently informs schools’ pedagogical work, has struggled to leverage an engaging pedagogical orientation. The policy-regulated ORF has not put schools that are in impoverished circumstances in a position to mitigate their material conditions and discursive teaching orientations, impacting negatively on their PRF. Socially engaging pedagogies in these circumstances have very little chance of being established.

Work by myself and my students (Fataar, 2007; Fataar & Du Plooy, 2012; Watson, 2011; Visagie, 2005) on teachers’ professional practice in selected poor schools of Cape Town provides evidence of the existence of teaching environments empty of generative material circumstances and pedagogies. What we found were one-dimensional school sites where teachers were discursively positioned to fulfil the performative requirements of a narrow set of curriculum implementation expectations. Watson (2011) and Visagie (2005), for example, show how teachers’ work is dominated by the pastoral dimension of teaching brought on by the exigent impact of poverty and desperate socialities that flow daily into school (Bhana, Morrell, Epstein & Moletsane, 2006). Fataar and Du Plooy’s (2012) work on students’ learning assemblages across their township living discusses the impact of the reductive educational environment of their school on the homogenising pedagogical approaches of teachers who ignore the rich knowledge’s that students carry with them to school. These are the kinds of contexts that the majority of students in these schools encounter, which the governmental policy platform, i.e. the ORF, failed to leverage productively as inclusive engagement sites.

On the contrary, South Africa's curriculum policy orientation is characterised by a circumscribed, 'teacher-proof' implementation approach (Spren & Vally, 2010) that provides a tight, if not constricted, curriculum classification and framing orientation on the assumption that the country's poorly prepared teachers require a strict regulatory regime to govern curriculum implementation. It is therefore apparent that what has characterised curriculum framings in the USA, UK and other contexts have come to characterise the school message system in South Africa. That is, the message system is dominated by a curriculum and a broader performative policy regime that tightly regulates the realm of pedagogy in schools. What this orientation issues in is what Lingard (2007) and Hayes (2003) describe as thin pedagogising based on 'pedagogies of same'. This involves an emphasis on a narrow school knowledge code, framed by regulative routines that teachers are meant to comply with, and in-service teacher training sessions aimed at preparing them to implement the school code. I argue that this school code is based on a 'pedagogy of same' that is emptied of an ability to incorporate the life world or socially generated knowledge's by which disadvantaged students can be engaged and stimulated. Pedagogies of same focus on a fairly uniform imbibing of the school code with little space for addressing the redistribution-recognition tension that is at the heart of Fraser's (1996) conceptualisation of social justice. Emphasis on the redistribution of the school code leaves little to no space for working with identity constructions of difference and the attendant life world-acquired knowledge's that students carry with them to school. Such pedagogies therefore fall short in addressing the class culture-school gap which, I argue, is decisive for engaging disadvantaged students in their take-up of, and critical engagement with, the school code. The resultant engagement platform has tended to be narrow, circumscribed by a curriculum orientation that provides very little space for socially just pedagogies.

While the moral logic for offering students a narrow pedagogical platform to access the school code cannot be faulted in emphasising the exchange value of schooling, the limiting conceptual logic of such an approach fails to take account of its inability to provide pedagogical traction to engage disadvantaged students in their own learning. In addition, it also falls short of providing them with knowledge for critical life use (Zipin, 2005). Acknowledging the limitations that the existing pedagogical platform of teachers set for teachers' work, as well as the reductive impact of the regulative policy regime that governs teachers, I now go on to offer a conceptualisation of an engaging pedagogical platform that can leverage deep student engagement with the knowledge codes of their schooling.

## **The case for explicit pedagogy based on a 'social relations of pedagogy' approach**

This section is a consideration of the challenge involved in recontextualisation work at the pedagogical site of the school and classroom. I work here with different theoretical strands of work done on what has been described as 'new pedagogies for postmodern times', especially by a group of Australian academics. I make an argument for combining an approach described as 'explicit pedagogies' with a 'social relations of pedagogy' approach. The latter is an attempt to theorise the relational basis of pedagogy, which I argue is the key to gaining disadvantaged students' consent necessary for leveraging their active engagement with school knowledge. Explicit pedagogies, in turn, refer to an attempt to make visible the intellectual parameters of an engaging pedagogical approach that would mitigate what is normally left implicit in school knowledge transfer. Explicit substantive framing of such a pedagogical approach is the key to socially just pedagogies. Drawing on Bourdieu, Lingard (2007:250) explains that pedagogies which are not "intellectually demanding, and which make implicit cultural assumptions, benefit those with the requisite cultural capital obtained through socialisation within the home, and disadvantage the already disadvantaged in terms of such capital". Making the approach to school knowledge and its intellectual and pedagogical parameters visible is one key way of creating a bridge between the cultural capital forms of working-class students and their school engagement. It opens up the unequal distribution of capitals through schooling and allows for an insertion of a critical orientation to school processes. Explicit pedagogies involve a conceptualisation of pedagogy that includes an emphasis on intellectually demanding content, on the one hand, and active recognition and working with life world knowledge's, on the other. I

put forward an argument for using life world knowledge's as a bridge into school knowledge and as a key to a critical dispositional orientation to such knowledge.

While explicit pedagogies, developed below, refer to the substantive properties of socially just pedagogies, an emphasis on the 'social relations of pedagogy' refers to the 'how' of getting disadvantaged students engaged in their school and knowledge constructions. The suggestion I make here is that the 'what' of pedagogies and the 'how' of its social relations in the classroom are entwined in socially just pedagogical recontextualisation work. Emphasis on the relational dimension of pedagogies is presented as the key to unlocking the recognition of the cultural presence of disadvantaged students and gaining their consent with the idea that schooling is in their interest. This position would counteract the view that these students have that schooling is not in their own interests. As suggested earlier, given the class cultural-school gap, students have to be actively acknowledged and engaged by a compelling pedagogical orientation for there to be a chance for their genuine inclusion and consent. Emphasising an engaging relational approach is therefore meant to persuade students that their schooling and its knowledge construction activities are genuinely in their interest. A key challenge for a socially engaging approach in the quest for pedagogical justice is therefore the provision of a relational platform that could secure such engagement.

Developing such a view, McFadden and Munns (2002) suggest that the logic of school rejection by students is based on their developing a negative attitude founded on individual rejection of education from within the cultural solidarity of the group. They explain that "culturally supported school resistance intensifies the challenge for educators committed to opening pathways so that students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds have greater chances of educational opportunity and success" (ibid:359). What is going to make students buy into attempts at engaging with their schooling is a convincing account of the idea that schooling is beneficial for them by providing a rationale for how they can become insiders in the culture of the classroom. School engagement depends on a view of one's presence in a school site where one has self-understanding of playing a meaningful role in such a site. A positive view of their co-presence in their schools is fostered when students are given an opportunity to actively respond to daily experiences and events in their lives, and where the pedagogical focus is on their own cultural interpretations. In this way they would become engaged in producing classroom practices of resistance, compliance, play and creative construction, which would mitigate the school as an alienating cultural site. McFadden and Munns (2002:362) explain that "students come quickly to understand when school is not working for them and when the practices of teachers are not of any use in their own lives, or more pointedly, when their use is illusionary". Conversely, pedagogical approaches that connect with, and engage the cultural and linguistic materials of these students, their socio-historical backgrounds, and their daily navigational practices across the complex spaces of their school going stand a chance of countering the class capital-school misalignment. Connecting with the subjective or relational aspects of their lives and school going holds the potential for providing a compelling, if not unproblematic, platform for socially just pedagogies.

It is clear that it is the students' depth and quality of school engagement relations and experiences that will determine whether the class cultural-school gap is successfully being closed. McFadden and Munns (2002:364) explain that gaining students' active consent would be the result of their own determination of whether schools are serving their interests:

*It is the students themselves who will be able to tell us that they are engaged and who will say whether education is working for them in a culturally sensitive and relevant way. It is the students who will be able to tell us whether the offers that education purports to provide are real or illusionary. It is at the messy point of teachers and students responding to each other culturally in relation to classroom discourse and assessment practices where we are truly going to see whether students feel that school is for them. It is within this space that education can provide a chance that is not illusionary, and that can indeed be engaging and lead to purposeful, relevant and productive educational outcomes.*

While emphasis on a compelling consent-generating relational approach is a necessary condition for meaningful school engagement, it is the substantive nature of the pedagogical platform that will determine

its success. This brings me to the rationale for explicit pedagogies meant to unveil and work with the culturally arbitrary connection between middle-class capital and the school code.

Lingard (2007:174) explains that the need for the explicitness of performance criteria and teacher goals for every lesson is a way of opening up pedagogical processes to ensure that schooling is not allowed to work in unequal ways. Key to this conception of pedagogy is the conceptual basis on which the distribution of capitals is made visible. Developed by Australian academics working on what they labelled 'Productive Pedagogies' (Lingard & Mills, 2007) and another group who labelled their work 'Redesigning Pedagogies in the North' (RPiN) (Hattam & Zipin 2009), an approach to pedagogical recontextualisation to engage disadvantaged students emerged that explicitly sought to combine a focus on intellectual rigour and depth with an emphasis on connectedness and relevance. A view of pedagogy is advanced that incorporates both dimensions as a basis for students to access and work critically with school knowledge. Aligned to assessment orientations able to elicit rigorous engagement, this pedagogical approach emphasises higher-order thinking, substantive critical conversation and generative connections to the world beyond the classroom. Valuing and working with difference is also intended as a key dimension. The emphasis on integrating the redistribution of school capital with critical connectedness to the lives of students is based on actively mediating the recognition-redistribution tension proffered by Fraser (1996), which she regards as key to social justice work. This approach is meant to bring the various forms of capital of disadvantaged students into a generative interaction with the required school code, in effect, laying a basis for critically accessing the school code. This active mediating approach to knowledge production is intended as a means of developing a knowledge engagement basis that would convince students that schooling is in their interest. In other words, such pedagogical recontextualisation is intended to substantially leverage students' productive engagement with their schooling and is regarded as a crucial component in augmenting the relational dimension of pedagogy discussed above.

This pedagogical approach is meant to open space for inserting what is described as students' life world knowledge's as a constitutive component of a school's teaching platform. Eschewing a deficit view of students, such an approach assumes that students' lives and knowledge's are assets worthy of valorisation and critical engagement. Hattam *et al.* (2009) explain that the ability to engage students in learning depends on infusing the curriculum and pedagogy with the rich familiarities of life world knowledge and practice. These context-dependent knowledge's are valorised for their important relational benefit, i.e. students begin to value school connections made to their own lives that allow teachers to gain students' active consent as participants in schooling which they begin to recognise as meant for them. It also provides a pedagogical platform to engage them in their own critical understanding of their life world knowledge's, while enabling the pedagogical recontextualisation process to establish an interactive and mediating relationship with the school knowledge code.

The use of the 'funds of knowledge' approach in the RPiN project is an example of working pedagogically with the students' life world knowledge's. Foregrounding rich connectivity with students' life worlds, the RPiN project used the funds of knowledge approach, developed by Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) among Hispanic American communities in the USA to capitalise on the students' household and other community resources in the classroom. Funds of knowledge refer to the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills that households use for their daily functioning and survival. These funds include the social and labour histories of families, their social networks, technological use and literacy resources. As context-specific knowledge's these funds are then treated as intellectual resources in school History, Geography, Art and Language classrooms. In this way schools are able to signal that they value the capitals of disadvantaged students as well as establish a platform for critical interaction with their knowledge's. An active consent generating pedagogy based on acceptance that schooling is in their interest would be facilitated, in other words, what life world knowledge use in pedagogies allows is the idea that schooling is for them.

I argue that a further pedagogical modality is required: the necessity of scaffolding from life world knowledge engagement to explicit and practical learning of the cultural codes needed for success in mainstream school work. This view respects vertical insertion into the school code, which holds the

promise of induction into the context-independent knowledge of power. Disadvantaged students ought to be given access to the knowledge of power and its exchange value which will enable them to enter into further and higher education and professional employment. The emphasis on life world or horizontal knowledge forms in school is not meant to cut them off from vertical knowledge acquisition. This dimension secures active student engagement and connecting points into the vertical school code. These two knowledge forms are thus held in critical juxtaposition, and as Delpit (1988:296) explains, “we must keep the perspective that people are experts on their own lives ... but in the second instance, students must be assisted in the learning the culture of power”.

A key conceptual challenge remains, as expressed in the work of Bernstein around the commensurability of horizontal (life world) knowledge and vertical school knowledge (Bernstein, 1999; Moore & Muller, 1999). There remains deep scepticism about mixing the two forms on the basis that there is a structural difference between these two knowledge forms. Important theoretical work has emerged to question this position. Wilson and Williams (2012:3), for example, base their critique of this bifurcation on Western epistemological thinking, which emphasises “a dualistic framework of thinking and practices, endemic in education systems, which constructs intellectual challenge (or ‘academic rigour’) and relevance as incompatible – or at least as antagonistic to each other.” Zipin (2005) calls the pursuit of both life world and school knowledge an exquisite tension which remains unresolvable, yet ought to be pursued.

The view adopted in this article is based on an acknowledgement of the difficulty of working across these knowledge forms, especially given the relatively sophisticated pedagogical platform such an approach would necessitate. I favour an intermediate approach that conceptualises the pedagogical relationship between them as involving careful processing and scaffolding of life world knowledge’s onto school knowledge. It is in the scaffolding activities led by the teacher, through strong classification, i.e. control of substantive knowledge acquisition in the classroom, and in active interaction with students, in which the potential resides for deeper recognition and incorporation of their knowledge’s into classroom processes. Life world knowledge’s would therefore serve as a bridge into deeper and more meaningful school engagement. McFadden and Munns (2002:363-364) suggest that pedagogical framing in such scaffolding processes, i.e. control over the pacing, sequencing and control of the knowledge production processes, should be relaxed in order for students to meaningfully engage in the social relations of the classroom pedagogy on the assumption that a more relaxed interactive approach to framing is meant to secure such engagement. This, in turn, would encourage a more productive approach to engaging in the knowledge construction work in the classroom.

The risk of having the life world knowledge’s co-opted by, or assimilated into, school knowledge is worth taking, despite the warning that this might mean the failure of recognition of difference on the basis that co-optation would mean that the life world knowledge’s would become something else, i.e. school knowledge. Bernstein (1999) warned that recontextualising everyday knowledge into the school curriculum would not lead to more effective acquisition of school knowledge. Here I suggest that the potential of incorporating life world knowledge’s into teachers’ pedagogies for persuading students that schooling is in their interest would trump considerations about what knowledge form is eventually produced. In this light, I would argue that life world knowledge’s have to be conceptualised as a bridge into induction and critical engagement with the school code. Such a view holds the potential for engaging disadvantaged students through the pedagogical incorporation of life world knowledge’s into an interactive relationship meant to secure students’ interest in and consent for their schooling. This would provide the basis for socially just and inclusive pedagogical recontextualisation in schools. Such an orientation, I suggest, provides some chance of persuading students that schooling is in their own interest, while also providing them with access to the code of power necessary for accessing their future education and employment aspirations.

## Conclusion

This article adopts a heuristic approach for considering the basis for generating pedagogical justice for disadvantaged students who are generally excluded from school success as a result of a mismatch between their working-class cultural capital and the capital associated with successful school going. It is this basic

pedagogical injustice that this article has sought to bring into view. It asked how we can get these students to actively engage in their school going, despite their alienation from the culture and knowledge practices of their school. The pedagogical recontextualisation that I favour is meant to challenge the current prevalence of a 'thin pedagogies' approach to curriculum implementation in South African schools. I argued that this approach is neither capable of engaging disadvantaged students in their schooling, nor would it succeed in providing a pedagogical platform for deep critical interaction with the school knowledge code. It issues in a 'pedagogies of same' orientation that favours the middle classes as a result of their close cultural capital alignment with the school code.

I am not oblivious to the reductive policy environment in which teachers have to do their professional work, nor to the generally weak pedagogical and content knowledge capacities of teachers in this country. Socially just pedagogical recontextualisation would have to be understood as a long-term project aimed at the considerable improvement of the conditions for teachers' socialisation as members of an internally regulated profession in materially enabling work environments, on the one hand, and their intellectual and pedagogical improvement, on the other. The article has nonetheless argued that teacher pedagogies are the key to leveraging a social justice orientation in school.

I have argued that it is in a re-oriented pedagogical recontextualisation approach at the site of the school where such a productive engagement can be established. Working with the redistribution-recognition tension that constitutes Fraser's (1996) approach to social justice, I propose a pedagogy founded on a rich relational approach that has the ability to leverage students' consent for their active engagement with school. This approach is motivated by the need to persuade students to internalise the view that schooling is in their interest and meant for them. Such an engagement platform is connected to what I have labelled an explicit pedagogies orientation that makes the substance of the pedagogical work visible. Intellectual rigour, relevance and recognition of difference are the conceptual cornerstones of this pedagogical orientation. This translates into pedagogies that incorporate the life world knowledge's of the students into the pedagogical process and use them as a link into knowledge construction associated with the school's knowledge code. Valorising the life contexts and knowledge's of students is meant to secure the disadvantaged students' engagement with their schooling and the acquisition of the school knowledge necessary for exercising their future educational aspirations. It also provides a basis to work with their schooling knowledge construction processes beyond utilitarian use by also providing intellectual material for application in their lives. Such a critical pedagogical recontextualisation platform has the potential to realise pedagogical justice in meaningfully engaging working-class students in their schooling.

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# The spatial practices of school administrative clerks: making space for contributive justice

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*This article discusses the work practices of the much neglected phenomenon of the work of school administrative clerks in schools. Popular accounts of school administrative clerks portray them as subjectified – assigned roles with limited power and discretion – as subordinate and expected to be compliant, passive and deferent to the principal and senior teachers. Despite the vital role they play in schools, their neglect is characterised by their invisible, largely taken-for-granted roles in a school's everyday functioning. This main aim of this article is to make their everyday practices and contributions visible, to elevate them as indispensable, albeit discounted, role players in their schools, whose particular expressions of agency contribute qualitatively to a school's practices. Using the theoretical lens of 'space', and based on in-depth semi-structured interviews in the qualitative research tradition, the article discusses how selected school administrative clerks' production of space exceeds their assigned spatial limitations, i.e. they move beyond the expectations that their work contexts narrowly assign to them. They resist the contributive injustice visited upon them and through their agency they engage in spatial practices that counters this injustice. They carve out a productive niche for themselves at their schools through their daily practice. This niche, I will argue, embodies practices of 'care', 'sway' and 'surrogacy,' understood through a vigorous 'production of space'. Through these unique spatial practices they reflect their agency and their appropriation of existing spatial practices at their schools. Thus, they produce personalized meanings for their existing practice as well as generate novel lived spatial practices.*

**Key words:** School administrative clerks, space, spatial practices, lived space, contributive justice

## Introduction

The article aims to contribute to our analysis of social justice by suggesting that we broaden our focus on social justice to include issues of contributive justice. It highlights how those who are denied contributive justice do not simply lie down and accept their fate but that they actively counter the contributive injustice visited upon them. Contributive injustice is where workers' opportunities for self-development, gaining self-esteem and recognition by others is thwarted by the unequal division of labour that assigns them simple, mindless, and routine tasks (Gomberg, 2007; Sayer, 2009, 2011). I agree with the assertion by the proponents of contributive justice that the unequal division of labour leads to the curtailing of opportunities for self-development for those who are denied complex work (Sayer, 2011). However, I posit that administrative clerks do not passively accept this inequality of opportunity but through their agency, reflexivity and tactics, carve out spatial practices of self-development and, in the process, gain self-esteem and recognition at school level.

Literature on the practice of school administrative clerks in South Africa is sparse (Van der Linde, 1998; Naicker, Combrinck & Bayat, 2011). These clerks suffer inequalities of opportunity because of the division of labour which relegates them to a role that offers low remuneration, little recognition and limited participation. Studies of the roles of administrative clerks in schools (Casanova, 1991; Van Der Linde, 1998; Thomson, Ellison, Byrom & Bulman, 2007; Conley, Gould & Levine, 2010; Naicker, Combrinck & Bayat, 2011), higher education institutions (Szekeres, 2004; Mcinnis, 2006; Whitchurch & London, 2004) and businesses (Fearfull, 1996, 2005; Truss, 1993) found that they are regarded as marginal and invisible even though their contributions are essential for the smooth running of their workplaces. Secretarial work is regarded as a ghetto occupation (Truss, 1993; Truss, Alfes, Shantz & Rosewarne,

2012). It is precisely this low esteem and lack of recognition attached to it as an occupation that confirms that those who fill these roles are subjected to contributive injustice.

This article sheds light on school administrative clerks' spatial practices within the exigencies of their everyday professional contexts. It highlights their noteworthy contributions to the on-going functioning of the school, especially the surreptitious and sometimes very concrete impact on the lives of students, teachers, the principal, parent governors and auxiliary staff. In authoring their spatial practices they counter and subtly resist the marginalisation and contributive injustice of their occupation. The article reveals their largely invisible spatial practices and unacknowledged contributions to the daily operation of their schools in which they engage to counter contributive injustice.

Since the recent emphasis on 'space' in social studies (Harvey, 1989; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1989) and education in South Africa (see Jacklin, 2004; Fataar, 2007, 2009; Dixon, 2007), researchers contend that we cannot ignore that human behaviour and space are interrelated and overlap. The theory of the production of social space argues that space is not empty or devoid of formative power. It opposes those arguments that consider space to be a container in which events occur and takes a perspective that space is firmly intertwined with social events. Space is thus regarded as constitutive of social relations.

Jacklin (2004) draws our attention to the constituent nature of spatial practices in the pedagogical routines of teachers and students in classroom contexts. Dixon (2007) argues that there is a relationship between classroom order and spatial organisation and that social space is used to manage, regulate and produce specific kinds of students enmeshed in knowledge and power constructions. Fataar's (2007) spatial lens highlights the agency and reflexivity of students from 'other' social spaces as they move to middle-class social spaces and the bodily adjustments they make to fit into these spaces. My article builds on their perspectives of the constituent nature of space of everyday practice.

The data was collected from a qualitative research study of three administrative clerks in public schools in the Western Cape. There was one male and two women participants. They are referred to as P, M and F. The research included both semi-structured interviews with them as well as participative observations at school. The data was analysed thematically through the spatial lenses discussed earlier. There are other themes in the data but I focus on those yielded by the specific lens used in this paper. I spent one school term observing the three administrative clerks at their schools, during which time I interviewed them over several days. I also interviewed their principals as well as members of the teaching staff. I spent several days at the schools making observations, taking field notes and interviewing the administrative clerks about their practices as they worked.

In the next section I advance my theoretical lens and thereafter use it to analyse the data collected on the spatial practices of the three school administrative clerks. Three sets of spatial practices are identified through which administrative clerks counter their experiences of contributive injustice and through it contribute significantly to the functioning of the school and the positive experiences of students, teachers and the principal.

## Theoretical considerations

Social justice is considered to be primarily about distributive justice – concerned with what people get. Of late it has been complemented by cultural/identity recognition and political participation perspectives of social justice (Fraser, 2008). A further development around the ideas and theories of social justice is the contributive justice perspective. Contributive justice asks us to turn our attention away from what people *get* to what people *do*. Focusing on what we do is based on the Aristotelian perspective that what we *do* has as much an influence on the quality of our lives as what we *get*. Thus, the contributive justice perspective urges us to consider social justice as arising from the variety and quality of practices that workers are able to engage in (Gomberg, 2007; Sayer, 2009).

Contributive justice is a normative framework which suggests that the unequal divisions of labour within an organisation and within the economy subject workers to unequal opportunities for realising their potential. This is an Aristotelian approach which emphasises the human development of dispositions and abilities through work and practice.

The type of work one does is directly related to the psychological and economic rewards that one receives which, in turn, have an effect on our well-being (Sayer, 2011). Work is not only a source of economic rewards but also of fulfillment, whether through self-satisfaction or recognition by others. The contributive justice argument is that the type of work that one does, affects what one can become, how one views oneself and is viewed by others. It shapes the capabilities of the individual (Sayer, 2011). For example, the administrative clerk develops her financial management skills through doing the budget of her school, feels a sense of accomplishment for doing a complex task and is lauded by the school management team. If she is only restricted to capturing financial data, her financial management capabilities would be limited, her sense of accomplishment would be less than in the previous example and this basic task would not get her much recognition. Sayer (2009:1) citing Gomberg (2007) argues that:

*as long as the more satisfying and complex kinds of work are concentrated into a subset of jobs, rather than shared out among all jobs, then many workers will be denied the chance to have meaningful work and the recognition and esteem that goes with it.*

Contributive justice is where workers receive the types of work that enable them to develop their capabilities, receive internal goods of satisfaction and external goods of recognition (Sayer, 2011). However, most schools are organised with an unequal division of labour. This unequal division of labour situates the administrative clerk in an occupation that is assigned routine and mundane tasks. They have fewer opportunities for developing their capabilities, gaining satisfaction or receiving recognition. The argument is that the unequal division of labour leads to inequality in the development of capabilities. Murphy (1993) cited in Sayer (2011) mentions studies that those who do complex work see their capabilities improve over time, whereas those who are subjected to routine work capabilities stagnate and deteriorate. However, I propose that administrative clerks do not let the division of labour dictate their practices, but through their agency, carve out practices that allow them to counter the contributive injustice of their occupation.

A focus on agency locates administrative clerks' daily practice as practice oriented towards personal action and meaning making. In foregrounding school administrative clerk's agency, I do not deny that they develop certain routine and habitual actions through role internalisation. However, within the everyday complex interplay of people, situations and events, administrative clerks exercise creative expressions of agency even if they are circumscribed and largely discounted. It is apparent that their exercise of agency is coloured by context, relationships, culture and existing spatial practice, aspects of which the analysis below sets out to capture. I am specifically motivated by Archer's position on agency which she views as an outcome of reflexive internal deliberations within oneself around a course of action in relation to personal projects (Archer, 2007). These internal conversations and deliberations about personal projects lay the foundation for the production of administrative clerks' spatial practice.

I theorise space using Schmid (2008) and Zhang and Beyes' (2011) reading of Lefebvre. The premise is that human beings produce social space through their everyday spatial practices and they, in turn, are shaped by it. This novel approach shifts the focus from material space to the practices that constitute or produce social space. I forward the argument that administrative clerks exercise agency in their production of space. They are not the only producers of space – certainly the principal and teachers as well as students produce spatial practices – but my focus in this article is on the administrative clerks.

Lefebvre (1991) argues that social space is produced through three dialectically interconnected processes. The spatial triad of 'spatial practices,' 'representations of space' and 'spaces of representation,' or, 'perceived' (production of material), 'conceived' (ideological-institutional) and 'lived' (symbolic-experienced) space respectively. The triad corresponds to Lefebvre's three-dimensional conceptualisation of social reality: material social practice, language and thought, and the creative poetic act (Schmid, 2008).

Spatial practices are in reference to the material dimension of social activity and interaction. It is the activities, networks, relations, interactions that are constitutive of all spaces. The empirical relationship between the body and its physical environment is referred to as perceived space (Lefebvre, 1991:39). Perceived space is concrete, tangible and recognised directly through the senses. The representations of space, i.e. conceived space, emerge at the level of discourse and speech and constitute conceptual frameworks of material spaces. These are the maps, plans and organisational charts

and organograms that aim to structure or construct spaces (Schmid, 2008). This is the intellectual and conceptual language or discourse of a particular space.

The lived space “dimension denotes the world as human beings experience it through the practice of their everyday life” (Schmid, 2008:40). It describes what a particular space means to an individual. Representational spaces or lived spaces overlay “physical space, making symbolic use of its objects” (Lefebvre, 1991:39). This is the experiential dimension of space. However, it is important to note that the three spaces are not separate realities but rather “features of a single – and ever-changing – reality” (Lehtovuori, 2010:55).

Fiske’s (1988) conceptualisation of the ‘locale’ as the micro level of spatial practice, where those in subordinate positions in society ‘produce’ their own meaning of images and events in everyday life, exemplifies the insertion of agency into the production of space. The locale is the space of agency and ‘little victories’ (Fiske, 1988). De Certeau (1984) sees space as the micro relations, where the subordinates spatially appropriate their conceived spaces ascribing new meanings to spatial practices. “The work of de Certeau ... frames the everyday as the sphere of creativeness par excellence ...” (Brownlie & Hewer, 2011:248). Thus, users or consumers of space do not passively enter spaces, but produce their own lived space by negotiating, changing and ‘metaphorizing’ spaces, thereby producing singular concretions at the same time that they are subjected to the framing of the conceived space.

The “production of space is an embodied process” (Zhang & Beyes, 2011:17). It is to be found in the moment of bodily action. Thus, “bodies ... ‘produce’ or generate spaces” (McCormack, 2008:1823). What the body does in a particular material space is what the space becomes in that moment. It is what we pay attention to when we research space (Zhang & Beyes, 2011). There is a generative relationship between space and the bodily movement therein (McCormack, 2008). So my focus on the production of space is on bodily movement, i.e. spatial practice as embodied action.

The spatial practices of administrative clerks are dialectically produced. The office space is conceived by educational authorities as a space of routine and mundane activities. The administrative clerks reproduce the objectives of the designers of the conceived space and employ their agency and tactics to construct their personalised spatial practices with their attendant lived space experience. Their spatial practices are everyday practices influenced by what is expected of them as well as what they intend to accomplish through their practices. This can lead to spatial practices that have one physical form for the principal, school management team (SMT), school governing body (SGB) or educational authorities but multiple meanings for the administrative clerks themselves. Social space is thus a spatial production fuelled by *both* structure and agency, domination and appropriation, and power and resistance (Lefebvre, 1991). The production of the spatial practices of administrative clerks is simultaneously fuelled by their conceived, perceived and lived space.

My premise is that administrative clerks’ agency gives rise to their creative poetic spatial practice: a new spatial practice, a new meaning for an existing spatial practice or a modification of an old spatial practice. Through these novel spatial practices and lived space moments, administrative clerks counter the contributive injustice of the unequal division of labour.

In the next section, I briefly introduce the three administrative clerks and their school contexts. Thereafter, I identify and discuss three major sets of their spatial practice: spatial practices of care, spatial practices of sway, and spatial practices of surrogacy. These spatial practices reflect their agency in countering the contributive injustice of their occupational role.

## Introducing the spatial practitioners

In this section, I introduce the three administrative clerks and their schools. This provides us with the contextual backdrop to make sense of their spatial practices.

M has worked at Y primary school (YPS) since 1999. She started off in the position of personal assistant to the principal and became the school secretary/administrative clerk when the senior administrative clerk retired in 2004. She grew up in the area and attended the school as a child. She has a matric certificate and worked in secretarial and administrative positions for more than ten years before she joined the school.

She is currently the only administrative clerk at YPS. She has a close relationship with the principal, Mr K. He is a disciplinarian who runs the school with a firm hand. M is a member of the SGB and acts as both secretary and treasurer to the SGB. She actively participates in its meetings. She is not part of the SMT.

P was part of the community committee that initiated and urged the educational authorities to establish a primary school in the area. Subsequently, he worked at the school soon after the school was established in 2001. He is the more senior of the two administrative clerks at the school. He has a friendly relationship with the principal and with most of the teachers. He is currently a member of the SMT. He was previously a member of the SGB and served in the capacity of financial officer which he still occupies even though he has resigned from the SGB. The principal depends on him to do many of his administrative and managerial tasks. P has an honours degree in social development and is currently doing his masters' degree in public administration at a local university.

F has been an administrative clerk since 1997. She has been at her current school since 2002. She is one of two administrative clerks at the school. She serves on the SGB and had previously served on the SMT. F handles the school finances. She has a somewhat turbulent relationship with some of the teachers. F has completed an adult basic education and training diploma course and has been teaching adults. She is currently registered for an undergraduate degree in education at a distance learning university. During the course of the research study the incumbent principal resigned and an acting principal was appointed and thus F's spatial practice became even more important and pivotal. The acting principal relies extensively on her experience and knowledge to manage the school. They have a congenial but not close relationship.

The three administrative clerks have many years of experience working in three primary schools that impose different constraints upon their spatial practices. They have served and continue to serve on the SMTs and SGBs of their schools. I contend that it is their many years of experience, as well as the varied types of work they are engaged in, which has given rise to their spatial practices that will be discussed in the next section.

## **Towards contributive justice: the spatial practice of three school administrative clerks**

The contributive justice thesis emphasises that the work we do affects the extent to which we are able to realise and develop our capacities and gain internal and external goods. In the following section I demonstrate how administrative clerks engage in spatial practices that are instances of agency within a circumscribed role. These spatial practices counter the contributive injustice of the administrative clerks' role and occupation. Spatial practices are the locale of agency and tactics of appropriation. These spatial practices are not only beneficial to the administrative clerks' development, but are integral and essential for the running of the school.

Their spatial practices are simultaneously an outcome of their conceived, perceived and lived space. The conceived space refers to the discourses and designs of the educational authorities of what should occur in the school office space. At school, the space designed for the administrative clerk is the school reception, office or administration block. This conceived space forms part of a broader conceptualisation of schools as spaces where the principal does all the strategic planning and thinking and the administrative clerks simply execute all the routine tasks. It is the space where the administrative clerks work is conceived as routine non-essential, non-pedagogic or involving non-strategic tasks. Yet, as I show below, this study has found that their hub is vital as a space of thought, creativity and strategy.

Perceived space refers to the immediate bodily feedback of enacting spatial practices. It refers to those bodily sensations that accompany three spatial practices of the administrative clerks, i.e. their everyday perceptions of the school space. An example of this is their routine response to a student requesting their help. In the spatial practices highlighted below, I provide examples of students' and teachers' routine perceptions of the administrative clerks' spatial practices.

Lived space is the affect and personal meaning making – the meaning ascribed to the spatial practice. It refers to the affective dimension of their spatial practice. In the next section their affective experiences are described as important to their spatial practices.

I highlight three sets of spatial practices. These spatial practices of care, sway and surrogacy are particular spatial practices that demonstrate how administrative clerks' agency in the form of spatial practices dialectically interacts with the conceived space which gives rise to particular lived spaces. It shows how the agency inspired moments of spatial practices operate side by side with the subordination of the administrative clerks. These practices demonstrate instances of spatial practices that counter, but are also intertwined, with the hegemonic conceived space.

## Spatial practices of care

'Spatial practices of care' refer to the practices of administrative clerks where they interact with students, teachers or the principal, with care and affection in their spatial domains. Students regularly come to M when they feel ill and she responds by undertaking a range of practices that reflect her care. This is akin to Hochschild's (1983) emotional labour. She asks them to sit on the couch in the reception foyer and attends to them when able. She touches their foreheads to check their temperatures. If she decides that they are ill she informs the teacher and then, depending on the severity of the illness, informs the parents. Sometimes after some attention, students feel better and return to class without further intervention. M's emotional work is embodied. This means that she responds to students' cries for help with motherly postures and expressions.

P has assisted a number of novice teachers and helped them with their assignments. He reads their assignments and gives them feedback. He even assisted a teacher in preparing lessons related to budgeting and accounting. He also assisted teachers with word processing and using the computer lab. His caring for the students extends to him prodding and urging the principal to do more to improve the quality of teaching at the school, which sometimes leads to a fractious relationship with the principal. He expressed that he felt he had let down the school when he resigned from the SGB.

He is always ready to go the extra mile because he cares about the students. The school is facing a great deal of social problems and he is currently participating in the School as a Sign of Node Care and Support (SNOCS) initiative. He says that students are being abused sexually, emotionally, physically and verbally. SNOCS aims to identify these students and help them. He is involved in several community projects that aim to uplift the community around and within the school.

F also engages in practices of care. Commenting on an interaction where she had played a significant role in the decision taken, she describes her lived space experience: "Yes, at the end of the day you also feel good because you were helping someone else and not just that you doing the job. And you doing it because it's your passion and it is your work". F cares about the students and receives them warmly when they come to pay their school fees. She is welcoming if they request any assistance and sees herself as contributing to their development. She says: "I like working with the learners and ... [when] one or two or some learners come visit that was at the school and finished with high school and ... tell you that they achieved so much in life, you feel ... you were a part of their education, you feel so good". She also provides the SGB chairperson with food and spent many afternoons making the SGB chairperson feel comfortable in her new position.

Poor students receive food and money from M. In one incident she bought a pair of shoes for a needy student. She provides support for the teachers, giving information about educational authority-related matters such as issues regarding salaries or how to access the web-based Integrated School Administration and Management System. All of these practices go beyond her job description.

## Pedagogic support

A subset of their practices of care is their pedagogic support for students. When students come to M's office complaining about other students, M tries to teach them to be fair and kind towards one another. She models good behaviour to them. When students are hungry or she knows that their parents are in need, she provides money or food and assigns the hungry students to receive food from the school kitchen.

M's school is a bilingual school that has many foreign language speakers. The policy of the school states that foreign students must not be placed in bilingual English and Afrikaans classes. When she

encountered a foreign learner who had been placed in a bilingual class, she immediately brought the matter to the attention of the head of department (HOD), who moved the learner to the English class.

P's pedagogic concern extends to leading and coaching students outside of the school curriculum and formal structures about being aware of their bodies and themselves. He acts as a life skills mentor. His involvement in such activities is based on his personal project of wanting to make a difference in his community. This is what drives him in many of his spatial practices.

F regularly assists students with their projects especially where they need information from the Internet. She would search and download information for them even consulting with their teachers to ascertain what information they needed.

M, F and P produce these spatial practices of care because they perceive the "school as a home away from home". Although their principals consider their spatial practices as contributing toward a better functioning school, for them, these spatial practices make them feel better about themselves and who they are or want to be. This means that they derive internal goods of satisfaction from embodying spatial practices of care. In producing a caring social space they are appropriating the office space and using their agency to transform it through their bodily action into spaces of care, hope and potential. They are poaching conceived spaces with their tactical spatial practice. Through their spatial practices of care, these three administrative clerks simultaneously embody their workspaces as spaces of care and work.

## Spatial practices of sway

'Practices of sway' are practices where the administrative clerks manoeuvre themselves into positions where their everyday practices allow them to transform moments of their spatial practice into moments of influence. These spatial practices are deliberate manoeuvres by the three administrative clerks to influence decisions at school. It includes coaxing, lobbying and negotiating.

F lobbied and was influential with a previous principal who allowed her to be part the SMT meetings. He needed her insight and support as he was new to the school. Via his support she attended and influenced the school management. She remarks about the influence she used to have: "... the ... senior teacher comes in – 'nee juffrou, ek gaan nou eers my regterhand vra' [no teacher, I am first going to ask my right hand]. Then he will call me in: Mrs F, what do you think of the idea? What should we do now?" This previous principal acknowledged that she used her position on the SMT to influence decisions that improved the effectiveness of the management of the school.

Once he left, she lost much of her direct influence on the SMT, yet she continued to influence the school management in more subtle ways. For instance, F proposed that Mr P, a retired educational authority official who had been the Institutional Management and Governance (IMG) manager assigned to the school, attend the recruitment and selection meetings to ensure that the school followed the educational authorities' policies and procedures.

F not only briefs the SGB chairperson before SGB meetings on the correct policies and procedures, but also on what she can expect from the principal and teachers. She acts as an 'unofficial' adviser to the chairperson. She has influence in the SGB meetings since she is responsible for school finance, which includes drawing up the budget. She also influences the SGB by proposing how the funds should be spent. She is very forthright in the meetings having developed her confidence over her many years of experience.

F's spatial practices of influence and sway were evident when she tactically manoeuvred herself to appropriate the school office spaces (SGB and SMT meetings) as spheres of influence for herself. These opportunities for self-development, satisfaction and recognition have increased especially with the appointment of the acting principal who now relies upon her for direction and guidance.

M also embodies practices of sway. She has made herself indispensable to the principal and teachers through the spatial practice of doing some of their administrative and even personal tasks. This seems to be a tactic that all the school administrative clerks embody. They are prepared to do extra tasks, whether through subtle coercion or through commitment, which gives them room to negotiate influence within their social spaces.

M describes her influence on decision making in the school saying: “Mr K [the principal] won’t have me in the school management team meetings but he ... discuss(es) what was discussed at the meeting or ask(s) me, ‘have you got money for this’ or ‘what do you think of this’... so I play a huge part in the decision making”.

M’s school is a fee-paying school. According to the South African Schools Act 1996 (SASA), parents can apply for a full or partial exemption from school fees. M’s official task is to record all the applications and present them to the SGB. However, her practice goes beyond this expectation. She has developed techniques and tactics to gather information about parents who apply for the fee exemption, noting among other things the quality of their clothing and the cars that they drive. During the fee exemption application process studies the bodily practices of the parent applicants when they deliver their fee exemption documents as well as observing their children’s attire to ascertain their financial status. She then produces a comprehensive summary of what that family or individual should receive in terms of a fee exemption. Once she has gathered all the relevant documents, as prescribed by the SASA, she presents her data along with her interpretation and recommendation regarding an exemption based on her visual analysis of the bodily movements of parents, students and the spaces they occupy.

P has been influential both on the SGB and the SMT. He requested to be on the SMT even though this is conceived as the teachers’ and principal’s space. He says: “I asked ... to be part of the SMT and the intention was that being an administrative clerk is not challenging for me and it doesn’t give me any opportunity, maybe to give my views on the way the school is being run.” Once on the SMT, he influenced the principal’s decision to adopt a standard agenda for the SMT meeting. On the SGB, he worked tirelessly to inform the parent governors about correct policy and procedure. Whenever they would decide something that was contrary to the education authorities’ policies, he would explain why that decision was incorrect. For example, with the appointment of a second deputy principal, the SGB wanted to appoint a junior teacher, even though there was a more senior teacher who was qualified for the post. He intervened and explained to them that this was not correct procedure. He exerted his influence and experience on the SGB to ensure that the new post selection was done correctly. However, because he felt that the principal was commandeering the SGB, he stepped down from the SGB.

F was on the SMT and is currently on the SGB. She remarked that teachers and even the principal did not follow the local educational authorities’ policies and procedures. The school had experienced money going missing and many procedures were being ignored. She said that she constantly had to fight the tendency by staff to do their own thing, especially if it was contrary to the educational authorities’ policies. She says she would reproach them: “... you don’t come with you[r] knoeieri [cheating and corruption] and then I must go and explain to the [education] department this and that. I am not going to do that and I am not going to allow it. When I see, I see right through you. Don’t come with an agenda and I say it just like that in the meeting”. This shows the extent of her influence.

M acts as a sensitive conduit between the principal and the teachers, where she selectively communicates the information that she informally acquires, to the principal. Sometimes she omits information that she knows will upset the conservative principal in order to keep the organisational climate favourable. F passes on important ‘insider’ information to the new SGB chairperson not only to socialise, but also to alert her to vested interests in school decisions. But F also does it so that she may have influence with the SGB chairperson. P’s son attends the school, so he cares about the school’s success. He constantly passes on information to the principal in the hope that the principal will consider some of these suggestions (for instance, doing something about the poor annual national assessment scores of the school’s students). When P was a member of the SGB he made it his duty to inform parents of what was happening in the school, at a day-to-day level, so that they could make ‘better’, more informed decisions.

All three administrative clerks have been given or have taken responsibility for financial matters at the school. Through their ‘control’ of the purse strings, they influence financial decisions. Whenever the principal wants to access petty cash, he has to go via the administrative clerk. Teachers know that they will have to go via the administrative clerk if they want to solicit petty cash for purchases or local travel related to the school.

These spatial practices of sway reveal the tactics they employ to increase their participation in decision making. It demonstrates how they have extended the range of their tasks in order to develop their capabilities and gain internal and external goods. From the above, we note that the administrative clerks engage in a multitude of spatial practices despite the limited tasks assigned to their occupational role and, in so doing, counter the contributive injustice of their ghetto occupation.

## Practices of surrogacy

'Practices of surrogacy' refer to those practices where the administrative clerks act as a substitute for the principal or the management of the school. These spatial practices include making management-related decisions when the principal is absent as well as making important management-related decisions while the principal is present at school.

When the principal is physically absent, all three school administrative clerks are able to reproduce the spatial practices required. This also applies to when the principal does not do his job. For example, P will gather and compile the documents that the educational authorities require and make sure they are correct and submit them to the correct recipient. When the principal is absent, M and F support the deputies and HODs, if the latter are not familiar with the task at hand. F is an important surrogate for the acting principal when she is faced with something with which she does not have experience. All of the school administrative clerks know the requirements of the educational authorities and their principals well enough to be able to act on their behalf.

Whenever the administrative clerk is absent from the school, the principal and even the teachers complain when they return. One of the teachers commented: "If [the administrative clerk were to] leave now ... I think we will be lost ..." This is because so many of their tasks cannot be done without information or insight from the administrative clerk. Their spatial practices have become integral to the work of the other stakeholders at school. When P was absent from the school for a few days due to study leave, he came back to school and found that the requisite forms for the submission of the financial subsidy application for Grade R, that had been due while he was on leave, had not been submitted. Even though this task is the responsibility of the principal, he waited for the administrative clerk to do it. The reason he did not do it was because P had exercised his agency and done many of the principal's work in the past and now the principal had become reliant on him.

P does the finances even though he is not officially the financial officer. He also assists in the computer laboratory as the Local Area Network administrator, helps with the school policy documentation, helps administer the school feeding scheme and assists with fundraising. All these activities are not part of his contracted work description but derive from the fact that the principal or the responsible person is not doing his or her job.

At the SGB meetings, P endeavoured to inform parents about their rights and responsibilities as well as the policies and procedures of the educational authorities. He acted as their facilitator. This is the responsibility of the principal and the educational authorities but he stepped in. He transformed the SGB meeting space to include a pedagogic space. The IMG manager responsible for P's school says that P is practically "running the school".

F does the management-related tasks that are necessary at the school, even though these tasks are not part of her remit, taking on some of the responsibilities of the acting principal. Because the school does not have sufficient students to qualify for a deputy principal, she does some of what would have been the deputy principal's work. This arises out of her need to extend her capabilities but is chiefly a response to the urgency and immediacy of the situation at school. This sense of immediacy of problems that crop up at school is what honed the spatial practices of surrogacy of the administrative clerks. In the aftermath of funds going missing from the school premises, F insisted that nobody else be allowed to deal with finance matters at school other than her. Despite grumbling from some of the teachers, she was given this responsibility and most of them are satisfied with her financial management.

F's spatial practices extend outside the school sphere. She is the coordinator of the school's fundraising efforts. She has coordinated the high tea fundraiser of the school for the past few years. She raised about

R25 000, which is the biggest fundraising contribution on the budget. She visited donors to collect donated goods and to drop off letters of thanks. This takes place both during school hours and in her personal time.

Because principals have to see to many different responsibilities, the administrative clerks sometimes fulfil the managerial school requirements and the on-the-ground activities of the school. In doing all of these management-related tasks, the administrative clerks' spatial practices counter the inherent contributive injustice of their occupational role. These spatial practices complement their existing capabilities as well as help them to develop new capabilities. This self-development affords them respect and recognition from their peers.

## Main conclusions

I used the normative framework of contributive justice to analyse the spatial practices of administrative clerks in public schools in the Western Cape. I found that even though administrative clerks were thought of as non-teachers and non-managers their spatial practices included pedagogic and managerial practices.

Even though administrative clerks suffered contributive injustice through the unequal division of labour of their occupational role, which relegated them to doing mundane and routine tasks, they countered this injustice and engaged in complex practices that led to self-development, self-satisfaction and recognition by those around them. This article confirms that administrative clerks are producers of, as much as they are positioned by their school space. As producers of their social spaces, I argue that they counter the unequal division of labour which denies them opportunities for self-development, satisfaction and recognition. In producing their personal, yet social spaces, they reflect their reflexively arrived at personal projects. They do not resist the contributive injustice inherent in their occupational role merely to counter managerial control, they resist to achieve self-development and to gain internal rewards of satisfaction and external rewards of recognition by their peers.

Through their spatial practices of care, sway and surrogacy the school administrative clerks countered the contributive injustice – by using their spatial practices to generate new spatial relationships with the teachers, students and principals. This led to their deep participation in the school and substantial benefits for the functioning of the school. Their novel spatial practices can be seen as personal projects that they want to see come to fruition at school as well as reactions to the spatial practices of the principal, teachers or the educational authorities representatives.

Administrative clerks, as they go along every day, change their spatial practices, invent new ones, and appropriate existing spatial practices. As they do that, they deploy their agency toward an imagined space – a space of possibility. Through their creative acts of bringing about new practices in the midst of existing spatial practice, they have appropriated and transformed their spaces of work into spaces of care, and in doing so they have transformed their spaces of subordination into potential spaces of participation.

Administrative clerks' occupational role provides them with lowly tasks which limit their ability for self-development. Yet, this investigation into their spatial practice shows them to be active agents, i.e. active readers, interpreters, articulators of space while simultaneously still having to reproduce the demands of their conceived space. This research demonstrates that administrative clerks, even as they occupy marginalised positions, engage in spatial practices that increase their capabilities, recognition and participation. It demonstrates that the lived spaces of administrative clerks are filled with little victories. One of the most important findings is that the administrative clerks' spatial practices, with tangible effects, are precisely successful because it is unrecognised and remains invisible. If it becomes visible, it may be shut down and troubled by the authorities. I view their spaces as spaces of enablement, operating in the shadows.

Administrative clerks are placed in particular spaces and are expected to enact particular spatial practices. Yet, they have agency (however circumscribed) and embody subjective understandings of their spatial practices amidst institutional expectations. In this study M, F and P creatively embody spatial practices that reflect citizenship behaviour, kindness and care while, at the same time, being very competent at the work that they are required to do. In doing so, they counter the contributive injustice of their occupational role and make space for contributive justice in their schools.

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