



# Regulative discourse, ritual and the recontextualising of education policy into practice



Paula Ensor\*

Room 5.19, School of Education, Humanities Building, University Avenue South, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, Cape Town 7701, South Africa

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 22 October 2014

Received in revised form 11 March 2015

Accepted 7 April 2015

Available online 4 May 2015

### Keywords:

Recontextualising  
Regulative discourse  
Ritual  
Curriculum  
Pedagogy

## ABSTRACT

This paper uses Bernstein's notion of recontextualising to consider pedagogic proposals set out in South African school national curriculum policy and the take up of these in classroom practice. For this purpose a data set of video recordings, field notes and learning materials was analysed of 38 Grade 3 mathematics lessons in schools serving poor communities in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Curriculum policy for Foundation Phase numeracy since 2008 has placed great emphasis on small-group teaching and the use of pedagogic strategies aimed at encouraging differentiation in teachers' engagement with learners. Analysis of the data suggests that while there is some degree of differentiation, strong countervailing tendencies towards a communalising pedagogy are apparent. These are supported by deeply embedded, sedimented pedagogic regularities or rituals which give shape and dimension to regulative discourse as a key determinant of recontextualising. Policy initiatives become incorporated into classroom life in ways that prevent or minimise disruption of existing social relations in the classroom and dominant forms of authority. While the study is located in one region in South Africa the conclusions have relevance to other contexts which grapple with the complexities of policy implementation in giving effect to educational reform.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

The resilience of educational systems internationally poses significant challenges to policy makers in their efforts to give effect to educational reform. The images of quality education set forth in policy documents are not commonly implemented as intended in schools and classrooms, either in form or substance (Calderhead, 2001; Clarke, 2003; Fullan, 2005; McCulloch, 2005). The disjuncture between curriculum policy and classroom practice is particularly salient in the South African context where we still confront the legacy of apartheid inscribed in deep structural inequality along the lines of race and class. Efforts to restructure education have failed to produce significant enhancement in learner performance, and this is commonly explained on the basis of factors such as teacher competence (and especially lack of subject knowledge), learner capabilities, school resourcing, home background of learners, and so forth. The purpose of this paper is to report on a study of the take-up of a set of policy proposals using a sample of 38 Grade 3 mathematics classrooms in the Western Cape province of South Africa, and to illuminate other factors which might explain the complex transition from policy to practice. A key finding of this study is that the policy proposals under consideration are taken up in ways that align with dominant forms of authority and communication (the regulative order) in classrooms and that this order is reinforced and sustained by deeply embedded, ritualised and enduring pedagogic practices which shape teacher and learner identities and the recontextualising of curriculum policy into classroom practice.

The paper describes four key moments in curriculum reform in South Africa since 1994, in order to provide a context for discussing proposals set out since 2008 for Foundation Phase mathematics and formalised in the current national curriculum framework

\* Tel.: +27 021 650 2756.

E-mail address: [Paula.ensor@uct.ac.za](mailto:Paula.ensor@uct.ac.za).

document, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2011). My particular interest is a set of proposals for teaching numeracy in the Foundation Phase (Grades 1, 2 and 3), which have emerged since 2008 regarding the organisation of a typical mathematics lesson for Grade 3. The year 2008 is significant in that in this year the Foundations for Learning campaign was launched (Department of Education, 2008; Department of Basic Education, 2008) with the intention of improving the teaching of literacy and numeracy in Grades 1–3. My interest is in the numeracy component, which in its very explicit stipulation of selection and sequencing of content and in the organisation of a typical numeracy lesson bears resemblance to the National Numeracy Strategy implemented in the United Kingdom (Department for Education & Employment (DfEE), 1999). Detailed proposals are set out in Foundations for Learning and in subsequent policy documents for the organisation of a typical mathematics lesson, with time allocations associated with each activity, accompanied with detailed proposed lesson plans (Department of Education, undated – b). I consider how these proposals are taken up in practice in 38 Grade 3 classrooms in schools serving poor communities in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Regularities in pedagogic practice identified in these classrooms were found to be consistent with an earlier empirical study conducted in Foundation Phase mathematics classrooms in schools serving poor communities in the Western Cape (Ensor et al., 2009).

The work of Basil Bernstein provides a useful theoretical frame for discussing the recontextualising of policy into practice in that he places particular emphasis on regulative discourse (or the moral order, within society and within schools) as the key shaper of recontextualising processes. Bernstein regards recontextualising as the process whereby texts and practices are selectively appropriated and relocated from one context to another, involving discursive transformations as a result of this repositioning and refocusing (Bernstein, 1990, p. 60–61).

## 2. Curriculum and school reform in South Africa

In significant respects the educational landscape in South Africa has altered since 1994, the year of the country's first democratic election. As Soudien (2007) comments, at that time educational provision for poor black learners was “barely functional” (p. 185). Since then compulsory schooling has widened access and efforts have been made through redistributive policies to improve resourcing in schools serving poor communities. Inevitably, in spite of these efforts, the legacy of apartheid remains heavily inscribed in our education system in terms of school infrastructure, textbook and other provisioning, school management, teacher qualifications and learner performance. Social inequality is reflected most poignantly in bi-modal learner performance statistics, with high student achievement in formerly white schools, now populated largely by white children and children of the black elite, and very poor performance by black learners (Coloured and African) in schools serving poor communities, especially in mathematics and reading (Soudien, 2007, p. 185).

Curriculum reform initiated in the years following 1994 has been overlaid upon this deeply unequal schooling system and as would be expected, curriculum policy has been taken up in very different ways within these different schooling subsystems. Four key stages of national school curriculum development have emerged since 1994 (Chisholm, 2005a; Fataar, 2006; Hoadley, 2011). The first, interim move was “cleansing” the existing curriculum of overtly racist and sexist content (Chisholm, 2005b, p. 80) before inaugurating a second stage which entailed a radically new curriculum referred to as Curriculum 2005 (C2005), originally intended for implementation from 1997. This curriculum exhibited three key design features: it was outcomes-based, promoted an integrated knowledge system which moved away from school subjects in favour of learning areas, and promoted a progressivist, constructivist approach to knowledge and pedagogy (Cross, Mungadi, & Rouhani, 2002; Harley & Wedekind, 2004). Department of Education policy documents promoting C2005 described the “constructivist classroom” as one which valued “learners as thinkers” and which advocated “the pursuit of learner questions” with teachers seeking “the learners' points of view” as crucial resources in teaching. Teachers were expected to “generally behave in an interactive manner, mediating the environment with learners” and “constantly use group work” (Department of Education, cited in Hoadley, 2011, pp. 147–148).

C2005 soon came under fire *inter alia* for lack of specificity and coherence, and research conducted shortly after its inception highlighted teachers' poor mastery of subject knowledge, inadequate curriculum coverage, inadequate provision of “opportunities to learn” (Fleisch, 2008, p.126), poorly structured lessons pitched at a low cognitive level, problems with pacing and assessment (Hoadley, 2008), poor access to textbooks and other materials, and very limited reading and writing requirements of learners (Taylor & Vinjevold, 1999). There was broad consensus that far from advancing transformation, C2005 in reality deepened the inequality between privileged and poor schools (Chisholm, 2005a; Mattson & Harley, 2002). Teachers in privileged, well-resourced schools continued to teach with an emphasis on content, whereas teachers in poor schools struggled to make sense of the new curriculum, a situation severely complicated by the official eschewal of the use of textbooks.

Pressure built up on the ANC government to resolve this crisis, and a review was constituted which heralded the third stage of curriculum reform, the revised National Curriculum Statement which became policy in 2002. This placed heavy emphasis on conceptual coherence and provided more detail of the content to be covered. This in turn led to a fourth stage, a review of the revised National Curriculum statement, and the publication of the present Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2011). In regard to the Foundation Phase, CAPS stipulates in very great detail what teachers should aim to cover over a year, broken down into coverage per term. It also formalises a set of proposals for preferred pedagogic practices that emerged since the launch of the Foundations for Learning campaign in 2008, the recontextualisation of which into classroom practice forms the focus of the present article.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/364387>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/364387>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)