

**Can critical theory contribute towards  
enacting democratic policy implementation in  
schools?**

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by

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## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

**SIGNATURE:**

**DATE: 22 October 2002**

## **ABSTRACT**

This assignment addresses the question whether critical theory can contribute towards enacting democratic policy implementation in schools. With reference to the Norms and Standards for Educators of 2000, I argue that critical educational theory offers an adequate framework of thinking and acting to engender democratic policy implementation in schools.

Using conceptual analysis, this assignment shows that one first needs to understand the meanings of concepts before one can consider implementing them. Many of the problems facing teachers in schools involve them not having sufficient understanding of educational concepts. Hence, they seemingly find it difficult to effectively implement policy. This results in the fact that democracy remains undermined. This assignment provides a modest attempt to show that democracy does not have to be sacrificed. However, then it requires teachers to use principles of critical educational theory to ensure that effective policy implementation does occur in schools.

**Keywords:** Conceptual analysis, critical educational theory and democracy

## UITTREKSEL

Hierdie taak beantwoord die vraag of kritiese opvoedkundige teorie 'n bydrae kan lewer om demokratiese beleidsimplementering in skole kan bewerkstellig. Met verwysing na die Norme en Standaarde vir Opvoeders van 2000, argumenteer ek dat kritiese opvoedkundige teorie 'n voldoende denk- en aksieraamwerk verskaf om demokratiese beleidsimplementering in skole te realiseer.

Deur gebruik te maak van konseptuele analise, poog hierdie taak om te bewys dat 'n individu eerstens die betekenis van konsepte moet verstaan voordat dit oorweeg kan word om sulke konsepte te implementeer. Baie van die probleme wat onderwysers in skole tans in die oë staan is daaraan te wê dat hulle nie 'n voldoende begrip van hierdie konsepte het nie. Dis kom dit voor asof hulle dit problematies ervaar om beleid effektief te implementeer wat tot die gevolg het dat demokrasie ondermyn word. Hierdie taak is 'n poging om aan te dui dat demokrasie nie behoort te verdwyn nie. Dit sal dan beteken dat onderwysers beginsels van kritiese opvoedkundige teorie moet toepas om te verseker dat effektiewe beleidsimplementering in skole geskied.

**Sleutelbegrippe:** Konseptuele analise, kritiese opvoedkundige teorie en demokrasie



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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION AND DESIGN**

#### **1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND FOCUS**

The Department of Education (DoE) released several education policy documents over the past decade of which the following are examples: The White Paper on Education and Training (1995), the South African Schools Act (1996), and recently the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000). Like other employers, the DoE expects teachers or educators (employees) to implement these policy documents in schools. Unfortunately many of the education policy issues announced in these documents are not understood by teachers who often claim that subject advisors, circuit managers and school principals do not establish opportunities for teachers to interpret, analyse and implement policy. Certainly in the school where I work, many teachers complain of a lack of knowledge about education policy documents and then demands are placed on them to enact policy.

In this assignment I wish to explore some aspects of the Norms and Standards for Educators policy document and look at some of their implications for democratic teaching and learning practices in schools.

## **1.2 SCOPE OF STUDY**

Not much research has been done in the field of conceptual analysis in relation to democratic teaching and learning in South African schools. A lot has been written about educational equity and school governance (Motala & Pampallis, 2001) and educational management in school reform (Fleisch, 2002) in South Africa. However, very little has been researched about the effective implementation of the Norms and Standards for Educators and their implication for teaching and learning. It is in this area of conceptual analysis of education policy that I hope to contribute towards the ongoing debates regarding the implementation of policy and its implications for democratic teaching and learning in schools.

## **1.3 GOALS AND THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE**

My goals are twofold: Firstly I shall analyse the meanings of concepts which make up the Norms and Standards for Educators, that is, analysing meanings associated with (teacher) education policy. Secondly, I shall explore whether these meanings of education policy can be enacted democratically in relation to teaching and learning in public schools, with particular reference to some of my own teaching experiences.



I am attracted to critical educational theory for the reason that, as I shall argue for later on, such a theoretical framework aims to look at meanings and self-understandings of agents of change (for example, teachers who are serious about making policy work in schools). Critical educational theory also aims to emancipate and empower people as well as improving their situations. According to Carr and Kemmis (1986: 162) critical educational theory strives to bring about self-reflective inquiry amongst people which can give rise to conditions which can replace one distorted set of practices with another, hopefully less distorted set of practices. My contention is that critical educational theory could help teachers to better understand education policy with the intention to bring about meaningful change in schools.

## **1.4 RESEARCH METHOD**

My research method relies heavily on an analysis of concepts as explained by Hirst and Peters (1998). According to them, analysing a concept involves getting to know the underlying meanings, what they refer to as logically necessary conditions, which make concepts what they are. In others words, conceptual analysis is about finding out the underlying features which constitute concepts. For example, education is a social practice. An underlying meaning, which makes education what it is, is that people engage in social practices – they share ideas, thoughts, perceptions, understandings in a climate of conversation and discussion. Thus, my research procedure involves conceptually analysing what meanings underscore the Norms and Standards for Educators. In this way, I would be better positioned to make

evaluative judgments about the implementation of these “roles” teachers ought to enact in schools.

## **1.5 PROGRAMME OF STUDY**

In **Chapter 2** I shall explain what conceptual analysis is and how it can be used to analyse education policy with reference to the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000).

In **Chapter 3** I shall examine the constitutive features of critical educational theory as a research paradigm (theoretical framework), which can guide effective teaching and learning practices in schools.

In **Chapter 4** I shall analyse the Norms and Standards for Educators. In addition I shall attempt to answer the question whether these seven “roles” reflected in the Norms and Standards can in fact bring about emancipatory practices in relation to teaching and learning in schools.

In **Chapter 5** I show how reflexive competences associated with the “roles” teachers need to enact can lead to an emancipatory classroom. I also examine the possibilities this kind of analytical study of concepts hold for other democratic practices in schools, thus paving the way for upholding a legitimate interest in democratic schooling.



## **1.6 SUMMARY**

This introductory chapter is an attempt to frame my research project along the lines of conceptual analysis in relation to education policy exploration. Theoretically I am attracted to critical educational theory and procedurally to conceptual analysis in making sense of what the Norms and Standards for educators could mean for teachers in schools. My contention is that teaching and learning would be democratic if practised according to the features of critical educational theory.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS AS RESEARCH METHOD**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I shall expound on the research procedure I intend using in this assignment to find out (later on) what concepts such as the Norms and Standards for Educators, critical educational theory and democratic practices mean. I shall firstly explain in a separate manner what constitutes both concepts and analysis before moving on to a discussion of what conceptual analysis entails.

#### **2.2 CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS**

Conceptual analysis is a philosophical tool (research procedure) used by philosophers of education and education policy analysts to unpack meanings of concepts in a logical, coherent and consistent manner. Before I expound in more detail on conceptual analysis I shall attempt to explicate the terms “concept” and “analysis”. Firstly, the term “concept” is guided by meanings. For instance, meanings of the term “education” are guided by logical principles, which make clear and bring to one’s understanding what makes the term what it is. Central to knowing meanings which underpin “education” is that guiding principle(s) which give meaning and understanding to the term (Hirst & Peters, 1998: 30). For example, the term “education” is guided by the

notion that people engage in social practices. Hence, the guiding principle of the concept education seems to be an engagement in practices. Hirst and Peters (1998: 29) contend that this ability to recognise the guiding principle of a concept, is to know what makes the concept what it is. To know that education involves people engaging in practices, say of teaching and learning, is to understand the guiding principle of the concept.

Moreover, Hirst and Peters (1998: 31) also make it clear that knowing meanings of concepts involve finding reasons, which constitute them. In other words, our understanding of what it is to know a concept covers both the experience of grasping a principle and an ability to discriminate and use words correctly, which is observable in the case of others as well as ourselves (Hirst & Peters, 1998: 32).

Secondly, analysis has to do with discovering or constructing meaning and giving a clear understanding of the concept. In other words, analysis is a research procedure which enables one to bring out the deeper and surface meaning(s) of concepts. Analysis has been described as “the elucidation of the meaning of any concept, idea or unit of thought that we employ in seeking to understand ourselves and our world, by reducing it, breaking it down into more basic concepts that constitute it and thereby showing its relationship to a network of concepts or discovering what the concept denotes” (Hirst & White, 1998: 20). In addition, Hirst and White (1998: 20) also claim that analysis is not merely concerned with meaning of beliefs, but also with their justifications. Now that I have explained “concepts” and “analysis” separately, I shall now expound on the procedure of conceptual analysis as a distinct method in education policy studies.



As have been stated earlier, conceptual analysis is a tool used mostly by philosophers of education and education policy analysts in order to bring about the connection or linkage between concepts and to analyse what constitutes concepts. Conceptual analysis helps us to pin-point more precisely what is implicit in our moral consciousness (Hirst & Peters, 1998: 29), that is, getting to know meanings, which justify the use of concepts. For example, in order to understand the meaning of “punishment” one needs to understand that the concept reveals a connection between committing an offence against rules and the infliction of something unpleasant on the part of an offender. If one understands the reasons why “punishment” is what it is, one knows its guiding principle, that is, one knows its underlying meaning(s). The point is, that one cannot tackle the question of whether there are any good reasons for punishing people until we are clear what we mean by “punishment”, that is, knowing the guiding principle of the concept. And, knowing the guiding principle of a concept involves providing justifiable reasons why the concept is what it is. Thus, to provide any kind of justification for a particular course of action is to provide reasons or grounds for that course of action. It is to show by argument the rightness of that action. Therefore, any logical meaning of a concept has to be linked to some form of justification.

In essence, to do conceptual analysis, is in fact to embark on a procedure to understand the point of actions, what Hirst and Peters (1998: 30) refer to as the ability to emerge with a neat set of logically necessary conditions for the use of a word like “knowledge” or “education”. In the process of trying to make explicit the principles, which underline our use of words, we should have



become clearer both about how things are and about the sorts of decisions that have to be faced in dealing with them.

Of course this approach to education policy analysis can be criticised for its production of a comprehensive set of conceptual “truths” about education. However, such an approach to education policy studies remains an important philosophical activity to understand the use of terms and clarifying what these terms stand for. Critics of conceptual analysis such as Evers (1998: 128) propose, for example, that critical educational theory needs to be used “to identify sources of social domination, oppression, and justice and to promote the kind of individual and collective reflective practices necessary for human emancipation”. I agree with Evers’ position that critical educational theory does provide educational practice a reflective and emancipatory (to transform to a more humane position) activity. However, Evers as a post-analytic scholar seems to ignore what he refers to as post-analytic traditions, which first require clarity about their meanings. In this way, critics of conceptual analysis invariably draw on a necessary condition (although not a sufficient condition) of conceptual analysis; to understand the meaning of a concept or practice before using it to transform an educational issue. One first needs to know what critical educational theory means before one understands its use in practice.

In this assignment I shall use conceptual analysis to find out the underlying meanings associated with the Norms and Standards for Educators. This involves getting to know the justifiable reasons or guiding principles which make the Norms and Standards or “roles” educators ought to perform what

they are. In chapter 4, I shall analyse the guiding principles which underscore the “roles” as announced in the teacher education policy document of 2000.

## **2.3 SUMMARY**

In this chapter I have given a brief account of conceptual analysis, which I intend using in my analysis of critical educational theory in the next chapter. Doing conceptual analysis involves getting to know the guiding principle(s) which make concepts what they are. These guiding principles are logical and reasonable justifications in defence of what constitutes concepts.

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **THE EMANCIPATORY AGENDA OF CRITICAL EDUCATIONAL THEORY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter I have outlined my research procedure which would be used in this assignment. As I have indicated in chapter 1, my research question is to explore the democratic potential of the Norms and Standards for Educators in relation to teaching and learning practices in schools. In order to do so, I shall locate myself within a critical educational framework of thinking for the reason that, as I shall argue for in this chapter, such a theoretical framework aims to (1) find out the self-understandings of actors (say, teachers), and (2) empower people (teachers) so that they can improve impoverished or inadequate practices. This brings me to a discussion of critical educational theory in education policy studies. But first, what constitutes education?

### **3.2 CRITICAL EDUCATIONAL THEORY**

What constitutes education? Peters (1966: 4) talks of education as being a deliberate attempt on the part of people (for instance, teachers) to initiate a practice of bringing to light understandings of an unknown world of



knowledge. The concepts “deliberateness” and “initiation” indicate that education is a two-way process of engagement between stakeholders, for instance, teachers and learners.

According to Peters (1966: 54) education is not merely a tool or instrument to do things with, such as to succeed in getting a job or provide one with a skill to obtain extrinsic ends, for example, to obtain a meritorious award. Rather, education is a social practice of critical engagement on the part of people. Thus, when teachers and students engage in education, they participate in a collaborative process of meaning-making through negotiation, challenging, questioning and deliberation. Such an understanding of education is different from that whereby teachers “transfer” knowledge to students as if such knowledge is absolute and that it cannot be reflected upon in a critical manner. When students merely acquire knowledge without reflecting upon its meanings, which in turn might be of relevance to their particular social settings, they are said to be uncritical agents of knowledge construction. It is such a transmission mode of knowledge acquisition that critical educational theory sets out to challenge and undermine.

Critical educational theory is concerned with getting to know the self-understandings of people, as well as the notion that “our research actions will change others, and an understanding that we too must be open to change” (Waghid, 2000: 33). Implicit in such a notion of critical educational theory is an understanding that one needs to know one’s reasons for performing actions, interpret them, and whatever actions one pursues should be done for the betterment and transformation of society as a whole. In this way, critical educational theory has an emancipatory agenda.



I agree with Waghid (2000: 34) when he claims that “inherent in the process of investigating how our research actions will change others, we are (should be) rational, that is, we are crafting meaning and understanding of critical, active inquiry within our research discourse, we conceptualise what we are doing and write about our knowing”. This claim maintains that whatever one researches, one needs to engage in practices which could lead to a positive impact on our lives and those of other human beings in society. This means that one needs to understand human actions and to be able to correctly interpret what is meant by their actions with the view to improve such actions or to establish conditions, which might result in improved practices. Gibson (1986: 2) states, “critical (educational) theory is not simply explanatory, but is committed to enabling change towards better relationships towards a more just and rational society”. Thus, besides getting to understand human actions, in particular meaning which shape their actions, critical educational theory has as its goal to allow individuals and groups of people to be in control of their own situations whereby they could be set free (liberated). For example, when teachers have to enact education policies, such as the Norms and Standards for Educators, based on their understandings of the document, they are said to be in control of their situation for the reason that they have analysed these policies and the possible impact it might have on improved classroom practices. They are free to reason about these policies and to critique such policies. They have a voice in such matters since at the end of the day they are the ones who will be in the forefront to put these policies into practice.

In essence, critical educational theory supports the notion of “standing up” if you are not satisfied with what you see. According to Gibson (1986: 5) “critical



(educational) theory argues that the identification of conflicting interest(s) is more truly revealing than other approaches". This statement implies that it is crucial to be able to remove or to be able to reach consensus about educational issues. Of course, it is natural for people to have different views about certain issues, but conflicting issues need to be picked up, discussed and positive resolutions be achieved, thus ensuring possible emancipation in education.

Gibson (1986: 44) claims that critical theorists of education have three things in common: "They begin from a concern to map the inequalities and injustices of education; next they claim to trace those inequalities and injustices to their source, showing the educational processes and structures by which they are maintained; and finally, they seek or propose remedies to those injustices". By implication, whenever one perceives that there might be something wrong with education in schools, one needs to find ways as to how and why the particular situation can be resolved. These are the questions asked by critical theorists of education because they consider it their duty to question in order to enable them to come up with resolutions.

Of what good is critical educational theory for education policy studies? The notion of critical educational theory is underscored by the recognition that our actions will change others, and an understanding that we too must be open to change. Tierney (1994: 101) states that critical educational theory is meant to be transformative (critical): "We do not merely analyse or study an object to gain greater understanding, but instead struggle to investigate how individuals and groups might be better able to change their situations". Inherent in the process of investigating how our actions will change others, we are engaged

with constructions of knowledge for ourselves and communicate what we have experienced to others. In this way, we are rational, that is, we are crafting meaning and understandings of critical, active inquiry within our educational discourse; we conceptualise what we are doing and write about our knowing. What this explanation of critical educational theory amounts to is, that classroom practices framed in a critical paradigm can be considered a logically necessary condition for effectiveness to occur.

### **3.3 SUMMARY**

In this chapter I have shown that critical educational theory is connected to a process of finding out the self-understandings of people with the aim to bring about a change in a particular social setting. Critical educational theory aims to improve school practices such as improving the roles of teachers in relation to demanding and challenging transformation processes in schools. It is this idea of critical educational theory, which I shall use to make an argument for the implementation of the Norms and Standards for Educators policy document, which can result in democratic teaching and learning practices in schools.



## **CHAPTER 4**

# **EXPLORING THE NORMS AND STANDARDS FOR EDUCATORS**

## **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Before I show how critical educational theory can bring about improved practices in relation to the roles teachers ought to enact in schools, I shall firstly conceptually analyse what the Norms and Standards for Educators entail. This is necessary if one wants to know the implications of these Norms and Standards for teaching and learning in the classroom.

## **4.2 EXPLORING THE SEVEN ROLES OF EDUCATORS AS ANNOUNCED IN THE NORMS AND STANDARDS FOR EDUCATORS POLICY DOCUMENT**

In chapter 2, I have expounded upon the research procedure of conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis aims to identify constitutive meanings or logically necessary conditions, which make concepts what they are. I shall now use conceptual analysis to find out some of the meanings, which constitute the Norms and Standards document.

### **4.2.1 Learning mediator**

According to the Norms and Standards document (DoE, 2000: 13), an educator (teacher) will mediate learning in a manner which is sensitive to the diverse needs of learners, including those with barriers to learning, construct learning environments that are appropriately contextualised and inspirational, and communicate effectively showing recognition of and respect for the differences of others. In addition an educator will demonstrate sound knowledge of subject content and various principles, strategies and resources appropriate to teaching in the South African context.

My understanding of an educator as mediator between himself / herself and learners is that an educator is there to provide help to learners and also to help learners who are having difficulties (say for example in reading and writing) and to enable them to understand the content of the subject matter. In other words, as a mediator, an educator puts subject matter into context by establishing favourable conditions for learning. Also, an educator uses different strategies to clarify subject matter and to communicate the necessary knowledge to learners who in turn make meaning or construct diverse understandings. Thus, as a mediator an educator does not merely “transfer” knowledge to learners, but establish conditions in classroom practices whereby learners can construct different understandings of concepts taught.



## **4.2.2 Interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials**

The Norms and Standards document (DoE, 2000: 13) emphasises the role of an educator as one who understands, interprets and designs learning programmes. In addition as “interpreter”, an educator identifies requirements for a specific context of learning, selects and prepares suitable textual and visual resources for learning. An educator also selects, sequences and paces the learning in a manner sensitive to the differing needs of the subject / learning area and learners.

In order for an educator to be an “interpreter” and “designer”, he or she acts as a specialist when it comes to the subject matter. He / she has insight into the subject matter. Moreover, as a “designer”, an educator needs to be creative in order to come with their own designs of learning materials. An educator also needs to know exactly what resources will be required in a given subject matter, that is, he / she needs to be selective of what should be used albeit theoretical or visual resources in relation to learners’ level of understanding.

## **4.2.3 Leader, administrator and manager**

The Norms and Standards document (DoE, 2000: 13) points out that an educator will have to make decisions appropriate to the level of learners’ understanding. He / she also needs to manage learning in the classroom, as well as carrying out classroom administrative duties efficiently, and

participating in school decision-making structures. These competences will be performed in ways, which are democratic, supporting learners and colleagues, and that demonstrating responsiveness to changing circumstances and needs.

As leader, an educator takes initiative as far as the constructive teaching of learning material is concerned. Educators, as leaders, are there to teach learners to become decision makers and to be able to make decisions that will impact positively, even on their own lives. Furthermore, an educator must be able to manage their classrooms especially their learners, inculcating in them “good” managerial skills because learners need to manage their own learning processes. Similarly, as administrator and educators has to prepare students’ class lists, marks sheets and work portfolio files.

#### **4.2.4 Scholar, researcher and life long learner**

An educator needs to achieve ongoing personal, academic, occupational and professional growth through pursuing reflective study and research in their learning area, in broader professional and educational matters, and in other related fields (DoE, 2000: 13).

What this means, is that an educator needs to upgrade his / her professional qualifications by pursuing further education at tertiary institutions. In other words, an educator needs to seek more knowledge to improve their knowledge in their specific learning areas. This in turn, can improve the quality



of their teaching assessment and also make them more capable of improving their classroom practices.

#### **4.2.5 Community, citizenship and pastoral role**

The Norms and Standards document (DoE, 2000: 14) accentuates that an educator needs to practise and promote a critical, committed and ethical attitude towards developing a sense of respect and responsibility towards others. An educator will uphold both the Constitution and Bill of Rights and promote democratic values and practices in schools and society. Within the school, an educator will demonstrate an ability to develop a supportive and empowering environment for the learner and respond to the educational and other needs of learners and fellow educators. Furthermore, an educator will develop supportive relations with parents and other key persons and organisations based on a critical understanding of community and environmental development issues. One critical dimension of this role is HIV/AIDS education.

Moreover, as a community member, an educator needs to show respect towards others. An educated person who does not show respect towards others is regarded as a disrespectful in any society because such a person does not play any encouraging role amongst others.

An educator needs to practice and promote democracy outside and inside the classroom following the guidelines of the South African Constitution and Bill of Rights. Within the institution, an educator has the task of supporting learners



who seem to lack the ability in their various learning areas, as well as empowering other teachers with the knowledge that he / she possesses.

The Norms and Standards document further explains the position of educators as community members in terms of working together with parents, as well as understanding educational problems in society and try to come with practical ways in solving those problems. South Africa at this point in time is faced with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Therefore, it is the task of educators to educate learners and parents about this deadly disease. Educators need to give support to those learners who are already infected.

#### **4.2.6 Assessor**

The Norms and Standards document (DoE, 2000: 14) explains an educator's role as an assessor or one who will understand that assessment is an essential feature of the teaching and learning process, as well as knowing how to integrate it into this process. An educator will have an understanding of the purpose and methods of teaching and learning and will be able to provide helpful feedback to learners. An educator as assessor will design and manage both formative and summative assessment in ways that are appropriate to the level and purpose of the learning and meet the requirements of accrediting bodies. Also, an educator as assessor understands how to interpret and use assessment results to incorporate into the teaching process for the improvement of learning programmes.

My understanding of the role of an educator as an assessor is that an educator needs to be able to assess learners as a means of “measuring” what has been taught to learners. Assessment helps an educator to see what learners understand. An educator needs to understand what to assess and how to go about doing assessment. Assessment also helps an educator because you are able to give learners feedback. Learners would then be able to correct their mistakes by trying to understand what they did not understand. It is the prerogative of an educator to assess learners correctly, for instance, summatively or formatively, as well as to make sure that learners’ portfolio files are in good order in terms of what is supposed to be in the files. The way an educator assesses must be in line with the guidelines or requirements of the accrediting bodies.

#### **4.2.7 Learning area / subject / discipline / phase specialist**

The Norms and Standards document (DoE, 2000: 14) makes it clear that an educator will have to be well grounded in the knowledge, skills, values, principles, methods and procedures relevant to the discipline, subject learning area, phase of study or professional or occupational practice. An educator needs to know about different approaches to teaching and learning (and where appropriate, research and management), and how these may be used in relation to learners and their contexts.

By implication, an educator will be well “trained” with knowledge pertaining to the area of his or her specialisation. This would enable an educator to come



with relevant approaches towards the subject and will also show his / her ability to use these approaches in different situations.

Now that I have expounded on the seven “roles” the Norms and Standards policy document envisages teachers (educators) should enact, I shall briefly look at the competences learners need to demonstrate in relation to teachers performing these roles. This is necessary for the reason that many of these competences seem to be in line with the basic idea of critical educational theory, that is, bringing about a liberatory change in learners’ self-understandings and situations.

#### **4.3 CRITICAL EDUCATIONAL THEORY AND REFLEXIVE COMPETENCES**

The Norms and Standards policy document discusses three kinds of competences: practical, foundational and reflexive. Firstly, practical competence refers to an ability a learner demonstrates whereby he / she can consider a range of decisions and possibilities which can be followed and “to perform the chosen action”, for instance, by adjusting teaching strategies to cater for different learning styles. Secondly, foundational competence exists whereby a learner demonstrates an understanding of the knowledge and thinking which underpin actions taken, for instance, understanding different learning styles. Thirdly, reflexive competence involves learners demonstrating abilities to integrate or connect performances and decision making with understanding and with the ability to adapt to change and unforeseen circumstances and to explain the reasons behind these actions. For example,



reflecting on the extent to which objectives of the learning experience have been achieved and deciding on adaptations where required (DoE, 2000: 15-16).

My focus is on reflexive competence for the reason that critical educational theory is also geared towards bringing about a change in learners' self-understandings and their situations. What these competences point out is that after teachers have enacted their roles as mediators; interpreters and designers; leaders, administrators and managers; communitarians, citizens and pastors; scholars, researchers and lifelong learners; assessors; and learning area specialists, they should be able to demonstrate reflexive abilities. Therefore I shall only look at selected reflexive competences of teachers whilst performing their seven roles and which link strongly with critical educational theory.

Some of the reflexive competences teachers could show while enacting their seven roles include the following:

- Reflecting, analysing, making judgements, critically evaluating and assessing learning related activities in the classroom and changing educational circumstances;
- Managing and constructing a democratic classroom which is sensitive to culture, race and gender differences;
- Promoting liberal values such as respect for human rights and resolving conflict;
- Nurturing team teaching;

- Adapting school extra curriculum programmes in response to needs, comments and criticism;
- Reflecting on ethical issues in religion, politics and the environment; and
- Cultivating an awareness of citizenship (DoE, 2000: 15-22).

To my mind, if teachers demonstrate these competences while performing their roles, as well as linking these competences to the basic idea of critical educational theory, emancipation can be achieved in teaching and learning experiences in the classroom. This would be the focus of my last chapter.

## **4.4 SUMMARY**

In this chapter I have analysed the primary concepts, which inform the Norms and Standards for Educators policy document. The seven roles teachers ought to enact in the classroom cannot be seen in isolation from the competences they have to demonstrate: practical, foundational and reflexive. Of interest to this assignment is the idea of reflexive competence for the reason that, like critical educational theory, it seems as if reflexive competence can be linked to bringing about a change in teachers' self-understandings, their learners and contexts.



## **CHAPTER 5**

# **TOWARDS EMANCIPATION AND DEMOCRACY IN CLASSROOM PRACTICES**

## **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Thus far I have shown that the Norms and Standards for Educators, in particular the seven roles which teachers ought to enact, together with the reflexive competences they need to demonstrate have the critical potential to liberate teachers' minds, those of their students, as well as improving the contexts in which they find themselves. This chapter reflects on the emancipatory potential of the Norms and Standards in relation to critical educational theory and my own practices in a historically disadvantaged school.

## **5.2 CAN THE NORMS AND STANDARDS ENACT AN EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION?**

Unquestioningly the seven "roles" teachers have to enact according to the Norms and Standards policy document have the potential to emancipate them and learners if these "roles" are performed in relation to critical educational theory. It is to such a discussion that I shall now focus my attention.



### **5.2.1 Learning mediator**

As a learning mediator I would be critical about what is taking place in my own classroom. This means, I need to be sensitive to the diverse needs of learners and also try to break the impediments that make learners not to be able to write, read or to grasp the content of the learning area. In other words, I would strive to know the self-understandings of learners, that is, understanding the meaning of my own and their actions. If an educator respects the differences of others and try to empower those who seem to lack understanding in a certain learning area, then he / she is on the road to emancipate others – an idea which seems to be in line with critical educational theory. In essence, if my role as a mediator of knowledge is going to be successful, I need to establish conditions whereby I reflect, analyse, critically evaluate and make judgements of the teaching and learning activities in my classroom. For example, I think about the subject I teach, namely Xhosa for Grade 8 learners. In terms of critical educational theory, I could “teach” my subject, making use of reflective and analytical activities whereby learners can make critical judgements about issues of language.

### **5.2.2 Interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials**

As a critical interpreter and designer I would not hesitate to initiate activities that will develop the critical thinking capacities of learners. This implies that I need to design my learning materials and programmes in such a manner

whereby learners would be encouraged to actively engage in the learning process. I should not treat them as outsiders in my classroom because they need to interpret what I teach in terms of the content of the learning area. This means that my planning of the curriculum has to be attuned to establishing conditions, which encourage learners to participate in activities. This also means that I need to constantly improve the materials of the subject content that is relevant to learners. In relation to Xhosa in my Grade 8 classroom, I need to afford learners opportunities to challenge and question. This could only be done if the learning materials are designed in a manner that is sensitive to cultural and gender differences. In this way, a democratic ethos in relation to quality learning materials can be achieved – an idea which is in line with critical educational theory.

### **5.2.3 Leader, administrator and manager**

As a reflexive educational leader, one would be faced with a crucial job, which involves taking decisions that will affect one's classes. As a leader, one needs to guide others including fellow educators. In this way, an educator can help in liberating others' thinking. As a reflexive administrator, a teacher has to keep record of her / his classroom performances. When a teacher is practicing democracy in his / her classroom he / she establishes and constructs a pleasant atmosphere for learning allowing learners' voices to be heard in a logical and rational manner. In addition, as a reflexive manager of classroom activities, I need to take the initiative to re-arrange desks in a manner that would undermine the transmission mode of teaching. Arranging desks in different ways can also encourage a discussion-centric classroom.



## **5.2.4 Community, citizenship and pastoral role**

I consider this role teachers ought to perform in schools of great importance, in particular encouraging active citizenship within learners. The question is, what can one do to encourage active citizenship within learners? First and foremost is the recognition of the achievements of learners in school and extra-curricular activities. This will indicate to them that they have a positive impact on society, which would promote a sense of responsibility within learners. Secondly, teachers need to empower learners with skills to help them recognise that they too can be agents of change. In this way, learners would not feel disengaged from school matters, which in turn would reduce their sense of alienation and restore their belief in democratic processes.

Certainly Outcomes-based education (OBE) fits well with this role a teacher can perform since it emphasises critical thinking and the fact that learners can take responsibility. In turn, these attitudes of a sense of community and citizenship can cultivate in learners a sense of out-reach within their society. For example, a teacher can aid this change in attitude by integrating community work with learners' school projects. Learners could then comment on and criticise such projects – an idea which links up with building the reflexive competence of learners within a critical way. Moreover, in these subject related school projects, teachers could promote the liberal values of respect for human rights, tolerance towards diverse religious views, and the idea that one has to be critical of authority, even of teachers.



### **5.2.5 Scholar, researcher and lifelong learner**

I consider these roles teachers ought to perform as necessary to effective teaching and learning occurring in the classroom. Surely a teacher who is continuously researching new ways of encouraging active learner participation in the classroom demonstrates a high level of reflexive competence. When such a teacher uses his / her improved ways of teaching to promote critical thinking and sound judgement in classroom practices, she / he is said to be critical.

Furthermore, a teacher as scholar is prepared to initiate debate and conversation through her / his classroom activities. Learners in such a teacher's classroom feel free to differ with one another. Yet, they respect one another in the sense that they do not just agree with everything everybody else says. But then, such a teacher is not threatened by what learners think or suggest. Learners know the teacher is open to correction and is always prepared for debate and conversation. A teacher in such a position also realises that he / she must be updated with recent developments in education. In essence, such a teacher is in fact a lifelong learner – an idea of reflexive competence, which connects with critical educational theory.

### **5.2.6 Assessor**

Nowadays much is being said of formal, continuous assessment in the classroom. In this regard the teacher needs to find ways and means to bring

about effective assessment of learners' work. I think of my own Grade 8 Xhosa classroom whereby learners were asked to make group presentations about the importance of language in expressing ideas. Together with another language teacher we assessed the presentations of learners and gave them valuable critical feedback. Learners could also question the presentations of others with the aim to improve their understanding of language issues. Thus, a teacher's role as an assessor should not be separated from stimulating critical thinking and challenging in her / his classroom – an idea which once again connects with reflexive competence.

### **5.2.7 Learning subject specialist**

A teacher must demonstrate the competence that he / she knows the content of the subject matter taught. But then, knowing subject content is not sufficient to engender critical thinking and discussion. It is more at the level of making educational judgements on educational issues arising from classroom practice where a teacher's specialised subject knowledge would actually be valued. Much of the research a reflexive teacher is involved with arises from real educational problems. A teacher who possesses subject knowledge can demonstrate an understanding of the implications of this knowledge for further research. Moreover, a subject specialist also has the competence to make critical judgements on the relationship between different subject disciplines. In this way, a teacher demonstrates critical competence.

In essence, a teacher who demonstrates reflexive competence in enacting his / her seven "roles" in the classroom can create opportunities for critical



thinking, discussion, debate, active learner participation, and an awareness of citizenship. These values are all connected to the idea of critical educational theory.

Finally, these values are also internal “goods” of democracy, which suggests that for teachers to enact these roles, they would actually be fostering a democratic classroom atmosphere. Why is this so? For Gutman and Thompson (1990: 1) a democracy secures a central place for moral discussion and deliberation in various forms of life. They argue that the promise of a democratic theory lies in a concern for “finding terms of cooperation that each citizen can accept” for the reason that contemporary societies are driven by deep conflict and moral disagreement (Gutman & Thompson, 1996: 26). Benhabib (1996: 68) explains democracy as “a model for organizing the collective and public exercise of power in the major institutions of a society on the basis of the principle that decisions affecting the well-being of a collectivity can be viewed as the outcome of a procedure of free and reasoned deliberation among individuals considered as moral and political equals”. In other words, classroom practices are legitimate insofar as activities are produced in a process of discussion and debate in which teachers and learners, going beyond mere self-interest and limited points of view, reflect on the general interest of education.

Walzer (1983: 304) contends that democracy puts a premium on speech, persuasion, rhetorical skill and the person who makes the most persuasive argument gets his / her way. Benhabib (1996: 69) states that democracy is a necessary condition for attaining legitimacy and rationality whereby all learners should have the same chances to initiate speech acts, to question, to

interrogate, and to open debate; all have the right to question the assigned topics of conversation; and all have the right to initiate reflexive arguments about the way in which they are applied or carried out say, in classroom practices (Benhabib, 1996: 70). Hence, demonstrating reflexive competence through enacting the afore-mentioned seven roles, teachers are in fact critical agents of democracy – an idea that can manifest in classroom practices if implemented along the lines of critical educational theory.

### **5.3 POSSIBILITIES OF THIS STUDY FOR FUTURE POLICY ANALYSIS RESEARCH**

This assignment offers some possibilities for future research in education policy studies connected with conceptual analysis for the following reasons:

Firstly, the fact that I have relied on conceptual analysis to find out what the seven roles teachers have to enact in schools could mean, I have shown how meanings of teacher performance could be interpreted and implemented along the lines of critical educational theory. For the reason that critical educational theory is connected to empowering and emancipating people, it could serve as a useful research paradigm to bring about liberatory changes in classroom practices.

Secondly, I have shown how reflexive competences of teacher performance can be related to cultivating a sense of citizenship in classroom. Studies of citizenship in relation to education are rare and this assignment could open up possibilities for research at a more advanced level in this area. I am



particularly aware of the transformative possibilities citizenship education could offer classroom practices with the aim to make teaching and learning more relevant to changing circumstances.

Thirdly, this assignment also shows how critical teacher performances in relation to the Norms and Standards for Educators can bring about a heightened sense of democracy in classroom. This is where the potential contribution of this assignment lies.

Finally, there is a shortage of studies linking critical theory to education policy analysis. This assignment is a modest attempt to make a contribution in this regard.

## **5.4 SUMMARY**

This assignment has shown how conceptual analysis can be used to find out meanings associated with concepts in an important education policy document for teachers in South Africa. The main argument has been that unless one understands what the Norms and Standards for Educators mean, one would not be in a position to show how classroom practices (teaching and learning) can be improved. I have shown that teaching and learning in and beyond the classroom can be improved if actions are connected to critical educational theory. Finally I have shown that the Norms and Standards for Educators hold much promise for enacting transformative practices, which in turn can lead to a heightened form of democracy in classroom practices.

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