Full Length Research Paper

Development studies students as constructors of classroom pedagogy in practice: Observed classroom dynamics from the Kingdom of Lesotho

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This study is a report on observed classroom methods, approaches and strategies employed by Development Studies teachers and students in selected senior secondary schools in the Kingdom of Lesotho to keep each other in an information-giving position. It is contrary to the existing view that teacher dominance is a negotiated product, which results from teachers and students exercising power on each other in the classroom. Such a view of classroom practice is only possible where power is conceptualized not as a negative force that dominates, but as a productive enabling force that simultaneously constrains and enables human action. In theory various perspectives of classroom reality becomes a co-construction, a joint project by teacher and students. This study surveyed Development Studies teachers and students in randomly selected schools. Participatory and action research methods (triangulation) were used in the study which directly involved the respondents. The literature reviewed, questionnaires administered and the interviews conducted enabled us to produce this report. The conclusion that could be drawn is that if classroom practice is viewed as a dialectical co-construction then students' passivity must be recognized as their exercising of power on the teacher.

Keywords: classroom research, teacher power, student power, co-construction, social studies, students.

INTRODUCTION

The teacher has often been singled out as the most important change agent to the exclusion of other participants – students in educational policy-making. Whenever change is desirable in educational practice, interventionist programmes usually establish for teachers without due consideration of students. Improving the quality of teachers has been viewed as a prerequisite for quality teaching and learning. The role the real consumers (students) of curriculum initiatives play in curriculum implementation is largely viewed as inconsequential. Students, all over the world, are rarely involved in any meaningful way in curriculum decision-making, even though they are central to the process of schooling. They are perceived as inconsequential in curriculum matters. This is self-evident in the work of classroom researchers, who tend to focus exclusively on what the teacher does in class, rather than on what students also do to influence classroom practices. This observation is pertinent not to the Kingdom of Lesotho in particular but other African countries as well.

From the mid 1980s, when the political landscape changed due to the military intervention the Kingdom of Lesotho found herself in the throes of curriculum reform.

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One aspect of this reform agenda has been attempts to have teachers adopt a learner-centred pedagogy. This move has been necessitated by the perceived inadequacy of the quality of teaching and learning using the old teacher-centred approach. Not unexpectedly, schools have lately witnessed an 'invasion' of their classrooms by 'researchers', whose interest is to establish whether or not learner-centred pedagogy is being adopted by teachers. The findings of many of these studies have characterized classroom practice as 'teacher-centred' and 'teacher-dominated' (Fuller and Snyder, 1991; Prophet and Rowell, 1993; Prophet, 1995; Tabulawa, 1997, 1998). Students in these studies are portrayed as 'passive recipients of academic verbal information' (Prophet and Rowell 1993: 205), which implies that they do not make any worthwhile contribution towards the shaping of the observed classroom. They are described as "fairly artificial [comprising] short responses to closed-ended teacher-initiated questions" (Marope and Amey 1995: 12).

Metaphorically, students are 'pawns' that merely respond, in a rather mechanistic manner, to the teacher's actions. The concept of metaphor is apt here. Boostrom (1998: 397) is of the view that a metaphor is about 'how we see the world', 'a compressed, imaginative expression of a perspective'. The metaphor 'students as pawns' expresses a particular perspective on power and power relations. The view of power expressed is that of students as passive 'actors' largely dominated by the omnipotent teacher. Power is cast in terms of being a commodity that can be possessed, given, or withheld. In much classroom research the teacher is the one who possesses power exercised over 'docile' students. This implies that students make no meaningful contribution to classroom processes.

Contrary to popular wisdom our contention in this respect is that especially in Third World countries, students make great input in classroom processes to the extent that they significantly influence the way a teacher carries out his or her teaching tasks. At the centre of this argument is the notion of classroom reality as a social construction jointly constructed by both the teacher and students. Doyle (1992) suggests that 'the study of teaching and curriculum must be grounded much more deeply than it has been in the events that students and teachers jointly construct in the classroom settings' giving orientation to this study. It can be indicated that the classroom reality dubbed 'teacher-centeredness' is a co-construction involving both the students and the teacher; that is both the teacher and the students should provide input to make a lesson successful. Such conceptualization of classroom practice is only possible where power is not viewed as a commodity or possession for exchange. My intention for using the concept "reality" is on "various perceptions of reality" which actually makes this discussion conceptualized in its practical perspective.

This research study report has two aspects: the theoretical and the empirical:

• First, we critique the 'power-as-sovereign' conception that underpins most studies on classroom dynamics ((Popkewitz 2000, as cited in McEneaney 2002: 104). We then offer an alternative analysis of power based on the ideas of Foucault. This alternative analysis portrays students as objects and subjects of power.

• Second, and on the basis of the alternative analysis of power, we advanced an argument for viewing classroom reality as a co-construction.

• Third, we outlined findings from an empirical case study, in which both latent and manifest ways students contribute to the construction of the classroom reality that has been dubbed 'teacher-centeredness' are examined.

• Finally, we offered a set of conclusions derived from the study and our analysis.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study surveyed 60 schools (30 primary and 30 secondary) in the educational districts of the Kingdom of Lesotho. The schools were chosen randomly (Ary et al., 1972; Gay, 1976; Nachmias and Nachmias, 1981; Smit, 1995; Hoinville, 1982; Babbie, 1986; Forcese, 1970; McMillan and Schumacher, 1993) to be able to attain a collective representation of schools to generalize the findings. However, attention was paid to the location of the schools in urban and rural areas. Furthermore some media reports have branded urban schools as rowdy and disrespect the authority of teachers (Sunday times, 13th May 2007, p. 1). This study was guided by dual methods. Participatory and action were fused into what is termed triangulation, which is the application of using more than one method in a study. The participatory and action research strategies are used because the study involves the actors who constitute the bulk of classroom environment. Since the survey involved teachers and students, the two methods were ideal for the following reasons:

• That research methods and techniques are task specific and the task is defined by the research goal. In this study the goal was the exercise of power in the classroom between teachers and students.

• That different studies use different methods and techniques because they have different aims and objectives. In this study our aim was to identify how teachers and students exercise power in the classroom

• That the method should be specific, relevant, applicable and appropriate for the task at hand. In this study the two methods chosen – participatory and action fit in this realm.

• That the chosen method should apply to sample, sampling, data collection, interview, and questionnaire design. In this study this has been taken care of.

The implication in this study is that participatory and action methods complement each other for systematization of the data required to produce the study report which should evoke participation and action on the part of the reader to be empowered to respond to the study report accordingly (de Vos et al, 2005; Bryman, 2004; Participatory Research, 1994).

Research instruments used to gather the required data for the study

In the collection of the required data for the study the observation, questionnaire and interview were selected as appropriate instruments. In order to ensure that the data collected were measurable, easy to

score and analyze, we made use of questionnaires. These questionnaires were designed using the Likert Scale format and covered all the areas of importance pertaining to classroom practice. For the purpose of making the questionnaire easy to complete and also to increase the percentage of accuracy, reliability and validity in the findings we included questions that required specific information from the respondents which made it easy for us to collect the most relevant data (de Vos, 2005). The questionnaires were administered by hand to the sampled teachers and students of the randomly selected participating schools. The collected questionnaires were tabulated according to respondents' responses and put into tables using the SPSS statistical programme.

Close-ended questionnaires were administered and open-ended questions were used to conduct the interview. The main reason for the interviews was to sift further information directly from the respondents to be able to compare them with the responses from the questionnaire. The study was carried out in 60 randomly selected senior secondary schools located in both rural (30) and urban (30) settings in the Kingdom of Lesotho. Generally, in most parts of Africa development is biased towards urban areas, with the rural areas lagging behind. In general, schools in urban areas are well resourced and staffed while those in the rural areas are under-resourced and understaffed making the disparity between urban and rural schools evident. Relative poverty is a characteristic feature of the rural population as well.

Data collection

In the selected 60 schools, the researcher observed 10 class periods per school (a combined 450 observation hours = 60 schools x 10 observation periods x 45minutes per period ÷ 60). The observations were unstructured and were aimed at providing a textured portrait of life in the Development Studies classroom to obtain data to substantiate those from the questionnaire. Record was kept of such features of the classrooms as control measures, student-teacher and student-student interactions, as well as non-verbal modes of communication. In these classroom observations we assumed the position of a semi-participant observer. After each observation we undertook individual interviews with ten of the 20 teachers and five each of forms three, four and five students (ten girls and ten boys), each interview for teachers lasting 30 and 60 minutes and that of students lasting 15 to 30 minutes. The sampled population totalled 1200 teachers and 1200 students making a combined total of 2400 respondents. Both sets of interviews were semi-structured and covered general areas such as pedagogy, schooling and its goals, classroom organization, and student-teacher relationships. The ultimate objective of the interviews was to establish how the teachers and the students made sense of their own classroom actions. The classroom observations were carried out before the interviews were conducted in order to facilitate the generation of interview questions from the observation data. Analysis of the data involved repeated reading with the aim of identifying recurring themes that could then be used as the organizing themes in the data presentation and discussion. Three such themes were identified: students' expectations; students' silence and teachers' 'deficit view' of students.

RESULTS

Revelations from observed classroom dynamics and the administered questionnaire and interview schedules

Observed classroom dynamics

The findings of the study confirmed the findings of a study by Tabulawa (1998) on classroom dynamics that teachers play a 'dominant' role in the classroom, with teaching and learning being primarily based on

information transmission by the teacher. Tabulawa further reported that elsewhere teachers employed strategies that ensured sustenance of their dominance. For example, teachers ignored what they considered to be students' incorrect answers (conversely, they emphasized 'right' answers); mass teaching was the norm; and they asked closed-ended questions. All these techniques ensured the maintenance of the teacher's dominance in class; hence the description of lessons as teacher-centred or dominated. Conventionally, the interpretation of such findings tends to portray the teacher as the embodiment of the oppressive structures. The teacher is presented as the one who possesses power and uses it for purposes of social control. The students are therefore considered as passive and powerless. The implicit view of power here is that of power-as-sovereign. However, in this study, teacher dominance was not necessarily seen as a product of the teacher's inherent desire for social control.

The interviews and observation data showed that in many instances teachers were 'forced' into the dominant position by the students themselves (Atkinson, 2004; Bryman et al., 2001; Bryman, 2004; Rampton et al., 2002; Banks, 2001; Charmaz, 2000, 2002 and 2004). Teacher dominance, far from being a teacher imposition, is a negotiated product resulting from students and teachers exercising power; within the limits of the constraints set by their context; on each other. In other words, students do contribute towards the classroom reality called 'teacher-centeredness'. The question, therefore, is "How was this accomplished?" What follows is a brief attempt to answer this question.

Students' role in the construction of teacher dominance in the classroom

Students' expectations of the teacher and fellow students' behaviour

Students have certain expectations of both their teachers' and fellow students' behaviour in the classroom. These expectations regulate the participants' classroom behaviour. In particular, the expectations position students as 'gatekeepers' to the teachers' reputation. From the interviews with the 60 teachers (ten from each school to give a balance of views from urban and rural schools) it was clear that they were aware of this powerful position of students. The 60 students selected for the interview, however, were not as conscious of the power of their own position as the teachers were. Nevertheless, they had certain expectations of teacher behaviour. It was these expectations, which the teachers were fully aware of, that influenced how they conducted their lessons. Whether the teacher was described by the students as 'good' or 'poor' depended on how well the teacher carried out responsibilities that essentially had to

do with imparting school knowledge (and not deviating from that role). Characteristically, in a summary, a 'good' teacher was described by students in the following ways:

"*A competent teacher usually comes to classroom punctually, prepared and has a good mastery of subject content and ability to deliver the lesson in such a way that students will understand and make their contribution. It must be clear that he knows what he is talking about. Whenever we get a new teacher we 'test' him to find out if he knows his stuff. Depending on how he or she impresses us we either call him or her the 'deep' one or the 'shallow' one. Notes are very important to us as students. We cannot pass our tests and examinations if we do not have notes for revision. Some teachers just give you what is in the textbook. A good teacher must prepare and give detailed notes. Yes, we can make our own notes but . . . we don't have time. I like a teacher who satisfactorily answers students' questions. Some teachers have this habit of ignoring questions by students or ridiculing students who ask questions they themselves feel are stupid. A good teacher keeps order in class and makes you do your work. You see there are students who always want to challenge the teacher by making noise. The teacher must be able to control those. Homework must be checked by the teacher*" (Students expectations and comments on their Social Studies teachers).

The teachers' act of satisfying these qualities was described by the students as "to pour out"—in this context, "pouring out" knowledge for students to pick them up for their use. Metaphorically, the teacher was viewed as a fountain of knowledge. If teachers were perceived in this way, then probably the most important thing for students was how effectively the teachers transmitted that essential commodity, knowledge and skills, and it was their ability to do so that determined, if they were any 'good'. A teacher who did not live up to these expectations was labelled as 'an incompetent' teacher. In a summary students felt that an incompetent teacher displayed the following qualities:

"*This is the teacher who gives notes without explaining them clearly or does not give notes at all. We have protested against such teachers before by reporting them to our class teacher. Some teachers, particularly female teachers, like teaching while seated on their front chairs. They also often speak very slowly. We do not respect such teachers. When students feel that the teacher is not watching them they tend to play. When the teacher is a slow speaker we doze off. It's like the teacher is not confident about what he or she is doing. Some teachers have the tendency to come late to class and to not mark homework and tests on time. As a student you need to know how you are performing. But some teachers take too long to give us feedback on our work and we often wonder if these are not the lazy ones. The label of*

incompetence was one that every teacher dreaded, and all of them confessed that in their teaching they consciously and deliberately attempted to avoid it". (Students expectations and comments on their Social Studies teachers).

Selected sample interview responses from teachers

Teacher 1: I make sure that I am prepared when I go for my lessons, and if I am not prepared I tell the students so.

Teacher 2: Every time I am in class I avoid habits that would make me appear as incompetent. Habits like not being well prepared. I collect their notebooks and check if they write notes, and I also give quizzes at the end of the lesson.

Teacher 3: I make sure that I have my facts right. I try to mark their work on time and to give them the feedback on time. I make sure that I am familiar and conversant with my material.

All these measures were taken by the teachers to appear 'effective' and 'efficient' in the students' eyes. In the comments above, teachers emphasized mastery of subject-matter and preparedness. Generally, these are qualities expected of any teacher anywhere. However, how teachers demonstrate possession of these qualities will differ, depending on the context. The teachers observed were aware that they had to demonstrate visible possession of these qualities by assuming an information-giving position. This would ensure that they 'effectively' executed their mandate of imparting knowledge and skills or 'delivering the goods' to the students.

Efficient transmission of information to students formed the cornerstone of almost all lessons observed in the schools. Not all the teachers would have liked to approach their lessons in this fashion; however, all were aware of the dangers of deviating from the norm. Adhering to the 'norm', in Foucault's view, has the effect of disciplining human subjects – termed as *normalization*, or the internalization of correct behaviour. Through normalization students and teachers internalize norms and rules that ensure consistency in their behaviour. Deviation from what is considered 'normal' is punishable, whereas adherence to the 'norm' is rewarded. One effect of normalization is self-regulation. To Anderson and Grinberg (1998:335) self-regulation is "*achieved through discourse practices that provide validation for behaviour*". Being described as a 'good and competent' teacher is normalizing in that the label tells the teacher what kind of behaviour is rewarded. On the other hand, being called incompetent tells the teacher what kind of behaviour is unacceptable. The fact that the students are the "*primary*

source of the teacher's reputation among colleagues, administrators, and in the community, as well as among [other] students" ensures that the teacher is continually under a disciplinary-normalizing gaze, a kind of surveillance that makes unnecessary constant reminding about the 'proper' way of behaving (Schlechty and Atwood 1977:286).

The teacher, therefore, self-regulates their own behaviour. The 'social order' of the classroom characterized by asymmetrical power relations between the teacher and students is reaffirmed and reproduced. Students, too, are under a normalizing and controlling gaze, not from the teacher as such, but from themselves. It is the students themselves who serve as the source of validation for their own behaviour. This is achieved through such factors as peer pressure and humiliation of those teachers. These relations are not static but rather highly dynamic. Explicably, these relations are multi-directional not unidirectional. In other words, there is no imposition; as Butin (2001:168) puts it, a *"good student . . . is not simply made. Nor is a teacher simply the "authority" in control".* Butin contends that these identities are not simply inscribed upon these classroom participants: rather *"the individual does this to herself, one might say under duress, one might argue unwittingly, one might confess with scant choice, but it is not something done to her; it is something done with her".* The point is that both the teacher and the student are involved in their own subjectification. That is, *"while they 'create' one another's identities they are at the same time involved in self-creation. This constitutive quality of power would not be possible if 'some individuals [were] active and control power while others [were] passive and controlled by power"* (Butin 2001:168). But if classroom events, including the subjectification of individuals and groups, cannot be an imposition, researchers are left with only the view of classroom events as co-constructions.

Emerging results from the above analysis

One strand that clearly emerges from the above analysis is that of the image of an 'effective' teacher as a particular cultural construction. It is possible to subject this image of the 'effective-competent' teacher to some kind of 'archaeological' investigation to establish the socio-historical conditions that permitted its development. Tabulawa (1997) suggests that the teacher-dominated environment reported in classroom research in Botswana can partially be attributed to the discourse of human resource development that emerged with the country's independence in 1966. In the Kingdom of Lesotho, the exploitation of diamond deposits in the Drakensberg Range near Mokhotlong encouraged the expansion of the country's economic base, with a consequent growth in jobs in the public-formal sector. However, access to those jobs depended on whether one possessed the

requisite academic credentials. Formal education, therefore, became an important means of distributing life chances. With so high a premium placed on formal education, examinations became a very powerful selection mechanism. Intensification of examining could only lead to a concomitant intensification of the demand for education and certification. In this event, the utilitarian view of education; that is the view that education is an important vehicle for social mobility; emerged. In the Kingdom of Lesotho one effect of this was a schism between the twin processes of teaching and learning, which emerged as distinct but inextricably related activities; with one becoming meaningless without the other. Not only does this teach-learn converse place the teacher in a very powerful position, *"it also serves to demarcate role boundaries between the teacher and the students; the teacher teaches and the students learn"* (Tabulawa 1997:201). Thus whether one is an 'effective' teacher becomes a function of how well one carries out those activities associated with teaching. Likewise, whether one is a 'good' or 'nice' student becomes a function of how well one carries out those activities associated with learning. Thus, the schism assists in constituting students' and teachers' identities - telling them who they are and what they can or cannot do. Possible and permissible practices are delineated. Once these role boundaries have been demarcated, each group is expected to play its role. The effect of this is the narrowing of the range of possible and permissible practices and actions.

Furthermore, the teach-learn schism leads to the view of school knowledge as a commodity out of the students' reach; because the teacher's duty is seen in terms of executing prescribed subject matter, their work is cast in terms of *"optimizing efficient performances"* (Pignatelli 1993: 419). Teachers then become mere technicians who *"pass along a body of un-problematized traditional facts"* (Kincheloe 1997: xxix). The teachers' effectiveness is then judged by how well they transmit the ready-made knowledge. However, by their very nature, *"technicist practices sustain and exacerbate asymmetrical relations of power in the schools"* and by extension, in the classroom (Pignatelli 1993: 422).

How does student's silence play possum?

Students construct classroom practice through 'silence'. Students' 'refusal' to participate in classroom activity is interpreted in several ways. For some, it is idiosyncratic student behaviour, a sign of laziness. It is considered as deviant behaviour. This interpretation is shallow and prejudiced. At a more sophisticated level, student silence is explained in terms of students' lack of 'voice', which is associated with powerlessness. The weakness of this interpretation is that it is anchored on the monarchical conception of power, a conception of power that positions

students as 'pawns' in classroom practices. The view of power as relational yields a radically different interpretation of students' silence. In this view of power, students' silence is not a manifestation of powerlessness or lack of voice. It is the 'active' exercising of power and construction of classroom practice. Silence is an important means of communication in some cultures. Goldberger (1996: 343) urges researchers not to dismiss silence as lack of power, but rather to search for what lies "*underneath silence*". If researchers were to follow Goldberger's advice, they would, as the 19th century English novelist George Eliot imagines, "*die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence"* (cited in Belenky *et al.* 1986:3). In other words, researchers need to theorize silence and find tangible evidence to support the theory of silence among students.

To Hurtado (1996:382) *"Silence is a powerful weapon when it can be controlled. It is akin to camouflaging oneself when at war in an open field; playing possum at strategic times causes the power of the silent one to be underestimated".* The second sentence in this quotation clearly captures the general stance adopted towards silence in classroom research. This is what appears to be happening with student silence. In the episodes below, students constructed classroom pedagogical practice (teacher dominance, in particular) through silence.

Episodes of silence in the classroom by students

Episode 1: The teacher walks into form three Development Studies class and introduces his lesson by the usual way of the question-and-answer sequence:

Teacher: What is tourism? (There is silence in class. There is no answer. He repeats the question but still there is no answer)

Teacher: I will rephrase the question. What factors affect the development of tourism? (Still there is no response)
.
Teacher [Looking disappointed]: I am sure that you know the answer. Expressing yourselves in the medium of instruction is the problem.

The teacher continued for almost three minutes asking the same question and trying to give students clues to the answer. In so doing, a 'stand-off' develops between the teacher and the students. Students are resisting the teacher's attempt to move them into his own world of meaning. Realizing that students were not 'willing' to answer the questions, the teacher wanted to prove his worth and remarked, *"Well, I will do the talking since in the afternoons students are too tired to answer questions".* The teacher then abandoned the question-and-answer session and started lecturing on tourism and

the factors that affect its development. While he was 'lecturing', the students listened attentively and caused no disruptions to the flow of information. Thus, the students succeeded in moving the teacher into their own frame of reference or world of meaning. Perhaps the attentiveness was possible because the students' game of possum was yielding the desired results.

In the described episode one above, the teacher seemed to have finished with the lesson and suddenly a hand shot up.

Teacher: Yes, what is it?

Student: Can I ask a question and make some comments?

Teacher: Why not, 'am happy that you are participating at last.

Student: Sir, don't you think you are doing our thinking for us? Don't you think most of us go on tour with our families during public holidays, at weekends and during vacations?

Teacher: Of course, yes. But why did you refuse to answer my questions?

Student: We want to let you know that we're old enough to make a contribution towards lessons. You should've given us homework to go and research on the topic so that we could make contribution during the delivery of the lesson.

Teacher: I have to thank you for this revelation. However, your silence made me feel you were tired because it is a very hot afternoon.

Student: No. I don't think that is the case. We want discussion where we can make input to the lesson. We suggest next time you don't underestimate our power of control in the classroom during lesson delivery.

Teacher: (Smiling and clapping) Thank you for your excellent contribution. I think you've made me a better teacher now. (All the students clapped their hands hugging nearby colleagues)

This is evident that under certain conditions, students can bring teachers to attention and remind them that they are part of the teaching business and can contribute immensely to make teaching in the classroom successful.

After the lesson, I followed the teacher to the staff room and requested to discuss with him the incidence during the lesson. we asked if he has learned anything from what the students did. His answer was this:

Teacher: "Yes, I've learned a lot and hope to involve them always, especially telling them the topic of a lesson in advance for them to research and keep some notes that they can provide for discussion in class".

Episode 2: Another teacher in form four classroom organizes students for a group discussion on 'The importance of the mining industry to the economy of the Kingdom of Lesotho'. The discussions are to be carried out in English. The majority of the students are observed doing nothing related to the task at hand. In another lesson, the same teacher asks students to discuss in groups five disadvantages of hydroelectric power as source of energy. Only eight students (four pairs) out of a total of 24 are observed working. The rest are either doing nothing or reading the class textbook.

Researchers' comments: *"In both episodes students appear to be 'refusing' to participate in certain classroom activities. This is what one teacher had to say in connection with the students" behaviour:*

Teacher: *Even if you give them group-work, they do not have the motivation to do it. Only one or two students will do the work. In this way you find yourself compelled to lecture at them if they are to gain any school knowledge".*

The way these students seem to express their refusal is through silence. How then is the phenomenon of student silence to be explained?

Power: a force to reckon in the teaching-learning environment

In this context, the post-structural feminists' attempt to demonstrate the gendered nature of classroom practice may be helpful (Belenky et al., 1986, Orner 1992, Maher and Tetreault 1994, Goldberger 1996, St. Pierre 2000). These feminists, following Foucault, understand power as a dialectical force. This understanding predisposes them to adopt a contrary stance towards modernist dichotomies such as powerful or powerless, voice or silence, man or woman, subjectivity or objectivity, and many others, preferring instead to see these categories as being in a dialectical relationship, as being relational. Seen in this way, one category is not privileged over the other. Post-structural feminists would, for example, deconstruct the voice or silence dichotomy so that the two end up, not as opposites, but as *'definitionally interdependent'* (Anyon 1994: 119). They would argue that as voice constructs knowledge, so too, does silence, in that silence is resistance. It is the exercising of power, and thus the construction of knowledge (Goldberger 1996). In other words, silence is voice; it is power. Thus, the students in the episodes above were exercising their power when they refused to participate - by keeping quiet - when their teachers wanted them to participate. In the

process they actively constructed classroom practice, as indicated by one teacher's remark that when students *"refuse to participate 'you find yourself compelled to lecture at them if they are to gain any school knowledge".* But why did the students 'choose' to exercise their power through silence? Maher and Tetreault's (1994) observation is instructive to this dilemma. They indicate that ..."The construction of voice is also partly a function of position. In the classroom students become aware and fashion themselves in terms of their individual or group relation to the dominant culture. Indeed, whether students participate or not in classroom activities depend on a number of factors, one of which is the position they occupy in relation to: (a) other students, and (b) their teacher. This factor of positionality could explain the silent refusal of students to participate. They also become aware of others in their particular classroom and factors (such as age, race, class, culture.) have 'an influence on teaching and learning, on instructors' and students' construction of knowledge, and on classroom pedagogic dynamics' (Tisdell 1998).

Age, as a positionality factor is pertinent to the understanding of students' silence in the lesson episodes illustrated above. Such is the importance of age in Sesotho, IsiZulu and IsiXhosa society that 'any senior of the same sex is one's superior and any junior of the same sex one's subordinate' (Alverson 1978:13). In the home culture of children in the Kingdom of Lesotho, and in many other African cultural settings, children do not talk back to and do not question the wisdom of elders. This is tied to the African cosmology which is based on the premise that there is a direct relationship between age and knowledge (the older a person, the greater that person's depth of knowledge and wisdom). This structures the child-elder relationship in hierarchical terms. Children internalize these power relations and carry them to the classroom as cultural medical prescription to be dispensed for diagnoses.

In the classroom teachers have double advantage; not only are they elders (and therefore presumably wiser), they are also the embodiment of official knowledge and skills to be acquired by students. Despite new developments in the learner-centred pedagogy, knowledge acquisition is the students' primary concern and, according to the students interviewed, this knowledge was to be acquired by 'following teachers instructions' and by 'listening attentively to teachers'. In the episodes illustrated above, students are being required to participate in activities aimed at, or suggestive of, knowledge construction. Insofar as the students understand their roles, it is not their duty to construct knowledge, nor do they see themselves as capable of doing so; hence their resistance against their teachers' moves. Butin (2001:168) follows Foucault and notes that: *"Resistance may take the form of running away or standing still, of saying no or not saying anything at all.*

Likewise, even the acceptance of the imposition, the lack of resistance, is an act. It may neither be helpful nor life-sustaining, but it is nevertheless an action within relations of power".

Henry (1996:377) observes that "*refusal to participate is a kind of oppositional stance*". It is an action embedded in the classroom relations of power, and has an effect on how the lesson progresses. The effect of the students' 'refusal to act' is that asymmetrical power relations in the classroom are exacerbated and teacher dominance is perpetuated. Thus, students are accomplices in the production and reproduction of asymmetrical power relations in the classroom. Student silence (as resistance), therefore, may not be a manifestation of powerlessness or lack of voice. In effect, it is the active exercising of power and construction of classroom pedagogical practice. Student passivity, so much reported in classroom research, is therefore, an illusion of minimal proportion.

Related summary of Foucaultian view of Power and Power Relations

Orner (1992: 82) recommends that researchers abandon what she terms the *'monarchical conception of power'*. This is the conception of power as a commodity, as 'property' possessed by individuals or groups of individuals, which can be acquired or seized. For example, it is often taken for granted that teachers possess power and that students lack it. Talk about 'student empowerment', e.g. through a learner-centred pedagogy, often implies teachers giving some of their power to students. This view of power as property to be exchanged inevitably leads to the 'identification of power with repression' and to a definition of power as primarily a negative force that serves the interests of domination (Cousins and Hussein 1984: 230). Aronowitz and Giroux (1985: 154) have characterized this perspective of power as follows:

"*Treated as an instance of negation, power becomes a contaminating force that leaves the imprint of domination or powerlessness on whatever it touches. Thus, social control becomes synonymous with the exercise of domination in schools . . .*"

The question of how power works in schools is almost by intellectual default limited to recording how it reproduces relations of domination and subordinacy through various school practices. McEneaney (2002) observes that this conception of power implicitly informs much educational research. In classroom research, such a conception has led to the understanding of classroom power relations in terms of dominators (teachers) and the dominated (students); teachers possess power and use it

to dominate students; hence the description of students as passive actors in the classroom.

Studies that describe classroom practice in the Kingdom of Lesotho as 'teacher-centred' or 'teacher-dominated' are informed by this monarchical conception of power. The problem with this conception of power as it relates to classroom power relations is that it denies the classroom its character as a site for struggles, victories and contradictions. Teaching is characterized by gaps, ruptures, and contradictions occasioned by the interactions between teacher and students (Orner 1992). This means that the students are active agents who exercise power to produce classroom practice. But this is not conceivable under the 'monarchical conception of power' paradigm. An alternative conceptualization of power that is one that recognizes students as active agents is absolutely necessary.

Foucault's (1980: 89-98) analysis of power is instructive in this regard. His view is that:

"…*power cannot be a commodity. It is 'neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and . . . only exists in action'*. It is only when people interact in relationships that power comes into existence. That is, power is a productive social dynamic. In Foucault's view, it is not power that differentiates between those who possess it (e.g. teachers) and those '*who do not have it and submit to it [e.g. students]'*. Rather power must be analysed as something which circulates, or as something, which only functions in the form of a chain. Each part of the chain must function to keep the system going. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. Not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.

According to Foucault (1982:220-222) a power relationship, as opposed to a 'relationship of violence' (which characterizes a slave-master relationship), has two features. It requires:

1.   First, that the person over whom power is exercised *'be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts',* and

2.   Second, that*, 'faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up'.*

That is, a power relationship is open-ended if the exercise of power is a *'way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions'.* An important element of any power relationship is freedom. Where action is completely constrained, one may not talk of there being a relationship of power. To Foucault power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. In other words, the person over whom

power is being exercised (e.g. the student) is also simultaneously a person who acts, and whose actions in the process transform the one exercising power.

Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982: 186) indicate that, *'power is exercised upon the dominant as well as on the dominated'.* Thus, the exercising of power is never unidirectional. To Kincheloe (1997: xxiii-xxvi), it is never the '*province of one group and not the other'.* It is, in this sense that power is seen as a productive force. It implies the capacity to act. Kincheloe summarizes the argument in this way: *"If power is not a unitary force with unitary effects or unidirectional hierarchy, then we can be alert to different ways oppressed people elude control. If we are all empowered by our particular capacities and skills and we are all un-empowered by our inability either to satisfy our wants and needs or express our living spirit, we begin to understand that power is exercised by both dominant and subordinate forces"* (p. xxvi) Thus, in the classroom the teacher exercises power over students and the latter also exercise power over the teacher. While one may not deny that there exists a power hierarchy in the classroom between teacher and students, one must not be tempted to believe that total domination is possible. Oppression elicits resistance, and this may be manifest or latent. Far from being an imposition by the teacher, classroom reality is *negotiated* (Delamont 1976) and, as such, it is a dynamic process in that it is constantly defined and redefined. Inasmuch as teachers employ certain strategies to influence students' learning, the latter also devise, consciously or subconsciously, strategies to influence the teacher's classroom behaviour:

It is important to indicate that a new class is not a clean slate passively waiting for the teacher to inscribe his will on it. It is an ongoing social system with very definite expectations about appropriate teacher behaviour. If these are not confirmed the students will protest and the renegotiated patterns of behaviour may not prove to be just what the teacher intended (Nash 1976). This observation is supported by Riseborough (1985: 209-214) who states that pupils can be "*overt curriculum and hidden curriculum decision makers"* and adds that:

"[T]he lesson does not simply belong to the teacher, children can and do make it their own. They put so much on the agenda of the lesson, to a point where they are the curriculum decision-makers. They make a major contribution to the social construction of classroom knowledge. Children actively select, organize and evaluate knowledge in schools". Similarly, Doyle (1983: 185) cites a study in which Davis and McKnight (1976) reported *"[meeting] with strong resistance from high school students when they attempted to shift information-processing demands in a mathematics class from routine or procedural tasks to understanding tasks. The students refused to co-operate and argued that they had a right to be told what to do".*

Researches which portray teachers as dominators of the classroom and students as mere pawns are flawed because they fail to capture the complexity of the ways power works both on and through people. The description of classroom practice as 'teacher-centred or dominated' requires problematization. Often it creates the impression that students have made no contribution in the construction of that reality. This is misleading, for the reality called 'teacher-centeredness' is itself a co-construction, that is, there is a sense in which students are involved in the construction of their own 'domination'. The appreciation of classroom practice as a dialectical co-construction assumes a pivotal position in understanding classroom dynamics. How, then, is this co-construction to be understood?

Analysis of various perceptions of classroom reality as co-construction

The classroom environment as an arena for human activity has an inherent structure. This structure, according to Doyle (1992) is constructed by both teachers and students so as to make classroom social interaction possible and successful. Let us, at this point borrow Arnold Gehlen's twin concepts developed by Berger and Kellner (1965) of **background** and **foreground** to explicate the dialectic of the classroom as a co-construction. Human life requires a stable background of routinized meanings. This background *"permits spontaneous barely reflective, almost automatic actions"* (Berger and Kellner 1965: 112). Life would be unbearable if it did not have a background of routinized activities, the meaning of which is taken for granted. This background becomes a reference point for future actions and practices. The classroom, as an arena for human activity, requires a background of routinized practices. Without that background there cannot be stability, and by extension, no teaching and learning. Both teacher and students know very well that stability is essential if learning is to take place; but because social stability is never a biological provision they have to 'construct' it. This requires the fullest cooperation of both parties in order to make this 'co-construction' successful and productive and its application practicable and effective in the classroom dialogue between the teacher and the students.

Generally, 'co-construction' can be accomplished by means of developing common-sense images of the nature of teaching and learning. Such images and their accompanying roles are then routinized, and should not be taken for granted. In their routinized form they come to constitute the classroom background. However, if human life only had a background, society would be static, because by its very nature the background constrains action. Social actors would then be reduced to 'choiceless' actors and pawns who are at the mercy of the overly oppressive social structure. As Giroux (1980: 234) observes, this structuralist view of human action

"seals off the possibility for educational and social change". In the absence of positive 'co-construction' where teacher dominance is exercised over students confrontation is possible manifestation.

Therefore, it becomes imminent that the coming-into-being of the **background** automatically *"opens up a foreground for deliberation and innovation"* (Berger and Luckmann 1967:71) which permits *"deliberate, reflective, purposeful actions"* (Berger and Kellner 1965:112). Thus, the existence of the foreground ensures that the background does not become a 'determining' instrumentality. Rather it becomes a structure that 'mediates' human action. The dialectical relationship of the background and foreground ensures the possibility of reflexive human action; because it guarantees 'freedom' of acting agents, the foreground opens up a whole field of power relations. It is here where meaning is negotiated and renegotiated by the actors. In the processes of negotiation and renegotiation a *"definition of the situation' emerges. Thus, classroom social interaction 'can be viewed as "negotiated" between participants [teachers and students] on the basis of a mutual "agreement" to sustain a particular "definition of the situation"* (Jones 1997:561). Because it has both a background and foreground, the classroom situation is at once stable and unstable. The stability occasioned by the classroom's background permits the reproduction of practices, while the foreground permits their production. In this sense, the classroom situation is simultaneously a constraining and an enabling field: it permits common participation (engendered by the existence of an agreed-upon 'definition of the situation') while at the same time allowing for tensions, contradictions, and contests. In other words, students' and teachers' classroom practices are neither completely constrained nor completely free. Viewed this way, the classroom becomes a dynamic system in which teachers and students are not 'pawns' but are instead active agents operating within contextual constraints. In this situation of relative freedom, teachers and students exercise power on one another, leading to the co-construction of classroom reality.

The strength of the idea of classroom practice as co-construction lies in its difference from the views expressed by theorists such as Anyon (1980) who sees classroom practice as mechanistically determined by wider structural and economic forces. It also rejects the phenomenological (subjectivist) view of a structurally unconstrained agent. What remains, therefore, is the view that *"praxis is only possible where the objective-subjective dialectic is maintained"* (Freire 1985:69).

The relevance of the empirical study to Development Studies as school subject

The broader question that the study seeks to answer is: How do Development Studies students contribute towards the construction of classroom reality?" Three specific questions are considered in an attempt to answer the broader question:

• In what ways do Development Studies students in a primary or senior secondary school in South Africa influence their teachers' classroom practice?

• What shape is the resultant classroom reality?

• What are the implications of this influence (if any) for pedagogical change?

The basic premises of the empirical study are that power and power relations are central to an understanding of classroom practice, and that students are capable of exercising power in the classroom. In other words they are co-constructors of classroom practice. The study, therefore, concerns itself with establishing the manifest and subtle strategies that students employ in action and the role of power and power relations in shaping those strategies. Because these strategies are under researched, we do not have a clear understanding of how much of an impediment students may be to efforts to alter teachers' classroom practices. This study attempts to offer an advance towards such an understanding.

Teachers' deficit view of students' power in the classroom

Secondary school teachers we have worked with during practical teaching supervision and observation held a deficit view of their students. The view was linked to the perceived students' deficient social, cultural, and economic background. Two factors related to students' backgrounds contributed to this perception. These were:

(a)   The students' poor mastery of English the medium of instruction and

(b)   Their rural background (especially who live and school in the rural areas).

These factors were linked to each other in a somewhat causal relationship—poor mastery of the English language, the medium of instruction in the Kingdom of Lesotho secondary schools, was attributed to the students' rural background. We observed that students were not eager to respond to questions posed by their teachers, nor were they prepared to participate in group activities organized by their teachers. Although the teachers interpreted this behaviour as 'unwillingness to participate', they acknowledged at the same time that students' poor self-expression hindered them from fully participating in planned activities. Indeed, we observed on several occasions students struggling to express themselves. This deficiency was linked to their rural background, a background, it was believed, that did not include learning resources such as television and libraries that students could use to improve their English. This deficiency was not envisaged with students in the urban schools. It was the direct opposite.

The teachers said: "*If you compare these two groups of students [i.e. urban and rural] as far as class participation is concerned, you will find that students from urban schools participate more. They talk and ask questions. Students from rural areas are really dull, and reserved. No matter how hard you try to motivate them they just remain lifeless in class. All they want is information from you. They are not confident. They do not believe in themselves. They do not believe that they are capable of knowing anything that does not come from the teacher or the textbook*".

The teachers thought that interactive methods of teaching; such as those associated with learner-centred pedagogy; were more suited to students in urban areas (although to our knowledge, there is no evidence to that effect), and that directive or transmission teaching was appropriate for the students they were teaching:

"*We try some of these new methods of teaching. Say you give them a textbook and a topic and ask them to sit in groups and discuss. At the end of the lesson you realize that they haven't done anything because they believe that the teacher should impart the knowledge to them*".

What should simply be seen as 'differences' between urban and rural students is turned into 'deficits' on the part of the latter. The deficit view becomes the basis for comparing these groups of students and for constituting their identities (as 'dull' or 'brilliant'). In the classroom these deficiencies translate into information that helps structure events. One effect of the deficit view is that it invariably calls for more control from the teacher, thus exacerbating the already prevailing asymmetrical power relations in the classroom. Given the perceived students' deficiencies, it is not surprising that teachers viewed their own responsibility in therapeutic terms:

"*My duty is to mould students into responsible citizens'. 'The teacher's role is to impart knowledge to the students'. 'Because they do not participate in class activities I am compelled to spoon-feed them*".

Just like the doctor, the teachers viewed themselves as charged with the responsibility for restoring to health those they were in charge of (the students). In the lessons observed, this visibility was heightened by the oblong-shaped classroom architecture and the arrangement of desks in rows and columns, which ensured unobstructed movement of the teacher in the classroom. This ensured that students were under constant surveillance. What sense did teachers make of this desk arrangement? I always feel psychologically in control of the class when they [i.e. students] are all facing me, and again I can also detect instances of playfulness in class when they are all seated facing me. It becomes easier to bring order in class in the sense that you are able to see who among your students is not listening attentively, who is falling asleep, or is doing something else different from what the whole class is doing. However, the surveillance did not always require the

teacher's physical enforcement. It appeared that students themselves had internalized the need for surveillance.

Teachers should ensure their visibility, both physically and vocally. However, it should be noted that this is not always the result of the teacher's orchestration; the teacher's 'physical' and 'vocal' presence is a demand from the students themselves. Covertly, however, teacher visibility becomes a control mechanism that inadvertently sustains asymmetrical power relations in the classroom, leading to both the production and reproduction of teacher dominance. Not only had the students internalized the need for surveillance, they had also internalized their own perceived deficit status, thus reinforcing the teacher's image as therapist. Such internalization ensured that the students took "*responsibility for behaving appropriately without the look of the teacher*" (Gore 1994:116). This was achieved through students turning in "*upon themselves, creating reinforcing gazes among themselves*" (Anderson and Grinberg 1998:336).

In the classroom, this self-regulation is achieved through measures such as peer pressure. In the classes we observed, the students' awareness of their classmates had a profound effect on whether they participated in class activities or not. For example, it was common for students to laugh (in a ridiculing fashion) at those students who had made an attempt at answering the teacher's questions but gave incorrect answers or were struggling with expression in English—not that the laughing students would themselves have given any better answers or better expressed themselves. The laughing rather seemed to express the unpleasant sentiment that, 'Well, this serves you right. You think you are better than us'.

Most students interviewed acknowledged that quite often they were inhibited from answering questions from the teacher for fear of being laughed at in case they gave a wrong answer or failed to express themselves well in English. In addition, students disliked fellow students who engaged the teacher in debates and arguments over subject content. Such students were seen as delaying progress and were often accused of posturing to win the teacher's favour, or even pretending to know more than the teacher. This was interpreted as unwarranted questioning of the teacher's authority. Given such an environment, many students withdrew into the safe cocoon of silence. The effect of this withdrawal is clear; the teacher is left to play the dominant role in classroom processes.

The analysis of teacher dominance advanced suggests that the teacher is not entrusted with absolute power that is exercised willy-nilly over students. Rather, the teacher's encounter with students in the classroom engenders relations of power in which both the teacher and students are caught. As Foucault (1977:156) puts it, "*this machine [i.e. the classroom] is one in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power as well as*

those who are subjected to it". In the process of this interaction classroom practice is constructed. The constructed reality thus constitutes a 'shared field' or a mutually agreed-upon *"definition of the situation"* (Jones 1997:561). While this 'field' permits the participants' actions, at the same time it limits and regulates the diversity of possible and permissible actions.

CONCLUSION

Research on teaching in the Kingdom of Lesotho has characterized classroom reality as teacher-centred or teacher-dominated, but deeply embedded in this discourse of teacher-centeredness are two assumptions: first that it is the teacher who possesses power to influence classroom practices, and second, that students are powerless, passive spectators in the production of classroom reality. These assumptions are predicated upon the conception of power as a commodity that can be exchanged, traded, transferred, and withheld. It is almost impossible where such a view of power is held, to conceive of classroom reality as a co-construction, involving both the teacher and students. But once researchers adopt the view of power as a productive force they come to appreciate that students are active agents that influence their teachers' classroom practices, that far from being an imposition from above, the teacher's apparent dominance is a negotiated product resulting from teachers and students exercising power on one another. The resultant shared, taken-for-granted classroom reality termed 'teacher-centeredness' is, therefore, a co-construction.

We sought to demonstrate that students are active agents in the construction of teacher-centeredness and to show how their perceived deficit status, their expectations of teacher behaviour, and their 'playing of the game of possum' influenced teachers to assume the 'dominant' position in lessons. The students' internalization of the need for teacher visibility or surveillance and of their perceived deficit status produced and reproduced teacher dominance. Thus, the taken-for-granted view in classroom research that teacher dominance is an imposition by the teacher; demands problematization. When classroom practice is viewed as a dialectical co-construction, then what has been termed students' passivity must be recognized as their exercising of power. However teachers are required to exercise power rationally so that they are able to accomplish their responsibility to the students.

This study, like Willis's (1977) report on the 'lads', has shown that students exercise their own power to move the lesson in the direction the teacher never intended. Conceptualizing classroom reality as a co-construction has important implications for the pedagogical reforms currently being implemented in the Kingdom of Lesotho. In such reform endeavours, no cognizance is taken of the

students' voice in curriculum transformation. This is in line with the tacit assumption that students do not make any significant contribution to education and classroom practices. For this reason, whenever change is proposed, in-service and pre-service programmes are mounted for teachers, never for students. It is often assumed that students' classroom behaviour will change as and when that of the teacher changes. However, this position becomes a fallacy once it is acknowledged that classroom reality (such as 'teacher-centeredness') is as much a student construction as it is a teacher construction. It is a reality that validates and imbues the participants' actions with meaning. An attempt to radically reform this taken-for-granted world (e.g. by introducing a 'radically' different innovation such as learner-centred pedagogy as is the case in the Kingdom of Lesotho schools) is surely likely to be resisted, not only by the teachers but also by the students. The message is clear: it is time researchers on teaching and curriculum accorded students the attention that they deserve and contribution they can make to improve classroom pedagogy.

Even though this study is exploratory in nature; it may serve as a starting point for future research on how students learn or expect to be taught. It has to be appreciated that teaching methodologies whose effectiveness are not manifest to students stand little chance of successful implementation. Fullan (1991) has called for the intensification of studies on teacher thinking and cognition. It is suggested that this call be extended to the study of student thinking for introspection with the view that classroom pedagogy is as dependent on the teacher as it is on the students.

Finally, our recommendation is that in the teacher education and training colleges as well as university faculties of education in the Kingdom of Lesotho should incorporate a variety of didactic approaches, especially those related to power and authority, to equip aspiring teachers to be able to undertake their pedagogical responsibilities professionally in a multifaceted perspective before the end of their training. In this way such teachers would be better placed to exercise power rationally through the use of a variety of methods, strategies, approaches and techniques in the delivery of lessons.

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