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Class in class: Ideological processes of class in desegregated classrooms in South Africa

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Ideological processes of class in desegregated classrooms in SA

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Abstract

This paper examines data from a desegregated school in South Africa and will focus on the way in which particular forms of English schooled literacy reflect and articulate class distinctions. After Apartheid, South Africa embarked on a wholesale democratisation of the education system, offering a new curriculum in which equal opportunities and respect for ethnocultural and linguistic differences are central. Ideologically, however, we see the persistence of pre-1994 social, cultural and linguistic stratification through the micromethodologies of teaching 'black' children. In a socio-economic environment characterised by explosive urbanisation, especially schools in poor immigrants' settlements become a battlefield for enfranchisement, and especially there we see how 'old order' patterns of inequality persist.

1. Introduction

Gunnar Myrdal's argument about the development of an underclass in America is well known (Myrdal 2005: 133-143). The democratisation of the education system created a paradox and a vicious circle: while more people got into socially upwardly mobile trajectories now defined and determined by access to advanced levels of education, those who did not have such access found themselves in a position of unemployability. A system aimed at maximum inclusion created permanently excluded people – a paradox – and it also made sure that this mechanism of exclusion extended from one generation into the next – a vicious circle. Thus, inclusive measures, by the very fact that they set standards for inclusion, also exclude and can perpetually exclude people who don't meet the rigid standards. Democratisation of societies is therefore a process that requires constant monitoring, because even if a system is maximally democratic it is rarely fully democratic.

The transition from Apartheid to democracy in South Africa presents exactly such challenges and requires this sort of continuous monitoring. The reason is quite simple. While, true, the general system of governance has changed dramatically towards a maximally democratic state, Apartheid patterns of inequality persist and appear to require more than the usual two generations we find in an optimistic literature on social change. Millions of people still live in abject poverty, and these people are – not accidentally – the same ones as those who formed the poorest layers of society under Apartheid: non-Whites. South Africa is still a deeply divided society, and the divide follows the same racial diacritics as the Apartheid ones. This divide is primarily seen as racial because of the overlapping of skin colour and social position. There is hardly any literature on post-Apartheid South Africa in which a class analysis is attempted. This is remarkable for several reasons. One reason is the continued presence and prominence of the communist party (SACP) and its affiliated trade unions in the South African political landscape; another one is the abundance of Marxist class analysis in the period prior to 1994 in international scholarship on South Africa as well as within the ANC

(see e.g. Curtis 1986).[1] Current discourses on class are still connected to these older traditions, but they tend to be activist and veer towards overly simple and mechanistic views on class and class dynamics. A more fine-grained analysis is needed, one which avoids rapid associations between social groups and social classes but which delves into the fabric of class processes and their effects.

Class is a stratifying principle; whenever we refer to class differences, we refer to stratified – hierarchically ordered – differences based on (and producing) inequality. We shall abstain from definitional battles here and use the term class as shorthand (following Bourdieu) for material and symbolic social stratification. We will take this elementary description as our point of departure and examine processes in the field of education in South Africa. Education has been, and is, one of the main institutional forces in promoting equality and democracy in South Africa. The post-1994 changes in the education system opened the doors of all schools to all children (in principle) and so destroyed one of the lynchpins of Apartheid: the refusal by the state to provide upwardly mobile educational trajectories to all South Africans. Education is seen as monumentally important in creating a new society, and schools, consequently, become far more than places of education: they become boundary-marking institutions that enable people to cross from one stratum in society into another. This process, as we shall demonstrate, is caught in a web of ideologically patterned distinctions which, together, not just produce class but also imagined patterns of class mobility.

The web of distinctions mentioned above leads us to a view of class as a complex of dispersed features. Such features are contingent upon the specific social environment we investigate; in the context of schools, they will have to do with 'learning', broadly understood. They represent an infra-politics of directing or policing conduct (a governmentality) in Foucault's sense, of distinction and evaluation, that is, of hierarchical ordering of small behavioural traits that are sensed to be indexical of broader categories (e.g. the 'good pupil'), and the management of which is understood to be productive of such categories (cf. Foucault 2003a, 2003b). You become a good pupil by organising a wide variety of aspects of your behaviour in highly specific ways. The models for such categories are historical, which means that they are ideological, and we will show that in the case we discuss they refer to racialised notions of class.

2. The Case

South Africa offers research sites of exceptional clarity. In this paper, we shall turn to a 'desegregated' school: a previously 'white' school which, after the end of apartheid, had to cater for non-white children too. This particular school marks a class and race boundary and can be seen as a 'class gateway', a place where pupils are believed to be enabled to make a jump from a lower social class to a higher one. As we shall see, in South Africa that means that 'black' pupils enter (or are prepared to enter) a 'white' world. For the purposes of our discussion, the school will be referred to as Melrose Primary. The school was specifically chosen as it had undergone several changes following the democratic transition, and had been portrayed in the media as a site struggle and racial contention.

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[1] In scholarship, analyses often focused on the degree of compatibility of Apartheid with capitalism: was Apartheid a capitalist strategy or a deviation from 'normal' capitalist exploitation?

Melrose Primary, a former Model C English-medium school, [2] is situated in a suburban area east of Johannesburg, Killarney – a well sought-after neighbourhood and predominantly a middle-class residential area. As was the case with all suburban areas during the apartheid era, Killarney was isolated for the white middle-class residents. Although black people have increasingly moved into former white-areas, facilitated by the abolition of the Group Areas Act, Killarney is still mainly a white middle-class area. Melrose Primary was first opened in 1928 catering for a predominantly Jewish intake until 1989 when it was closed down owing to its discriminatory admission policy. Until then, Melrose Primary was a 'fully-fledged' white school (both teachers and learners), with enrolments from Grades 1-7. Despite pressure from various sectors in education, non-governmental organisations, parents and teacher organisations to open its doors to all children, white parents still voted against allowing black children into this school. With the dwindling numbers of white learners, and the fact that the school remained opposed to a changed admission policy, Melrose Primary was forced to shut down. This resonates with some of the racialised attitudes that framed education during Apartheid. Thus recalling H.F Verwoerd's famed address to parliament in 1953: 'the native must not be subject to a school system which draws him away from his own community, and misleads him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he is not allowed to graze'. Against this background, as espoused by the education policy of the time, it is thus unsurprising that white parents at Melrose Primary wanted to uphold the status-quo, and retain the tradition of segregated schooling.

Melrose Primary opened its doors to children of all racial groups in 1992. However, only a limited number of black learners were admitted. This was so because one of the conditions set in place by the Clase announcements in 1991 was that the white learners should remain in the majority (51% or more) in ex-Model C schools. In addition, schools such as Melrose Primary 'cherry-picked' black middle-class children. For instance, a whole range of exclusionary/inhibiting mechanisms including exorbitant fees, 50 % of which was to be paid up-front, were used in these schools to limit access. The introduction of new legislation in 1996 fundamentally altered the school's demographics as the new Act stipulated the inclusive enrolment policy. At the time of investigation, there were approximately 650 learners enrolled at Melrose Primary, the majority of whom were Black, with Coloured and Indian[3] learners, and insignificant numbers of white learners. The learner intake has changed significantly over the years; in contrast, the teaching staff (as well as the administration staff and SGB) remain predominantly white women. According to Mrs Goldsmith[4], the school principal, this is so because 'it is difficult to find good black teachers and we have to be careful with our selection' (fieldnotes 11/04). While previously catering for white middle-class learners in the neighbouring areas, the school now accommodates learners from a wide range of areas in and around Johannesburg. The majority of learners came from disadvantaged or working class backgrounds, and approximately 5% had official exemption from paying the school fees by the provincial department of education. The academic fees

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[2] With the introduction of the Clase models in 1991, aimed at educational reform, previously white-only schools were converted to model C in 1992. These schools effectively became semi-private/semi-state with the government paying teachers' salaries, while other operational costs were the responsibility of the school community (for further discussion on different Models A-C, see Nkomo et al., 1995).

[3] Racial categorisation in South Africa continues to be affected by the legacy of the Apartheid past. We use the terms 'Black', 'White', 'Coloured' and 'Indian' here as a reflection of entrenched racial labels still perennial in post-Apartheid South Africa.

[4] All names of the school, the neighbourhood, staff and learners are pseudonyms. Attempts have been made to represent the ethnic identification of the names of all participants mentioned in this paper.

were R200[5] per month and a number of parents struggled to meet their monthly payments. Most of these black learners use public transport to school from various townships (historically urban slums designated for non-whites), which are situated far from central Johannesburg, and the suburban areas. As a result, learners travel long distances leaving their homes very early in the morning to make the 8AM start of the school.

Melrose Primary, like most schools in SA today, is characterised by a multitude of identities, ethnicities and a variety of indigenous languages, including those from other parts of Africa. Despite religious diversity brought about by desegregation, Melrose Primary tended to engage only in Christian practices. In terms of the school's language policy, English is the medium of instruction, Afrikaans is the second language of choice and isiZulu is the third. The school's response to its diverse learner population seemed geared toward cultural assimilation. As shall become clear later, the general teaching and learning practices tend to perpetuate, as well as organise, the adoption of specific traits, demeanour and ways of being. The school claims to embrace and celebrate multiculturalism; however, the day-to-day practices observed point to a less dramatic institutional/cultural change. Limited attempts were made at Melrose Primary to incorporate 'meaningful' cultural activities other than the use of African languages in social activities such as singing, scripture/bible reading and drama. With no official 'air-time' in the school curriculum or mainstream, these performances were relegated to a secondary position, often displayed at the school's assembly during special occasions such as fundraising and prize-giving events. Many researchers (see for example Mda 2000, Penny 1993 et al.) have criticised this 'tokenist' approach for suggesting that the culture of schools such as Melrose Primary is superior, while the rest of other cultures are deemed inferior.

The investigation took place during 2004 and 2006[6], using audio and video-recording as the main source of data collection. For the purposes of this paper, we focus on two grade one classrooms and a grade three classroom. Learners in grade 1 were between the ages of six and eight, and the average age in grade was eight. Many of the learners came from home situations in which English, the medium of instruction, is rarely used and as such have little access to the language outside the school. Three teachers will feature in the examples below: Ms Schneider and Ms Zulu both teach grade 1, and Ms Botha is a grade 3 teacher.

The class groups were large and ethnolinguistically (if not racially) mixed. Ms Schneider's class was composed of 46 learners, 27 boys and 19 girls. The majority were black with a small number (8) of coloured children. English, French, Afrikaans, Setswana, Sepedi, isiZulu and isiXhosa were reported as home languages. Ms Schneider is a white South African of Jewish descent; she is an experienced teacher with over 30 years in the teaching profession. Ms Schneider has been a member of staff at Melrose Primary for many years, including the period when the school was a whites-only establishment to the 1989 closure of the school.

Ms Zulu's class had 45 children, 27 boys and 18 girls, all of whom were black except for one white boy whose home language was reported as Afrikaans. She has a diverse linguistic

repertoire; in addition to her home language Setswana, she speaks isiZulu, Afrikaans, Sesotho and Sepedi – home languages to most of her learners. Ms Zulu, a multilingual black teacher in a previously white and exclusively English school, is one of the few black teachers employed in desegregated schools since the de-racialisation of education became statutory. Prior to joining the staff at Melrose Primary in 2000, she was teaching at one of the township primary schools in Soweto for almost 10 years. As is the case with most of her learners, Ms Zulu commutes (by public transport) daily from Soweto to this suburban school. For teachers like Ms Zulu, a move from the poor township schools into the English-sector of the former white education is commensurate with middle-class status. Similarly, we could say that the presence of large numbers of black children from the township in desegregated schools has do to with class mobility, good quality education and better resources. While Ms Zulu emphasized the importance of black role models and diversity, in former white schools she was acutely aware of negative attitudes from parents (and some colleagues) that the deployment of other staff would lower standards at the school. As a black person, she is much more vulnerable to such an accusation. As she succinctly put it when she commented on parents attitudes '…I usually tell them…I told them that…you know what, you take your children to the suburbs even if you do not go there yourselves...they do not take black education seriously…I mean where there is a black person the standards are low according to them…you see this kind of mentality' (interview transcript 6/12/04).

Ms Botha is a white South African, fluent in both Afrikaans and English. Ms Botha has been in the teaching profession for over 30 years, and has taught in South Africa, as well as some parts of the Southern African region. Like Ms Schneider, she has been staff at the Melrose Primary prior to 1989 and continued to teach after re-opening. Ms Botha's class was composed of 42 learners, 26 boys and 16 girls. Although predominantly black, the learner profile of her class was more diverse when compared to the other two classrooms above. This included a French speaker from Burundi, a Nigerian Igbo speaker, four Indian and three Coloured learners. The home languages reported were Sesotho, Setswana, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Tshitsonga, Afrikaans, English and Urdu.

3. The micromethodology of teaching

Class, Bourdieu argued, is 'habituated'. The macro-structural features of society collapse in the individual's body and mind and, consequently, microscopic aspects of comportement (Bourdieu's bodily hexis – the way in which the body is affected by class distinctions) can reveal class features. Such aspects of behaviour are rarely fully conscious, and even when they are conscious they do not necessarily derive from a conscious class ideology. They are naturalised forms of 'order' which we display in and about ourselves. The features that make up such habituses are, as argued above, not uniform but dispersed, and in Bourdieu's Distinction, the educated middle class distinguished itself by means of features as widely divergent as a preference for abstract art and a liking for particular kinds of food (Bourdieu 1984).

Once we leave the theoretical territory in which class is pre-defined by one's particular position in the system of economic production and instead turn to the actual behaviours that 'articulate' class, the empirical field is wide open and class can become an ethnographic object. We then have our ethnographic epistemology ready: to detect the big (and often invisible) things through structured attention to small things. While the advanced educational background of Bourdieu's middle class subjects was invisible, their preferences for abstract art and exotic food were visible and researchable, as indexicals of the harder, deeper and

larger structural features of class. The particular (micro) features that together compose class habitus are not identified as class features, but covered by circumscriptions such as 'lifestyle', 'taste' and so on. To the extent that the ideological resides in established connections between micro- and macro-levels of social events, the ideological is here erased. In the field of education, as we know, class habitus is erased as well and assumes the shape of practices and discourses that go under the term 'pedagogy' (Bernstein 1971; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977).

3.1. Ordering the bodily hexis

In analysing the data below, we attempt to bring into conversation the view of class outlined above, the ideologically motivated teaching/learning and the disciplining of the body in the early years of schooling. As shall become evident, teaching is more than doing school; it works rather to constitute children in relation to cultural beliefs about how children should be habituated in the learning process. Foucault's (1975) definition of 'discipline' as both the body of knowledge and as a means of social control is critical here. We begin with Ms Botha's class and look at ways in which the body is inextricably linked to her teaching and consequential for different subject positions.

Example 1
   Approx 8h30 The beginning of the lesson.
   Ms Botha: (TRYING TO GET THE CLASS SETTLED) Hands on your head everybody…I did not say that you should say anything. Shush! Those people who didn't do my homework, please put up your hand quickly (SHE RECORDS THEIR NAMES). If you didn't finish your homework put up your hand as well…now take out your books quickly…your writing books and keep quiet. Let's see who's a shining star. Yesterday…who got all the answers right (REFERRING TO A WORKSHEET COMPLETED THE PREVIOUS DAY). Sandile how much did get yesterday?
   Sandile: 7 mam (OUT OF 8)
   Ms Botha: Stand up so that I can see you…come stand here (IN THE FRONT OF THE CLASS) so that we can see you. Good...Lindi and Sipho well done (THEY EACH GOT 6 OUT OF 8; PUTTING STARS NEXT TO THEIR NAMES[7]). Let's give them a clap…
   Class: (SINGING THAT SYMBOLISES CONGRATULATIONS) Thank you very much. Keep it up. Shine.
   [Gr3 23.03.06]

Following up on her previous lesson on English vocabulary (phonics) and writing, Ms Botha starts her lesson by organising the bodies 'hands on your head everyone', perhaps to indicate the intricate relationship between the general demeanour and learning in this context. Her opening statement is followed by '…I did not say that you should say anything. Shush!', giving the directive on desired classroom behaviour. Here, we begin to see that the 'docile body' is created as a defining precondition for learning – it needs to be presented in certain

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[7] All the names of learners are listed on a 'star chart' which is placed next to the chalkboard, basically in front the class for everyone to see it, and perhaps keep track of their status. It is divided into two columns, one for individual behaviour and the other for academic success such as English proficiency (both oral and written), attaining good marks in set tasks etc. For instance, each time learners do well, be it good behaviour or academic achievement their status gets elevated star-wise. Effectively this means that the more stars you have next to your name the more successful you become. However, in terms of behaviour, the teacher may subtract from the number you have amassed if for whatever reason a learners behaves 'inappropriately'.

ways and not in others. The sanctioning or deployment of the body becomes an instrument of socialisation where different features such as posture, gestures, presentation will have an impact on learning. A few minutes later, Ms Botha remarks 'let's see who's a shining star…' in trying to establish the names of those learners who received high scores in their work. This is immediately moved to the expected behaviour and images of achievement or success 'Stand up so that I can see you…come stand here (IN THE FRONT OF THE CLASS) so that we can see you'. The attainment of high scores, coupled with the display of such achievement suggests a particular learning motif and ethos – that the 'well-ordered' body is likely to yield academic success, and therefore it is worthy of display. In addition, Ms Botha puts (sticking silver shiny) stars next to Sandile, Lindi and Sipho's names. Children are also instructed into a collective, and well-established, singing ritual '…Thanks you very much. Keep it. Shine' to mark this grand moment. We will see more of this elaborate display in the next section on grade 1 classrooms.

Example 2

>Ms Botha: What do you need to do to get correct answers?
>Lebo: Concentrate.
>Ms Botha: Good my girl, you need to concentrate. I have work for you (THE WHOLE GIVEN A TASK TO PRODUCE 2 SENTENCES USING QU-SOUND. AN EXAMPLE 'THE QUEEN AND HER FRIENDS WON A QUIZ ON FRIDAY' IS PROVIDED ON THE CHALKBOARD)…look so that you don't make mistakes. I said quiet. Hey shush! Thandi do your best writing…and make sure your letters touch the line (MARGINS). Some people are still talking. Other children want to concentrate and you are disturbing them. Lindi concentrate. When you write your sentences you are not allowed to use the words 'quiz and queen' because I have used those words in my sentence. Write 2 best grade 3 sentences and you will get yourselves smiley faces. Let's see how best you can do…don't disappoint me…
>[Gr3 23.03.06]

In example 2, Ms Botha introduces writing tasks. She recalls collective expectations with regard to achievement 'what do you need to do to get correct answers'?...good my girl, you need to concentrate'. In this classroom moment, Ms Botha invokes a particular state or ambiance of the body vis-à-vis learning. Here, she draws a parallel between 'concentration' and 'the best writing; letters that touch the line' suggesting that these features are the recipe for success. Ms Botha invites her class to 'write 2 best grade 3 sentences and you will get yourself smiley faces'. This is followed by a two-pronged comment 'let's see how best you can do…don't disappoint me' stressing the importance of 'good' performance, and that failure to accomplish the task results in 'disappointment'. As in example 1, in addition to regimenting the body, she reiterates and maps symbolic images of successful 'smiley faces' into her teaching methodology, thus triggering and conditioning a specific learning ethos – that successful learning is tantamount to 'hands are on the heads', 'immobile bodies', 'quiet and concentrating bodies' etc.

Example 3[8]

>Ms Schneider: OK, everybody sit up, breathe … (INAUDIBLE). We are going to go back to our paper. I want you to look at me. I want you to open your spelling book. Mpho, please, look at me. I want you to look at me when I give an instruction. You need to look at the person who is talking, and listen, and it is easier and better … look

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[8] See, for a fuller discussion, Pachler, Makoe, Burns and Blommaert (2007)

at me and listen to me. Don't ask the point from anybody what you need to do. And I want you to open your spelling book at a place …(PAUSE) where you have been writing sentences. So, …(PAUSE) you are going to open your book and you are going to find a place where you have been writing sentences at home. (THE CLASS BECOMES VERY NOISY)
[Gr1 22.11.04]

In example 3 below, Ms Schneider's class of 6-8 years old grade 1 learners, we continue to see a number of references to the body, particularly its positioning during literacy activities. Ms Schneider's lesson is focused on vocabulary and spelling. Before she introduces this subject, she provides a defining instruction intended to set the (behavioural) tone for the lesson – 'everybody sit up, breathe'. This is immediately followed by another 'body-discipline' directive:

…I want you to look at me. I want you to open your spelling book. Mpho, please, look at me. I want you to look at me when I give an instruction. You need to look at the person who is talking, and listen, and it is easier and better … look at me and listen to me

All these examples here recall Foucault's (1980) argument that institutions such as Melrose Primary are sites of control and surveillance that induct children into specific 'world view' of learning practices. Through recurring body-discipline, coupled with ideological discourses, we see how a group of black children are trained to 'adjust' to the demands of ex-white education. This adjustment constructs learning as the natural order of things, perhaps even the only one applicable to this particular group of children.

3.2. The good boy-good girl

In our introduction, we said that standards of inclusion generate forms of exclusion. The ordering of the bodily hexis is one example of the way in which standards for inclusion are habitually being articulated in a micromethodology of teaching. But that is not the end of the story. The teachers in our data produced all sorts of other micromethodological articulations of standards of inclusion. We will focus on three different implicit criteria: space, language, and (as an extension of what we saw above) literacy practices. Together these elements will form an ideologically formed matrix, which we will summarize in the next section.

As we said, Melrose Primary used to be a white-only school, and it is located in an upper middle-class suburb of Johannesburg. Most of the pupils come from 'black' townships, and sometimes cover serious distances to come to school. This spatial trajectory, from the townships to the affluent suburbs, is thematised by Ms Zulu; reflecting on the parents' attitudes, she says:

Example 4
Ms Zulu: I usually tell them…I told them that…you know what you take your children to the suburbs even if you do not go there yourselves…(laughter) really…they just ship their children to the suburbs and expect us to change them into English speakers
P: why do you think this is the case?...it is just out of curiosity
Ms Zulu: they do not take black education very seriously…I mean where there is black person the standard are low according to them…you see this kind of mentality…

P: mm…
[Interview 6.12.04]

Space, in apartheid South Africa, was of course deeply politicised and racialised: some spaces were 'white', others were 'black', 'coloured' etc., and crossing the frontiers between such spaces involved changes in rights, entitlements, opportunities and identities. The transfer of 'black' pupils to a 'white' suburb is thus not just a move through physical space, it is also a move through ideological space. This becomes clear from the collocation, in Ms Zulu's statement, of 'suburbs' and 'English speakers'. Moving into the 'white' suburbs means moving into a different set of identity features, and language is one of them. This is confirmed by Ms Schneider:

Example 5

Researcher: so would you say parents…send their kids here mainly because you teach the language?
Ms Schneider: yes and that is what they want for their children (unclear)…you know a better education as they see it is English, English, English. What can we do, we just have to teach their children what they want. That is what they are paying for. They do not realise how difficult it is for us.
[Interview 6.12.04]

"English, English, English": the move from townships to suburbs is caught in perceived patterns of access to linguistic status commodities, and English – the language of the white middle class and of globalisation – is the top of the ideological language pyramid here suggested. Ms Schneider has very fond memories of how 'bright' and 'dedicated' learners were in the early years after the school's re-opening, and she attributes much of this to the 'good standard of English and proper English' used by pupils at that time. Among the historically disadvantaged groups in South African society, English is widely seen as the symbolic instrument that will get them out of the township; the language defines an upward trajectory of emancipation and enfranchisement, and it is a powerful emblem of the new democratic disposition: everyone can now 'get' English (cf. also Blommaert, Huysmans, Muyllaert & Dyers 2005). In the eyes of the pupils' parents – mainly 'black' township dwellers – getting into a 'quality' school such as Melrose Primary, located in a 'white' suburb equals getting access to 'quality' features of distinction: 'good English'. Consider examples 6 and 7:[9]

Example 6

Ms Schneider: Good morning children.
Class: Good morning Ms Schneider, good morning Mrs M, good morning Ms Pinky and good morning friends.
Ms Schneider: Put your lunch at the back and when you are finished come to the carpet. Come and tell me news. Maybe you went to church and you learnt something new. Everyone should talk. I do not want anything about food. What do we do when we tell a story?
Pupil: We put our fingers here
(MS SCHNEIDER DEMONSTRATES – PUTS HER FINGER ACROSS HER MOUTH TO SHOW THAT THEY SHOULD KEEP QUIET)

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[9] For a fuller discussion see Makoe (2007).

Ayanda: My puppy is sick and my mother said we'll take it to the vet when I come back from school.

Ms Schneider: Good my girl. Listen to Ayanda's English. That's why you got your certificate. That is good. Did you hear her? Let's sing for her.

Class: Thank you. Very much. Keep it up. Shine. (SINGING AT THE TOP OF THEIR VOICES, AND CLAPPING)

[Gr1 18.10.4]

Note the whole-class chanting routines in which adequate performance is praised in English colloquial expressions such as "keep it up" and "shine". Knowledge of 'good English' is immediately lifted here to the level of academic achievement: "That's why you got your certificate", and a certificate equals a ticket to upper layers of society. 'Good English', however, comes with a series of instructions and forms of conditioning, notably revolving around literacy practices and objects. Observe example 7, in which Ms Schneider directs a reading session:

Example 7

[Learners were instructed to sit on the carpet. They sat in no particular order. Those who did not want to listen to Ms Schneider's story were given an option of sleeping. 6 learners opted for sleeping and 1 girl read a book picked up from the small collection that they had at the back of the classroom.]

Ms Schneider: This book is called The Cake Story (SHOWING THEM THE TITLE). I baked a cake; this is the cake (REFERRING TO THE PICTURE IN THE BOOK). Benny can you read?

Benny: (boy) Yeah.

Ms Schneider: You be the teacher. Sit here (PUTS A CHAIR FOR HIM NEXT TO HERS SO THAT HE COULD FACE THE REST OF THE CLASS). I'll help you where you can't read.

Bobby: Red, Red, Red. I baked a cake (SHOWS THE CLASS THE PICTURES ON THE DOUBLE SPREAD PAGE AND REPEATED THIS THROUGHOUT) The bear baked a cake. I love cake. I love cake. Hooray, Hooray. I love cake. The bear baked a cake. I love cake. Hooray, Hooray.

Ms Schneider: (INTERRUPTS).The other animals are happy because the bear baked a cake.

Benny: (CARRIES ON) No cake. No cake. No cake.

Ms Schneider: (INTERRUPTS) The bear is cross now. Why is the bear cross?

Class: They ate the cake. The other animals.

Ms Schneider: He was busy entertaining.

Benny: We baked a cake. We baked a cake. Poor bear. I love cake. Hooray. Hooray. We love cake. We love cake. Hooray. Hooray.

Ms Schneider: Well done my boy. Tell your mummy that you read the whole book. Your English is good too. Let's thank him.

Class: Thank you. Very much. Keep it up. Shine (SINGING AT THE TOP OF THEIR VOICES)

Benny: Can I take the book home. I want to read to her (ALLOWED TO TAKE THE BOOK HOME)

Ms Schneider: That is fine my boy. Tell her I am very proud of you.

[Gr1 1.11.04]

Observe the connection between the praise for the reading practice and the assessment of language 'quality' ("your English is good too"); and note how the class achievement is exported towards the home environment: the boy wants to take the book home, and the teacher praises him for that ("tell her I am very proud of you"). There is a reverse spatial trajectory here, from the suburb school to the township. Possession of books, and the opportunity to take books back to the home environment, is seen as an award for outstanding achievement:

Example 8
>Ms Zulu: listen children…Sherly, Tsholofelo and Godfrey have their first reading books. You know what that means? They are taking them home. They are doing their work. When I give homework they do it. They practice their reading. They write their sentences. They read so nicely and now they can take the reading books home.
>[Gr1 20.10.04]

Reading well comes with a reward: the reverse class and spatial mobility of books. If you read well, you'll be allowed to take the books back to a space where books are rare – as rare as 'good English' and advanced levels of education. Reading, however, goes hand in hand with writing. In the following excerpt, Ms Zulu takes the homework copybook of one of her pupils and shows it to the whole class:

Example 9
>Ms Zulu: Good boy. (SHOWING THE CLASS TSHOLO'S HOMEWORK BOOK). Do you see how nicely he has written his sentences. His book is clean. No silly mistakes. Thank you …(PROMPT)
>Class: (SINGING) Thank you. Very Much. Keep it up. Shine.
>Ms Zulu: you see that good work pays. Tsholo is going to represent grade one in a quiz competition on Friday. On Friday he will be on the stage with all other children who do their work and you will all be watching.
>Class: ha ma'am
>Ms Zulu: that is very good thing. You should all be happy for him.
>[Gr1 20.10.04]

Tsholo's copybook is clean, and his sentences are nicely written – not stained or torn like many other pupils' books. Regimented and controlled writing practices are clustered with the reading fluency and the quality of English we encountered previously. This cluster feeds into an ethos of educational achievement, which is nicely summarised in the next example in which Ms Schneider tests the class' knowledge of what school is for:

Example 10
>Bonga: During my school days I learned that I should not give up and always try. I wrote a letter as well.
>Ms Schneider: He said something very nice. Excellent my boy. You wrote a letter too. Do you want me to read it to the class
>Bonga: It's for you ma'am
>Ms Schneider: Thank you my boy.
>Sarah: I learned that I must always do my homework.
>Ms Schneider: What is homework?
>Lele: Work that you must do at home.
>Ms Schneider: Yes. What happens if you do your work?

Benny: You'll get a certificate… I learned that I must not give up. I must not play in class…I must do my homework and listen to my teacher. I must think before I write my sentences and be a good grade one.
[Gr1 2.12.04]

The regimented language and literacy practices and the ordered bodily hexis here connect to higher-order values such as perseverance, as well as to desired outcomes (the certificate) and the general outcome category "a good grade one". We also see the spatial trajectory activated again: homework is "work that you must do at home", i.e. in the township, thus exporting the quality education to places where it was historically not available, and extending the pupils' learning environment so as to include his/her township home. The children appear to have incorporated – habituated – the pedagogy of Melrose Primary.

4. An ideological matrix

This pedagogy, as we have suggested, circumscribes a dispersed set of class features and trajectories that, taken together, can be represented as the following series of oppositions:

Black	White
African languages	English
Townships	suburbs
Disorderly, disorganised	Ordered, disciplined
Uneducated	Educated
Immobile, local	Mobile, translocal

Education then – or at least, education within Melrose Primary (a 'class gateway', as noted above) and its particular pedagogy – is sensed to enable or provoke a transition from the first to the second column, from the real 'black' township to the real 'white' suburb and from a 'black' imagined world into a 'white' one. The fact that this trajectory (now often captured under labels such as 'democracy' and 'equality') is racialised should not surprise us – it is one of the features of South African society that has survived Apartheid. The point, however, is that it is not only racialised, but that it comes as a larger cluster of ideological features involving features such as space, language and so forth, and that precisely the way in which this cluster occurs enables all sorts of micromethodological practices that circumscribe class and class trajectories. It is the fact that 'class' can be broken up in a multitude of seemingly non-class ('pedagogical') features that makes education such a rich field for investigating social class. Its very invisibility is an effect of the dispersal of its features over a multitude of habitual domains, the structure and composition of which can only be established ethnographically. Absence of (direct) evidence is not evidence of absence – a golden rule in ethnography.

We would suggest understanding the above set of oppositions as the mode of occurrence of class in the field of education in contemporary South Africa. It operates within a general ideological frame of democracy, equity and equal opportunities, but it operates there through a clear continuity between the new and the old social orders. This is apparently a paradox, but recall that Gunnar Myrdal warned us against exactly such paradoxical phenomena. The particular mode of occurrence of social class is in South Africa, as elsewhere, a matter about which only limited forms of generalisation will do. It is best to look at the concrete ways in which people orient towards stratifying diacritics (such as the ordered bodily hexis, the use of English, reading books, and so forth) in articulating images and patterns of social mobility

before making general statements about class. This is one way of rescuing a hugely important analytical concept from totalising (and thus irrelevant) interpretations – the tendency, already observed by E.P. Thompson in 1963, "to suppose that class is a thing".

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