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Transition and the Education of the New South African Citizen

DANIEL HAMMETT AND LYNN STAEHELI

South Africa's democratic transition was a time of optimism, with immense hopes pinned on the youth who would be educated to see themselves as equal citizens. It was also a time of pragmatic decision making, not least in the education sector, which would shape the future of the country. Negotiating the imperatives of redress, development, and equality set in train many contradictory pressures within the education sector, within which teachers were tasked with instilling ideals of equality and social justice amidst a context shaped by entrenched social and spatial inequalities. Policy debates surrounding the meaning of citizenship and equality are shown to be removed from the everyday classroom challenges in South Africa. In particular, realization of the values of citizen education is hindered by differential resourcing of schools and education, the underlying poverty experienced by many students, and the challenge of finding ways to talk about difference and inequality without recourse to racialized explanations. These constraints act to limit the possibility of education as a site in which the new South African nation is (re)produced.

As South Africa transitioned away from apartheid in 1994 and anticipated a society based on commitments to democracy, human rights, and social justice, immense hopes were pinned on the youth who would be educated to see themselves as equal citizens. The transition period was also a time when pragmatic decisions had to be made that would shape the future of the country. These decisions were framed by South Africa's position as one of the world's most unequal societies, reflected in the country's Gini coefficient of income inequality rising from 59.3 in 1994 to 65 in 2005 (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] 2009). Fearing that radical policies of redress would undermine the white¹ population's support for the transition—including reform of the previously racially segregated education system—political leaders adopted an incremental approach to enhancing opportunities and resources for previously disadvantaged communities and introduced a values-based curriculum to instill commitments to equality, unity, and justice.

¹ The use of racial signifiers in South Africa has a long history connected to imperial and colonial projects. Here we follow the postapartheid government terminology used in equity policies: white, colored, Indian, and black or African.

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The new educational system simultaneously embedded the hopes for a new country and a sense of what was possible. These policies and practices were framed by two transitions: one away from a specific history of division and one shaped by a broader, globalized move to neoliberal governance. This double transition limited the options that were pragmatically and ideologically possible, resulting in an education system characterized by contradictions and dilemmas.

A central dilemma was how to achieve equality while avoiding the financial and political implications of massive redistribution. Attempts to negotiate these dilemmas set in train contradictory pressures as teachers faced the challenge of translating broad ideals of equality and social justice within schooling contexts shaped by social and spatial patterns of poverty and inequality. Thus, the negotiation of tensions between ideals of education for equality and for economic advancement lies at the heart of how new citizens are imagined not only within “citizenship education” per se but across a broader, more holistic engagement with how citizens are educated.

In this article, we examine the contradictions confronted as South Africans use their education system in an attempt to build a new citizenry. We first consider the role of education in creating a citizenry capable of adapting to the situations that countries confront in moving away from social division, even as they strive to position themselves in a globalizing economy. Two key themes emerge: (a) the tensions between two competing logics—the pursuance of state-guided, communal racial and social equality, and market-led socioeconomic individualism and responsabilization; and (b) the challenges faced by educators in responding to demands for the delivery of nonracialism in the face of these contradictory logics.

Drawing from interviews and observations in a range of South African secondary schools, we argue that the new citizenry promoted in South African classrooms imperfectly reflects the hopes for a new nation. Noting the effects of inadequate resources, the grinding poverty in which many learners live, and the lack of an agreed framework for the teaching of nonracialism, we explore how teachers and principals seek to foster nonracialism despite the contradictions of ideologies and material conditions, and between pressures for redress and the embracing of neoliberalism.

Forging a New Citizenry through Education

Eliminating the formal structures of apartheid was not enough to provide a clear sense of what it means to be a citizen of the new South Africa; a new citizenship and sense of identity had to be constructed and nurtured through the education system. Endeavors elsewhere highlight the role that education for citizenship can play in building a new national understanding while ne-

gotiating memories of the past and meeting contemporary demands.² As Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1990) contend, education in these contexts is conceptualized as an arena through which an aspired-for social structure can be attained and existing social hierarchies dismantled to (re)produce a new nation (also Harber and Mncube 2011).

Educational reform in postconflict and transitional societies is driven by the ideal of education for progressive cultural (re)production which will entrench a new, more equitable and equal nation and nationalism (Valverde 2004; Steiner-Khamsi 2005; Goddard and Anderson 2010). Such reforms require changes in political, social, economic, and cultural realms, encompassing institutional structures, financial resources, human resources, and negotiation of fears surrounding changes in curricula content and pedagogies (Goddard and Anderson 2010). In postindependence states, these reforms have been integral to consolidating the role for education in nation-building projects, both to realize a new, inclusive citizenry and to meet external demands from global markets (Sandel 1998; Valverde 2004; Manby 2009).

This process of citizenship building involves the ability to forge what Rogers Smith (2003) calls an “ethical story of peoplehood” in which a basis of solidarity and commonality is emphasized, such that histories of repression and marginalization can be contained in “the past.” Building such stories is challenging, particularly when the basis for commonality may be contested (Christodoulidis 2000). Historic and contemporary experiences frame education for citizenship, meaning that content and ideals must be meaningful and relevant so as to avoid cynicism and accusations of indoctrination (Roman 2003; Sears and Hughes 2006). In postcolonial contexts, narrating common citizenship is challenged by histories of division and multitiered citizenship regimes (Manby 2009). Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) argument that schools are sites of cultural reproduction is enhanced in such contexts: in South Africa, apartheid and postapartheid education policies have been deliberately designed to capitalize upon these processes and promote particular identities and citizenship understandings (Soudien 2001; Ansell 2002).

Cosmopolitanism and a commitment to human rights are often offered as the bases for a new story of peoplehood (Staeheli and Hammett 2010). By asserting the humanity and rights of belonging to all people within a country, diversity becomes the basis through which understanding and respect for others can be built (Appiah 2007). Cosmopolitanism therefore challenges people to build a feeling of citizenship through the articulation of universal values and particular histories to foster political subjectivities and practices of commonality and equality in difference (Osler and Starkey 2005; Appiah 2007). Education for citizenship must therefore intervene to develop

² For example, Jarausch and Geyer 2003; Astiz and Mendez 2006; Bertz 2007; Niens and McIlrath 2010.

understandings of, and interactions between, three sites of citizenship: status, feelings, and practices (Osler and Starkey 2005). As Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue, education for citizenship must provide the skills required of individuals to act as citizens, encourage practices of active citizenship, and explore the histories that connect citizens and are the basis of the polity.

However, this production of citizens is tempered by competing demands: the “good citizen” as one who is inculcated into postapartheid ideals of nonracialism and equality, but also as one who is skilled and equipped to meet the demands of the neoliberal economy (Larner 2000; Sparke and Lawson 2003). Within education, these pressures are evident in growing emphasis on neoliberal governing regimes and production of “employable” students rather than critical citizens (Spring 1980; Mitchell 2003). Gilbert Valverde (2004) and Laura Johnson and Paul Morris (2010) outline how the envisaged citizen is the product not only of domestic histories and aspirations, but also of the negotiated demands of global politicoeconomic imperatives and neoliberal logics. Under such pressures, governments may shy away from contentious histories in the curriculum, a strategy that critics argue simply buries or exacerbates conflict and division (Stradling 2003; Hill and Kumar 2008; Goldberg 2009).

The transition from apartheid to democracy required the South African government to negotiate competing needs for economic development and greater equality. Political leaders had to balance the need for reform and resource redistribution with the need to retain the economically powerful white population within the new nation, while reintegrating the country into the global economy. The result was a host of social and economic policies increasingly aligned to neoliberal principles (Weber 2002; Marais 2011). Thus, while the Constitution is framed by struggle values and grounded in a rights-based discourse, neoliberal imperatives have resulted in the government’s abdication of responsibility to deliver these rights (Weber 2002, 365). These processes are reflected in the government’s policy shift from the transformative Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which emphasized wealth redistribution, to the more neoliberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) plan, which prioritizes the free market and economic growth as providing for redistribution (Marais 2011, 113). In education, critics argue that the curtailing of social spending and introduction of school fees have entrenched structural inequality and deny equity in education provision (Spren and Vally 2006; Christie 2010; Tickly 2011).

Alongside these structural decisions, curricular content was developed in keeping with the new citizenship envisaged in the Constitution’s values of equality, human rights, and cosmopolitanism (Enslin 2003, 75). The Revised National Curriculum was designed “to ensure that a national South African identity is built on values very different from those that underpinned apartheid” (Department of Education [DoE] 2003, 3). The values promoted have

shifted from contrasting liberal and republican ideals present in apartheid education materials toward a liberal-communitarian ethos combined with an emphasis upon active citizenry (Hunt 2011; Solomons and Fataar 2011). The newly envisaged citizen is one empowered to live with the ghosts of the past and the nightmares of the present, while able and willing to critically and progressively engage these challenges and strive for a better future (Solomons and Fataar 2011).

Notably absent from these reforms, however, is a specific policy of redress to apartheid's inequalities. This, critics argue, has constrained ideals of equitable education and limited education policy so as "to signal progress and a commitment to transformation (as opposed to effecting real change)" (Fataar 2008, 103). Others argue that such policies would impoverish the country and that equality is dependent upon economic development, with or without a policy of redress (see Kubow 2009; Marais 2011).

The resulting jumble of "priorities" is manifest in the social aims of the South African curriculum: social justice expressed through commitments to human rights, citizens with skills for a global economy, and a healthy environment. The *Manifesto on Education, Values and Democracy* (DoE 2001) positions the values of equity, tolerance, multilingualism, social honor, openness, and accountability at the core of the citizenship project. While the first values signal attention to equality, inclusiveness, and a certain cosmopolitan attitude, the latter values draw attention to the values (and behaviors) that should position youth in the future as responsible citizen-workers (see Spring 1980). Yusuf Waghid (2004), however, argues that these values only partially address the basis for redress and reconciliation, and that the divergent natures of education for redress and education for neoliberal governance and development are not resolved. Leon Tickly (2011), similarly, notes a tension between neoliberal demands for a human capital approach to education and domestic imperatives for a human rights-based approach to education with a resultant entrenching of existing disparities of opportunities and outcomes. Returning to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), we can see the danger that education can become a site in which inequitable social relations are entrenched or exacerbated (also Harber and Mncube 2011).

Layered onto these policy tensions are the contrasting classroom experiences and community conditions in which young people learn citizenship. It is in the daily settings of the school that teachers negotiate seemingly contradictory citizenship values while navigating problematic discourses of race and inequality within a social and political context that remains infused with the politics of race (see Hunter 2010). In South African schools, the gap between education policy and practice is rendered in particular ways that produce ambiguities in the experience of education as a site for social transformation and cultural reproduction. In the remainder of the article, we explore how the resourcing of schools and landscapes of inequality and

TABLE 1
 MATRICULATION EXAM PASS RATES BY SCHOOL FOR 2000 AND 2010, PLUS STUDENT AND STAFF
 NUMBERS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

School Type and Province	Matriculation Exam Pass Rate (%)		No. Students	No. Staff	Fees (ZAR)
	2000	2010			
Independent:					
Western Cape	93.48	100	524	43 (43)	15,000
Model C:					
Eastern Cape	98.77	96.9	500	27 (12)	10,250
KwaZulu Natal	99.1	97.5	900	67 (32)	11,200
Western Cape	100	99.1	499	41 (24)	16,350
Colored:					
Eastern Cape	85.45	70.4	1,210	41 (5)	600
KwaZulu Natal	89.4	88	1,500	48 (11)	1,500
Western Cape	80.34	69.7	1,200	41 (2)	700
Indian:					
KwaZulu Natal	86.86	95.3	1,100	43 (7)	1,300
Western Cape	92.62	93.7	1,036	37 (5)	2,300
Township:					
Eastern Cape	57.41	67.6	1,071	40	250
KwaZulu Natal	36.71	48.5	963	30	150
Western Cape	48.82	43.7	1,393	49	No Fee

SOURCE.—Matriculation exam pass rates are from G.o.S.A. (2000, 2009, 2010).

NOTE.—Staff numbers in parentheses denote number of School Governing Body-financed teachers (i.e., those paid for from school fees).

education contest stated goals of equality and economic development and underpin the difficulties faced by teachers in efforts to promote nonracialism.

Method

Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including 12 school principals and 50 teachers. Data were also collected through classroom observations, attendance at school meetings, and participation in school activities. Twelve schools were included in the research: four state and one independent school in Cape Town (Western Cape), four state schools in Pietermaritzburg (KwaZulu Natal), and three state schools in King William's Town (Eastern Cape).

Schools were selected to provide a range across the previous racial classification system and among provinces to encompass a range of socioeconomic conditions, historic experiences, and levels of educational achievement. The sample may not be nationally representative in a statistical sense, but the variety of contexts allows key themes and contradictions in the transition from apartheid and construction of a new citizenry to be explored. Background information on schools (enrollments, pass rates, fees) was collected from schools and education department records where possible (see table 1). In keeping with the study's ethics protocols, pseudonyms are used to identify individual schools and teachers.

Citizenship education content is present across the South African cur-

riculum, but is most explicitly visible in the life orientation and history subject areas. Teaching staff for these subject areas at each school were invited to participate. Some declined, and timetabling pressures precluded a few interviews, but the majority of these staff members were interviewed. Between three and six teachers were interviewed individually at each school, reflecting the varying staff numbers across institutions.

Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour and were conducted either in the school staff room, when no other teachers were present, or the teacher's main classroom. Discussions with both teachers and principals covered a range of topics coalesced around understandings of citizenship, the role and content of citizenship education, and experiences of delivering citizenship education curricula. Responses were subjected to discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995) and key themes extrapolated from the transcripts. Several of the schools refused to record the racial categories of teachers and students, a practice that guided our own decision not to record the racial classification of interviewees. However, the majority of teaching staff at each school were from communities that would have shared the same apartheid-era racial designation as the school, although more racially mixed teaching staff were evident at former white-only schools.

Equal Citizenship or Citizenship for Development?

Academic and policy debates over the meaning of citizenship and the merits of equality and redress as compared to economic development seemed far removed from the daily experiences of teachers facing the challenges of a transitional education system and the prosaic issues of classroom life. Yet these debates are made manifest in classrooms in several ways. In this section, we examine three of these that emerged as key themes from the interviews: (1) the resourcing of schools and education, (2) the poverty experienced by students, and (3) the difficulties of teaching about South African society and problems without recourse to racialized explanations.

Resources and the Promotion of Equality

South African government funding of education is high, representing 5.4 percent of GDP and 17.4 percent of total government expenditure (Lemon 2005, 72; Roodt 2009, 13). Historically, this spending has been unequal, with a disproportionate amount spent on white students' education (Harber 2001). Against this backdrop, the postapartheid move toward equalizing funding across provinces and schools is a strategy of redress, but it is not enough to overcome the preexisting inequalities (Roodt 2009, 11). Increased access to education, rather than progressive redress or provision of equitable opportunities and outcomes (Harber and Mncube 2011), has been the priority in the face of overall population growth and rapid expansion of informal urban settlements. Macroeconomic conditions and policies, includ-

ing competing spending demands and the introduction of market principles in education, have further constrained efforts to channel greater proportions of capital expenditure to the poorest schools (Fiske and Ladd 2004).

State schools may supplement their government income through collecting school fees: 11 of the 12 schools included in our sample charged fees in 2009, ranging from ZAR 150 to ZAR 16,500 per annum (compared with average annual household incomes of ZAR 280,870 for white-headed households, to ZAR 37,711 for black-headed households [StatsSA 2008]), with the former white-only schools and the independent school charging the highest fees (see table 1). Schools use this fee revenue to maintain and expand buildings, grounds, and equipment; to hire additional teaching staff; and to offer additional courses and career counseling. The schools charging no/low fees were in, or on the edges of, townships or informal settlements. These schools endured poor quality physical plant, with exposed wiring, broken windows, and raw sewage on the school grounds. They also were chronically understaffed; one school needed an additional eight teachers to meet minimum staffing requirements, and at another school a researcher was repeatedly asked to teach classes. These schools did not have guidance counselors to help with further education or career choices. Whereas the former white-only schools enrolled some black and colored students, there was no racial mixing at the no/low-fees schools (see Hunter 2010; Lemon and Battersby-Lennard 2011).

The national government has attempted to respond to these conditions, providing some additional funding for schools situated in the lowest quintiles (measured through a matrix of indicators including connection to running water and access by paved road). Principals bemoaned the inadequacy of these funds, as well as the perverse logic they forced the schools to adopt. During a walkabout at a school located in a poor, mainly colored township, the principal lamented that he was not able to draw enough of the “right” kind of students (i.e., black students) to qualify for funds that would allow him to repair classrooms. The principal at a former whites-only school, which had made notable progress in attracting black learners from local townships, noted similar concerns. According to the principal, the increasing number of fee exemptions was not offset by increased income from the government as the school is located in a wealthy suburb: “I’ve written to the department, one of the things that they use to rank schools, and this is really crazy: do you have a tarred road, do you have a water supply, do you have electricity, infrastructure, and of course the wealth of the community in which you are. But the failure of that is kids coming from the rural areas and townships to the school, so the in-house poverty is growing, but the level of subsidies from the department isn’t” (Tarak, May 6, 2009).

Elsewhere, principals noted the burdens posed by nonpayment of fees and lack of support from parents in completing paperwork required to lodge

claims for fee exemptions. One principal noted that the school had written off ZAR 800,000 in bad debt in the previous year due to nonpayment of fees. Simultaneously, a number of teachers in townships spoke of how perceptions of fees as a structural barrier perpetuated apartheid-era educational segregation. For instance, “There’s still a problem in schools, you see. There’s the ex-Model C schools, the White schools, to prevent the so-called Blacks and Coloreds to come to their schools, they put up their school fees. . . . [The students] can’t afford it . . . [and] are forced to come to the Colored school, where it’s cheaper. So there is no integration” (Ronald, January 29, 2009). It appears, therefore, that economic standing has replaced race classification as the basis for segregation (although a strong correlation of wealth and race remains) in a system that ostensibly does not discriminate but is not able to respond to shifting school enrollment patterns (see also Hunter 2010; Lemon and Battersby-Lennard 2011).

Compounding these challenges to government policy are the social and spatial legacies of apartheid’s inequality. Providing equal resources to schools in an unequal educational landscape has simply perpetuated inequalities. Even when charitable foundations step in to provide support, the lack of resources in some schools constrains their ability to use them. For instance, one township school, with only a single public telephone (no business line) and solitary computer, received a copier machine from a foundation but could not afford the toner, paper, and other needed consumable supplies, so the copier went unused. At another school serving an informal settlement, 20 computers had been donated for student use. However, the schools had no internet connectivity, teachers lacked computer education skills, and the hardware and software were outdated. When we visited the school, the computer room was being used by students as both a study and social space in which to complete assignments, but without using the computing resources.

These conditions, which complicated teachers’ abilities to deliver the new curriculum, appeared to be overlooked by education department officials. This situation was compounded by frustrations with poor communication from education departments, including inadequate notice of forthcoming training workshops for staff and a lack of resources to cover teacher absences and support teachers traveling to and from meetings. This was a particular concern at township schools, where few staff owned cars and either walked to work or relied on minibus taxis. While many principals spoke of these issues off the record, the principal at a township school in Cape Town commented during an interview, “I would like to speak about the department and this thing of dragging things. . . . Those things, those bureaucratic things, they also demoralize, you know, us as educators. It does impact on our morale and it affects us negatively” (Banoyolo, February 20, 2009).

The feeling that education departments were disconnected from the daily classroom experience, dysfunctional, and unresponsive to the realities of

schooling has been commented on elsewhere (see Harber and Mncube 2011). This “institutional deafness” contributed to a sense of teacher exhaustion encountered in almost every interview at each school, as teachers lamented their wasted energies in fruitless efforts to obtain support from education departments or in jumping through seemingly pointless bureaucratic hoops. Hiten, a teacher at a school situated in a predominantly Indian community in Cape Town, noted: “We have these wonderful policies, but we don’t have suitable qualified personnel to deliver. The infrastructure is not there, the resources are not there” (February 5, 2009). Similarly, Hossam, a history teacher at a school on the edge of the Cape Town townships serving a working-class colored community, reported how his students would retreat into a mindset of inferiority when they participated in an “activity . . . held at white schools. The facilities there, it takes them back, so they feel a little inferior” (January 28, 2009).

These resourcing and capacity inequalities are also reflected in the variations of National Senior Certificate (matric) results (see table 1). The schools in our sample demonstrate this, with the independent and former whites-only schools maintaining pass rates of between 93 percent and 100 percent, while the township schools achieved pass rates of 21 percent to 75 percent. These tangible legacies of apartheid inequalities still permeate the sites of education, disrupting the possibility of realizing the ideals contained in citizen education—both as teachers seek to translate abstract ideals into meaningful classroom content and as students reconcile this content with the conditions and experiences of their daily lives.

Landscapes of Inequality and Education

The persistence of inequality has effects beyond the differential ability of schools to raise fees to meet the learning needs of its students. It also affects the ways that learners relate to the school and their education, and the values they learn from the world they experience around them. Ronald, a teacher at a majority colored school in Cape Town, put it succinctly: “The things that’s on paper, it’s very good and nice, but in practice, it’s a whole different story. And then what we teach our kids in school—they go back to their communities, and that’s a different thing; they can’t live out what you teach them” (Ronald, January 29, 2009).

Vuyiswa, a life-orientation teacher at a township school in Pietermaritzburg, noted the multiple ways in which poverty affected her learners, from lack of nutrition and study aids/spaces at home, to knowledge of and ability to take advantage of higher education opportunities, to a quest for quick money, respect, and social success through alternative means:

We are living in a society where poverty is a huge problem, and poverty hinders them [the learners] to develop academically. Some of them have passed grade 12 but they are not exposed to loans, bursaries, and they don’t have enough information about how they can continue with their studies. Most of the time when I

talk to the student they have bad role models; they want to get things very fast and that is not possible when you are coming from a poor background. Some of them say that “you have to spend such a long time in the university and then . . . maybe I won’t get that job. Maybe it will be wiser if I associate myself with people who are thugs or hijacking. I can make my life very easy in a very short time.” (May 27, 2009)

Simangile, like others teaching in schools serving working-class communities, makes a similar point: “Unfortunately, because of the high rate of crime in this area you find there is a lack of visibility of the police and the role models end up moving out—they are living in suburbs. [The role models for] our kids, the people who are left now are only the drug lords, and so now if you want to become somebody, you want to drive a Mercedes Benz” (February 19, 2009).

According to the principal at a township school, moreover, such conditions meant that students did not feel they were citizens: “When you were talking about citizenship, when you talk to the learners, then they feel this citizenship, they don’t feel like they are really citizens of South Africa, you know, when looking at their conditions under which they live and the difficulties which they are experiencing, you know, especially having a child who comes to school and who says, ‘you know I didn’t have something to eat’” (Banoyolo, February 20, 2009). An overriding concern for many teachers was that students from poor backgrounds often viewed curriculum content and concepts of citizenship as irrelevant to their daily lives and future aspirations (Hammett and Staeheli 2011). For example, Charlotte commented: “People’s survival is more important because those [ideals presented in textbooks] kind of go out the window when it’s all about survival” (February 9, 2009).

In township schools, students’ sense of powerlessness was manifest in their poor performance at school and aspirations for the future, which rarely included educational success. Instead, staff in these schools were concerned that a lack of positive role models or belief in possibilities for social mobility meant their students lacked self-confidence and would “become social delinquents” (Stephen, May 12, 2009). Hossam, an experienced history teacher at a school in a working-class colored community, explained this challenge: “We are sitting with an unemployment rate of more than 60 percent, and not all of the people have access to higher education because of financial constraints. . . . Because the situation becomes so dire for most of them, there’s just this lack of interest in bettering their lives” (January 28, 2009).

Consequently, students’ visions of the future are described by teachers as invoking imaginaries of success and respect achieved through alternative means. Those alternative means are often dystopian, as described by Kaleb, an educator born and raised in a township but now working at a privileged, former whites-only school in King Williams Town: “They [the poor and destitute] cannot respect anyone because they are hungry. They cannot respect

anybody's property because they are hungry. But they would love to see society, everybody, like them, while they are like that. So, they want to change the society to be hell, because they are living hell. So, the environment is really a huge thing; the society is influential to [them] want[ing] to become good citizens" (June 1, 2009). These sentiments reiterate Carol Anne Spreen and Salim Vally's (2006, 354) contention that "progress (or lack thereof) in schools cannot be divorced from poverty and its consequences." The differing challenges, as well as educational outcomes across schools, underscore the need for broader societal change and equitable economic growth.

Such sentiments were reinforced by teachers at a range of schools, most notably in relation to poverty and hunger among students. Hiten, at a former Indian school in Cape Town, commented on "the starvation, the poverty, the violence, the drugs, all the social evils," and added, "If all those things are addressed, then you'll find that the child that comes to school is coming ready for lessons. But under these conditions, we are not so bad here, but if you look at a child in a township school, how do we educate, how do we inculcate these values into the child? The child hasn't had breakfast or hasn't had supper" (February 5, 2009). Similarly, Dhriti, the principal at a former Indian school in Pietermaritzburg, outlined the school's reliance on local companies and other organizations to meet the basic nutritional needs of the learners: "The key challenges [to teaching and learning] will be poverty. The children come to school hungry, but we do have in place a feeding scheme. Fortunately the local Spar provides us with about ZAR 1,000 groceries each month, and Divine Life Society gives us about 12 loaves of bread a day, so we have fresh sandwiches for learners to help them a bit. I mean a child must have something in their stomach before they can absorb or retain anything" (May 21, 2009).

The challenges to teachers posed by broader social inequalities are multiple: how to make curricula relevant and meaningful to students, how to counter socialization into mindsets rooted in inequalities, how to ensure that education is viewed as a tool for the promotion of social justice and personal advancement, how to use education as a tool to empower individuals and communities in the face of an overwhelming sense of exclusion and powerlessness. These feelings of marginalization and powerlessness may also lead to structural exclusion from the full opportunities of citizenship, making simply equalizing school funding an impotent response, not least as these perceptions are frequently framed by race—posing a challenge to curricula ideals of nonracialism (see Maré 2001).

Nonracialism

Nonracialism is a key component of the postapartheid regime, incorporating efforts to eschew the use of racial categories to describe people, explain patterns of inequality, and allocate "blame" for past inequities. How-

ever, the meaning of nonracialism in practice has never been fully articulated. In education, the imperative to talk about difference and inequality in a country—but to do so without recourse to race—is problematic. The challenge extends beyond that identified by Patricia Kubow (2009, 50) of “equip[ping] learners with the abilities and skills to think deeply about issues of citizenship and to deconstruct the fixed notions of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ fashioned during the apartheid era.” It requires finding ways to talk about social issues that condition citizenship and the differential possibilities and abilities of social groups to claim the rights of citizenship. Teachers are unsure of how to deal with these issues; they have not been provided the guidance and training to know how to talk either about race while promoting non-racialism or how to talk about inequality through a different language.

Such concerns resonate with broader appreciation among educationalists that the values and the ideals of the new, democratic nation cannot be delivered effectively through the South African education system without addressing shortcomings in the numbers and abilities of the teachers (Mncube and Harber 2010). For many teachers who had grown up during apartheid, teaching about apartheid history and debates about citizenship, race, and identity was challenging and emotionally fraught. As Hossam (January 28, 2009) explained: “Because we lived through apartheid, you become very emotional when you teach it. But then you must also distance yourself from the things [that happened] in order not to create any animosity with the youth. You can so easily abuse history, because we, the nonwhites in South Africa, were dehumanized by the apartheid system. . . . When teaching apartheid history, you should be very careful because you can so easily alienate the nonwhite students from [their] white countrymen.” In a different way, a younger teacher from a privileged background noted how this protected upbringing had been a major challenge in coming to terms with teaching and talking about diversity, difference, and equality: “Because we’ve such a diverse school—and I mean we’ve got every kind of person. We’ve got all races, all religions, all economic backgrounds. Sometimes, personally, myself, because I’ve come from quite a protected background, it’s very difficult for me to relate to others. That has been an issue in the past but . . . I don’t know . . . because there are no boundaries here” (Charlotte, February 9, 2009).

Classroom discussions of race would generally involve the outright castigation of racism and the use of race, without providing students with the tools and knowledge to critically engage with the underlying implications of racism and theories of race. Teachers at all schools were wary of such discussions, fearing that learners may be offended or uncomfortable in these situations or that as teachers they may be accused of being racist themselves if they did not police the discussion “correctly.” Classrooms were viewed as important spaces in which teachers could challenge racial prejudices and

create supportive environments for students to engage in critical thinking. However, as Anne outlined, teachers were wary about putting these ideas into practice: “We have such a multi-cultural, multi-racial group of students in this school that something is going to trigger a feeling in somebody. Whether it was something they experienced or something their parents experienced or just—especially the black children in my class have a feeling of—hatred is the wrong word but—like about what happened to them or to their families. So when we talk about things and maybe some child is insensitive in what they’re saying, but not on purpose, it becomes a bit of a problem” (February 12, 2009).

In many classrooms, teachers were faced with learners who invoked race in claims to their marginalization under the democratic government. This was a difficulty faced both at predominantly white and colored schools, where learners (and, on occasion, teachers) mobilized claims to marginalization and oppression, implying that affirmative action policies disadvantaged white and colored youth while privileging black youth. These sentiments and encounters contest the ideals of citizen education and cultural reproduction, rendering the meanings of nonracialism and nationhood ambiguous. Ronald, who taught at a high school in a working-class colored community, tried to deal with this issue by reminding students that all South Africans are equal, but was frequently challenged by students who felt aggrieved: “It’s my job to get to them [to understand] that they all are human and we are all equal, we all stand the same chance in this country. But what they say is, they can’t afford to go to university; there’s no money and they say all the bursaries go to the black people and not to the colored people—you see, and that discourages them even to come to school” (January 29, 2009). Similarly, Juan, who taught in a working-class colored community near King William’s Town, sympathized with the students: “They [the learners] definitely talk about it and you can see it in the way some of our colored learners perform. One girl asked me a question one time, ‘What’s the use of studying and you have matric and you don’t get a job?’ . . . It creates a problem amongst learners; they question the future and what’s going to happen to them after matric? There’s many more matriculates walking around here who pass matric who don’t get jobs” (June 8, 2009).

These sentiments provide a challenge to teachers as they attempt to realize a key goal of South African education policy: the fostering of a tolerant, equitable, and united nation. Faced with such sentiments, teachers are expected to disabuse students of racially framed exclusionary thinking, even while talking about past inequalities and the need for racially framed policies of redress. They face an intractable tension, not least in challenging the racialized ideas many students were exposed to at home or in the community. For many teachers, the nonracial aspirations of the curriculum stood in opposition to the popular opinions expressed by pupils, as Nurina, an early

career teacher at a former whites-only school identified: “As I see it a lot of it comes from the parents because the parents come from a different era, and we have a new generation now, postapartheid, but there is still bitterness, hatred and prejudice—because the kids have been taught it from their parents” (May 5, 2009).

Teachers and principals were also frustrated by the competing messages from government surrounding the promotion of nonracial citizenship and the implementation of racially framed policies. Jason, a history teacher at a former whites-only school, outlined these competing priorities and their implications for realizing nonracialism: “So, any efforts to promote citizenship are completely nullified by the fact that the ANC [African National Congress] government has set their course on classifying people according to race. They haven’t moved away from that rhetoric, and now we’re stuck with this thing. . . . Nonracialism would be a great start, because then you could promote being South African, then you could be proudly South African” (February 13, 2009).

These challenges are exacerbated by the inherited divisions of apartheid-era social and spatial geographies. While there has been a growing desegregation going “up” the old hierarchy of schools, questions remain over the level of integration, while the burden of the costs associated with education—the time and money required for transportation and to purchase uniforms and equipment—have severely constrained educational access (see Christie 2010; Lemon and Battersby-Lennard 2011). We saw signs of growing integration in former whites-only schools, although this poses further challenges to teachers who must deliver lessons on diversity and equality without necessarily being trained and equipped to do so. In these situations, teachers mentioned the challenges they faced in overcoming their own prejudices (Nurina, May 5, 2009) or trying to draw views from a diverse group of students while policing “negative” beliefs. For example, Eugene, a principal at a former colored school, noted:

We are a diverse community, we’re a diverse country, we are a diverse school and each learner brings his [or her] own culture, own ideas to school. . . . I guess that some are positive, some are negative . . . but we try in this space, the school space, we try to accommodate each and every one, taking the positives only. . . . [However,] sometimes it’s difficult for them to reach that common ground where they can understand each other and accept each other. And one of the challenges that starts that you do find incidents or pockets of racism at school, because children, some of them—the very minority at school—find it hard to accept change has happened and change is here to stay. (June 8, 2009)

A teacher at the same school, Paul, discussed his efforts to teach the history of the apartheid era and issues of racism to a class containing a solitary white student:

Because I’ve lived through that era [apartheid], I’ve been in detention, so when

I explain to them I know what I'm talking about. I'm not just teaching out of a textbook. I mean, it was real life experiences, being detained and being assaulted by the security police. But now, when it comes to the grade nines, then you must go down to their level. In one of my classes there's a white girl sitting amongst colored pupils, so now you've got to be careful how you express yourself and explain this because she's coming from another environment with different views about this whole thing. Now we've got to get a middle path not to offend her but also to make her know that this was wrong. . . . The other day I had to explain [to] them [about] the Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Act, but then I thought, okay, let me make an example with her and she quite enjoyed that. And I explained to this boy, colored boy, sitting next to her that during the 1960s you won't be able to—wouldn't have been able to—marry her. So she was feeling part of this whole lesson but, like you said, you've got to find a balance to explain this. (June 2009)

Meanwhile, schools in many working class colored communities and in townships have very little, if any, racial desegregation (see Lemon and Battersby-Lennard 2011). Teaching about diversity in these contexts provides a different set of challenges (see also Hunt 2011). Not least among these is overcoming students' socialization into particular perceptions of and mitigating their lack of exposure to and interaction with other communities. This lack of integration—both within schools and within communities—concerned several educators who questioned how students could practice many of the values emphasized in their lessons. For example, Ronald discussed his experience at a school serving a working-class colored community:

In [this community], we are just coloreds. There's no opportunity to play, or to work, or whatever, with a black or a white, where this person can say, "Okay, I'm going to be now a good citizen and act like a so-called, proper South African, because we all are South Africans," you see. There's never a chance to interact and that's why people still have that old idea of, "You're white, you're black, and I'm colored," you see. There's no integration . . . there's a black teacher at our school, there's a white teacher at our school, so the kids can learn from their experience but it's never integration. (January 29, 2009)

These challenges are underpinned by both the inhibiting effect of the home on the transformational potential of education and the dominance of assimilationist approaches and institutional ethos of schools (Lemon and Battersby-Lennard 2011). Thus, teaching about, and for, nonracialism is hindered by limited levels of desegregation and even lower levels of social integration. Stephen, a life-orientation teacher at another former "colored" school in Pietermaritzburg with an increasingly diverse student population, described the challenges of implementing the curriculum in such contexts: "For me curriculum is just paperwork. It is down on paper, it is beautifully presented, the ideals and the goals behind it are perfectly done. However, when you come into a classroom situation and you are dealing with what we are dealing with, such diverse cultures, we need to first try and respect everyone's culture, and it is extremely difficult. . . . For me the curriculum, things are hidden in the curriculum and it is a teacher's role to try and bring

out those hidden things and try to get the children to understand” (May 12, 2009). The sentiment expressed by Petronet, a life-orientation teacher at a former colored school, captured this concern, pointing to the need not only for better equipping of teachers to deal with these sensitive topics but of the broader importance of desegregation and integration as a means of entrenching nonracialism: “I think the Life Orientation teachers have a difficult job . . . to convince them [students] that you can interact with each other. The kids that go to ex-Model C schools [former whites-only schools], I think they’re in a better position, because they are, most of the time there will be kids of different races in school, and they are, want to learn from each other. And maybe there will be conflict, there is conflict, but it’s the process that counts in the end” (January 30, 2009). Through these mechanisms and endeavors, teachers attempt to produce Smith’s (2003) “ethical stories of peoplehood” despite—or, indeed, because of—the continued profound inequalities of everyday life that may serve to disrupt the ideals of the nation-building and citizen-education project.

Conclusions

South Africa’s democratic transition and reimagining of equal citizenship was a time for optimism. This optimism and idealism, however, was tempered by pragmatic recognition of socioeconomic and political constraints on what was possible. The South African transition was, as with many postcolonial and postconflict societies, the product of negotiated imperatives to realize a radical shift from a history of division within complex economic, social, and political constraints (Alexander 2002; Marais 2011). Layered onto domestic imperatives to include all population groups within the transition, the South African government’s efforts to relocate the state within the world economy contributed to the adoption of a range of neoliberal policies—a process witnessed in many educational systems around the world (Hill and Kumar 2008). Consequently, responsibilities for building and ensuring the rights of citizenship were increasingly shifted from the state onto individuals and communities, while adopting practices of “governing-at-a-distance” (Rose 1999; also Peck and Tickell 2002). Thus, the unresolved complexities of realizing nonracialism while using racially framed policies of redress and the tensions between pragmatic decisions to equalize state educational expenditure versus the need for more radical redistribution to realize equitable outcomes reflect the constraints—“the common sense of the times”—placed on the idealism of the transition (Peck and Tickell 2002).

The pervasive neoliberal logic of South Africa’s transitional politics has impelled the government to adopt particular pathways to development and to devolve responsibility for the claiming and delivery of citizen rights to communities and the private sector. The education system embodies these tensions. Education for citizenship emphasizes, on the one hand, human

rights in general for a citizenry with a cosmopolitan outlook and attitude, while locating the responsibility for acting upon these rights at the individual or community level, rather than as obligations of the state. The state therefore restricts its role to the provision of education to all (although questions remain as to whether this aim is substantively realized; see Bloch 2009) as a means to equip individuals to claim rights and progress the nation—an engagement that does not, at present, result in the convergence of development and equality.

Rather, the conditions for schooling remain highly unequal. The legacies of divergent apartheid-era education resourcing remain inscribed in the fabric of school buildings, the spatialities of educational provision and access, and the experience and qualification of teachers. As noted previously, the adoption of neoliberal economic development policies has resulted in the entrenchment of structural inequalities in educational provision and outcome (Christie 2010; Tickly 2011). The underlying inequalities remain in South Africa, and the equal provision of funds will not yield a landscape of equal educational opportunities without broader progressive change and moves toward equality. Government policy remains focused upon reform and incremental redress—the expansion of access and provision of basic needs in education. These decisions, however, simply circumvent rather than address the material and spatial inequalities that are part of apartheid’s enduring legacy and that challenge students and teachers alike in the education of the new South African citizenry (see also Fataar 2008). These inequalities entrench disparities in life chances and hinder social mobility within South Africa, underscoring the imperative to ensuring continued focused interventions in education systems around the world in ways that improve equality in provision, practice, and outcomes so as to deliver on policy rhetoric that locates education as vital to social mobility.

Compounding these challenges of unequal conditions for schooling is a failure of the government to provide a coherent framework and language to talk about race/nonracialism, redress, and (in)equality (see Maré 2001). Teachers are hamstrung, unsure of how to talk about histories of inequality and the ways inequality remains inscribed in the educational and social landscapes, or how to debate contemporary efforts toward redress and equality without talking about race, and potentially (and inadvertently) reinstilling racist attitudes and division or making education seem meaningless in the lives of many learners. This lack of an alternative language, and guidance from government for teachers, through which to operationalize idea(l)s of equality, opportunity, redress, and development is a major weakness in South African educational policy and practice.

While teachers could take a more active role in driving this debate going forward, there are a number of key factors that render such efforts problematic. First, the lack of a framework through which to talk about development

and (in)equality that does not rely upon racial epithets is a broader challenge with which the South African government has thus far failed to deal (see Maré 2001). Second, teachers are concerned that in the current educational and political context, in which race remains a highly charged topic, any efforts to engage with this issue would leave them open to accusations of racism and to persecution as a consequence. Third, there are doubts as to whether the Department of Education or the teachers' unions are equipped to mobilize in response to this concern given the broad range of challenges facing the education sector. These factors, allied to a general sense of fatigue and exhaustion among the teachers interviewed, mean that while teachers could push for greater leadership roles in addressing the curricular and pedagogical issues raised, there is, in reality, limited scope for such interventions and very limited likelihood that these would succeed. Rather, such efforts should come from other actors in the sector.

Education may be tasked with creating new South African citizens (Enslin 2003), but these citizens' engagement with the content and aims of education depends, to a great extent, upon their aspirations for the future and the value attached to formal schooling to those ends. In South Africa, education is undoubtedly a site for nation building. Within this transitional context, however, these processes are constrained by a range of conceptual and material factors that undermine the progressive intent inherent in education policy and practice, resulting in, at worst, a regressive—but more commonly, an ambiguous—realization of the ideals contained within the intended cultural (re)production of the postapartheid nation-building project. These engagements and challenges are echoed in experiences of education systems elsewhere, both in transitional societies and established democracies, illustrating the need for policy makers and educators to recognize and respond to the continually evolving nature and meanings of citizenship, democracy, and nationhood. Ultimately, such contexts problematize the production and narration of “ethical stories of peoplehood” (Smith 2003) that are mobilized within attempts to ensure that education provides a site for progressive cultural reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). As transitional (and entrenched) states negotiate competing educational priorities, the shying away from contentious topics within and beyond educational policy and practice can store up and exacerbate key challenges to the ideals and foundations of the envisaged nation (Fataar 2008; Goldberg 2009). It is vital, therefore, that established and transitional education systems identify and respond to key challenges—negotiating race/nonracialism, contentious histories, divided societies, and histories of conflict—to ensure that the new stories of nationhood and peoplehood serve to culturally reproduce an open, tolerant, and progressive society.

Thus, while education may be viewed as a tool for empowerment and the basis for a new kind of citizen in South Africa, many students encounter

it within a context of profound powerlessness and do not view it as a vehicle for personal and social advancement. Rather than being a means of overcoming the nation's challenge, the system itself has become one of the problems during the transition. The failure to provide a coherent strategy for a move to nonracialism and to provide an alternative language of difference and diversity compounds these challenges; in Smith's (2003) terms, there is no way to tell a new story of peoplehood. Furthermore, decisions taken in the context of transition have become ossified in policy and practice, leaving a stark gap between the two that is common to many states undergoing educational reform (e.g., see Kim 2011). In this case, the failure to address the legacy of inequality seems to have cemented the effects of past practices and relationships in the contemporary challenges of building a new citizenry.

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