

Changing regimes: Governmentality and education policy in post-apartheid South Africa

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Abstract

This article applies Foucault's notion of governmentality to educational restructuring in post-apartheid South Africa. It argues that the nature of government in a modern state entails engaging with particular practices and domains of knowledge, which themselves constrain the changes that are conceivable and credible. Using Foucault's concepts of 'conduct of conduct', regimes of practices and 'saviors', the article outlines the approach adopted by the new government in relation to establishing constitutional ground rules and managing the economy. It argues that in its approach to restructuring education, the new government prioritised issues relating to the 'conduct of conduct'. The article suggests that Foucault's approach of questioning normalisations might yield alternative accounts of the exercise of governmental power in changing education. It ends by proposing that a range of theoretical framings be used in engaging critically with educational change.

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1. Introduction

Since the unbanning of the ANC in 1990, discourses of education policy have been extensively used to articulate the possibilities and limits of educational change in South Africa. This stands in contrast to the prevalence of discourses of liberation and resistance characteristic of the 1980s. In 1990, the National Education Policy Investigation used the format of policy options to explore what an education system based on the values of the broad democratic movement might look like. This policy format was maintained in the Implementation Plans

for Education and Training, co-ordinated by the ANC's Education Desk and the Centre for Educational Policy Development. The ANC's (1994) 'yellow book', *A Policy Framework for Education and Training*, continued this tradition. All of these initiatives involved participation of a range of educationists and individuals who endorsed the values of the mass democratic movement. In addition, a number of civil society groupings and non-government organisations set out and lobbied for proposals for new policy. Policy discourse was pervasive.

By the mid-1990s, education theorists and researchers had begun to puzzle about what had happened to the envisaged policy shifts after the establishment of the new Government of National

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Unity (GNU) in 1994. In a significant article entitled ‘Remember people’s education? Shifting alliances, state-building and South Africa’s narrowing policy agenda’, Chisholm and Fuller (1996, p. 693) pointed to ‘a sudden move to the political centre by South Africa’s Government of National Unity’. Conceding that the People’s Education agenda of the 1980s ‘did not constitute a coherent set of policies’, they argued that nonetheless ‘it did provide a vision of future policy priorities, largely centred on the classroom’ (1996, p. 695). Their argument was that vision had not been sustained in the subsequent policy agenda.

Engaging with and extending Chisholm and Fuller’s argument, de Clercq (1997) argued that the policy proposals generated by the GNU were themselves problematic: they were ‘flawed in their conceptualisation’ of policy and the policy process, and they ‘misjudge[d] the educational context and dynamics on the ground’ (1997, p. 127). de Clercq argued that the new policy proposals were not likely to meet their intended goals of redress: ‘Because of the way they understand and address the problem and the policy process, these policies are in danger of creating conditions that will assist the privileged education sector to consolidate its advantages while making it difficult for the disadvantaged to address their problematic political realities’ (1997, p. 127).

Since these early formulations of a policy problem, policy themes have been extensively explored in a number of subsequent articles, book chapters and edited collections. Collections by Motala and Pampallis (2001), Sayed and Jansen (2001) and Chisholm et al. (2003) gave prominence to policy in their titles, and contain many good analyses of the policy process and policy shifts as well as systemic changes in education post-apartheid. In a different tradition, stands Fleisch’s textured, insider account of educational restructuring in the province of Gauteng and Chisholm’s (2004) edited collection *Changing Class: Education and Social Change in Post-apartheid South Africa*, which uses a different discourse of ‘contours’, ‘landscapes’ and ‘margins of change’. Certainly, Tikly’s (2003) article on ‘Governmentality and the study of education policy in South Africa’ suggests a shift from the policy genre.

This article endorses the insights provided by the education policy literature outlined above, and suggests a slightly different approach to the puzzle of why the visions of change so characteristic the 1980s and early 1990s were not carried through by

post-1994 governments. While endorsing the importance of historical forces in shaping change, and the importance of policy discourses in mediating between what is and what might be, I suggest that policy discourses by themselves do not provide a complete account of the task of what government entails. Using Foucault’s concept of governmentality, I argue that the nature of government in a modern state entails engaging with particular practices and ways of thinking which themselves set limits to the changes that are conceivable and credible. This is not to argue for determinism or the impossibility of agency in change, but rather to address in a different way what taking and holding the reigns of government entails. According to Gordon (2002, p. xxiii), Foucault held the view that ‘A Left that cannot show it knows how to govern or has a clear conception of what governing is will not be likely to achieve power’. The perspective proposed here is that the mere task of shifting from a liberation movement to form a government entailed adopting a framework of procedures, regulations and domains of knowledge, the consequences of which may be traced in the ways in which the ANC-led GNU engaged with educational change.

2. Governmentality

Foucault’s notion of governmentality addresses both the practices by which modern governments exercise control over their populations, and the rationalities by which these practices appear ‘normal’. In an often-quoted phrase, Foucault (1982, pp. 220–221) refers to government as ‘the conduct of conduct’, or the power to act on the actions of others. Tracing different forms of rule in western history, Foucault (1991) looks at the emergence of ‘government’ as a particular mode of rule from the middle of the sixteenth century, and ‘governmentality’ from the eighteenth century onwards. Liberal constitutional governments in this period have as their focus the government of *populations* made up of individuals—the government of all and each—and they have particular governmental practices and particular rationalities and doctrines about how to govern (see Foucault, 2000; Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999; Christie and Sidhu, 2005).

Distinctively, Foucault’s (1988, p. 81) work focuses not on the forms of the state and its institutions, but on the multiple practices by which an assemblage of institutions, authorities and

agencies act to shape the actions of populations, and on the mentalities that normalise these. In broad terms, government refers to ‘techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour’ and it consists, on the one hand, of a series of specific procedures and techniques—‘regimes of practices’—and on the other, of a complex set of domains of knowledge—‘*savoirs*’. In looking at the modern state, Foucault develops the terms ‘biopower’ and ‘biopolitics’ to denote a specific form of governmental power which addresses the administration, control and regulation of human beings as members of populations: their ‘health, sanitation, birth-rate, longevity, race’ (Foucault, 1991, p. 73).

For Foucault (1988, p. 104), the exercise of power is a central problematic, to be explored in its micro-forms and manifestations rather than sought in obvious places. His concern is to explore ‘strategies of power’: networks, mechanism and techniques as well as the accompanying rationalities which normalise acts of power so that there is a sense that a particular decision ‘could not but be taken in the way it was’. Writing about war, Foucault suggests that accounts of the exercise of power typically portray a rationality which covers over the disorder, confusions and chance happenings as well as brute force and violence that combat entails. Above this ‘tangle’, a rationality of calculations and strategies grows, which is fragile and illusory. However, it has the appearance of ‘a fundamental, abiding rationality, linked by nature to the just and the good’, underpinning ‘the visible brutality of bodies and passions’ (1997, p. 62). Foucault’s (1997) project was to provide an ‘explanation from below’, to develop an approach which ‘turns the traditional values of intelligibility upside down’:

This type of discourse develops entirely within the historical dimension. It undertakes not to measure history, unjust governments, abuses, and acts of violence with the ideal principle of a reason or a law but rather, to waken, beneath the form of institutions or laws, the forgotten past of real struggles, of masked victories and defeats, the dried blood in the codes (1997, p. 62).

It is important to recognise that the ‘regimes of practice’ and ‘*savoirs*’ of governmentality are not foundational truths or rational laws; they are the products of ‘petty circumstances’ and chance happenings, illusions and mystifications, as well as calculations and strategies in the exercise of power. Particular ways of doing things may appear to be

inevitable, or the only decision that could have been taken, but this is the effect of rationalities that accompany the exercise of power. It is also important to remember Foucault’s (1988, p. 84) observation that ‘there is no power without potential refusal or revolt’. Institutions are full of ‘cracks, silent shocks, malfunctionings’ (1988, p. 56) and the challenge is always to work against seeming inevitabilities and monolithic manifestations, as points of departure for alternative action, and as places for reworking matrices and strategies of power.

In using this approach to understand post-apartheid education in South Africa, a number of caveats are important. First, Foucault’s work on governmentality forms a small part of his later corpus, and is sketchy and incomplete. I suggest that it is best used for the insights offered by its perspectives on power, and more specifically, power/knowledge. In my view, governmentality does not replace the textured analysis offered by historical approaches to political economy. Nor does it replace Weber’s major work on bureaucracy, in comparison with which it appears particularly sketchy and unexplored. Nor is it an alternative to theories of administration. Rather, it is a form of analysis which foregrounds the different practices and rationalities of power/knowledge which have historically accompanied different forms of government. I use the concept here, not as an overarching theory, but as an approach to opening up the operations of power/knowledge in the myriad practices of the state. This leads to my second caveat: the recognition that the strict adoption of a Foucauldian mindset may itself powerfully limit what may be said and done. In my view, this is not the most useful way to use the insights of a post-structuralist theoretical position (see Yeatman, 1994). Rather than using governmentality as an alternative ‘grand narrative’ in explaining education policy settlements and practices, I suggest that it be used for the part of the narrative that it most usefully explains. Third, governmentality should not be understood as an explanation in itself; to do so brings a teleology and determinism which is a historical and a sociological, and which ultimately brings little additional understanding to social activity. Such an approach also misses one of the strengths of a Foucauldian analysis: the detailed textures available through genealogy and archaeology. This article can do no more than outline the concepts of a Foucauldian approach; the detailed

account of multiple practices whereby institutions act to shape the actions of populations and their accompanying rationalities lie beyond what is possible here. Without them, however, any Foucauldian account runs the danger of being sterile, lacking flesh and blood, without the contingency and petty circumstances, emotions and confusions in which people make history.

3. Governmentality in the ‘new’ South Africa

As mentioned earlier, the ANC-led government came to power, not through the anticipated bloody conflagration, but through negotiated settlement, which included forming a government of national unity with the erstwhile apartheid government and other political groupings. Moreover, the ANC came to government as the leader in a tripartite alliance consisting of itself, the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions, also involving negotiations and compromises. Thus, the liberation movements did not ‘overthrow the state’ or ‘seize state power’; instead, they entered into power-sharing arrangements with the assumption that they would, over time, bring about transformation. The complexity of exercising power through the assemblage of institutions and practices making up the state was thus rendered even more complex by the ambiguities and difficulties of power-sharing and compromise. How, then, and in what ways, did they exercise government?

In changing status from a banned ‘terrorist’ organisation to the elected leaders of a democratic modern state, a high priority for the ANC was to show that it could govern—that it could think and act like the government of a modern state. Using Foucault’s categories, this meant attending to issues of population, economy, and security, engaging with particular technologies of practice and domains of knowledge. Pivotal tasks for the ANC leading government were to build governmental capacity within its own ranks; to establish different ground rules for the ‘conduct of conduct’; to develop alternative measures to those of apartheid for regulating the population; to take decisive steps in the macro-economic arena to build confidence in its ability to manage the economy in global conditions; and to establish legitimacy and capacity as a leader on the African continent and a player in world affairs.

Taking over government meant engaging with established rules and procedures (‘regimes of

practices’) as well as the accumulated bodies of knowledge (‘*savoirs*’) which frame up and address issues in specific ways. If education is viewed from the perspective of governing the welfare of populations, the new government had a number of tasks to attend to. It was required to establish a new education system which erased the categories of population registration which were key to apartheid regulations and rationalities. This it had to do while still running the existing system, and conveying credibility in its capacity to do both without ‘dropping standards’. Discourses of equity and redress, part of the liberation movement, had to be woven into regulatory frameworks. Macro-questions of redress would necessarily entail grappling with existing regulations and knowledges in a range of areas: how to finance and administer the system and its schools; what actual steps to take to work against the fundamental inequalities of the apartheid system materially as well as symbolically; what steps to take to deracialise the system; how to establish legitimate governance for schools and other educational institutions which had a history of contestation of authority; how to reduce spending on the personnel budget in education in order to free up money for other changes; what to teach in the new system; how best to assess and accredit; how to administer the national system of examinations and their results; how to develop teachers’ capacity and willingness to participate in a new system and new curriculum; and so on. The list is endless and daunting (see Fleisch, 2002; Chisholm, 2004). However, the list continues at the micro-level of institutional practices: what records to keep on students and how to keep them; how to get textbooks delivered to schools; how to get the right number of teachers appointed to each school; how to establish basic financial accountability at school level. In each of these areas, existing regulations and practices and the knowledge bases informing them had to be grasped and, where necessary, shifted—bodies of knowledge on appropriate budgetary expenditure on education in relation to other services; on labour relations; on the statistical procedures for establishing norms in the national matriculation examination; and so on.

Arguably, one reason why idealist policy proposals developed before the election did not have their anticipated salience was because they were not grounded in a conception or experience of governmentality, and did not anticipate or address the day-to-day imperatives of running the system and at the

same time changing it. In encountering the existing regimes of practices and attendant knowledge domains in the institutions of government, the ANC and its allies made circumstantial if not arbitrary choices alongside considered policy decisions, and the rationalities which took shape around these actions inevitably glossed over the historical struggles of the past, covering the ‘dried blood in the codes’ (Foucault, 1997, p. 62) and giving a sense of purpose and inevitability to the results. The result, I argue, was the governmentality of a modernist capitalist state in historically specific form.

4. The conduct of conduct

Establishing constitutional ground rules—the basis for ‘the conduct of conduct’—was an early priority of the ANC-led alliance. Even before the transfer of power to the new government, was the task of drafting a new Constitution and Bill of Rights (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Reflecting global as well as local expertise, the Constitution may be viewed as an exemplar of liberal modernism. It enshrines rights to equality, human dignity, and freedom, and outlaws discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sex, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, age, disability, culture, language and so on. This framework of rights was taken up (alongside the theme of human resource development) in the first White Paper on Education and Training (Republic of South Africa, 1995), which set the ground rules for the restructuring of education and the development of new policies.

In terms of governmentality, it is worth noting that the Constitution as well as the White Paper and subsequent education policies actively framed the population in terms of non-racism and equal rights. In the face of apartheid’s structured and codified identities of difference, the government pledged itself to non-racism, a common national identity and a single citizenship in a democratic polity—a set of modernist ground rules. In contrast to the old, the new governmentality emphasised commonalities rather than differences, reconciliation rather than conflict, and inclusion rather than exclusion.

Yet statements of rights do not actually deliver rights; rather, they provide frameworks in which these may be fought for and, hopefully, won. The right to basic education is a case in point, as school fees and other costs in practice exclude poor children from attending school and the gulf in the

quality of educational experience provided by rich and poor schools is almost as wide as ever (see Chisholm et al., 2003). Moreover, non-racism and a common identity cannot be built simply through citizenship rights, crucial though these may be in a democratic polity. Alexander (2002, p. 82) is trenchantly critical of the ANC’s ‘glacial tempo’ in dealing with issues of language, race and ethnicity, which he terms ‘the (cultural) software of identity politics’. In his words:

...in this country we face the real problem that if we do not promote national unity, that is, arrive at a core of common values, practices and national projects (regardless of the class character of the leadership for the moment), we shall, as in similar cases in recent historical experience in Europe, Africa and Asia, fall apart into warring ethnic groups, each with a more or less separatist agenda. If that were to happen, similar events to the north of us would pale into historical insignificance (2002, p. 91).

In other words, it is necessary to go beyond a discourse of rights to achieve social change. Modernist discourses of rights and citizenship have an apparent universalism and certainty which belie their historically contingent forms. They are not stable and singular in meaning, and their political history shows them to be contested and hybrid in practice. The challenge is to work with these in new ways, to engage with networks of power, practices, subjectivities and knowledge domains. Alexander has pointed to the importance of building common identity alongside difference, and this is particularly pertinent as class relations in South Africa become more racially diffuse. It is important to recognise that statements of non-racism are fragile, given the historical struggles which have preceded them and the sedimentations of past struggle along racial lines. Foucault’s analysis alerts us to ‘the dried blood in the codes’ (1997, p. 62)—but the blood in this case may not yet be completely dried, the tangled contests not yet settled, the past struggles not yet exhausted.

A second major aspect of the new governmentality has been management of the economy. The ANC and SACP, partners in exile, had a long-standing pragmatic agreement on change: democratic political transformation in the first instance would open the ground for inequalities of ownership and social class to be addressed subsequently. After the unbanning of the ANC and other political

movements in February 1990 and in the lead-up to the elections of 1994, the ANC, SACP and COSATU had attempted to formulate a coherent development strategy for radical economic and social transformation. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was based on the central principle of ‘growth through redistribution’. However, by the end of 1996, this redistributive agenda had faded away as a program for transformation. One reason for this was that its agenda was too complex to implement (see Christie, 1996a). The redirection of resources, establishment of cross-department initiatives, and stimulation of grass-roots economic activity could not be achieved, particularly under the conditions of the new government of national unity described above. Their logic was not able to prevail over regimes of practices and domains of knowledge operating in the existing government institutions.

More importantly, however, in the global climate of neoliberal capitalism, the ANC made the political choice to attune its macroeconomic policy to market-led economic growth (see Marais, 2001; Weber, 2002). In place of the RDP, the ANC introduced its Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, an unabashedly neo-liberal macro-economic programme of deregulation, privatisation and fiscal restraint. Distancing itself from Marxist ideology, socialism and nationalisation, the government did all it could to court domestic and international capital, riding any tensions this caused within alliance partners. Thus the bodies of knowledge which rationalised government policy and normalised their actions were predominantly oriented towards maintaining the existing economic framework, rather than changing it.

In reflecting on this, it is worth recognising that the ANC-led government inherited a deeply distorted economy which had been weakened by anti-apartheid economic sanctions. In global terms, South Africa may be described as a middle level, semi-industrialised economy, with contrasting first and third world living conditions based historically on race (see Castells, 2000). This is a complex economy to govern. Yet it is important to remember that macro-economic policies are based partly at least on political choices and judgements. And these in turn are based upon particular domains of knowledge which normalise what may and may not be said. As Foucault’s work points out, discourse systematically and actively forms that about which it speaks, so that the very categories of

analysis used to talk about the economy (in this case) themselves constitute the options they pose.

An analysis of governmentality opens up the possibilities of tracing not only policies and practices, but also actors and their subject positions in the discourses that form them. A Foucauldian approach calls for consideration how activists and intellectuals came to assume the subject positions of government officials, parliamentarians and bureaucrats, who articulated a variant of neo-liberalism in a particular engagement with the global economy. To what extent have these social actors changed the subject positions and practices of government in the political and economic decisions they have taken, and to what extent has being in government changed the actors? I would suggest that engaging with government power in a modern capitalist state tempers visions of what is possible, and that discourses of government normalise what office bearer subjects can and cannot say, in ways that rule out radical speech and action. In any event, it is important to recognise that the South African transition is not a narrative of neoliberalism imposed in a monolithic top-down way, but one of nuanced mechanisms of power and strategy, as well as contestations and contingencies, played out by various actors in complex global conditions. The unequal structure of interests remains largely untouched to this point (see Marais, 2001), though there are important shifts in the race-class configuration. A complex and contradictory transitional phase of government still prevails.

5. Educational restructuring

Education policy and provision was one among many areas that required immediate attention to break with the racial distortions and assumptions of apartheid. In the lead-up to the elections, significant policy actors, including the ANC, COSATU, private sector groups and even the National Party, had been involved in policy exploration. What was envisaged by the broad democratic movement was the integration of education and training in a system of lifelong learning that would articulate adult basic education and training, formal schooling, and learning programmes for out-of-school children and youth. Structures representing civil society stakeholder interests would ensure accountability and participation at all levels of the integrated system. A national qualification framework (NQF) would plot equivalences between qualifications to

maximise horizontal and vertical mobility. New policies would articulate changes across the whole of the existing education and training system.

As it happened, there were considerable shifts after the 1994 elections. In the new government, education and training were kept in separate ministries, and policies for the two were developed separately (see Christie, 1996b). Structures for civil society stakeholder involvement were not included in the new designs. The GNU's moderate politics of compromise tempered the alliance's more radical pre-election ideals, and activists and inexperienced bureaucrats rubbed shoulders in government with erstwhile apartheid officials. As with politics and the economy, conventional forms of government prevailed over radical visions of change. It is this shift which policy literature has identified and deliberated upon extensively.

The lens of governmentality provides a slightly different logic to that of policy. From this perspective, what stands out is that, in facing the complexities of administering the system outlined earlier in this article, the new government addressed issues of governance and 'conduct of conduct' as a priority. An early move was to dismantle and restructure the apartheid education system with its 19 different racially based departments, and to restructure the system provincially. New organograms and staffing arrangements were developed. The national Department of Education was given responsibility for developing norms and standards, frameworks and national policies for the system as a whole, while nine new provincial Departments were given responsibility for implementation and service delivery within these frameworks. This restructuring proved to be a massive bureaucratic task in itself, leaving aside the need to deliver educational reforms at classroom level.

As a priority, the new national government set out to develop blueprint designs for education policy frameworks. As many writers have pointed out, these policies drew specifically on what was judged to be best international practice, as well as local values (Sayed and Jansen, 2001; Cross et al., 2002). However, in policy terms, major weaknesses were soon apparent: first, as ideal-type frameworks, they did not have strategies for transforming actual conditions on the ground; and second, they tended to require greater capacity to implement than has been available in the bureaucracies and schools. There is not an education writer who omits to point out the gap between idealist policies and actual experiences.

Using a Foucauldian approach, it is important that government actions not be seen as the only way things could be done (though the *savoirs* and rationalities of government would have it that they are). That alternative approaches to education transformation were possible, is well highlighted by de Clercq's (1996) analysis of restructuring policies during this period. de Clercq illustrates convincingly that those in power had choices about how to exercise their power, including (she suggests) building more explicitly on prior policy work, mobilising educational communities through campaigns and pilot programs, working in partnership with NGOs and other interest groups to deliver better quality services to traditionally disadvantaged groups, or focusing on building the managerial capacity of its own bureaucrats. Ultimately, the new government chose to approach change through consolidating its own structures of authority and frameworks of conduct. Concerns about the conduct of conduct preceded concerns about delivering educational services or addressing the conditions of the most disadvantaged communities as a priority in a programme of redress. Continuity of conventional forms took precedence over exploration of alternatives.

That changes have proven to be so hard to implement is evidence of the depth and complexity of apartheid's legacy, of continuities as well as changes in governmentality, and of the time and effort that it takes to build new regularities of practice and new rationalities. But, I would suggest, the new system also bears the marks of the rationalities of modernist democracy and market economy, which are not fundamentally transformative or redistributive in nature.

In relation to the normalisation of knowledge around regimes of practice, an important example is to be found in expenditure on education. Given that macroeconomic policies have been driven by logics of fiscal austerity, a reduction in social spending (including education spending) and achieving greater efficiencies within the system, these logics and their attendant *savoirs* have had significant implications for educational restructuring. Without an increased budgetary allocation for education, the distortions of apartheid's resource distribution in education continue to be reflected in the system and profound inequalities remain. Improvements are certainly in evidence, but conditions in the poorest and most marginalised communities and their schools have been slow to change. Arguably,

without a large injection of spending, historical inequalities are likely to remain in the system for the foreseeable future. Yet the rationalities of the particular economics of education on which these decisions are made insist that the 8% of GDP that South Africa spends on education cannot be increased, and is in fact a greater percentage than, for example, OECD countries. Thus continuities of logic and practice pervade education, and the disparities of social class have hardly shifted even though there are racial blurrings across the historically rigid boundaries of apartheid. The population to be regulated is formally equal in terms of citizenship and rights, while profound inequalities remain.

Speculatively, I would suggest that curriculum change is another area where a Foucauldian approach might yield insights—particularly in terms of policy archaeology. How did it happen that the broad generic outcomes envisaged in the early 1990s for an integrated system of education and training were transformed into the jargonistic, conceptually empty, and fragmented outcomes of Curriculum 2005, and simultaneously, the fragmenting unit standards of the training system? If the National Qualifications Framework was first envisaged in terms of enhancing mobility and flexibility, how did it come to take shape as a rigid, codified system of control? The answers to questions such as these are not to be found only in policies, the way they were formulated, or the gap between policy and implementation. A far more textured investigation of the regimes of practices and rationalities of government, and attendant subjectivities, is needed to understand changes of this nature. An approach ‘from below’ would enable narratives of change to emerge that come closer to explaining how decisions were actually made in the exercise of governmental power, as well as the strategies of power entailed in them. In this regard, Chisholm’s (2005) insider account of the forces shaping the Revised National Curriculum Statement provides important insights on the influence of interest groups in the shaping of curriculum. Yet its analytical approach does not aim to bring the power practices of government under scrutiny.

6. Theorising changes/changing theories

The account of educational restructuring provided here argues for the importance of considering the nature of governmental power in understanding

South Africa’s transition to a modern democratic state under the leadership of the ANC. In arguing this, I am not attempting to replace policy analysis or theories of political economy in explaining change, but rather to put an additional theoretical perspective to work alongside them. I suggest that policy has its limits as an explanatory discourse and as a tool for change—a point which applies also to governmentality.

The perspective I have outlined here challenges us to engage with the regularities of practice and domains of knowledge that constitute governmentality, with its technologies and networks of power, but also its ruptures and cracks. In line with Foucault’s observation that resistance accompanies power, it is important also to engage with the limits set by discourses which normalise patterns of power and unequal subjectivities. Thus I would argue for the ethical importance of engaging with the institutions of government to work for more equal and socially just conditions for all.

Experience in South Africa over the last decade suggests that it is important to consider change not only in relation to shifts from one state form to another, but also in terms of engaging with the practices and rationalities of government in a continuing process. This is certainly the case as far as education is concerned, given not only the complex legacy of inequalities in South Africa, but also the difficulties of changing the patterns and regularities of modernist schooling and its accompanying domains of knowledge. Rather than searching for overarching theories and explanations, the approach I suggest here is that range of different theoretical framings may be necessary in these times as a basis for critical engagement with educational change.

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