National education policy and the learning subject: exploring the gaps

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I explore the relationship between education policy and identity by looking at how the learning subject is constituted at national education policy level. The notion of the “ideal South African learning subject”, which I suggest, foregrounds national education policy discourse, contradicts the reality of continued class, race, cultural and gender divisions that influence ways in which identity is constructed. The representation of the “ideal” learning subject has resulted in the over looking of contextual realities that have played a crucial role in defining the identities of young South Africans. It is the disconnect between this policy borrowing orientation on the one hand, and the contextual realities of a country that continues to be fractured by race and class that is of interest here. My focus in this paper is how the learning subject is imagined at policy level and this will be addressed by examining what is said about the subject as well as what is not said. The absence of a clear articulation of the learning subject relates to evident gaps in national policy discourse, namely, that of difference and diversity. By making use of text analyses, sections of two policy documents are examined. First, I analyse sections of the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) Policy as an example of a key National Policy, and thereafter explore how the subject is constituted in The South African Schools Act (SASA). By drawing out recurrent themes and exploring ambiguities within these texts, competing discourses are exposed which serve to influence how the meaning of the subject is constructed at policy level.

Keywords: difference; discourse; diversity; identity; learning subject; post modern; South African Schools Act; Whole School Evaluation

Introduction: the learning subject

A critical question in terms of the articulation of the learning subject at policy level is whether the identity of the South African subject, as envisaged by the policy makers, is legitimising of the individual both in terms of attitudes to the self, as well as to the other. This is contingent upon a second question, namely, whether the subject as it is constituted opens the space for racially inscribed identities to be sufficiently interrogated by learners in schools so that young people may move beyond a race based identity and engage in processes of imagining new subjectivities. Discussion of the learning subject is therefore integrally linked to the discussion of difference and diversity, and in particular, to how these notions are addressed in key policies and, ultimately, managed in schools.

In the context of this study, ‘diversity’ refers to the acknowledgement of difference in terms of culture; gender; race; religion; language; ability; age; tradition; values; norms; morals, and beliefs. The term ‘inclusivity’ refers to the rejection of homogenisation, bias, discrimination and prejudice through engaging consciously with identities other than one’s own. This implies an attitude to others and an approach to education that is based on fair and just practice. In this paper I do not address the practical application of diversity management training programmes in schools, nor do I explore appropriate measures for the evaluation of diversity management. Both these areas constitute crucial aspects in the broader debates concerning diversity in schools; however, each requires an in depth study, and must therefore be deferred to further research. I focus instead on the articulation of the subject at policy level through examining how the subject is imagined by the policy makers. Dominant discourses in selected sections of SASA and the WSE Policy are analysed to
understand how the subject is spoken of and, of equal importance, to reveal the unspoken. A description of what is present in these texts is employed to reveal what is absent in them and to identify the important issues that have been overlooked. This is intended to promote an understanding of how the subject is constituted in some of our key policies and whether the discursive space is provided for possibilities of new subjectivities.

The inclusion of difference and diversity in policy discourse necessitates at the outset an explicit articulation of the learning subject within a specific social, cultural, historical and political context. This perspective is currently obfuscated by imported ideologies and international policy borrowing. I suggest that the overlooking of difference and diversity in education and its absence in systemic school development have profound consequences for the ways in which young South Africans identify themselves and the other, and furthermore, contribute to sustained patterns of racism, prejudice and discrimination in South Africa. It is my intention in this regard to critique sections from SASA as well as the WSE Policy by making explicit the notions and assumptions underlying these texts and, in so doing, create an understanding of how the individual is constituted at policy level. To this end I critically examine references within the selected sections of the texts, to the ‘subject’ with a focus on exploring ways in which the individual is represented. In deconstructing assumed notions of the learning subject, I critique those aspects of the policy that I believe insufficiently address the complexity of the South African learner identity.

The post-modern subject

The Enlightenment notion of the subject as stable, coherent, centered, self contained and differentiated from the social structure has become increasingly difficult to sustain (Gillborn, 1995:71). The fracturing of social life in post modernity has dislocated the subject from its previously held central position, and suffused individual identity with new possibilities. Hall describes the postmodern subject as “having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity becomes a ‘moveable feast’: formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us” (Hall, 1992:277). As such, the subject no longer is able to see itself as entirely self integrated, absorbing its identity solely from “the essential centre of the self” (1992:275). Instead he/she “assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent ‘self’” (1992:277) identities that are both “relational and contextual” (Peters, 1995:49).

Hall, Held and McGrew (1992) argue that the more globalised social life becomes, “the more identities become detached disembedded from specific times, places, histories, and traditions, and appear ‘free floating’” (1992:303). Although identities may be seen to be shifting, they are not entirely “free floating” either (Procter, 2004:120). In this paper it is the positioning of the subject within a particular context that is of interest, as, according to Hall “every identity … insists on specificity, on conjuncture” (2004:121). Because of the shifting, contested nature of the post modern subject and the need simultaneously for identity to be positioned in a cultural, historical context, policy makers are called upon to explicitly articulate the type of subjectivity that is envisaged as it is through discourse that “subjects are fashioned in terms of social positioning, subjectivity and voice” (Fejes & Nicoll, 2008:22). Within the context of South African education policy, an explanation of the subject is critical because of South Africa’s complex, contested past and, furthermore, because of the recent emergence within the post 1994 education policies of “the possibility of new articulations” the potential for the creation of new identities; the “production of new subjects …” (Hall, 1992:279).

The location and articulation of the subject within SASA and the WSE Policy concerns the broader “relationship between educational policy and identity” (Soudien, 1999:1). The deconstruction of this relationship would help to make clear what the implications of identity and difference in the policy might be why this has been included in particular places such as the Life Orientation Learning Area on the one hand, and why, on the other, it has been omitted from that part of the
policy which directs the school’s development. It is suggested that the lack of explicit articulation of the subject is problematic in that embedded notions of the individual that have occupied pre and post modern western thinking have become normalised, idealised assumptions which remain unnoticed and unchallenged.

Soudien’s exploration of how subjectivity is “being imagined in our education policy” (2008:3) demonstrates that through the current education policies, “our new government … misrecognises the child whom it is serving” (2008:3) by displacing “non western and non traditional forms of learning” (1999:11) and meaning. By activating the subject within the policy and redefining the subject in relation to his/her history, the space could potentially be opened for “a new South African identity” (Soudien, 1999:1).

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“… it is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know” (Bourdieu in Fairclough, 1989:41).

The explication of the subject within national education policy discourse has direct implications for how awareness of the self is constructed within South African schools. Potter and Wetherell (1987) acknowledge that “the question becomes not what is the true nature of the self, but how is the self talked about, how is it theorized in discourse?” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:102). Soudien suggests that education historically has misunderstood the child it has served, just as now, 340 years after the introduction of formal education, the child continues to be ‘misrecognised’ (Soudien, 2008:3). Drawing on current National Education Policies, he posits that these education policies “read them in ways that are dismissive of and in some ways contemptuous of their histories and … impose on them ways of being and becoming that are profoundly discriminatory” (2008:3). The persistence of racial injustice, discrimination and unequal opportunities experienced by children of colour shape the process of how young people see themselves, and each other. In this sense, “the question of the subject, and subjectivity is, alongside of the economy, the invisible but fundamental problem that haunts us” (2008:4). The kind of injustice to which Soudien refers, may be “located in our policy and the way the policy is implicated in the process of becoming human” (2008:7).

The potential for young South Africans in the 1980s and 1990s to develop their subjectivity to become conscious may be seen as the opportunity to establish and activate their agency. However, the possibility for young people to take control of their lives was dismissed and delegitimized by the redefinition within the new policies of the South African identity. By universalising the subject, the “subordinate identity” (2008:8) of the learner has been submerged and disempowered. The notion of the “universal subject” (Morley & Rasool, 1999:122) establishes a “homogenized, ungendered, non racialized or social classed group” (1999:122) that is disembodied, dislocated and undifferentiated. The learner is therefore positioned as a cognitive unit, devoid of the opportunity to develop “the capacity to act and think in the name of a creative personal freedom” (Touraine, 2000:282). This personal freedom, Touraine suggests, can only be developed through “coming into direct contact with the intellectual, technological and ethical constructs of both the past and the present” (2000:282). As “critical actors in our own histories” (Soudien, 2007:5) we need to find a way of engaging actively with our recent history, so that we are more meaningfully able to “come to terms with the deeply engrained forms of culturalisation or socialisation that accompanied and even characterised our experiences as subjects of history during apartheid” (2007:6).

If identities have been influenced and defined by individual and collective histories in South Africa, I ask whether sufficient opportunities to mediate differences within the education policy context have been provided and, following this, whether the complexity of the South African identity is sufficiently probed at policy level. Although the “1990s (may) have seen the deracialization of social policy” (Gillborn, 1995, 17), I argue that the notion of race in understanding the subject remains absent. Creating a deepened understanding of South African identities, according to this perspective, implies an investigation into the effects of racism in the shaping of South African
identities and in the defining of those relationships. Similarly, an exploration of the implications of the silence of race discourse may reveal the extent to which these silences and absences serve to normalise the subject as the privileged middle class learner, reinforcing traditional power relations which “become so naturalized that they remain unquestioned” (Morley & Rasool, 1999:127). What is of equal interest here is the positioning of those identities that may be regarded as deviating from the norm. In the context of this paper there are important questions that emerge: First, how are issues pertaining to difference and otherness mediated in schools if they are not part of education policy discourse? Second, what are the broader implications of the silence of discourses relating to identity and difference in policies such as WSE, and third, to what extent does this silence permeate the school, reducing possibilities for young people to mediate difference and engage in the formation of new identities?

The selection of the WSE Policy for this study
The WSE Policy was selected for this study as it is this policy that establishes the framework for school development and improvement in South Africa, and it is the school that exists as a primary site for identity formation and socialisation. It is through the school that young people need to be guided and supported in managing and engaging in diverse relationships, and simultaneously in building new subjectivities.

The WSE Policy, which is grounded in the School Effectiveness and to some extent the School Improvement traditions, is dominated by an effectiveness discourse. Both these paradigms, I argue, are disengaged conceptually and methodologically from the social, historical and political context of South Africa. The consequence is that the WSE Policy fails to resonate with the lived dynamics of the local context. This is evident in the epistemological notions and nuances of the policy. The emphasis on concepts such as efficiency, performance, success, effectiveness and evaluation epitomises the ideological orientation of the policy makers, the intention being primarily to prepare young South Africans for effective participation in the global economic market. The normative assumptions embedded in School Effectiveness discourse result in a narrowing of the discursive space, precluding possibilities for alternative discourses representing ‘other’ realities. Moreover, the existence of competing discourses, which will be discussed later, highlights contradictions and ambiguities which serve to obscure the policy’s meaning. Emerging from this is the need to widen the space for the inclusion of discourses pertaining to difference and diversity.

The omission of diversity management from the nine focus areas of WSE
Of the nine focus areas presented to schools in the WSE Policy (see Appendix A), not one addresses diversity management, and it is this omission that requires deeper exploration. The inclusion of difference and diversity in the Life Orientation Curriculum at the GET (General Education and Training) and FET (Further Education and Training) levels without systemic attention being given to diversity and inclusivity suggests the view that diversity can be dislocated and compartmentalised so as to ‘fit’ into a Learning Area, neglecting the need to create a context which foregrounds and underscores the entire policy. West and Hopkins’ (1996) reference to “Whole School” development as an “illusion” (West & Hopkins, 1996:10) as a result of its school effectiveness influence, reminds us of the intention of Whole school Development to be an integrated developmental strategy that is multi faceted, broad, and differentiated—a perspective that potentially takes into account diversity, plurality and all aspects of difference and “otherness”. Such an approach would by necessity legitimate the existence of diverse groups within the school community and would, by implication, ensure that strategies which address diversity and promote inclusivity are integrated in schools.

De Clercq (2007) critiques the WSE Policy, suggesting that a reconceptualised, more “appropriate quality monitoring system” (De Clercq, 2007:97) which can establish the basis for school improvement for all South African schools (2007:97) would be more appropriate. Although the focus of her critique primarily concerns accountability and support, she challenges the “problematic
or ambiguous assumptions” (2007:103) of the WSE strategy. She states that “WSE is not primarily a system which can easily be used to identify specific school improvement strategies”, and it is this point that I wish to reinforce. In the context of this paper, an important question that emerges concerns the appropriate evaluation of diversity management strategies. As De Clercq suggests, the evaluation of school improvement requires a different strategy to that contained in the WSE Policy (2007:103) one that is amenable to the situational context of the school. This suggests that evaluation strategies for diversity management may need to be reconceptualised, as would the specificities of its inclusion in the nine focus areas and in the WSE Policy more generally. These issues, whilst crucial to the discussion of diversity in schools, must be deferred to further research which would need to consider the practical implications of diversity management strategies.

An important point for consideration in this paper, and one that needs to be problematised before considering the practical specificities of diversity management in schools, concerns the normative assumptions underpinning school effectiveness, and the extent to which effectiveness discourse is divorced from the social context of the majority of South African youth. In the argument that follows, notions of achievement, performance and effectiveness will be interpreted as signifying an epistemological understanding of education reflecting a discourse that is “both … homogenized and homogenising” (Morley & Rasool, 1999:13). If school effectiveness discourse is intrinsically homogenising, it is important to ask whether it is discursively congruent with gender, ethnicity, sexuality and social class discourses (1999:15). More specifically, it is the question of whether Whole school Evaluation is epistemologically conducive to the complexity of the South African context that needs to be examined. In order to address this issue, I argue that one must make explicit that which is “hidden, contradictory, distorted and avoided in the common sense rhetoric of school effectiveness” (1999:13).

Although De Clercq questions whether the nine prescribed areas “are the most pertinent and essential to schooling in South Africa” (2007:107), there has been no specific South African study, to my knowledge, which explores the link between the WSE Policy and the South African context, focusing particularly on the need to integrate diversity explicitly and systemically into the policy. More specifically, there has been no literature to date which problematises its absence from the policy and the consequences this may have in terms of the formation of South African learner identities.

Despite South Africa’s fractured past, and despite the WSE Policy existing as one of South Africa’s transformational education policies, discourses pertaining to difference and diversity are absent in the policy. As mentioned, it remains questionable whether the WSE Policy, as it exists, is amenable to the integration of school improvement strategies such as diversity management. The point that needs to be reiterated is that it is the WSE Policy that identifies the nine focus areas for the purpose of school development, yet not one of these areas either identifies diversity management, or includes it as a criterion for school development. This suggests that the WSE Policy, rather than being contextually oriented, is more representative of a global approach to education reform and that policy makers have been predominantly influenced by international trends in policy development. The outcomes based, human capital focus of the policy has overlooked the complexities arising out of the local South African context, with the result that an opportunity for young people to engage with difference and diversity has been forfeited. This is, I have suggested, a critical omission given the defining role race has played in the formation of South African identities. With regard to current scholarship, I have also suggested that there is a gap in the literature pertaining to the WSE Policy in relation to the South African context. Jansen (in Nkomo & Dolby, 2004) expresses a similar concern with regard to the limited focus, in general, of educational literature on race in South Africa:

Educational literature on “race” has focused on an extremely small number (in relative terms) of learners who will attend multiracial schools. Most learners will spend their entire educational careers in schools that are, demographically, entirely black. Yet, the policy issues and questions that swirl around these learners — questions about language, standards, centrali
sation, teachers, and governance are laden with traces of race. Additionally, all of the above are also situated within a new, global reality where the old reality – racial inequality – is still very much alive (Nkomo & Dolby, 2004:5).

The importance of Jansen’s concern in the context of this paper is that it suggests that issues regarding difference which affect the daily realities of South African learners are not being addressed: “… even learners in all black schools are surrounded by ‘difference’ everyday. And schools, as vital components of the public sphere, are often the location for battles over the borders of diversity in a society” (2004:5).

The articulation of the subject in the WSE Policy and SASA: the notion of the ‘learner’

An important consideration in the discussion of the learning subject in the WSE Policy, is the policy’s intention which is to focus on the development and evaluation of the school rather than on individual achievement: “Recognising the importance of schools as the place in which the quality of education is ultimately determined, focus is primarily on the school as a whole rather than simply on individuals and their performance” (Minister’s Foreword, WSE Policy, Government Gazette, 2001:6). Since it is the school that is primarily the unit of analysis rather than the individual learner, it could be argued that it is inappropriate that an explication of the learning subject be presented in the WSE Policy, and that what should assume central focus instead, are the technicalities of the evaluation process. The counter argument presented in response to this view is that if the policy is “aimed at improving the overall quality of education in South African schools” (2001:7) and if it “seeks to ensure that all our children are given an equal opportunity to make the best use of their capabilities” (2001:7), then it is the learning subject that needs to be positioned at the centre of the policy. The WSE Policy states that it prioritises the development of the whole school, and as such identifies the nine focus areas to guide the school in its process of development. However, despite the school development discourse in the policy, (“… focus is primarily on the school as a whole …”) (my emphasis, 2001:6), only one of these focal areas, ‘Learner Achievement’ addresses the needs of the learner. Moreover, the notion of ‘learner achievement’ is narrowly defined, in accordance with the school effectiveness model, which privileges outcomes based principles such as ‘performance’; ‘quality’; ‘effectiveness’; and ‘excellence’. The learner is first mentioned in the policy on page eleven, in the section entitled ‘Principles’, where it is stated that:

… the core mission of schools is to improve the educational achievements of all learners.

Whole school evaluation, therefore, is designed to enable those in schools, supervisors and support services to identify to what extent the school is adding value to learners’ prior knowledge, understanding and skills (2001:11).

If evaluation is, as the policy indicates, the outcome and purpose of this model, then learner achievement and indeed school effectiveness, are based on a positivist, mono causal approach. Furthermore, if Whole school Evaluation is “designed to enable those in schools … to identify to what extent the school is adding value to learners’ prior knowledge …” (2001:11), then, I argue, there needs to be an explicit understanding within the policy, of the differentiation in learners’ “prior knowledge”. Learners’ “prior knowledge” is shaped by specific historical, political and socio economic circumstances. It is not monolithic and cannot be standardised. Therefore if the school is seriously to consider ways in which it may be able to “(add) value to learners’ prior knowledge, understanding and skills” (2001:11), it needs to be able to address first, the contextual realities pertaining to learners’ experiences of their past and second, how these experiences have shaped learners’ identities as well as their “knowledge, understanding and skills” (2001:11).

‘Learner achievement’ is identified as the sixth of the nine areas for evaluation, and the learner is referred to three times in the sections selected for analysis in this paper. It appears therefore that the identification of standards to which schools must aspire in order to become effective, remains the policy’s priority, the implication being that if this outcome is accomplished all other aspects of
the school will automatically function more optimally. However, as a result of being de-centred, the learner is implicitly displaced. The narrow consideration of the subject is problematic if the policy’s “first intent is to redress the discriminatory, unbalanced and inequitable distribution of the education services of the apartheid regime” (2001:8). I argue that the policy must address how discrimination and inequity have influenced the learner’s identity how these contextual realities have come to shape the learner, influencing both individual performance and the performance of the school as a whole.

I now return to the use of the term ‘learner’ which, I suggested earlier, serves to objectify and idealise the subject. The objectification of the subject disengages the child/young adult from his/her cultural identity, discounting any consideration of the difference and individual history that each child brings to the education process. The use of the term ‘learner’ is idealising of the subject in that it universalises the South African child, invoking the assumptions that all children share the same South African history. In emphasising the uniformity of the subject, the policy ignores historical, social and political factors which have resulted in the existence of many different identities. The school operates as a powerful site of identity formation and socialisation; yet it is only in one of the four Life Orientation Learning Areas that issues regarding identity are addressed. Ironically, despite the school’s potential for influencing identity formation and socialisation, school effectiveness narrows the discursive space, validating mainstream, dominant identities and subjectivities. “Subjectivity … is framed in the traditional Western epistemological tradition as the autonomous and rational subject” (Soudien, 1999:10). The silences and absences in the WSE Policy with regard to the learner have served to construct assumed interpretations relating to identity and difference, ensuring con formity by reinforcing traditional power relations (Morley & Rasool, 1999:127).

It would be valuable at this point to refer to SASA in order to understand how that text considers the learning subject. In the Act the learner is defined as “any person receiving education or obliged to receive education …” (SASA, 1996:2). The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘learner’ as “a person who is learning a subject or skill, a person under instruction”. Implicit in this is a strong element of passivity, inactivity and non participation in the learning process. This suggests that young people in South Africa are being attributed an identity which may be regarded as “subordinate” (Soudien, 1999:8), and which undermines and disregards the potential they may have to actively participate and engage in their education to experience rather than receive an education.

In Chapter Two of SASA, entitled ‘The Learner’, focus is placed on “compulsory attendance” (SASA, 1996:3). There is no articulation here, or anywhere else in the Act, of the subject as it is constituted within the social, political and economic context of South Africa. Instead, according to Soudien, the learner is given a “defining singularity” (1999:6) and is cast into a “vision of a modern citizen who is able to manage him or herself in a global 21st century” (1999:9). In the conclusion to his paper, “Heralding the New South African: The Relationship between Educational Policy and Identity” (1999), Soudien suggests:

... texts such as the SASA are profoundly important in holding up to us that which its authors wish us to be and also that which they wish us not to be. In using the approach of deconstruction, it is important to see that it makes possible not only the recognition of contradiction, but fundamentally also the recognition of the deployment of power. Identity framing strategies are an important expression of power (Soudien, 1999:11).

I suggested earlier that the subject, as it is presented in the WSE Policy is suffused with ambiguities. Market place values reflective of, and emanating from, the global context, permeate the education system without being made visible. These values are directly implicated in the production of the learning subject who is positioned in a tightly institutionalised structure of competition, performance and evaluation. Drawing on the work of Bowles and Gintis, Power provides a current applicability of their ‘correspondence thesis’ (Witty & Power, 2003:100), composed 20 years ago, in which they examine a “structural correspondence between the social relations of the educational system and those of production” (2003:100). This raises the issues of “whether schools are still engaged in the production of ‘old’ rather than ‘new’ subjectivities, and more specifically, whether marketised edu
cation systems (are) simply a new way of producing ‘old’ subjects?” (2003:100). The absence of a clear articulation of the subject within school effectiveness discourse serves to displace and de value those ‘learners’ whose subjectivities do not comply with the western, rationalist paradigm, with the result that the majority of young South African school goers find themselves once again disavowed and peripherally positioned.

Diversity management and schools

Of the nine focus areas in the WSE Policy, only one ‘learner achievement’ directly pertains to the learner. Morley and Rasool remind us that “at the heart of the education process lies the child” (Morley & Rasool, 1999:33). Without the child as a pivotal focus, schools may find themselves engaging in Whole school Development without considering its implications for the learners. Amplifying the learner’s experience demands an examination of the expectations placed on diverse students to adjust and adapt to certain cultural norms and behaviour. This necessitates creating new learning activities amenable to different types of learners, “to more equitably match learning experiences to the wealth of diverse intellectual strengths” (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995:37). New attitudes, norms and behaviour based on an anti bias approach would create a school culture and ethos reflecting plurality and inclusivity. By engaging more directly with difference and diversity, schools may begin to address the extent to which gender, race and religion, for example, impact on the experience of schooling for the individual learner and in this way may begin to take responsibility for the influence they have on the identity formation process, both at an individual and social level.

To this end, language and discourse need to be critically examined in an attempt to expose ways in which meaning is created and identity constructed. Ironically, this is obfuscated by “the very vocabulary that we use to talk about discrimination …” (Wildman & Davis, 1995:52). According to these authors, privilege needs to be established as part of the pedagogical discourse so that discussions about race, gender and sexual orientation, are represented as “power system(s) that create privileges in some people as well as disadvantages in others” (1995:52). Such an approach would help to confront and dismantle the ‘normalization of privilege’ (1995:53) so that entrenched characteristics attributed to privilege no longer represent the ‘norm’ against which people are measured and judged. Because systems of privilege reflect power relations which serve to define and influence the way we view ourselves and the other, I argue that they need to be made visible in order to establish the school as a diverse, prejudice free community. Hoare (1994) indicates that diversity management must recognise and teach young people the implications of privilege; that is, the tendency of people within society to group and polarise according to social constructs that have been internalised. Education must therefore “increase understanding that culture and language create prisms of ideas, values, and biases … (and) create ways in which biases are challenged” (Hoare, 1994:30). The inextricable relationship between education and broader societal systems means that “class, gender and racial bias of conventional forms of political association” (Witty & Power, 2003:321) must be critically confronted and challenged.

Finally the principle of diversity management within the education context must reflect a contextualised approach. Through addressing the psychological and social effects of a history of segregation, it is suggested that “deeply held beliefs about the self, the other, and intergroup relations” (2003:184) can be unpacked and probed. Through critical reflection and deconstruction of “‘racially constructed’ understandings of the self, the other and the world …” (2003:185), young people can begin to co construct their realities and their identities in ways that honour difference and draw inspiration and meaning from the other. “Finding ways to dialogue across difference recognising difference while also transcending it is now widely seen as crucial to the survival of democracy” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999:96).
Conclusion

I have argued that the influence of school effectiveness discourse has resulted in the idealising of the subject on the one hand, and in the overlooking of difference and diversity as key areas of Whole school Evaluation and of National Education policies in general, on the other. The consequences of these gaps are first, that schools are not compelled to integrate diversity management in any formalised or structured way and second, that young South Africans continue to define themselves according to pre-constructed notions of race. The opportunity to grapple with identities inherited from a fractured and dislocated past, and to provide the space for re-imagining new identities has been eclipsed by the notion of an idealised learning subject. The space for new identities to be constructed needs to be opened up so that young people may be equipped more effectively to address difference without being truncated by notions of race, gender and class.

By recruiting notions of difference and otherness into education discourse, a greater understanding of the relationship between the self and the other may be encouraged, which may serve to help young people mediate difference and identity and thereby open up the possibility of different conceptualisations of identity so that we no longer define ourselves in terms of a particular identity. Norval calls for a regard for “radical pluralism” (Norval, 1996:304) which requires “responsibility for keeping open the space of contestation of identification” so that the possibility for recognising “the non sutured nature of identity” (1996:305) is protected and fostered. Similarly, Gillborn reminds us that “… an awareness of hybrid identities and ‘cultural syncretism’, should not blind us to the continuing power of traditional ‘racial’ dichotomies categories that have genuine currency in countless contexts and can still prove fatal” (Gillborn, 1995:90). Nkomo and Dolby suggest that “… the changing landscape of race, racism, and racial identities is further complicated by the desire to ‘escape’ race to somehow transcend or mute its power in a search for a common national identity. Such a desire is expressed in policies and practices of non-racialism, which simultaneously mark the importance of race, while stripping away its power” (Nkomo & Dolby, 2004:5).

I have argued therefore that through the representation in key education policies of the “ideal learning subject”, issues pertaining to difference and identity have become submerged. The masking of these discourses has resulted in them being infused with ambiguities and uncertainties. By recruiting discourses pertaining to difference and diversity into national education policies and by reconstituting the subject accordingly, the discursive space may be opened for new possibilities in the formation of South African identities.

References


Appendix A

The Nine Focus Areas of Whole School Development

1. Basic functionality of the school
2. Leadership, management and communication
3. Governance and relationships
4. Quality of teaching and learning, and educator development
5. Curriculum provision and resources
6. Learner achievement
7. School safety, security and discipline
8. School infrastructure
9. Parents and the community

(Government Gazette, 2001:13)