

Teacher Narratives of Social (in)justice: Early Experiences Shaping Pedagogy

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Abstract

This paper explores a sample of English language teachers' perceptions and practices of social justice in Johannesburg, South Africa. These teachers teach substantial numbers of learners who are not mother tongue speakers of English, learning exclusively through an English medium. This accounts for injustices that face learners regarding access to and performance in education. These learners are of various linguistic backgrounds and require support to meet the basic promotion and pass requirements for English proficiency. Guided by critical pedagogy, social justice education and multilingualism, this study explored teachers' narratives of their experiences of justice/injustice. In examining teachers' narratives this study explored whether these experiences of justice/injustice shaped teachers' perceptions of social justice and if teachers actively took up positions as agents of change through their teaching practices. Using a qualitative exploratory case study method, data in the form of written narratives was elicited from ten English teachers from two secondary school sites. This study found that teachers' views, values, and attitudes were shaped by their own experiences of injustices and marginalization. All teachers believed they play a critical role in the personal and academic growth of their learners and acknowledged the potential role they possibly play as agents of individual and social transformation. Curriculum demands and contextual factors for some made the enactment of social justice pedagogy challenging. Language was highlighted as a key area where learners were disadvantaged in the learning process and further support was needed.

Keywords: second and additional language learners, critical pedagogy, social justice, agency

Introduction

Education plays a critical role in social reproduction and as a means of social transformation. As such, education should provide learners with the capacity to think critically, be reflective and to elicit an understanding of others and the realities they come from to participate in actively improving society. South Africa's protracted history of colonialism and apartheid shaped deeply entrenched inequalities and injustices which are still prevalent in the lived experiences of its people. Despite changes in political ideology, from apartheid to democracy, quality education is still inaccessible to many, with social institutions like schools continuing to function as they did under apartheid (Spaull, 2013). Many former black schools were dysfunctional under apartheid and remain so after democracy due to the socio-economic disadvantages of the learners they serve (Fiske & Ladd, 2004 as cited in Spaull, 2013). According to Spaull (2013) elements such as ill-discipline, low cognitive demand and inefficient management have had an undeniable impact on former black schools as apartheid legacies. These schools display high dropout rates, high grade repetition, high teacher absenteeism and are characterised by severe underperformance (Taylor et al., 2003 as cited in Spaull 2013). Schools began desegregating during the early nineties with migrations of black learners into former Indian, coloured, and former Model C schools across provinces in South Africa (Chrisholm & Sujee, 2006)¹. Currently these schools serve diverse communities of learners of varied ethnicities and economic backgrounds.

In South Africa, the constitution recognises eleven official languages, but all do not have equal status in practice and within schooling, English and Afrikaans are the only two languages supported after grade 4 (Christie & McKinney, 2017). Monolingualism in a European language is positioned as normative and favoured over multilingualism. About language in the schooling system in South Africa, the overwhelming dominance of English that pervades the schooling system is evidence of the schooling system operating firmly within the logic of coloniality (Christie & McKinney, 2017). The most important resource that a child brings to the classroom is their language resources which are rendered as invisible or invaluable when they are confined to using a single language medium in which they have insufficient proficiency (Christie & McKinney, 2017). For second and additional language speakers learning various subjects through the medium of English with limited proficiency in the language, the goal of learning is reduced to learning English and memorization (Christie & McKinney, 2017). This has a substantial impact on learner performance throughout schooling as well as access to higher education. According to Mda (2000) the integration experiences of African-language speakers in English-medium schools in South Africa revealed that studying through English was frustrating, demoralising and even traumatic for many learners. Language is key to accessing education and schools therefore need to have a strong sense of social justice in terms of accessing education for all learners, irrespective of their linguistic capabilities.

¹ Note that apartheid nomenclature is used for research purposes only.

Given the challenges surrounding the use of language in education, the main aim of this study is to examine narratives of teachers' early experiences of social justice/injustice and how these may influence their representations of social justice in their teaching.

Theoretical framework: Critical pedagogy and social justice

The roots of social justice lie in critical theory. In describing lessons learned by Paulo Freire, Giroux (2010) provides a meaning for critical pedagogy as a movement that assists students in developing a consciousness for freedom by recognising authoritarian tendencies, empowering their imaginations by connecting truth to power and reading both the word and the world as part of a broader struggle for agency, justice and democracy. The premise that all men and women are not free and live in a world that has numerous contradictions and imbalances of power and privilege is the basis for all critical theorists. Critical theory is primarily concerned with a just society in which people can exercise full political, economic and cultural control of their lives (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). It is for this reason that critical theory serves as a basis for this paper, given its alignment with the challenges South African education has had to navigate through due to its historical past, mired as it is by injustice and inequality. Teachers need to develop an awareness of the diverse identity dynamics present in the classroom including the disparities that may exist between them. For teachers who are critical pedagogues, recognition of the imbalances of power and privilege and inequality and injustice are essential as is knowledge and practice of theories and approaches that are essentially dialectical. This study argues in favour of McLaren's (1989) assertion that the function of schools is the empowerment of students around issues of social justice. This entails the advocacy of issues relating to injustice, inequality, exclusion, and marginalisation of people and specifically learners in school communities. Institutions of learning need to challenge and disrupt all systems and processes that promote the marginalisation and exclusion of learners from reaching their full potential in their educational achievement. Schools, however, function simultaneously to sustain and legitimize the reproduction of the dominant class and its interests as well as the production of a future docile and obedient work force (McLaren, 2003). Schools are thus sites of both domination and liberation (McLaren, 2003). Critical theory calls for teachers to recognise how schools sustain the dominance of some groups and marginalization of others by supporting and perpetuating theories that link what is accepted as legitimate knowledge and power (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003). Critical teachers need to view schooling as strongly linked to the struggle and goal of a better quality of life for all learners and the construction of a society free from exploitation of any form of one group over another. Content and knowledge needs to be carefully examined and the question of why this knowledge is being taught in the first place should be constantly asked.

This paper asserts that teachers are uniquely positioned to use their knowledge and experience in the South African historical context to act as possible agents of social justice and transformation. Teachers who emanate from similar narratives of ethnic exclusion, language exclusion or working class backgrounds become empowered

when they recognise their own agency at being active participants in the pedagogical process of challenging class antagonism which prevents learners from gaining the knowledge and skills needed to live whole, fulfilling lives actively participating in society (hooks 2003). Active participation of citizenship can be encouraged by challenging the existing structure of class and cultural antagonism that prevents students from gaining knowledge and using it constructively to break down the idea that students from working class or ethnic backgrounds need to conform, in order to be accepted (hooks, 2003). Teachers should create classroom environments that challenge and address negative tensions developing learning communities where everyone can be heard, their presence recognised and their contribution valued (hooks, 2003). According to Giroux (2010) personal experience can become valuable resources that give students opportunities to relate their narratives, social relations, and histories to what they are being taught. Confronting issues of class tensions however, is not, according to hooks (2003) only the task of those who come from working class or ethnic backgrounds but of all teachers who should engage with pedagogy that recognizes the importance of constructively confronting the issues of class. Schools should provide learners with the skills to think critically so as to participate and contribute to the policy decisions that govern their lives and should strive for democratic social relations where there is equal treatment and opportunities for all who reside within that society (Giroux, 2003). Pedagogy is a central element in influencing a culture that creates a critical consciousness in individuals to act as agents of social change (Giroux, 2010).

Social justice as defined by Bell (1997) is a goal towards full and equal participation of all groups within society, equitable distribution of resources and a vision of society where all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. Bell (1997) defines the goal of social justice education to equip people with critical analytical tools to understand oppression as well as their roles in oppressive systems and to further develop the agency to counter and interrupt oppressive patterns and behaviours within themselves, the institutions they are a part of and the communities in which they belong. According to Hackman (2005, p.103) equity and social justice need to move beyond what she terms 'buzzwords' and need to become practical enactments within the classroom. Education is a major source of social transformation and should provide learners with tools necessary for a critical and reflective consciousness that will allow them to participate in the creation of a more improved form of social life than that which they are currently experiencing (Walker, 2003). Social justice education in conjunction with other educational theory bases, encourages students to take up a more active role in their education and supports teachers in the creation of democratic, critical, and empowering educational environments (Hackman, 2005). South Africa as a post conflict society and relatively young democracy still carries with it the burden of its oppressive past, which in some instances is still reproduced in current society. According to Bell (1997) oppression needs to be defined and analysed in order to understand how it operates on different individual, cultural and institutional levels both historically as well as at present. Social justice education needs a theory of oppression as it will allow for the thinking about the intentions toward the goal of social justice and the means that is used to actualise this, providing a

framework for action and reflection of steps taken and for the potential to remain conscious of the position that individuals have as historical subjects, able to learn from the past in order to meet current conditions in more effective ways (Bell, 1997).

Research design

Using an interpretive paradigm which allows researchers to view the world through the experiences and perceptions of their participants (Thanh & Thanh, 2015), this paper adopts a qualitative case study as an approach to examine teachers' narratives of their early experiences of social justice/injustice and how these shape their views of teaching. Qualitative methods of research are useful for describing the perspectives of a particular group of people toward events that have occurred as well as their beliefs or practices (Morrell & Carrol, 2010).

We used purposive sampling to ten teachers from two public secondary schools in Lenasia, Johannesburg. This non probable, purposive sampling is in line with qualitative research aims of being systematic and principled in attempting to best select teachers who will provide data that will be valid and best provide answers to the research questions.

We used teacher narratives to elicit data from the participants. According to Etherington (2000) narrative knowing allows us to gain interesting knowledge that brings together understandings about an individual, their culture and how they have created change. This method is chosen for this research study because the shape of story helps to organise how people have interpreted events in their lives, their values, beliefs and experiences that have guided those interpretations and their hopes, intentions and future plans resulting from those interpretations (Etherington, 2000).

Data was analysed by means of narrative analysis in which common codes and categories were drawn from teachers' narratives and linked to theoretical propositions. The validity/reliability/trustworthiness of the data were verified using multiple sources of evidence in a manner that encourages convergent lines of enquiry relevant during data collection (Yin, 2003). The use of multiple participants allows for triangulation to aid in the validity and trustworthiness of the data collected.

Ethical considerations were made prior to the conducting of research and gathering of data. These include written requests for permission from the School Governing Body and the principal to use the school as a site to conduct research. Written consent was also be requested in writing from the teachers sampled to participate in this study. The information presented to the School Governing Body, principal and teachers sampled included the purpose of the study, how and what length of time the sampled teachers will be expected to participate, the risks and benefits associated with participation in the study, how confidentiality was assured e.g. use of pseudonyms, the researchers' contact information, a statement indicating that participation is voluntary, and a participant may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence and finally, what will be done with the findings of the study.

Data description and analysis

To ascertain how teachers' early experiences of social justice/ injustice we coded and categorised their narratives into several themes: growing up poor, challenging stereotypes, and linguistic injustices.

Growing up poor:

Gita (pseudonym), a twenty-six-year-old female teacher, describes her experiences of growing up with a single parent who earned a low income. She could not apply to university because of the bleak financial situation, and had to wait to get a bursary to study education. She describes the sensitivity she has for learners who share similar experiences or are dealing with difficulties as she did growing up:

I am not quick to judge if a child is sleepy or easily distracted. My own experience has taught me that they may be hungry or may be troubled by issues at home. My experience has made me more sensitive and has equipped me with an added sense of compassion for those I teach. My experience has also coaxed me into motivating kids about the importance and value of education and how education can truly change one's life. I often share anecdotes of my own life to try and give hope to them that there is a better day when education and hard work is involved. (Gita's narrative, July 2020)

The empathy and encouragement Gita portrays to connect with and motivate her learners, indicates her care for her learners, and that she goes beyond the teaching of content only. She shares her own experiences to substantiate that obtaining an education can bring forth opportunities for financial or other improvement in the lives of individuals. This is in line with Freire's (1970) feelings of respect and humility for those who are oppressed and less fortunate, which he believed fosters communication and trust between teacher and learner. The extract is also reminiscent of Freire's (1970) dialogic relationships in the classroom, as well as humanising pedagogy (Kajee 2018, 2020). Freire (1970) makes the assertion that teachers should enter dialogue with their students on an equal standing with mutual respect, care, and commitment. This is further evident in Gita's narrative as learners have developed a level of trust with her to share their own experiences of racism and injustice:

I personally have not experienced any injustices, but learners in my classroom have shared many stories of being treated unjustly. I have had learners confide in me about instances of racism against them from teachers and learners. I have also had learners express how they have been treated differently or unfairly because of their race or religion. Their shared stories have impacted my behaviour as a teacher in a positive way. I am now extra cautious in the way I behave around learners. I am more conscious and inclusive in the way I speak as well as the lessons I teach. In my lessons, I always try to show or mention a diverse range of examples that appeals to many children and not one group of children. (Gita's narrative, July 2020)

As Freire (1970) upholds; through "dialogical relations" the teacher is no longer the one who only teaches, but who is himself taught through dialogue with his student who assume the capacity to teach, while being taught. This extract demonstrates the cultivation of trust between Gita and her learners. She too has adopted a learner role through "dialogical relations" and has been transformed. Despite Gita's claim of not experiencing injustice personally, her experiences of growing up in a lower income

group has impacted on her attitude toward her learners and her teaching practice, designed as it is to motivate her learners to use education as a means of transforming their own lives. For Bartolomé (1994) a humanizing pedagogy promotes respect, trusting relationships between teachers and students, academic rigor and learning contexts where power is shared by teachers and students. Macedo and Bartolomé (2000) adds that the pedagogy values students' background knowledge, language, culture, and life experiences. Teachers who work with subordinated students have a responsibility to assist them in appropriating knowledge bases and discourse styles seen as desirable in society (Bartolomé, 1994). A humanizing pedagogy is crucial for both teacher and learner success and critical for the academic and social resiliency of students, given that educational policy is dominated by standardized and technical approaches to schooling that dehumanize students, especially those of colour (Del Carmen Salazar, 2013).

Challenging stereotypes:

Sami, a 35-year old male, recognised the need to use his role as a teacher to enact critical change in the thinking and way learners perceive and interact with others. Sami draws his perceptions of his role as an agent of social justice from his personal experiences of injustice that he faces as a Muslim man. He describes the preconceived notions and bias people have shown toward him because of his Islamic faith.

In my life, many instances of the injustices toward me stem from a clear judgement of the religion I follow. Dressing in the attire of a clearly Muslim individual regardless of where I am or what setting I am in, sometimes causes people who do not understand the reasoning behind our dress code to be unjust toward me. The media portrays the Muslim identity as inferior and oppressed. By donning attire that clearly shows this identity and thereby does not conform to the norm of what society deems as an accepted dress code gives certain individuals the idea that all Muslims are "stiff" and "oppressive" toward women and the people around them. Moreover, the notion of all Muslims are terrorists simply because they wear a turban, or a hijab is another injustice I have experienced. (Sami's narrative, March 2020)

Sami's experiences of bias towards him have influenced the outcomes he has envisioned for himself as a teacher. He aims to break down the stereotypes that he faces in his daily life by teaching his learners critical thinking skills in order for them not to make judgements of people based on stereotypes portrayed in the media and society at large. Freire (1970) views the humanist and revolutionary teacher as one who partners with one's students, such that efforts align with critical thinking and mutual humanization. Sami has identified the need to address negative stereotyping of people by the media by teaching beyond what is expected: the expectation of content as all that is necessary in learning. He describes his efforts to teach critical and analytical thinking skills that he recognises as important for learners in their perceptions of people from diverse backgrounds.

These experiences of injustice toward to me based on what ideologies of Islam is advocated, have given me insight into knowing and accepting the need to teach fairly firstly and thereby to teach not just what is necessary for an examination but also to teach critically and analytically developing these reasoning skills within learners so that they are not susceptible to believing everything that society advocates or that the media portrays but rather critically making an

informed decision and idea based on their own experiences without any bias. (Sami's narrative, March 2020)

The role of the problem-posing teacher as identified by Freire (1970) is to create the conditions under which knowledge from popular beliefs and dominant narratives “doxa”, are challenged and replaced by true knowledge “logos” based on rationality and reason. Freire (1970) encourages the practice of problem posing through dialogue between teachers and learners. Through his lived experiences, Sami has identified the problem that minority groups like Muslims encounter and he tries to enable his learners to think critically and not be susceptible to believing everything portrayed in the media. Sami does not specify the teaching method he uses to challenge the knowledge and views that his learners may have and merely states that he teaches them to be critical and analytical in their reasoning. He merely states that he encourages his learners to think critically and make informed decisions by recognising bias. This is done by encouraging his learners to think critically and make informed decisions by recognising bias. These are issues that impacted Sami's life directly, as was the case with two other teachers, Thembi and Sizakele, who experienced linguistic injustices.

Linguistic injustices:

Thembi is a twenty-six-year-old female teacher who comes from a rural area in KwaZulu Natal. She describes the way she was taught English as an injustice, based on the teaching methods that were used to support learners. Her teacher taught English predominantly using the mother tongue of learners, isiZulu which Thembi felt was an ineffective method in supporting the learning of the language. This had a negative impact on learners' ability to adequately understand English as they were largely dependent on translation, especially during examinations. At the same time Thembi acknowledges that some learners may have benefitted from the method employed by the teacher.

I am from a deep rural area school whereby the teacher used to teach us English using our home language which is isiZulu, even though that was fair for us, but on the other side it was unfair because if the teacher used to translate everything in isiZulu and during examination time the question paper is written in English and there is nobody to do translation for us, that was becoming problematic for us as learners. But somewhere, somehow it is helpful for other learners in their performance. (Thembi's narrative, July 2020)

First year teacher, Sizakele, had similar experiences to Thembi. She is a twenty-three-year-old teacher who comes from a home where only isiXhosa is spoken and attended a school in the township of Soweto, where she learnt English as a first additional language. She describes the difficulty she had in learning English and the methods and practices her teachers used to teach the language to her in her narrative.

I attended a school where we did English as an additional language. And at home we only communicated in isiXhosa. I tried speaking English in my English classes but most of the time my home language would just take over then I would end up talking/responding in isiXhosa in an English class. My English teacher really tried to make us answer or speak to each other in English but we would practice that for a few minutes then switch to our different home languages. This made some of my classmates to be less fluent in English. Prior to my matric

year, we had teachers that would teach us English using their home languages. Hence, we were used to communicate in different languages other than English in an English class. This had a negative impact on me and my other classmates, as we were struggling with reading comprehension and poems during exams. What was problematic the most was writing essays (paper 3). In order to pass English, one would need help from other people, like family or friends. (Sizakele's narrative, July 2020)

Both teachers, Thembi and Sizakele, describe their experiences learning English as challenging with examination periods highlighted as particularly problematic. In Sizakele's case different teachers taught her in their own specific home languages. This had a negative impact on her learning and education and highlights the disparities in how schools approach teaching English as an additional language compared with schools that have English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) and as Home Language. The results of this were traumatic for her in the transition from secondary school to university which she describes as one of the challenges she has had to deal with.

Thembi and Sizakele are products of the inequitable education system and experience the linguistic injustice that many learners face in South Africa. Both describe the difficulties they experienced in learning English as a subject. What constitutes an injustice is the problems that these learners face once they enter tertiary institutions, given that the medium of instruction in most South African universities is English. Learning English as first additional language does not sufficiently prepare learners to meet the academic requirements at university as seen from Sizakele's traumatic experiences. Teachers are perhaps not making use of effective pedagogy to teach English to additional language learners or they may possibly lack proficiency in the language themselves. The experiences of learners in examinations, described by both teachers as being highly dependent on the need for translation highlights the ineffective pedagogy that was used for second additional language speakers in this case study. Childs (2016) demonstrates in her study on translanguaging in South Africa, the dehumanising learning experiences learners feel in the disconnect between their mother tongues and the dominant language of the classroom. In this case, Sizakele felt this at university where students are forced to make a dramatic shift to adapt to the English dominant environment. According to Romaine (2013) the speedy shift to English without appropriate support of the mother-tongue causes educational failure. The dominance of English in the education sector therefore causes learners who lack proficiency in the language to have traumatic experiences in school and university, making education inaccessible to them (Hurst & Mona, 2017).

These experiences by Sizakele and Thembi have given them perspective into the learning experiences of learners like themselves whom they currently teach. Thembi empathises with learners who are disadvantaged in the classroom due to lack of English proficiency and she attempts to address their needs using a bilingual approach in her lessons.

As an English Home Language teacher, I have experienced that some of the learners are privileged because English is their mother tongue, but some of them are disadvantaged. What I am trying to say is that some of the learners come from a background whereby they only speak

their mother tongue at home and they only speak English in the classroom. This reflects social injustice and has an impact on learner's performance in the English Home Language classroom. I have realised that speaking English only in the classroom is unfair for other learners, so in order to be fair, I have to use code switching by translating my explanation in Zulu so that those who are left behind can be able to understand what I am teaching. (Thembi's narrative, July 2020)

Thembi displays an awareness of the learner dynamics in her class related to those who are privileged and disadvantaged and is reflective of the specific challenges that her learners face. She addresses the needs of those whom she views as disadvantaged due to the linguistic barriers they face as second additional language learners and adopts a bilingual pedagogy, 'code switching' that she feels may support them. Thembi's awareness of the dynamics in her class, reflection on their specific differences and needs and action towards supporting her learners, models Hackman's essential components of social justice education. Teachers need to constantly reflect on how power and dominant group privileges connects to learners' social identities (Hackman, 2005). This is important because social identity can contribute to the reproduction of marginalisation of some groups and the reproduction of the oppressive structures of dominant groups (Hackman, 2005). Teachers need to consider the composition of the classroom when analysing the issues of privilege and address the needs of all learners (Hackman, 2005). Thembi recognises that using English only is a disadvantage to those who are not home language speakers and uses a strategy to support and include them in the learning process. According to Hurst and Mona (2017), multilingualism is a necessary response to support learners who have limited proficiency in English.

Jameela, a twenty-seven-year-old teacher, describes herself as fortunate not to have experienced any injustice and recognises the difficulties that her peers endured as foreign nationals. She claims that being born in a post-apartheid era helped create an awareness of the movement toward a more equitable society which was only highlighted and notable once she attended high school and university which were more diverse environments than school. Her experiences as a learner in school were limited to exposure to learners very much like her in terms of racial demographics, from the surrounding predominantly Indian community. This made her unaware of the challenges that other learners from more diverse racial and social circumstances experience in the school environment and which she would later encounter as a teacher.

In my personal life, I was fortunate enough not to experience social injustices to an extent whereby it would have had a negative effect on me. I grew up during an era (post 1994) when much emphasis was placed on overcoming the social injustices based on race. I grew up and attended school in a predominantly Indian community, so the issue of race, especially in my primary school days, was something which I didn't ever consider to be an issue. However, as the years went by and I entered high school and later university, it became clearer that race as well as nationality was an issue. Especially concerning foreign nationals from African countries; I feel that they were not treated or given opportunities to bridge the gaps in terms of opportunities, although they were living and learning amongst us. (Jameela's narrative, April 2020)

As an English teacher, Jameela notes the injustices that learners face as second and additional language learners who are trying to obtain a secondary education through a strictly English dominant medium. She highlights the difficulties these learners experience in grasping concepts in literature and poetry due to the complexity of the language and identifies the studying of Shakespearian texts as particularly obscure for learners who are struggling with understanding English. She describes this in her narrative and states that learners do not have sufficient support from their parents due to social and economic factors that have been shaped by the history of South Africa.

On a daily basis, as teachers of English as a home language, we deal with injustices in our classrooms. English is being taught at a home language level to learners who aren't from English speaking backgrounds. There are instances where learners do not understand certain concepts, especially those pertaining to literature and poetry, simply because the language seems too complex for someone who may be speaking English as a second or third language. Literature pieces such as Shakespeare seem like another language altogether for these learners who are already struggling with a language barrier. Generally, these are the learners who come from the townships, some from impoverished backgrounds, some raised in homes with single parents who don't have the time to take an interest in their child's education or barriers thereof; some parents uneducated themselves, not having even completed high school, or unable to speak/converse in simple English. (Jameela's narrative, April 2020)

Teachers need to create classroom environments which challenge and address negative tensions and develop learning communities where everyone can be heard, their presence recognised and the contributions that they make, valued (hooks, 2003). Jameela attempts to create a classroom environment which she believes is a 'place of social justice' that is a safe place for learners and there is no discrimination based on learners' social circumstances. She believes the pedagogy she uses is in the best interests of her learners, however it may achieve the opposite and encourage the frustration and exclusion that learners feel in learning as second and additional language speakers. Despite having an awareness of injustice and unfair opportunities that some learners are faced with, Jameela implements pedagogy that may further disadvantage learners. She describes the 'English only' rule that she implements as an attempt to support her learners and believes that this will allow her to help them in improving their communication skills. Note Jameela does not speak the learners' languages.

Personally, in my own classroom, I try to implement an "English only" rule, I encourage the learners to speak to each other in English, rather than their native language; in this manner I am able to hear and address their communication skills in an informal way, hoping that this would have a lasting impact in a formal setting. I also, consciously, try to make my classroom a place of social justice whereby there is no discrimination based on any social factors, in an attempt to make the classroom a safe space for learners. Good behaviour, etiquette or efforts in an attempt to contribute positively to the classroom or lessons, are rewarded (either through assigning a role of responsibility or otherwise). (Jameela's narrative, April 2020)

Giroux (2003) believes that education is a political and moral practice that should provide knowledge, skills and social relations that should enable learners to discover and explore for themselves what it means to be an engaged citizen in democratic

governance. Although Jameela believes that forcing learners to only speak English in her class will benefit them by her correcting their speech, it may encourage and perpetuate the dominance of English as the accepted means of learning and what is deemed as acceptable knowledge. The language and cultural resources that second language speakers bring into the classroom are not accommodated or welcomed. Critical teachers need to view the school and learning as strongly linked to the struggle for a better quality of life for all. The schooling experiences of learners need to allow for the construction of a society free from exploitation of any form, or dominance of one group over another. Teachers need to have an awareness of how they may actually be perpetuating injustice and therefore always be reflective of the methods or pedagogy that they administer in the classroom. According to Bartolomé (2004) teacher education curricular needs to be infused with critical pedagogical principles so as to adequately prepare teachers to recognise ideologies and practices that are potentially harmful to learners.

Conclusion

Teachers were shaped by their experiences of social (in)justice, which contributes to their role in the classroom. The motives and values that these teachers hold influence their practices in the classroom. They are passionate about what they do and believe that they have a significant role to play in the lives of their learners. There is a strong sense of care and nurturing that these teachers try to offer to their learners in the hope that it will nurture and guide them in making good choices for their lives. The teachers uphold and favour values of compassion, tolerance, equity, empathy, and democratic choice. There is a strong belief that quality education can uplift society and create positive change. All teachers believed they play a critical role in the personal and academic growth of their learners and acknowledged the potential role they possibly play as agents of individual and social transformation. Curriculum demands and contextual factors for some made the enactment of social justice pedagogy challenging. Language was highlighted as a key area where learners were disadvantaged in the learning process and support was needed. While the teachers do not yet overtly perform the role of change agents, they appear to understand what it means to be agents of social justice.

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