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Teachers' proof or teacher proof? The influence of performativity on teachers' practice in South African classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Using the meta-theoretical tenets of social constructivism and the conceptual framework of Stephen Ball (2003), this qualitative study investigated teachers' perceptions and practices in highly regulated reform policy contexts. Data capture involved semi-structured interviews and observations conducted over the period of a school year. Findings revealed that accountability and performativity measures that are aligned with the current reform have increased the complexity of teachers' practices, intensified labour and heightened their need for compliance. The data revealed a dissonance between the perceptions of policy bureaucrats and teachers in relation to the efficacy of statistical goals within the paradigm of performativity. However, the main factor that motivated teachers' compliance and conformity hinged on the creation of a favourable impression and an appeasement of external agents.

The central position of this article, however, holds that suppressing teachers' professional judgement leads to the neglect of crucial learning goals such as learner motivation and critical thinking which are crucial aims of schooling. English teachers are best placed to support this type of learning, but it is doubtful whether silenced teachers can raise critical learners.

Keywords: teacher accountability; performativity; teacher compliance; teacher judgement; teacher voice

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1. Introduction and background context

The global focus on performance-based accountability in schools places tremendous pressure on teachers as it is said to heighten their obligation to ameliorate outcomes related to learner performance and poor throughput rates. The term 'performativity' was coined by Ball (2003) to show how current reform policies in the UK were categorised by changes that control teachers work through an alignment with performance rated against their efforts to ensure learner pass rates. Thus, appraisal of teachers' efficiency and performance through this accountability mechanism has a direct influence on their practices. Currently, the performativity culture in South Africa is enabled by specificity in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS) reform in terms of scripted lessons and a focus on pass rates in all the grades with a spotlight on grade 12 exit exams. For almost three decades, in the US, educational reforms, led by the standards movement have been underpinned by the idea that improvements in the academic performance centres on improving schools and making teachers accountable (Apple, 2011). Positioned within strict regimes of accountability and performativity, this reform with its attendant mechanisms of supervision, monitoring of implementation and analysis of learner performance, creates perceptions in teachers that they need to follow the script and ensure that learners passed. Criticisms against these types of reforms and mechanisms have been levelled by many with some scholars arguing that it is not schools and teachers but learners themselves who are responsible for their declining achievement rates (Traub, 2000). In this vein, Steinberg (1996, p. 60) points out that the source and solution of the problem of declining student performance is not to be found "by examining or altering schools." This argument makes good sense when upheld against the disparate South African political, economic, and educational landscape that was created by the apartheid regime. In this view, the socio-economic considerations of the learners in South Africa and the inequalities that exist play a major role in students' ability to perform in assessments and learning. These beliefs do not absolve teachers and leadership in schools as scholarship indicates that teacher quality and resources do contribute to declining learner performance (Pudi, 2006). However, there is limited evidence demonstrating how teachers view these accountabilities-driven curriculum outcomes; to what extent they adopt these policy moves; and accept responsibility for performance-related practices.

This article uses Stephen Ball's (2003) work on performativity to examine South African English teachers' voices within frames of increased bureaucracy, accountability and data-driven reforms which have been identified as mechanisms that have reconstructed teachers' roles. Emanating from a broader PhD study with the research

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question: How does teacher voice influence educational change? The article draws on the emerging data to contextualise South African teachers experiences of performativity with global scholarship, thus adding to literature in this field. Performativity has as its cornerstone the assumption that teachers need to adapt to a culture of control and regulation which is also characterised as using reprimands and rewards through appraisal, critique, and measurement by significant others (Ball 2003). However, South African teachers work in contexts with distinct historical, political, economic, and cultural features that have different complexities, experiences, and rewards than other teachers globally who have been subjected to the same level of attainment focus.

The current South African educational change context has been through almost three decades of rehabilitation, revision, and reconstruction to the point that teachers are suffering from policy fatigue. At the fulcrum of this constantly shifting field of educational change is the failure of policies to provide any measurable success. While scathing critique by scholars blame the government for lack of foresight, teacher capacity and resistance to reform efforts were identified by policymakers as the reason for implementation failure. Paterson and Baxter (2020, p. 4) state that "The overall lack of trust in South Africa's education system seems to prevent the development and implementation of constructive accountability as teachers and principals are wary of any kind of control or monitoring." This lack of trust emerges from the period of apartheid where an ideologically imposed curriculum was sanctioned by rigidity and control. Thus, teachers equate control and subjugation with tools of oppression. This context of reform has tendencies of the historically apartheid regime in terms of the command-and-control approach and 'ongoing effects of globalisation and neoliberalism on the South African economy' (Paterson & Baxter, 2020, p.7). Key reporting structures in the South African educational landscape include Annual reporting to the province; Integrated quality management system (IQMS, including developmental appraisal, performance measurement, and whole school evaluation); South African Council of Educators (SACE); National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU). According to Paterson and Baxter (2020, p. 13) "accountability relationships in South Africa's system are predominantly vertical and situated in a compliance-oriented system where teachers are accountable to their principal and school management team." The chain of command continues in a pyramid of hierarchy with schools being accountable to the governing bodies of schools and district managers who monitor teachers to ensure fidelity to the curriculum and curriculum coverage that needs to be on par nationally. Further up, the provincial departments who supervise districts are accountable to the National Department of Basic Education which reviews performance against targets and measurable outcomes that are pre-set. In practice, teachers are

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rigorously monitored through document analysis, regular visits with tick lists that check for compliance. While some gains have been recorded in terms of student attainment according to statistics (Boocock, 2014), there has been findings that indicate that there has been a decrease in learner motivation and teacher creativity (Khosa, 2016; Ramatlapana & Makonye, 2012). Consequently, another outcome of this policy move has been a lack of holistic development of learners which is detrimental to the acquisition of skills needed for long terms success in career and society (Perrin 2015). Thus, the literature reveals that a narrow focus on statistics and measurements as ‘‘key factors in education is fundamentally flawed” (Poole, 2022. p. 1520).

Amid these considerations it is imperative to be mindful of the distorting effects on not only teacher voice but that of student learning which is aligned with teacher practice. To foster higher order skills like critical thinking, interpretation, reasoning, and rationale-based argumentation, critical preparation by teachers need to precede the application of such skills by learners. If teachers are forced to teach to the test because the results are equated with being a good or bad teacher, then the goals of learning are compromised. Moreover, Eisner (2004, p. 13) argues that “the kind of minds we develop are profoundly influenced by the opportunities to learn that the school provides.” This argument has resonance for the English classroom where teachers are tasked to develop creativity and critical thinking or provide educational experiences that nurture these features. Accordingly, Greene (2009, p. 95) proposes that teachers need to move “the young into their own interpretations of their lives and their lived worlds, opening wider and wider perspectives as they do so… encouraging multiple readings of written texts and readings of the world.” The educational encounter that is suggested by Greene, is often impossible to achieve as teachers work within current systems of work intensification, tyranny of time and teaching practices that are constructed with the goal of passing the learner. Consequently, in cultures of performativity, quantifiable targets displace values (Ball, 2003). Thus, English teachers become vulnerable to the ideologies that shape their practices with the telescopic slant to performativity that attempts to limit creativity and explorative deconstructions of texts (Dymoke, 2012). Thus, the very nature of English teaching is challenged by standardisation, and accountability, the administration of which consumes the life of a teacher. Consequently, the literature makes urgent calls to move “beyond the methods fetish toward a humanising pedagogy” (Bartolomé, 2009, p. 408). However, global pressure to ‘perform’ is transmitted according to the central ideology imposed on education which is to adopt a method that is delivered ‘through surveillance and the imposition of tightly monitored testing of “chunks” of knowledge’ (Hennessy & McNamara, 2013. p. 7).

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Curriculum efforts by governments, have moved towards the granting of more control to external agencies over curriculum construction, delivery, and assessments (Apple, 2011; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012). These reforms aim to standardise the implementation of the curriculum thus positioning teachers as recipients of policies developed elsewhere and at the 'far end of educational reform' (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, p. 1). These large-scale mandated approaches have garnered more control through several mechanisms such as teacher proof curricula; accountability and performativity. These instruments are implemented with increased authority for the purpose of ensuring fidelity to the curriculum reform (Priestley, 2010) with greater focus on suppressing teacher intuitions and knowledge. Thus, these mechanisms have resulted in teachers focussing on appeasing the monitors and suppressing good sense. As argued by Apple and Junck (1992), under these conditions completing the tasks takes precedence over doing it well. This finding is confirmed in a study by Winter (2017) who stated that most teachers acted according to the preferred image of competent teachers and followed all the stipulations despite acknowledging that the focus on covering the content had detrimental effects on the learners' knowledge acquisition.

The central rationale for reforms that suppress teacher intuition is the philosophy that success of a reform can be measured by learner throughput rate. However, scholarship evinces that the focus on learner attainment telescopes the curriculum, restricts teacher voice, and veers teacher practice towards preparing their charges for assessments (Au, 2011; Winter, 2017). In this situation, teachers feel bound by the attainment agenda and forced to direct their practices to achieving goals prioritised by policymakers and government (Ball, 2003). Consequently, policy texts are viewed as blueprints for attainment, and critical interpretation as a sociocultural necessity is sacrificed for the benefit of policy ideologies. In these policy contexts, it is reasonable for teachers to suppress their own interpretations and deliver the curriculum according to the words on the page. Often curriculum documents seem to entrench the authority of the state as a legislated text (Campbell, 2006, p. 111). In the case of the CAPS reform, teachers mentioned that the word 'Policy' is used by authoritative figures to promote compliance and subservience (Badal, 2019). Teachers are positioned near the learner therefore they need to make decisions, demonstrate professional judgement after thorough assessment of learners' needs. However, top down and teacher proof reforms that are data driven have disrupted teacher authority to the extent that tensions erupt when teachers interpret and respond to policy texts contrary to what is intended (Campbell, 2006, p. 112).

In South Africa, findings by Khosa (2016) confirm that teachers have become dependent on expert guidance and that teacher practices have become regulated by a

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focus on performance and the resultant image of a good teacher. Khosa concluded that teachers who teach technically end up 'imitating others without understanding the vision and goals' of learning (2016, p. 118). In a similar study Ramatlapana and Makonye (2012), found that teachers capitulated to external demands out of fear of negative consequences. Teachers, in their study, reported that they perceived accountability as a punitive undertaking that suppressed any effort on their part. The pattern that emerges is that teachers believe that noncompliance to the authorities means insubordination. Elsewhere, Appel (2020) found that learners are drilled for the exit exam to the extent that they suffer burnout from test preparation. According to the scholar, test fatigue has been an occurrence but has now become more prevalent as schools and teachers are made to account for their statistics: "With education systems increasingly valuing outputs and efficiency over inputs and processes, teacher performance has been (re)conceptualized as that which can be quantified and measured, relying on a system of performance benchmarks and assessments" (Holloway, 2018, p. 261). Concomitant with performativity pressure, teachers have reported an increase of bureaucracy in schools which further compromised teacher autonomy and voice (Bourke et al., 2015; Sachs, 2016). One of the reasons for this increased monitoring and regulation from school principals and management is because they are also accountable for school performance. These leaders often use their authority to instil compliance in teachers to meet 'benchmarks of performativity' (Sachs, 2016).

Positioned within the complexities highlighted, and with due consideration to the diverse identities and contextual disparities, the notion of teacher voice for this study is conceptualised as cognates of teacher empowerment, especially in terms of voicing perceived injustices, articulating possibilities in both speaking and operationalised manifestations of proactive agency and finding space for agentic expression within data driven policy environments. Policies form part of a culture that regulate teachers' actions and influences the constructions and perceptions of their voice/s. In this instance Pajares' (1992, p. 308) argument has substance:

> All words begin as servants, eager to oblige and assume whatever function may be assigned them, that accomplished, they become masters, imposing the will of their predefined intention and dominating the essence of human discourse.

Teachers, who work in organisations that impose predetermined goals and outcomes through the language of discourse, create perceptions of the amount of power they have in terms of influencing their work. Often, the notion of voice is relational to finding space to bring their own beliefs and teaching styles to the transformational reform efforts. Thus, it can be said that teacher voice is embedded within stratified frameworks

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of power, ensconced in existing cultural peculiarities, thus, understanding the negotiation of the tensions may excavate teachers' perceptions and responses to external constructions of power.

2. Conceptual framework

Performativity is defined by Ball as a culture that practises a mode of regulation that uses evaluation, control, incentives, attrition and is based on a system of rewards and sanctions. He argues that this definition is applied to policy reforms where the performance of an individual, or organisation 'serves as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection' (2003, p.216). For the purposes of this article, the definition of performativity is limited to his work on how performativity broadly influences teacher control. In this regard, Ball's questions about the control of judgement, about what is important, who determines what counts as valuable and what indicators are deemed valid are crucial to understanding the effects of performativity on teachers' work. Ball's (2003) work, titled "Teachers' soul and the terrors of performativity" captured concerns related to the suppression of teachers' professional judgement and values by the performativity focus. The following voices quoted by Ball (2003, p. 216) documents teachers' feelings about the terrors of performativity:

> *T 1. What happened to my creativity … to my professional integrity … to the fun in teaching and learning?*
>
> *T2. It's as though children are mere nuts and bolts on some distant production line, and it angers me to see them treated so clinically.*

Considering the above responses by teachers, Ball argues that the policy technologies of educational reforms do not merely amount to technical and structural changes to the ecology of schooling but serve as mechanisms for 'reforming teachers' 'for changing what it means to be a teacher' and in doing so reconfigure new teaching subjects (2003, p. 216). Accordingly, these reconfigurations emanating from performance technologies restructure the image of a good teacher thereby inducting teachers into a set of values that involve thinking of themselves ''as individuals who calculate about themselves, add value to themselves, improve their productivity, strive for excellence, and live an existence of calculation" (Ball, 2003, p.217). This reorientation of teacher values and status requires an emergence of new identities embedded in adoption of new values and ways of working. Thus, traditional notions of teacher values, moral conscience and interactions are replaced by the focus on productivity hence 'learning is re-rendered as

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a cost-effective policy outcome; achievement is a set of productivity targets, etc' (Ball, 2003, p. 218) and teachers become human resources that are controlled and used effectively to suit policy purposes. In this context teachers are introduced to new ethical considerations, based on the interest of external forces and their worth as individuals are calculated in terms of performance. This new identity contrasts with teachers' traditional roles as care givers with professional judgement making decisions based on the needs of the learner-focusing on quality learning. In this paradigm of measurement and datafication teachers are called upon to account or required to change of themselves to produce the attainments that correlate with the image of a good teacher.

A consequence of this technology of performance is increased responsibility on the part of management in schools where "institutions are encouraged to make themselves different from one another, to stand out, to improve themselves" (Ball, 2003, p. 219). Therefore, organisational bureaucracy encapsulates the promotion of a culture that makes teachers accountable through evaluations and performance reviews (May, 1994). The panoptic approach influences teacher subjectivity and commitment to the new approach as information is scrutinised and teachers' worth is measured against set achievement goals. Within this auditing culture teachers and organisations learn how to transform themselves to appear more functional thus fostering 'pathologies of creative compliance' (Elliott 2001, p. 202). Recording and reporting intensifies teachers' work, and an audit culture is entrenched emerging from external agents to the management who pressure teachers into performing to the image that the school wishes to maintain, hence commercial decision making replaces moral and value judgements (Ball, 2003).

Essentially, discourses on performativity express concern for teacher autonomy and values and the culture of teaching and learning. In this regard Ball (2003, p. 226) argues "These technologies have potentially profound consequences for the nature of teaching and learning and for the inner life of the teacher." Hence, Hennessy and McNamara (2013, p.7) state that as dominant goal posts, performativity is often at the cost of more critical educational encounters which narrows 'critical educational experiences.' Consequently, teaching to the test and drilling methods become the methodology as external supervision entrenches the need to improve targets based on past attainment (Badal, 2019). Many studies have illustrated findings of teaching within 'the narrowed parameters of exam prescriptions' (Gordan 2008, p. 228). Consequently, this message is transferred to the learners who start believing that schooling is about writing exams (Badal, 2019). Thus, the trend that presents knowledge as a measurable commodity often sacrifices students' ability to critically challenge, argue and question. In the case of English teachers, creativity, and challenge, especially in literature study robs learners

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of the romance of literature as prescriptive views, notes and standardisation of answers pave the way for exam-style teaching and learning.

3. Research strategies

Meta-theoretically, this article drew from the principles of social constructivism and phenomenology which provided the lens that supports the description of the development of certain perceptions and experiences of individuals concerning certain occurrences (Hammersley, 2012). This bounded case study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine how teachers navigated contested terrains to find voice within cultures of accountability and performativity. A case study is a bounded unit of analysis that could involve individual/s, groups, institutions, and policies (Yin, 2021) and comprises a case representing "a phenomenon of sort occurring in a bounded context" which is the "unit of analysis" (Miles & Huberman 1994, p. 25). This paradigm allowed for in depth probing of teachers' cognitive consciousness (Richardson & Placier, 2001). The research sample of the broader study consisted of 9 teachers from differing contexts of public high schools in a district in Gauteng. These teachers were purposively sampled and differentiated by ethnicity, teaching experience and, gender with the specification that they needed to have taught the CAPS curriculum for at least five years. For this article, data generated from the voices of two of the nine teachers who taught in a previously Coloured Township school are analysed using qualitative content analysis. This sample allowed for a deep analysis of a township school to provide a more nuanced understanding of a complex issue in a particular setting. However, the experiences of the participants from the township school are representative or emblematic of broader trends or challenges within South Africa. Thus, the data can be used to draw meaningful conclusions about the larger teaching population. The literature review also revealed that the findings are experienced globally with certain contextual and spatial differences. Moreover, the spotlight on these individuals only enhanced the rigour of qualitative research by enabling more in-depth analysis and interpretation of data. By immersing themselves deeply in the experiences of a few individuals, researchers can develop richer insights that may not be possible with a larger, more diverse sample.

The study used semi structured interviews to "gain information on the perspectives, understandings and meanings constructed by people regarding the events and experiences of their lives" (Grbich, 1999, p. 85). The interview protocol from the original study is lengthy with many deviations arising from the teachers themselves. However, the following questions sparked the most responses and contributed extensively to this study:

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1. Do you feel free to change the curriculum and adapt it to your students' needs? Explain.
2. Tell me about your idea of accountability?
3. How do you hold yourself accountable to your learners?
4. Do you think that this policy is succeeding in the attainment of educational goals? Explain.
5. Do you have goals for your learners and work towards achieving them? Provide examples or explain why you cannot achieve them-if there are any.

Both Salome and Melisiwe (pseudonyms) are passionate and enthusiastic teachers and eager to share their perspectives about the influence of accountability and performativity on their practices. The interviews and follow up interviews took place over a period of a school year which allowed for observations and confirmations during different stages of a school calendar. Field notes and observations were written to record informal conversations and incidental occurrences. Foreman and Damschroder (2008) aptly point out that a "few extended in-depth interviews" allows participants to provide in-depth elaboration on what they mean about certain issues in their statements, "and may indicate causal linkages emerging from the data." Thus, two interviews and one follow up interview were conducted and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The follow up interview allowed teachers to reflect on their responses and clarify certain meanings that are latent in linguistic expressions and language use. Accordingly, member checking was used for authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researcher reflexivity was maintained throughout in terms of decision making as 'a means for critically inspecting the entire research process' Schwandt (2001, p. 224) and validity ensured through "faithful reconstruction of the participant's multiple perceptions" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 415).

Data generated provided rich descriptions which enabled a basis for analysis and interpretations on teacher voice in contexts of regulation and control. Data analysis was supported by the qualitative analysis tool used by Zao et al., (2010, p. 386) for "conceptualising practice" and as a "data-reducing device" in connecting social findings to theory" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 250–252). The analysis was initiated by a process of in-depth reading for instances of reflections on regulation, control, lack of space for voice and performativity. Thereafter, key categories were identified which were grouped according to the meanings that emerged. The final step involved clustering the categories into themes. Qualitative content analysis through hermeneutic interpretive analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) resulted in the emergence of themes aligned with notions of performativity and accountability and their influence on teacher

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voice (Patton, 1990). The data was coded for sensemaking of emergent categories that demonstrated the social realities of the participants. As a reflexive and iterative process from which extensive codes and themes emerged, it allowed for multiple readings of the data after which they were organised into higher levels of categories with inclusion of all the sources of data (Merriam, 1998). Subjectivity and bias were suppressed through concentration on the authentic text in consultation with the participants.

The study used quality measures such as transferability, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity to ensure research rigour. With reference to transferability, consideration was given to the scope and limitations of the study relating to applicability. Credibility of the study was achieved through careful sampling, criteria for the selection of the research site, and the selection of appropriate data capturing tools in line with the chosen data generation methodologies. Reflections on crucial decisions of the research process through reflexivity provided 'a means for critically inspecting the entire research process' Schwandt (2001, p. 224). This process ensured dependability and confirmability (Seale, 1999). Hence, validity of the study was ensured by focussing on "faithful reconstruction of the participant's multiple perceptions" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 415).

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Department of Basic Education and from the Ethics committee of the university and thus went through a rigorous review process. Voluntary consent was secured from the participants who were reassured that they could withdraw at any stage of the process without censure. Confidentiality was secured using pseudonyms for the participants as well as the research site. This aspect of confidentiality was also used in the storage of data.

4. Findings and discussions

4.1 Introducing the participants

The two participants whose voices ring in the section below have the same qualifications, teach the same grades using the same documents, are exposed to the same level of accountability and external dictates but are distinguished by qualitative differences which reveal that personal traits, beliefs, and attitudes contribute to their beliefs and practices within the paradigm of performativity and accountability. This finding viewed against scholarship on control and performativity reveals that fidelity, conformity, and national attempts to standardise teaching is still sifted through teachers' personal characteristics thus homogenisation of teacher voice is not possible.

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Salome: the softie

Salome's first words were, "I am a teacher and I love teaching!" heralding her passion and enthusiasm for her job. Even though the rest of the interview turned to the challenges of her context and her job, she still confirmed her passion for teaching. A self-confirmed introvert she metamorphosed in the classroom where she radiated energy and confidence that encouraged animated responses from her learners. Being acutely aware of the poor context, she expressed concern for the physical wellbeing of the learners and consideration for their home conditions. In this regard she stated:

> *…they may look like the others, but they are not the same… Sometimes the electricity is cut off or there is domestic trouble. Some of them come to school hungry and cannot afford to bring a lunch box… we need to be sensitive to learners' circumstances.*

However, her confession, "I am compliant, and I do not like to challenge authority" alerted me to her personal characteristic which signalled compliance moderated by fear of bureaucrats.

Melisiwe the compliant combatant

Melisiwe was a confident and energetic speaker who expressed an awareness of unfairness and infringement of teachers' rights and responsibilities. However, she did report that even though she challenged certain external requests for data that may position teachers in a deficit mode, she complied because she realised that power structures do not acknowledge the voice on the ground. This is evident in the following statements:

> *They always give and give, and we just receive. We have no voice. We can't ask but why can't we do it this way? The way we do it now works for us. They don't come to help; they only come to find faults with us.*

Melisiwe' s discourses were couched in strident and scathing language whenever the issue of teacher authority came up, but she also came across as a passionate and animated teacher who expressed care and concern for the learners. This duality in her attitude was a recurring motif in all our interactions.

The next section is captured via three themes distilled from the data relating to the participants' perceptions of performativity and accountability. These themes are underscored by the premise that teacher voice, embedded in teacher judgement,

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professional and curricular authority is an important component in the educational system. The summarized themes are, pyramids of power, culture of schools and panoptic performativity. These themes are interrelated and should not be viewed as discrete as they are perceived by teachers as starting at the top and traversing in a downward spiral to converge and suppress teacher intervention and deviation from fidelity to the curriculum and focus on attainment.

4.2 Pyramids of power

The data suggests that teachers perceive themselves to be positioned as silenced implementers at the bottom of the pyramid of hierarchy and therefore feel demeaned and disempowered. Top-down initiatives entrench teaches in a subordinate position while the language in curriculum artefacts includes the word 'policy' to remind teachers of their position as subjects of the state thus compelling them to comply with instructions. Consequently, it is marketed as an official document representing the authority of the government thus confirming the argument made by (Campbell, 2006),

> *You must just follow here. They say its policy, so we cannot challenge it, policy says this, and policy says that…that's how they speak when they come here. You must comply with policy, that's your job! Or they say you are a non-compliant teacher then you not doing your job. (Melisiwe).*

Increasingly, teachers' narratives revolved around the words 'policy say's and 'the document tells' revealing the authority encapsulated in the documents as constructors of teachers' work. This prescription leads to feelings of frustration as they begin to see the documents as impenetrable,

> *The document tells me what to do. I have a problem with the document saying what I cannot say... (Melisiwe).*

Following a rigid curriculum stifles creativity and estranges them from any mental activity. The strident tone of anger continues as Melisiwe describes her position and authority as a teacher within the current educational system. This narrative aligns with Helsby (1995, p. 12) where he argues that a teacher under the current regime is treated as a 'functionary in need of regulation and control.' Melisiwe expresses her objectification by stating,

> *You are just an empty box waiting to be filled with policies and then you work…I AM AN EMPTY BOX. This tells me I should just do my job and go home.*

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The feelings expressed by Melisiwe is common to both teachers as Salome reports "our knowledge and experience mean nothing. We are not allowed to contribute so we keep quiet and follow." Evidently, the belief relating to their lowered status emanates from governmental structures who reconceptualised teachers' role and authority. Hence, teachers feel demeaned and either become reactive or accept it as an altered reality where they see no possibility for transformative actions. Thus, leading them to feel that their professional judgement and expertise is not valued. As stated by Salome, "we have two options – sink or swim, and I am swimming."

The need for judicious compliance is enforced by the term 'policy' in the curriculum documents which sanctioned the belief that it was mandated by the government (Drake & Sherin, 2009). In line with the conclusion reached by Day (1999) it becomes clear that teachers are not likely to take ownership of a reform unless voice is constructed through a heightened awareness of collaboration and agency. Even though curriculum-imposed decisions did not align with teachers' expressed realities, they felt compelled to comply. Subordination to external dictates compromised their own professional judgements for self-protection. However, in terms of accountability there was a disengagement from the concept as teachers' discourses reveal that the fault lay with the government, policymakers, and bureaucrats they therefore felt robbed of their curricular authority and rights as important stakeholders in the educational field. There also seemed to be a sense of victimisation and indifference starting to set in.

4.3 Culture of the school

Emergent findings in this category reveals the dominance of stratified power structures in the ecology of schooling and is emblematic of Ball's (1994, p. 21) assertion that policy environments determine 'Who can speak. When, where and with what authority.' In this regard both participants levelled strong criticisms of the top-down communication styles, and autocratic management that drew the lines between level one teachers and middle and upper management. Prolonged exposure to hierarchical dominance patterns teachers' responses to the extent that they accept the status quo and 'stay in our lane.' This acceptance connotes to a lack of open dialogue between teachers and senior management teams. Typically, Melisiwe asks,

> *what's the point of speaking? They do not listen to us anyway. If we question anything, even for clarity, they say we are resisting or challenging authority. I am tired now, so I keep quiet but sometimes I say how I feel about decisions that affect our work, but I know it doesn't matter what I say.*

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The data indicates that conflictual relationships exist in ecologies of high control and impermeable walls are created between those in the trenches of teaching and management structures. While some have adopted silence others sometimes challenge the imperatives even though they know that it is pointless. Bound by the realities of hierarchies of control, they see any attempt on their part as futile. This echoes a finding by Jessop and Penny (1998) whose participants also expressed resigned acceptance of the status quo.

The data reveals that compliance is the custom and that a kind of ventriloquism exists where teachers' voices are transmitted by middle management. Teachers reported that they do not freely contribute to curricular decisions as decisions are made by management and communicated to them. Consequently, teachers felt that their input was not valued,

> *We are passive. The principal makes all the decisions and if he wants it done that way then let it be done. We communicate via the Head of department. There is no need for our input. (Melisiwe).*

Scholarship reveals that the stratification of power emanating from governments' move to silence teachers, replicates in the school space through legitimisation of the discourses of control that emanates from above (Masuda, 2010). Accordingly, disempowerment was expressed by candidates who revealed that the ethos of the school enforced the notion that teachers were mere technicians (Ball et al., 2011) who delivered scripted material. Strict governance by senior management structures-maintained regulation to protocol characterised by 'line function' as mentioned by Salome. Thus, the space for teacher voice was found to exist in the 'realm of impossibility' (Badal, 2019) because strategic patterns of hierarchical communication enforce policy stipulations confining teachers to a constantly shrinking space for teacher voice (Le Roux, 2011).

4.4 Panoptic performativity

This category reveals that the current approach to supervision uses a "combination of pressure and support" with an increased dose of pressure (Fullan, 2007, p. 9). Narratives revealed that fidelity to the curriculum, the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) and covering the curriculum were monitored stringently through regular supervisory visits from the district. Consequently, teacher efforts were geared towards pleasing the supervisor who focused on curriculum coverage and other technical matters instead of the business of

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teaching and learning. This finding aligns with those of Valli and Buese (2007) who termed this teaching approach 'drive by teaching'.

Teacher narratives confirm that the push for technical compliance created the perception that deep coverage and diverse learning experiences were unnecessary. Thus, the propensity for creative and enriching learning experiences for learners were stifled by the fear of not meeting the facilitators' specifications,

> *We could do more to make the lessons more interesting and add to the poetry list but where is the time? We must be on par with the ATP or else…When teachers are not where they are supposed to be Mrs X will kill you! (Melisiwe).*

Analysis of teachers' awareness of the boundaries and limits indicated that they are restricted in enclaves of control and regulation. Supervision and regular monitoring by district officials pattern and shape teachers in ways that encourage conformity and compliance. It is not surprising that the data shows teacher voice as silenced with a shifted focus on accountability and performativity. Although there is evidence of tension experienced between delivering the 'curriculum as planned, and curriculum as lived' (Drake & Sherin, 2009) teachers opt for compliance as a means of protection of the self from any negative repercussions. As stated by Salome, "teachers don't think because it is not required, they focus more on doing what they are told to do." This aligns with Priestley et al. (2012), who found that teachers fear becoming innovative when faced with regulation and monitoring. The main factor that motivated teachers' compliance and conformity hinges on creating a favourable impression and appeasing the facilitator.

With reference to the heightened attainment focus, the participants admitted that the performativity agenda had influenced their practices. Melisiwe and Salome stated that contrary to their beliefs they resorted to using the drilling method in preparation for exams. Both candidates explain that they would "rather take time to focus on deep learning" but feel compelled to teach to the test. Evidently, it is the fear of being classified as a bad teacher that keeps them focused on achieving acceptable pass rates,

> *I drill and drill until they are ready for the exams. I cannot afford to focus on learning as the supervisor will ask me about my students' poor performance and will visit me more often the following year. The principal will also be asked to write a report and we will have to account for the bad results. Everyone does that here. We start this process in Grade 11 so that the learners are already primed in Grade 12. We were asked by the principal to keep the learners in an hour after*

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> *school just to do exam prep. That's all we do here to make sure we do not fall below national attainment goals. (Salome).*

This finding confirms those of Apple (2011) who concluded that in contexts of heightened specification and regulation teacher input is limited in their teaching practices. Thus, teachers' perceptions of the control influenced them to carry out their tasks without critical engagement. These findings confirm that when teacher competence is aligned with learner performance teachers are bound to defer to the attainment agenda. Thus, all planning and goals flowed in the direction of attaining an acceptable pass rate. Priestley (2010) warned that the introduction of an auditing regime would stultify teachers' work to a degree that they would not progress beyond ticking boxes. This consequence appeared in the study underpinning this article.

The study found theoretical resonance with Ball (2003, p.216) who argued that within regimes of accountability and performativity, the decisions, and actions of an individual "serve[s] as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection." A major setback for transformative teaching and teacher agency is identified in the data. It is apparent that for some teachers, the accountability and performativity mechanisms have influenced their instructional processes. Teacher confidence in their own self efficacy to produce desired outcomes through their own efforts have been compromised to the extent that they merely follow instructions. Moreover, they also seem to distance themselves from these products as they are aware of the deleterious consequences for teaching outcomes. The data found that teachers have resigned themselves to being silenced executors of the goals of others thus inducting them into perceptions where they think of themselves "as individuals who calculate about themselves, add value to themselves, improve their productivity, strive for excellence, and live an existence of calculation' (Ball, 2003: 217). The following questions posed by ball (2003:20) has crucial significance for teachers who perceive their voices to be muted:

> *Are we doing this because it is important, because we believe in it, because it is worthwhile? Or is it being done ultimately because it will be measured or compared? It will make us look good! Do we know we are good at what we do, even if performance indicators tell a different story. Do we value who we are able to be, we are becoming in the labyrinth of performativity?*

These questions reflexively interrogate whether teachers can successfully consider the demands of production while staying true to their own beliefs and professional authority. Ball (2003, p. 221) refers to the type of anxiety that ensues as 'values

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schizophrenia' since teachers often ask why professional judgement and learning is sacrificed for statistics and impression of successful pass rates. The teachers in my study consistently asserted that the new approach did not benefit learners in relation to improved learning experiences, creativity, and depth of learning. This finding is confirmed by Appel, (2020) and Poole (2022). These scholars report that the performativity culture strains teacher's ability to produce innovative and creative lessons for the benefit of their learners. A crucial area of concern presented by the data in this study is the idea that goals and target setting is externally constructed therefore beyond the scope of teachers' work. Within this setting teachers experience reduced agency, limited authority, and are subjected to externally driven accountability (Leckie & Goldstein, 2019). Moreover, the finding confirmed Ball's (2003) argument that working towards external targets may lead to decreased self-efficacy and motivation.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to investigate how the accountability and performativity culture introduced by the CAPS reform has influenced teacher voice. The findings indicate a strong correlation between policy regulation and the products of teacher practice. Within this paradigm of external control teacher voice in crucial decision making is suppressed (Helsby, 1995) leading to a decrease in motivation and teacher satisfaction (Day & Smethem, 2009). The main findings indicate that while there is a rupture between working towards external targets and internal beliefs, teachers suppress their own knowledge and merely tick the predetermined boxes. Teachers perceive external control to be detrimental to both teachers and learners and report that their teaching methodologies are not synchronous with the performativity ideology. Hence, the need for teachers to locate space for teacher voice in their practices is amplified in this study. Space and boundaries can coexist if teachers can look beyond their immediate discomfort and find spaces to manoeuvre in policy contexts that are both enabling and circumscribing through their own efforts to transform their practices and work towards the goals of teaching and learning. However, the question remains: are facilitators and senior management solely focused on fidelity to "external data-driven performativity outcomes" (Poole 2022, p. 152), to the exclusion of any consideration about the tension that this type of governance afflicts on the teachers? It is therefore the recommendation of this article that studies are conducted in this vein with the inclusion of voices of district facilitators and middle and senior management for a holistic picture to emerge.

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