Interpretive discourses in South Africa's Education White Paper No. 6: Special Needs Education

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We (de)construct interpretive discourses in South Africa's recently published White Paper on Special Needs Education. In particular, we (de)construct objects, agents, actions and binaries constituted by social constructionist discourses as well as the voices these discourses marginalize. We discuss the implications that interpretive discourses, as we deconstruct them in White Paper 6: Special Needs Education, have for inclusion/exclusion.

Introduction

Since 1994 policy documents, Green Papers, White Papers and Acts have been produced constructing their purpose as promoting and protecting the rights of people with disabilities. In education, children with disabilities are constructed as being part of a larger group given the name "learners with special needs" or "learners experiencing barriers to learning and development". Texts promoting their inclusion/exclusion include:

- Education White Paper 1 on Education and Training (RSA, 1995) which discussed the importance of addressing the needs of learners with special needs both in special and mainstream schools;
- South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996) which stated that principals and heads of department should take into account the rights and wishes of the parents in deciding where learners with special needs should be placed. It was also recommended that schools accommodating such learners should have persons with expertise in the field on the governing body;
- Quality Education for All: Report of the National Commission on Special Education Needs and Training and the National Committee for Education Support Services (Department of Education, 1997a) which described special needs as "barriers to learning and development" with one category of barriers being (dis)ability;
- Consultative Paper No. 1 on Special Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 1999) based largely on the recommendations of the above document;
- The Higher Education White Paper (Department of Education, 1997b) which calls for identification of existing inequalities "which are the product of policies, structures and practices based on racial, gender, disability and other forms of discrimination or disadvantage" and "a programme of transformation with a view to redress";
- Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education (Department of Education, 2001), the text to be (de)constructed in our narrative.

The research question in the broader study (on which this research is based) was, "What grand narratives, discourses, agents, actions, objects, binaries and voices on the margins constituting inclusion/exclusion and (dis)ability" are to be (de)constructed in reading White Paper 6?" (Van Rooyen, 2002:5). In this article we examine the agents, actions, objects, binaries and voices on the margins constituting inclusion/exclusion and (dis)ability by interpretive narratives in White Paper 6. The rationale for selecting White Paper 6 for (de)construction was:

- immediacy: The text was published in July 2001;
- relevance: We narrate it as central to the construction of (dis)ability and inclusion/exclusion in education in South Africa today.

(Re)search approach

Our research is broadly informed by poststructural theory/theories. We story poststructuralism as a response to structuralism: structuralism constructed as the search for deep, stable, universal structures, regulated by laws, underlying any phenomenon (Miller, 1997). Within the poststructuralist "interpretative framework" we use deconstruction as a strategy ("method") for reading policy. We find Appignanesi and Garratt's (1994:79-80) view of deconstruction particularly useful. They write:

> This is deconstruction — to peel away like an onion the layers of constructed meanings ... Deconstruction is a strategy for revealing the underlayers of meanings 'in' a text that were suppressed or assumed in order for it to take its actual form — in particular the assumptions of 'presence' (the hidden representations of guaranteed certainty). Texts are never simply unitary but include resources that run counter to their assertions and/or their authors' intentions.

So, the intent of our narrative is (de)constructive, with emancipation seen as emerging from such a process. We call such a process (de)constructive in that we aim to disrupt "truth" or "unquestioned" stories in the legislation: exploring binaries, hierarchies and inconsistencies constituted by discourses and the silences and "rebel voices" (Boje & Dennehy, 1999) in their margins. We see our approach as emancipatory in that, in (de)constructing such stories, it creates space for alternative narratives or knowledges. As Clough and Barton (1998:5) cogently state: "One move which has been characteristic of emancipatory research and its variants is to exploit the potential for multiple constructions in order to subvert and critique those constructions which are currently dominant."

But, what are some of the deconstructive strategies that we might use?

Gough (2000:74) states that deconstructive reading strategies include:

- Pressing the literal meanings of a metaphor until it yields unintended meanings;
- Looking for contradictions;
- Identifying gaps;
- Setting silences to speak;
- Focusing on ambiguous words or syntax;
- Demonstrating that different meanings can be produced by different readings;
- Reversing the terms of a binary pair and subverting the hierarchies.

The textual matrix

Batley (1994:4-5) describes every text as an intertext, taking its "place between texts, with other texts in mind, picking up the traces of texts

that have gone before". White Paper 6: Special Needs Education is a text that can be (de)constructed as emerging from a matrix of texts about inclusion (de)constructing inclusion/exclusion and (dis)ability in a multiplicity of ways.

Inclusion has become a "global agenda": a rapidly emerging, dominant issue within and even beyond special education across national contexts (Clark, Dyson, Millward & Robson, 1999:37). South Africa, state Sayed and Carrim (1998), has entered into discourses of inclusiveness on all levels of society. We argue that this is, however, a fragmented agenda with constructions of inclusion that vary depending upon the grand narratives and discourses of the proponents. For as we read about inclusion, we found ourselves flung into a field of contested meaning. We are not alone in this experience. Armstrong (Bélanger, 2000:233) notes that:

> ... discourses of inclusion have multiple meanings, used by different people in different contexts, and are commonly used in ways which mask the attitudes, social structures and processes which produce and sustain exclusion.

Lloyd (2000:135) describes as "dangerous" the assumption that "there is some kind of agreement about what is meant by equality of opportunity and inclusion". He strongly challenges notions of inclusion as a simple matter of "relocation" rather than "a problematic and controversial concept which is open to a wide range of definitions and about which there is little agreement or shared understanding" (Lloyd, 2000: 136). Dyson (2001:1) furthers the debate, noting that there is not one agreed upon conception of inclusion, but rather a range or variety of inclusions. These include inclusion-as-placement, inclusion-as-education-for-all, inclusion-as-participation and social inclusion.

(De)constructions of inclusion/exclusion discourses are multiple. Naicker (1999) and Slee (1997) suggest that responses to inclusion/exclusion are constructed by discourses on disability. Naicker (1999: 13-14) cites four of the discourses constructed by Fulcher, namely, medical, lay, charity and rights, but omits to mention the management discourses, which are noted by Slee (1997). Slee notes all five of Fulcher's discourses, but suggests five others constructed by Riddell (Slee, 1997): the essentialist, social constructionist, materialist, postmodern and disability movement 'theoretical perspectives'. Skrtic (1995) uses his framework of functionalist, interpretivist, radical structuralist and radical humanist to describe discourses around inclusion and disability. Dyson, Bailey, O'Brien, Rice and Zigmond (1998) use three primary strands: critical, pragmatic and rights. Table 1 illustrates the discourses deconstructed by these writers.

Table 1   In/exclusion discourses (de)constructed

Naicker (1999)	Slee (1997)	Dyson *et al.* (1998)	Skrtic (1995)
Medical	Essentialist	Pragmatic	Functionalist
Charity	Social constructionist	Critical	Interpretivist
Lay	Critical	Rights	Radical structuralist
Rights	Disability movement		Radical humanist
	Postmodern		Postmodern

From these we construct the following framework within which we read the literature and White Paper 6, recognising as we do so that we are (re)constructing as we read. In constructing our framework, we also recognize that we include and exclude as we write, marginalizing and silencing possible discourses that could be voiced. We invite the reader to (de)construct these silences. We further suggest that our constructions may imply boundaries between grand narratives and discourses that are not there as they construct and position one another: thus the broken lines of Figure 1, which (re)presents the framework of grand narratives and discourses (de)constructed in our reading. The medical discourse, for example, decentres and silences the voices of subjective experience and individual strength by emphasising and giving greater importance to objective observation and individual deficit. However, these voices are constructed in the margins: binaries

Grand narratives

	Functionalist	Interpretivist	Radical Structuralist	Radical Humanist
Discourses	Medical Charity Lay Special needs Pragmatic/ Systems	Constructivist (individual) Social constructionist	Materialist/ Critical	Democracy Human rights Social justice Normalisation Independence/ Inter-dependence
Disability movement				
Postmodernism				

Figure 1 Grand narratives and discourses (de)constructed in this (re)-search, incorporating the work of Dyson *et al.* (1998), Naicker (1999), Skrtic (1995), and Slee (1997)

signified through opposition, which gives that which is centred in its meaning.

For the purposes of this article we focus on the interpretivist discourse as read in White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) in the following ways:
- (de)constructing grand narratives constituting and constituted by this discourse;
- (de)constructing objects in the text constituted by this discourse;
- (de)constructing agents and actions in the text constituted by this discourse;
- (de)constructing binaries in the text constituted by this discourse;
- (de)constructing voices/alternative knowledges on the margins of those discourses.

In the larger body of work upon which this article is based (Van Rooyen, 2002), readings of the other grand narratives and discourses within the literature and White Paper 6 were also offered. It is not within the scope of this article to explore them further.

The interpretive (grand) narrative as read in the literature

Skrtic (1995:32) defines the interpretivist grand narrative as being concerned "primarily with understanding the social construction of reality". The interpretivist perspective resists the construction of disability as fact "an entity — whose nature is just waiting to be discovered" but rather describes it as "an experience waiting to be described or, more precisely, a multitude of experiences waiting to be described" (Skrtic, 1995:113). Within interpretivism we construct two strands:
- The Piagetian approach (Thomas, 1996:231-269), which focuses on how the individual constructs reality and knowledge. We refer to this as constructivism;
- The Vygotskian approach (Thomas, 1996:270-293), which explores the social construction of knowledge. We refer to this as social constructivism.

What distinguishes interpretivist from postmodern discourses, is the assumption that there is a single, underlying reality which can only be known subjectively. As Skrtic (1995:147) writes: "Even the subjectivist paradigms are, according to the postmodernists, built on the idea that behind appearances there is still the true and the real." Thus interpretivist approaches do not deny that there may be a reality — disability — but they focus on either the individual or individual-social construction of that experience. Several writers — among them Armstrong, Dolinksi and Wrapson (1999), Biklen (2000) and Carrington (1999) — construct interpretivist grand narratives in their storying of inclusion.

Constructivist discourse(s)

In our research we construct the constructivist discourse as presenting individual narratives or responses to disability and inclusion. For example, "What about Chantel? From inside out: an insider's experience of exclusion" is one such study, co-written by and charting the expe-

riences of Chantel Wrapson who experienced exclusion within inclusion: sent into a mainstream that could not meet her needs (Armstrong, Dolinski & Wrapson, 1999). Another such study is that of Green, Forrester, Mvambi, Janse van Vuuren and Du Toit (1999:127-156) which describes the responses of individual teachers to inclusion.

The value of such research is, we argue, constructed by Clough (1999:67) who states that "... the present system (of broadly exclusive provision) is supported not merely in the structures of society (such as institutions) but necessarily in *the structures of experience of the individuals who participate in that culture*". If individual experiences and constructions supporting exclusion and inclusion are not voiced, they cannot become part of an inclusive postmodern dialogue. Another argument is supported by Slee's (2001:171) observation that the "quasi-medical generalizations that carried expert authority" which said little about the experience of disability but rather essentialized "people, their lives, hopes and possibilities". We suggest that individual narratives counter such constructions.

Skrtic (1995:118) suggests that the value of individual stories lies in their "reformative" possibilities. He describes parents' accounts of their experiences of and views about raising their children with severe disabilities in the community, in schools and with other children as one of the "primary forces toward integrated, inclusionary education". Skrtic (1995:118) further posits that simply telling stories is empowering. We found the following words particularly meaningful: "So, let us tell our stories: recognize them as legitimate. Listen to the stories of others; appreciate them as additions not contradictions. And most important, proclaim the value of those whose stories so often go untold" (Skrtic, 1995:119).

Social constructionist discourse(s)
Social constructionist perspectives or discourses, writes Slee (1997: 409), present disability as an "oppressive and normative construct deployed against minorities enforcing social marginalisation". Erevelles (2000:41) calls these 'liberal constructivist theories' appealed to by 'disability scholars' who, while conceding that "certain aspects of the disability experience may impede functioning in a world whose organization is based on particular conceptions of 'normality' ... nevertheless argue that it is not really their differences that are the issue. It is rather how these differences are "read" or constructed by the social world."

Carrington (1999:257-259) brings the notion of culture into the social constructionist discourse, describing success and failure, ability and disability, and the notion of schooling, as "cultural constructions". These constructions are represented in teachers' personal beliefs, attitudes and values and shape the way they interact with students. Inclusive education, she writes, "will require a school culture that emphasizes the notion of diversity and is based on a desire to explore similarity and difference". The focus should not just be on the needs of students with disabilities but also on "recognizing and understanding social responses to difference and establishing 'cultures of difference' in schools". She links such a culture to a child-centred pedagogy in which there can be no construct of failure because the learner is seen as directing his/her own learning (Carrington, 1999:259-260).

Describing the inclusion of multiple cultural positionings in discussion about inclusion and education in general, Kisanji (1998:68), quoting Welch, speaks of the need for cultures to enter into "an open-ended dialogue, where neither party is in control" and where "there are no privileged cultural positions".

Biklen (2000:337) asks how inclusion can be practised in the light of critical disability narratives: narratives which recognize "disability as a social construct and which see disability as occurring within shifting political, economic and social contexts, often highly marginalizing and discriminatory in nature". Such an interpretation directly challenges the concept of disability as an individual characteristic, a construction dominating the medical model of disability.

Deconstructing interpretive discourses in White Paper 6
Although disability itself is not narrated as socially constructed within White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), but is constituted as medical/organic with no reflection on how these medical/organic differences are read, we do (de)construct interpretivist narratives within this text. These narratives are concerned with understanding the social construction of reality (Skrtic, 1995:32).

Social constructionist discourse(s)
The social constructionist discourse argues that "all social realities are constructed and shared through well-understood processes. It is this socialized sharing that gives these constructions their apparent reality, for if everyone agrees on something, how can one argue that it does not exist?" (Guba quoted by Skrla, 2000:296). As we noted previously, White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) does not reflect upon the social construction of disability itself, but it does constitute social constructions related to disability and inclusion.

Objects constituted
The social constructionist discourse forms the following objects: public awareness and acceptance of inclusion; support for the policy; community support (Department of Education, 2001:33); negative attitudes to and stereotyping of difference (Department of Education, 2001:7); fears, concerns, worries and anxieties about inclusion (Department of Education, 2001:3).

Agents constituted
Agents constituted by the social constructionist discourse are the Ministry and the passive voice.

Actions constituted
Actions are constituted primarily by what we narrate as a military discourse. The Ministry uncovers negative stereotypes, launches an information and advocacy campaign, targets parents and mobilises community support. The passive voice arms parents with information. War is declared against social constructions averse to the vision of the Ministry. Another group of actions is formed by what we story as the missionary discourse which disseminates information, advocates unconditional acceptance and wins support for the cause.

Binaries constituted
Binaries are constituted in adjectives describing social constructions: unconditional versus conditional acceptance of inclusion; negative versus positive stereotypes. What we construe as ironic is that White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) itself constitutes conditional rather than unconditional acceptance of inclusion. There is not full inclusion within the system: all schools including all learners. There is rather conditional mainstreaming or allocation to ordinary schools depending upon assessment of the severity of the barriers to learning and the degree of support needed. There is also conditional entry to full-service schools "that will have a bias towards certain disabilities" (Department of Education, 2001:10). Thus inclusion in any sub-system of the inclusive system is conditional: "subject to one or more conditions being met" (Pearsall, 1999:297).

We also find ourselves questioning a system that requests unconditional acceptance in the following way: "... advocating unconditional acceptance and winning support for the policies put forward ..." (Department of Education, 2001:33). To what is this unconditional acceptance attached? Is this advocating unconditional acceptance of the policy? Unconditional acceptance or positive regard within psychology constitutes acceptance of a person regardless of what that person does. The behaviours may be condemned, but the person must remain accepted (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1989:385). Is the public being asked to accept a policy regardless of what actions materialize from that policy? Is this freedom and democracy? Or is the object of the unconditional acceptance people? If so, as noted above, the document is inconsistent, in that certain schools within the vision of the inclusive system do not accept certain people.

As regards negative and its binary, positive, these are value judgements. A stereotype is constructed as "an image of idea of a particular type of person or thing that has become fixed through being widely held" (Pearsall, 1999:1408). Constituting people with differences roo-

ted in organic/medical causes as a people with disabilities or the reversal of abilities is a fixed idea associated with particular knowledges constructing ability in particular ways. Is this a negative or a positive stereotype? Within the medical discourse, White Paper 6 (2001:12) frames it as "internationally acceptable"; thus positive? Is international acceptance the value we use to determine what is negative and what is positive? If the world stereotypes a group of people in a particular way, is that positive? And what of the way in which the document represents the mothers and fathers who must be convinced that the place of their children is not one of isolation in "dark backrooms and sheds" (Department of Education, 2001:4). The words "dark" and "isolation" bring to mind imprisonment, thus constituting parents as the imprisoners. We (de)construct this as the representation of a negative stereotype. Does the Ministry frame it as positive?

Implications for inclusion
We read the social constructionist discourse in White Paper 6 as constituting the Ministry's awareness of these attitudes, stereotypes, fears, anxieties, worries and concerns but, simultaneously, outlining a lack of acceptance of these constructions. They must be changed, thus the constitution of military and missionary discourses focused on uncovering and overcoming resistance.

What we ask is why these voices cannot become part of the process, why they cannot dialogue with and be heard. Rather than information being disseminated, can information not be collected? Rather than a dominant story being imposed, can space not be created for alternative stories? The answer may lie in Young's languaging of what she calls "cultural imperialism": a form of oppression that stereotypes oppressed groups' experience and interpretation of life and imposes the dominant group's experience and interpretation of life (in Gewirtz, 1998:477).

Voices on the margins
That a need is narrated for a military or missionary discourse, indicates that there are many voices on the margins — heard by the narrators — that need to be converted. They need to be made aware of their "rights, responsibilities and obligations" as outlined by the policy; they need to be armed with "information, counselling and skills"; they need to change. These are the voices of the many parents, educators, lecturers and learners who are anxious and afraid, or who do not unconditionally accept inclusion. It is the voice of the lay discourse storied by Naicker (1999:14) as one of "prejudice, hate, ignorance, fear, and even paternalistic tendencies".

But what of voices within the text that are not unconditionally accepting, that create negative stereotypes? What of the medical and charity discourses we read in the text? What of the exclusion? What of the narrating of parents as prisoners and educators as inadequate? Are these voices too going to be converted?

"Concluding" reflections
White Paper 6 is constituted by multiple discourses, namely *functionalist, interpretive, radical structuralist, radical humanist* and *postmodern* discourses (Van Rooyen, 2002). In this article we (de)constructed interpretive narratives constituting and constituted by White Paper 6. We pointed out that White Paper 6 does not reflect upon the social construction of disability itself, but that it does constitute social constructions related to disability and inclusion. In Kappeler's words (quoted in Lather, 1991:30): "[We] do not really wish to conclude and sum up, rounding off the argument so as to dump it in a nutshell on the reader. A lot more could be said about the topics [we] have touched upon... [We] have meant to ask the questions, to break out of the frame ... the point is not a set of answers, but making possible a different..." policy reading.

Acknowledgement

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