The effect of the ideology of new managerial professionalism on the South African education system

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If the intention of South African education legislation is to professionalise teachers, and if this is seen as empowering them for their task, connected to quality education, then it is indeed a worthy ideal. However, pedagogical values have been redefined within a neoliberalist framework, serving corporate culture and lowering the pedagogical role of teachers to a position of obedience to market norms. In the attempts of professionalising teachers, education has fallen prey to an ideology of new managerial professionalism – the worthy ideal of professionalising teachers has become a mechanism for dominating the very people it set out to liberate. Within the context of a growing global economy the pedagogical values that embody the professionalisation of teachers have been replaced by values aligned with economic growth. The professional role of the teacher and educational reform has been driven by a political ideology committed to new managerial professionalism. The paper highlights the way in which an overemphasis of the professional status of teachers within a neoliberalist framework establishes and sustains relations of domination in South African education. The effects of new managerial professionalism on education are also explored.

Keywords: decentralisation; goalsetting; managerialism; neoliberalism; new managerialism; new public management; performativity; professionalism

Introduction

Against the background of the education system that is under pressure in South Africa (eNCA, 2015; McCarthy & Bernstein, 2011) the "professionalism" of teachers has been a much-debated issue. It is, however not a new debate, although social and other media has opened up new avenues for such a debate. The debate in South Africa was, in the previous political dispensation, deeply influenced by the ideology of ethno-nationalism. White teachers were regarded as professionals and African [Black] teachers were largely regarded as technicians (Msibi & Mchunu, 2013:19), hence the apartheid construction of teacher professionality contributed significantly to the deep division in South African education system. The dismantling of the previous regime after 1994 did, however, not improve the autonomy and professional status of teachers in this country, since the ghosts of the past have merely been replaced by new (ideological) ghosts in a neoliberal guise. While ethno-nationalism has served as a mechanism of social control and resulted in relations of domination in education between various population groups prior to 1994, uneven power relations and performativity framed by neoliberalism permeates the education system in an equally devastating way.

Aim of the Paper

The paper draws on ideology critique to explore the impact of neoliberalism on current education, particularly on the professionality of teachers, and the way in which the autonomy of teachers is affected. The underlying thesis is that in post-apartheid South Africa an ideology of new managerial professionalism has emerged, and that this ideology influences the education system in this country in a fundamental way.

A brief overview of the main features of new managerial professionalism as an ideology, on which the last part of the paper is based, is offered. An exploration of transformative structures in the South African education system are subsequently undertaken to indicate the ways in which professionalism and new managerialism (herein referred to as new managerial professionalism) have an impact on education by creating and sustaining unequal power relations.

New Managerial Professionalism as an Ideology

The concept, "professionalism," is indistinct and definitions thereof mostly lack clarity of meaning. Yet it appears that debates around teacher professionalism have primarily been influenced by two distinct ideological discourses.

Ideology in the context of teacher professionalism

Ideology can be depicted, in a neutral way, as a life and worldview, or a system of ideas that provide a framework of normative principles or guidelines for everyday life that view the world from one specific perspective (Leatt, Kneifel & Nürnburger, 1986:281; Van Niekerk, 1990:94; also see Heywood, 1997:41). According to Thompson (1994:8), in the neutral sense, ideology functions as a kind of "social cement," which "succeeds in stabilizing societies by binding their members together, providing them with collectively shared values and norms." Viewed in this way, the ideology of professionalism can be seen as an ideal (or a system of beliefs) that promotes a set of values and norms that would unify teachers as professionals. Thus, one discourse regards professionalism as an ideal or an ideology in the neutral sense, relating to a professional vocation of what teachers can do and how they do it. Professionalism, in this context, refers to moral attributes that teachers strive to attain, based on excellence,

collaboration, teamwork, professional development, and trust (De Klerk, 2014:76–78; Firestone, 2001:3; Sachs, 2000:78; Terwilliger, 2006:1).

On the other hand, in a second ideological discourse, Thompson argues that "the concept of ideology can be used to refer to ways in which meaning serves, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain asymmetrical relations of power or relations of domination" (1994:7). In line with the view of Thompson, Karl Popper regards ideology as "an instrument of social control to ensure compliance and subordination" (1947, in Heywood, 1997:40). Indeed, Bettache and Chiu (2019:9) argue that *neoliberalism* (which includes managerialism and performativity) as an ideology has "extended its hegemonic influence to all areas of life." Within such a viewpoint, professionalism is often viewed as an ideology in the negative sense as it is oppressive and often unjust (Shepherd, 2018). In this paper we consider the latter view, namely to examine the intricate ways in which an ideology can maintain relations of domination. The main thesis of the paper draws on the work of a number of critical theorists, and especially on Thompson's critical conception of ideology, as outlined in *Ideology and modern culture: Critical social theory in the era of mass communication* (1994).

The ideology of professionalism within neoliberal and managerial thinking developed around liberalist values such as liberty, the importance of the individual, and competition. In this instance, the understanding is that while professionalism supposedly provides teachers with a degree of autonomy of action, it legitimises control over them. Indeed, in South Africa, teacher professionalism is characterised by measurability and functionality. This is rooted firmly in neoliberalism and based on the premises that "efficient management can solve any problem; and that practices which are appropriate for the conduct of private enterprises can also be applied to the public sector" (Sachs, 2000:79). When the professional role of the teacher is clothed in such managerialist values and favours rigid lines of bureaucratic control, it can be referred to as the ideology of managerialist professionalism (Shepherd, 2018). Besley and Peters (2006) link self-interest and distrust to negative aspects as a result of this ideology. Managerial professionalism is often associated with an emphasis on expert knowledge and productivity (Engelbrecht, 2016) and "places teachers and teacher-educators above and apart from the people they serve" (Gale & Densmore, 2001:17). It therefore seems to be radically influenced by values of the neoliberalist ideological tradition, such as an emphasis on effectiveness, efficiency, and measurable performance in its close relationship with managerialism (Ball, 2003; Bettache & Chiu, 2019; Van der Walt, 2017). It seems that the ideology of professionalism is thus inseparably linked to managerialism, specifically the "new" version of

managerialism, or new public management. In this paper I therefore do not refer to professionalism and managerialism as separate ideologies that developed out of both liberalist and neoliberalist values, but to new managerial professionalism, hosted in the macro-ideology of neoliberalism. For the purpose of this paper, this term thus combines the features of new managerialism (to distinguish from [old] managerialism) and professionalism.

New managerial professionalism and new public management

At this point, a clarification of the term "new managerialism" (as it is found in literature) seems appropriate. This can be done by making a distinction between managerialism (sometimes referred to as old managerialism) and new managerialism.

Wallace and Pocklington define old managerialism as a

> … rational technicist approach to education management, grounded in the belief that all aspects of organisational life can and should be managed according to rational structures, procedures, and modes of accountability in the pursuit of goals defined by policymakers and senior managers (2002, cited in Herman, 2006:38).

According to this view, public services such as schools should follow the models practised in the private sector (Goldspink, 2007). Old managerialism is based on bureau-professionalism, which means that it represents a centralised, strictly hierarchical form of direct control and, applied to the sphere of education, expects that role players must comply, or face disciplinary measures. A typical example of this was the old school inspection system under the apartheid regime, which was met with resistance.

Managerialism and new managerialism differ in terms of their approach to control. Where managerialism involves intensifying systems of direct control (bureaucratically), new managerialism (or new public management, as it is referred to in some countries) relies on power that regulates rather than controls. Compliance is supposedly attained through commitment to a shared vision. The long-term aim of new managerialism is "to transform compliance into commitment, thereby winning the 'hearts and minds' of those who are managed" (Herman, 2006:40; also see Hali & McGinity, 2015). The preferred model of new managerialism is therefore people-centred, envisaging the achievement of competitive success through self-motivation and the loosening of formal control.

To achieve their objectives, adherents of new managerialism thus employ the Foucauldian concept of "governmentality," which refers to a "form of activity aimed to guide and shape conduct" (Olssen, Codd & O'Neill, 2004:25). Governmentality thus represents a conceptualisation of governance that is based on agency, but is dependent on the cooperation of the teacher (Peters, Marshall & Fitzsimons, 2000). This perception is closely related to the theory of

Popkewitz (2000:158–159), "governing of the soul," according to which the individual can be governed at a distance "through the principles by which an individual becomes self-motivated, self-actualized, and empowered."

It further appears that both versions of managerialism are primarily based on the same values inspired by neoliberalism, although the measures of control have been adapted in the new version of managerialism in an attempt to escape the rigid control of a bureaucratic style of management. One could thus infer that managerialism controls openly, while new managerialism employs more covert and cooperative measures of control. Tuinamuana (2011), however, points out that while this might sound like an idea to support, she highlights that there is controversy with regard to ownership, and how it is used.

Values Underlying New Managerial Professionalism

Some values of new managerialist professionalism can be identified in current education practices in South Africa.

Accountability is central to new managerialist professionalism. It is based primarily on external accountability of teachers as professionals (Goldspink, 2007). It is focused on standards, performance indicators, learner results, and other observable and quantifiable aspects of teaching (Avis, 2005; De Klerk, 2014) within a regulatory framework (Tuinamuana, 2011).

Goal-setting is a value of new managerialist professionalism that relates to the formulation of a corporate vision in the school, which also means that teachers adopt mission statements, development plans, and targets (Herman, 2006:49–52; Robertson, 2005:203–210).

Decentralisation is employed by new managerialist professionalism, claiming that institutions need to become more dynamic and flexible to add to the agency of teachers and parents. When linked to teacher professionalism and new managerialist market mechanisms, it is believed that decentralisation would contribute to quality and efficiency in the school (Fenwick, 2003:338–339; Herman, 2006:46–47; Nielsen, 2003:240; O'Brien & Down, 2002:115–124).

Efficiency and effectiveness of teachers to create better schools by utilising resources in a more effective manner. According to Herman (2006:42), efficiency can also be seen as "cost-effectiveness, value for money, responsiveness to market forces, controls on spending, outsourcing of services, performance indicators and quality assurance, accountability, output measures, and income generation," while Engelbrecht (2016) places emphasis on productivity. The emphasis that new managerialism places on performance is also referred to as "performativity."

The Impact of Values of New Managerialist Professionalism on Education Practices in South Africa

In view of the above, values, policies, and practices in the current South African education system that are framed within the ideology of new managerialist professionalism are considered.

Policy borrowing

A neoliberal policy stance is obvious in the emphasis that the South African government places on international consultancy and policy borrowing. The trend to borrow policies from international sources appears to be influenced by the global market and can be seen as a way of "legitimising" policies (Jansen, 2001:47). In this way, South Africa appears to be incorporated in the global market of modern economies. Mattson and Harley (2003:285) are of the opinion that the state has to "mimic the tools and means of implementation borrowed from the Western world or run the risk of not looking modern." The neoliberal managerialist influence on education is overtly declared in the preamble of the White Paper on Education and Training (Department of Education, 1995); it clearly states that education in South Africa is required to deal with the reality of international trends, international technologies, and expanding economic markets (cf. also Department of Education, 1996, 2004:16–17). Moreover, the unsuccessful implementation of *Curriculum 2005* (C2005) illustrates this point. The subsequent replacement of this outcomes-based curriculum by the *National Curriculum Statement,* with its narrow and restricted focus, and the *Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS)* (Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, 2011) has also not done much to professionalise teachers and confirm their agency, as the autonomy of the teacher was restricted even more.

Professional standards and teacher autonomy

In an attempt to re-professionalise teachers after the devastating effects of ethno-nationalism on teacher identity, the *Norms and Standards for Educators* (Department of Education, 2000) provides detailed descriptions of roles for educators in South Africa (Department of Education, 2000). The roles are expressed in terms of practical, foundational, and reflective competencies. They are strongly linked to development appraisal, career-pathing, and grading, as well as to performance management (Department of Education, 2000; Parker, 2003; Sayed, 2004). These are subsequently found in policies that guide teacher education programmes, and specifically *The Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications* (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015) and its revised 2018 version.

This new identity portrayed by teacher roles perceives teachers to be "officially regulated

performers whose actions are not only identifiable but measured against set standards or outcomes or performances determined by the state" (Jansen, 2003:123). The increased anxiety among South African teachers, as a result of their inability to live up to the expected (and unrealistic) roles, has over a period of time undermined their own sense of professional competence and has constrained their sense of professional autonomy (Carrim, 2003; Herman, 2006; Jansen, 2003; Sayed, 2004). The prescribed roles may be seen as underwriting a model for the teacher to be a competent professional, and who is able to implement government policies efficiently. However, my argument is that, by prescribing specified roles we have moved to a model of restricted, rather than extended professionality, as Barton, Barrett, Whitty, Miles and Furlong (1994:529) propose. In terms of Foucault's notion of "pastoral power," the teachers' roles can also be seen as "normalizing judgements based on pre-constructed standards" (Fenwick, 2003:339). In line with Foucault's view, norms function like an "inspecting gaze," from which follows that each teacher will exercise his or her own surveillance over, and against themselves. In policing themselves according to standards, the teachers' freedom and choice are minimised (De Klerk, 2014:7; De Lissovoy, 2013:423; Fenwick, 2003).

The problem here is that teachers are marginalised by the exact policies that were supposed to establish their professional status. Instead of empowering teachers, it appears that a predetermined identity of what professional teachers should be rather serves as an ideological mechanism to *de*-professionalise them. The development of national standards and competences (as specified in the *National Curriculum Statement* [NCS] and CAPS [Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, 2011]), and the roles of the *Norms and Standards for Educators* (Department of Education, 2000) provides a centralised specification of "effective teaching," giving "agents within the state an enhanced capacity to define the desired outcomes of education, with policy steering achieved through much tighter regulation" (Rich, 2001:135). Central to this kind of legislation, dispersed with new managerialist rhetoric (accountability, competencies, outcomes), teachers are expected to challenge personal interests in accordance with the objective standards of practice and the economy, and to behave rationally in the name of learner results and economic growth. Teachers consequently regard themselves not as "agents of change, but more as subjects" (Carrim, 2003:317; De Lissovoy, 2013:423–427). Tuinamuana (2011) warns that such standards can even lead to fabrications by teachers simply to get by.

Against the background of a previous system where accountability measures were regarded with suspicion, the new government was not in a hurry to implement quality assurance policies. However, the first *Code of Professional Ethics* provided teachers with implicit values and standards for their behaviour (Douglas, 2005:25–26), and also required accountability from teachers to government and society. South Africa thus embarked on its own system of quality management, the *Integrated Quality Management System* (IQMS), which was implemented in schools from 2004 (Education Labour Relations Council, 2003). In essence, the IQMS combined three piloted instruments, *Development Appraisal* (DA) (appraisal of individual teachers with the purpose of development); *Performance Measurement* (PM) (evaluation of individual teachers for pay progression), and *Whole School Evaluation* (WSE) (evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school). The IQMS, using self, peer, and supervisor evaluation, is still used, but not without controversy with regard to how it is being implemented (Engelbrecht, 2016). Indeed, the overall aim of the IQMS was explained as improvement of the quality of teaching and learning, and as such to monitor, empower, and support the training of teachers (Education Labour Relations Council, 2003:A1). Aligned with the values of new managerialist professionalism, the IQMS document is fraught with market terms such as "performance measurement, monitoring, accountability, competence, performance standards," and "levels of performance." One of the guiding principles in the document states unambiguously that,

> [t]he system meets professional standards for sound quality management, including propriety (ethical and legal), utility (useable and effective), feasibility (practical), efficient and cost-effective, and accuracy (Education Labour Relations Council, 2003:A1).

De Clerq (2008), however, concludes that the IQMS is flawed, that it is not realistic and that the support is not sufficient. Importantly, De Clerq (2008:16) emphasises the need for IQMS to change "... so that it reflects the local context, where educators and schools are at, and how they need to change and improve." Still, more than a decade after this recommendation, it is still being used. Avis' (2005) argument that performativity has become embodied in a regime that does not recognise other interpretations of good practice as legitimate, seems to still hold true.

In line with the mindset that the South African teachers currently experience, what Avis (2005:210) regards as surveillance on their work, implies that "spaces for autonomy have become severely circumscribed" (also see Burbules & Torres, 2000; De Lissovoy, 2013; Hursh, 2000). This reminds of what Popkewitz (2000:158) refers to as "governing of the soul," not only "through institutional change but also through changing the inner capabilities of the individual so that the person acts as a self-responsible and self-motivated citizen." However, "governing of the soul" can be seen as an invasive form of intensified surveillance so that the individual can be

"governed at a distance – through the principles by which an individual becomes self-motivated, self-actualised, and empowered." In this way, relations of domination are sustained and perpetuated.

It is clear that in the hands of this ideology, the IQMS, and other possible forms of standards and benchmarks, can be seen as an overt and powerful mechanism of control that was not likely to succeed in improving the quality of education. The implication is that if questions about quality in education will be mere questions about measurable performance, and whether the customer was getting what he/she wanted (De Klerk, 2014; Douglas, 2005) teacher autonomy is inhibited, and the way in which the very nature of education is regarded becomes problematic (Van der Walt, 2017). While accountability in terms of what is expected from teachers cannot be questioned in itself, what should be questioned is indeed what is expected of teachers (Tuinamuana, 2011), and also what support is provided towards the achievement of said standards. The impact of performance management on freedom, equality, and justice can thus not be understated.

Goal setting, education practice and accountability

The subtle control of governmentality is also visible in the pre-occupation with shared mission statements in South African education, such as the *South African Schools Act of 1996* (Republic of South Africa, 1996:Section 20(1)c, p. 50) and *Education White Paper 2* (Department of Education, 1996:Section 1.7(5), p. 11). Although goal setting as a personal empowerment tool can be a valuable exercise for teachers, it can also be used as performance objectives and a mechanism for surveillance when it is framed within a market-driven model (Rinehart, 2016:32). Teachers are expected to be "productive" in what Pekuri, Haapasalo and Herrala (2011:41) describe as "... a relationship between output produced by a system and quantities of input factors utilized by the system to produce that output." Provinces, districts, and schools are also required to set goals in terms of learner performance, yet Samuel (2012:30) warns against the "obsession with assessments" without consideration of context and how results are being used in a politically opportunistic manner. Such neoliberal tendencies are detrimental to the profession and stoke populism.

Decentralisation and new managerialist professionalism

In South Africa, governmentality is visible in the appearance of greater autonomy to schools and particularly to educators through measures of decentralisation. However, the government controls school education from a distance through technicist control mechanisms such as a rigid national curriculum, prescribed roles of an ideal teacher, whole-school evaluation, performance-based pay, and development appraisal, as discussed in the previous sections. Despite its democratic stance, it appears that in the South African education system the push for redistribution of authority and the commitment to individual (consumer) freedom cannot be accepted at face value (Sayed, 2004). Critics of the decentralisation of powers to school level in the form of school governing bodies (SGBs) indicate that, despite claims that this could improve the quality of education, the decentralisation rhetoric has always been grounded in political and economic motives (Grant Lewis & Motala, 2004). As such, decentralisation in South African education reflects tensions and contradictions in the demand of the government on the one hand to be globally competitive, and the demand to attend to issues such as equity, quality, and redress.

Apart from the quality rationale offered for the establishment of SGBs, political reasons such as participatory democracy (Herman, 2006) and empowerment of parents (De Clerq, 2008) were used to justify the state's policy of decentralisation. Regardless of the problems encountered regarding this policy (relating to a lack of the necessary resources and systems to manage these functions, as well as of capacity at local levels), it appears that the policy served a legitimating function. Various critics of the decentralisation initiative in South Africa and abroad criticise the policy for increasing the boundaries between developed and undeveloped schools, especially with regard to a lack of capacity (Carrim & Tshoane, 2003; De Clercq, 2002; Grant Lewis & Motala, 2004). Research has shown that it is mostly middle-class and professional parents who benefit from decentralisation (Carrim & Tshoane, 2003; Sayed, 2004).

Another important consequence of decentralisation is the shifting of power relations within schools. Decentralised systems increase the power of the managers and lead to top-down management in schools, which also serves to widen the gap between teachers and managers (Herman, 2006). Shushu, Jacobs and Teise (2013) highlight that the intended democratisation of education through such decentralisation of power, in practice did not realise, and particularly failed to include those with perceived lesser power, like learners.

It also appears that there is no clear indication that decentralisation enhances learners' performance or efficiency (cf. Elmore, 1993, in Herman, 2006; Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1998, in Herman, 2006). It seems that in South Africa, Jansen's (2003) account of the symbolic value of policies that claim to address inequalities, while promising democracy, might just be applicable.

The danger is here that, invisible to the majority, through the use of subtle mechanisms of ideological control, unequal power relations develop, and the government plays an authoritative role, demoting its willing "servants" to a position of performance and subservience.

Effectiveness and efficiency under the guise of the ideology

Influenced by new managerialist values, the term "effectiveness" can be translated into:

> cost-effectiveness, value for money, responsiveness to market forces, controls on spending, outsourcing of services, the use of performance measurements and quality assurance, accountability, output measures and income generation. (Herman, 2006:45–49; also see De Lissovoy, 2013:427).

Over-emphasis of market-related goals has resulted in a culture of performativity (rigid interpretation and quantification of the ways in which an educator should perform), where trust in market standards and values replaces trust in teachers. This view regards management as control, demanding that employees be loyal, penalising them when they are not. Teachers therefore reproduce the agenda of government.

Although quality of education is one of the central themes in policy jargon, and is generally understood to be related to education being improved for the perceived good life, it rather appears that quality has been reframed in corporate terms to refer to effectiveness, efficiency, statistics, and responsiveness to market needs. A recent example is experimentation with progressed learners in secondary schools, and the modular examination opportunities for grade 12 learners, that at face value, are seen as an attempt to improve pass rates. Ball (1999b, in De Klerk, 2014:101) explains that "the global trends of school improvement and effectiveness, performativity, and management are working together to eliminate emotion and desire – rendering the teachers' soul transparent, but empty."

Conclusion

Against the background of the current debates about the quality and standard of education in South Africa, it is clear that the integration of new managerialist professionalism in the education arena has not succeeded in a re-professionalisation of teachers, as envisioned by many policies. On the contrary, their much-sought-after goals of economic prosperity through education have moved even further away. The teaching profession is repeatedly critiqued in the public domain, and these critiques, at face value, seem justified (e.g. ANA Reporter, 2016; Mbiza, 2019). Annually the release of the grade 12 results constitutes a spectacle, and political parties use it to promote their agendas. Samuel (2012), however, warns against a simplistic view, based on such measurements of what constituted transformation schools and the education system. In my view, new managerial professionalism is trying to do exactly that. Based on the ideas of Bourdieu (1977, 1990), Nairz-Wirth and Feldman (2019:796) argue for a conceptualisation of professionalism "not solely as a competence cluster, but as a logic of practice." We need to value education, and by implication teachers, as professionals in their own right, and not as "tradable commodities" (Van der Walt, 2017:13).

Because of its rational claims, new managerial professionalism is difficult to resist, and it is not surprising that this neoliberalist ideology has subtly migrated to South Africa and is portrayed by followers as panacea for chaos. It has, however, been seen as a powerful ideology that leads to domination and coercion. The difficult question is how to contest and escape from it? It seems that continued awareness of its devastating effect on education and society in general might be a starting point for resistance.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the research:

- Despite policy intentions of the democratic government in South Africa to escape the effects of the ideology of ethno-nationalism that marginalised the majority of the population, current education is characterised by the ideology in the form of an imported new managerial professionalism. This ideology has created and will sustain new structures of domination.
- Although the professional status of teachers is central in the transformation discourse, ideological mechanisms have succeeded in de-professionalising teachers.
- Although the intention of decentralisation in South Africa was to facilitate democratic participation, these values have not materialised, because the state controls education from a distance through technicist measures inspired by new managerialism, executed through performance management, quality assurance mechanisms, prescriptive images of what a teacher should be, and an unimaginative curriculum.

The possibility of collective autonomy for teachers seems only a dream while education remains controlled and prescribed by central government, and policies are driven by political factors or constructed by outside experts.

Note

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