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# Dialogical habitus engagement: The twists and turns of teachers' pedagogical learning within a professional learning community

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## Abstract

*The focus of this article is on the pedagogical learning of five teachers in a professional learning community (PLC). The PLC was conceptualised as a means of generating pedagogical learning and change among the participating teachers in consonance with a socially just educational orientation. The two authors of this article participated in the PLC as participants and facilitators. This article discusses the difficulty that the PLC encountered as it engaged with the 'hardness' of pedagogical change among the teachers. We suggest that the dialogical approach of the PLC, as a form of 'habitus engagement', has the potential to capacitate the form of adaptation and change required by the teachers. The article discusses the twists and turns involved in the PLC's struggle to deliberate productively about pedagogical change. It describes an absence of a didactic language and pedagogic reflexivity among the teachers that caused the PLC conversations to remain 'stuck' in discussions that revolved around issues external to pedagogical knowledge transfer, mainly regarding keeping order and discipline in their classes. We describe how introducing a pedagogical tool into the PLC deliberations enabled the teachers to move towards a more participatory approach in their teaching practices. The exemplifying basis of our article is our deliberations with the five teachers in the PLC and the article describes the 'methodo-logic' of the PLC process that incorporated an emphasis on reflexive dialogue and ongoing interaction to establish a generative pedagogical platform for social justice pedagogies.*

**Keywords:** *Pedagogical habitus, professional learning community, pedagogical learning, social justice pedagogies*

## 1. Introduction

The focus of this article is the ongoing conversations between five teachers and two facilitators (the two authors of this article) in a professional learning community (PLC). The PLC was set up involving a university lecturer, a tutor and practising teachers who had completed the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) Honours programme at a university, which is located in Cape Town, South Africa. The key problem of a particular B.Ed. Honours module called *Education and Society* offered by the lecturer included a deliberative encounter with the notion of social justice to inform the

teachers' active pedagogical engagement with their students and teaching contexts. At the end of this module, five teachers each teaching in different school contexts, voluntarily formed a PLC to engage in reflexive conversations regarding the incorporation of a socially just orientation in their classroom pedagogies. The meetings were held fortnightly at the university campus. As lecturer and tutor, we participated in the PLC as participants and facilitators of the discussion, the latter requiring us to at times identify and challenge conceptual issues that we felt impeded the connection to the social justice purposes of the PLC.

This article is a discussion of the 'methodo-logic' of the PLC process. By this, we refer to the particular interaction between our social justice informed approach to dialogue (explained below) and the unfolding processes in PLC. This logic unfolded via respectful dialogical engagement among the PLC participants, which in turn influenced the way social justice conceptions were taken up and mediated in the PLC. For this approach we draw on Hattam *et al.* (2009: 304) who explain that,

*[b]y 'method-logic', we thus do not mean research methods or even methodology, but rather the logic of an approach for chasing social justice change through research [and dialogue], including guiding principles that underpin decisions and activities in all points and dimensions of the project.*

Following this 'methodo-logic', we discuss how the PLC encountered and engaged with the 'hardness' of pedagogical change and its struggle to deliberate productively about pedagogical adaptation.

In conceptualising the setting up of the PLC (Feldman & Fataar, 2014) we acknowledge that teachers' pedagogical practices are exceptionally difficult to shift or change. In response to the difficulties that the PLC conversation encountered we adopted an approach that viewed the dialogical interaction in the PLC conversations as a form of 'habitus engagement' (discussed below). Habitus engagement, we suggest, acknowledges the durability of the teachers' pedagogical habitus and provides a basis for actively engaging their pedagogical dispositions to understand how change may be mediated within their pedagogical habitus. The dialogical approach of the PLC was envisaged as a platform to support deliberative conversations that engage with this durability, challenging the pedagogical processes that the teachers have internalised and structured through their professional socialisation in their school contexts.

The article offers a consideration of the PLC's engagement with the durability or 'hardness' of the teachers' pedagogical habitus, what it entails and how to understand it. It also explains how, through the insertion of a pedagogical tool in the PLC deliberations, the teachers were able to shift and adapt their teaching practices. This tool, which we discuss in more depth below, was used to develop a pedagogical language among the teachers that would allow them to experiment and dialogue about ways to actively generate engagement and participation in their students' learning.

Our role as facilitators within the PLC was to support and assist the conversations to progress productively by situating the teachers' adaptation in a dialogue that centred on the perplexity of the teachers' pedagogical change. This periodically necessitated us to raise tough issues, at times by inserting complex conceptions of pedagogical practice into the discussion to bring the multi-dimensionality of teaching to light. At other times, we reduced the complexity to enable the emergence of workable and manageable pedagogical strategies that could assist the teachers to find practical ways of making pedagogical adaptations and changes towards a socially just approach in their pedagogy. Our role included assisting the participants

to remain on track regarding the focus of the PLC, working through the conceptual challenges that the PLC conversations faced and introducing external knowledge and resources into the PLC when we deemed necessary (Brodie & Shalem, 2011; Brodie, 2013).

The exemplifying basis of this article is our deliberations with the five teachers from different school contexts who formed the PLC. The article is based on the twists and turns that the PLC dialogue took to actively search for a platform that supported the teachers' pedagogical adaptations. Our data for this article is mainly drawn from the audiotaped PLC conversations that took place over a twelve-month period that explored the teachers' adaptations mediated by the PLC conversations. The PLC-based data is supported by individual interviews that we (the authors) conducted with the teachers, which explored their educational biographies and professional socialisation as teachers. These placed us in a position to come to grips with some key aspects of their pedagogical habitus formation, which we argue is key to the PLC's work in effecting a shift in their pedagogical repertoires. Various observational visits at different stages of the PLC discussions to the teachers' school-based classrooms provided further background on the teachers' actual classroom practices that assisted our understanding of the PLC participants' teaching contexts and the way in which their pedagogy played out within this context.

A final dimension that we present in the article is a discussion of how the dialogically reflexive approach of the PLC supported a shift in the teachers' pedagogical habitus to begin considering new possibilities in their pedagogy. We argue that the ongoing dialogical process of the PLC was able to generate a positive pedagogical disposition among the teachers for experimenting with engaging, open-ended pedagogies. This gradual shift in the teachers' pedagogical disposition as noted in the PLC conversations and observed during the visits to the schools provided the PLC participants with the traction to move to a more multi-dimensional approach in their teaching practices over time.

## **2. Setting up the PLC as dialogue about pedagogical engagement and adaptation**

Since 1994, South African schooling has witnessed a number of curriculum reforms intended to redress the inequalities and injustices caused by apartheid education. Following a number of curriculum policy reforms during the post-apartheid period, the new curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014) was finalised and implemented from March 2011. According to Fataar (2012), CAPS authorises a tightly scripted curriculum that can be considered 'teacher-proof' in its approach to implementation. This curriculum is framed on "the assumptions that the country's poorly prepared teachers require a strict regulatory regime to govern curriculum implementation" (Fataar, 2012: 58). Broadly in line with this, we suggest that the CAPS curriculum has tended to reduce teaching to a scripted pedagogy that expects teachers to teach to the test in a climate of standardised systemic testing intended to improve the quality of education in schools. System-wide tests written in grades 3, 6 and 9 (Department of Basic Education, 2013) and the National School Certificate written in grade 12 are an attempt to infuse regimes of performance accountability into the operations of schools across the country. Many schools have become focused on producing measurable outputs and performances with constant pressure on teachers to improve on these outputs, which discourage authentic and purposeful pedagogical processes in schools (Feldman & Fataar, 2014). The current curriculum reform approach thus leaves

teachers with little conceptual space to stimulate and meaningfully engage students in their learning (Fataar, 2012).

The PLC activity, on which this article is based, is informed by a focus on a broader, more engaging pedagogy that is intended to augment the narrow curriculum orientations implicit in the CAPS curriculum. To this end, we adopted the view that teachers and their pedagogies are the one factor that can contribute the most significantly to improving student achievement, as they are key to “changing the practices and relations that directly shape learning” (Zipin & Hattam, 2007: 5).

Three of the participants completed a four-year B.Ed. programme in senior primary school teaching and two participants completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) for high school, i.e. grade 10 to 12. All except one of the teachers began their teaching careers during the last six years, with one teacher beginning her career in January 2014. The participants are enthusiastic about their teaching and in our interviews with them indicated that their intentions were to remain in teaching and pursue further studies in education. Their commitment to the PLC was based on their desire to continue the conversations initiated during the B.Ed. Hons class that challenged the teachers to find ways to consider a more socially just orientation in their teaching practices.

We base our PLC work on the idea that authentic and sustained changes and teachers’ pedagogic adaptation require collaborative, ongoing professional dialogue among teachers within a safe and trusted environment. This form of collaborative enquiry and adaptation,

*has the potential to create deep conceptual change and dramatic changes in practice. It includes [...] ongoing and challenging engagement with new ideas, rethinking existing beliefs, unlearning past habits and practices, and going through the process of learning how to do things in (sometimes dramatic) new ways (Katz & Earl, 2010: 46).*

The initial stages of the PLC thus laid the foundation for creating a collegial environment where the teachers could talk about and explore their teaching practices through sharing and reflecting on ideas within a safe dialogical space. The PLC conversations invited the teachers to inquire critically into their pedagogical practices, to find ways to leverage change and adaptation and implement a pedagogy that engaged and connected with the lifeworld knowledges of their students. It is our contention that this form of collaboration and dialogical engagement, founded on a basis of trust, mutuality and respect, holds the potential to adapt or shift the teaching practices of teachers.

Our point of departure in our PLC work is the view that what is required to enhance the professional agency of teachers is a far richer notion of pedagogical practice aimed at engaging all students in their learning. We suggest this type of approach is required in a context such as South Africa where the space for professional dialogue about ways to enrich the teaching and learning at schools has been eroded. Our socially just PLC focus is motivated by the view that schools should be spaces where “knowledge and talk about pedagogy [are] ... at the core of the professional culture of schools” as it is a focus on pedagogies that “can make a difference to students’ academic and social outcomes from schooling” (Lingard, Hayes & Mills, 2003: 399).

In support of a richer notion of classroom teaching and learning, the PLC discussions were founded on an approach to teaching that draws on Fraser’s (1997) notion of social justice. This approach emphasises the need to consider the tension between the redistribution of

school knowledge, as, for example, currently encoded in CAPS, on the one hand and on the other hand, the need to recognise and work with the lifeworld knowledges and social-identity formations of students (Lingard, 2007). This latter element is founded on the view that making curricular connections with and actively engaging the students' home socialisations, interests and knowledge is one key way of securing students' intellectual interest in their schooling (Fataar, 2012). A social justice approach brings the redistribution dimension of school knowledge into an interactive relationship with the re-cognitive dimension, i.e. the curricular connection to the students' life knowledges and identifications. The conceptual underpinning of the PLC was therefore an attempt to bring these two dimensions into a productive relationship with each other to inform the teaching practices of the PLC teachers and provide them with a productive set of conceptual resources that informs their teaching in terms of which they are able to engage their students intellectually in their schooling.

Our approach to the PLC conversations was framed by an understanding that a teachers' pedagogical habitus is durable and resistant to change and requires a form of vigorous 'habitus engagement' and reflexive dialogue to achieve a meaningful change or shifts in pedagogical practices. This includes an ongoing commitment, effort and time as well as a willingness to question beliefs and educational practices that do not have much teaching and learning merit and might have ossified within school contexts.

### 3. The 'hardness' of pedagogical change

The PLC placed the teachers' conversations about teaching and learning at the centre of its deliberations, allowing the participants to take ownership of the conversations. Initially however, the teachers' conversation in the PLC seemed to focus primarily on their classroom control and management concerns. Although they willingly participated in dialogue concerning the need for socially just pedagogies, talk about their teaching practices mostly remained rooted in maintaining order and discipline in their classrooms. The PLC teachers described their pedagogy in terms of strictly regulated classroom control and we found that they seemed unable to discuss in a critical manner what was not working within their actual pedagogies. Invitations to talk about their teaching and the implementation of the curriculum, assessment or reflective practice, were diverted to talk about classroom management and control, which, it became apparent, they positioned as central to their teaching. Although they verbalised a desire to engage their students in a participatory learning environment, their substantive dialogue in the PLC displayed a closed and tightly regulated content transfer approach to their pedagogy. One of the teachers described her inability to engage the students by saying that,

*they [referring to the students] just take over and you are just trying to control the class in order to do your job, to give them the subject content. All my classes are over 40, 42, 43 students. I do my best but I just can't engage them so I put up the work and they copy it down.*

Accepting the need to discuss these classroom organisational issues, as many of them taught large classes, the PLC dialogue initially allowed the conversations to address these issues. As facilitators we continued however to pose critical questions to direct the conversations towards a pedagogical discourse with a socially just focus. Yet despite a willingness to discuss the elements of an engaging and participatory approach to teaching, our PLC interaction was constantly diverted back to issues of management and control by the teachers and conversations about pedagogy became elusive.

Refusing to allow the PLC conversations to be trapped in the one-dimensional space we moved the conversation towards finding ways to open the teachers' pedagogy to a different, more open-ended, approach to knowledge transfer. It was within this debate that we discovered that the teachers seemed unable to provide clear descriptions of their actual pedagogical practices. Instead, they displayed a limited vocabulary to problematise and discuss the central aspects of their teaching. The teachers' pedagogy appeared to have been formed around what they believed was necessary for the management and control of their circumstances, rather than a reflexivity concerning the efficacy of particular pedagogical techniques in their teaching practices.

Four of the five schools where the participants teach are located in working class environments, which brought various social issues into the PLC discussions. The teachers discussed their tightly regulated classroom control as a response to the demands of their working class school contexts and the impact of the social issues in their classes. Discussions revolved around broken and abusive home situations, a lack of parental support and related homework issues as well as dealing with recalcitrant students that the teachers expressed as undermining their teaching and students' learning. These issues remained prominent throughout our discussions. One of the teachers explained that this tight control was the only way he survived large and difficult classes.

*I see my geography class once a week ... I just don't know, they are just going to chaos. So if I get them quiet and I start teaching, obviously I want the interaction, I see now ... there must be interaction between us. Then I ask them things, but then it is chaos. So at a stage I just used to say, you keep quiet, you write the notes, do your activity and then we are done, the bell rings and you go. Just to survive.*

It would appear, based on interviews with the PLC teachers that discussion surrounding teaching practices in their schools has all but disappeared. In other words, dialoguing about pedagogy was almost non-existent. School pedagogical practices seem to have been replaced by a survival mode that ensures that the curriculum content is delivered, assessed and recorded as required by the school and the department. Discussions about pedagogy centres around discipline methods, time constraints, lack of resources and external factors that impact on the school.

Within the PLC dialogue, the teachers showed a willingness to discuss the possibilities of a socially just approach that actively involved the students in the knowledge transfer, however, beyond verbalising the positive impact this could have on their students, the teachers were unable to allow this approach traction in their actual classroom practices. Each week the conversations continued to return to the teachers' focus on the maintenance of order and discipline routines as an articulation of their pedagogy.

#### **4. Teachers' professional and pedagogical identity**

As facilitators, we found the teachers' one-dimensional emphasis on classroom discipline and control confounding, which led to us opting to delve deeper into the reasons why their teaching prevented teaching approaches that are more engaging to emerge. Understanding how teachers go about their work is contingent on understanding their professional biographies and the manner in which they were socialised into their teaching careers. Teachers' professional socialisation includes their own schooling experience, teacher training and induction into their teaching careers. These along with critical incidences in their lives and teaching contexts

(Amin & Ramathan, 2009), define their sense of professional self as a teacher in a particular way and informs their pedagogical repertoires and skills, the 'how' and 'why' they do certain things or act in certain ways as a teacher. The way in which teachers have been socialised into the teaching profession informs and shapes their professional and pedagogical teacher identity. This identity includes their sense of self, their knowledge and beliefs, dispositions, interests and orientation towards their work (Drake, Spillane & Hufferd-Ackles, 2001: 2) and changes and shifts over time as they interact within the various fields of education.

During our interviews with the teachers in the PLC, they revealed a range of ways in which they were socialised into the teaching profession and thus the manner in which their professional and pedagogical identities had been formed. One of the teachers did not initially train to become a teacher. She first completed a B.Com in Management Accounting and worked in the business field for three years before deciding to complete her PGCE after which she took a job as a teacher. She feels that her time spent in the business world has been instrumental in acquiring an in-depth understanding of the business and accounting concepts that she teaches her students. She describes her teaching by saying that "I love what I am doing, every single aspect of it". However, she is frustrated by an inability to share her business world experiences with her classes due to the behaviour of the students who make it difficult to engage with them in this manner. She explains by saying,

*I would love to have a conversation with my class ... but if you try that it gets out of control. With my class of 41 kids ... it doesn't work so how I survive is I give them the notes to copy down and if I can keep them busy writing they are quiet and they work. As soon as I try to engage or discuss things with them to find out what they know and understand ... it doesn't work, I can't do that with a class of 41.*

Another teacher refers to how he initially completed a diploma in pastoral psychology while involved in a church. It was here that he discovered his enjoyment in teaching as he worked with youth in the church and enrolled to study a B.Ed. degree via correspondence. During his first year of studying, he was invited to teach at a high school where he taught for the next three years while completing his degree. Starting his teaching career with very little understanding of teaching was a challenging experience. He describes how this experience socialised him into the teaching profession:

*I had only studied for six months and now I am a teacher ... that was quite a shock. And there my learning curve started ... I had to survive, my main goal was to survive, to control this 47, 49, sometimes 50 kids in a class. I struggled with so many things. I had a mentor who helped me. At the beginning I had discipline issues and every now and then I had to call him to talk to the kids ... he taught me how to show love and care in my class ... He was shaping me as a teacher. He would talk and advise me on things ... over time I slowly picked up things and found out things that worked for me and I realised that I was doing things wrong. Every year I got better. I became more experienced but it was hard work.*

These descriptions of the teachers' socialisation into teaching show how the amalgam of professional socialisation and interactions between themselves and their contexts operates as a structuring and internalising set of rules that influences their teaching repertoires and the formation of their pedagogical habitus.

## 5. Pedagogical habitus formation

In order to understand the impact of these socialised experiences on the teachers' professional and pedagogical identities and formation of their pedagogical habitus, we draw on Bourdieu's

concepts of habitus, field and the logic of practice. Bourdieu describes one's habitus as a set of dispositions that incorporates social structures and affects our view of the social world and its practices (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002: 21). Operating largely below the level of consciousness our habitus is durable and transposable and allows us to respond to cultural rules and contexts in a variety of ways. Teachers' professional identities are shaped by their habitus; they make decisions about their pedagogy based on their experiences, present circumstances and dispositions embodied in their individual habitus (Webb *et al.*, 2002).

The PLC participants' socialisation into their teaching careers as well as their life histories is instrumental in the formation of their pedagogical habitus, which informs their teaching practices and their pedagogical repertoires. Although one's habitus allows for improvisation, one's responses are largely determined by one's context and those directly involved with us within the context. Bourdieu calls this one's 'fields of play', which he refers to as a structured social space or force field within which interactions, transactions and events occur at a specific time and location (Thomson, 2008). These contexts or 'fields of play' include the "discourses, institutions, values, rules and regulations" (Webb *et al.*, 2002: 21) that have produced and adapted the teachers' pedagogical habitus. Teachers, therefore, within their specific school fields, will incorporate into their pedagogical habitus the values and imperatives of the field within which they operate (Webb *et al.*, 2002). The teachers' pedagogical habitus, which incorporates their identities, practices and dispositions, are therefore shaped, reinforced and changed by the nature of each school 'field' or context within which they work and the teachers will incorporate a complex array of strategies and tactics that they will use within a teaching situation given the circumstances they face.

It was their different school contexts and the teachers' socialisation into teaching that had inscribed a certain way of doing things for these teachers and consequently had informed their pedagogical repertoires. The teachers found it difficult to challenge the dominant practices at their schools. One of the teachers describes herself as follows,

*I feel like I am already becoming one of those teachers ... I feel like I have to conform to doing things and disciplining children in ways that I don't want to. What happens if the children are so used to being disciplined in a certain way ... the other teachers discipline them in ways I don't agree with. What happens if that is what the children come to expect? Because that is what I am finding ... I won't do it, I won't become that teacher ... but they are so used to that way of doing things that they don't respond to you or listen to you when you try to do it differently.*

The PLC teachers' pedagogical habitus formation therefore includes a conscious and unconscious incorporation of pedagogical orientations and dispositions that form over time. These include their complex and multidimensional personal and social biographies, their professional socialisation and their professional and pedagogical identities that shape their attitudes and responses to their circumstances within their school contexts.

## **6. Engaging the educational doxa of the PLC teachers**

Dialogue in the PLC was facilitated to bring elements of the conscious and unconscious inculcation of the teachers' habitus formation to the surface and this included an awareness of the options or restrictions available to them as they considered their own educational trajectory in their professional habitus. PLC discussions were intended to provoke the teachers' taken-for-granted ways of teaching that were inherent in their pedagogical habitus through their socialisation into teaching and thus informed their teaching practices.



Bourdieu describes conforming to a dominant view of a field as 'doxa', i.e. we conform not because we agree or because it is in our best interests but because there does not seem to be an alternative. We may not even be aware that we are complying with the dominant discourses or agree with them but we accept the status quo because it is the way things are, or always have been. 'Doxa' is the taken-for-granted assumptions found in one's 'field of play' and is reproduced through expectations and behaviour in social institutions, structures and relations (Webb *et al.*, 2002). As the teachers engaged with the reflexive PLC conversations, they came to recognise that their tightly regulated knowledge transmission was a form of 'doxa' that did not engage their students. They were however unsure how to change.

Bourdieu points out that even common-sense reflection on established rules is mediated and restricted by day-to-day experience and taken-for-granted practices which stifle the possibility to question or change what is implicitly accepted (Webb *et al.*, 2002). This form of 'doxa' could be found within the school structures where the teachers taught. In defending the way the teachers conducted their classroom practices, they regularly compared themselves to other teachers at their schools and their way of doing things as well as stating that the school management had certain expectations with which they had to comply. This form of 'doxa' for the teachers therefore found its traction in the mutual reinforcement between the acceptable discourses, i.e. the 'doxa', in their educational field and their own professional and pedagogical habitus, which positioned them to enact what they have come to regard as allowable and expected teacher practices in their classrooms.

Recognising that the teachers were in effect 'stuck' in a teaching 'doxa' into which they had been socialised and lacked a reflexive pedagogical language that prevented productive conversation about their pedagogy, we developed a 'pedagogical tool' to leverage dialogue about the modalities of pedagogical transfer. At this stage, we (the authors) adopted an intervention facilitation style. In other words, unlike our predominant facilitation based on valorising the voice and opinions of the teachers, at this point we chose actively to insert concepts and ideas aimed at getting the teachers to dialogue about pedagogical change. In this light, the pedagogical tool was based on three elements. These included a set of pedagogic transfer modalities using Bernstein's (1975) concepts of sequencing, pacing and scaffolding, the element of student engagement via active participation and an experimentation with adopting teaching styles on a continuum of a closed or firmly held pedagogical approach on the one end and an open-ended or relaxed approach on the other.

This tool enabled the PLC to discuss the teachers' actual teaching practices, the 'internals' of pedagogy and shift the PLC's dialogical focus to the 'how to' of teaching. We also employed an analytical device that we adapted from Hugo (2013) which invites the teachers to analyse their educational practices by considering which pedagogical practices should be separated or held apart from one another (closed) or allowed to flow together or integrate (open). Hugo uses this device to analyse and deliberate about pedagogy in differing educational situations, asking teachers to consider carefully the 'what' (selection of knowledge) and 'how' (transmission of knowledge) of our classroom pedagogy. Hugo states that there is no right or wrong answer when using this device to analyse our educational practices, "it depends on the educational situation at hand" (Hugo, 2013: 5). We adapted Hugo's analytical device to provide a tool which the teachers, within their teaching contexts, could use to consider when to either open (allow for students participation and discussion) or close (teacher directed learning and note taking by their students) the pedagogic transfer of knowledge in lessons.

The PLC used this tool to develop pedagogical capacity among the teachers in terms of which they would be able to employ an approach to generate active and participative student learning while retaining an orderly and disciplined learning environment. Enabling a pedagogical stance based on deciding when to relax (open) or close the frame was decisive in the PLC's dialogue. By inserting this tool into the PLC conversation we enabled the teachers to dialogue about their approaches to lesson framing, i.e. whether, when and why they would use strict didactic control or open participation. This enabled the PLC to challenge the teachers to deliberate on finding ways to open the instructional dimension of their pedagogy i.e. the pedagogical transfer of knowledge in lessons, to incorporate a more participatory and engaging approach. Engaging with this tool also allowed us to introduce a pedagogic language to begin to discuss, question and critically analyse the teachers' transmission of knowledge and enabled the PLC conversations to move in a new direction. The PLC's dialogue, centring on the teachers' pedagogical repertoires as a form of 'habitus engagement', began to shift the teachers' pedagogical language, which, in turn, began to shift the focus of the PLC towards dialoguing about ways to incorporate a more participatory approach in their teaching practices. This process challenged their taken-for-granted ways of teaching, i.e. their 'doxa', which informed their teaching practices, opening space for more nuanced dialogues about their pedagogical approaches.

## 7. Eliciting a shift towards a socially just pedagogical orientation

Opening up the PLC discussion by using Bernstein's concepts to provide a shared language and Hugo's analytical device that challenged the way in which the teachers were engaging with their pedagogy, provided the necessary impetus to draw the teachers into critical pedagogical discussions about their teaching practices. By engaging with an emerging pedagogical language, the teachers were able to shift towards conceptualising pedagogical possibilities that moved beyond the limitations that the teachers initially felt had been imposed on them by their large classes. Conversations moved towards finding ways to include student participation for sections of the lesson (opening the frame) or becoming teacher-controlled (closing or tightening the frame) when required. Once the teachers realised the possibilities that this open/closed approach held, they began to experiment with this in their school lessons. One of the teachers described how she experimented with this approach:

*After our PLC discussions ... I thought let me just talk for the first 15 minutes. So I just sat on my table and I had a conversation with them about inflation and money and interest rates. And they were all looking and listening and interacting. I tried to use examples out of their own life world to help them understand what I was explaining ... Then it got a bit rowdy and so I put the slides on for them to copy down the information so that they would settle down and work ... but it worked and I really enjoyed it ... because I felt that what we were talking about things and they actually learnt something, it wasn't just a transferring of knowledge, but we were talking together as a class ... so I am excited to do that again.*

A second teacher noted,

*I also started doing that [here this teacher is referring to including more engaging dialogue with her students as opposed to the learners writing notes off the board with no class discussion], and talking more to the children about the work. It is so much better than just going to the class, opening a page ... saying let's read. I started instead with talking to them. I found that they have a lot of questions actually.*

Another teacher who had worked hard to establish control and order in his class describes how he struggled to come to terms with allowing the students to talk during his lessons,

*My challenge was to loosen the tight content transfer that I used ... so I sat and I taught by talking to them about the content and they interacted and responded to me. Then I gave them work to do and it seemed like chaos because there was a lot of noise, but ... the noise was them talking about work ... about what we had discussed. In the past I have been angry when they are so noisy because ... if I walk past the other teachers' classes they are dead quiet ... But I realised now ... that the children like my class when we talk together, they are learning something ... but when it is so noisy, it looks like chaos and maybe people think that I cannot control my class.*

The teacher above refers to the 'doxa' of schooling practices that equates to a quiet and well-controlled class environment with productive teaching and learning. This view repeatedly emerged as the teachers struggled to consider allowing students to talk during a lesson. One of the teachers stated, "But people think that if your class is noisy then you are not teaching". The teachers felt that the school expected their classes to be quiet and orderly and that noisy classes implied that poor or no teaching was taking place.

## 8. Conclusion

The success that the teachers experienced as well as the positive responses from their students encouraged and motivated them. They experimented with spending more time opening their lessons to include interactive student engagement and closing the interaction down when needed. Sharing their successes and positive student responses provided the impetus for different PLC conversations to begin to dominate. While issues around student discipline, behaviour issues and the social issues of their students remained a concern, they no longer dominated the PLC conversations. The teachers themselves moved the conversations into a new pedagogical discourse. Using a pedagogical language to dialogue about an open or closed pedagogy enjoyed prominence in the discussions and the PLC conversations now included a pedagogical reflexivity initiated by the teachers.

Changes and success were not instantaneous, neither was the process linear but rather messy and staccato. However, the PLC participants became more reflexive and critical about their own pedagogy and the ongoing PLC conversations were central in providing a supportive environment for the teachers to reflect on ways to re-appropriate their pedagogies towards a socially just teaching orientation within their specific school contexts. The successes and positive feedback the teachers received from their students provided the momentum for them to continue. However, the changes that we describe the teachers beginning to make in their pedagogy, facilitated by the ongoing PLC conversations, were only the beginning of their adaptation towards a socially just orientation. We envisage an ongoing reflexive dialogical engagement in the PLC in order to facilitate socially just shifts in the teachers' pedagogical habitus that influences and sustains changes in their pedagogical practices.

Building on these successes, the focus of the PLC has now entered the crucial phase of deliberating and building pedagogical capacity to design and teach lessons that engage the students in generative knowledge processes. As discussed in this article, we believe that it is the ongoing dialogical PLC environment that includes a form of 'habitus engagement' based on critical pedagogical reflexivity that has the potential to adapt and change the PLC teachers' pedagogical habitus and teaching repertoires towards a transformative socially just platform that will actively engage their students in the learning process.

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