

“Youth mediating education through their languaging practices”

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Title of the panel:

“Students mediating knowledge practices in school sites”

Provisional title of the edited collection:

“Mediation and Materiality in Troubled South African Times: Unveiling the Identities, Practices, Knowledges and Literacies of Students in Uneven Educational Sites”

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Why use “mediation” in unpacking marginalised youth and education in South Africa

- “Agency” too conscious, intentional, misguided understanding of human individual
- Negates non-human and social factors
- Mediation as an embodied practice that reveals (but does not pre-exist) materiality (Appadurai)
- Mediants allow us to foreground the sociality that emerges through specific materialities (Appadurai)
- Mediate: to intervene between 2 things; in this case between materiality and sociality, between individual and society

Why use “mediation” in unpacking marginalised youth and education in South Africa

Oversocialised views:

- “Identity research”
- Ameliorate the harmful effects of South Africa’s colonial and apartheid histories by connecting with students’ classed, raced and gendered identifications.
- Insufficient focus on ‘knowledge’

Undersocialised view:

- Neo-Bersteinian, Hard boundary approach: school versus everyday knowledge
- Develop abstract, school knowledge and classification
- keep the external noise of the home, community and cultural heritage at bay, allowing smooth transfer of knowledge
- Believed to catalyse social mobility for disadvantaged young people.

- Is it possible to do BOTH...? To research who young people are (their identities) AND the knowledge they need to acquire...?
 - How might the concept of *youth as mediants* aid in this endeavour.....:
- “Mediants allow us to foreground sociality”**

Why do this?

- To improve learning outcomes: surely understanding who the learner is will make learning better...
- Social justice: not knowledge in a vacuum; knowledge in context

Race, space and language in Cape Town:

“young people from Rosemary Gardens as mediants of the social”

- Youth spoke a language variety= informal, Kaapse Afrikaans
- Emerged through the mixture of indigenous Khoi and San languages, British and Dutch colonial settlers and slaves from East Africa and Asia
- Portuguese creole was particularly common during the eighteenth century amongst Malay slaves
- A great deal of contact between languages occurred at slave lodge, at homes and on farms. Common for up to five languages to be spoken in an eighteenth century household (McCormick, 2002)

Rosemary Gardens

- Rosemary Gardens established in the 1970s after people removed from the inner-city and suburbs
- Reserved for people that the state classified as 'Coloured'
- 19% of those aged 20 years and older had completed Grade 12 or higher
- 58% of the labour force (aged 15 to 64) employed
- 59% of households had a monthly income of R3 200 or less
- The language that RG youth spoke was interpreted by others in classed and racialised terms

Youth in RG speaking informal Afrikaans

- These youth are mediants of a particular social history of interactions between groups of people, of people moving (and being moved) through space and of the production of social stratification
- Their language practices as a form of mediation (a living manifestation of that social history)
- Mediation as an embodied practice that reveals (but does not pre-exist) materiality (Appadurai)
- Mediants allow us to foreground the sociality that emerges through specific materialities (Appadurai)

Mediants operate in place specific ways... Some places produce misrecognition (Nancy Fraser)

- Misrecognition as a social status
- An institutionalised form of social subordination
- Denying full participation in social interaction
- Constitutes some actors as normal and others as deficient

Misrecognition and language in schools

- Late nineteenth century a 'White'-led movement campaigning for Afrikaans to be officially recognised, culminated in this group's version of the language becoming a medium of instruction
- Afrikaans: Instruction in schools from 1914 and, along with Dutch and English, an official national language in 1926
- Standard Afrikaans taught at school in Rosemary Gardens
- Standardisation of Afrikaans, by 'Whites', excluded the Afrikaans spoken by 'Coloured' and 'Black' people
- The Afrikaans that has been standardised and is used in school curricula is the culmination of the Afrikaner nationalist movement's attempts to entrench political and economic power.

Mediants and misrecognition: Multi-site linguistic ethnography in one Cape Flats community

- Language use at school
- Language use amongst a hip-hop group

Rosemary Gardens High School



The Doodvenootskap hip hop crew

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Fresh, rude, fierce rappers storm the Cape

TRENDING

Roger Young
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Cape Town - Doodvenootskap, a talented and cheeky young hip-hop outfit, is part of the new wave of progressive rap from the Mother City. They tell Roger Young they are drawing on their childhood games in the hood to create a new street language



Doodvenootskap say although they come from a community of gangs and violence, the unifying factor is that everyone's human and has had a childhood.

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The school had many positives...

- Dedicated staff
- DCAS programme after school: sports, dancing, extra lessons
- Library
- Virgin active community gym
- Entrepreneurial projects

But....

- Mass discontinuation; 2012: 400 grade 9s, 60 matrices
- Classrooms: deathly silence in relation to academic work

Educators' attitudes to language

“The biggest problem is that learners come with a cultural deficiency...no books at home. The only proper English or Afrikaans they hear is from the teachers. Once they have good command of the language they can be fine.”

“You can see by their accents that maybe my values and theirs doesn't merge because of their backgrounds.”

Learners' attitudes to language

“The words are very high this year. We never hear those kinds of words. Everything we get is in Afrikaans but it’s high Afrikaans. Not the Afrikaans that we speak. And that’s the Afrikaans that they train us in. It’s the Afrikaans that we ought to speak but it’s not the Afrikaans that we speak”

Learners' attitudes to language

“you can't mix your language. If somebody says to methen I say “naai it's cool I'm going to chill in the sun”. We can't speak like that. Your marks go down immediately. They will penalise you.”

Doodvenootskap rap group

- Approximately 8 core members; up to 50 involved
- hip hop artists, musicians and activists who aimed to bring about community change
- Some worked for NGO: research on children's rights and participation
- Wrote lyrics and performed tracks in and beyond the community
- Access to the community centre and important role-models

Doodvenootskap supported by:

1. NGOs: community organisations that resisted apartheid; democratic, Freirein traditions; human rights discourse
2. Hip-hop culture: in CT- space for black youth to resist apartheid and assert forms of language on their own terms

Human rights discourse

“I felt that was my responsibility as a elder brother to teach her her rights, cause I was never taught that. I was always taught that whatever an adult say they right, you a child you wrong.”

“I have a poet license, it’s freedom of speech and I’m using mine now.”

Also used ideas and language from local/global hip-hop culture

*A: and what does it mean, **freedom of speech**?*

*R: it means a lot for me, **especially** with the work that we're doing now. We're building resilience, now resilience for me is, resistance. I am a resistance against gangsterism. The best lyrics instead of **accepting** it you rebel against it. The coolest lyrics in terms of **hardcore, commercial and underground** is to **manipulate** the mind....*

Doodvenootskap lyrics

“My self-confidence se boosters het bruises, ek is a problem as ek wil unique is”

“Organisations are competing doing it for charity”

“My porridge bowl is nou a satellite dish”

“Babies lost their toys want their tannies wil rattle.”

Language as social practice learning and knowledge acquisition/production

- Linguaging practices as a form of mediation: demonstrate the inherently social nature of knowledge and learning
- Indispensable both to 'who young people are' and to how they become armed with powerful knowledges.
- Language: integral part of the pedagogic device and the embodied transfer of powerful knowledges,
- But languaging practices simultaneously produce and reproduce social stratifications by communicating raced, classed and gendered hierarchies within which young people are positioned.

Youth as mediants in educational settings

- Youth unable to act as mediants of their own learning and knowledge acquisition unless forms of materiality (their words) institutionally recognised as valid
- The institutional norms, values and practices that produce particular places simultaneously enable/inhibit forms of mediation
- The materialities that inscribe forms of knowledge are institutionally validated social products

What do we do?

- Adapt and 'indigenise' theory?
- Find (alternative) relevant theory?
- Throw it out?
- Make our own?

- We should use theory that helps us to understand better our lives and ourselves and the challenges that we face
- We should not reference and try to use theory simply because it is made by people that are considered to be experts in and relevant to other parts of the world
- We use theory to help us understand, not as a ticket that might gain us access to a place at the table

Adaptation of theory needs to be a conscious and extensive process, reflecting on what these theories mean in OUR contexts

- We should strive to unearth Africa-centred theory that has been forgotten or was disused, if it helps us to understand our contexts
- We must claim our own work as theory that can be used in other places
- Revolutionary rhetoric is not a substitute for reading widely and writing well.

“Knowledges can become applicable to the global South regardless of where they are produced, but only when they become entangled in Southern realities”