

## Exploring transformative social justice teaching: A South African education policy perspective

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It is vital that in-service teachers transcend their professional knowledge, towards a recurrently developing research base about transformative social justice issues. This paper provides a theoretical lens from a South African education policy perspective on how in-service teachers could develop professional knowledge about transformative social justice teaching in public schools. Scholars argue that when in-service teachers surpass their professional knowledge base, it empowers them to transform learning spaces. Discourse analysis was applied to the *Continuous Professional Teacher Development* (CPTD) policy to understand professional knowledge and to identify transformative signposts for social justice teaching emerging from the policy. The findings show that the main barrier to professional development is a perceived lack of attention to the value and applicability of transformative social justice teaching practices for in-service teachers, while teaching and engaging in CPTD activities. Conclusions and recommendations were drawn based on the analysed data. The study recommends that for in-service teachers to perform more competently in their learning spaces, while maintaining the reputation of both their designation and the profession, they must engage in a continuous process of professional development.

### Introduction

Scholars in higher education believe that what may have been considered as a backdrop to the political thinking in Africa, generally, and in South Africa post-1994, was aimed at eradicating all the old philosophies that had been systematically connected to apartheid and implementing renewed policies in all spheres of this country, including education (Luiz, 2002; Du Plessis, 2009; Thobejane, 2005). However, notwithstanding variations in rhetoric, policy and statutory affirmations that aimed to rehumanise South Africa's oppressed people, this country's recent celebration of 25 years of democracy fails to reflect fully social justice gains made in society and, specifically, in education (Griffin, Bell & Adams, 2007; Subreenduth, 2013; Eidson, 2015). When searching for social justice, it is essential to consider practices that could provide an indication that the discourse of transformative teaching is not limited to singular meanings or periods of time; indeed, it contains discursive formations which enable the analyst to decipher the meanings of texts in education policy so that the construction of innovative perspectives is made possible (Olssen, Codd & O'Neil, 2004; Larrabee & Morehead, 2010; De Klerk, 2014).

Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal's (1979) global idea, the *Theatre of the oppressed* (TO), is applied in this paper to provide a platform for cultivating transformative social justice teaching practices for in-service teachers in public schools. According to Freirean principles of dialogue, an application of the discourse of TO is relevant, because it is

designed to encourage observers (in this case, in-service teachers) to take control of their professional development, rather than submissively permitting things to happen to them (Singhal, 2004; König, Ligtvoet, Klemens & Rothland, 2017). Boal coined the term *spect-actor* to describe the activated spectator and imaginative subject, who looks at the world and acts on it by transgressing its repressive configurations. He describes the *spect-actor's* main assignment as that of reinstating the capacity of the oppressed for action, and replacing the culture of muteness with a transformed wisdom of self-consciousness (Singhal, 2004; Alencastro et al., 2020). Boal shared Freire's concern about harassed subgroups, and all his theatre work aimed to remedy what he saw as the power disparity between the crowd and the stage and, by likeness, between South America's innate populaces and their governments.

Principally, in theatre terms, Boal wished to release theatre spectators from the inactive nature of their role, by eliminating the epilogue that characterises stage production (Boal, 1979; Hakemulder, 2007 as cited in Hakkarainen & Vapalahti, 2011; McClimens & Scott, 2007).

Studies conducted in Austria and Germany reflect that developing in-service teachers' professional ethos, including skills such as combining theoretical, methodological and practical knowledge to fit specific classroom situations, become all important in transformative learning contexts (Singhal, 2004; Gomba, 2019). The challenges to transforming teacher professional development of countries such as Tanzania, Scotland and Saudi Arabia, include a lack of clear policy for teacher professional development, predominance of a traditional approach to teacher professional development, and ineffective organisation of in-service teacher professional development activities which render CPTD programs insufficient to provide teachers with pedagogical knowledge and understanding (Ghoneim Sywelem & Witte, 2013; Price, 2007 as cited in Chinyowa, 2013; Komba & Mwakabenga, 2019). Considering Boal's theory, we argue that through continuing professional development, in-service teachers should be cognisant of and aligned to the emerging changes in school contexts and advances in digital technologies in teaching and learning. Education policy (inclusive of South African education policy) is intricately intertwined within such structuring realities. Whilst policy is regarded as a course of action, CPTD policy emphasises entitlement and expectations for teachers on how their abilities may be used to acquire valuable information as part of their professional empowerment and taking accountability for their own knowledge and skills (Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004; Donaldson, 2010).

Research conducted in countries internationally reveals that professional empowerment is a fundamental aspect of positive change at school level, because teachers need tools if they are to be regarded as independent education practitioners who are in control of their teaching activities (Hargreaves, 1996; TEngland, 2008 as cited in Balkar, 2015; De Klerk, 2014). Professional empowerment can have an impact on education programs, teaching methodologies, as well as in-service teachers' sense of commitment to and interaction with their learners (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994; Changwong, Sukkamart & Sisan, 2018). The question this paper poses is: "How is transformative social justice teaching, as a tool for in-service teachers' professional development, articulated in the CPTD policy?"

## Challenge and change in transformative social justice teaching

Social justice involves justice that necessitates social activities that authorise individuals to participate as counterparts in social life, while disabling inequality to ensure that participants function as complete transformative educational agents (Fraser, 2005; McDonald, Kazemi & Schneider Kavanagh, 2013). A transformative approach to social justice teaching requires a move beyond a shallow view of transformative practices towards inspiring in-service teachers to maintain a dynamic persona with respect to their own teaching (Nagda, Gurin & Lopez, 2003; Guthrie & McCracken, 2010). Possessing such a persona supports in-service teachers in their construction of enabling, self-governing, and critical actions to promote and recognise specific program practices that prepare in-service teachers to teach from a social justice viewpoint (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009; McDonald, Kazemi & Scheider Kavanagh, 2013; Hackman, 2005 as cited in Rambiritch, 2018). In contexts such as the United States and the United Kingdom, social justice comprises a broad assessment of questions about how class continues to impact on education practices and how life opportunities have not been realised, whilst elite tertiary institutions continue to draw students, fundamentally, from the middle and upper classes (Reay, Davies, David & Ball, 2001), which leads to questions about commitment by states to the discourse of widening participation.

In higher education, a transformative social justice view directs attention to issues of efficacy, with education outcomes categorised in evidence-based terms. When in-service teachers focus on diversity and transformative social justice in education, they are positioned to cultivate powerful educational environments within their own teaching practices that will support learning and schooling in a democratic society (Hlalele & Alexander, 2012; Baily, Stribling & McGowan, 2014; Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2016; Cooper & Subotzky, 2001 as cited in Case, 2017). Consequently, in-service teachers have an obligation to undo existing suppressive acts and contribute to inclusive and socially just learning environments (Francis & Le Roux, 2011; Subreenduth, 2013). In keeping with developing a transformative methodology, social justice holds that in-service teachers, as self-governing persons, have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social accountability and a need to be dynamic contributors to society (Nieto, 2000; Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2007; Cuypers & Haji, 2008; Subreenduth, 2013). South Africa's CPTD policy envisages that in-service teachers will participate in skills development actions and receive professional improvement scores over an uninterrupted, continuing three-year cycle (Department of Education, 2008). Since this policy emphasises that teachers must be answerable for their own professional development, the CPTD policy, like other education policies worldwide, can be considered *the theatre* for in-service teachers – a theatre in which they are enabled to act on transformative social justice teaching practices. This paper reflects the argument that the CPTD policy can be applied to create a form of theatre to contribute to the professional development of in-service teachers with respect to social justice teaching, in that it can assist them to explore and transform the educational realities which they find themselves in.

The objective of transformative social justice teaching is full and equal involvement of all groups in a society, which is reciprocally formed to meet their needs. Similarly, preventing

in-service teachers being regarded as passive players in Boals' theatre (CPTD policy in this study) of education, can be implemented to empower them to enact and engage in socially just teaching practices in their schools. As social justice teaching should be inherent within a transformative pedagogy, it is undoubtedly a valuable tool which in-service teachers can utilise to work towards transformative goals of action on both local and global educational levels (Ayers, 1998; Kincheloe, 2004).

## Method

Numerous scholars regard discourse as a collection of thoughts or patterned techniques of thinking which can be recognised in written and spoken communications, situated in wider social arrangements (Lupton, 1992; Gebremedhin & Joshi, 2016; Lester, Lochmiller & Gabriel, 2017). It provides awareness about the functioning of forms of information relating to texts in their located settings, by generating explanatory statements about the power effects of a discourse on groups of individuals. It seems, therefore, that there is an interplay of script, setting and practices of talking and writing, because discourse analysis does not constitute a single, unitary approach and is considered to be the act of demonstrating how particular discourses are used to achieve specific effects in particular contexts (Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Jansen, 2008; Janemalm, Barker & Quennerstedt, 2020). Nevertheless, the analysis of texts can model the possibility of alternative readings and multiple interpretations, because policies are continuously constituted and reconstituted through dialogue, actions and social relations as it includes utterances, and consequently both text and context, as its object of study (Ball, 1993; Spolsky, 2003; Alba-Juez, 2016). Discourse analysis provides the authors with a frame of thinking with which to interpret and explain discourses and help reveal hidden meanings and decoding conversational biases (Russel, Greenhalgh, Burne & McDonnell, 2008; De Klerk, 2014) in the CPTD policy.

Thus, by applying discourse analysis, we were positioned to negotiate and renegotiate interpretations of selected discourses in the CPTD policy. Such thorough examination is essential, because South African education policies are, like other policies worldwide, set within a poignant conversational structure which expresses likelihoods and prospects of understanding and performing (Ball, 1993).

## Boal's *Theatre of the oppressed*

Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the oppressed* (1974) commenced as an educative practice which analysed political, social and pedagogical consequences of different forms of human relations, conceiving a human and liberating pedagogical method in which the oppressed reveal the world of oppression through transformation of their practice (Silva & Menezes, 2016; Alencastro et al., 2020). Boal's approach aimed at transforming the passive "spectators", into "actors" to actively intercede and alter the course of practices, that is, that the passive individual is also capable of acting in changing the course of actions in the world. To perform as actors, individuals have the options to perform in any of Boals' four theatres (Table 1).

Our discussion will not attempt to strictly demarcate the limits of each theatrical approach, but rather to highlight the unique facets and central emphases of each approach. We situate teaching for social justice as an extension of these approaches, located in the legislative theatre. The legislative theatre creates a theatrical space for in-service teachers to enhance their professional knowledge and contribute to transformative social justice teaching.

Table 1: Boal's theatres of the oppressed

Theatre	Explanation
Forum theatre	Spectators are invited to participate in the staging of events in order to develop solutions and ways to overcome oppression. The themes and acts recommended and performed by individuals in the forum presented primarily conditions of hostility and direct corporeal oppression. Consequently, participants are able to experience a rehearsal that is a tangible training for actual situations they may face (Boal, 1985; Harbrecht; 2013; Alencastro et al., 2020).
Image theatre	Image theatre is the emotional representation of participants' feelings. The aim of the image is not to recreate emotional moments but rather to re-present such moments participants are depicting, based on the issue that is being discussed by a group. The choice for image resonates with the idea that an image communicates in a more immediate way than spoken language (Boal; 2002; Weltsek-Medina, 2007; Odhiambo, 2008; Malloy, 2015).
Legislative theatre	Legislative theatre is useful within the public education system, within municipal government, community-based organizations, and grassroots social justice initiatives. It is regarded as an innovative methodology for emancipation and to confront socially accepted beliefs (Boal, 1998; Majaury, 2013; Salvador, 2014).
Invisible theatre	Invisible theatre transpires in a public place where none of the spect-actors are knowledgeable about a play is going on. With this information withheld, the public is free to interact with the actors without facing. Participants, as outsiders, are able to gain understanding into people's characters and how they work in groups. Consequently, it instantaneously become clear who gravitates towards management roles, who contributes to new ideas, and who makes decisions, amongst others (Boal, 1979; Nielsen, 2009; Osburn, 2010; Salvador, 2014).

Boal (2003) argued that when participants engage in transformative acts, they begin to bridge the distance between self and others. From a social justice point of view, recognising and striving to transform themselves, in-service teachers' professional empowerment constitutes a significant part of their learning (Braidotti, 2011; Leibowitz & Naidoo, 2017; Hill et al., 2018). The legislative theatre allows for credibility and thoughtfulness, where the CPTD policy enables in-service teachers to operate as a playwright, director and as teacher-artist when they find themselves amidst different multicultural scenes during their studies in their teaching (Fraser, 2005; Chinyowa, 2013).

### **The policy for analysis (CPTD)**

To comprehend what education policy texts wish to address, it is necessary to think about text and action, arguments and performances, discourses of policy scripts as representation, and what is envisioned with such discourse. If domestic policies require

that all teachers are regarded as socially just teachers, the problematic issue for teacher education, “the un-scrutinized versions of the self” (Goodman, 2001; Francis & Hemson, 2007, p. 99;) is wide-ranging, and not restricted only to those who educate about oppression. The stance policy texts generally assume is that social justice is stable and universal, social justice relates to the provision of means necessary for individuals to develop capabilities (Lall, 2007; Guthrie & McCracken, 2010) and this, in itself, has implications for the way policy (the theatre) is represented (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997; Ball, 2017). Typically, it includes developing a sense of agency and equality which encapsulates the concerns social justice teaching for in-service teachers reflects (Taylor et al., 1997; Cranton, 2006; Mandell & Hermann, 2007; Kanuka, 2008). Education policy aims to speak with authority, and privileges certain visions and interests. Fundamentally, it is assigned a purpose, that of affording individuals, in this instance, in-service teachers, CPTD policy privileges perspectives of being *teachers in the theatre*, with specific reference to issues of social justice teaching. (Usher & Edwards, 1994; Ball, 2012; De Klerk, 2014).

The focus of this study is on the *Continuing Professional Teacher Development System (CPTD)* (Department of Education, 2008). This policy was compiled in terms of the Minister of Education’s *National Policy Framework on Teacher Education and Development* (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2006). Within *The National Policy Framework on Teacher Education and Development* (RSA, 2006), the CPTD policy presents an administration structure and a long-term perception of ongoing skills training and personal growth (Department of Education, 2008). Globally it is imperative that all teachers register with professional bodies to earn professional development points by undergoing approved professional development activities that meet their development needs (Desimone, Smith & Ueno, 2006; Republic of South Africa, 2007; Steyn, 2008; Gomba 2019). The worth of teachers’ professional work underpins the worth of education, and the improvement of these teaching rehearsals are an ongoing procedure that continues for the duration of the vocation of a dedicated professional teacher. Essentially, expectations of in-service teachers’ roles are changing as they have immense responsibility to be accountable for their professional growth whilst identifying their own specialised necessities (Department of Education, 2008; Zhao & Zhang, 2017).

In relation to in-service teachers’ social justice teaching practices in schools, we contend that the legislative theatre is applicable and will therefore take prominence in the discussion. The applicability of the mentioned theatre aligns with the notion that education policy documents are interpreted as languages of information and ideas (De Klerk, 2014; Olssen, Codd & O’Neill, 2004). For instance, in the theatre, individuals have the opportunity to try out all their ideas, to rehearse all opportunities and to validate them in practice (Boal, 1985; Harbrecht, 2013). Our interpretation is that, in the legislative theatre, individuals are enabled to participate more fully in policy processes in terms of the application of policy stipulations to transform their own lives as well as that of others.

## Discussion

Our discussion reflects the two stipulations from the CPTD policy where in-service teachers find themselves functioning in the legislative theatre (Burr, 1995; Allan, 2008; De Klerk; 2014), where they are placed in subject positions.

The CPTD is explicit when it indicates that it is important to:

support and facilitate a process of purposeful, high quality continuing professional development... to revitalise the teaching profession and to reward teachers who commit themselves to these goals (Department of Education, 2008: Section 2).

coordinate professional development activities with a view to achieving sharper focus and effectiveness (Department of Education, 2008: Executive Summary).

enable teachers to develop professional competences and fulfil their normal employee and professional duties (Department of Education, 2008: Section 2).

Table 2: Categorisation of extracts

Extracted quotes	In-service teachers' subject positions
facilitate a process of purposeful, high quality continuing professional development	In-service teachers in a position of transformative capacity
coordinate professional development activities	In-service teachers in a position of transformative agency
enable teachers to develop	In-service teachers in a position of self-transformation

The phrases “facilitate...”, “coordinate...” and “enable...” contain a transformative change agenda. Transformation in this sense hinges on actions to change the conduct and capacity of individuals to reconceptualise what they should be (Karlberg, 2005; Strasser, De Kraker & Kemp, 2019). When individuals have mastered the capacity to bring about change, they will be able to transform themselves and others in a deliberate and conscious manner (Ziervogel, Cowen & Ziniades, 2016; Dias & Partodário, 2019). In the context of social justice teaching, transformative capacity refers to the ability of individuals to be able to transform both themselves and their society in a deliberate, conscious way (Taylor, 2007; Ziervogel, Cowen & Ziniades, 2016). Such transformation holds the capacity to promote learning in others and sustain personal and professional growth. Moreover, in contrast with traditional ways of teaching, transformative social justice teaching capacitates in-service teachers as change agents who encourage their learners to collaborate with each other. In so doing, it emancipates in-service teachers to act as intellectual coaches who establish a shared vision for lessons, provide modelling and mastery of classroom experiences where learners are challenged to be creative thinkers and opportunities for reflection and self-directed learning unfold (Boyatzis, 2009; Beauchamp & Morton, 2011; Rosebrough & Leverett, 2011; De Klerk & Palmer, 2019).

In the second subject position, transformative agency, in-service teachers would self-consciously commit and contribute to creating new forms of social life and practices by

enabling problem-solving skills in learners based on social justice principles (Stetsenko, 2016). This implies that transformative acts do not occur independently but are framed within purposeful classroom activities with mutual benefit (Engeström, 2007; Eun, 2008; Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011; Shabani, 2016; Lynch, 2019). During such activity, in-service teachers initiate and participate in policy content discussions applicable to the policy. In this way they develop their own stance regarding issues of inclusivity and justice, but also allow learners to express opinions, develop social justice skills and strengthen interactions. As transformative agents they could act as mediators who work towards achieving personal and social change in their diverse learning contexts (Gutiérrez & Calabrese Barton, 2015; Kumpulainen, Kamjamaa & Rajala, 2018; Mäkitalo, 2016; Siry, Wilmes, & Haus, 2016).

In the third subject position, self-transformation of the in-service teacher through continuing professional development is presupposed (Foucault, 2005; Foucault, 1988). As such, self-transformation is an investigative and collaborative process whereby individuals act upon themselves to change their thoughts, conduct and teaching practices and in doing so, it becomes a transformative practice which requires knowledge of the self and others (Papadimos, Manos & Murray, 2013). In the context of schooling in South Africa, liberation of the self and the mind is a profound measure of development where in-service teachers learn how to notice, critique and imagine and ultimately transform the spaces in which they interact (Neuwirth, 2003; Johnson, 2006; Hart, 2016). A possibility engendered in transformative social justice teaching is the capacity for in-service teachers to possess knowledge about equality of classroom norms, and the competence to enact, learn and live in transformative relation to norms (Butler, 2004; Fine-Davis & Faas, 2014). Drawing on Torres (2013), we argue that transformative social justice teaching be regarded as a social practice which will take place when in-service teachers reach a more profound and richer understanding of themselves and the world.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to provide a theoretical lens from a South African education policy perspective into how in-service teachers could develop their professional knowledge about transformative social justice while teaching in public schools. We applied Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* as an approach that uses interactive theatre to aid educational processes. Of Boal's four theatres, the legislative theatre of TPO was used as a metaphor to address in-service teachers' social justice teaching practices so that they transform learning spaces through policy discourses. Analysis of policy discourses in the CPTD revealed that transformative capacity, transformative agency and self-transformation can be useful for in-service teachers' professional development towards transformative social justice teaching.

The paper supports earlier findings in the literature that a focus on the professional development of in-service teachers is important for shaping the professional identity of future teachers (Büssing, Schleper & Menzel, 2018). Another study found that social interaction affords in-service teachers the possibility of undergoing value-change in terms of their individual attitudes, preferences and intentions in order to teach and lead for



social justice in schools (Palmer & Larey, 2016). Our paper is complementary to the findings of the indicated studies in that we found that a main barrier to professional development is a perceived lack of attention to the value and applicability of transformative social justice teaching practices for in-service teachers while teaching and engaging in CPTD activities.

Another contribution of this paper is the enrichment of understanding that engaging in transformative social justice teaching demands that in-service teachers wield their own power, as knowledgeable and critical people, in attempts to create a society that is more just. We acknowledge that inequalities in education are problems that will always be with us in one form or another but contend that in-service teachers can be capacitated to guide learners in analysing systemic inequity in their classroom settings.

Another important insight is the notion that to achieve transformative social justice teaching, in-service teachers continually need to assume roles such as intellectual coaches, mediators and transformative actors to grow as autonomous beings.

Importantly, the study has implications for the teaching of professional development opportunities as per the CPTD. Significantly, in creating transformative learning environments, continuous monitoring and support for in-service teachers are imperatives and thus have CPTD policy implications.

As in-service teachers prepare to teach in multicultural classrooms, programmes in higher education institutions should be tailored to capacitate them to recognise and work with diverse learner's cultures in the learning content, so that they involve learners in structured dialogues across their differences about social justice issues. As such, an important avenue for future research could be an empirical study on the views of in-services teachers regarding their readiness to develop skills in classroom-based social justice practices in multicultural teaching contexts.

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