

Unequal Education? Knowledge-based limitations on substantive citizenship in South Africa

Unequal Education? Knowledge-based limitations on substantive citizenship in South Africa

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by

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Introduction, Methods, and Context

INTRODUCTION: SOUTH AFRICAN BASIC EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE, AND CITIZENSHIP

In spring 2011, Equal Education, a high-profile group of education activists, held a town hall meeting in a local Cape Town school. Students, parents, and community members came to voice their concerns to a government official. The activists mostly raised questions on the causes they had been fighting for since the inception of the group three years prior: the fact that fewer than one in ten schools had a functioning library, and the awful state of school infrastructure throughout much of the country. The official listened attentively, sometimes interrupting to defend the government from the occasionally angry citizens who wanted better services for their children, or, in the case of the students, for themselves—a demand understood by all in the room as a demand for the resources needed to build a better future. The government representative, though not high-ranking or powerful enough to enact much change, appeared to listen to the community's concerns.

On its surface, the meeting seemed a success, at least until the official came to speak with Equal Education's leader, Doron Isaacs, after the meeting. Isaacs thanked the official for coming, but noted that Equal Education had requested they be heard by a more senior official, one who actually had the power to address the citizens' complaints, and who could be held accountable for what was said in the meeting. The activists and community members had grown tired of meeting with officials who deflected criticism towards others, or shrugged helplessly, as if to say 'We're on the same side, but what can I be expected to do about it? We all know these problems are hard—and that I'm not in a

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position to fix them.’ Barely missing a beat, the seemingly sympathetic official told Isaacs that the Director General had personally stated that he could not be bothered to participate in meetings where the people ‘don’t know about education’ (Isaacs, Interview: May 2011).

That dismissal, from the most senior bureaucrat in the South African Department of Education, is representative of much of the South African government’s attitude on public participation in education. An impulse towards democratic inclusiveness may be present, given the Director General’s willingness to send someone else along to meet with the activists and listen to their concerns, something the Director General was under no obligation to do. Yet, it is unclear that citizen participation is taken seriously. Moreover, the grounds upon which the Director General chose not to take the town hall participants seriously were specific and clear: they lacked what he understood as ‘expertise.’

By most reasonable metrics, Equal Education (EE), the activist group in question, has a great deal of expertise. Their advisory board includes Mary Metcalfe, a widely respected former Director General: Higher Education in the Department of Higher Education and Training (the most senior technocratic post in the department in charge of post-secondary education), as well as three prominent education professors. Their full-time and part-time staff members are highly educated, holding undergraduate and graduate degrees from the strongest universities in South Africa and abroad. They are some of the country’s brightest young minds and see improving the education system as a calling. Their activist credentials are impeccable; most of the core strategists in the group learned their skills from the senior strategic thinkers in the Treatment Action Campaign, a

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South African advocacy group known as one of the most effective HIV/AIDS activist groups in the world and South Africa's most dynamic post-apartheid activist group for a time (Robbins 2004). And the Equalisers, the 1000+ dedicated rank and file members of the movement, are students, parents, and community members who have seen some of South Africa's worst schools first hand. In short, the bureaucrat's statement is either curious or deeply concerning. If, with its myriad formats of expertise, Equal Education does not know what it is talking about, who in South Africa does? What does it mean for popular participation in education and for substantive citizenship if the politicians and bureaucrats believe the answer is 'no one' (except, of course, themselves)?

This thesis is an attempt to better understand the connections between knowledge, expertise, and citizen participation in the context of South Africa's education system. The education system is impressively participatory in its structure, but in practice rejects or undermines participation. Both the national government and the provincial government of the Western Cape have a record of blocking citizens' attempts to participate in improving the education system. Since the democratic transition, students, parents, community members, and non-governmental organisations have been working to engage with education policymakers, only to have their involvement dismissed on grounds of ostensible lack of expertise.

Despite this dismissal, a popular movement, Equal Education, has found it possible to challenge the government on technocratic grounds. While the dominant belief in democratic theory is that technocracy and notions of bureaucratic expertise render

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broad-based popular participation nearly impossible¹, my argument is that Equal Education's work demonstrates that with a bit of ingenuity, citizens can overcome the disempowering effects of technocracy. Government officials in this realm routinely dismiss participation from citizens on the grounds that the citizens lack expertise (regardless of whether government itself possesses it). Rather than try to shift the debate to more comfortable or familiar terms, Equal Education works to train its activists to speak in the same statistics, laws, and policy language as government. This is not to say government officials then immediately accede to demands phrased in such ways. More frequently, officials then introduce other standards that must be met by would-be-participants, related to stake, authority, age, and more, leading to a continued negotiation, but one in which government does not hold its standard trumps of expertise.

In my first chapter, I will develop a theory of governmental 'knowledge practices' based on the work of Thomas Kuhn and Michel Foucault. This theory provides the basis for my argument that many government officials understand "expertise" on narrow and self-serving technocratic grounds that seem incompatible with citizen engagement, ultimately limiting overall participation in the system. The chapter moves on to examine historical knowledge practices in the government's education bureaucracy, and then to demonstrate the dominant knowledge practices today.

My second chapter shifts to look at the work of Equal Education in the context of the limitations government has placed on citizen engagement through its knowledge practices. The chapter makes a theoretical argument for activist organisations as a

¹ For theoretical underpinnings of this belief, see Weber 2001, Foucault 2007, Habermas 1989. For applied work, see, for instance, Fischer 1999, and Peters 2010. For examples in developmental states, see Heller 2001, Karuri-Sebina et al. 2009, and von Holdt 2010.

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vanguard in forging new practices of citizenship, building on the anthropological literature on health and citizenship. The arguments of Steven Robins, Joao Biehl, and others ground an analysis of Equal Education's activist precursors and current peers, as well as an in-depth discussion of how Equal Education's strategies and tactics have been shaped to target the technocratic agenda set forth by government.

The third chapter focuses on key interactions between the government and these activists and citizens. The chapter contains mostly ethnographic material on particular instances in which government officials' knowledge practices and the activists' strategies appear at loggerheads. The manoeuvres by each to gain an upper hand in these conflicts, especially government's willingness to render 'expertise' as a shifting target, reveal much about broader patterns relating to knowledge and citizenship.

Finally, my conclusion offers some initial ideas about what these interactions mean for an understanding of substantive citizenship and democratic participation in an era of ever-increasing complexity. Contrary to the dominant thesis on the effects of technocracy on democratic participation (that is to say, it renders it all but impossible), I argue that the experience of Equal Education shows that 'technocratic citizenship' is indeed possible—but imperfect in ways that both the activists and government may not have predicted.

The rest of this introduction is dedicated to covering the methodology used to research these questions and providing a brief historical context for how the education system has been rendered the site of contestation it is today.

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METHOD AND DATA

I came to this topic via research for my previous job, in which I was a consultant working to improve the education system in the United States. This work included several projects on community participation in education. The literature reviews I did at the time showed there to be no education activist group in the world as broadly supported or as effective as Equal Education. In addition to their singular global status, they appeared to occupy an interesting position in South Africa: the heirs to the activist throne, or so it seemed in the media. Moreover, EE's work placed them at the nexus of multiple narratives on citizenship, education, and knowledge, a nexus that at points can seem paradoxical. Their mission makes it clear that they see education as foundational to engaged citizenship, yet they are themselves a group of engaged citizens who have, on the whole, been failed by the education system. Their tactics rely on their ability to become 'experts' on their campaign topics, but many of their members, precisely because of the education issues the group highlights, lack a strong foundation in either English (South Africa's dominant business and government language) or maths. A scan of the news reports on the group showed them to be effective in their work, making them an ideal case study on the ever-changing nature of citizenship and participation in South Africa as well as a likely counterpoint to theories on the stifling effects of technocracy.

I drew upon a number of methods to obtain the data and sources for this thesis. Much of my evidence comes from a three-month period of participant-observation from July 2011 to October 2011. This project is not about macropolitics, at the level of parties, elections, etc., but about micropolitics, and the everyday interactions involved in the constant negotiations of what it means to rule and be ruled in a democratic state. The questions here require quotidian and mundane details in order to better understand the

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larger, more extraordinary whole. Moreover, truly following the actions of an activist group requires a capacity for spontaneity, as requests come in as needs arise, and projects are picked up because of ability sometimes as much as pre-determined strategy. Activist organisations are not known for their rigid fidelity to schedules, detailed strategic plans, and rules, and Equal Education proved no exception to that perception. As such, participant-observation, with its adaptable form, ability to witness details as well as query them afterward, possibility to catch elements of which the subjects themselves are unaware, and, as a researcher, chance to move from an initial sense of strangeness to an eventual sense of normalcy, was the ideal method to gather baseline data. In the manner suggested by anthropologist and ethnographic theorist Clifford Geertz (1973), I placed myself in ‘the flow’ and followed it. I was embedded at the Equal Education headquarters in Khayelitsha, a township just outside of Cape Town, spending the most time in the Policy, Communications, and Research department (PCR), but also spending time with the Youth and Community departments. I went to all possible formal EE events, which included school library openings, youth mass meetings, staff seminars, internal strategy meetings, youth group meetings, and youth camp. I also went along with EE staff and members on unscheduled or unplanned activities, which included anything from dropping off EE’s student magazine at dozens of schools and libraries in Khayelitsha to EE’s attempt to mediate between administrators, parents, students, and the police at a spontaneous Khayelitsha protest that had rapidly turned violent. I was at the office as often as any full-time staff member or volunteer, and my presence at the EE office made possible critical opportunities to see EE’s students and staff in action, especially their interactions with government. Having a desk at Equal Education also

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allowed me to catch busy staff and Equalisers for informal interviews, witness the staff and students at some of the highest and lowest moments of their work in those three months, and see first-hand the day-to-day exchanges between members, staff, and government officials that are the lifeblood of the organization.

In exchange for unlimited access to EE's work, both internal and external, I contributed research to two main projects for PCR: a training manual for youth group leaders and activists, and a 'shadow report' to South Africa's Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Basic Education, assessing the Department of Education's activities of the past year against its stated goals. I was also sometimes asked to lead youth group sessions in conjunction with a Xhosa-speaking facilitator who grew up in Khayelitsha. My project depended on the access EE gave me, and the data behind the arguments in this thesis would be impoverished without the staff and students' tolerance for my persistent questions. However, my collaborative relationship with the organisation's staff and members and my personal sympathy with their mission raise questions about my bias as a researcher, and the entanglement of my personal and professional obligations. I am on friendly as well as professional terms with many of the staff in particular.

Several aspects of this question of bias and objectivity are worth discussing. The first idea to note here is the well-established argument that no social science research can claim true objectivity; social science is imbued with the interpretation of the researcher, invariably coloured by his or her previous experiences and subjectivity. This is an idea thoroughly discussed elsewhere, leaving no need to reinvent the wheel here.² The idea that no social science research can be completely objective does not imply that it cannot

² See, for example, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, Ferguson 1999 and 2006, Graeber 2004 and 2009, Haraway 1997, and Harding 1986.

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bring useful and important assessments of the world. Here, I defer to Donna Haraway's (1997) argument that researchers should do their best to limit their biases by actively seeking counterpoints, and by disclosing relevant personal factors to readers. In this spirit, in addition to what I have mentioned above, I should also note that I spent roughly half a year working with Zackie Achmat and the Treatment Action Campaign (EE's incubating organisation) in 2007 and 2008, where I first came across EE in its developmental stages. I am sympathetic to Equal Education's mission—intuitively, few choose to write on issues on which they lack opinions. But, as David Graeber (2009) points out, a lack of support for a cause is not a neutral standpoint; it is a stance in favour of the status quo, and just as biased as a result. Moreover, support for a cause certainly does not preclude critical assessment of the cause's other supporters, as the persistence of social movement in-fighting demonstrates.

However, David Mosse (2005, 2006) rightly notes that maintaining critical distance can be difficult when researchers also consider their subjects to be colleagues, and justifiable criticism can still burn bridges. I fared better than Mosse in his development agency experiences when writing this thesis. I offered several Equal Education staff from my time there the opportunity to read my work and check it for fact and tone. I also gave them the chance to raise objections to my interpretations, and did not draw any challenges. This is not because my experience and portrayal of Equal Education is exclusively positive. I had numerous conversations with staff members who were disillusioned with EE for various reasons, as well as with outsiders who had complaints about EE. Few of those complaints rose beyond the level of office politics, interpersonal relationships, or inter-organisational competition. Where they did, I have

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included them in this thesis, without objection from anyone in EE. Three of EE's senior managers also asked me to provide any feedback I might have for them based on what I had heard in my research, including negative feedback. To the extent that I was able to fulfil that request and keep my informants anonymous, I did so. They responded to some of the criticisms I brought up, and where those critiques are included, I have done my best to include their responses.

I also attempted to balance what could have been an exclusively inside view of Equal Education with outside interviews. My internal formal interviews were almost exclusively with management level staff; these were the individuals with whom I had the least day-to-day contact. Perspectives of non-management staff and student members are included in the participant-observation material, as I had frequent contact with them through this method and thus the opportunity to ask questions as they arose, rather than in a formal interview setting.

I conducted a series of interviews with other education NGO staff, and a former Department of Basic Education official, as well as sat in on education sector meetings outside of EE. Since I found that EE is generally well-regarded in the sector, most of these interviewees could be understood as 'critical friends' of the organisation. While I came across no one with a fully negative perspective on EE's work, I certainly encountered criticism of EE, and have included those critiques in my data and conclusions. As I did not intend to conduct quantitative or statistical analysis on the information provided to me by interviewees, fully structured interviews were not necessary. To the contrary, fully structured interviews would have limited the information I received, as I gained much from the opportunity of 'back and forth'

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dialogues with my interviewees and from following the discussion where they wanted to take it. My interviewees clearly had their own ideas about the most interesting questions I could be asking them, and often the directions they tried to steer the interviews were as informative as their answers to the questions I walked in the door with. Topics covered included attitudes towards government generally to gain a broader understanding of participant views, attitudes toward government in this particular realm, past interactions with government education officials, thoughts on the importance of a high quality education, components of a high quality education, thoughts on Equal Education's work and public participation in education as a whole, and, if applicable, reasons for involvement in Equal Education and ways in which their views, beliefs, and attitudes have changed as a result of their participation in Equal Education.

Per University of Oxford ethics expectations, minors who participated in my study are not identifiable, nor are any adult participants who wished to remain anonymous. None of my formal interviewees wanted anonymity, and so they are referenced with their real names. A list of interviewees is provided following my bibliography. Quotations and instances from my participant-observation research are anonymous.

Despite my best efforts, I had difficulty obtaining interviews with officials at the Department of Education, the Western Cape Education Department, and the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Basic Education. Instead, I have addressed the government's perspectives and corroborated what my informants had to say about government and its representatives as best as I could via publicly available sources: news

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articles, government department releases, government websites, minutes from Parliament Committee meetings, my own notes from government meetings, etc.

The remainder of my evidence relies on other published and grey sources: information released by various government departments, press releases from NGOs, and other academic work on the subject. Each of these sources has a slant (e.g., NGO press releases characterise issues and events in ways consistent with their overall causes, and statements by one government official may not be representative of the entire department's attitude), and I have attempted to highlight the deficits in these sources where appropriate. I have drawn heavily on prior academic work to establish the historical context for my questions, as there is a wealth of existing work and time constraints prevented conducting intensive archival research in addition to my ethnographic research.

Numerous historical factors, including Bantu education, prior activist tactics and strategies, and the overall legacy of apartheid have played a role in the status of education in South Africa today, as well as the attitudes held by interested community members and the strategies used by activists. The next section acts as a basic historical grounding for the rest of this work. The section is not intended to be a full chronicle of the changes in the education system, but rather a brief outline of the major shifts that produced the system's poor performance and made it a site of past and present activism.

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SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION: CONTEXT AND HISTORY

Apartheid deeply scarred South Africa's education system. Generations of students, black³ and white, passed through schools that propagated apartheid's segregationist, racist ideology. The first students to see attempts at creating high-achieving schools for all have not fared much better. The slow pace of change cannot be attributed to neglect. Even before the talks to end apartheid began, the African National Congress (ANC) highlighted educational deficits as a major issue undermining social equality and opportunities for economic advancement. Moreover, they underscored the importance of education to participating as fully engaged citizens in 'the new South Africa,' an emphasis that continues today (South Africa 2010b). To the heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle, education was not merely necessary for economic development, it was the key to democracy itself. This stance was not a revelation. Some of the most strategically significant and morally symbolic elements of the struggle were connected by their opposition to education inequality, most famously the Soweto Uprising of 1976 (Fiske and Ladd 2005). South Africa's current educational problems cannot be

³ Government officials working on the education of non-Europeans in this era used several terms interchangeably and ambiguously, in line with the fluid, confused, and arbitrary nature of apartheid racial categorisations. While political arguments can be and have been made for using particular phrases, capitalisation, or quote marks, in this thesis I use simplicity, consistency, and historical fidelity as my guides. 'Black,' 'native' and 'bantu' were used to refer to dark-skinned indigenous people, though 'black' also sometimes included anyone who was non-European. 'African' denoted indigenous people (sometimes including the lighter-skinned Khoisan), and 'coloured' could be used to mean someone of mixed race, the Malay slaves brought over by the Dutch, and sometimes the Khoisan or Indians (the latter two groups were also used as categories). I will avoid inverted commas for racial categories here forward and use the capitalisation shown above when not referencing a proper noun, save when quoting from others.

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understood without historical context; this section will provide a brief history of primary and secondary schooling for the rest of this thesis.⁴

The first school to educate non-Europeans in South Africa was opened in 1658 to educate Dutch slaves brought to the Cape from other colonies. Expansion beyond slave education did not occur until the 18th century, when Protestant missionaries from the Moravian Church opened a school for Khoisan people who lived in the Cape (Molteno 1984, Lewis and Steyn 2003). Missionary education expanded its geography and audience through 19th century, though the limited number of schools meant most black children never had the opportunity to attend. While these schools were diverse in their intentions and thus their pedagogy, at least some promoted liberal arts curricula (Fiske and Ladd 2005).

By the time the British and Dutch formed the Union of South Africa in 1910, the education of blacks had a vocal set of critics as well as proponents. The most common argument made by whites against the missionary schools was that education gave blacks an inflated sense of self-importance and the capacity to create trouble, while their white proponents frequently argued that the schools produced a cadre of ‘civilised’ African allies (Beinart 2001). For the first half of the century, these differences of opinion never rose to the level of national policy. This is not to say that mission schools were not places of contestation—Afrikaner nationalists had been interested in using education to further their ideology since the start of the Union, and mission schools were occasionally the

⁴ The history of the intellectual trends in South African education policymaking can be found in Chapter 1, and more detail on activism and protests related to education is in Chapter 2.

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target of protests by their students and parents over poor conditions and lack of funding (Beinart 2001, Hyslop 1999, Davis 1984).

Major changes to this status of black education did not occur until the National Party took power. Native education was a key issue for the National Party and in 1949 the government commissioned a panel led by Dr. W.W.M. Eiselen to examine the status quo and offer prescriptions for change. Eiselen and his colleagues found the mission schools to be impoverished, with underpaid teachers and a dramatic undersupply of school slots for eager students. Additionally, there was an overall lack of systematic coordination (Kros 2002).⁵ The Bantu Education Act of 1953 (BE), created on the basis of the Eiselen Report, reflected some of the Commission's suggestions on improving efficiency and spurring socio-economic development, but also included an emphasis on a racist ideology absent in the report.

While Bantu Education swiftly centralised and expanded schooling for black students, many other aspects of it were flawed as a result of the aforementioned racist ideology. The language policies made it difficult for students to achieve the fluency needed in either English or Afrikaans to land a well-paying job, the curriculum propagated the National Party's ideas about racial separateness and ethnic pride, and much of the curriculum was vocational in nature and did not encourage critical thinking. The state capped its spending at R13 million and required that any expansion of funding come from the expansion of African taxation. In the most extreme era of apartheid, ten times more was spent per pupil for whites than blacks (Fiske and Ladd 2005). In

⁵ See Chapter 1 for a more detailed commentary on the Eiselen Report.

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addition, the school boards supposedly created for community participation rarely encouraged it in practice (Hyslop 1999, Unterhalter 1991).

Despite this, there was little initial opposition to BE, likely because of its benefits. Jonathan Hyslop (1999) argues that the policy had three main advantages, for both the whites that implemented it and its students. First, the Act significantly expanded access to schooling. Second, it created financial mechanisms that allowed the system to run more efficiently than the missionary schools. Third, it created new linkages between the needs of industry and the curriculum in schools. This progress was all the more important in light of the fact that missionary schools were nearing collapse for financial reasons, and had garnered their fair share of popular discontent related to their conditions and management (Beinart 2001, Hyslop 1999). While BE was the subject of much criticism by the press as well as some opposition politicians, critics found it difficult to build a movement against it. The ANC had called for a compulsory state schooling scheme, and parents unable to get their children into missionary schools (the vast majority) were eager to have educational opportunities for their children (Lodge 1983, Hyslop 1999).

Education for blacks under apartheid went through several major shifts which indicate that the operation of the system over time could not be solely reduced to black acquiescence/protest, capitalist domination, or racist apartheid ideology, the standard narratives on BE (Unterhalter 1991). 1953 through 1963 saw the large-scale expansion of schooling, mostly at the primary level, and the centralisation of black schooling under the Bantu Education Department (BED) (Hyslop 1999). There was a near total absence

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of industry commentary in this first decade, and efforts appeared to be focused almost exclusively on the promotion of apartheid's segregationist ideology (Unterhalter 1991).

The subsequent decade, 1963 to 1973, brought continued expansion of primary schools and accelerated expansion of secondary school enrolment. Much of this expansion took part in the Bantustans, where the apartheid government sought to place civil servants in their newly created puppet states. In the minds of many industry leaders, the reforms in this period were insufficient to keep up with the changing needs of business (e.g., the mass expansion of manufacturing and corresponding need for permanent skilled labourers), and so the era ended with a strong push by industry to convince the government to tailor Bantu Education to provide a skilled workforce and increase economic growth (Unterhalter 1991).

Manufacturers and urban businesses successfully persuaded the apartheid government to put in place many reforms they desired for increasing student skills beginning in 1973 (Unterhalter 1991). The move to support the demands of industry enraged the National Party's far-right, who wanted Bantu Education to be used for the explicit promotion of their racial ideology. Shifting the system to focus less on maintaining segregation and more on providing for the needs of businesses in urban areas undermined the far-right's project. They channelled their anger into a demand of symbolic importance: enforcing Afrikaans language instruction in schools.

In an attempt to placate the far-right, the BED began to enforce the Afrikaans Medium Decree (AMD), which required half of all secondary school subjects to be taught in Afrikaans. This decision frustrated teachers (who often lacked the ability to teach in Afrikaans) and angered students (who not only were commonly incapable of

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understanding their lessons, but were also bereft of the opportunity to learn the English skills they would need for the job market) (Hyslop 1999). This series of government and industry policy demands alongside rising student discontent and political awareness (fuelled by the expansion of the Black Consciousness Movement), culminated in the Soweto Uprising on June 16, 1976. What began as a peaceful march by students in the township of Soweto to protest the Afrikaans policy quickly became violent (Lodge 1983). Upon the arrival of security forces, students started throwing rocks and the police intensified the violence by teargassing the students and firing live ammunition at them. Nearly 20,000 students participated in the protests, and by the time the riots died down, a significant number had been killed.⁶

The Soweto Uprising and subsequent riots throughout the rest of the country forced the government to grudgingly accept the need for reform. The AMD was removed, programming for teacher training was increased, and the hated BED became the Department of Education and Training (Hyslop 1999). The post-Soweto policies were heavily influenced by the needs of industry, especially workforce shortages and skills deficits. The far-right lost their influence in the department, but students were implacable. Government attempts to comprehensively repress those involved in organising Soweto failed; education protests in various forms and locations would continue on until the transition (Hyslop 1999).⁷

Continuing the trend towards human capital theory and the needs of South Africa's changing economy, another landmark government commission produced a report on how to reform black education to address growing economic concerns related to

⁶ See Chapter 2 for more detail on the causes and ramifications of the Soweto Uprising.

⁷ Protests after Soweto are also covered in Chapter 2.

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skills shortages in particular. The De Lange Report of 1981 argued for expanded vocational training, a single Department of Education to cover all races and ethnicities, and equal student expenditure regardless of race (Beinart 2001, Kraak 2002). However, while government was willing to make some improvements to black education, including significant funding increases, the government ignored much of the De Lange recommendations (Kraak 2002). The rest of the 1980s and early 1990s were consumed by school boycotts, ungovernability strategies, and debates within the black community over ‘liberation before education’ versus ‘education for liberation,’ out of which came the activist conceptions of ‘People’s Education for People’s Power,’ an anti-apartheid strategy, philosophy, and set of alternate education programs⁸ (Alexander 1990, Motala and Vally 2002).

Unfortunately, despite the hopes of proponents, the People’s Education programs and ideas never evolved into a robust alternative philosophy or curriculum that could pose a credible opposition to the policies argued for by the National Party and conservative bureaucrats and academics in the transition (Alexander 1990, Hyslop 1999, Fiske and Ladd 2005). In the 1980s, the ruling party deepened its technocratic commitment and expertise, and successfully set a trend of statistical, ‘scientific,’ ‘technical’ approaches to education policy linked to capitalist economic development and human capital theory (Hyslop 1999, Chisholm 2004). Negotiators for anti-apartheid groups found themselves outmanoeuvred by the apartheid education bureaucrats and struggled to get philosophical traction in the discussions, in part because their

⁸ De Lange and People’s Education are examined in more detail in Chapters 1 and 2 respectively.

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philosophies had yet to take a fully-developed, pragmatic shape (Harley and Wedekind 2004).

By the end of the negotiations, necessary changes like integrating the education departments, setting policies of non-racialism, and funnelling more money into historically disadvantaged schools were secured, but the more left-wing representatives lost the ideological battle. Linda Chisholm (2004) writes that a full account of the causes of this loss has yet to be provided, but commonly cited reasons for the breakdown include the incomplete nature of the leftists' policies, and the ANC's growing acceptance of ideas of human capital theory. The Washington Consensus had a large degree of influence over the entirety of the negotiations and ideas about skills, prosperity, and human capital won out across the board. School fees were implemented to keep wealthy, white families in the public system but priced most others out of the best schools (requirements for poverty-based fee waivers were and remain minimal), and all attempts at more radical pedagogy (e.g., rooted in Marxism or the ideas of Paulo Freire, both cornerstones of People's Education) failed entirely (Alexander 1990, Chisholm 2002, Hyslop 1999, Levin 1991).

Educational researchers Edward Fiske and Helen Ladd offer four main educational deficits left by the apartheid government. First, there were high levels of residential segregation and persistent poverty. Black students lacked access to the high quality schools of their white peers because of the overwhelming success of apartheid's segregation mechanisms. For black learners in the townships of major cities, reaching good schools in wealthy areas would take hours of travel if they could even afford the costs of transit; for learners living in the former Bantustans, those high-quality schools

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rarely existed. Second, the existing resources for black and coloured learners were poor. Current teachers had not been trained to perform their new tasks, nor were there well-trained teachers to replace them. Learning materials and physical structures were outdated and/or rundown. Third, there was a low level of educational attainment amongst black and coloured parents, meaning they could not effectively supplement the formal education system. Finally, there was a weak “culture of learning” in black communities. Black communities were sceptical of the opportunities provided by education due to prior experience. Moreover, the standard parental pride when children exceed their parents’ degree attainment meant the many parents with low educational attainment set lower standards for their children (Fiske and Ladd 52).

To be sure, those working in the education sector post-apartheid faced major challenges. Yet, the continuing abysmal state of education almost two decades after the end of apartheid is surprising. A full generation of students has started school since legal segregation ended and funds were poured into the education system. South Africa spends a higher percentage per capita than any other country on the continent, but for worse results (Economist 2010). Some African and coloured students now attending schools that were out of their reach under apartheid, but there has been almost no integration of whites into previously coloured and black schools (Soudien 2004). While the official numbers show just over 70% of final year high school students passing their exit exams in 2011, those numbers smooth a rougher reality. South Africa has very high primary school enrolment rates—90% of school-aged youth are enrolled in primary school, but the system is plagued by poor retention rates. Nearly half of the 2011 graduation cohort that began school in grade 1 dropped out somewhere along the way. Out of the class that

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should have graduated in 2011, the ‘real’ pass rate accounting for dropouts is 38% (Parker 2012). Moreover, the university-level pass rate is dismal; just under 1 in 4 students who sat the exam passed highly enough to attend university (Gernetzky and Visser 2012). As it stands, South Africa’s schools are still failing their youth, who are not unaware of that fact. South Africa’s schools have long been social laboratories for government conceptions of democracy (however unequal in ideology and practice) and as a result have been sites of protest for just as long. The traditions of activism in and on schooling and the history of inequality prefigured the activism that exists today, and the historical technocratic policymaking practices have led the way for the current bureaucratic practices of exclusion.

Chapter 1

Knowledge Practices: Theories of Power/Knowledge in the context of South African Education

KNOWLEDGE AS POWER AND PRACTICE

There is no doubt that government structures affect how citizens participate. Structures outline points of interaction, such as voting, representative bodies, or forums for interaction, like town halls. These structures are established via law, custom, or both. In South Africa's case, many points of interaction are written into the law: the existence of elections, provisions for school governing bodies, and the constitutional right to freedom of assembly, for example. Others are provided for by the absence of laws regarding them: the ability to contact one's representatives (used broadly here to mean members of both the political and professional wings of government with the ability to affect change on any given issue) via letter, to appeal to them in newspaper editorials, to discuss politics should one happen to run into them on the street. The representative's ability to comprehend these actions is a necessary condition of rendering them effective. While nothing in the law prohibits sending your representative an abstract expressionist painting in the post, the existence of the act outside the spheres of both custom and easy interpretation likely leads it to have a low or nonexistent political impact.

This last example, though frivolous, speaks to a serious point: performances of citizenship are constrained not just by laws and structures, but also by the people comprising government itself, however intentionally. If a representative receives the aforementioned painting and interprets it as an act of artistic generosity, its effectiveness as a political act is much reduced. At this point, the argument reaches dangerous territory

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regarding whether acts are defined by their intent, their interpretation, or what might be understood as their fundamental character. Conveniently, a resolution for this is not needed for my argument, which operates in constrained descriptive realms.

Government officials, through the practice of their jobs, place substantive limits on citizenship as exercised by the population. Those limits are in addition to those specified by legal structure and prohibition, and sometimes run contrary to exactly those laws and structures, which should come as no surprise to anyone who has ever paid a bribe to an official to receive a ‘free’ service guaranteed under the law. My point here is more specific, however: limits on substantive citizenship arise through what I will call the “knowledge practices” of government officials. While a schematic explanation of the term will inevitably leave out important aspects of the phenomena, here I will attempt a definition as well as offer several examples to clarify my meaning. Before delving into this definition, it is worth a brief examination of how government knowledge practices are constitutive of government power, for which I will turn to the work of Michel Foucault.

Two of Foucault’s major contributions to analysing knowledge within government systems were demonstrating that knowledge itself is a mechanism of power, and showing the importance of the concept of ‘population’ to government knowledge practices. His analysis of population runs through many of his works, but his clearest explanation of the idea is in *Security, Territory, Population*, a series of lectures delivered in 1978. His aim was to show “the knowledge effects produced by the struggles, confrontations, and battles that take place within our society and by the tactics of power

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that are the elements of this struggle” (Foucault 2007, 3). He differentiates between the different types of power he has studied in the past, moving from the sovereign, juridico-legal, and disciplinary strategies of power covered in *Discipline and Punish* to the population-based ‘apparatus of security,’ where this discussion will begin.

In an apparatus of security, Foucault (2007) claims, the above strategies of power are brought into the determination of a ‘probable set of events,’ and situated in a ‘calculation of cost.’ This strategy of probabilistic aggregates differs from prior mechanisms of power in its acknowledgement of a deviation from the norm as well as the establishment of an acceptable level of deviation. Where previous systems set a binary between licit and illicit, then either punished accordingly or shaped individuals to the licit, an apparatus of security sees such goals as impossible and also unnecessary. The governmental apparatus of security takes what it is given, whether environmental, human, or otherwise, and attempts to work *with* the traits and tendencies of those elements rather than against them to form arrangements deemed acceptable. Unlike discipline, which aims for perfection, security is a matter of ‘maximizing the positive elements, for which one provides the best circulation, and of minimizing what is risky and inconvenient, like theft and disease, while knowing that they will never be completely suppressed’ (Foucault 2007, 19).

This format of power cannot exist without a certain kind of knowledge, ‘the emergence not only of the notion, but also of the reality of population. Population is undoubtedly an idea and a reality that is absolutely modern in relation to the functioning of political power, but also in relation to knowledge and political theory, prior to the eighteenth century’ (Foucault 2007, 11). The calculation in managing a disease like

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smallpox is not to stop it in its tracks immediately—such a move is impossible—but rather to minimize its circulation, limiting its impact and perhaps providing for its eradication, ensuring that any loss along the way remains at an acceptable level. Such decisions are impossible without the ability to think of ever-widening circles of social interaction, mandating that government reach the level of population, rather than the limited domain over which discipline can be effective. Moreover, this management does not rely upon some relation of dominance and obedience, but anticipates the nature of the elements themselves, and directs it in ways understood to be beneficial (Foucault 2007).

This set of strategies, is what Foucault calls ‘governmentality,’ the modern mode of governance in which we remain today (Foucault 2007, 106-109). With governmentality came the beginning of ‘political economy,’ involving an attention to detail previously foreign to the state. It is inextricably ‘linked to a set of analyses and forms of knowledge that began to develop at the end of the sixteenth century and increased in scope in the seventeenth century; essentially knowledge of the state in its different elements, dimensions, and the factors of its strength, which was called, precisely, “statistics,” meaning science of the state’ (Foucault 2007, 100-101). With statistics, one could catalogue detailed knowledge of the elements themselves, at a level that can be abstracted, manipulated, and generalised, and with a method of political economy, one could assess what ought be done. To put a finer point on it, such a mode demands that the ‘knowledge involved must be scientific in its procedures. Second, this scientific knowledge is absolutely indispensable for good government. A government that did not take into account this kind of analysis, the knowledge of these processes,

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which did not respect the result of this kind of knowledge, would be bound to fail' (Foucault 2007, 350-351).

To illustrate with an example closer to the subject at hand, this kind of knowledge and management can be seen clearly in the progression of the South African schools curriculum since the end of apartheid. Teachers expressed strong opposition to the central, authoritarian-style curriculum under the apartheid system, and a desire for more freedom to determine their own lessons. Recognising that the 'elements' at hand were forced into a position contrary to their 'nature' (emphatic preferences, in this case), one of the reforms made in the post-apartheid era was the introduction of outcomes-based education (OBE) in the Curriculum 2005 (C2005) strategy, allowing teachers freedom to determine most of their own curriculum. OBE aligned with the democratic sentiment at the time, and had been the subject of much statistical examination and research in other countries that had implemented it, such as New Zealand. While there was clearly some awareness that the South African teacher corps was not as well-trained as New Zealand's, this was deemed an acceptable level of harm (Harley and Wedekind 2004). However, post-implementation, it became apparent that initial bureaucratic assessments of the teachers' capacities were incorrect, and most teachers were incapable of developing their own lesson plans, materials, etc. After several years with the C2005 strategy in place, the bureaucrats realised that they had miscalculated the degree of damage that would be wreaked by the element of (inappropriate) teacher training. Poor student exam results were judged to have gone beyond the acceptable levels of poor performance, and adjustments were made to provide more structure to the curriculum (South Africa 2010c).

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While population can be understood at a biological level, as in the case of epidemic management, it can also be understood as ‘the public,’ ‘the population seen under the aspect of its opinions, ways of doing things, forms of behaviour, customs, fears, prejudices, and requirements; it is what one gets a hold on through education, campaigns, and convictions’ (Foucault 2007, 75). Foucault devotes little time to the idea of population as public, with their myriad opinions and (at least in the liberal tradition) influence over government, nor to an idea of government as an entity that exists to serve the people. The people exist at the level of an object of power. There is perhaps the implication that government cannot run roughshod over them—one can read ‘population will be the object that government will have to take into account in its observations and knowledge, in order to govern effectively in a rationally reflected manner’ to mean that not only must the population be known, it also must occasionally be reckoned with (Foucault 2007, 106). This is, to some degree, what happened in the above example. One of the necessary elements for the education bureaucrats to take into account in creating a new education policy was the teachers’ *desires* to teach and be treated in a particular way, an element that could create significant obstruction if not directed or circulated properly.

Foucault also offers a brief mention of how we might think of ‘politics’ in a system of governmentality: ‘governmentalization of the state is a particularly contested phenomenon, since if the problems of governmentality and the techniques of government have really become the only political stake and the only real space of political struggle and contestation, the governmentalization of the state has nonetheless been what has allowed the state to survive’ (Foucault 2007, 109). However, this characterisation is

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hardly backed up in the text—it is merely implied that if society is drawn into this apparatus of security, this governmentality, questions of what we might call morality, justice, and first principles are subsumed by or always already rooted in this strategy of power.

On its face, this seems to be at odds with a liberal understanding of government, particularly democracy. Government may be ‘of the people,’ but it does not appear to be ‘by the people’ or necessarily ‘for the people.’ However, I would argue that Foucault’s views on governmentality are not irreconcilable with a notion of democratic governance—but they do make a concept of such governance more complicated. Further, I would argue that Foucault is slightly off the mark that ‘governmentalization,’ that is to say, the *process towards* governmentality, is the only space of political struggle in modern society. While that may be one space of contestation, seen, perhaps, in phenomena like anti-bureaucrat or anti-intellectual backlashes in democratic societies (of which South Africa is only one of many cases), it is not the only space of engagement. Rather, my argument is that democratic engagement can take place at the level of governmentality itself—on the grounds of the statistics, the science, the technical judgments put forth by government agents on behalf of the state (as well as elsewhere). This means that not only is the process up for contestation, so are the intended ends, the ‘beneficial’ ends that governmentality seeks to guide its constitutive elements towards. To establish how that process takes place, we must first increase the specificity of our understanding of Foucault’s ‘techniques of governmentality’ or the analysis behind the ‘apparatus of security’ so that we may also see how these knowledge practices function to set the terms of engagement and how those terms can be adopted or challenged.

FROM PARADIGMS TO KNOWLEDGE PRACTICES: WHAT CHANGES WHEN ‘SCIENCE’ BECOMES ‘SOCIAL SCIENCE’

Thomas Kuhn’s concept of a ‘paradigm’ is a useful concept with which to start an elaboration on what I intend by ‘knowledge practices,’ but, as will become evident, is ultimately an insufficient frame for understanding the concept. In his seminal work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn (1996, 175) describes a ‘paradigm’ as ‘the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community.’ The paradigm is the fundamental system of understanding shared by a particular group. These groups could be as broad as ‘chemists,’ or as targeted as ‘macrophage biologists.’ At the least, they need to be a group that is understood to be in communication with each other, regarding a specific topic. Those two elements give rise to a need for shared foundations on which further discussion can rest without having to repeatedly reconstruct those foundations (e.g., ‘the earth revolves around the sun,’ for astronomers, or ‘when the movement of any object approaches the speed of light, certain properties of its movement always hold true’ for physicists working on projects at all connected to special relativity). Once a paradigm has taken root, there is no need to continually restate all of the contributions to the field that comprise that paradigm. They are taken as a given, and, in the case of the scientific community, ‘normal science,’ the standard, specific forms of science that the vast majority of scientists engage in can go on, making the paradigm increasingly specific and articulated.

Kuhn’s work makes it clear that paradigms also involve certain modes of communication; contained within that set of beliefs, values, and techniques is a way of speaking about that which is contained in the field, and conveying it to others. When

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paradigms start to break down, or are challenged by alternate theories, those working in that field are forced to find ways to reconcile what seems to be two entirely different languages, at least insofar as those languages refer to particular understandings of the world. This, Kuhn takes care to note, is not a mere problem of definitions. When an alternate theory appears to challenge the meaning of ‘molecule,’ the contestation is not over how to define the word molecule—it is over how to comprehend the properties of matter, in which the meaning of ‘molecule’ indicates entirely different field-views.

The final aspect of a paradigm worth elaborating on here is how events, phenomena, and elements unpredicted by the paradigm are handled. For most unpredicted phenomena, this answer is simple; paradigms are underspecified by their nature, and so as long as an event does not directly contradict what is predicted, or what is believed to have been shown already, there is no problem at all. The event is simply incorporated into the paradigm as one of many further elaborations or articulations on it. For those events, phenomena, and elements that cannot be so easily accommodated, two other possibilities arise: they are set aside as an acknowledged problem for the science of the field, but one that cannot be dealt with at present (for instance, for lack of needed instrumentation). Here it is assumed that they *can* be accommodated, but sadly not for the time being. It is the final case that produces scientific revolutions: anomalies that cannot be presently accommodated in the current paradigm, and which do not appear reconcilable via future scientific advancement in the same paradigm. It is at this point that new theories that approach the level of paradigm are developed, and the practitioners must decide whether the alternate paradigms answer important enough questions, and

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answer them well enough to set aside their previous paradigm and move forward with the new paradigm in its stead.

Kuhn's scientific communities are not wholly comparable to the realm of interest here, basic public education in South Africa, for reasons that are more and less salient to this discussion. For the sake of space, I am ignoring what I perceive to be less salient differences. The two most important differences appear to be: First, there is far more contestation over the 'the entire constellation of beliefs, values, [and] techniques' which would comprise a paradigm. The process of validation and invalidation of paradigms as described by Kuhn for science does not function in the same way outside of it. It is quite rare for non-scientific theories or understandings of the world to be overturned or set aside in the way that paradigms are in the sciences; secular theories of morality, for instance, took their place alongside theories of religious morality, rather than displacing them entirely. For an example closer to the subject at hand, those who wished to use schools as sites to promote and enforce apartheid ideology did not have to demonstrate that more market-based understandings of the importance of schooling were *invalid* in order to successfully argue for their own purposes.

Second, the adoption or non-adoption of beliefs, values, and techniques within a governmental branch is determined in part by forces external to the ideas themselves. Kuhn's scientific paradigms are evaluated by communities committed to certain precepts about how to do science, including their commitment to a belief that science ought not bend to the will of politics. One may argue that many decades worth of history, philosophy, and sociology of science has rendered that belief more than a bit naïve, but it remains a lodestar of scientific practice. Education policy, on the other hand, is

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transparently affected by politics, as it probably should be. Insofar as those involved in policy creation concede that there is no objective *truth* of education, they must also concede that its formation is beholden to subjective judgments, here generally framed by discussions of what is beneficial—to society, to the collective of students as future individual adults, to the economy, the list goes on. The important point here is that outside of the sciences, the political nature of paradigms is in many ways more transparent. This also means that paradigm formation, contestation, and shifts are affected by power dynamics external to the paradigms themselves, unlike how Kuhn understands the similar process occurring in the sciences.

These differences point to limitations on a fully-fledged ‘paradigm,’ in the realm of basic education in South Africa. To begin with, it cannot be assumed that there is a single paradigm in operation regarding any particular field of education or the field as a whole (e.g., one way of understanding effective technical education, or one way of understanding how to sequence government interventions in the education sphere, given clear time and monetary constraints). Additionally, contestation within the realm does not occur solely at the realm of paradigm—discussions of the desirability of a more socialist society certainly impact upon the education system, but rarely if ever take place exclusively in the realm of education. My point here is not that sites of contestation like those discussed above could never eventually be established as paradigmatic, but rather that many critical sites of contestation lack the traction or support to be categorized as such, and so those battles do not wholly follow the logic of what occurs when a paradigm is soundly in place, nor the logic of how a paradigm shifts. With those caveats in place, however, Kuhn’s idea becomes quite useful. It speaks to important principles regarding

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community, content, and communication that inform the operation of government representatives or agents in the realm of basic education.

Community, as explained above, is a way in which Kuhn characterizes those labouring under the same paradigm—with the same set of questions and working goals, as well as the same starting set of values, beliefs, and techniques. Several such important communities are at play in the situations detailed throughout the rest of this thesis. The national Department of Basic Education (DBE) and its provincial wings form a community as a combined entity, in that for the purposes of providing the service of basic education, both operate as together as a unified entity in which both levels are needed. The DBE sets goals, targets, and regulations, while provincial governments deploy resources on behalf of the national level at the ground level and take care of much of the managerial and day-to-day work of schooling. Each of these entities could also be seen to be a community unto themselves—the DBE as one community, the Western Cape Education Department as a community, etc. The national Members of Parliament that serve on the Basic Education Portfolio Committee also appear to function as a community in the above description, sometimes independently, and sometimes in conjunction with the DBE. Other communities and subcommunities likely exist, such as the collective of the provincial departments, or specific divisions within the departments that focus on particular tasks and goals (like testing, curriculum, etc.). While those other communities and subcommunities likely have paradigms worth exploring, this work is most concerned with the communities that are understood as the public face of government on the issue of education. Given that methodological reasoning as well as the constraints of my fieldwork, the focus of the analysis from here will be on the

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combined DBE and provinces, the national DBE, the WCED, and the Portfolio Committee, as well as their most prominent civil society challenger, Equal Education.

Content is the heading I have created to capture what Kuhn calls beliefs and values, as well as the collection of established ‘facts’ that the communities consider to be relevant to their practice. He also mentions ‘techniques’ as a consideration in understanding paradigms, that is to say, the actual practices of the field and the ways in which they conduct their work. At the risk of drawing overly messy lines between these clearly interrelated categories of community, content, and communication where clean lines could exist, I believe technique straddles any divide that may exist between content and communication. How ought content and communication be understood? I would argue that these two categories speak most clearly to the interesting aspects of paradigm function and knowledge practice throughout the thesis. At the nexus of content and communication, we find the motivating questions behind the creation of policy, the methods through which those questions are answered, and the ‘answers’ themselves, manifested in government’s policy recommendations, strategic plans, regulations, and actions. I wish to draw particular attention to methods and facts here; these two elements, broadly construed, determine how questions are asked and to what ends, which in turn determine the ‘answers’ outlined above.

Finally, in the category of communication I refer to attempts to convey content to others. This includes internal communication within the communities, as well as outward communication, with emphasis on the communications made to and with citizens. As mentioned above, the distinction between content and communication is somewhat blurry, with the framing of the content of discussions as one of the more important of

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many aspects that could fall on either side of the divide. Other communicative elements include language (meant here literally—Xhosa, English, etc.) rhetoric (actual word choice), medium (format of communication—e.g., text vs. oral, policy documents vs. posters). These decisions, as will later be shown, significantly affect what audience is drawn, what it understands, and more.

The communities I named above are the collective units of analysis for examining particular notions of content or exercises of communication. Those notions of content or exercises of communication constitute what I will hereafter generally refer to as ‘knowledge practices,’ or ‘practices of knowledge.’ The above is not meant to be a comprehensive description of the three categories, nor are the categories themselves intended to be mutually exclusive. Rather, it is intended to serve as a guide to my arguments regarding the functioning and effects of governmental knowledge practices.

The main concern of this work is with *how* these governmental knowledge practices affect substantive citizenship, or what could be described as practices or performances of citizenship. Looking solely at the knowledge practices cannot illuminate this, as the state and its representatives are not the lone actors involved in these effects. Examining citizens independent of the state’s representatives (should we even grant the possibility of such an existence) also appears faulty—there are far too many contravening factors in their behaviour to trace citizen actions or knowledge practices, as well as their limitations, back to government knowledge practices. Instead, I aim to establish the connection between the two by focusing on instances of direct or active—that is to say, person-to-person—interactions between citizens and the state’s representatives. I will also introduce supporting evidence gathered from indirect or passive interactions between

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state and subject—where citizens interact not with the state’s human representatives, but rather its inanimate proxies—documents, websites, laws, and more, all of which can of course be traced back to human representatives.

EDUCATION POLICY AS TECHNOCRATIC PRACTICE: THE EVOLUTION OF KNOWLEDGE PRACTICES SINCE THE START OF APARTHEID

The Eiselen Commission in 1951 marked the first instance of a national knowledge community related to black education in South Africa in government itself (Chisholm 2002, Kros 2002). While the history of inequality and abuses under BE has certainly tainted the reputation of the 1951 Eiselen Report and of Dr. Eiselen overall, accounts from the time indicated that while Eiselen was in some ways sympathetic to arguments in favour of apartheid, he found many of the National Party’s views on race despicable (Kros 2002). While the system the report was used to justify was deeply unequal, the only major analyses dedicated to examining the report and the context in which it was produced conclude that Eiselen and his colleagues found a genuine lack in school provision and were motivated to act on grounds of efficiency and progress, and some sympathy for blacks, rather than on the explicitly racist ideology promulgated by Verwoerd and other right-wing elements of the National Party (Fleisch 2002, Kros 2002). The members of the commission approached the question in the manner Foucault’s arguments suggest they would: armed with statistics, ideas of the ‘nature’ of blacks, and a mandate to channel the elements involved (at a basic level in this case, state resources and black youths) in what they thought to be a socially beneficial manner—in this instance, making them into a gainfully employed, law-abiding class of African labourers (Fleisch 2002). Brahm Fleisch (2002) argues that that the Eiselen Commission marks the

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first point where black education was removed from the control of ‘amateurs’ (missionaries and an emerging black elite) and placed in the hands of ‘experts’ (the bureaucrats on the Commission). Consistent with both intellectual policy trends at the time and the way that the apartheid state viewed itself, the Eiselen Report relied heavily on a modernisation narrative. As Fleisch (2002, 42) describes,

The commissioners believed that scientific ‘facts’ and technical expertise would provide the ‘solutions’ to the complex ‘problems’ of developing an education policy for ‘the Bantu.’ They subscribed to the view that the scientific method and social engineering applied correctly would usher in a stable social order. Values such as equality, individual rights, and democratic participation were ultimately subordinated to rational planning and bureaucratic efficiency.

These knowledge practice of modernisation, technocracy, and bureaucratic supremacy have carried through to the present day, ebbing and flowing in dominance over the course of time. The members involved in the community changed—sometimes industry was present, sometimes it was not—as did the paradigm, in one sense of the word. Kuhn offers paradigm as both a set of values and beliefs and a set of techniques and tools, without ever explicitly clarifying his meaning. In this case, the beliefs and values changed, but the tools and techniques (which themselves indicate a certain set of beliefs) have remained mostly constant since the Eiselen report.

The same knowledge practices demonstrated in the Eiselen Report’s modernisation narrative (cultural anthropology, rational planning and management efficiency) were also used by the far-right to achieve its racist ends. Until the 1970s, industry leaders paid little attention to Bantu Education. They were not involved in the production of the Eiselen Report that founded the system, nor did they get involved after its establishment (Fleisch 2002, Unterhalter 1991). But, in the 1970s, new actors entered

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the knowledge community. In the early 1970s, industry leaders came to believe the education system could assist it in producing the semi-skilled and skilled workers they needed, and began to successfully argue for their interests. This shifted much of the discussion away from questions of how to best propagate the apartheid ideology to questions of workforce and human capital, producing major reforms from 1973 onward. The Soweto Uprising revealed the far-right's education policy as a Pyrrhic victory when its chief achievement in this era, the enforcement of the AMD, became the focal point of protests that threatened to bring down the entire system of Bantu Education (Hyslop 1999). Industry and academic 'experts' quickly reasserted control in the BED, transforming it into the Department of Education and Training and ensuring that the only 'scientific' arguments were aimed at meeting workforce demands (Davies 1984, Unterhalter 1991, Chisholm 2002). As Unterhalter (1991, 64) describes, education policy after Soweto was increasingly influenced by 'a grouping of financiers, senior military figures and high-level civil servants, who came to be referred to as the technocrats. Their approach was presented as a technical rather than an ideological "solution" to some of the problems apartheid confronted...' (Unterhalter 1991, 64). This group was sometimes divided on intended ends, but almost always united on their supposedly factual and scientific methodology. Their 'solution,' most clearly manifested in the Education and Training Bill of 1979, included provisions for parent and community participation in education, school health programs, and more, but it still contained many elements consistent with the racist apartheid ideology, most obviously the continuation of racially divided schooling. As a result, most black and progressive groups rejected the majority of the new bill, and continued their battle for the schools (Davies 1984).

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The 1980s continued the technocratic policy approach described by Unterhalter, as seen in the arguments for vocational training advanced by the De Lange Report in 1981 as well as the National Party's response to De Lange in the form of their government White Paper on the Provision of Education in the Republic of South Africa (Kraak 2002). Outside of government, however, the struggle movements were arguing for an entirely different approach to education: 'People's Education for People's Power' (Alexander 1990). The diverse nature of what People's Education (PE) meant to different groups and individuals make it difficult to establish a single definition of the phrase or concept. Instead, as Shireen Motala and Salim Vally (2002, 174) write, People's education could be understood as

...a notional term providing impetus to a political strategy or an important contribution to educational praxis in its own right. It was defined variously as an educational movement, a vehicle for political mobilization, an alternative philosophy of education, or as a combination of all three. For the majority of South Africans, People's Education promised liberation from the effects of an unequal and disabling education system, and was seen as providing the basis for a future education system in a democratic South Africa.

The fact that People's Education was many things to many people was an asset in its acceptance across ideological divisions in the anti-apartheid community, but was unfortunately a hindrance in its ability to establish real policy traction during and after the transition (Chisholm 2002, Fiske and Ladd 2005, Motala and Vally 2002). Its supporters were unable to develop their influences of Paulo Freire and Marxist ideology into a full pedagogical theory, school curriculum, or alternate schooling system, all of which were goals voiced by parts of the movement (Alexander 1990, Nekhwevha 2002, Motala and Vally 2002). While some alternative schools were set up, and attempts were made at developing schooling materials and a curriculum in accordance with principles set forth

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by the National Education Crisis Committee, the main stewards of People's Education, the alternative schools never became widespread and the curriculum and materials were never properly developed. People's Education played a critical role in getting students to set aside chants of 'liberation before education' and go back to schools during the era of 'ungovernability,' but it did not succeed in producing an explicit policy agenda, partially because its supporters were united in opposing apartheid but divided on most other subjects, and partially because heavy apartheid repression (including banning the NECC) prevented many efforts from getting off the ground (Motala and Vally 2002, Levin 1991).

This is not to say that People's Education was never picked up by some of the chief negotiators of the transition. Many of the goals of PE did make it into the policy documents released by COSATU and the ANC regarding education. In their review of COSATU and ANC documents, Motala and Vally (2002, 185) highlight the contribution of People's Education to the ANC's negotiation stance, citing 'redress, equity, and participation' as key PE goals taken up by the ANC. Still, the lack of practical, fully-developed policies targeting those goals made it difficult for the negotiators to gain traction at the table. PE was moderated and diluted by its own representatives, eventually falling by the wayside in the ANC in favour of ideas about macro and systemic change. Most importantly, 'the discourse and content of education policy shifted substantially from the radical demands of People's Education, which focused on social engagement and democratising power relations, to a discourse emphasising performance, outcomes, cost effectiveness, and economic competitiveness' (Motala and Vally 2002, 185). Apartheid's old representatives, prepared from their decades of governing (however unequally) rather than theorising, and already steeped in technocratic modernisation

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discourse from their internal debates on the same, emerged as the decisive victors on education policy at the negotiation table (Chisholm 2002, Fiske and Ladd 2005, Motala and Vally 2002). That trajectory has barely budged since the transition (Chisholm 2002, Fiske and Ladd 2005). While ideas of equity and democracy are certainly present in departmental policy, its goals, outcomes, and overall strategy remain focused on the ‘performance, outcomes, cost effectiveness, and economic competitiveness’ cited by Motala and Vally above.

In summary, a consistent trend can be highlighted across the knowledge practices of government education policymakers from the start of apartheid through today. The discussion has always been in ‘scientific,’ technocratic terms. Even at the height of apartheid, bureaucrats placed emphasis on using information that they most closely understood to be scientific fact—at the time, physical and cultural anthropology, psychology, and management science. However, this trajectory also demonstrates that agreement on ‘technique’ does not necessarily indicate agreement on the intended ends of that technique. While the understanding of what constituted scientific practice changed over time, as did the members of the community, and what their goals were, reliance on ‘scientific’ information and practice has been a constant since the start of apartheid. My claim is not that these disciplines were/are scientific, or that they were actually value neutral, as appeals to ‘science’ and ‘fact’ imply. To the contrary, these appeals to science are, in many instances, obvious attempts to justify values premised on particular notions of race, society, and the economy. Rather, my point is that these ‘scientific’ knowledge practices served as an authoritative gatekeeper to any and all challengers. The movement

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best positioned to disrupt the domination of technocratic ideals came to an abrupt halt when its own negotiators adopted those same technocratic ideals.

CURRENT PRACTICES OF KNOWLEDGE AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The underlying ideals of the knowledge practices in the education system have changed dramatically to emphasize non-racialism, non-sexism, and equity, and the structure of the schooling system changed significantly. The series of departments charged with managing education across the Republic of South Africa and the Bantustans have been combined into a single Department of Basic Education at the national level, which sets policies and oversees the provincial education departments. The changes to education policy and management went beyond bureaucratic reorganization; advocates for People's Education saw a major structural change in the creation and empowerment of participatory boards in education. Prior to the transition, these structures either did not exist or were severely hamstrung by the limited powers they were ascribed as well as widespread perception that they were attempts to co-opt non-whites. Community and parent engagement with schools has been a Department of Basic Education objective since the end of apartheid and the transition to a system intended to provide high quality educations to all learners. The law that set up the present education system, the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA), provided for the creation of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) to create a venue for parent and community participation. The law further specifies that parents should hold the majority of SGB seats, emphasising the importance of their involvement. Community members, teachers, and principals hold the remaining SGB seats.

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SGBs are empowered far beyond similar structures found in the US or the UK. SGBs have the ability to implement school fees, and have the discretion to spend collected fees on the creation of extra teaching and staff posts as well as educational materials. SGBs also control school enrolment. Questions of fees, teaching, and enrolment are central to schools' functioning and ability to fulfil their missions. SGBs are integral to school governance and their decisions can have major impacts on learners. It is thus encouraging that the SASA requires the Department of Basic Education and the provincial departments to provide training to SGB members so that they can be effective in their roles, lest the structural reform outpace the capabilities of those who choose to participate. Unfortunately, the departments do not appear to be meeting needs on this front. In a study of SGBs, Nolene van Wyk (2004) found that only 27% of educators (including those who serve on SGBs as well as those who do not) believe their SGBs to be 'very effective' at discharging their duties, because many SGBs lacked interest in their jobs and had low levels of literacy and training. She also found that, contrary to the participatory aims of SGBs, principals tended to dominate SGBs. My interview with Duncan Hindle, the most recent former Director General of Education indicated that in their current state, SGBs neither improve the quality of school governance nor advance more democratic school governance.

A brief review of the literature on SGBs also shows parent training and education is lacking.⁹ Comprehensive department training for SGBs is rare, and where it exists, it is insufficient or tends to distort information. Boards in low-income areas tend to be particularly ineffectual, but parents from historically disadvantaged communities with

⁹ See Adams and Waghid 2005, Heystek 2004, Mncube 2009, Mtiyhane 2006,

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children in former Model C schools¹⁰ also see themselves as insufficiently equipped to participate and often select themselves out of the process. I interviewed Former Director General of Education Duncan Hindle (Interview: Oct 2011), and when I asked him to comment on participatory structures in the education system, he noted that SGBs had been put in place ‘in the bloom of democracy,’ which gave them ‘extraordinary powers.’ He continued,

In retrospect, I can say two things: where they have worked, they have worked exceptionally well, but in the vast majority of cases, they have not been a success. They are too powerful at both the former Model C schools, which have nearly turned themselves into private schools, and they fail in disadvantaged schools as well.

Letting schools choose their own language policies and their enrolment levels has been particularly detrimental. Hindle (Interview: Oct 2011) reflected,

In some parents’ minds, the government has abdicated power it could have and should have taken. Language policy is now decided by the SGBs, but parents don’t have the access to research, which shows that home language schooling for six years is the way to go. We’re asking people to take decisions on very complex educational issues that they aren’t prepared to decide on.

In short, the participatory structures in the education system appear to have over-empowered the already powerful, and cut the disadvantaged adrift: the reverse of what they were intended to do.

Challenges to citizen participation in education also exist at the policymaking levels above schools. The technocratic knowledge practices highlighted above are still very much in place in the Department of Basic Education, as can be seen in the *Delivery Agreement for Outcome 1: Improved quality of basic education*. This document is the

¹⁰ ‘Model C’ was the bureaucratic classification for well-resourced, white public schools under apartheid. Former Model C schools are still South Africa’s top performing public schools today.

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highest-level representation of the DBE's strategy until 2014, and was created as a part of President Jacob Zuma's public commitment to 12 major policy goals during his presidency. The *Delivery Agreement* is the result of a mandate for all government departments in charge of an outcome to produce a document outlining their plan to reach their outcome. The very first paragraph of the introduction sets the tone for the rest of the *Delivery Agreement*:

Government has agreed on 12 outcomes as a key focus of work between now and 2014. Each outcome has a limited number of measurable outputs with targets. Each output is linked to a set of activities that will help achieve the targets and contribute to the outcome. Each of the 12 outcomes has a *Delivery Agreement* which in most cases involves all spheres of government and a range of partners outside government. Combined, these agreements reflect government's delivery and implementation plans for its foremost priorities. (South Africa 2010b, 3)

The document continues, in paragraph three:

The *Delivery Agreement* provides detail to the outputs, targets, indicators, and key activities to achieve outcome 1, identifies required inputs and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the various delivery partners. It spells out who will do what, by when, and with what resources. The outcomes apply to the whole of government and are long term. While the *Delivery Agreement* may contain longer-term outputs and targets, it also includes outputs and associated targets that are realisable in the next 4 years. (South Africa 2010b, 3)

The style and emphasis on bureaucratic management, technocratic language, and the framing of the education system has not changed under the ANC government.¹¹ The *Agreement's* 'High Level Problem Statement' focuses on education as a poverty reduction tool, discusses the 'performance' of the system based on test results, and situates the improvement of the education system as critical to the economic development

¹¹ A more detailed discussion of the *Delivery Agreement* and the related documents can be found in Chapter 3.

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of the country—phrases and framing that would not be out of place in the De Lange Report of 1981, or, for that matter, the Eiselen Report of 1951.

Looking at policy reports and strategic documents as indicative of not just internal but also external knowledge practices runs the risk of confusing or conflating different spheres and audiences. The argument could be made that the *Delivery Agreement* and its associated documents were aimed at an exclusively policy-literate audience, and that interpreting them as a mode of communication for the general public is unfair to the DBE. However, Angie Motshekga, the Minister of Basic Education, makes the case in her own media statement on the occasion of signing the *Delivery Agreement* that this should be read as a document of public commitment and accountability. She calls the signing itself a ‘landmark in improving the schooling system of this country,’ and remarks that it ‘binds’ her department and the provincial MECs ‘to deliver an improved quality of basic education.’ She explicitly highlights the signing in the context of public concern about education, seen in the outpouring of commentary on the DBE’s related *Action Plan to 2014*, saying that she is ‘very impressed by the volume of responses received and the level of interest our people have shown in the need to improve the quality of basic education in South Africa’ (Motshekga 2010). This document, in all of its bureaucratic and technocratic density, is the South African Department of Basic Education’s public commitment to excellence, proudly linked to and downloadable from the top of the home page of the Department website (Department of Basic Education, 2012). As the rest of this thesis will show, this is not an anomalous tone-deaf episode on the part of the DBE; it is a consistent theme of their interactions with the public, which in turn limits the public’s capacity to engage with them. Despite the fact that the

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Department acknowledges in its own ‘Problem Statement’ that it is not providing the skills students need to live a life of ‘meaningful citizenship,’ its own interactions with citizens do not attempt to find common ground on knowledge and authority; instead, its representatives reference their own knowledge in authoritative dismissals of those whose participation they deem unworthy.

The Department of Basic Education has not made it easy for citizens to get involved either at the school level or the policy level in a meaningful way. The institutions at the school level are inadequate at best and destructive at worst, sometimes undermining schools instead of assisting them, and the Department’s own attempts at making itself publicly accountable are abstruse and hard to follow even for those with technocratic or policymaking backgrounds. None of this is to say that the Department is operating with anything but the best of intentions—the existence of SGBs, aspirations of training programs, and the express desire to be publicly accountable all seem to point toward the members of the Department generally acting in good faith. However, good faith does not guarantee good results. As James Ferguson (1994) showed in his study of a development project in Lesotho, intention does not translate directly into production, and so disparate elements can coalesce into unpredicted events and effects. Ferguson (1994, 17) notes that the ‘multi-layered, polyvalent, and often contradictory’ nature of institutions and the agents within them produces what he terms ‘instrument effects,’ or unintended effects of power. In the Department of Basic Education’s case, it has produced limits on public engagement.

Chapter 2 ‘Every Generation Has its Struggle’: The Work of Equal Education

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER, AND SPEAKING TRUTH IN THE MANNER OF POWER

The dispersed origins of the limitations on participation in South African education make it difficult to ascertain where to begin an attempt to reclaim space for meaningful participation. It is not clear that pulling on any single thread, or adding pressure at any particular point would be sufficient action to unravel the web of influences limiting engagement. But, one potential starting point offered by academic work focusing on expert knowledge would be to persuade the Department to expand its understanding of expertise to include knowledge widely held by members of the public. The most obvious form of knowledge that the public has is experiential knowledge, in the mould of James Scott’s (1998) ideas on *metis* or ‘local’ knowledge.

Though Scott’s book focuses mostly on what he terms ‘high modernist’ notions of social planning, he writes that his extreme examples are demonstrative of the broader principle that social planning relies upon informal, local, practical knowledge in order to be at it is most functional. The danger of technocratic rational planning is not in its technocracy, exactly, but rather in it attempts to construe it as universal and inevitable, eliminating the inclusion of other, potentially more useful forms of knowledge.

To resist this universalist mode of thinking present in the technocratic approaches taken by government, local knowledge could be recognised as a legitimate alternative of supplement to bureaucratic knowledge. Through their daily attendance, students know far more about their individual schools than the DBE or the WCED is capable of knowing, given their limited resources. Students and parents can speak to the particular

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challenges faced by their schools and how those challenges affect them as individuals, from the absence of chemistry textbooks to specific skills deficits of given teachers. Citizens could act as local informants to add specificity and shades of lived experience to the statistics and aggregate information possessed by the governmental education bureaucracy. No doubt, the statistics are useful to a point, and so are studies attempting to assess the impact of particular investments on improving education outcomes; but so too is an awareness of how students and families actually experience, feel, and understand the deficits and assets of the education system. Such a system would actually adhere to the principles of participation expressed by government, rather than merely gesture to them. While this is a sketch of an idealised system—in which the bureaucrats and the citizens all have the knowledge that they would be expected to have, and in which the interactions run smoothly—it offers an alternative to the system currently in place. This is the predictable starting point for gaining traction in a system like the one described in the first chapter, but this is not the starting point taken by the largest popular movement working on education in South Africa.

Instead, the movement has accepted the terms given by the Department of Basic Education, implicitly and explicitly. Fully aware that the rules of the game as specified by the DBE advantage the authority of government at the expense of its citizens, Equal Education has nonetheless made it its mission to beat the Department on its own ground. This is an intentional strategy on the part of the organisation; in interviews, their senior strategists indicated that they believed government would never listen to a group of schoolchildren just voicing their own stories of the system that the bureaucrats govern. As their lead organiser, Doron Isaacs (Interview: Sept 2011) explained,

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When ‘kids’ speak about their personal experiences, there is a tendency to just pat them on the head. When arguments are produced that include data of a more academic nature, it’s not that the data simply speaks for itself. There’s implicit importance in the voice that speaks it, an implicit power in young people saying it themselves, even if others already said it. Early in our libraries campaign, we had a professor of library science writing op-eds, and it never went anywhere. But the image and the spectacle of young people mastering certain issues and backing up moral claims with expertise has a certain impact.

Rather than persuading the Department to change its knowledge practices, Equal Education is training its members to be capable of thinking and speaking in terms the department understands, a strategy this chapter is dedicated to outlining.

In speaking truth to power, Equal Education is speaking truth in the manner of power. I went to Khayelitsha expecting this movement, in the manner of movements before them in South African education, or movements in South Africa more broadly, to behave like proper Scottian subjects, pressing the DBE to accept the importance of experiential knowledge. What I found instead was a movement redefining the practice of citizenship itself. This claim requires context beyond a discussion of the activist strategies exercised by Equal Education. To that end, the next section will first give a definition of what I mean by citizenship followed by an overview of Equal Education’s work, structure, and strategy. The remainder of the chapter will cover the activist movements that prefigured Equal Education as well as its contemporaries.

CITIZENSHIP, THICK AND THIN

Researchers across academic disciplines have closely followed South Africa’s process of shifting from apartheid’s exclusive notions of citizenship to new egalitarian foundations. Some work has looked at legal conceptions of citizenship, as defined and refined by the Constitution, legislation and court decisions (Budlender 2005, Wesson

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2011). More common, however, is an angle that looks to the practice of citizenship, particularly in the context of activism and social movements.¹² The literature in the former category focuses on how the government has interpreted its obligation to its subjects; that is to say, what does the South African government owe the people within its borders? The literature in the latter category examines the ways in which the state interacts with its subjects, and the demands made on government. These two approaches can be seen as two sides of the same coin, and indeed engage each other with relative frequency (in particular, Colvin and Robins 2009 and Robins 2004 on activism and rights to health). Alongside this dialogue on citizenship in South Africa runs an independent literature on institutionalized notions of citizenship, focused heavily on how it is taught to youth through schools and curricula (Enslin 2003, Johnson, 2007, Waghid 2004).

This thesis is concerned with a particular aspect of citizenship: citizenship as practiced by government's subjects. Drawing on the anthropologist James Holston's (1998) work in Brazil, I understand citizenship to be the relationship between the state and its subjects, elucidated by both legal code and general conduct. Citizenship has both formal (legal) elements and informal (substantive) elements. While the legal elements, or a 'thin' understanding of citizenship are often straightforward in their writing, they may be less straightforward in their performance, requiring an examination of the substantive elements of citizenship, which include the ways in which the relationship between state and citizen operates in practice. One of the vanguards for changing the reality of substantive citizenship is 'activist' or 'insurgent' citizenship, best understood briefly as citizenship through engagement with government.

¹² See Beinart 2010, Colvin and Robins 2009, Mirafab 2005, Robins 2004, 2006.

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‘Activist’ understandings of citizenship examine the relationship between those who work to change the government/government policy and the government itself. It is worth noting here that “working to change the government” need not be direct protest. Acting in a manner that in some way subverts government directives, laws, or expectations of behavior is also understood to comprise ‘activist citizenship’ (Biehl, 2004). A variant on this is Holston’s (2008) work on ‘insurgent’ citizenship, which generally fits within the same framework. In the case of Holston’s ethnography, his Brazilian informants created an ‘insurgent’ citizenship through forcing the government to recognize informal settlements as legal residences. Formal understandings of legality were subverted by mass yet independent action to construct housing on the peripheries of the city.

Much of the other groundbreaking work on ‘activist’ citizenship in anthropology has been done in public health. Influential works include Adriana Petryna’s (2002) work on Chernobyl and Ukrainian state/citizen relationships, and Joao Biehl (2004) and Steven Robins’ (2004) work on HIV/AIDS in Brazil and South Africa respectively. Unlike in Holston’s work on housing and property in Brazil, the public health authors have an explicit focus on how information is used within these campaigns. Robins’ article makes the argument that a major South African HIV/AIDS organisation, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) ‘democratized’ HIV/AIDS science—took a medical understanding of how the disease worked, and rendered it in ‘lay’ terms it for people of varying levels of education while leaving the scientific principles intact. According to Robins, the success of South African AIDS NGOs depended in large part on creating demand for proper medical treatment in the face of President Mbeki’s AIDS denialism. Education on the

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disease produced demands for biomedical treatment. TAC's strategy of "grassroots mobilization and treatment literacy campaigns," allowed TAC "to articulate new forms of health/biological citizenship and political subjectivities" (Robins 2004, 667). The discussion of 'expert' knowledge in this literature is of particular relevance to Equal Education's work, as they also have a programmatic focus on training activists on technocratic issues: in this case, the Department of Education's structures and policies as well as academic research on education.

'EVERY GENERATION HAS ITS STRUGGLE': THE WORK OF EQUAL EDUCATION

Equal Education is 'a movement of learners, parents, teachers and community members working for quality and equality in South African education, through analysis and activism' (Equal Education 2012). In its 'What is EE?' explanation on its website, it cites 'unequal educational opportunities' as 'amongst the greatest obstacles to equality, dignity, and freedom in today's South Africa,' rhetoric echoed by its leaders and members in conversation and meetings. In the organisation's philosophy, education is an end in itself as well as something that 'helps one to understand and demand the full realisation of the rights enshrined in the Constitution' (Equal Education 2012). Literature distributed to members and curious outsiders speaks of education as critical to participation as a fully engaged citizen in South Africa's democracy. Headquartered in Khayelitsha, an almost entirely black, Xhosa-speaking township outside of Cape Town, the group has campaigned for better schools at the local, provincial, and national level since 2008. Over the past four years, the group has developed a national following, with over 1000 dedicated members who attend youth or parent meetings on a regular basis, and supporters in most provinces across the country.

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Its activism, according to one of its informational videos, is premised on two fundamental elements: ‘a serious understanding of policy’ and a ‘broad political education’ delivered weekly at ‘fun but intensive meetings’ (Equal Education 2010). From the start, EE has placed priority not just on having staff members capable of doing policy research and analysis, but also teaching that research and analysis to its student members, so that they too can advocate to government with the sorts of facts and statistics often cited by government itself. Sometimes this requires teaching concepts to students that should have been taught in schools—statistics and fractions pose particular problems given the state of math literacy in the schools EE operates in—but youth group facilitators work with students to ensure comprehension of concepts, not just soundbites or pieces of data.

Equal Education launched with what it called the ‘Broken Windows’ campaign, in which it equipped a number of students at a school Khayelitsha with disposable cameras, and had them take pictures of their schools, highlighting the broken windows in the classrooms, cafeterias, and meeting places of their school. It quickly followed that up with the ‘Campaign for School Libraries,’ making the case that a school without a library is not much of a school at all; over 90% of the public schools in the country lacked fully functional libraries. This campaign was a success at raising awareness not just domestically but globally as well. EE’s March for School Libraries in 2011 turned out 20,000 students to march on Parliament and demand functioning libraries in their schools, and was front-page news in the New York Times (Dugger 2009).

That campaign spawned The Bookery, an organisation within Equal Education that solicits books from publishers, the public, and corporate donors, and then works with

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schools to help them build libraries. To date, the Bookery has put in place 17 school libraries, all of which appear to have extremely high levels of use in the schools in which they have been placed, and in which the schools take obvious pride. The Campaign for School Libraries was eventually folded into a broader campaign for Minimum Norms and Standards for Basic Infrastructure, an effort to convince the DBE to repair the most ramshackle of the country's schools and sign the standards the Department has already developed for school infrastructure into law, making them legally enforceable.

In addition to the two central campaigns on libraries and infrastructure at the moment, Equal Education picks up issues at specific schools on an as-needed basis. For example, in the course of my field work, a concerning trend of corporal punishment at one school turned into a potential legal action against the school as well as an organisation-wide discussion of the laws on corporal punishment and avenues of legal recourse for students who were being abused by teachers or principals. Equal Education sustains its campaigns through ongoing weekly youth group meetings throughout Khayelitsha and nearby Mitchell's Plain and Kraaifontein, sleep-away youth camps that every Equaliser has the opportunity to attend at least once a year, parent and community meetings, and ongoing mass actions—marches, pickets, and the like. Many of the mass actions are student-devised and driven. One such action, a 100-student sleep-out outside of Parliament in Winter 2011 was highly effective at creating visibility on the issue of school infrastructure, with students arguing that they had as much shelter from the elements in their open-air sleeping bags as did their fellow students in Eastern Cape, some of whom are forced to attend school under a tree for lack of suitable classrooms.

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EE's central office is divided into several different departments, but cross-department collaboration is frequent. The Policy, Communications, and Research department (PCR) has the highest overall education level—all but one of its permanent staff members have university degrees, and as a department, it absorbs nearly all international volunteers (university students mostly from the US and UK) and university volunteers (undergraduate and Masters students from the nearby University of Cape Town), and its staff are most often found in front of computers or books. Youth and Community department staff, on the other hand, are more frequently in the middle of the action, so to speak, frequently chatting and bantering with students, and, by dint of their jobs, leading songs, dances, and chats, particularly during youth groups.

EE's main constituency is its students, the Equalisers, drawn mostly from the secondary schools of Khayelitsha and some other secondary schools around the Cape Town area. Measuring the size of the organisation is difficult; EE has a clear membership core, as well as an incredible ability to turn other students out for major events. The core of dedicated members hovers around 1000, but if one looks at levels of turnout, EE has 20,000 members. Regardless of how membership is measured, the population of Equalisers dwarfs the staff organizers (about 30, including volunteers), and dedicated parents and community members (between 10 and 50 attend meetings frequently). EE understands the Equalisers to be the soul of the movement and the political future of South Africa, and thus invests a significant amount of time training Equalisers at the youth group meetings and retreats. The Equalisers have a variety of reasons for joining EE—one student leader told me with a smile that he initially joined for the attractive girls at the meetings. He added that he stayed because of the politics

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and the mission, the main reasons cited by Equalisers as to why they participate. EE is a group that takes action on issues directly relevant to students' lives. Students I spoke with said it was rare that people took their political opinions seriously, and even rarer for them to invest resources in making them better advocates for themselves and their peers. EE's draw, according to the student consensus, was that it cared about students' opinions, and wanted to help them express themselves now and in the future.

As an example of this commitment, EE has instituted the Community Leader program after finding that some of its most dedicated student leaders underperformed on their matric exams. This gap year program selects no more than 20 students to receive intensive tutoring for a year to improve their exam scores and thus increase their chances of acceptance to university. In exchange, the gap year students continue to lead within EE, coordinating actions and facilitating youth groups. Equalisers who have gone on to university at nearby University of Cape Town, University of Western Cape, or to technical schools often stay involved with the organisation, facilitating youth groups and lending a hand at camps.

The students are understood by both the students and staff to be the leaders of the Equalisers, and there are self-determined student leadership structures at each school as well as in the organisation as a whole. Empowering these dedicated student members and leaders is central to EE's mission, and when opportunities to address DBE or WCED officials or MPs arise, students are often at the front and centre of those discussions.

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HERITAGE AND LEGACY: EQUAL EDUCATION'S ACTIVIST PREDECESSORS AND CONTEMPORARIES

In my time with Equal Education's students and staff, I often heard them cite previous South African education activists and student activists as their personal heroes, especially the students involved in the Soweto Uprising of 1976. The aesthetic created by EE's talented graphic designer, Gill Benjamin, intentionally evokes images of the anti-apartheid struggle, frequently using the classic image of a raised fist but with a pencil or book in hand. 'Every generation has its struggle,' the bright yellow t-shirts read. The use of the word 'struggle' is not coincidental. EE youth group meetings start and end with adapted anti-apartheid songs and toyi-toying. The Equalisers have also created their own 'struggle songs' and dances for Equal Education—one particularly catchy tune runs through the vowels of the alphabet in order, and finishes with a chorus of 'Sign it Angie!' imploring the Minister of Basic Education to take action on the issue of infrastructure. EE promotes these connections to history, with youth group leaders speaking frequently of the bravery and importance of the students in the Soweto Uprising and other student activism as inspirations to their own work. Materials produced by EE to train student members, youth group leaders, and staff trade heavily on stories of anti-apartheid student activism and herald Equal Education as the continuation of that proud and productive tradition. It is clear that the Equalisers and staff feel some amount of kinship with the protesters who came before, and see their work as similar in some ways.

This sense of kinship is not unidirectional. Several prominent student activists under apartheid who went on to become labour leaders describe EE in terms that characterize it as in the tradition of their own student activism, and see hope for an activist youth revival in EE's work. Jay Naidoo, the first General Secretary of the union alliance COSATU, then Minister responsible for the Reconstruction and Development

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Programme under Nelson Mandela, came to Equal Education's offices in 2011 to deliver a speech about organizing at one of their staff seminars. The event was filmed by one of Naidoo's entourage, as he appears to be in the midst of making a movie regarding his current human rights work. While some of the speech was clearly useful advice, some of the speech illuminated the tensions of the intergenerational activist connections: parts of Naidoo's speech appeared to frame his own activist work as a mould-maker for student activism, leaving some staff members wondering if he was taking a bit of credit for their hard work.

Naidoo is not alone in seeing reflections of himself in EE's work, nor does he appear to be alone in his attempts to establish a kind of kinship or shared heritage with them. Zwelinzima Vavi, head of South Africa's union alliance, COSATU, kicked off EE's campaign to minimise student late-coming with an address to learners and teachers at Chris Hani High School in Khayelitsha. Vavi's support is made all the more interesting by the fact that COSATU includes the major teachers unions, and he has castigated them for their own poor behaviour regarding tardiness and attendance (SAPA 2012). In addressing EE, Angie Motshegka, the Minister of Basic Education, drew clear parallels between EE's work and the work of the ANC affiliated student activists who dedicated themselves to ending apartheid.

EE staff members appear conflicted on these renderings of history, regarding them as flattering and inspirational, strategically useful, and occasionally frustrating. Sussing out the strategic advantage created by such historiographic footwork is trickier than it may appear at first glance. There are obvious reasons why one might want to be understood as 'a chip off the old block'—and thus reference shared heritage, ideals,

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goals, or capture the golden aura cast by nostalgia's glow. Many of those connecting their pasts to EE's present are legends in their own right, with wisdom to share, and desirable affirmation to give—Naidoo's speech was a clear example of this. Still, this active management of the family tree does not come without drawbacks; rendering oneself as heir necessarily renders the other party as elder, or senior, bringing with it the potential for infantilisation and intergenerational conflict as well as the hoped-for sage advice. EE's intentionally youthful profile already lends itself to such manoeuvres by anyone over the age of thirty (the age of EE's two oldest leaders). EE's youth may be one of its key legitimisation issues, and is used not infrequently in order to dismiss legally and politically legitimate claims.

Yet, there are fewer commonalities between Equal Education and previous South African student movements than one might imagine, despite having structurally similar participants and a focus on improving the education system. The songs, the dancing, the call and return chant of '*Amandla! Awethu!*'¹³ feel familiar to activists of a prior era who have come and visited Equal Education. But the work itself is fundamentally different. Where previous activists focused first on practical, parochial concerns, and then on broad, obviously values-based political change, Equal Education's intervention often functions at the technocratic level. A brief review of previous secondary school student activists will illuminate the difference.

The first education protests on record took place at the missionary schools, in the first half of the 20th century. Acquiescing to community pressure to accept more students in the absence of increased resources sparked localised student uprisings against the

¹³ Translated, the Xhosa/Zulu chant is roughly 'Power! Is ours!' and was the rallying cry of the anti-apartheid movement. The second word is sometimes spelled 'ngawethu.'

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schools over conditions like food quantity and quality (Hyslop 1999). At one particularly intense uprising in 1946 at Lovedale, one of the flagship missionary schools, 157 students were arrested for stone-throwing and general revolt, sparking weeklong chaos at the school. This revolt supposedly took place over sugar rations, but as Hyslop (1999) points out, the sugar rations were generous, and were likely just a stand-in for questions of power and respect. Students at Lovedale and elsewhere believed the abominable food quality (such as mealies with weevils in them) was a sign of the missionaries' disrespect for them. In this era, the protests generally stayed contained at particular schools, and while African nationalist ideas likely fuelled the conflicts, on the surface protests targeted particular practical considerations.

The next notable set of protests were the ANC boycotts of Bantu Education in 1954, held because the new Act did not meet their demands for high-quality, universal, state-provided education. The boycott did not gain many supporters, particularly amongst students. While some parents became active in hope of improving conditions for their children, nearly all protests and resistance died down by the 1960s due to a combination of heavy repression involving imprisonment and banning by the apartheid government, and the government policies to 'reverse the flow' of urbanisation and send jobseekers back to the rural Bantustans that led nearly two-thirds of African townships to decline in size (Hyslop 1999, Lodge 1983, Unterhalter 1991).

By the mid-1970s, however, the townships were again becoming prime locations for resistance. Protests gained momentum from 1973 to 1976, spurred by the workers' strikes in Durban. Labour was reinvigorated as a political force. The Bantustan universities created to produce African bureaucrats were being subverted from within by

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the South African Students Organisation (SASO) and their promotion of black consciousness thinking, which encouraged university graduates to go out and spread the philosophy through teaching in township schools (Lodge 1983). Moreover, soaring secondary school enrolment—the number of secondary school pupils jumped from 67,000 in 1965 to 389,000 in 1976—both increased the number of students in a potentially activist milieu and amplified the strain on the already inadequate schooling system. As Hyslop (1999) writes, ‘Paradoxically, it was the youth’s common experience of a poor quality mass schooling system that created a common sense of identity and grievance.’ If the structural conditions produced by the Bantu Education system were not themselves the spark for the Soweto Uprising, they certainly created the powder keg that caught alight.

In this era from the start of Bantu Education through the end of the 1970s, students were either not very active at all (1960s) or directly targeting the apartheid system on questions of values.¹⁴ While some of the challenge levelled by students in the Soweto Uprising against the Afrikaans Medium Decree was about the pedagogical usefulness of Afrikaans, most of the protest was about broader values of equality and resistance against a system that treated blacks as second-class citizens and abused their humanity (Hyslop 1999). The political questions continued to gain in their importance to student activists from the end of the 1970s through the 1980s. If students did not leave the country to join Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the ANC, the apartheid

¹⁴ The students did make direct and specific demands for policy changes—most famously regarding language policy and student representation in schools (SRCs)—but I would argue that these specific policy demands are firstly, exceptions to the norm of values demands, and secondly, couched in broader values-based demands related to equality and democratic participation (O’Connell 1991).

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government's responses in the wake of Soweto only radicalised them in their domestic fight.

As anti-apartheid activist and education leader Neville Alexander's (1990) published speeches from the late 1980s indicated, many students in the 1980s focused on the bigger political struggle, letting education improvement drop into the background of their activist work. They adopted the mantra of 'Liberation before Education,' believing that the fall of apartheid was imminent and that time ought not be wasted focusing on particular pieces of the system when it needed to be destroyed in its entirety. It was this stance that alarmed the mostly older members of the struggle, unifying them to create 'People's Education for People's Power' as an alternative to the apartheid system. As discussed in Chapter 1, People's Education never became more than a motivating philosophy and sometimes pedagogical supplement to the apartheid schools, and much of that work was not done by secondary school students (Motala and Vally 2002). The 1980s thus did not do much to change the student activists' focus on large, fundamental values like full social equality and political rights. The horrific behaviour of the apartheid state prevented activists from attempting targeted policy change. Aside from the dubious moral content of working with a government that had no qualms hunting down struggle leaders in neighbouring countries as well as shooting down and beating its own citizens in its streets, the government was (unsurprisingly) not a good faith negotiator. Apartheid education bureaucrats agreed to meet with the National Education Crisis Committee to discuss particular policy reforms, and then within a year had banned the organisation and arrested its leaders (Motala and Vally 2002).

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Absent an abusive, oppressive state like the National Party government, activism is inevitably smaller in scale and more targeted in scope. No current institution or institutional failure is as unifyingly monstrous as apartheid. Legitimate criticism can be and is levelled at the national ANC government and the provincial governments, but is unlikely to reach the degree of popular protest as existed under apartheid, rightfully so. The post-apartheid popular movements have been issue-oriented and far more limited in their participation, with the most-widespread (TAC) reaching roughly 40,000 regular members at its height, out of a national population nearing 50 million. Thus, given the major change in political conditions, it may be more useful to view Equal Education in light of its activist contemporaries, rather than its predecessors. While the student activists of the struggle receive deserved admiration from the Equalisers and can serve as a model of what activism looks like, they do not make much sense as models for what Equal Education's activism aims to achieve, and thus how to go about realising its goals.

Two major post-apartheid activist groups may serve as closer counter-points to Equal Education's work: The Treatment Action Campaign and Abahlali baseMjondolo (Abahlali or AbM for short), an HIV/AIDS campaign and a shack-dwellers movement respectively that have sharply divergent approaches to advocacy. At the height of their work, both movements were frequently in the press as well as served as the subjects of a good deal of academic research.¹⁵ Both groups are also useful in situating Equal Education's work because EE has been entangled with both, in quite different ways.

¹⁵ Sources on the Treatment Action Campaign, include Colvin and Robins 2009, Friedman and Mottiar 2005, Mbali 2010, and Robins 2004, 2006. On Abahlali baseMjondolo, see Bryant 2008, Gibson 2008, Patel 2008, and Pithouse 2006.

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Abahlali started outside of Durban in 2005, and has since expanded to townships outside Pietermaritzburg and Cape Town, for a total of roughly 25,000 members (Zikode 2010). They work to improve the conditions of the poor and to democratise society from the ground up through rejecting party politics/elections and promoting direct democracy through community collectives and communes. The movement has frequently been in conflict with the police in the areas in which they operate, and their members and leaders have at points faced severe repression; a 2008 statement alleges not only police harassment but also torture of their members (Lynch and Nsibandé 2008). Their philosophical stances lead their tactics to be more confrontational than other South African movements (especially in the Western Cape branch), which has at times drawn criticism from other activists. In the fall of 2010, AbM Western Cape called for a month long general strike, including road blockades usually made of burning tyres, rubbish, and stones to make the main streets in Khayelitsha impassable (AbM Western Cape 2010). The Treatment Action Campaign and Equal Education both condemned the general strike, releasing a statement characterising it as ‘mindless violence’ that would be counter-productive to the cause and punishing of the poor and working class people who live in those neighbourhoods (Achmat 2010).

Zackie Achmat, the founder of TAC and author of the statement on AbM WC’s general strike emphasised that he and other TAC activists had been arrested over the years of their work, but they had never raised a hand or thrown a stone. Non-violent resistance is a cornerstone of TAC’s strategy, and has been since its start in Cape Town in 1998. This was likely an asset in garnering the global support that has helped fund their campaign and spread their ideas about how to approach the epidemic in countries

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throughout Africa and the rest of the developing world. TAC was the most outspoken and influential challenger to President Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialism, as well as one of the leaders of the global HIV/AIDS treatment access movement (Robins 2004, 2006).

While TAC is still going strong, it is generating nowhere near the publicity it did when it could present itself as a group of charismatic Davids fighting a set of bewildering and unyielding Goliaths, as it did under President Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialist reign. Since Jacob Zuma assumed the presidency, South Africa's public health policy has consistently followed the scientific consensus on how to approach the AIDS crisis. The spectre of denialism and deadly heterodox approaches to the disease TAC had been fighting at a national level receded into rural homes, township shacks, and *sangomas'* huts, where TAC has begun an uneasy transition from vaunted public advocate to private mindset changer and compliance enforcer.

Achmat, stepped down as TAC's leader when Mbeki's presidency was ending, arguing that TAC needed fresh leadership at the national level, and to continue building leadership at the provincial and local levels. This, he stated, could not happen so long as leadership at the top was static, and a blockade to the advancement of talented leaders. These reasons are no doubt true, but it also would have been surprising for an activist of his savvy to have not seen the writing on the wall for TAC's era of spectacle and dramatism—activist talents of Achmat's that have been undeniable since he set fire to his school as a young teenager in protest of the Afrikaans language policies. This is not to say that Achmat's work has been all flash, no substance. Far from it, he's deservedly lauded in the national press as a sharp mind and brilliant strategist.

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After stepping down as Chairperson of TAC, Achmat launched a series of new organisations. Achmat and other TAC staff had been working on the project that would become Equal Education for at least a year before the launch of EE's first campaign. TAC's leadership and members are hardly novices at generating publicity as well as practical change, and their savvy plus that of EE's own leaders ensured EE's launch did not go unnoticed. EE drew several leaders and board members from TAC's ranks, generated initial public and media interest in part through its TAC connections, and has operated in near-lockstep strategically with TAC and its sister organisations since its founding. Another affiliated organisation, the Social Justice Coalition (SJC), arose almost purely from unpredicted demand: the xenophobic attacks in 2008. SJC now works on a wide variety of basic needs in the townships, most notably on sanitation. Achmat's most recent effort, Ndifuna Ukwasi ('Dare to Know'), launched in 2011, with the mission of educating a cadre of new leaders focused on social justice in South Africa and abroad. The social justice law organisation Section 27 (formerly the AIDS Law Project), run by a close collaborator of Achmat's and former TAC treasurer Mark Heywood also belongs in this tight knit activist scene.

On the level of personnel, some staff members have rotated through more than one organisation, high-level leaders of each organisation serve on each other's boards, and members of each organisation frequently belong to the others as well. On the level of coordinated action, staff from each organisation hold informative events for the staff and members of the others regarding their own organisation's campaigns, announcements and press releases from any given organisation are distributed internally and externally by the rest, and it is a default assumption by all that the campaigns run by one organisation

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will be robustly supported by the rest. It should thus come as no surprise that the groups share tactics and strategies, as there is an expectation of endorsement amongst the groups. External allies do not receive the same treatment, nor do they share the same level of connection via staff career trajectories or shared memberships. At present, Equal Education's star seems to shine most brightly in this constellation; it holds the biggest mass actions, appears most frequently in the press, and captures the highest level of national government attention.

Despite what appears to be clear success in its mission so far, EE still seems in some ways uncertain of its purpose and future. The disagreements over the future of EE's Bookery illuminate one of the many ways in which EE sits somewhat uneasily at the intersection of multiple, distinct understandings of what it is and what it is meant to be. The EE staff interpret The Bookery in two divergent ways. The first camp understands The Bookery as a stunt with some substance behind it, a thumb in the eye of the Department of Basic Education. In this view, The Bookery was created to prove that providing books for libraries is not actually all that difficult. Many schools already have spaces for libraries, and just need the books. If a couple of EE staff members can put together that many libraries relying on donation alone, and whilst managing other work for EE as well, why has the DBE proved incapable of putting together libraries with the backing and resources of a large government department? On the other hand, the second group understands The Bookery as a form of service provision, intended to fill a gap in the government's provision of educational services guaranteed by the constitution. In this way, it can be seen as a strategy more in line with traditional education NGOs in South Africa, and not with traditional activism.

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It should be apparent that these two interpretations are not necessarily in tension—in its actual functioning, The Bookery certainly does both of the above. But when trying to clarify the strategic purpose of The Bookery, and thus in arguing for its continuation, expansion, or scaling down, EE staff invariably prioritize one or the other of these interpretations. At one point in my fieldwork, the staff lunch and meeting was held at The Bookery, located in downtown Cape Town just down the street from the national Parliament. EE’s full-time and part-time staff often get brought on board to focus on a particular project, and orientation to the organisation as a whole can be haphazard—this meeting was intended to ensure everyone at EE knew The Bookery’s origins, mission, function, and progress to date. The staff members in charge of The Bookery, Cosmas and Themba, gave introductory speeches over lunch consumed at the tables ordinarily used to catalogue books, and then fielded questions from the rest of the staff. The question and answer session quickly became a full scale discussion amongst EE leadership about the Bookery in front of the rest of the staff, as questions intended for Cosmas or Themba were picked up by senior leaders and used to argue for scaling up The Bookery or spinning it off into its own organisation, a debate which caught most staff seemingly unaware.

The implications of the conversation were far more important than the surrounds of greasy, empty pizza boxes and stacks of slightly worn picture books indicated. The conversation was about The Bookery, but the conversation was about the entire *raison d’être* of Equal Education, a conversation spilling over from leadership and board strategic planning meetings, feeding into subsequent all-staff meetings, and back through to the board. Did providing services undermine Equal Education’s mission through

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moderating its demands and restricting its ability to manoeuvre throughout all levels of the school system? Or did it bolster its credentials by demonstrating it was not just a talk shop, and it was not going to leave all its members to simply fend for themselves in their own quests for an education? As of the end of my fieldwork, EE's staff and leaders had yet to unify behind a consistent understanding of the answer to these questions, leaving its allies from across the political and educational landscapes occasionally confused about where EE stood, or even what it was.

I had the opportunity to interview a number of different people working in the education NGO sector in South Africa, whom I reached either through their contact with EE, or, more frequently, through their participation in the BRIDGE Network, a collaborative project intended to improve the strength of its NGO members through coordinating their efforts and sharing best practices. BRIDGE welcomed my attendance at their meetings, and introduced me to several of the largest and most established education NGOs in the country. Mentioning Equal Education to my interviewees within the education NGO landscape produced three common reactions. Each reaction occurred with all interviewees, without exception, regardless of whether the interviewees then went on to speak glowingly or critically of EE. First, all of my interviewees, unprompted by me, expressed some level of self-aware envy of Equal Education's profile. The education NGO sector in SA is not new—many of the organisations currently operating in schools have existed since the end of apartheid, or even before. To paraphrase one interviewee, his organisation has been doing great work in schools for decades, but no one seemed to pay attention to their work, or the education sector at all, until Equal Education came along—which would be frustrating to anyone (Tenille, Interview: Aug

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2011). The second common line on Equal Education is that it is not much of a collaborator. Quoting another interviewee, his organisation ‘has given more to EE than they’ve given back. We shared a lot with them that they’re now using, but we haven’t heard much since. We’d like more collaboration—we have collected experience and lots of valuable work. [EE’s leaders] know we’re here, but EE has become the 800 lb. gorilla of the sector’ (Willis, Interview: Aug 2011). He went on to say that he’d talked to quite a few other organisations doing work similar to his, and they all had the same perceptions of EE as a poor collaborator. Finally, there is a repeated question of whether EE is an “organisation or a movement”—the precise question at the heart of The Bookery debates. One of the more prominent education reformers in South Africa, LEAP School Director John Gilmour (Interview: Aug 2011), believes that EE’s reluctance to share its name or collaborate with others is indicative of it behaving more as an organisation than a movement. It seems to understand its brand as proprietary, and is a careful gatekeeper regarding who is or is not allowed to use the EE name. However, to Gilmour, this alienates the education groups he believes would be its natural allies, and leads them to regard EE with cynicism and scepticism: not signs of a broad-based social movement advancing causes with which each organisation in question agrees.

According to its potential peers in the education reform sector, then, EE is not a movement, it is an organisation, and not one known to play well with others. Interestingly, it is precisely the characteristics that make it more akin to a movement than an organisation that alienate its education sector peers. Equal Education’s leaders see it squarely in the tradition of activist movements. When I brought up the comments made by education organisations regarding their frustration with their inability to collaborate

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with Equal Education, the usual response was to question whether there was anyone out there in the education world with whom EE ought collaborate. Who had as many members? Who did similar work? Who also had the goal of transformational, systemic change, rather than traded in small-scale gap-filling? EE is right that they stand alone in this regard. But the other education groups are on to something in their recognition of the chasm between themselves and EE.

Rather than behaving like any previously existing education NGO, EE has, consistent with its origins, functioned more like the post-apartheid activist groups that preceded it, particularly (and predictably) like its parent organisation, the Treatment Action Campaign. However, placing EE in the activist landscape is not as simple as trading out HIV/AIDS and health related causes and language for educational causes and language, and calling it a day. EE has many historical antecedents, some more obvious than others. Equal Education's heritage places it at a series of interesting intersections of the worlds it has tried to seamlessly navigate. Its support is too widespread to characterise it as a simple NGO, but its tactics, particularly its research-heavy bent, are out of alignment with both its activist predecessors and contemporaries. What seems truly strange about EE is that its work does not appear to be driven by conflicts with government over values. Equal Education seems to *agree* with the Department and WCED on almost any issue or ideal one can cite. Instead, Equal Education's mission appears to be to tell the Department how to do its job better. More than anything, it seems to function as a government accountability movement that happens to operate in the sphere of education, capable of going toe-to-toe with the Department on any number

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of legal or technocratic issues, much to the Department's frustration. These sites of contestation are the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Confrontation and Contestation: Knowledge in practice

So far, this thesis has covered the knowledge practices that dominate the government's work on education, and introduced a civil society actor, Equal Education, which is dedicated to improving the government's education work. This chapter is dedicated to highlighting a series of representative interactions between government representatives and members/staff of Equal Education in order to show first, that government explicitly uses its perception of its own knowledge superiority to limit citizen engagement and second, that government is not on the most solid ground in claiming such supremacy. Other predictable government tactics and strategies, such as references to age and authority also serve to dismiss citizen participation. Intriguingly, these tactics and strategies do not appear to be the "go-to" options for representatives and officials looking to silence the public, and moreover, they are often bound up in the same claims of knowledge authority and expertise that the first sections of this chapter show. Both the government and Equal Education play a series of 'mixed strategies' that rely upon technocratic expertise and claims to identity, experience, and metis, cycling through different strategies in attempts to gain the upper hand.

CONFRONTATION AND CONTESTATION: THE PEOPLE'S SUMMIT FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

One event stands out most clearly as a near-comprehensive representation of interactions between the government and Equal Education: the inaugural People's Summit for Quality Education. It involves individuals each side would consider to be most representative with government represented by the Minister of Basic Education and

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Equal Education by a number of secondary school Equalisers. It centres on issues the activists consider deeply important to their work, gives a glimpse of both scripted and unscripted opinions of government officials, and covers most aspects of how the activists' attempts at participation are rejected by government.

In June 2011, Equal Education hosted the first 'People's Summit for Quality Education.' The Summit was a conference intended to bring together students, parents, community members, educators, academics, civil society, and government to discuss the problems faced in the education system. 360 delegates attended, selected via an application process. 100 of the delegate slots were reserved for students. A wide variety of people presented or gave talks—students, lecturers, education NGO leaders, EE staff members, and government officials working in education. The top national education official, Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga, and the top provincial official in the Western Cape, MEC Donald Grant, both gave plenary addresses. One of the Summit board members I interviewed, Gordon Ingg (Interview: Aug 2011), noted that the decision to invite the Minister to speak, not just participate, was one made with political considerations in mind—they did not want to be disrespectful in merely asking her to attend—in addition to their desire to hear what she would have to say. The students I talked to were very excited to hear her speak. They were pleased that she saw their group and cause to be important enough to spend time on, and that she was willing to both address them and field questions from them.

However, according to both my student and civil society informants, the addresses went disastrously. In the words of the Summit organizer, Jon Hodgson (Interview: Oct 2011), the minister '...gave the wrong kind of speech. She missed an

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opportunity to do what she should have done [in addressing these students eager to improve their country]. The tone of the speech was not “I am the minister, I will provide leadership and guidance, and I’ll show you how to put your energy into this usefully.” The tone was quite petty at times...’ While Hodgson did not give specific examples of this, the text of the Minister’s speech contains multiple instances he might be referencing. Motshekga (2011) notes the importance of their participation in improving the education system, and commends them for their efforts at a general level. She notes the felicitousness of their choice of Summit date, which coincided with the 56th anniversary of the Freedom Charter, invoking both the proud activist history of the ANC as well as its commitment to education. As can be expected of a minister addressing her critics, she devotes significant time to highlighting the accomplishments of her department, both under her tenure and the tenure of the minister before her. This, one can assume, the students listened to patiently, if sceptically. It is when she reaches a discussion of Equal Education’s campaigning issues and how to think about student involvement that she likely ran into trouble.

In referencing the issues raised by Equal Education regarding libraries and school infrastructure, she appears dismissive, however unintentionally. She acknowledges the problems with regards to libraries (fewer than 10% of schools in South Africa have libraries that both have a dedicated space and have books), but then rejects their importance, saying:

Be rest assured, we share your frustrations on the length of time required to tackle infrastructure backlogs and other challenges flowing from the apartheid legacy. But I must say, I would rather have a school with a library that will last than one that is built on sand and falls in the wink of an eye. I would much rather have a school with a library corner, where books are shared and read, than one without any at all because we are

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folding our hands and waiting until there is a room called a library.
(Motshekga 2011)

The students may have even tolerated the several such instances in which she makes similar points regarding broken windows and overall infrastructure, EE's other two major campaigns since their start. But she does not stop there:

We have an enormous challenge as a country. This challenge begins with teaching and learning how to read and write, count and calculate, reason and debate.... We can either look for scapegoats and evade responsibility, or we can all think and act as responsible citizens of a democratic country and grab the bull by the horns. (Motshekga 2011)

This, the students interpreted as a direct jab, viewing it in context of her previous statements arguing that they should spend less time agitating and more time studying.

The question and answer period did not resolve the tensions that arose from the Minister's prepared remarks. When fielding questions from students, there appeared to be a fundamental disconnect between the Minister and the Equalizers. The Equalizers were offended that she did not receive their petition at the 2011 march in which they had turned out 20,000 of their peers to advocate for improved library facilities in schools. Hodgson (Interview: Oct 2011), the summit organiser, believed Motshekga 'didn't know why it was such a big deal about her not coming to the march to accept the petition. She said she had a prior commitment, which is what happens when you're the minister—you have prior commitments, and it's disrespectful the way in which you're [the students] are going on about it.'

Students I spoke to considered the Minister's speech particularly poor, certainly the time during the Summit where they felt most clearly dismissed. Not only did she not understand where they were coming from, she called them rude and disrespectful for challenging her on her lack of responsiveness, and for questioning the progress made by

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her department in fixing challenges they highlighted regarding school libraries and the need for Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure. Rather than answer their questions, she told them they needed to study harder and pay more attention to their books, which the students pointed out to me were often nonexistent.

In an interview with Katie Huston (Interview: Aug 2011), a summit participant who represented a longstanding and reputable education NGO, she saw the questioning period as one in which the Equalizers effectively took turns yelling at the minister, which created a weekend-long debate amongst summit participants about whether they were ‘being disrespectful or doing what they needed to do.’ Katie chose to defend the students: ‘their militant rhetoric is fair and warranted—these kids have been completely cheated.’ At one point during the summit, she had to leave the venue; she was so overwhelmed by the personal stories she heard from the students in her small breakout groups that she just sat on the steps and cried for half an hour.

Tensions regarding the Minister’s speech existed both sides; the students felt they were being condescended to or ignored, and the minister felt she was being unfairly attacked. My concern here is how to understand the grounds of the disagreement. There are, unfortunately, no transcripts of the Q &A session following the speech, at least not that I can find. However, all accounts confirmed that the student activists were phrasing many of their questions in their own personal experiences of their schools, often quite angrily noting the deficits in their own educations that the Minister was responsible for fixing, and that the counters from the Minister were either to reject their accounts as isolated incidents, or to note that they too had responsibilities in these situations that they weren’t fulfilling.

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A handful of dynamics are at play here. First, and perhaps most importantly, there's an indication that the Minister does not believe the students have the needed authority or knowledge to speak on this topic; telling them that they speak only of isolated incidences indicates they don't know the broader context, and telling them they need to go back to their books is either a straightforward 'let the adults deal with this' or a somewhat more complex 'without learning your subjects, you will not be able to speak on this in a way I find compelling.' Telling the students to return to their books was particularly galling; the minister and the students are both aware of the 'broader context' on this issue, which is one in which there are not many books, the exact problem the students' libraries campaign is trying to fix.¹⁶ Next, the Minister's comments about responsibilities function as an attempt to exclude participation in the public debates unless one goes through Herculean efforts to fulfil responsibilities, something that could be understood as 'the only citizens worth listening to are super-citizens.' As we will see later, 'fulfilment of responsibilities' (absent consideration of individuals' capacity to fulfil those responsibilities) is not the only characteristic demanded by government representatives before acknowledging people's rights to participate, further raising the

¹⁶ At a different EE public event held on the topic of libraries and creating a culture of reading, Nthuthuzo Ndzomo, a member who joined EE as a student and who is now a youth group facilitator and university student spoke. Nthuthuzo moved from the personal to Motshekga's preferred "broader context," saying that when he was a primary school student, he had access to one book—Roald Dahl's *Danny, the Champion of the World*. He shared it with three other students, and read it over and over. When he reached secondary school, he again had only one shared book: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee. There was no library at either school, despite the DBE claiming one existed at his high school—the teachers used it as a staff room and students were never allowed in. His experience was not atypical, he continued, and the 5 public libraries in Khayelitsha were supposed to serve 54 schools and the rest of the community. 54% of students in South African schools are forced to share books much like he did as a student several years earlier.

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bar for being a ‘super citizen.’ It was also interpreted as an offensive bit of misdirection by the students and activists gathered there, given that many of their conversations at EE gatherings centre on what their responsibilities are as students, and the two speakers before the Minister’s talk, including one EE student leader, both spoke passionately and in depth about how to think of responsibilities in the learning environment provided to the students by the government. Finally, there are also clear concerns regarding the way in which authority is challenged, with the statements about disrespect and rudeness, understood by the education officials as the activists not showing proper deference to their age, station, or the hard work that got them there.

This interaction is representative of the constellation of elements affecting Equal Education’s ability to get through to government: not just knowledge and expertise, but also identity, age, and authority, all of which cause knowledge-based challenges to manifest in slightly different ways. While the interactions at the conference alone are not enough to cement the importance of the more knowledge-based explanation, repeated instances where both elected and appointed education officials say these things more explicitly make it a more persuasive interpretation of the significance of government knowledge practices and their effects on citizenship. The next series of interactions will trace these threads—knowledge, super-citizenship, and confounding factors.

KNOWLEDGE ABSENT A QUALITY EDUCATION

Minister Motshekga is not the only official to have ignored or refused to work with Equal Education (and the individual citizens that comprise it) on knowledge-based grounds. The national Director General of Basic Education has refused to turn up to meetings with Equal Education because he doesn’t have time for ‘people who don’t know

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anything about education.’ (Isaacs, Interview: May 2011) The Western Cape Education Department, while seen as better organised and more efficient than the other provinces, has a bad reputation amongst my interviewees regarding its lack of interest in citizen/NGO participation. Some of this reputation ties directly to the WCED’s allegations that those who are attempting to participate are ignorant or incompetent. Jon Hodgson (Interview: Oct 2011) thought Western Cape MEC Donald Grant’s Summit speech did the same thing that Motshekga’s did. ‘[Both ministers] tell you about what they’ve achieved, and there’s space to do that. But when it doesn’t go beyond that, and that’s the tack that people take when talking to people who want to work with you, that’s a problem. It’s a lack of engagement.’ According to Hodgson, in the face of the audience ‘asking specific questions about things that EE has complained about, like a widespread lack of textbooks in Khayelitsha,’ Grant just did not engage. An EE staff person characterised Grant’s speech as ‘technocratically dismissive,’ noting that he was ‘talking down to learners like a school teacher.’

Other education NGOs were also wary of the WCED following on their 2009 ban of NGOs working in schools in 2009. The banned NGOs saw the policy as rooted in a belief that the WCED could do the NGOs’ work better than the NGOs could (Gilmour, Interview: Aug 2011). Over the course of 2009 and 2010, the WCED attempted to recreate the NGO programs, and in the mind of my interviewees, did a worse job than the NGOs that had previously been in place (Woods, Interview: Aug 2011). One example given was a WCED program to tutor matric year students that raised ‘concern that they’re just shuffling around underqualified teachers. So instead, why not let NGO tutors work with curricular advisers?’ (Tennille, Interview: 2011). When the WCED let NGOs back

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in roughly a year later, the WCED sometimes undermined the effectiveness of the NGOs by making them hidebound to bureaucratic processes less effective than the NGOs' own management practices, furthering the bad blood between the NGOs and the WCED.

In an attempt to reach out to the broader NGO community, the WCED hosted a large forum entitled 'How we can work with NGOs and NPOs' in September 2011. Equal Education nearly did not attend the meeting, predicting it would be a useless waste of their time given the WCED's track record, but ultimately sent one manager, one staff member, and two volunteers. Amongst BRIDGE members (the education network coordinating NGO efforts and sharing best practices), the general attitude was cautious optimism. BRIDGE's members had been working for months to get an audience with officials from the WCED with mixed success, particularly at the higher levels of the WCED, and they saw this as an attempt to extend an olive branch to BRIDGE and the rest of the education NGO sector in the Western Cape. However, if this was an attempt at diplomacy by the WCED, it was jarringly ham-fisted.

The meeting began with an introduction from Penny Vinjevold, Head of Education in the WCED (the top bureaucratic post). Looking around the high school auditorium filled with several hundred adults, mostly over the age of 30, she remarked, 'Those who think we're in crisis now weren't in Soweto in '76. Many people in this room, I see, started during what I call "the real crisis" in education.' My scan of those who were not old enough to be alive in '76, including Equal Education's four representatives, returned looks of astonishment, or, more commonly, scowls. One EE community volunteer tapped me on the shoulder to ensure I caught the remark, saying 'that's clearly a dig at us!' Already, a number of audience members were alienated. She

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continued, ‘My hair stands on end when NGOs/NPOs say “my school, our school,” because they’re not your schools. When the auditor general asks us about spending, you’re not behind me and Linda Rose [Vinjevold’s second-in-command]. Or when the matric results come out. The list goes on’ (Vinjevold, Public Address: Sept 2011). The line between diplomacy and verbal bomb-throwing blurred.

The meeting was a wealth of missed opportunities. Even obvious ways of generating goodwill were skipped, such as when Vinjevold put the spotlight on one of WCED’s NGO partners. ‘One of our NGOs, with whom we’re often at loggerheads, who we really battle with in the press, has developed a beautiful video about textbooks, and we couldn’t do better than that. And so with their permission, we just use that video’ (Vinjevold, Public Address: Sept 2011). Equal Education’s name was conspicuously absent in Vinjevold’s compliment, an omission that its representatives did not appreciate.

It may well be that the WCED officials thought the NGOs needed a wakeup call and approached the meeting as such. But they badly misread the crowd, which was so accustomed to being ignored or having their work attacked by the WCED that they were eager for any positive interaction. Some parts of Vinjevold’s speech came across as realistic about the work, like her acknowledgment that she is ‘deeply ashamed of the conditions of some of our schools that we send our children to daily’. At points, she was empathetic, like her story about ‘a very determined person in my office who came here from the Eastern Cape because she wanted better schools for her daughter, but my blood curdled when she said where her daughter went to high school. I want to be able to say that *all* of our schools are fabulous’ (Vinjevold, Public Address: Sept 2011).

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Flashes of empathy and a sense of shared obligation and commitment saved Vinjevold's speech to some degree, according to the audience members I spoke to, as did the fact that she's widely acknowledged as capable and talented, if hard to work with. While her Chief of Districts, Linda Rose, is often seen as just as capable, her remarks earned no such accommodation from the audience, managing to anger not just those who were not alive or involved in the struggle, but almost the entire audience with her opening remark. Imperiously, Rose informed a room full of education organisers and NGOs that she often receives people in her office that she's never seen before or who represent organisations she's never heard of before. In her words:

When they sit on my couch, I ask them, 'What do you know about the Western Cape Education Department?' I'm surprised by how little people know about us and our values. The number of people who tell me they've been 'working in our schools' (scare quotes hers) for years, and know nothing about us! So it's important for us, in order to work with you, that you know something about us... (Rose, Public Address: Sept 2011)

Her audience had expected her, given the cadence and pacing of her last sentence, to continue with '...and we know something about you.' That knowledge gap, however, did not make the WCED's equation, much to the dismay of the audience. She went on to say that the meeting was 'for all of you to be *knowledgeable* about what the WCED is doing. That way, you know what we're doing' (Rose, Public Address: Sept 2011). Multiple people I spoke to after the meeting were appalled by Rose's speech and those remarks in particular, calling them 'condescending', 'patronising', and 'disrespectful' (though according to one audience member, this speech was far from the most condescending Rose has been to them).

While the stories about the WCED's lack of cooperation with NGOs are concerning, as is its misleadingly self-centred approach to 'working with', the other

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striking trend in the remarks was in how little regard the speakers held the knowledge of the NGO representatives in the room. The WCED representatives treated the gathered crowd like a group of simpletons or primary school children, explaining the most obvious of concepts and frequently repeating themselves, as though concerned that the audience was not comprehending much of what the WCED was saying. The speakers appeared convinced that the education professionals who dedicated their lives to working with children and teachers had zero idea of how schools work, and could not be trusted to get anywhere near them without intensive supervision. The role prescribed for parents and students, to the extent they were mentioned, was exclusively at the school level—learning for the students, and helping their students learn and potentially serving on School Governing Bodies for parents. The DBE and WCED have made it clear that government gets to call the shots on what constitutes legitimate and/or important “knowledge” of schools and government’s work to improve them. Personal narratives and experience, of either communities (like students and parents) or NGOs do not make the cut.

For all of the government’s worries about concerned citizens not knowing enough about education to participate, and their repeated dismissals of those they see as not sufficiently expert, government does not make it easy for one to become expert. The *Delivery Agreement* mentioned in Chapter 1, a document released by the DBE in an attempt to be publicly accountable, is not the sort of document that much of the public can follow. First, it is only available in English. Second, the kind of English it uses is not simple English—it is rife with bureaucratic rhetoric, of inputs and outputs, of subinputs, suboutputs, and outcomes. Following its logic is possible if one is highly educated and/or familiar with the form, but it is not a document that lays out, clearly and

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plainly, what the department wishes to do. The *Delivery Agreement* and its connected documents were the subject of an intensive research effort by Equal Education over the course of the months I spent with them. An EE funder, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, asked them if they would be in a position to put forth a ‘shadow report’ to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Basic Education. In the funder’s mind, it would be worthwhile to examine what progress the department had made against the goals it specified for itself.¹⁷

In addition to the *Delivery Agreement*, the DBE’s goals and strategies could be found in several other related documents: the DBE’s *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025*, the *Strategic Plan 2011-2014*, and the *Annual Performance Plan 2011-2012*. Together, these documents provide the most comprehensive public overview of the Department’s planned activities and goals for the next several years. A fifth document, the *Medium Term Expenditure Framework*, (MTEF) offers a budget for the DBE’s work and thus more specific details of its plans. Conventional government wisdom dictates that most of these documents will be densely technocratic in the manner described in Chapter 1; however, if they are intended to provide some aspect of public accountability, one would assume they also contain a

¹⁷ This kind of monitoring is one of the Portfolio Committee’s main tasks—to act as the people of South Africa’s representative oversight on the work of the Department of Education. However, the likelihood that it would take place within the Committee itself seemed slim. One recent incident found the Head of the Committee, MP Malagas, pulling aside one of EE’s parliamentary observers after a meeting to quietly but carefully put him (and thus EE) in his place. ‘I hear you have been being very rude to my Minister,’ MP Malagas said. ‘If you continue to be rude to my Minister, our friendship will be over very quickly.’ With this kind of ranks closing, and the hierarchical party structure that places senior party members in Minister posts and more junior members as the MPs in charge of monitoring them, the structure itself does not appear to be a recipe for success.

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simple, high-level overview for those unwilling or unable to engage with the language, statistics, or policy rhetoric that fill the nearly 200 pages of these documents. Such a summary does not exist.

EE's shadow report project began with a single researcher, Mongi, allocated to the project. Mongi came to EE with a strong background in South African civil society and government research, and was hired away by a widely regarded German human rights research organisation in the middle of my fieldwork. As the project got off the ground, it became apparent that this report would be too much for Mongi to wrangle with alone. He asked for assistance, and another researcher was added to the project. This researcher became hung up not on attempting to source information on the Department's actual performance, but in the first stage of ascertaining what the DBE's goals and strategies were. To his mind, if the documents were read alone, they were broadly sensible, though vague. Despite the DBE's own suggestion that they ought be read together, when read side-by-side they were incoherent. None of the categories of the Department's intended actions stayed consistent. The Delivery Agreement offers 4 outputs:

- Output 1: Improve the quality of teaching and learning
- Output 2: Undertake regular assessment to track progress
- Output 3: Improve early childhood development
- Output 4: Ensure a credible outcomes-focussed planning and accountability system (South Africa 2010b, 1)

It then explains the importance of these outputs to their overall outcome: 'Improved quality of basic education' and offers a series of 'Actions needed to achieve each output.'

While it is possible to take issue with the fact that these outputs are not mutually exclusive, or that they operate at different levels (for instance, undertaking regular

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assessment to track progress could be seen as a necessary component for improving the quality of teaching and learning), the outputs are at least reasonable, important elements for the DBE to focus on. Aside from the problems about the public's ability to understand the document, EE's only complaint at this level was that none of outputs or suboutputs (the actions needed to achieve each output) covered its main campaign issue, infrastructure.

In the introduction to the *Delivery Agreement*, the Department directs its readers to the *Action Plan*, writing, 'That document, which is the outcome of consultations with stakeholders, is envisaged as the Department of Basic Education's primary vehicle for communicating key sectoral strategies to stakeholders' (South Africa 2010b, 3). It continues to say the *Action Plan* 'will serve as a key source for planners of envisaged targets and methodologies. In many ways, this *Delivery Agreement* extracts key issues contained in the *Action Plan*. The correspondence between the elements of the *Action Plan* and of this *Delivery Agreement* are explained in Appendix C [of the *Delivery Agreement*].' (South Africa 2010b, 3)

It is here that the coherence begins to break down. The Introduction to the *Delivery Agreement* suggests that the reader should consider the *Delivery Agreement* to be a high-level version of more specific targets or strategies contained in the *Action Plan*. The *Action Plan* is organized by 27 separate 'goals,' the first 13 of which deal with 'outputs we want to achieve in relation to learning and enrolments' [emphasis theirs]. The word 'output' is used differently in this document than in the *Delivery Agreement*. In the *Delivery Agreement*, the outputs were overarching, high-level categories that covered vast swaths of the Department's work. In the *Action Plan*, the outputs are highly

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specified, targeting performance in particular realms in particular grade levels. For example:

- 3) Increase the number of learners in Grade 9 who by the end of the year have mastered the minimum language and mathematics competencies for Grade 9
- 4) Increase the number of Grade 12 learners who become eligible for a Bachelors programme at a university...
- 10) Ensure that all children remain effectively enrolled in school up to the year in which they turn 15. (South Africa 2010a, 2)

Goals 14 to 27, on the other hand, 'deal with the things we must do to achieve our 13 output goals,' such as:

- 14) Attract in each year a new group of young, motivated, and appropriately trained teachers into the teaching profession...
- 19) Ensure that every learner has access to the minimum set of textbooks and workbooks required according to national policy...
- 25) Use the school as a location to promote access amongst children to the full range of public health and poverty reduction interventions (South Africa 2010a, 3)

These are again a set of high-level goals that appear much closer to the four 'outputs' given in the *Delivery Agreement*. However, there are fourteen of them here, and some of them do not align with the *Delivery Agreement* at all, including Goal 24 (on infrastructure) and Goal 25 (on schools as sites of public health intervention) (South Africa 2010a).

Given the confusing structure and fit across the documents, it should have been helpful that the Department provided Appendix C in the *Delivery Agreement*, the chart that was supposed to match all of these disparate elements together. The chart is a grid, with the Action Plan goals in rows, and the suboutputs from the *Delivery Agreement* listed vertically. Where they connect, the department placed a dot. The only problem is that the dots in many instances made no sense. In some instances, achieving an *Action*

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Plan goal contributed to a *Delivery Agreement* suboutput. In other instances, the causality was reversed, and achieving a suboutput contributed to an *Action Plan* goal. More worryingly, sometimes the dots appeared completely random, such as when managing to ‘Increase the number of learners in Grade 6 who by the end of the year have mastered the minimum language and mathematics competencies for Grade 6’ was purported to be related to strengthening the capacity of district offices. To the extent that these two items can be connected at all, it requires a level of abstraction so intensive as to be devoid of meaning. EE gathered most of its research staff to read through the documents and make heads or tails of them, myself included, yet no one could produce a sensible interpretation of Appendix C.¹⁸

Assistance could not be found in the *Strategic Plan*, which referenced the outputs from the *Delivery Agreement* but then added a new layer of complexity with five ‘programme objectives,’ five categories of work (like ‘Administration’ or ‘Curriculum Policy, Support, and Monitoring’) that both did and did not connect to either the *Delivery Agreement* outputs and/or the *Action Plan* goals. Nor did rescue come from the *Annual Performance Plan*, which ignored the outputs in the *Delivery Agreement* and the *Action Plan* goals and focused on the *Medium Term Expenditure Framework* and the five programme objectives from the *Strategic Plan*. Ultimately, EE allocated several researchers to the shadow report, and it took the group of four university educated, fluent English speakers several weeks to move from total bewilderment to a sensible baseline of what the DBE’s goals and strategies really were, and how they all fit together. Repeated calls and emails to the DBE to discuss the documents went unanswered. To say the least,

¹⁸ At EE’s request, I spent roughly a week mapping out the connections between all four documents.

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most individual citizens do not have those resources. Some of this lack of clarity, no doubt, is actual incompetence, rather than a demonstration of expert status. The rhetoric and the approach have the veneer of expert status, circulating the same kind of language and values from knowledge practices of bureaucratic efficiency and statistical demonstrations of importance. However, that expert status is to some degree undermined by failure of the documents to be easily legible even when read with full comprehension of those same knowledge practices.

By way of contrast, EE trains its members on the same topics through fact sheets in simple English. EE's youth groups follow a general curriculum for the year, which is supplanted by 'of-the-moment' issues as needed (such as when it became apparent that a special session was needed to address the illegality of corporal punishment in schools). The general curriculum is supported by a number of teaching materials for use by the group facilitators. One of the most important materials for the facilitators is their stack of 'fact sheets' for distribution to the Equalisers in their groups. The group reads through the material in the fact sheets, taking turns reading aloud and asking questions of the facilitators as needed, then does some kind of fun activity intended to energise the students, check comprehension, and present the material in a different way for students who struggled with the written English. The students are then intended to take the fact sheets home as easy references for the future, though some inevitably get lost in the clutter of the average teenager's life.

The first of the summer 2011 series, a broad overview of the issues facing the education system entitled 'Unequal Schools, Unequal Outcomes,' serves as a good example of the form. The sheets are never longer than four sides of A4 paper, and

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provide graphics to assist comprehension of statistics and figures—mathematical concepts that many of the Equalisers struggle with due to poor quality maths lessons. The language is colloquial, and speaks to students' own experiences. One passage about teacher distribution issues (that is to say, the concentration of highly qualified teachers in former Model C schools) could speak in the language of education policy, citing school environment, student to teacher ratios, workload, learner motivation, and salary. Instead, the passage reads:

Think about it, if you are a well-qualified and experienced teacher, where are you going to want to work? In Khayelitsha, where class sizes are huge, there's lots of homework to mark and your fellow teachers are often grumpy? Or at Westerford, where classes sizes are small, there's less homework to mark, your fellow teachers are happy and most importantly, where you get paid more? (Equal Education 2011a)

The same arguments are there, but the language is easily accessible. One of the goals of the fact sheets and education programmes as a whole is to get Equalisers to the point where they can follow government documents. To that end, fact sheets often mix policy terms in with the colloquial language and offer definitions for them on the fact sheets. The fact sheet on EE's Minimum Norms and Infrastructure Campaign defines the words 'infrastructure,' 'school infrastructure,' 'norms and standards,' 'regulations,' 'silver bullet,' and the acronyms 'MEC' and 'NEIMS' (National Education Infrastructure Management System report).

My experience in the youth groups made it clear that the issues themselves were not beyond the grasp of the Equalisers—not surprisingly, given the self-selection involved, the students are a bright, passionate, dedicated group. They occasionally struggled with English vocabulary words in the fact sheets, but that was to be expected given the quality of their education in English. Often, students who were struggling to

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express themselves in English would switch to Xhosa, and then, as translated to me by Thoko, my co-facilitator, drew powerful connections between the broader themes and their own experiences, asked thought provoking questions, or offered creative possibilities for future actions on the issues presented. The Equalisers were savvy activists, and fully able to engage with the ideas and strategies of the DBE and WCED when given the tools to do so.

Putting out a 'fact sheet' on the *Delivery Agreement* or the *Action Plan* was something EE staff wished government would do (Holtzman, Interview: Sept 2011). But department communications like this have never existed, and the staff members I talked to were not hopeful it would occur. This lack fit a broader pattern of lack of documents from the DBE that the community could understand, which EE's Head of PCR, Yoliswa Dwane (Interview: Sept 2011), cited as a constant obstacle to citizens being informed and taking action.

THE UNEASE OF EXPERTISE: WHO ARE THE TRULY KNOWLEDGEABLE?

For all of the government's protestations about the ignorance of the citizens they have to deal with, they do not appear to be expert as often as they portray themselves as being. Expertise is a tricky category for the department. Bureaucracy in practice often does not resemble Weber's 'iron cage' of efficiency and expertise (Graeber 2006, Herzfeld 1992). As seen in the episode involving the *Delivery Agreement* and the connected documents, it's not particularly clear that the Department knows what it is doing so much as it knows how to look like it knows what it is doing. In its fidelity to demonstrating bureaucratic expertise, the Department captured most elements of the form; the rhetoric, the structure, the air of quantitative unimpeachability, the references to

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hallowed principles of efficiency and performance management, and the reductive aspirationalism of discrete targets to be achieved: x number of students with y level of competence by z year. The crucial missing element, however, was the expertise itself—a clear, focused, achievable and high impact plan. Absent that, the documents appear less like demonstrations of expertise and more like anthropologist Alexei Yurchak's characterisation of the official Soviet governmental speeches post-Lenin, so riddled with empty repetition of the original instantiations of the practice they that they come to signify nothing more than an expertise in the form itself. The value then coheres in the performance, not its content (Yurchak 2006).

This would not be the first time such an allegation has been made about the South African government. Notably, Jean and John Comaroff (2004, 2006) as well as Jonny Steinberg (2008) have made similar claims regarding the South African Police Services. In these works, the police can be seen to play the part of policing, yet not actually policing. At points, the work of the police appears as an elaborate charade, known as spectacle to both the performers and the observed, but it remains critical that the theatre occur; its absence would be a bellweather of social order's collapse.

Here, the Department's performance is laid bare as farce by episodes like the creation of the shadow report, where technocracy demystified was oft shown to be no more than inanity. By the end of the shadow report, EE's researchers were confident they had a better grasp of the DBE's strategy than the DBE itself; that is to say, there was not a full strategy there to start. Government representatives tasked with education frequently are exposed as ignorant of their own mandate. In one Portfolio Committee meeting, the chair of the Committee had no idea what the South African Schools Act

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was, despite its status as the major law governing the work of her committee. In another instance, school officials insisted to EE students and staff that they were doing nothing illegal in administering corporal punishment to students, in flagrant contravention of the law. The claims of exclusive policy expertise are hard to swallow when the most detailed research on the status and importance of libraries in South African schools is produced by the civil sector group that ‘does not know anything about education’ (Equal Education 2011b). The farce has many opportunities to repeat itself, across government levels and domains, perhaps no moment so clearly as when Penny Vinjevold was simultaneously dismissing the expertise of EE (and other civil society organisations) in her tone and most of her statements, but highlighting their work on provision of textbooks as better than the WCED could have done themselves (Vinjevold, Public Address: Sept 2011).

It would be too simple to declare government expertise as solely farce. In the meeting with the WCED officials, none of the audience members I spoke to, including Equal Education’s representatives, considered either of the top two bureaucrats to be incompetent. To the contrary, they were frequently complimented as highly professional, talented, and dedicated. While the pace of improvement in Western Cape schools is not what people would hope, incompetence at the top of the WCED was not perceived to be at issue. Competence in this case may be a double-edged sword, in giving the bureaucrats the ability to perform well at their jobs, but also the self-assurance needed to declare themselves expert above all others.

It would also be too simple to declare local knowledge as beyond reproach. In the rare instances that the WCED appears to reach out to communities to gain a better understanding of what is happening on the ground, it tends to do so in the wake of the

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unpredicted and unplanned, to address events and circumstances they did not see coming. The WCED loosens its grip on the monopoly of knowledge in the face of the anomalous and the extraordinary. Unfortunately, the more closely such events fit the characterisation offered above, the more likely they are to be dislocating, confusing, and difficult to comprehend by those involved, as one particularly explosive interaction between the community and the department showed.

On 26 July, a spontaneous protest broke out at Chris Hani High School, a Khayelitsha secondary school with one of the biggest contingents of Equalisers. Equal Education's office was called early in the morning by several students, with a request for as many staff members as possible to get to Chris Hani immediately. Few details were given to the staff, only that there was a major situation developing, and the students thought EE could help them. Several carloads of EE staff and adult volunteers arrived on the scene to find one female student bleeding profusely and in need of medical attention, and hundreds of uniformed learners shouting at a large group of armed police or milling aimlessly about the community square across the street from the school. The gates of the school were closed, with a police car blocking them. Rubbish bins had been flipped and their contents set alight, and several of the school's windows were broken. Several hundred square feet in front of the school gate were cordoned off by police tape, and officers were gesturing with their rifles at learners who approached too closely for their tastes.

The EE group and I managed to establish several things quite quickly: the protest erupted because two Bambanani (volunteer security guards) at the school beat a learner so severely he landed in the hospital, and were back at work at the school within days.

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The injured learner we saw upon arriving (who was immediately taken by one EE group to the local clinic) had been hit by one of the rubber bullets fired into the crowd by the police without warning (and, according to the learners, without provocation). Nearly every other question or detail was contested or unresolved. For instance: the beaten student, Malibongwe, may have been beaten so severely his back was broken, he might have been paralyzed, or neither of the above. He did absolutely nothing to provoke the beating, he refused to give up his headphones, or he refused to give up his cell phone during examination time. The Bambanani had not been arrested, they had been arrested and not charged, or they had been arrested, charged, and let go. The principal of the school ordered the beating, joined in the beating, or stood by while the beating occurred without interfering. The broken windows, rubbish burning, and subsequent tyre burnings that occurred after our arrival were the act of students or of outside agitators just trying to cause trouble. Suffice it to say, not all of these descriptions can be true simultaneously, and on some of those issues, perhaps none of them were true at all.

All of the people who spoke to me were emphatic that their versions were correct. Each of these details, and more, were given to me when I arrived at the protest, to the EE representatives who facilitated a meeting between parents, students, teachers, and the WCED later that afternoon, to the Head of the Community Department who held a meeting to get the facts from the students the next day, and stated to the WCED by the students. Coming up with a coherent narrative was necessary to ascertain the necessary disciplinary action for the principal and Bambanani, whom the students insisted should be removed from the school. However, this was not an environment conducive to establishing the 'truth' of what happened between the beaten learner, the principal, and

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the Bambanani. While the EE staff and I were at the school, the police again opened fire with rubber bullets on the gathered crowd without warning, causing the group of uniformed students to flee from the area, only to reassemble in the face of a large group of riot police because justice had not yet been met. Tensions were high, and outcomes deeply important to both the students and school staff were at stake. Here, the WCED sought information from the community, but their search returned mostly chaos. Expertise cannot be reduced to placement, in the case of either local or governmental knowledge and experts.

PARADIGMS LOST: WHEN KNOWING IS NOT EVERYTHING

Beyond revealing ways in which government representatives mobilise knowledge practices to their strategic advantage, the above interactions also demonstrate that knowledge is not everything. In addition to highlighting expertise, both Motshegka and Vinjevold highlighted struggle credentials as a needed aspect of authority on the subject. When factors like age, authority, and experience are combined with an emphasis on efficiency and professionalism, officials may find it difficult to abide by a group of school kids, however well-versed in the issues. Moreover, while having former activists in government may make them sympathetic in some ways, it also opens the door for those former activists to dismiss EE as the (in their minds) currently unready heirs to their legacy, or, conversely, to find it difficult being on the other side of the activist/government divide. References to age, authority, experience, and identity obstruct participation, sometimes through shading challenges on expertise, and sometimes functioning as fallbacks when officials find themselves caught out on the actual knowledge.

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In one such instance, Dmitri, an EE staff member with a law degree, was contracted by a group of students noting that they lacked a geography teacher. Their teacher had gone on maternity leave, and there had not been a teacher there for several weeks. Dmitri called the government employee in charge of staffing at that particular school to lodge an initial inquiry, and then several days later to follow up. The bureaucrat stonewalled Dmitri, claiming there was no problem. Dmitri responded by referencing the relevant laws and regulations on the rapidity with which the teacher needed to be replaced, and the government instituted replacement pools from which a temporary teacher could be drawn. With either the knowledge that Dmitri was right (and thus equivalently expert) or the ignorance of the laws (and thus less expert than Dmitri), the bureaucrat turned to questioning Dmitri on his stake in the issue: Is he a student at this school? Does he have a child who is a student at this school? Dmitri answered that neither of the above were true, he was with Equal Education. The person on the phone became defensive. She falsely declared a replacement had been placed, and started berating Dmitri about his supposed lack of stake.

In a short phone conversation, the authority to speak on a topic shifted from having the proper technical expertise on the issue to having the proper identity expertise on the issue, despite all of the government's lofty talk about education as an issue that affects us all. Through the turn to expertise based on identity, rather than policy/technocratic knowledge, the *metis* or local knowledge that so frequently gets dismissed returns to the picture, as a part of a dual standard even harder to achieve than technocratic expertise alone. Claims of superior knowledge-based expertise are often the initial move made by government to dismiss popular challenges levelled against them,

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but since they are not necessarily successful, they are not the only strategies used. When technocratic expertise proves to be a draw between government and activists, each seek recourse in other realms. For activists, this is often through generating broad support (e.g., the 20,000 person march), providing compelling spectacles (e.g., the photos of the broken windows, or the sleepout in front of Parliament), or demonstrating that services government fails to provide are not that difficult (the Bookery). Government, for its part, renders legitimacy to speak to them as an ever-shifting target, determined variously by expertise, identity, and experience, which are rarely independently sufficient. Hence, countering expertise with expertise often produces extended negotiations, giving activists more strategies with which to make their case (for instance, Equal Education followed their technocratic arguments about libraries with public spectacles enforcing the importance of books, and then demonstrated that building libraries in schools was not that difficult by doing it themselves). Ultimately, the technocratic manoeuvring by Equal Education strengthens their abilities to address government by allowing them to demonstrate their own expertise to the broader public as well as the government, and by adding another tactic to their already expansive arsenal of activist strategies.

Conclusion **New frontiers of citizenship**

The experiences of Equal Education tell us that a format of citizenship previously written off—popular technocratic citizenship—is indeed possible. Technocratic citizenship is not an exclusive strategy, as Equal Education’s interactions with government indicate. Were EE to rely solely on its technocratic capabilities, it would be vulnerable to the mixed strategies deployed by government (e.g., dismissals based on identity, having a stake, age, etc.). As one of EE’s strategists explains,

Sure, learners can say ‘I need a desk, I need a chair,’ but we also need to engage with government to change things based on the way government operates. Government will never take seriously someone who says ‘I want a desk tomorrow.’ We very much understand things in terms of ‘building a movement.’ It’s unrealistic to expect you could pull any and all members out and have them talk eloquently. The marches and demonstrations show this is mass based. This is how you show that thousands of others support these issues. (Holtzman, Interview Sept 2011)

Simply demonstrating that there is a broad base of students and citizens interested in and taking action on issues of education is not enough to be effective. Those citizens must be capable of speaking to government in the manner in which government speaks to them, using the same knowledge practices and techniques that render claims comprehensible in a way that government officials understand and act on. Conversely, it is not enough to simply be a think tank, deft at policy but without popular support and necessary credentials. Because aspects of experiential knowledge (struggle credentials, belonging to a disadvantaged community, age, and more) subtly creep into even the ways in which government dismisses participation on what are ostensibly grounds of expertise, the activists too must be diverse in their abilities, leading to the mix of classic activist

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tactics in the manner of Alinsky (1989) with the ability to play the knowledge game as well as government does itself, sometimes better.

Bureaucratic technocracy, then, is not necessarily as democratically impenetrable as is often suggested, even absent the more direct forms of democracy suggested by Habermas (Habermas 1989, Weber 2001). Nor is it necessarily depoliticising in the ways suggested by Scott (1998), Ferguson (1994) and others. Rather than rendering issues devoid of values and beliefs subject to social debate, in this case the existence of a technocratic paradigm has enabled Equal Education to reinsert itself into the realm of policymaking, a manoeuvre that ensures space for the political even when high-level questions of value are agreed upon, and which is in its performance a demonstration of the political values of participation and democracy.

Importantly, Equal Education's tactics apply, albeit in different ways, regardless of the competence of the bureaucracy and their own 'expertise' measured in the way they measure others. Whether government bureaucrats and policymakers were in fact expert (the top bureaucrats at the WCED) or inexperienced (the low-level WCED bureaucrat, the authors of the DBE strategy documents), space existed for engagement on the level of technocracy. This participation can be read as positive on a number of levels: in adhering to South Africa's own expressed democratic principles, in providing avenues for people to offer input on issues they are passionate about, in creating a community sense of ownership and commitment to government institutions like schools, and in improving outcomes.

Importantly, participation alone may not improve outcomes. Equal Education has made a definitive contribution in citizenship education, in creating avenues for

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participation, and in holding government to account. But, they are not the only public actors in the system, and as in the case of School Governing Bodies, participation absent education can generate worse outcomes, like those on school language policies and enrolment caps. Even on issues of ‘local’ knowledge, citizens don’t always have the information they need, as in the example of the Chris Hani protests. But, when the bureaucracies are themselves inexperienced, common in developmental states, technocratic citizen input can be highly useful as in the case of the EE textbooks video or libraries report (van Holdt 2010).

Still, this form of citizenship is not ideal. While Equal Education’s role in ‘translating’ government policy for community consumption is a necessary stopgap, it is the government’s responsibility—understood by both its representatives and their critics—to make themselves open and accessible to citizens. Government serves at the citizens’ behest. To communicate in inaccessible ways and to mask incompetence through inflated claims of expertise is a failure of duty. Moreover, the strategies used by government representatives to elide popular challenges posed on the grounds of technocratic expertise allows them to both dodge the question at hand and incorporate additional demands that citizens must embody in order to be taken seriously (e.g. they must cite struggle credentials, or demonstrate their direct stake in issues). In this manner, the same experiences that often get rejected because they are not ‘expert’—a student saying he lacks a desk, or a story of attending a school missing a wall—are smuggled back into the equation as additional hurdles that must be cleared.

Left unchallenged, this protean approach to citizen participation creates a standard that is nigh impossible to attain. The only citizens taken seriously are the super-citizens,

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those who have overcome dramatic disadvantage in order to know more than those who govern. This standard cannot be democratic. Those who lack the demanded identity are excluded pre-emptively. Those who possess the right set of characteristics and wish to participate are forced to turn to civil society organisations in the mould of Equal Education, which lack sufficient scale to empower more than a select few to meet the standards demanded by government representatives. While it is too early to tell how this approach of playing by the government's rules (at least some of the time) will work out in the long term, the aforementioned disadvantages raise the concerns posited by Wendy Brown's (1995) work on American social movements that made initial tradeoffs in favour of immediately productive outcomes, only to find their own strategies trapped them in ultimately destructive modes of existence later on.

Moreover, a necessity for technocratic engagement limits citizens' ability to participate fully on more than one issue. The capacity to know as much as is demanded on one issue is time-consuming and/or difficult, and most people are not singularly focused. Individuals who live at society's margins are both most affected by the quality of government services and least structurally likely to master information related to each. There may be some lessons here in Equal Education's network of allied groups mentioned in Chapter 2, which between them cover health, housing, sanitation, and education. The tight links and trust between the groups allow them to outsource the work that they cannot do for themselves to the others and have faith in the results. In this regard, it also makes sense that the organisations share many members as well as staff cross-overs.

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The above thoughts on the drawbacks of technocratic citizenship as a strategy of democratic participation are at this point mostly hypotheses. The tactics are at this point nascent, and further time and research is needed to understand the long-term impacts of this kind of democratic practice. What is clear, however, is that the case of Equal Education demonstrates that popular technocratic citizenship is not only possible, but often productive. While expertise is not the only grounds used by government to reject participation, it is one of the most enduring and difficult to counter. Technocratic government knowledge practices in South African education policy have been persistent over time, pervasive in scope, and pernicious in effect. Equal Education, through speaking truth to power in the manner of power, has shown it possible to blunt technocracy's antidemocratic tendencies, and reclaim them as a mode of empowerment.

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