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### Social Cohesion and Initial Teacher Education in South Africa<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

Initial teacher education (ITE) is a key focus in current policy particularly in respect to shaping student teachers' dispositions and capabilities to effect change within the systems they will work, and for the learners they will teach. Teachers' pedagogic strategies also mediate inequalities and continuities within the education system, linked to the schooling system and society they operate within. In South Africa, contextually relevant pedagogical strategies that address diversity, reconciliation, and promote social cohesion are crucial to enable initial teacher education to prepare teachers in this way (Sosibo, 2013). This paper draws on data from a case study of an ITE programme at one higher education institution (HEI) in South Africa. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with students and lecturers, focus groups, documentary analysis, and a survey of initial teacher educators, and was part of a large-scale study that focused on teachers as agents of social cohesion in South Africa (Sayed et al., 2015). Specifically, it considers how student teachers are prepared to enact social cohesion in the classroom. The paper concludes by discussing several implications of the research for ITE in South Africa.

Keywords: social cohesion, initial teacher education, pedagogy, South Africa, education policy

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#### Introduction

Initial teacher education (ITE) is a key focus in current education policy in South Africa, including how student teachers' dispositions and capabilities are shaped to effect change within the systems they

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will work, as well as for the learners they will teach. It is claimed that teachers' pedagogic strategies mediate inequalities and continuities within the education system, and that this is linked to the schooling system and society they operate within. To explore this policy focus, this paper examines how student teachers in an ITE programme at one higher education institution (HEI) in South Africa are prepared and trained to enact social cohesion in the classroom, and how this is done through the particular pedagogic strategies and practices that they are taught. The paper discusses the implications of this for the curriculum (or for the programme) in the context of humanising teacher pedagogies.

The data on which the paper is based drew on observations of lecturers in the ITE programme, as well as from focus group discussions and individual semi-structured interviews<sup>2</sup> with staff and students. It also drew from a cohort survey on social cohesion (SCS) and teacher education at the HEI. The paper further utilises data from semi-structured interviews that were conducted with senior policy makers and officials from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on the topic of social cohesion.

The paper starts by outlining the policy context within which measures to effect social cohesion in education is articulated in South Africa. This is followed by a brief review of how social cohesion has been addressed within the evolution of teacher education policy in South Africa, and an exploration of the interrelationship between education, pedagogy, and social cohesion. This context provides the background for a detailed analysis of how student teachers are prepared to become agents of social cohesion within the ITE programme at the noted HEI. The conclusion highlights several emerging themes from the research, exploring more pointedly the dialectic between critical pedagogies within ITE and the realities of schooling in South Africa, and between individual agency and structural constraints in a deeply unequal society.

## The South African Policy Approach to Social Cohesion

In South Africa, the current macro *National Development Plan (NDP) 2030* (National Planning Commission, 2013) as well as the *Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) of 2014–2019* (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation [DPME], 2014) underscore the importance of addressing inequalities and enhancing social cohesion within society. Whilst the thrust of the NDP may be mainly geared towards economic growth, it is notable that education and social cohesion are articulated as key supporting mechanisms. There is an entire chapter (Chapter 2) devoted to nation building and social cohesion:

*The NDP's vision for 2030 is that South Africans should have access to training and education of the highest quality, characterised by significantly improved learning outcomes. Education then becomes an important instrument in equalising individuals' life chances, ensuring economic mobility and success and advancing our key goals of economic growth, employment creation, poverty eradication and the reduction in inequality (DPME, 2014, p. 1).*

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<sup>2</sup> INTERVIEWS:

Interview A. (2015): Interviews with Lecturer 1 (18 May & 19 May 2015).

Interview B. (2015): Interviews with Lecturer 2 (21 May 2015 & 8 June 2015).

Interview C. (2015): Interview with Lecturer 3 (27 July 2015).

Interview D. (2015): Interview with Student Teacher (23 September 2015).

Interview E. (2015): Interview with SCS (May 2015, as cited in Sayed et al., 2015)

*South Africa's own history and the experiences of other countries show that unity and social cohesion are necessary to meet social and economic objectives (NCP, 2013, p. 25).*

The NDP identifies several actions as necessary to promote social cohesion in education. These include enabling learners to read the preamble of the Constitution (1996) in different languages at school assemblies, ensuring representation through the sharing of common spaces across race and class, and encouraging citizens to actively participate in different local committees, boards, and forums (NCP, 2013).

This view of social cohesion is similarly evident within the MTSF. The MTSF is the government's strategic plan for the 2014–2019 electoral term, and reflects the commitments made in the election manifesto of the governing party, specifically how to implement the goals of the NDP. For example, Outcome 1 on basic education suggests that the introduction of African languages in schools will foster social cohesion, while Outcome 14 of the MTSF advocates nation building as a key element within social cohesion initiatives (DPME, 2014). Outcome 14 identifies 31 actions that will assist in achieving this, grouped under five subcategories. These include fostering constitutional values, equal opportunities, inclusion and redress, promoting social cohesion across society through increased interaction across race and class, promoting active citizenry and leadership, and fostering a social compact.

In terms of ministries tasked with actions associated with Outcome 14 of the MTSF, the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) was given the responsibility in 2012 to develop the *National Strategy for Developing an Inclusive and a Cohesive South African Society* (DAC, 2012) as a way of providing an overall definitional and operational view of social cohesion. It noted: "Social cohesion is defined as the degree of social integration and inclusion in communities and society at large, and the extent to which mutual solidarity finds expression itself among individuals and communities" (DAC, 2012, p. 30). More specifically, the DAC conceived of social cohesion as when a "society of people with diverse origins, histories, languages, cultures and religions come together" as equals "within the boundaries of a sovereign state with a unified constitutional and legal dispensation, a national public education system, an integrated national economy, [and] shared symbols and values" (DAC, 2012, p. 30). This focus on nation building and developing a society of people was regarded as a key way of "eradicating the divisions and injustices of the past; to foster unity; and promote a countrywide sense of being proudly South African, with everyone committed to the country and open to the continent and the world" (DAC, 2012, p. 30). A cohesive society, according to DAC, could only be achieved if there was a reduction or elimination of inequalities and exclusions within South African society, as well as close cooperation between citizens to develop shared goals that would improve the living conditions for all.

In terms of the ministries tasked with enacting this approach to social cohesion, the NDP and MTSF regarded the Department of Basic Education (DBE) as playing the foremost role. This ministry had historically played a key role in debates about social cohesion, most visibly in the Directorate for Race and Values within DBE in the 2000s. Notably, the directorate was reestablished in 2011 as the Directorate for Social Cohesion and Equity in Education with a much broader position on the intersections between race, class, and gender, with the aim to overcome social exclusion, and whose work is much more closely tied to the DBE's overall long-term plan, two midterm plans, and annual sector plans. *Action Plan to 2019: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030* (DBE, 2015a), for example, detailed the overall direction of the basic education sector to achieve the goals set out in the NDP, in the MTSF, *Five-Year Strategic Plan 2015/16–2019/20* (DBE, 2015b), and in the *Annual Performance Plan, 2015–2016* (DBE, 2014). Crucially, the focus on social cohesion within the DBE's plans from 2011 was tightly aligned to NDP and MTSF priorities.

In the above regard, a number of approaches to social cohesion and the role of education within the policy documents are evident. First, all the noted policy documents treat social cohesion as a societal issue rather than that of individual capacity. This is linked to the need to promote positive relationships, trust, solidarity, inclusion, collectivity, and common purpose. Second, the documents regard social cohesion initiatives as a necessary response to historical legacies of inequality and as part of overcoming income and other forms of inequality. Improved social cohesion would be achieved, the documents argue, by addressing structural, interpersonal, and intergroup domains. Third, the policy texts take a very normative view of social cohesion whereby the lack thereof presumably will lead to a state of anomie, crisis, and disorder, and where integration will play a positive normalising role (Barolsky, 2013). Fourth, the documents highlight a close link between social cohesion initiatives and nation building discourses (Freemantle, 2012, p.2). In this respect, social cohesion is mainly seen as promoting citizenship, patriotism, and nationhood, and as the main or only denominator that bonds citizens. Fifth, the documents approach social cohesion as assimilationist under the ideal of the *rainbow nation*, with identity often presented as homogenised and generalised (Carrim, 1998).

Several challenges and tensions emerge from the approach to social cohesion evident in policy. To start, in instances where social cohesion initiatives narrowly focus on overcoming income and other such forms of inequality, the preoccupation invariably can be on how to foster stability and consensus in an environment that is seen to threaten the economic market system. In such instances, the problem is how to foster social cohesion and the building of a common citizenry to redress inequalities while avoiding the inclination to overly focus on developing a positive correlation between economic development and social wellbeing (Shuayb, 2012). Secondly, in most international contexts, positioning social cohesion in close alignment to nationhood has rarely translated into acceptable forms of social justice. It remains difficult, if not impossible, to promote citizenship, patriotism, and nationhood while at the same time specifically targeting the needs of one large group, especially when they are the socially disadvantaged and have been so for a considerably long time. Lastly, adopting an assimilationist approach to social cohesion and encouraging acceptance of a unity narrative can promote reticence and silence in the face of ongoing injustice. How to promote togetherness while directly confronting the trauma of inequality and injustice is a difficult and discomfiting balancing act; especially so in an environment where calls to promote a national cohesive identity while respecting diversity run the danger of reifying group identities that were consolidated in particular ways under apartheid.

Within the above South African policy context, government initiatives that promote integration for social cohesion have situated education as a field of engagement that should intentionally focus on ameliorating ruptures in the social, and ensure that notions of diversity are tied together within a single narrative of unity and togetherness. Efforts to engage social justice and diversity crucially rest on education. In this respect, teachers have an important role to play, and how they teach is a crucial part of the promotion of social cohesion in the classroom.

In the two sections below, the South African teacher education policy context is briefly described, and then followed by a discussion of how teacher pedagogies can be conceptualised with regard to promoting social cohesion in the classroom. This provides the background for a detailed analysis of how student teachers are prepared to become agents of social cohesion within an ITE programme at one South African higher education institution.

## The South African Teacher Education Policy Context

Apartheid policies exacerbated qualification imbalances associated with teacher education in the colonial period. Essentially, the demand and supply of teachers was based on “the need to maintain racial and ethnic segregation” (Sayed, 2002, p. 382). The postapartheid government’s transformation plan envisioned major modifications to both the governance and curricula of teacher education in order to shift qualification structures and their requirements (Council of Higher Education [CHE], 2010, p. 9). Governance and the curricula of teacher education was considered essential to bring about redress, equity, efficiency, and quality within teacher education, and in preparing teachers to implement the new school curriculum that was introduced (CHE, 2010, p. 9). To this end, several policies were promulgated, the most significant of which are discussed below.

The *Norms and Standards for Educators* (NSE) was gazetted in 2000 by the Department of Education (DoE, 2000). Since then all teacher education providers in South Africa have been required to implement the policy and align their programmes accordingly (DoE, 2000). The policy provided the overarching framework for initial teacher education programmes, as well as specifying all requirements attached to education-related qualifications up to doctoral or NQF 10 level. It also specified the applied competence and associated assessment criteria for educators (DoE, 2000, p. 10), and prescribed seven roles that higher education institutions had to emphasise when preparing student teachers. With regard to social cohesion, two of these roles encompassed requirements for teachers to be agents of social cohesion, namely those of “learning mediator” and playing a “community, citizenship and pastoral role” (DoE, 2000, p. 65). Notably, teacher education providers were given significant freedom to decide and design how to integrate the roles and competencies within the modules and programmes that they each offered.

This was followed by the *National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development* (NPFTED) in 2007 (DoE, 2007), which sought to better align policy around the need for “more teachers; better teachers” (p.1) in the system. However, this attempt to generate more and better teachers was severely limited by the financing available for teacher education at that time, the low status of the profession, poor working conditions, and limited salaries (Chisholm, 2009).

In 2011, the NSE was replaced by the *Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications* (MRTEQ) policy (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2011), with teacher education programmes aligned to the Higher Education Qualification Framework (DHET, 2011, p. 9). The MRTEQ emphasised the development of academic skills and knowledge amongst student teachers within particular qualification knowledge mixes. But, much like the NSE, it did not prescribe for teacher education providers the details, pedagogies, theories, and structures that they needed to adhere to when implementing these knowledge mixes within programmes. “After much consideration” (Interview E, SCS, 2015, in Sayed et al., 2015) the MRTEQ policy chose not to “prescribe” for teacher education providers a specific or fixed curriculum (Sayed et al., 2015), even though it had developed a “framework within which you can get universities to collaborate” (Interview E, SCS, 2015). The DHET view at the time was that rather than “impose standards,” “collaboration and the process of sharing” between teacher education providers (Interview E, SCS, 2015) would lead to better quality teacher education. The DHET did, however, posit the need to establish commonly accepted curricular that each ITE programme would cover in terms of knowledge and practice.

MRTEQ (DHET, 2011) was updated in 2015 to the *Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications* (DHET, 2015), where it was revised and realigned with the amended 2008 *National Qualifications Framework* (DHET, 2013). Notably, the changes were mainly technical in nature and

did not shift in any significant way the broader framework related to particular knowledge mixes, nor the ways in which the “learning mediator” and “community, citizen and pastoral” roles are articulated (DHET, 2011, pp. 52–53, 2015, pp. 60–61).

## Education, Pedagogy and Social Cohesion

Conceptually, teacher pedagogy may be analytically conceived of as either having an explicit focus on social cohesion with specific pedagogic approaches, or as subsuming the goals of social cohesion less visibly within a particular pedagogical framework. Drawing this distinction brings together implicit pedagogic approaches that are generic in nature and assume that teacher pedagogy for social cohesion forms a part of the overall pedagogic approach to the management of classrooms or group work. Similarly, a generic approach such as that proposed by Dupuy (2008), for example, suggests that peace-oriented pedagogy ought to be characterised by general pedagogic methods such as cooperative learning, critical thinking, participation, and dialogue.

In contrast to generic pedagogic approaches, critical pedagogic approaches foreground strategies that embody the building of conflict management, conflict resolution, and mediation skills that foster resilience as well as engage critically with diverse identities and belongings that in different contexts are drivers of conflict. Critical pedagogy advocates the use of strategies and policies to challenge individual subjectivities and investment in systems of privilege and racial and other forms of domination and inequality in society. This approach is particularly relevant to the South African context given that racial stereotyping associated with domination and subordination persists. For the paper, critical pedagogy approaches provide a lens through which the data from the noted ITE programme is examined.

Critical pedagogy resonates with, and draws from, Paulo Freire’s (1998) work on the goal of humanising pedagogy for social cohesion. Freire argued for a politics of hope founded on the presumption that human beings have the capacity to overcome and transcend the imposed narratives of their subjectivities. For Freire an oppressor is not simply an individual, but rather a social position that is constructed to deny the humanity of another. Freire (1993) argued that oppression can be disrupted when individuals cross boundaries to affirm their humanity, for example, when they participate in (re)constructing themselves and their worlds in ways that affirm the humanity of others. Freire further noted that the key mechanism for disrupting existing subjectivities is reflection. This is the process by which subjects bring acts of oppression and insights into critical consciousness, and then combine them with action. For Freire, action has to be a reflective preoccupation if it is to be fully human (Irwin, 2012). And as such, the relationship between the individual and the world needs to be dialectical if pedagogy is to bridge the gap between thought and action (Freire, 1993). By advocating a humanist sense of generosity rather than a humanitarian stance, Freire argued that a dialectical relationship between reflection and praxis serves as a form of counter-hegemonic adaptation, rather than mere acceptance of social realities.

The term *humanising pedagogy* more recently has been recast by Zinn, Porteus, & Keet (2009) to specifically address education in post-conflict peace building. In this regard, in their review of peace building in education, Gill and Niens (2014) suggested that a humanising pedagogy needs to tap into its potential to redress processes of dehumanisation that are at the root of societal violence. Their review suggests that where inequities lead to forms of exclusion and marginalisation, peace building education can be dialogic, humanising, and transformative, and incorporate in practice elements of critical reflection and dialogue, inquiry-based learning, and the building of authentic relationships.

A key drawback for the adoption of critical pedagogic approaches, however, is that it may impose an erroneous conceptual division between oppression and anti-oppression, and the moral categories of good and bad. Yoon (2005), for example, cautioned that assuming a position based on forms of moral and ethical sensibilities, predisposed to alleviating the suffering and struggles of the oppressed, can easily compromise teacher pedagogies and advocacy and allow for slippage from dialogue to imposition. Yoon noted that it is often assumed that teachers' learning about social justice would identify and internalise feelings of appreciation, reward, and actualisation, and a focus on support, care, recognition, and salvation. This is based on moralistic arguments, "noble" sentiments, and envisaged demonstrations of commitment.

To counter this, a constructivist approach may help to address identities, social categories, and their cultural meanings, and provide an important first step in a pedagogical dialogue. The problem though is that it could also easily fail to disrupt "us and them" perceptions of collectives and how to (re)humanise the other. As such, we propose an explicit approach that foregrounds practice and embeds critical theory at the practical level. Shuayb (2012) observed, for example, that the implementation of dialogic approaches to history education in the classroom, such as perspective taking, listening, and critical thinking, as well as applied citizenship education, may offer important ways of promoting social solidarity.

In this respect, Zembylas and Boler's (2002) notion of *pedagogy of discomfort* offers a useful critical device to not only disrupt and renegotiate notions of comfort and well-being, but also to challenge educators to find alternative and innovative ways of responding to students existing subjectivities. For Zembylas (2013), a humanising pedagogy that focuses on reflection and praxis requires discomfort in order to problematise subjectivity. It needs children to experience "some degree of injustice in order to fully empathise with those who are constantly subject to it" (Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012, p. 53). It is in the process of experiencing discomfort that learners are afforded an opportunity within the classroom to negotiate solidarity and knowledge of the self. Because these are difficult processes, they need the classroom to be a safe space to tackle uncomfortable topics and issues. They also need issues of power in the classroom to be completely disassociated from safety (Amsler, 2011).

In the latter regard, Zembylas & McGlynn (2012) asserted that pedagogies of discomfort require concrete strategies in the classroom that give learners the opportunity to reflect, enact, and connect. For this, Zembylas & McGlynn (2012) provided concrete examples of strategies, such as the "Blue-Eyed, Brown-Eyed" exercise activity (Zembylas & McGlynn, 2012), that introduce learners to pedagogies of discomfort. Such pedagogies entail teachers presenting alternative perspectives that often are contrary to their own or those of their surrounding communities and remind them that they may lack empathy themselves with these divergent views (Barton & McCully, 2012).

It is argued in this paper that by introducing student teachers in ITE programmes to such critical pedagogies, especially where such pedagogies of discomfort are enacted for them, that they would be capacitated in ways that cause them to reflect on their own pedagogic approaches and to carefully think of how to enact social cohesion in their own classrooms.

### **Social Cohesion and Pedagogy in an Initial Teacher Education Programme**

In this section we review how initial teacher education programmes in South Africa engage with pedagogy and social cohesion in relation to the discussion above, focusing on the qualitative data obtained from interviews with teacher educators and students as well as data garnered from surveys with students.

The ITE programme was offered at a higher education institution that did not have a particularly diverse student population, and provided a perspective of how inequality and difference was understood at a historically privileged institution. The ITE programme was in line with the MRTEQ and foregrounded teaching about difference and inequality within specific modules of the ITE curriculum. In terms of the ITE student cohort, students came from predominantly well-off urban or semi-urban areas and included male and female students in both primary and secondary school phases of the ITE programme. As part of the programme, before beginning the course, student teachers spend 2 weeks observing classes at a preferred school. This is followed by a densely packed programme that includes lectures throughout the year, tutorials for specific subject courses, and a teaching practicum component.

In terms of the ITE programme and how it is organised and conceptualised to position student teachers to be agents of change and social cohesion, this paper considers below a number of features about the logic of the programme as it relates to social cohesion, how it seeks to empower students with the resources and strategies for enacting critical pedagogy pedagogies, and its effects on students' knowledge and understanding of social cohesion.

Firstly, the programme is designed in such a way that the different modules are each organised around six key questions within a spiral learning design, while being sequentially linked to each other in a progression from language and learning theory, to professionalism and social positioning. This fits in with the overall aim of the programme, which is to build upon students' awareness over time towards stronger reflections on identity and difference, beginning with a focus on language and different experiences of education within the wider context of South Africa. In interviews with lecturers, for example, they noted that the programme is specifically designed to first develop individual transformation and growth and then get students to engage with aspects of systemic change. They felt that it is only when student teachers meaningfully change in their personal capacities and thinking, that they would be able to contribute to institutional transformation and social cohesion initiatives. As such, a significant part of the programme is focused on encouraging them to articulate their learning processes in a democratic and participatory way, with a strong emphasis on peer feedback, critique, and collegiality.

This design approach is premised on the idea of *powerful knowledge* (Young, 2013), and the work of socioconstructivist thinkers such as Vygotsky (1978). Lecturers observed that the programme is specifically designed around chosen educational theories and that the modules are used to generate thinking and learning tools through scaffolding, reflection, and talk. This focus on theory has particular implications for how social cohesion and social justice discussions are dealt with, as well as for the more practical questions on teaching and pedagogy. As one lecturer put it:

*I would say all of us are passionate about transformation and equality. I think the programme achieves that through the [core education] course, okay, through the theoretical tools we give the students. I think they are incredibly powerful, you know, we teach them about apartheid, the history of apartheid and the curriculum development and what failed and what succeeded etc., because these are born frees we're teaching so they didn't grow up in apartheid and don't have a sense of historicity and the impact this has [ . . . ] so we definitely do that on the XXX [core education module]. We give them wonderful theoretical resources to fall back on but another aspect, on a more practical level is the teaching practicum. I think that, you know, getting them to go into less resourced schools as a requirement is useful in opening their eyes to the reality of teaching in South Africa, to the reality of the challenges. So I think we succeed on that*

*level but certainly, I feel most strongly that we deal with issues of social justice and social cohesion in our theoretical courses. (Interview A, 2015)*

A second feature of the programme is its explicit intent to challenge the different understandings of student teachers about social cohesion, especially as it relates to inequity in the South African context. As two lecturers observed:

*I really try to get our students to reflect on why it is that English is so dominant, and why it is that African languages are so marginalised and not respected, and you know, how much advantage English gives to people (Interview B, 2015).*

*Umm, I think that the problem is that we are still such a racially segregated society, and that post apartheid, there has never been a moment where those who were advantaged, privileged, by the system, have had an opportunity, or if you don't want to call it an opportunity, whatever you want to call it, have had to confront their own advantage. It's as if, you know, we just want everybody to come into the fold of white middle class and everyone has the same, and it doesn't work like that. So I think that everybody needs to engage in how they were part of the past and in how that influences their present, and we don't really have any processes to do that. So for me that is a huge challenge (Interview C, 2015).*

A third feature of the programme is the generation of resources and pedagogies within modules that student teachers may use and enact in their own teaching, especially with regard to promoting social change and social cohesion. One subject lecturer stressed the need to capacitate student teachers by providing them with resources to use in the classroom, as well as sharing with them specific pedagogical strategies that support learner-centred instruction. The following lengthy quote reflects some of the approaches and strategies used by lecturers in the programme to provide students with resources and approaches to effecting social cohesion in the classroom:

*One of the things that I feel has been successful, and we're still working on it, but is to try and use some of, I mean for me it's come from Sam Wineburg<sup>3</sup> and from his very explicit teaching strategies of saying, well lets actually, you know, how do we work with sources, with students whose language is a barrier to learning and so be it using template, be it using specific ways into text. . . . what I've tried to do in the methods is provide strategies that will be practical, that help get to those core issues that for me that are preventing powerful knowledge. Now that doesn't deal with a lot of the, I mean what we were talking about earlier about the historical consciousness and identity of students, I mean that's a very discipline based way of doing it.*

*So one of the other things that we've done a lot of is things like silent conversations, getting students to either through text and writing it that way, or through objects and he's actually practically giving people time to read, to think, to formulate questions, trying to get, give the students strategies which will allow in their classroom other people to have a voice so that it's not that just that immediately, you know, you ask the*

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<sup>3</sup> The interviewee is referring to an article about schooling in the USA (Wineburg, 1991), which informs her approach to teaching in the programme.

*question three hands go up immediately the conversation is always drawn to those, so trying to give them very practical ways to get other people involved. (Interview B, 2015)*

Together, these features show how the programme has been thoughtfully conceptualised and organised and how it has sought to address issues of social cohesion. Notably, however, notwithstanding its focus on empowering student teachers to become agents of social cohesion, a key weakness in the programme lies in how it engages with, and integrates, the social and personal realities of different student teachers into the logic of the programme. There are several important findings in this respect that warrant attention. First, from observations conducted in ITE classes, it is quite evident that groups of students mix with each other in ways that reinforce divisions based on race, gender, and programme streaming (primary/secondary). While it is admittedly difficult to socially engineer such spaces, the opportunity to encourage the development of pedagogical approaches that address such awkward realities, is invariably lost.

Second, from a survey undertaken amongst student teachers about their knowledge and understanding of social cohesion (Table 1), it was found that student teachers hold quite generic and conventional views of the term. When asked which two words they most closely identified with social cohesion, they overwhelmingly wrote “respect” and “understanding.” Few responses identified social cohesion with social justice ideals such as recognition, redistribution, justice, or even reconciliation.

**Table 1: Student teachers’ 2-word associations for “social cohesion”**

2-Word associations for “social cohesion” (%)			
More frequent		Less frequent	
Respect	44%	Recognition	7%
Understanding	25%	Community	7%
No response	19%	Harmony	5%
Ubuntu	18%	Nation building	5%
Acceptance	14%	Peace	4%
Togetherness	14%	Justice	4%
Communication	12%	Redistribution	3%
Equality	11%	Reconciliation	1%
Cooperation	7%	Total	200%

Third, student teachers in the programme are provided with a number of techniques and resources to teach in diverse schooling environments via the crossover practicum (which is a form of teaching practice in which they are assigned to diverse school contexts including less and more well resourced schools). In the research we surveyed students teachers’ views about their experiences of the opportunities provided to apply their knowledge and understanding of social cohesion in practice. Table 2 below provides these findings and shows that student teachers found the experience of teaching in diverse settings in particular quite valuable, but not as useful as compared to other aspects. Importantly, 21% of those surveyed did not have the opportunity during the programme to experience teaching in a diverse classroom setting.

**Table 2: Student teachers' views on the skills developed during the programme**

	Not useful	Slightly useful	Quite useful	Very useful	Not experienced	Experienced but not rated	No response	Total	Quite or very useful
<b>Observation</b>	0%	10%	42%	45%	0%	3%	0%	100%	87%
<b>Mentoring</b>	3%	8%	44%	35%	7%	3%	0%	100%	80%
<b>Feedback</b>	0%	8%	30%	55%	4%	3%	0%	100%	85%
<b>Different classroom</b>	0%	2%	30%	60%	4%	4%	0%	100%	90%
<b>Code of conduct</b>	1%	22%	36%	25%	15%	1%	0%	100%	61%
<b>Classroom management</b>	1%	16%	36%	32%	14%	1%	0%	100%	68%
<b>Lesson planning</b>	1%	14%	36%	43%	4%	1%	1%	100%	78%
<b>Learner assessment</b>	1%	18%	41%	30%	7%	2%	1%	100%	71%
<b>Diverse classroom</b>	4%	18%	31%	25%	21%	1%	0%	100%	57%
<b>Multilingual setting</b>	7%	15%	18%	21%	38%	1%	0%	100%	39%

Crucially though, even though they regarded the crossover practicum as valuable, many student teachers did not feel empowered by the experience. In that regard, learning about social cohesion within a programme may not necessarily prepare student teachers enough for the particular realities of schooling in South Africa, often leaving them in shock and with feelings of serious discomfort about their otherness. While these were important experiences, as noted below, such engagements with social reality often limit the teaching and pedagogical ambitions of student teachers. As one student put it:

*My experiences in the township, that really made me think a lot about my identity and my racial background and how it plays into who I am as a teacher and how my privilege, you know, has defined my life [ . . . ] I always just keep coming back to the fact that because they've been where they've been born and their social economic status is what it is, they have had to end up in the township where they have a 40% matric pass rate and if I go to a private school, you know, because of the wealth that they were born in to, 100% pass rate [ . . . ] and they are just 10 or 20 kilometres apart, and that always, for me, is just that immediate symbol of how social cohesion is not happening at the moment and that when you walk through the township I was the, very often, the only white person that I could see. (Interview D, 2015)*

While many student teachers become acutely aware of the hard realities of impoverished schools and the urgent need to realise social justice goals in their work and their agency in this, often the

exposure for many student teachers to the difficulties of such contexts undermines their commitment to social cohesion. As one student noted in response to a question about where she would most likely go to teach after the course, “Sadly, I think I will teach in a Model C school” (Interview E, 2015).

Fourth, while ITE programmes invariably provide student teachers with innovative and theoretically grounded insights on subject content knowledge and teaching pedagogies, the realities of schools in South Africa inevitably ensure that much of what student teachers learn in the programmes are quickly lost and subsumed by conventional school cultures. As one lecturer noted:

*What I hear from the students is that mediation and scaffolding and developmental teaching is just the bomb. What do I see? In general I see didactic teaching; they teach the way they were taught, I mean at school, in general that's what I see but I do see some instances of, I do see some different instances—so every teaching prac, maybe one or two out of the eight I see will be doing developmental stuff, will be pushing students beyond what they can do, will be giving them tasks that build scaffolding in. I don't think it's a general uptake—I think they grab the theory, I think they dig the theory, I think they think this is the way to do it but there is something about teaching that makes us default to how we were taught. (Interview A, 2015)*

Utilising the lessons from ITE programmes is even more difficult for student teachers in less resourced schools, with most ITE programmes invariably not providing students with specific tools or strategies to counter the prevalence of generic approaches and preferences for “chalk and talk.” Many student teachers at less resourced schools noted that without being trained in very particular ways on how to teach difficult and dense materials and debates, time constraints often meant that they would gloss over things and not develop the pedagogical techniques that were often needed to promote social cohesion.

Crucially, the above four points offer important observations about key disconnects between initial teacher education programmes and the social and personal realities of different kinds of student teachers that undermine the commitment of student teachers to enact, and commit to, the pedagogies and approaches they acquire in their training. As such, it seems evident that student teachers need to experience and witness actual critical pedagogy teaching strategies that mirror school realities of changing school contexts, and are exposed to concrete and modelled teaching strategies that help them translate taught approaches into specific pedagogic practices. Also, it seems noteworthy that the experiences of student teachers always be recognised as a reflection of their individual histories of division and privilege within the wider society; something that they bring into training programmes. In that regard, student teacher experiences of the programme are inevitably punctuated by their prior experiences of being raced, classed, and gendered in unequal and somewhat segregated spaces. Lastly, it is necessary to ensure that the enthusiasm of student teachers to effect change does not get trapped by school cultures that are deeply authoritarian and conservative, and to assist them to mediate these and other tensions as they enter the world of teaching. The next section turns its attention to more general lessons that emerged from the research.

## Conclusion

As is evident in the case study described above, the preparation of student teachers is often less about what is taught in ITE programmes and more about the many stark realities of schooling in South Africa. Preparing student teachers in South Africa to be the teachers of the next generation

often sits very uncomfortably alongside the need to help them to simply cope within the ambit of public schooling. Also, while many teachers often may want to commit to be agents of social cohesion, especially after learning about issues like diversity and race in and through education, many become quickly aware that they are simply expected to fit into the system and fulfil a particular function. Furthermore, what the case study illustrates is that a transformative social cohesion agenda in schools and at universities is unlikely in policy environments that deal with issues of diversity and difference in fragmented and individualistic ways.

Indeed, in drawing the paper to a close, a number of interrelated issues regarding ITE, social cohesion, and pedagogy need noting and emphasis.

First, it seems self-evident that it is in the teaching practicum, and in particular the crossover practicum, that there exist key pedagogical opportunities to enable student teacher agency to promote social cohesion. It is, in fact, in the crossover practicum that student teachers can be best helped to expand and develop a range of teaching strategies to apply in different contexts. This can even be extended to how the teaching practicum is organised: where student teachers could be assessed on how much they sought to reduce social exclusion and address inequalities in the classroom, or fundamentally address the learning needs of all students. Such initiatives would be especially helpful if the aim within ITE programmes is to open student teachers' eyes to diverse school contexts in South Africa. The big challenge, however, is that many student teachers continue to resist being placed in schools where they feel uncomfortable, or where they don't want to be. This not only prevents many student teachers from being properly prepared for teaching in challenging environments, but reinforces a racial and class dimension within their training (Robinson & Zinn, 2007).

Second, it seems necessary to ensure that social cohesion is firmly and coherently embedded within ITE programmes in South Africa, and that greater attention is paid to cultural diversity. Currently, social cohesion within ITE provision often lacks coherence, is not comprehensive, and is invariably added onto ITE programmes (Sosibo, 2013). Also, for many students social cohesion, multiculturalism, and diversity remain tied to the curriculum and are invariably not experienced in their everyday learning. If student teachers do not experience social cohesion within their own tertiary learning, it seems less likely that they would address this in their classrooms. Sosibo (2013) noted the following views of students in her study:

*We rarely ever practice diversity [in social interactions on campus]. We don't mingle but we sit in groups according to our race and gender. Even when we do group work, we stick to our own. Lecturers don't integrate us and those who try to mingle us, don't succeed (p. 14).*

Third, it seems apparent that education in post-conflict and traumatised societies should be partly underpinned by a principle of *mutual vulnerability* and should be central to all humanising pedagogies (Zinn, Porteus, & Keet, 2009). As such, it would be necessary to create opportunities within ITE programmes for critical reflection and processes of disclosure. In this regard, Zembylas, (2005) noted that students often need to find ways to engage with their own investments in systems of power and privilege, and have to experience a pedagogy of discomfort in order to develop a counter narrative for themselves. Countering situations where experience and social class unequally shape and inhibit teacher agency in South Africa is thus crucial, as according to Amsler (2011), dominant groups generally prefer simplified mythologised realities and foster an avoidance of ambiguity by making "critique, difference, otherness and resistance into alienating, isolating and

virtually sacrificial practices” (p. 56 ). All too regularly, observed Amsler (2011), teachers enact their agency in spaces that remain segmented and separated with tools that are shaped by experience and institution, and in ways that are productive in as much as they are barren.

Lastly, there is a need for ITE programme designs to better articulate their understandings of agency for change and agency. With regard to the former, it is always good to question what is being changed, what is the nature of that change, why, and how. These are important questions to ask about teacher preparation because there is a clear tension between whether teachers are prepared for their own sense of purpose and their personal development and whether their training should be firmly tied to the practices of a social justice agenda. With regard to the latter, ITE programmes need to acknowledge the extent to which agency is constrained by the conditions and regulatory environments of schools, as well as by the constraints of teaching-to-the-test and authoritarian and paternalistic attitudes within schools. Indeed, by articulating a more multilayered view of agency, ITE programmes could help student teachers look for spaces and teachable moments to create learning possibilities and, in so doing, be agents of social cohesion.

These points serve as some practical ways in which social cohesion within ITE programmes can be addressed. In South Africa, currently, there is a dire need to confront issues of race, racial identity, and diversity in ITE and to directly tackle implicit and explicit segregation and enduring and persistent forms of inequality. In this, student teachers need to be supported to become teachers who understand that their own identities are situated in particular structural conjunctures, and that their future pedagogies need to move beyond a politics of avoidance that precludes discussion of group and individual investments in systems of privilege. In that respect, there is little doubt that the current system of teacher education in South Africa requires a systematic approach to social cohesion rooted in a framework of transformative social justice. For this, an important starting point would be for teacher education providers to come together and agree on a common ITE curriculum embedded within a social justice agenda.

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