Reading 3

Teachers, identities, and space

Heather Jacklin

The history of teaching in South Africa has been one in which the most significant single factor has been the enormous differences in the experiences of teachers – dependent primarily on whether they were identified as 'black', 'coloured', 'Asiatic', or 'white'; male or female; rural-, township-, or suburban-based, and so on.

In this article, Heather Jacklin analyses how such factors have affected – and still affect – the identities and experiences of teachers in South Africa. She uses a sociological approach that draws attention to the importance of people's **perceptions** in creating the **realities** that teachers (and learners) experience on a daily basis. However, she does not suggest that in order to solve the problems of inequality in education and teaching, all that needs to be done is to change people's perceptions.

As you read this, think of how the reading does or doesn't reflect your own perceptions of history. Does Jacklin's argument make sense?

Reading

The key dimensions of the argument

The experiences of teachers are different depending on who they are and where they live. This article explains these differences in relation to teachers and develops the following arguments:

First, identities are not fixed, something that is simply 'there' from birth. They arise from the **meanings** that people attach to different races, genders, classes and so on, as well as from the ways in which society is organized. For example, in the past, women teachers could not occupy perma-

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nent teaching posts in some South African education departments, nor could they obtain housing loans. These arrangements were based on commonly held ideas about women's identities and the relationship between their domestic and professional duties. They were also expressed in official regulations.

In other words, people's identities are constructed both at the level of *ideas and meanings* (for example, women are seen as 'caregivers', not as administrators) and at the level of *social practice* (women end up filling lower positions in the education hierarchy).

Second, relations of power strongly influence how identities are constructed and how differences between people are defined. There are many ways of understanding power. In this context, it may usefully be thought of as access to social resources […]

This means that, in the first instance, various groupings within society would tend to use whatever forms of power are available to them to organize society and social institutions in line with *their* ideas about *which identities* are significant. The conflict around access to some historically white schools in parts of South Africa provides an example. The governing bodies of these schools argue that student identities should be defined in terms of their 'culture', which is overtly based on language and covertly based on race. They also argue that this provides a legitimate basis for defining who could or could not have access to such schools. Such governing bodies feel that it is in their interests to ensure that a white minority continues to exclude black learners from well-resourced, historically white schools. The students who are excluded, and the education department, argue that language differences are not relevant to access to a particular school. It is in the interests of the students to gain access to well-resourced schools and it is in the interests of the education department to reorganize access to schools in line with a new political dispensation that aims to deracialize society.

overtly: publicly, apparently

covertly: implicitly, secretly

Various groupings within society do use whatever forms of power are available to them to assert their understanding of a particular identity. Dominant ideas would show themselves in the way society is organized. Those who are socially subordinate may accept and internalize these ideas, or they may resist them and produce alternative understandings of identities that challenge their subordination. In all these cases, constructions of identity would be related to what particular groups perceive to be in their interests.

This does not mean to say that people consciously choose between different views or 'arguments'. In most cases, people's understandings and choices are limited by the sets of meanings to which they have previously been exposed. For example, if they have been exposed to racist explanations and beliefs all their lives, they may find it very difficult

to see things differently, or to relate to others in a non-racial way.

People would also not necessarily agree as to which definitions of identity and difference best serve their interests in a particular context. In the mid-nineties, for example, there was a dispute between black teachers belonging to different political groupings within Khayelitsha, a historically black area within Cape Town. All the groups aimed to ensure that their jobs would remain secure when the education system was desegregated. Some believed that only black teachers should be employed in Khayelitsha, so that jobs previously held by black teachers would not be lost to teachers from other racially defined groupings. Others believed that teacher selection should be based on professional merit, not race, so that black teachers could apply for jobs in historically white and coloured as well as historically black schools. Thus teachers made different decisions about whether or not to foreground *race* as part of their identities as teachers, depending on how they interpreted the relationship between this aspect of their identity and their interests.

Third, people 'produce' places by the ways they organize and use space and by attaching different meanings to different places. One example of this is the way in which the space of a school is organized so that certain activities take place in particular places within a daily routine. For instance, the various rooms and outdoor areas of a school are used – or not used – at certain times and for particular purposes only, according to a shared understanding of what goes on where, and when. Schools also tend to be characterized partly in relation to their broader spatial contexts (i.e. their geographical location). We tend to have expectations of what a school is like if we are told that it is located in a particular place such as, for example, Soweto or Vryburg.

Fourth, the production of space is also influenced by power and interests. For example, the old Department of Education and Training had a policy of allocating larger school sites to schools in middle-class areas than to schools in working-class areas. This policy was guided by a broader strategy of reorganizing educational provision along class lines. This reflected the political interests of the government of the time. Another, more current example is the way in which most well-resourced schools allocate much more space to fields for games generally played by boys, such as soccer, cricket, or rugby than to fields for games usually played by girls, such as netball. It can be argued that this arises from, and reinforces, the social dominance of males.

Fifth, identities and space are interrelated. In other words, people are thought to 'belong' in certain spaces, or to be the sort of people they are partly because of where they come from. Women may be thought to 'belong' in the kitchen rather than the workshop, while women teachers are 'thought' to belong in junior primary schools; people from rural areas

are often thought to be different from people from urban areas and it has proved difficult to persuade teachers from urban areas to move to rural areas. Rich people may be welcome in expensive shopping malls while poor people may be discouraged from 'hanging around' shops if they cannot afford to buy anything. People who come from the same region, country, or continent are thought to be similar to each other. The concepts of identity and locality can come to mean the same thing for many people. For instance, if people hear that one is black, Australian, or 'Pedi', they may make certain assumptions about one's identity, many of which may be wrong.

Sixth, those who are in power tend to promote particular understandings of identity and locality that best serve their interests and purposes. They can use their power to organize society and space in ways that are consistent with the understandings of identity and locality that they wish to promote. Anybody who thinks about the history of apartheid will soon see that the policies of the apartheid government depended on the manipulation of understandings of identity and locality and the organization of society and space in line with these understandings.

Those who wish to contest official policies must also necessarily contest the underlying understandings of identity. They can only do this if they accept the general principle that identities are not predetermined or fixed. The fight against apartheid was, partly, a contestation of official understandings of what it meant to be black, white, 'coloured', 'native', 'Indian', Afrikaner, 'European', Zulu, etc. It was also a contestation of the official view that each of these 'groups' belonged in different and prescribed *places*.

Gender, race, class, and place

[…] Let us look at some of the ways in which the experiences of teachers have differed according to who they were and where they lived.

Gender

By far the majority of all teachers in South African schools are women – the proportion is even higher in primary schools. In 1996, 63 per cent of all teachers and 73 per cent of primary school teachers were women. Yet women occupied only 13 per cent of promotion posts such as Heads of Departments, Deputy Principals, and Principals.

Up until 1992 women teachers were paid less than men for the same job and up until 1996 married women teachers were excluded from the government's home owner's scheme and received lower pensions. Even

today a higher proportion of women teachers are temporary and underqualified than are men. (*Budlender 1997*).

The organization and management of schools tend to reflect local understandings of gender. In primary schools, for example, women are frequently allocated to the younger classes while senior classes are allocated to men. Within the classroom, gender influences the dynamic between teachers and learners. Studies have found that most teachers, including women teachers, tend to pay more attention to boys than they pay to girls in the classroom. In all of these ways, understandings of gender shape the experiences of teachers who, in turn, tend to relay these understandings to learners.

Race, ethnicity, and language

There is hardly any need to point out that teachers in different officially designated racial groupings had very different experiences in South Africa prior to 1994. But apartheid governments also created and formalized differences between ethnic and language groups. Sotho-speaking teachers were expected to teach Sotho-speaking children in schools for Sotho speakers, often in a 'Sotho homeland'. The Lebowa Education department generally had a lower budget and lower Standard ten results than those of the neighbouring Bophuthatswana. English schools for whites often had quite different school management practices from those of Afrikaans schools.

Since 1994 the official differentiation of schools on the basis of race, ethnicity, and language has been removed. However, this does not mean that these differences have disappeared. Schools develop their own cultures through the composition of their teaching and student bodies, through policies regarding matters such as language, religion, and staff selection and through their management practices. For example, black learners and teachers tend not to apply to schools where Afrikaans is the medium of instruction. An important part of the development of school cultures is the composition of the learner and teacher bodies, in terms of their identities.

The locality of the school is likely to be an important factor determining the composition of a school body. For instance, most schools in the remote rural areas of Kwazulu Natal are likely to be fairly *homogeneous* in the composition of their learners and teachers, while schools in high-rise areas near the centres of cities are likely to be quite *heterogeneous*.

homogeneous: in this context, formed of learners that are all of the same type

heterogeneous: here, composed of different kinds of learners

Class

Under apartheid, class was fairly closely related to race and locality. The majority of poor people were black, especially if they lived in rural areas. White people were generally protected from extreme poverty**.** This had important consequences for teachers. Teaching offered poor people an opportunity to

attain a middle-class lifestyle. This was particularly so for poor black people living in rural areas as there were so few other opportunities available to them. Becoming a teacher was not only a way out of poverty but also a way out of rural areas. Even today it is difficult to persuade teachers to teach in remote rural areas, although many teachers come from those areas.

In recent years, class has begun to shape the working lives of teachers in new ways. New policies encourage schools to charge fees that vary greatly from one school to another. Better-resourced schools can charge higher fees and maintain or improve their resources. They can also generally offer teachers more support and better working conditions. This was illustrated recently when many formerly white schools undertook to pay the salaries of temporary teachers whose contracts were no longer paid by provincial education departments. The level of supplementary resources available to each school depends on the extent to which a particular parent body is willing and able to contribute fees and other funds. Since residential areas tend to be class based, the locality of the school is an important factor in determining the kind of resources available to a school.

Teaching may be regarded as a middle-class occupation. However, many teachers find themselves in schools where learners and parents are either working class or upper class. These class differences tend to complicate the relations between teachers, learners, and parents. Some important education studies in other countries have shown that teachers tend to teach from a middle-class perspective and to project middle-class values (*See for example Willis, 1972*). Learners and parents do not necessarily identify with these values. Willis has argued that, in the context of the United Kingdom, this might cause learners to reject schooling rather than to contest these values.

Place

The preceding paragraphs point to some of the ways in which experiences based on gender, race, ethnicity, and class are partly shaped by place and space. Space can be thought of on many levels. We can talk about the differences between the experiences of teachers in adjoining suburbs, or in different regions, or in different countries or continents.

Under apartheid, there were important differences between the experiences of teachers in different group areas, or in different bantustans.

There were also considerable differences between the experiences of teachers in farm schools compared with those in the suburbs.

The differences between town government schools and rural community schools within the bantustans illustrate the ways in which dominant forces within society create spatial differences between schools. Bantustan governments developed different funding and governance

bantustans: areas designated under apartheid legislation as being the 'homelands' of particular ethnic groups

policies for urban government and rural community schools. An important difference was that, while the education department paid for building new classrooms in town schools, they did not do so for community schools. Instead, relatively poor parent communities in rural areas had to pay for some or all of these costs themselves. They could apply for subsidies from the Chief Minister's Office, but sometimes this was not obtainable and at other times it did not cover the whole cost. Consequently, community schools seldom had sufficient classrooms, and the ones they had were often not well equipped. This made it difficult to offer subjects like science or even to keep books, and it made these schools more unattractive to teachers as places to work. Even today, the more rural provinces, which include former bantustan areas, have considerably fewer classrooms than do the more urban provinces. In 1996 the Eastern Cape had a learner classroom ratio of 51:1 as compared to 25:1 in the Western Cape (*National Schools Audit, 1996*).

Communities in rural areas did oppose these policies, and towards the end of the bantustan era the differences between urban government schools and rural community schools were no longer so clear-cut. These differences were legally abolished when the South African Schools Act came into effect in 1996. However, schools in rural areas continue to be at a disadvantage compared with urban schools because poorer rural communities cannot contribute as much to school funds, nor are they politically strong enough to put pressure on government to change its policies. And teachers continue to prefer not to work in rural areas.

Current developments in education policy have introduced new ways in which schools are either advantaged or disadvantaged depending on their locality. In early 1998, for example, the Western Cape Education Department proposed the introduction of a policy linking schools to small businesses, and managing schools as if they were businesses. These policies would be likely to have very different effects in rural areas, where there are few businesses and few people with the kinds of skills that this form of management requires, compared with urban areas where these resources are more easily available.

What does it mean to be a teacher?

So far, this article has focused on the differences between the experiences of teachers based on their ethnic, race, class, or gender identities, and their localities. I now wish to turn to the way in which the identities of teachers are constructed in official policy documents.

At different times in our history the identities of teachers […] have been *represented* in particular ways in the discourses of those who have

produced the official education policy documents and organized the education system. These representations have provided a justification for the policies and organization of the education system.

In South Africa the question of what it means to be a teacher has continually shifted within official discourses since the establishment of the first colonial schools in the seventeenth century.

Images of teachers in pre-apartheid policy

In the early eighteenth century official government documents suggested that the most important characteristics of a teacher were sober habits, religious convictions, and a commitment to the cultural traditions of the colonial power. Education was organized largely by the church, and the job of teaching was seen to be closely linked to that of a priest. In 1714, for example, the Governor and Council of the Cape Colony produced a document in which the requirements for teacher selection were prescribed as follows:

> *Whereas for the prosperity of the good colony and welfare of the land it is not of slight importance that the young from their childhood should be well instructed in the fear and knowledge of God and be taught all good arts and morals from their youth, and thereto it is above all necessary that they should be provided with competent and God-fearing teachers, and that those should be prohibited who should desire to teach otherwise than is practised in the Reform Churches, […] (Report of the 1863 Commission into the Educational System).*

By the mid-nineteenth century teachers were no longer viewed as representatives of a particular religious denomination. While teachers were generally expected to have religious and moral convictions they were also required, ideally, to have received some general education as well as specific teacher training. In 1838 Herschell, an adviser to the Cape colonial government, proposed a 'new and improved system of education' in which teachers would be seen primarily as professionals:

> *To make the profession of education truly respectable, it must be made an independent profession. (Report of the 1863 Commission into the Educational System)*

While teachers had previously been portrayed as having a primarily pastoral and religious role, the ideal teacher was now seen as a well-paid professional within a secular civic administration. Throughout the colonial period, however, the ideal teacher was constructed within official discourse as being male and educated in Europe. In the 1838 document quoted above,

pastoral: caring (as a minister cares for a congregation)

secular: non-religious

Herschell says that there are probably not sufficient 'suitable' teachers available in the colony and he suggests that teachers should be brought to the colony from 'home', i.e. Britain. By implication, this suggests that teachers would also generally be white. In other official documents from the same period, it is assumed that most teachers – and learners – are male. However, where there are female learners, they should be kept separate from the male learners and should be taught by female teachers. These documents show that the identities of teachers were constructed in terms of their race, nationality, and gender as well as a professional status. However, race is implicit in these accounts and is not foregrounded to the same extent as later became the case.

It must be emphasized that real teachers did not necessarily match the ideal described in government documents. However, these constructions would have influenced those who selected and paid teachers.

These constructions of the identities of teachers were consistent with a broader institutional and spatial organization of schools. Public schools were mostly located in urban areas. Within this category, there were different 'classes' of schools, which charged different fees. Missionary schools were generally located in rural areas. These varied considerably, but very few took learners beyond the first four years of schooling.

From the late-nineteenth century and throughout the first half of the twentieth century, government policy increasingly emphasized the racial segregation of the school system. Only white teachers could teach in white, public schools, although both black and white teachers could teach in the missionary schools, which accommodated most black learners.

Images of teachers under apartheid

In the mid-twentieth century, the Eiselen Commission provides a clear example of the way in which the construction of the identity of learners and teachers provided a rationale for changes in the organization and content of the education system. The Eiselen Commission was appointed in 1949 to design an education system for black people in South Africa. The very fact that the government set up a commission to plan education specifically for black people indicates that its actions were shaped by an official discourse of racial segregation. In other words, they based their actions on a shared set of ideas about the significance of racial differences. The Commission was expected to adopt this segregationist discourse, and to make recommendations for the organization of education and the curriculum accordingly.

The Commission set about developing an elaborate representation of the identity of black South Africans. They portrayed them as a physically diverse but *culturally* homogenous group, which they called the 'Bantu'. According to this portrayal, the cultural differences between the 'Bantu' and others were more important than the differences within the 'Bantu' group. Although the emphasis was put on culture, it was assumed that culture was fundamentally linked to ethnicity.

Many of the education policies proposed by the Eiselen Commission

were argued for on the basis of the representation of the identity of the 'Bantu' developed in the Commission's report. The 'Bantu' were portrayed as a people who were practically rather than academically inclined, so it was proposed that there would be no need for most children in this group to continue beyond the first four years of schooling.

Although the Eiselen Commission foregrounded race and culture, it also portrayed other identities in particular ways. It linked race to class by arguing that the 'Bantu' were more suited to manual work than to mental work. Under 'Bantu education', more women than men were appointed to primary school posts; it was argued that women rather than men should be employed as primary teachers since women were 'more suited' to this task. This was an effective way of limiting the costs of education, as women were paid less than men. In this way, particular representations of race, class, and gender were brought together in a discourse that shaped the organization and content of 'Bantu education'. This discourse also informed the creation or perpetuation of other education departments for racially and ethnically defined groupings under apartheid.

'Bantu education' was underpinned by spatial organization. The Eiselen Report linked race to locality by describing the 'Bantu' as a 'rural' people; it proposed that the majority of new schools should be established in rural localities, and specifically in the 'reserves'. The link between social and spatial organization is very explicit in the report:

Prior to 1994 there were nineteen education departments in South Africa.

> *If the social aim of Bantu education is as important as your Commission believes it to be, it follows that the reserves, being areas in which Bantu cultures function most completely, have a special task to perform in the furtherance of the development of Bantu culture and schools (Eiselen Report).*

The construction of 'Bantu' education carried with it a particular construction of what it meant to be a 'Bantu' teacher. Because the 'Bantu' were seen as a relatively homogenous group who were culturally different from other groups, it was argued that 'Bantu' children should be taught only by 'Bantu' teachers.

> *Bantu personnel should be used to the maximum to make the schools as Bantu in spirit as possible as well as to provide employment. (Eiselen Report)*

According to the Report the ideal 'Bantu' teacher should not only have appropriate qualifications and aptitudes, but should also have qualities of 'obedience, willingness to help, truthfulness, self-control, and the gift to impart knowledge'. Prospective teachers were to provide a statement from the minister of the church to which they belonged regarding their morals and religion. These qualities suggest that the ideal teacher, from an official point of view, was one that was compliant with authority. In the context of the Report as a whole, this points to the need to select particular kinds of teachers in order to shape the kind of people learners would become – their moral, religious, cultural, and economic as well as academic identities.

During the apartheid years the work of teachers – particularly black teachers – was so constrained by state control that teachers came to be seen by many as civil servants with very little autonomy and very little claim to professional status. Influential new teacher unions that emerged in the mid-eighties argued that teachers should be seen as workers rather than professionals. Although this debate has faded with the ending of apartheid, teacher unions have become more established and have been able to contest government views regarding what it means to be a teacher.

Images of teachers in post-apartheid South Africa

The 1995 White Paper on Education and Training recognized that a funda-mental task of the new government was to **redefine** identity and difference as a basis for government:

> *[…] our entire history can be read as a saga of contending moralities, which in our era has culminated in a historic agree-ment based on the recognition of the inalienable worth, dignity and equality of each person under the law, mutual tolerance, and respect for diversity. (para 3)*

Thus, when apartheid ended, the reorganization of the education system was based on new constructions of the identities of learners, teachers, and communities. Learners were constructed as citizens of a single, unified nation whose participation in the economy would depend on individual aptitude rather than race, gender, or class. This construction of the identities of learners informed the reorganization of the education system into a single, national department with an undifferentiated curriculum for the first ten years of schooling. Although there are provincial departments that are responsible for

schooling, the curricula for all provinces are intended to be similar with no streaming within the curriculum. For the first time in South African history, schools may not base their selection of teachers on divisive identity criteria such as race, gender, or religion. Instead, the identity of teachers is constructed in relation to their role within an integrated system of lifelong education and training. The notion of teachers as 'Education and Training Development Practitioners' has emerged to describe this role.

Within this broad approach, though, there has been a considerable contest over the identity of teachers. When the transitional and final constitutions were drawn up there were debates as to whether schools could be established for identity-based groupings such as religious, language, gender, or culturally based groups and whether the state would be obliged to fund such schools. And during the process of producing the South African Schools Act, there have been ongoing debates about whether mother-tongue schooling and religious education was a right or a choice. The South African Schools Act presents these as choices that school governing bodies may make.

But the position of the national government, represented by the South African Schools Act, is contested by some of the provincial governments. Western Cape provincial legislation asserts that identities based on language and religion are educationally significant and the protection of these identities is a right rather than a choice within schools. These kinds of policy decisions will influence the ways in which identities are defined and differentiated in schools.

Since 1994 ethnicity and culture have been the most significant identities in discourses about schooling in South Africa. The government and various lobby groups, including oppositional parties, have focused mainly on these categories in their debates. The government has argued for the deracialization of, and racial redress within, schooling. The New National Party, in particular, has argued for the protection of cultural and language differences.

While class and gender have been acknowledged in the debates, those who have aimed to minimize class and gender inequalities have not had a very strong voice. The policies of the new government have asserted that there should be no discrimination on the basis of gender, but there has been very little exploration of the practical implications of this principle. Recently the government has attempted to rectify this by establishing an Education Gender Commission. One of the greatest difficulties facing this commission has been a lack of information about ways in which the experiences of men and women, boys and girls have been different in South African schools. Apart from statistics that tell us what the numbers of male and female teachers and learners are, we have very little academic knowledge about what difference sex and gender

make to the actual experiences of teachers and learners. The absence of a knowledge base to inform policy arguments makes it more difficult for those who wish to bring about change.

Meanwhile, new and influential ideas about how to manage schools may well undermine the professional status of teachers. According to these new ideas, schools should be managed like businesses. This would suggest that important decisions of policy would be made by the school 'management' and that ordinary teachers would generally be expected to implement these policies. This goes against an idea of professionalism that suggests that all teachers should be involved in decisions of policy: in other words, that all teachers be able to decide 'why' as well as 'how' particular teaching practices should be adopted. The Western Cape Education Department has taken up these ideas more directly and explicitly than have the other provincial education departments. This illustrates how the experiences of teachers in different provinces will increasingly be subject to different influences within the new spatial organization of education across the country.

The spatial organization of post-apartheid education

One of the key arguments that has run through this article is the idea that social and spatial organization are intertwined; neither can be achieved without the other. Any attempt to change society, whether ideologically, economically, or in any other way, necessarily also involves the spatial reorganization of society. Therefore, it is not surprising that the first post-apartheid government found it necessary to reorganize South Africa's internal boundaries by creating new provinces and municipalities, and to redefine the ways in which these provinces and municipalities would be governed.

This spatial reorganization also applied to education. Provincial education departments were established. Political processes were initiated to decide which responsibilities would be given to the national department, which to the provincial departments and which to the schools themselves.

The spatial reorganization of schooling in recent years has had a dramatic effect on teachers. Part of the process of the spatial and social reorganization of schooling has been an attempt to bring greater equity by equalizing education spending and teacher:pupil ratios across provinces. The central strategy within this process has been the redistribution and rationalization of teachers. This has proven to be one of the most difficult tasks facing the new education departments.

The rationalization process has been very complex, and it will not be analysed fully here. Instead, three problems relating to this process will be identified in order to illustrate how teachers have been differently affected, depending on their identities and localities.

The first difficulty in this process has been the assumption, on the part of education departments, that it is possible to move teachers from one place to another. This assumption shows a lack of awareness of the spatial politics of teachers' lives. Most teachers are either unwilling or unable to move, particularly to the rural areas where more teachers are required.

A second difficulty has been the different ways in which schools have responded to the rationalization and redistribution process. Historically white, middle-class schools in middle-class suburbs have been able to avoid losing teachers by using money from fees to pay salaries. Historically black, working-class schools in working-class suburbs have not had sufficient resources to retain additional teachers. In other words, because of class differences between schools in different places the rationalization process has had inequitable outcomes.

A third difficulty relates to the fact that the majority of teachers are women. It has already been mentioned that a greater proportion of women are underqualified and that only 13 per cent of women are in promotion posts. Since women as parents are more often than not the primary caregivers for children, they are more likely to be in temporary posts. For all these reasons, women are more vulnerable to current rationalization and redeployment policies. In those cases where women teachers are not the main breadwinners in families, they cannot easily move away from the places where their partners work. The point is not so much that women do not move but rather that the decision to move is not theirs to make.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed to show that the experiences of teachers are shaped in fundamental ways by their identities and localities. However, no particular identity or locality has an essential meaning. Meanings have been given, or attached, to identities; they have been **constructed** over a considerable period of our history, and these meanings are manifest in the way society is organized. In other words, the experiences of categories of people – whether defined by race, gender, or class, are shaped both at the level of **language and meaning** and at the level of **social organization and social practices.**

This organization necessarily includes spatial organization. We assign places to identities. We expect to find women teachers in Grade One

classes and black teachers in rural schools. And more often than not, we find what we expect because that is how society has been organized.

Similarly, the meanings of particular places are imagined, and these imagined meanings are manifest in the ways in which we organize and use space. In other words, the production of places also takes place at the level of *meaning* and at the level of *spatial practices and spatial organization.* This organization is necessarily social. We *expect* to find dilapidated schools in rural areas, and more often than not we *find* what we expect because that is how resources have been distributed.

Because identities and social spaces are *created*, they are not fixed. They are subject to a constant process of shifts in meaning, changes in social and spatial practices, and social and spatial reorganization. These changes take place within relations of power. Governments can and do produce new discourses, new constructions of identity, and new forms of spatial organization. Major political, social, and economic changes – such as those that took place in South Africa in 1948 and 1994 – inevitably bring shifts in official discourses and spatial organization. These changes underpin new education policies and reshape the experiences of teachers.

Teachers do not necessarily accept the new ways in which their identities and status as teachers are constructed, nor do they always accept the new forms of spatial organization. Instead, they respond in complex ways, which include adopting some policies and identities and not others, as well as more open resistance or contestation of official meanings and practices. They also interact with official discourses and practices at many levels. Within each province, area, or school, these processes play themselves out differently. Ultimately, however, teachers can respond to, but cannot ignore, official meanings and practices.