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## Material effects: race, class and masculinities among South African teachers

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### *Introduction* <sup>1</sup>

Current debates about race are not always successful in capturing issues of materiality which were a strong feature of social history and Marxist work twenty and thirty years ago. In this paper we approach the issue of race and the way it is experienced by exploring the life narratives of teachers in South Africa. In this exercise we show that race was experienced within material contexts which were themselves characterized by racial inequality **and** by material inequalities. The result of this overlapping set of factors and power relationships is to be found in the memories of childhood of three black teachers. In his article, 'Race, articulation and societies structured in dominance', Stuart Hall used South Africa as a case in point for his (then) Althusserian approach to understanding racism. He made the point that:

One must start, then, from the concrete historical 'work' which racism accomplishes under specific historical conditions-as a set of economic, political and ideological practices, of a distinctive kind, concretely articulated with other practices in a social formation.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper we take up Hall's call to start from the concrete historical context and the work of race/class focusing on the complex interactions of race, class and gender in the lives of men in a specific profession - teaching. Drawing on four out of nine life history accounts obtained from male teachers in greater Durban<sup>3</sup>, we show that race and class are materialised through and imbricated in the identities of these South African teachers but that they cannot be reduced to effects of these factors. Nevertheless, their accounts show how race and class shape the teachers' gendered narratives and demonstrate the links between their stories and their contemporary pedagogical attitudes and practices as teachers. The paper begins with a succinct account of the historical conditions of South Africa when these men were growing up. This is followed by a brief discussion of life histories as method. The next section presents the four teacher biographies. Three further sections explore contrasts and continuities in their lives, their experiences of and attitudes to punishment and discipline and what they regard as their achievements and failures.

We have approached the transcripts of our interviews from two directions. First, we have seen them as providing stories that our informants have narrated about their lives. In this sense, the transcripts may be seen as identity statements and representations. Second, we regard the men's narratives as testimony to the material and emotional conditions of their lives that provided the context for the masculine-making processes that they engaged in. This paper is not an exercise in psychoanalysis or a psychological examination of the motives or the subconscious of the teachers. We are more concerned to understand the explanatory frameworks that they deploy, while at the same time paying attention to the material circumstances in which their choices were made. In our research about teacher masculinities in South Africa, we have been concerned to unpick the complex ways in which race, class, gender and sexuality are woven into their lives and what this means in terms of the materiality of their current lives and their life histories

### ***The material conditions of apartheid and its legacies***

So what were the specific historical conditions under which our four teachers grew up? As is well known, the South African regime prior to 1994, when the first democratic elections were held, imposed the system of apartheid. Unlike racial discrimination in, for example, the UK, apartheid was systematic in imposing racial segregation through law. Among a myriad of laws imposing segregation of all kinds were laws (a list of such legislation can be found at <http://africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blsalaws.htm>) which:

- reserved skilled jobs to white people (Job Reservation Act, 1954);
- created the bureaucratic classification of people into 'European', 'Indian', 'Coloured' and 'Bantu' - i.e. black (Population Registration Act, 1950);

- prevented sexual relationships and marriage between people classified as being of different race (Immorality Amendment Act, 1950; Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, 1949);
- forced people to live in areas designated as being for their classified race (Group Areas Act, 1950);
- established 'Bantustans', which were supposed to be self-governing tribal areas where Africans without permission to work in white areas were supposed to live (Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act, 1959);
- established intentionally inferior education of Africans designed to hold them in positions of subservience (Bantu Education Act, 1953);
- prevented black people from going to 'white' universities (Extension of Universities Education Act, 1959);
- and forced black men to carry the hated passes at *all* times (Natives (Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents) Act, 1952).

There was also a range of legislation that imposed such draconian punishment for dissent as imprisonment without trial for up to 90 days, during which people were held in solitary confinement, subjected to torture and even murdered while in custody (most famously, Steve Biko).

The ending of apartheid and the first democratic elections held in 1994 did not, of course, automatically end the race/class structuring of South African society. The bureaucratic classification of individuals' racial categories no longer exists but social distinctions continue. The terms 'white', 'African', 'Indian' and 'coloured' still exist both in every day parlance and reflect the social divisions of South African society. There is an emergent black middle class of professionals and entrepreneurs but poverty continues to be largely racialised, 'informal settlements' (known as 'locations' in apartheid parlance) continue to be populated by black people and while there are no longer white-only schools the schools in the townships continue to be black only.

The early years of South African children are lived in vastly different circumstances. Race has long been a key determinant.<sup>4</sup> Particularly in the era of *apartheid*, the racialisation of poverty meant that many black children grew up in harsh, resource-poor conditions,<sup>5</sup> although, as we show below, neither race nor poverty determine experiences or outcomes.

### ***Life histories as method***

The most obvious danger of using life history method is the temptation to treat the story told, whether in written auto/biography or in life history interviews, as being a simple and unvarnished reflection of the 'truth' of someone's life. In such an approach, little or no note is taken of the role of the interviewer in the creation of meaning and the eliciting of particular stories in the course of the interview. The problem with the alternative approach to life history as narrative and discourse is the tendency to reduce it to text, without reference to the materiality of people's lives and experiences. We note the importance of recognising the conditionality of interviews and how their relationship to reality needs always to be understood as contingent on many factors (the self, the interviewer, the interviewee-interviewer relationship, the various agendas floating in this space and so on). Our approach builds on these insights and treats a personal life as:

a path through a field of practices which are following a range of collective logics, and are responding to a range of structural conditions which routinely intersect and often contradict each other.<sup>6</sup>

Our methodology is also informed by the goals of social history, using oral sources to establish the nature of the material conditions that impacted on the subject's narrative and life. These material circumstances can be deduced from secondary literature but they are correlated and confirmed by the interviewees' responses. Such are the class and race fault lines in South African society and history that it is possible to get, from the words of the interviewees, some validation of the classed and raced grand narrative generated by social history.

Our selection of interviews reflects a mix of race and class factors. We also compare teachers whose pedagogic attitudes can broadly be described as 'progressive' (child-centred, respectful, tolerant) with those whose styles reflect more authoritarian approaches. Accordingly we present the stories of two black African teachers, Mxolisi and Velile, a white teacher, Matthew, and an Indian teacher, Vijay<sup>7</sup>. The interviews were conducted in three government schools. Oak High, a middle class, now multiracial boys' school; Gladstone Secondary, a school formerly reserved for Coloureds but now with a substantial

number of African, *isiZulu* speaking students; and Dingiswayo Secondary, a school providing for poor, working class black students in the African dormitory suburbs (townships) and flanked by a large informal settlement (squatter camp).

**Four teacher biographies: childhood, family, growing up**

Our youngest teacher, **Mxolisi**, teaches at Oak High. He was an infant during the Soweto student uprising of 1976. He is a man with an easy smile and an engaging manner. His spoken English is good though his first language is *isiZulu*. He is one of only a small number of black teachers at school.

Living in apartheid South Africa, the material conditions of his childhood reflect those of millions of his fellow black South Africans. The Group Areas Act 1950 formalised the geographical separation of 'African', 'Indian', 'Coloured' and 'European' (i.e. white) groups such that non-whites were excluded from white areas and needed specific permission to be there as workers. Mxolisi grew up with his parents in a rural area, living in a mud hut with no electricity, running water or telephone. His mother died when he was very young and his father, a farm labourer, followed shortly thereafter. Yet his parents and extended family valued education and he was encouraged to do well, walking 75 minutes to school each day. Of ten siblings, he was the only one to get to university, obtaining bursaries for higher education, successfully completed in 1998.

Mxolisi's childhood was shaped by racialised poverty. The story he tells is of difficulty, scarce resources and few opportunities. His advantages were intellect, determination and a supportive family, which he holds to be sacrosanct. There is no question of doing anything that might damage it. A key principle ensuring family cohesion is respect.

RM: And do you respect them [the family elders]?

Mxolisi: I do respect them.

RM: At what point do you withhold your respect?

Mxolisi: At no point (laugh). Um, at no point. I always respect them. I can't think of a situation where I will do things that they tell me not to do.

As a child, Mxolisi attended the local Catholic church but this is not a major source of inspiration or stability in his life. Nor is political commitment. Mxolisi was not involved in student politics in the turbulent 1990s, believing in the importance of forgiveness. Even though his forebears were badly treated workers on white farms and often not paid, he expresses no anger towards the farm owners or whites in general.

From a very early age Mxolisi was obliged to work. The straitened circumstances of his home demanded that he assist with domestic chores and, like most boys in the area, he had responsibility for his father's cattle. When he erred in this task, his older brothers beat him, and corporal punishment continued at primary and secondary school. At an early age he began to earn small amounts by working as a gardener for white residents in the locality:

I started working when I was in standard 2, that's grade what these days, grade 4. I looked for a job, I didn't have shoes, and my friend was working after school, was working for a white guy in the garden, and I told him I was looking for a job as well. We were at the same school. He introduced me to, to the, to one of the neighbours who was working for one white guy, and he said they could be looking for someone. Then I started working, and I was very small at that time ... I think I was 10. 10 or 11. And I worked for ten rand [just under a pound sterling] a month.

Mxolisi had to cope with death from an early age. Both parents died when he was young, and when he was at university a brother died. Since then, a number of friends have died of AIDS. Mxolisi admits that the combination of being at university and his brother's death depressed him and, unusually, he consulted a psychologist. Although Mxolisi has had to deal with poverty and all its associated challenges, he has not adopted a stoical masculinity. He has turned inward to examine himself and has, at the same time, kept up his links with his family. He returns to see them in the countryside as often as he can. In addition, he intends to build a family of his own. He already has three children (aged seven, four and three years) by

three different mothers. He is proud of being a father and wants to marry the mother of his last-born.

Overall, Mxolisi has responded to his life experiences with a tenacity and creativity that has enabled him to move into the ranks of the middle class. His life is a case of dramatic upward social mobility from orphaned black rural existence to the professional role of a teacher in a formerly white, but now mixed, elite school in Durban.

**Matthew**, a white man now in his early 60s, has taught at Oak High, where he has become a legend, for 30 years. He grew up in Durban with his parents and four sisters. His father was a lawyer and the main breadwinner. Thus Matthew's family of origin was seen as a model of middle class white respectability. However, his father, while admired in white middle class circles, was a bully at home and his mother bore the brunt of it, but Matthew was on the receiving end as well. Although his father's behaviour '*verged on the autocratic or almost despotic*', Matthew grew up respecting him:

He was very loyal to his family, and he was supportive. There was no hint of ever, neglecting the family. He would provide and that was it, he would always be there. And, he was a very, very strict in terms of um morality. You know that's a vast concept morality, but swearing was a no-no, he didn't swear. You were respectful, almost chivalrous, you know, the old style chivalry coming out of the 1820 settlers<sup>8</sup> and English background/colonial style of opening doors and that sort of thing. So he's highly respected in that way, but he went down to play bowls, which he did, people had high regard for his integrity, that sort of idea. So he had a tremendous strength in that way.

Matthew seems to have tried to satisfy his father in terms of public recognition and achievement. He excelled at sport, particularly at rugby, which made the most demands of a physical masculinity and gave the greatest recognition. He captained rugby teams all the way through his school and university career and played representative provincial rugby. This was one area where he both brought glory to the family name and rebelled:

I revolted against, I mean I got into the university thing and I became a little bit of a rebel, you know the normal ...through those years of the hippies and that sort of stuff. And I was probably the first in fact I think when they described me as I ran onto the rigger field at Kings Park [the Durban stadium] as lacking sartorial elegance. I was the first rigger player from varsity to run onto that field with long hair.

Despite official recognition of his talents, Matthew never neatly fitted the standards of the day. He was left-leaning in his politics and was never promoted up the teacher hierarchy. He was often at odds with headmasters at the school, several of whom he found to be unfeeling, cruel and competitive bullies.

In some respects, Matthew is an archetypal white, middle-class man. Sport is important in his life. He occupies space in a confident way, is comfortable in his body and sure of his views. He is heterosexual. He has children although he is no longer married. In some ways, he occupies all the unmarked categories of a range of social binaries - being, as the title of Catherine Hall's<sup>9</sup> book has it, white, male and middle class both through his family of origin and by profession. But it is not easy to read a hegemonic masculinity into or off Matthew's own accounts of his manhood. The contradictions are strong and conformity with conventional white, English-speaking, middle-class values is marginal.

**Velile** is an African teacher in his late forties (born in 1957), the middle child of seven children. He teaches at Dingiswayo Secondary. Velile grew up in a township area, with an African only population, outside Johannesburg. His father was a Mozambican, like many other black workers in the cities of South Africa, a migrant worker. He managed to Johannesburg and settled there despite the pass laws, which limited the urban settlement of Africans. He had a job in manufacturing and earned reasonably well by African standards. Unusually within his community, Velile remembers having a car when he was a child and his family was also the first in the community to have a television.

Velile's parents were devout Christians, who directed him into teaching. He attended a College of Education and qualified in 1976, the year of the Soweto school uprisings which, in many ways, were the beginning of the end for the apartheid regime. Velile battled with these developments:

It was very tough [in 1976] but because I was from an organized family, I didn't go too much into this politics and things, because my father was very strict and my mother was very strict. They couldn't understand that you were not at school because of political reasons. They didn't go for that.

Velile talks of his parents as being 'very strict' but does not display any resentment. Indeed, he says that he liked the fact that his father was, 'first and foremost ... a disciplinarian'. Not only did Velile receive regular thrashings, he was also required to take on a range of responsibilities including polishing the *stoep* (verandah), washing and polishing the cooking pots and preparing vegetables on a daily basis so that his mother could start cooking as soon as she got home. With this level of responsibility, Velile was, as he says, 'too busy in the house' but managed to find time, also, to work hard and play softball for the school team and, later, at college. At the same time, it seems that Velile was developing an active heterosexual social life. He became interested in girls in the first form of secondary school, which he describes as usual in his peer group, but did not take it further than that for another year because:

I was scared of my parents, that once they discovered I was having a date with a girl, they'd kill me. That's why I think it took me such a long time.

He felt himself to be in competition with other boys to have many girlfriends and said that the boys who were heterosexually successful became a 'sort of hero' in the peer group. The outcome of this approach is that Velile has fourteen children, none of them with his wife, whom he met when he started teaching at Dingiswayo in 1992. Her first husband died in 1998 but it is not clear how long after that they married.

His oldest child was born in 1975, when Velile was eighteen, the second a year later, the year that he started teaching and the third nine years after that. Of his fourteen children, Velile has a relationship with three, primarily because they grew up and were schooled in the Durban area. He pays maintenance for his youngest child, born in an extra-marital affair, only two years before the interview.

Under *apartheid* black teachers could get teacher certificates without matriculating, by doing a two year course after standard eight (the third year of high school) and this is what Velile did.<sup>10</sup> He subsequently matriculated and continued thereafter to improve his qualifications. He taught for five years before going to university. His long suffering father supported him financially, not knowing that Velile was, in fact, on study leave from his school and receiving pay and a bursary from the provincial government:

When the school opens, I was carrying cash [from his father] for the whole year. And I was on study leave and I was getting a pay and he never know about that. And I was having a bursary from the KwaZulu government. I didn't tell him about that because, you know, I didn't have money to live the life I wanted to live at school.

Unlike some of his colleagues, Velile is not interested in politics or active in the teacher unions. His views on politics reflect a generational and traditionalist commitment to the existing order and he expresses distaste for student rebellion of 1976 when 'children were ruling adults'. He is not particularly enthusiastic about 'the new South Africa' and says that getting the vote has made little difference.

**Vijay**, and Indian man in his late forties, teaches at Gladstone Secondary and was born in Durban in 1959, the fifth of seven children. His grandfather, like most first generation Indian South Africans came from India and worked on the farms on the North Coast of what was then Natal as and indentured labourer in the sugar cane fields. Vijay's parents moved around a lot because of his father's job as a truck/bus driver. His mother was a housewife, who, presumably, kept on making a new home in each new place. Vijay had numerous relatives on both sides but seldom sees those on his mother's side (she was one of 14 children, having 9 sisters and 4 brothers) because most live in Johannesburg. He says that most of his ten uncles on his father's side have died.

Although Vijay grew up in a large family, this has not been replicated in his generation. He and his brothers have two children each, but the brothers and sisters still keep in close touch, moving between the families and sharing meals to which all contribute every couple of weeks. Family events are marked by Hindu observance - 'there are various prayers we have during the year and whenever somebody's having a prayer so we do come'.

Vijay was a talented sportsman and played professional soccer<sup>11</sup> for a while, until he had a leg injury. He represented his school and province in 1974 and soccer loomed large in his emotional life as well. He played every day, playing with his friends before school, at break times and after school. Then, when he got home, he would go to the 'association ground' where, presumably, he was coached along with other talented youngsters. Vijay's account is redolent of the enjoyment he had in this sporting activity and he has no regrets that the time spent playing soccer impacted adversely on his examination results.

Vijay's father was also a keen soccer player and used to support Vijay and come to watch him play whenever he could. He died when Vijay was in standard six (about 13 years old), which was a tremendous shock. He is defensive of his father's memory, insisting that, although he rarely saw him, he didn't feel neglected at all. Nevertheless, this absence (caused both by working away a lot and by premature death) has impacted on his attitude to fathering:

I really didn't want to take a job that took me away from my family. I had to do something that I would be always with my kids. You know, be there with them especially academically. That's why I stayed in education. That relationship that I missed in my life, you know, make sure my kids get it.

Vijay's two children, a daughter aged 21 and a son aged 17, live at home. Vijay is close to them, saying that he would worry if he didn't see them for a few hours a day. The daughter is in her final year of a pharmacy degree and the son is completing his matriculation. Vijay and his wife have considered emigrating to New Zealand because his wife's brother is there, but this has not worked out, partly because he was in two minds about it and partly because of his daughter's education.

Vijay has thought about his future in education and has some ambitions. He says that while, at one level, he would like to become a head of department, he would miss the interaction with the pupils:

I would like to [get promotion], but my real love is with kids now. When you go higher up, you'll find you have fewer classes to teach. I don't really want to get to a managerial position you know. I like to be more interactive with students.

In the past it has been difficult to survive on a teacher's salary, but now his wife has taken up employment and things are financially better, though he hardly sees her as a result of her work. Of more concern is his perception that teachers have lost status - '*When I was at school the reality is, if you were a teacher you were somebody, but now there is little respect from young people for teachers*'.

Vijay is not politically aware. Although his life as a child was affected by apartheid - '*you know we weren't allowed to own our own homes*' - he did not feel particularly disadvantaged. He is not interested in teacher or national politics.

### **Contrasts and continuities**

Of all the teachers, it is Mxolisi alone who had serious material problems as a child. Vijay and Velile were relatively secure in material terms and Matthew clearly benefited from the privileges of white middle class living, including private schooling and university.

All our teachers said that their fathers were important influences. All the fathers were either aloof or physically absent and all were strict, to say the least, yet it is Matthew who seems to have been worst affected. He struggled with the legacy of his father. It put him at odds with school rules but also gave him a healthy suspicion of decorum and a dislike for uncaring and overbearing authority. Velile's father was stern and distant and seems readily to have resorted to physical chastisement. Yet Velile seems not to have been so affected as Matthew, seeking the company of friends and, particularly girlfriends, to establish a sense of himself. He accommodated himself to his father's rules and, by deception, milked this relationship for his own benefit. He sought heterosexual affirmation behind his parents' back to build his masculine status among his peers. He seems quite unapologetic and uncritical of his sexual exploits and the fourteen children that these begat.

Vijay and Mxolisi both suffered the trauma of parental death yet they both regarded their fathers as a positive influence. Vijay recounts his life in a stoical way that largely deletes memories of hardship. He notes his losses (the death of his father and subsequent deaths of many paternal uncles), his hardships



(being beaten, breaking his leg at soccer), without letting them become major features of his life narrative. Despite the material deprivations and early death of his father, Mxolisi's account of childhood has little of the roughness or pain that are so evident in Matthew's testimony. With the family support he chose a path to adulthood that many of his cohort, who became involved in politics or crime, did not take. Mxolisi pursued education, paid work and a teaching career - an unusual path for an impoverished rural African boy.

What we have in these four biographies is a jumbled picture that defies attempts to connect childhood experience with adolescent and adult outcomes in any neat or causal way. In the next section, we map race, class and experiential factors onto two themes relevant to the men's profession of teaching: punishment and discipline; and achievement and failure.

### ***Punishment and Discipline***

Corporal punishment has a long history in South Africa and has been applied, especially, to boys of all races. In privileged white South African schools, corporal punishment played a similar role to that documented in elite British schools.<sup>12</sup> Under *apartheid*, authoritarian pedagogies ensured that corporal punishment was commonly and widely used in all white and black schools. It was particularly common and vicious in black schools, where it was applied to girls and boys. Although corporal punishment was abolished in South Africa in 1996, it remains widely used<sup>13</sup> and many, particularly African, parents and teachers support its continued use.<sup>14</sup>

Corporal punishment was, historically, an important rite of passage for schoolboys. Silently enduring it was part of the process of becoming men. It was associated with other masculine values of toughness, ability to withstand pain, endorsement of violence and an acceptance of patriarchal authority, with the power of older over younger men and of men over women being expressed in very physical ways. Nevertheless, the experience of corporal punishment did not inevitably produce brutalised or brutal men.

All four men were beaten as children, although Vijay's experience of this violence seems to have been less frequent and severe. Amongst those who were severely beaten, neither Mxolisi nor Matthew support corporal punishment. Mxolisi comments:

I've always been against the use of corporal punishment because we sometimes were beaten for nothing. Um, I don't see it work. You can beat a person today; they'll do it again. You have to convince people why they shouldn't or should do something. To beat them up, I don't think it helps.

Matthew's opposition is based on his observation of misuse and cruelty:

[This] particular chap, was a terrible bully, terrible bully. He used to cane kids - literally break them in half ... take a run before he hit them. And I couldn't accept that sort of attitude.

Neither believes that corporal punishment works and Matthew, particularly, abhors the masculinity with which it is associated:

The male, you had to be strong and you had to, you know, bump people out of the way and assert yourself and drink your beer fast and this sort of rubbish. And here they were in these positions of authority ... That I couldn't handle.

Vijay and Velile, on the other hand, both lament the abolition of corporal punishment and believe in its use as a pedagogic tool for discipline. As Velile comments:

It's hard for me to believe that it's [abolishing corporal punishment] going to work. We always say in Zulu, which means that when you want to burn something, you burn it while it's still young. Meaning you must be given some beatings when you still young ... More especially *our* kids, they are, they are not as organized as the white kids. The white kids seem to, you know, find direction in their ways. But ours, they need some beatings all the time.

Justifying his own belief in corporal punishment, Velile harks back to his childhood:

What I liked about my father was, first and foremost, he was a disciplinarian. ... And whenever he had a problem with you, he would call you to the bedroom to give you some beatings in the bedroom. So, I liked all those things when I grow up - I admired these things

Vijay thinks that *'they should you know really bring back that discipline in kids'*. He believes that pupils don't listen any more:

When kids realise that you can't use that on them, they really do take advantage. They took the stick away from the teacher and they lost a lot of command.

As with Velile, Vijay refers back to his own childhood to justify the use of corporal punishment. He was beaten, sometimes for no reason, by teachers, but says the beatings 'worked', they *'taught me how to bring up kids, you know, the right way'*.

One cannot understand the diverse attitudes to corporal punishment by looking only at family and school disciplinary practices. While the men were all beaten, they received and responded to beatings in different ways. And their responses cannot be understood either through simple raced or classed lenses. The way our informants negotiated these experiences and the overall context of their lives (especially within families) enabled some of them to develop strong views against corporal punishment but left others firmly convinced of its efficacy and legitimacy.

### ***Achievement and failure***

Achievement and failure are important in constructions of masculinities. The process is fraught and failure is a highly threatening prospect to boys seeking to meet the ideals of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>15</sup> In South Africa, sporting success, across racial divides, is the most important signifier. Failure at sport (and not only in South Africa) can elicit homophobic jibes that call into question one's masculinity.<sup>16</sup>

The situation with regard to academic performance is more complex. In some working class and ethnic minority contexts, for example, academic success is regarded with suspicion and this has been well documented in the UK.<sup>17</sup> In South Africa, however, particularly for African boys aspiring towards upward social mobility, academic success has historically been very important. This is not to say that all African boys have sought success and, indeed, current indications in South Africa are that increasing numbers of African, working class boys are no longer vesting their energies in academic work and performance.<sup>18</sup> But both of our African men have invested their emotions and energies in academic success, working hard and often against the odds to achieve their academic and professional qualifications.

Success and failure in our teacher narratives must be understood in two ways: first, *their own* achievements and failures; and second, the performance of their (male) pupils. Sometimes these are in alignment - pleasure in their own success is transmuted into pride for and endorsement of their pupils. At other times, their attitudes are less congruent. For example, they may see their own failures as learning opportunities but decry the failures of their pupils.

Our four teachers work in a system in which academic success was a prerequisite - they could not have become teachers without passing their examinations. We would, therefore, expect them to place a high value on academic achievement and to take a dim view of failure. However, amongst our four teachers, views about achievement varied and there was not universal regard for academic success.

In terms of their own academic achievements, none claimed to have been very good scholars. What is common is the fact that they passed. In their own lives, therefore, while they have experienced success and failure it is tenacity rather than achievement that has helped them to succeed as teachers. Under these circumstances we might expect to find an appreciation of perseverance and participation rather than outright success. On the other hand, globalising forces in education are inclined to emphasise success and to overlook the virtues of pupils who simply participate.

Matthew did not do well academically, despite attending an elite school, saying, *'I was a poor scholar. I had no idea of how to approach learning ... or I didn't enjoy it'*. Nonetheless, he felt impelled to strive *'to*



*be the best or whatever*.

Velile experienced borderline academic success, having achieved the bare minimum grades required and putting the emphasis on passing rather than excelling:

I was okay at school. Then I wrote all my 6 subjects [for the Junior Certificate], and I passed them. So I became a teacher, just like that, at that school. And after that, with the matric, I went to the University of Zululand to do my degree. I wanted to do a BSc, because I was doing maths and physics, only to find that my symbols were not so good ... they were D, D, D ... so I went for the BA.

Similarly, Mxolisi had difficulties getting the grades he needed to do the degree he would have preferred:

I, at the beginning, I didn't want to be a teacher, I had other things in mind -doctor, doing engineering at varsity, but I wasn't good at maths. That was a failure, but that did not discourage me to say no, because I can't do maths. There's nothing else I can do.

Turning to the men's explanations of their academic performance, we can see that each makes different sense of their experiences. Vijay ascribes his underachievement to the hours spent playing soccer - '*what was supposed to be a B aggregate was becoming a C because I spent little time [on school work]*'. However he takes pride in his daughter's academic success and expressed particular pleasure in the fact that she will be the first in his family to get a degree. In other words, he resolves his own sense of failure by enjoying his children's success. Matthew offers an analysis of the pedagogic failures of his school to teach him how to learn and of his teachers to nurture him.

I didn't enjoy [teachers who were] bullies or ...that er what would uh probably from my father, the paternal figure, this dominant figure. I didn't enjoy that sort of thing, the bullying aspect of teaching.

Mxolisi believed that school gave him opportunities and accepts that failing was a useful part of that experience:

You fail, you fail, you have to do something else, you try something else. You might fail again, but you have to pick up the pieces to start again. It's not a shame. To me I want to try new things. I fail, I learn. ... If I fail, what's the deal, I fail. I try something else again. It's not a shame to fail to me. It's something you have to go through at some stage.

Velile, in contrast to the others, offers no explanation of his low grades, accepting them as being adequate for gaining work and continuing to qualify himself. He seems unconcerned at the mediocrity of his academic performance. Paradoxically, even though he has never done more than pass, he has continually sought to upgrade his qualifications in what de Vries<sup>19</sup> has described as a '*paper chase*', a process that does not impact on pedagogy but is essential to personal advancement.

When it comes to sport, our teachers all experienced some measure of success, though Mxolisi, never achieved representative honours, which might be explained by the total lack of sporting facilities at his black school in rural South Africa. Matthew represented his province at senior level in rugby (a very prestigious sport for white South Africans); Vijay played high level soccer and was a professional for a short period until he suffered a serious injury; Velile played softball, a low profile sport, for his school and university.

Matthew is self-deprecating and makes light of his own (sporting) achievements. Neither does he place emphasis on success for his pupils. Indeed, he is dismissive of Oak High's obsession with competitive sporting success:

You asked the question of pressure and what's the importance attached to winning - it's very, very big at the top level ... for a big school like this. ... you'll get a group whose parents pride themselves on their knowledge of games and they want to win, and their son must win. He's sent to this school to win, so there's this push. .... But then you get some, particularly young coaches, coming through - got to win, got to win...winning's all. You know

they tell the kids: we've got to win this one, or else this is a defeat for the whole school. You won't be able to walk through the corridors, and all sorts of rubbish.

Vijay was proud of his soccer achievements and has fond memories of being coached and encouraged by his father. He now takes similar pleasure in supporting his pupils to play soccer. He is happy about his ability to get his pupils to participate, regardless of the levels of their proficiency. Equally, Mxolisi works with his pupils outside the classroom, believing there is a relationship between performance on the sports field and in class. He understands teaching to be about bringing out the best in pupils in a process that needs to be seen holistically and involves taking an interest in all aspects of the pupils' lives:

There, there, they do give me pleasure, because I like, I like to see boys outside the classroom situation. I've learnt a lot from that. Boys behave differently. The way they behave in class might, because some of the boys, the way I see it, they, people are not the same. Some people enjoy, because they play sport. They come here to play sport. Although parents would like them to concentrate on, on, on their academics, but some are not that gifted. They come here for sport. When you see them on the field, you learn a lot from them, because they enjoy what they doing. When you compare it to what they do in class, it is totally different. I enjoy, I enjoy, I enjoy what I'm seeing outside the classroom situation.

All four teachers are concerned more with participation than success. However, there are major differences between them. The two Oak High teachers, Matthew and Mxolisi, do not wish to get sucked into the ultra-competitive sports ethos of the school, which is a feature of elite schools in a global context and which may be even more emphatically so in a sports-obsessed country like South Africa. The Oak High teachers relate to their pupils in a close and caring way. Despite their different class and race backgrounds, their pedagogy is shared. They condemn corporal punishment and oppose a '*win at all costs*' philosophy. They are learner-centred and anti-authoritarian. Vijay and Velile, in contrast, are more focused on their own career development than on their relationships with their pupils. They maintain a strict social distance from pupils, which, for Vijay, takes a paternalistic turn. Associated with these attitudes are conservative views about society and about teaching including lamenting the abolition of corporal punishment. At the same time, they do not express inhumane or exploitative views, but nor do they adhere to human rights discourses or national transformation agendas.

### **Conclusion**

What is the relationship between class, masculinity and race amongst our teachers? We address this question by looking at three indices of masculinity: work; authority; and respect.

Work is a key element of masculinity.<sup>20</sup> Our teachers had varied understandings of work. Even amongst the African teachers, there were significant differences of approach. Velile's rationale for being a teacher is earning a salary, which he spends primarily on himself. Since beginning his teacher training, he has shunned the provider role, preferring to commit his financial resources to his own well-being, including girlfriends and drinking. Earning a secure salary is also very important for Mxolisi, but for different reasons. His project is to support his extended family of origin, to provide for his own children and create his own family by marriage. Vijay is similarly invested in family and also has concerns about financial security. His salary is important and he has committed this to supporting the academic successes of his children. These black South Africans were all disadvantaged, to varying degrees, by the economic system of *apartheid* and this is carried through into adulthood in their determination to secure their economic futures. Matthew, coming from a white middle class environment, expresses no such concerns. Financial security has never been an issue for him and continues to play only a small part in his thinking.

Power and masculinity are deeply entwined. To be powerful establishes a claim to manhood. But power is understood in diverse ways. Velile understands power in terms of patriarchal hierarchy, which he applies equally to his pupils and in his private life. He needs social distance in order to feel powerful and consolidates this distance by his advocacy of corporal punishment and his authoritarian approach to teaching. Mxolisi is much more comfortable with an understanding of power which involves mutual acknowledgement of duty and respect. He has no need to be feared but is affirmed by the affection of his pupils, particularly those from the black townships. Vijay seems to have little interest in exercising power directly, but develops a paternalistic relationship with male pupils who participate in soccer. Like Velile, he maintains his distance, but his approach draws on the model of the large extended Indian family in which he grew up. It contained hierarchies but, like Mxolisi's, was united by reciprocal ties of duty and respect. Matthew's authority in Oak High comes partly from his longevity as a teacher there. His pupils regard him

affectionately at least partly because he bucks the system of authority and competition and is highly approachable. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that he embodies the standards and values of his elite school, which, until relatively recently, was for whites only.

There is, then, no simple symmetry that we can trace between classed, racialised locations and attitudes to teaching. As we have seen, our teachers have negotiated their lives in individual ways that have, nonetheless, been inflected by their race and class. There is much that we can learn about teachers, their work and pedagogy by examining in more detail, the childhood processes which are critical in the shaping of gendered and racialised identities. Such research should not assume any linear or causal link between factors such as race and class, but paying attention to these social forces is equally necessary if we are fully to understand how teacher attitudes and pedagogies are formed.

## Notes

1. We would like to acknowledge funding by the Ford Foundation, Grant No. 1035-0493, to Robert Morrell for the primary research for this article. [↩]
2. Hall, S. (1980) *Race, articulation and societies structured in dominance*. In *Sociological theories: race and colonialism*, Paris: UNESCO, p. 338 [↩]
3. with interviews carried out by Robert Morrell in 2003 [↩]
4. Burman, S., & Reynolds, P. (1986). *Growing Up in a Divided Society: The Contexts of Childhood in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press [↩]
5. Jones, S. (1993) *Assaulting Childhood: Children's Experiences of Migrancy and Hostel Life in South Africa*. Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press [↩]
6. Connell, R.W. (1987) *Gender and Power Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p222 [↩]
7. Names of teachers and schools have been changed throughout. [↩]
8. In 1820 an immigration scheme brought the first relatively large group of British settlers to the Eastern Cape. They eventually formed a kind of 'colonial aristocracy' amongst English-speaking white South Africans and valued their descent. [↩]
9. Hall, C. (1992) *White, Male and Middle Class*. Cambridge: Polity [↩]
10. Matriculation was, and remains, the school-leaving examination in South Africa. Students must pass 'matric' at a certain standard to qualify to go to university. Since the end of apartheid, black teachers who had previously qualified, in the way that Velile did, without matriculating have not been recognised as qualified teacher [↩]
11. Soccer in South Africa has, largely, been a black game, while rugby has been largely white. [↩]
12. see, for example, Chandos J. (1984) *Boys Together English Public Schools 1800-1864*. London: Hutchinson; Heward, C. (1988) *Making a Man of Him: Parents and their Sons' Careers at an English Public School 1929-1950*. London: Routledge and Morrell, R. (2001) *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal, 1880-1920*. Pretoria: UNISA Press [↩]
13. Morrell, R. (2001), "Corporal Punishment and Masculinity in South African Schools", *Men and Masculinities*, 4(2): 140-157 [↩]
14. Morrell, R. (2001) 'Corporal Punishment in South African Schools: a neglected explanation for its persistence', *South African Journal of Education*, 21(4): 292-299 [↩]
15. see, for example Frosh, S., Phoenix, A., & Pattman, R. (2002) *Young Masculinities: Understanding Boys in Contemporary Society*. London: Palgrave [↩]
16. for example, Epstein, D. (1998) 'Real boys don't work': boys' 'underachievement', masculinities and the harassment of sissies. In J. Elwood, V. Hey & J. Maw (Eds.), *Failing Boys? Issues in Gender and Achievement* (pp. 96-108). Buckingham: Open University Press [↩]
17. for example, Mac an Ghail, M. (1994) *The Making of Men: Masculinities, Sexualities and Schooling*. Buckingham: Open University Press; Sewell, T. (1997) *Black Masculinities and Schooling: how black boys survive modern schooling*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books [↩]
18. Perry, H., & Fleisch, B. (2006) Gender and Educational Achievement in South Africa. In V. Reddy (Ed.), *Marking Matric: Colloquium Proceedings*. Cape Town: HSRC Press [↩]
19. de Vries, P. (1989) 'South African Black Teachers and the Academic Paper Chase', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 10(4): 449-458 [↩]
20. see, for example Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity [↩]

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