

KNOWING POLITICS:
KNOWLEDGE AND DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN SOUTH
AFRICA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM



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ABSTRACT

This thesis brings together democratic theory's calls for an understanding of the actually existing democratic state and anthropological work on innovative forms of citizen participation. Building on the work of Joao Biehl and Steven Robins, the research focuses on access to knowledge and claims of expertise as grounds upon which politicians and bureaucrats exclude citizen participation. It argues, using an ethnographic case study of South African student activist group Equal Education, that authors such as Max Weber, Michel Foucault, and James Scott are wrong to imply that citizens cannot train themselves in the technocratic manner frequently deployed by the state's representatives. It also argues, however, that the state's representatives are often not the technocrats they are hypothesised to be or that they claim to be, and their knowledge practices cannot be separated from politics. This makes the process through which citizens establish expertise and credibility with the government more complicated than simply training themselves in the government's knowledge practices.

Drawing on the work of Danielle Allen and Francesca Polletta, the thesis thus also examines how questions of personal experience and identity on grounds of lived experience as well as claimed or perceived identity often interact with claims to knowledge, opening up or shutting down citizens' ability to participate. Even when citizens are able to leverage their technocratic expertise to successfully influence policy creation, they may still find it difficult to effectively participate in the implementation thereof beyond external monitoring and accountability enforcement. The thesis concludes that the current democratic theory ought not be so pessimistic about the spectre of a know-nothing citizenry, but nor ought it presume that education and expertise alone will be sufficient for democratic governments to take seriously an involved and engaged citizenry.

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INTRODUCTION

In spring 2011, Equal Education, a high-profile group of education activists in South Africa, held a town hall meeting in a local Cape Town school. Students, parents, and community members came to voice their concerns about the education system to a government official. The official, a spokesperson for the Minister of Education in the Western Cape, sometimes listened to the community members, but was at other turns hostile towards their comments and questions. The spokesperson came to speak with Equal Education's lead organiser at the time, Doron Isaacs, after the meeting. When Isaacs asked why the Head of Department of the Western Cape Education Department did not attend, as she was someone who actually had the power to change things, the spokesperson told Isaacs that she did not want to bother with meetings where the people 'don't know much about education.'¹

That dismissal is representative of much of the South African government's attitude on public participation in education. An impulse towards democratic inclusiveness may be present, given the government's willingness to send someone else along to meet with the activists and listen to their concerns. Yet, it is unclear that citizen participation is taken seriously, and the grounds upon which it was disregarded by the Head of Department were specific and clear, according to her representative: the citizen participants lacked what she understood as knowledge or expertise.

By most reasonable standards, Equal Education (EE), the activist group in question, had a great deal of expertise. Its board at the time included three prominent education professors. Some of its staff members were highly educated, with its researchers holding undergraduate and graduate degrees from the best universities in South Africa and abroad. They were some of the country's brightest young minds and saw improving the education system as a calling. Other staff members came to the group with strong experience in schools, and in community organising. Their activist credentials were impeccable. Some of founding strategists of the group learned their skills from senior strategic thinkers in the Treatment Action Campaign, a South African advocacy group known as one of the most effective HIV/AIDS activist groups in the world and South Africa's most dynamic

¹ Doron Isaacs, Coordinator, Equal Education. Interview, 17 May, 2011, Online text conversation.

post-apartheid activist group for a time.² And the thousands of dedicated rank and file members of the movement were students, parents, and community members who had first-hand experience of some of South Africa's worst schools. In short, the bureaucrat's statement was either curious or concerning. If Equal Education, with its myriad forms of knowledge, did not know what it is talking about, who in South Africa does? What does it mean for popular participation in education and for substantive citizenship if the politicians and bureaucrats believe the answer is 'no one'—except, of course, themselves?

That question and its answer are not of merely academic interest. If that is indeed the answer as understood by South Africa's government officials, most citizens lack the ability to democratically participate on the terms provided by their own representatives. It is not coincidental that this statement was made to a group of largely poor, black students and parents—the above questions of what it means to know what one is talking about cannot in practice be separated from who one is, particularly in a place such as South Africa, where access to quality education is radically unequal. This thesis analyses these connections between knowledge, expertise, identity, and citizen participation in South Africa's education system, arguing that citizens can and do democratically participate via claiming expertise. However, when they attempt to do so, their participation is often challenged on other, more personal grounds, making active citizen participation in democratic societies more complicated than acknowledged by both the bureaucrat above and the existing theory on the subject.

On its face, the credibility of citizen knowledge and expertise may not appear to be one of South African democracy's most pressing concerns. Media and academic attention both inside and outside the country have been drawn to the corruption scandals wracking the government, and the militant, sometimes violent protests related to the lack of much-needed services in the townships and rural areas. The work of Equal Education and groups like it reveals a different side of what it means to be a citizen in South Africa twenty years after the end of apartheid. The government is freely and fairly elected. The African National Congress, the national ruling party, won a fifth straight national election in 2014, garnering over 60% of

² Steven Robins, "'Long Live Zackie, Long Live': AIDS Activism, Science and Citizenship after Apartheid," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 3 (2004).

votes cast. The rights afforded by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa are some of the most comprehensive and robust in the world. The country is comparatively wealthy, with GDP per capita far outpacing the rest of the African continent. But the distribution of wealth is dramatically unequal, and the effects of apartheid are still visible the instant one starts tracing South Africa's allocation of people, of services, of infrastructure, of—in short—socio-economic advantage.

Equal Education's work and challenges speak to this contradictory South Africa: a South Africa in which the democratic guarantees look great on paper, and a popular ruling party is working to bring high-functioning services to areas that desperately need them. But the services are sparser and thinner on the ground than the government would like to admit, and so too are the processes of democracy. The average South African citizen occupies a paradoxical world, one where the government is obliged by the Constitution to provide services that it neither has the skills to create nor the money to afford, and offers citizens a set of rights and laws that welcome active participation in theory while rejecting it in practice. This rejection is not ancillary to daily life in South Africa—it undermines attempts to hold officials to account, and drives people to protest angrily in the streets. Since 2004, South Africa has arguably had the highest level of urban protest in the world.³ Equal Education's experiences working for a better education system demonstrate the bewildering, frustrating obstacles facing citizens who challenge and resist their radically unequal existence. Its experiences also reveal avenues through which citizens may still manage to work with government officials or triumph, despite difficult odds, over the obstacles created by those officials. Equal Education's work, in short, illuminates some of the reasons why the democratic promise of participation fails, as well as ways to make it succeed, insights which extend beyond the realm of education, and the borders of South Africa.

DEMOCRACY, CITIZENSHIP, AND KNOWLEDGE

I use the word 'democracy' here and throughout to describe a governmental system in which the representation of citizens' wills goes beyond the ballot box to include the possibility of their participation in the creation and implementation of

³ Peter Alexander and Peter Pfaffe, "Social Relationships to the Means and Ends of Protest in South Africa's Ongoing Rebellion of the Poor: The Balfour Insurrections," *Social Movement Studies* 13, no. 2 (2014).

government policy and programming (through avenues such as contacting their representatives and officials, attending government-created community forums to seek their input, etc.). This definition is developed in more detail in the following section on the current state of democratic theory. This representative structure, in South Africa as elsewhere, is paired with a 'bureaucratic' apparatus which adds detail to and implements the projects and programs of the government. An ideal typical bureaucracy, according to Weber, is a professional administrative system characterised by hierarchy, rules, a norm of impersonal or objective orientation towards the subject of work, and the keeping of records on the subject of work. Weber's description of the bureaucratic form was never intended to describe an actually existing system, but rather an ideal against which existing systems might be compared.⁴ Bureaucracies come in many forms, but the version of the institution most relevant to this inquiry is a 'technocratic' one, in which the bureaucrats are highly educated 'experts' in their respective fields who rely on rigorous research to inform their policy creation and their decision-making. My use of these definitions does not imply that the South African education system functions as an ideal version of any of these systems or characterisations. Instead, the terms and definitions serve as a guide to the concepts under discussion, with the recognition that all of them will be challenged and refined in the following chapters.

In the sort of democratic system described above, both elected representatives and bureaucratic officials facilitate substantive citizen participation. Failures of democracy as both a system of representation and as a functional administrative state are produced by the bureaucratic 'experts' and government representatives' rejection of participation by 'ordinary' citizens. Democratic theory has made calls to incorporate the lived experience of actual people in real democracies, anthropology has developed numerous theories of how knowledge is a form of relational power, and political science and anthropology have produced intensive empirical archives on how knowledge relationships function in different realms of society. There has been little work unifying these clearly connected fields, nor attempts to produce a better theory of the practice of democratic citizenship, the purpose of this research. Activism within the South African education system acts as a case study through

⁴ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (1978); Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, "Studying the Dynamics of African Democracies. An Introduction to States at Work," in *States at Work: Dynamics of African Bureaucracies*, ed. Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2014).

which to understand citizens' micro-level knowledge interactions with democratic representatives and technocrats, out of which I build a better theory of the role of knowledge in substantive democratic citizenship.

Acknowledgement of knowledge- or expertise-based power is neither new nor controversial. Two schools of thought about how this occurs in government systems have emerged, reliant on either Max Weber or Michel Foucault for foundation. Weber saw bureaucracies as highly capable and ruthlessly efficient, systems so skilled that people were dominated by knowledge and at risk of dehumanization.⁵ Foucault's rendering was very different, understanding knowledge as a power relationship between individuals and those who govern.⁶ Both, however, largely saw these spaces as capable when it came to the manipulations of aggregated data that make up the 'science of the state,' and neither saw these systems as spaces of citizen engagement. Rather, both saw them as depoliticising institutions, which removed questions and issues from democratic contestation by rendering them as subjects of technocratic expertise. While these accounts, and the theories that have followed since, drew on history and thin sociological description to advance their ideas, they neither captured thick description of bureaucrat and citizen interactions nor built connections between the theories of power/knowledge and theories of democracy and citizenship. For thick description, one must turn to the anthropologists and sociologists who have produced a variety of ethnographic work on the development of knowledge paradigms and understandings of expertise,⁷ bureaucracies/technocrats,⁸ and citizen engagement with government.⁹ To the extent that these accounts look at relationships between citizens and states, they largely focus their attention on citizens' subversion of state technocratic structures,

⁵ Weber, *Economy and Society*.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College De France 1977--1978*, vol. 4 (2007); *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (1980); *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977).

⁷ For example: Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (2013); Steve Woolgar, *Science, the Very Idea* (1992); Joseph Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico* (2006); Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996).

⁸ The most direct ethnography of bureaucracy is likely Michael Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference* (1992). Other prominent ethnographic works on political interactions between people and technocrats include James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development", Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (1994); David Mosse, *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice* (2005); *States at Work: Dynamics of African Bureaucracies* (2014).

⁹ For instance: Arun Agrawal, *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects* (2005); Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands*; Adriana Petryna, *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens after Chernobyl* (2002).

rather than on attempts to engage with the state according to the rules and structures set out by the state's representatives.

From another direction, democratic theorists concerned with the power/knowledge dynamics mentioned above advanced new theories of citizen participation, most notably Jürgen Habermas' ideas on the public sphere and deliberative democracy.¹⁰ His contributions have been built upon by a number of political theorists, mostly in the analytic tradition.¹¹ Deliberative democratic theory acknowledges the importance of informed and engaged citizens and rightfully understands bureaucracy and power/knowledge dynamics as a challenge to producing democratic systems truly representative of citizen will. However, 'democratic realist' critics as varied as Ian Shapiro, Raymond Geuss, James Tully, and Chantal Mouffe, reach the same conclusion on the work of the deliberative democratic theorists: they are 'democratic idealists,' whose work is detached from reality. Without situating their ideas in the contexts of actually existing democracies with real citizens facing obstacles to participation, the idealists' abstract ideas about hypothetical democracies can only be of so much use, and may indeed contribute to masking pernicious power dynamics.¹²

Much of the above democratic theory focuses on or presumes developed world democracies operating in the liberal democratic tradition; as Marc Stears points out, a major impetus for the development of deliberative democratic theory has been a belief in the possibility of democratic reform in the United States in particular.¹³ Most theories regarding developing world democracies are clustered under the work on democratic consolidation, which chronicles the obstacles faced by nascent and developing democracies.¹⁴ The major theorists of democratic

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1979); *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1 (1984); Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2 (1987).

¹¹ For instance: Bruce A Ackerman and James S Fishkin, *Deliberation Day* (2004); Robert E Goodin, "Democratic Deliberation Within," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 29, no. 1 (2000); Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (2009); *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (2009).

¹² Influential critiques on relevance and accuracy include Ian Shapiro, *The State of Democratic Theory* (2009); Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (2000). The idea that democratic idealism may not just lack relevance or accuracy, but is in fact actively harmful has been advanced by, among others, James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key* (2008); Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (2008).

¹³ Marc Stears, *Demanding Democracy: American Radicals in Search of a New Politics* (2010).

¹⁴ For example, Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies* (2013); Juan J Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-*

consolidation are generally in dialogue with each other, not ‘developed world’ democratic theorists, and vice versa. While there are obviously exceptions to this, the general lack of engagement appears a relatively consistent trend.

In some ways, the absence of dialogue between these literatures makes sense; challenges to democratic development or stabilization are logically limited to those democracies currently developing or stabilizing. For instance, literature on bureaucracies in Africa often, though not always, focuses on their dysfunction rather than function, looking at their use as instruments of economic capture or neopatrimonialism, or how their ‘disorder’ is politically useful.¹⁵ Similarly, there are likely challenges in ‘established’ democracies that are either absent or far from being a current concern in developing democracies. But it does not follow that there are no crosscutting challenges faced by both types of democracies, if we can or indeed ought to understand them as discrete categories. Knowledge-based exclusion by democratic representatives and technocratic elites is one of those crosscutting issues. Preferences for particular understandings of expertise or access to particular forms of knowledge are present in both kinds of societies and have strong effects upon democracies in either case, though the preferences and their effects may be different. Regardless, the power dynamics created by knowledge are relevant to both literatures. Moreover, examining only the manner and degree to which these newer democracies conform to the frames of analysis used for democracies in the global North may mean that the global North is missing lessons from democracies emerging out of different philosophical and ideological traditions, and different sets of cultural practices.¹⁶

Communist Europe (1996); Michael Bratton and Nicholas Van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (1997).

¹⁵ Much of this literature focuses on West Africa. For instance: Jean-François Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Béatrice Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (1999); Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (1999); Patrick Chabal, "The Quest for Good Government and Development in Africa: Is NEPAD the Answer?," *International Affairs* 78, no. 3 (2002); "A Few Considerations on Democracy in Africa," *International Affairs* 74, no. 2 (1998); Jean-François Médard, "Corruption in the Neo-Patrimonial States of Sub-Saharan Africa," in *Political Corruption: Concepts and Contexts*, ed. Arnold J. Heidenheimer and Michael Johnston (2002); Giorgio Blundo and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, *Everyday Corruption and the State: Citizens and Public Officials in Africa* (2006); Thomas Bierschenk, *States at Work in West Africa: Sedimentation, Fragmentation and Normative Double-Binds* (2010); *States at Work*. South Africa occupies a very different place in the literature, with an assumption of a much more centralised, ‘Western’ style bureaucracy measured against the mould of Foucault or Weber above. See, for instance, Karl Von Holdt, "Nationalism, Bureaucracy and the Developmental State: The South African Case," *South African Review of Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2010).

¹⁶ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Democratizing Democracy: Beyond the Liberal Democratic Canon* (2005); Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (1996).

Thus, broadly, the current literature contains a notable gap. Political science offers either the utopianism of the democratic idealists, particularly Habermas and the other theorists of deliberative democracy, or empirically rigorous but theoretically bereft accounts of bureaucratic institutions and stakeholder interests. Another approach to the apparently inescapable power dynamics of technocratic knowledge is acquiescence, quietism or withdrawal, as preached by Foucault and his acolytes.¹⁷ And the only avenues for action seem to be anarchism¹⁸ or subversion of a system perceived to be incapable of effective engagement or reform.¹⁹ There is an absence of attempts to reclaim some of the possibility of the democratic state through citizens responding directly to the real, experienced flaws produced by technocratic knowledge regimes; it is on this ground that my project seeks to intervene. My claim is not that these are the only problems faced by citizens who seek to substantively participate, nor that democratic participation can be made impervious to the ill effects of power/knowledge in relationships between bureaucrats and citizens. Rather, given the existence of these dynamics, I seek to create an account of what happens when citizens use expert knowledge to engage in substantive democratic participation with those who already perceive themselves as ‘in the know,’ including bureaucrats, and political elites, and what that means for our understanding of the relationship between knowledge and democratic participation. Such a project stands apart from the above literature, in which egalitarian options for citizens to engage constructively with the state either do not exist (quietism, anarchism, utopianism) or may require them to inadvertently reproduce conditions of inequity for others (subversion by those with insider knowledge—which, according to the accounts cited above, allows for manipulation of problematic conditions, but not their reform).

SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

In the debate between the idealists and the realists, I side with the realists in believing that building democratic theory in the abstract is unlikely to produce a

¹⁷ The beginnings of this withdrawn or inwardly-focused approach can be found in Foucault's discussion of the care of the self in his last works, starting in Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (1978). The clearest articulation of these ideas is in his final lectures and writing, namely *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self* (2012); *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (1997).

¹⁸ Anthropologist David Graeber's work is the most relevant here, especially David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (2009); "Beyond Power/Knowledge an Exploration of the Relation of Power, Ignorance and Stupidity," Lecture (2006).

¹⁹ Petryna, *Life Exposed*; Agrawal, *Environmental*.

workable or tenable account of democracy on the ground. As such, I use activism in the South African education system as a theory-building case study for my questions of knowledge, expertise, democracy, and citizen participation. As is true of any place, South Africa's democratic practices cannot be analysed absent their historical context.

South Africa's comprehensively democratic system was only installed in 1994. From 1948 until the country's first democratic elections, it was ruled by the National Party, which instituted the system of apartheid. Apartheid was partially a continuation of pre-existing policies of racial discrimination and exclusion, and partially an expansion of those policies through further legislation predicated upon an ideology of racial separatism. People living within South Africa's borders were required to declare their race to the government (subject to the highly arbitrary testing thereof). The apartheid government placed race-based restrictions on jobs, voting, place of residence, and marriage, as well as created separate systems of provision of government services with high quality services (including education and health care) for white people and substantially worse systems for anyone not judged to be white. The government created separate 'homelands' or 'Bantustans' for black²⁰ people, some of which it claimed were entirely separate countries (unrecognised by most of the world). The homelands had separate administrations and 'governments' initially installed mostly on the basis of their agreeableness towards the apartheid regime and subsequently on the basis of extended patronage networks.²¹

This large-scale, comprehensive system of racial oppression was recognised as a crime against humanity by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1966. A diversity of movements sprung up to resist the apartheid government and fight for freedom and equality, by black people as well as white people. The African National

²⁰ Government officials working on the education of non-Europeans in this era used several terms interchangeably and ambiguously, in line with the fluid, confused, and arbitrary nature of apartheid racial categorisations. While political arguments can be and have been made for using particular phrases, capitalisation, or quote marks, in this thesis I use simplicity, consistency, and historical fidelity as my guides. 'Black,' 'native' and 'bantú' were used to refer to dark-skinned indigenous people, though 'black' also sometimes included anyone who was non-European. 'African' denoted indigenous people (sometimes including the lighter-skinned Khoisan), and 'coloured' could be used to mean someone of mixed race, the Malay slaves brought over by the Dutch, and sometimes the Khoisan or Indians (the latter two groups were also used as categories). I will avoid inverted commas for racial categories going forward and use the capitalisation shown above when not referencing a proper noun, save when quoting others.

²¹ William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (2001).

Congress (ANC), which has led the country since the establishment of free and fair elections in 1994, was one of those movements, as was the South African Communist Party, the union movement, and others. A comprehensive history of this resistance is not necessary to detail here, though the history of resistance and activism related to education is covered in depth in chapter one, and aspects of the historical union movement are outlined in chapter five. The explicit and particular racial discrimination of the colonial period, the initial Union government, and apartheid created and ensured the continuation of a poor, black majority in the country that persists to this day. Though there are an increasing number of wealthier black people, white people on the whole remain a privileged class in nearly all aspects of South African society, including in education.

It is, as a result, impossible to talk about politics in South Africa without talking about race. Given South Africa's history and current circumstances, it is inevitable and necessary that discussions of politics, from the national to the micro, return repeatedly to discussions of race, power, and inequality. There is an on-going academic debate about how to approach the racial categories established during apartheid in post-apartheid South Africa. Approaches include the continuation of Black Consciousness ideas; 'race cognizance', which argues for recognizing race for the sake of recognizing continued structural injustice on the basis of race; and an extreme version of non-racialism which does not recognize any racial categories.²² These theoretical approaches offer accounts of how South Africans approach race as a category of analysis in actual everyday practice, argue in favour of a particular approach, or both. In the popular press, not only is race frequently mentioned with regards to levels of service delivery, or how far things have come since apartheid, it is also a constant category of analysis in the opinion pages. Adam Habib wrote nearly ten years after the transition that people's credibility in the eyes of others was still often tied to racial identity.²³ Another ten years after that, little appeared to have changed, with Mamphela Ramphele, Helen Zille, Lindiwe Mazibuko, and

²² James L Gibson, "The Legacy of Apartheid: Racial Differences in the Legitimacy of Democratic Institutions and Processes in the New South Africa," *Comparative Political Studies* 36, no. 7 (2003); James L Gibson and Amanda Gouws, "Social Identities and Political Intolerance: Linkages within the South African Mass Public," *American Journal of Political Science* (2000); Jeff Guy, "Somewhere over the Rainbow: The Nationstate, Democracy and Race in a Globalising South Africa," *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa* 56, no. 1 (2004); Michael MacDonald, *Why Race Matters in South Africa* (2006); Xolela Mangcu, "Liberating Race from Apartheid," *Transformation*, no. 47 (2001); Gerhard Maré, "Race, Democracy and Opposition in South African Politics: As Other a Way as Possible," *Democratization* 8, no. 1 (2001).

²³ Adam Habib, "Elites and Our Racial Quagmire," *Mail and Guardian* 20 (2002).

Mmusi Maimane's skin colour commented on sometimes more frequently than their policy stances in the 2014 national election and 2015 opposition leadership contest.²⁴

Race in South Africa is heavily entwined with class, as a result of black people enduring for decades a system designed to deprive them of their material wealth as well as their dignity. Equal Education's status as a multiracial movement mostly in the service of poor black youth, then, is not without complexity. Chapters four and five focus on this reality specifically, but elements of it are visible throughout the thesis. Questions of the performance of citizenship and expertise cannot be divorced from these questions of personal identity in South Africa, nor can they be divorced from similar questions in other places. My treatment of these elements of the performance of citizenship in separate chapters is to allow for further scrutiny of them, not as a statement about their separateness from the ideas about knowledge and expertise discussed throughout the thesis. To the contrary, I argue that the experiences of Equal Education show that personal experiences and identity are inseparable from the technocratic knowledge and expertise that undergirds the work of both Equal Education and the government institutions and officials that they interact with. Previous literature on knowledge and citizenship has largely elided these intersections; I argue that they are crucial for understanding interactions between active citizens and their government representatives and bureaucrats, including on the grounds of knowledge.

The deep effects of apartheid on South Africa's education system, to some degree, exacerbate this intersection of knowledge and expertise with identity and experience. Generations of students, black and white, passed through schools that propagated apartheid's segregationist, racist ideology. As a cohort, the first students to see attempts at creating high-achieving schools for all have not fared much better—many formerly black schools continue to lack necessary resources, from books and desks to a sufficient number of competent and qualified teachers. There were substantial improvements on some fronts—for instance, two decades

²⁴ See, for instance, Haji Mohamed Dawjee, "Mmusi Maimane: Black Leader, White Saviour?," *Mail & Guardian*, 13 May 2015; William Saunderson-Meyer, "How Helen Zille Turned the DA Upside Down and Inside Out," *Mail & Guardian*, 20 April 2015; Bekezela Phakathi, "Zille 'Uses Black People for Her Own Gain', Says Fransman," *Business Day*, 18 May 2014; Andisiwe Makinana, "Ramphela's Move to DA Will Remove Race Card, Says Zille," *Mail & Guardian*, 28 Jan 2014; Murray Williams, "Zuma Lays into 'White' Zille," *Cape Argus*, 9 Jan 2014.

after apartheid, the majority of university students in the country were black, and there was an increasingly large and stable black middle class—but for the majority of black people, educational quality continued to be poor. The slow pace of change cannot be attributed to neglect. Even before the talks to end apartheid began, the African National Congress highlighted educational deficits as a major factor undermining social equality and opportunities for economic advancement. Moreover, they underscored the importance of education to participating as fully engaged citizens in ‘the new South Africa,’ an emphasis that continued through 2015.²⁵ To the heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle, education was not merely necessary for economic development; it was the key to democracy itself. This stance was not a revelation. As discussed in chapter one, some of the most strategically significant and morally symbolic elements of the struggle were connected by their opposition to education inequality, most famously the Soweto Uprising of 1976.²⁶

The apartheid government left four major educational deficits for the new, democratic government, according to Edward Fiske and Helen Ladd. First, there were high levels of residential segregation and persistent poverty. Black students lacked access to the high-quality schools of their white peers because of the overwhelming effectiveness of apartheid’s geographic segregation. For black learners in townships of major cities, reaching good schools in wealthy areas would take hours of travel even if they could afford the costs of transit. For learners living in the former Bantustans, those high-quality schools rarely existed. Second, the existing resources for black and coloured learners were poor. Current teachers had not been trained to perform their new tasks, nor were there well-trained teachers to replace them. Learning materials and physical structures were outdated and/or rundown. Third, there was a low level of educational attainment amongst black and coloured parents, meaning they could not effectively supplement the formal education system. Finally, Fiske and Ladd argued that there was a weak ‘culture of learning’ in black communities. Some in black communities were sceptical of the opportunities provided by education due to their own prior experience. Moreover, the standard parental pride when children exceed their parents’ degree attainment

²⁵ Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education, "Strengthening Curriculum Implementation from 2010 and Beyond," ed. Department of Basic Education (2010).

²⁶ Edward B Fiske and Helen F Ladd, *Elusive Equity: Education Reform in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (2005).

meant many parents with low educational attainment set unintentionally low expectations for their children.²⁷

To be sure, those working in the education sector after the end of apartheid faced major challenges, and the post-apartheid education system has delivered substantially better results on all fronts. Yet, the continuing poor state of education almost two decades after the end of apartheid is surprising. South Africa spends a higher percentage per capita than any other country on the continent, and some African and coloured students now attend schools that were out of their reach under apartheid, but there has been almost no integration of whites into previously coloured and black schools.²⁸ While the official numbers showed 76% of final year high school students passed their exit exams in 2014, those numbers smooth a rougher reality. South Africa has consistently high primary school enrolment rates—over 90% of primary school-aged youth are enrolled, one of the reasons South Africa's per capita costs are higher than elsewhere on the continent—but the system is plagued by poor retention rates. Nearly half of the 2014 graduation cohort that began school in grade 1 dropped out along the way. Out of the class that should have graduated in 2014, the 'real' pass rate accounting for dropouts was 37%.²⁹ Moreover, there is a dismal rate of students passing exit exams highly enough to attend any sort of tertiary education; just over 1 in 4 students who sat final secondary school exams passed highly enough to attend university.³⁰

As it stands, South Africa's schools are still failing their youth, who are not unaware of that fact. Since well before 1994, South Africa's schools have been social laboratories for government conceptions of democracy and social order (however unequal in ideology and practice) and as a result have been sites of protest for just as long. The traditions of activism in and on schooling and the history of inequality prefigured the activism that exists today, and the historical technocratic policymaking practices have led the way for the post-apartheid bureaucratic practices of exclusion.

²⁷ Ibid., 52.

²⁸ Crain Soudien, "'Constituting the Class': An Analysis of the Process of 'Integration' in South African Schools," in *Changing Class: Education and Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Linda Chisholm (2004).

²⁹ Nic Spaull to Africa Check, 13 January, 2015, <http://africacheck.org/2015/01/13/how-to-raise-the-real-matric-pass-rate/>.

³⁰ Bongani Nkosi, "Matric 2014: Gauteng Tops as National Pass Rate Flops," *Mail & Guardian*, 5 Jan 2015.

Given this history, the reasons for selecting education activism in South Africa as a site of study for my research questions are fourfold: First, South Africa's democracy aspires to participatory democratic ideals. The South African education system offers one of the better examples of a system intentionally structured to function as suggested by the democratic idealists (and in particular, the deliberative democracy theorists).³¹ At every layer of government involvement in primary or secondary education, input is sought from citizens. In schools, parents, community members, and secondary school students can participate in councils with high levels of control over school policies.³² In provincial governments, which direct funding and develop plans to meet the national government's goals, community meetings are a frequent occurrence and parents and students have direct access to the officials involved, even the highest ranking. At the national level, all of the Department of Basic Education's policy documents, budgets, and strategic plans are submitted for public and civil society scrutiny. The public is welcome to observe the meetings of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee in charge of Basic Education and pose questions to them. Those in government appear to recognize a place for citizen participation.

Second, South Africa's democracy is structured such that there is a cognizance of and attention to the importance of knowledge in civic participation. While one obviously cannot reasonably expect the government to be steeped in the academic literature on knowledge, bureaucracy, and participation, national government documents frequently reference the role of education in becoming a fully participatory citizen.³³ The aforementioned structures aimed at eliciting and incorporating citizen input almost function as a laboratory component of the political science and government lessons taught in schools. The ANC sees the education system as a critical site of democratic reproduction.

Third, South Africa possesses substantial and vibrant democratic participation. Improving the state of democracy in South Africa is widely understood by its

³¹ Carolyn Hamilton, "Why Archive Matters: Archive, Public Deliberation and Citizenship," in *Becoming Worthy Ancestors: Archive, Public Deliberation and Identity in South Africa*, ed. Xolela Mangcu (2011).

³² *South African Schools Act*.

³³ Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education, "Delivery Agreement for Outcome 1: Improved Quality of Basic Education," ed. Department of Basic Education (2011); "Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025," ed. Department of Basic Education (2010); "Medium Term Expenditure Framework," ed. Department of Basic Education (2009).

citizens as a national project, and democratic participation is high. Turnout of registered voters, a thin but common measure of democratic participation, was 73.5% for the 2014 presidential election (compared with 67.95% in the 2012 US presidential election or 65.77% in the 2010 United Kingdom election), and there is a vibrant culture of activism and citizen engagement with government.³⁴ This aspect of South African democracy is encouraging on two levels: first, citizen participation is prevalent and indicates a sense of optimism for positive change, and second, more data is available for this research than in locations where participation by disadvantaged groups is in a moribund state.

Fourth, South Africa is undergoing a high level of democratic experimentation. South Africa is a democracy both fledgling and stable, with impressively democratic structures (the structure of government, the Constitution, much of the legislation and Constitutional Court decisions) but highly contested democratic institutions, beliefs, and values.³⁵ Values and institutions are currently in flux but the continuation of democracy is largely certain—despite frequent, sometimes militant protest, South Africa appears to fit Linz and Stepan's description of a consolidated democracy in which democratic process and procedure is 'the only game in town.'³⁶ This allows for broader experimentation regarding civic participation in South Africa than in locations where institutions and values are rigid and thus there is little point in experimentation, or where structures are uncertain and thus experimentation and challenges to the existing systems may be dangerously destabilising.

Finally, those wishing to participate in South Africa's democracy encounter significant knowledge- and expertise-based obstacles to substantive participation. Despite the appearance of invitations to citizen participation and the beneficial

³⁴ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, "Voter Turnout Data for South Africa," International IDEA, <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=246>; "Voter Turnout Data for United States," International IDEA, <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=231>; "Voter Turnout Data for United Kingdom," International IDEA, <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=77>.

³⁵ The so-called 'service delivery' protests, President Zuma and other high-ranking ANC members' comments criticizing the independence of the judiciary, and the 2015 fracas involving the Speaker of Parliament calling riot police into Parliament to remove a minority party whose members made corruption allegations against the President on the floor of Parliament are only a handful of examples demonstrating how citizens and government officials (both majority and opposition) are experimenting with the boundaries of what counts as democratic governance in South Africa.

³⁶ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*; Tom Lodge and Shauna Mottiar, "Protest in South Africa: Motives and Meanings," *Democratization*, no. ahead-of-print (2015).

structures highlighted above, civic engagement with the education system is routinely halted, often on grounds of 'expertise,' defined narrowly and opportunistically by the government official in question. Both the national government and the provincial departments of education have a record of blocking citizens' attempts to participate. Since the democratic transition, students, parents, community members, and non-governmental organisations have been working to engage with education policymakers, only to have their involvement dismissed on grounds of ostensible lack of expertise. This point is of particular importance in South Africa, where the majority of the country attended or presently attends schools that fail(ed) to equip them with the skills needed to participate on technocratic grounds. If poor schooling or low levels of educational attainment are enough to exclude people from the democratic process, then South Africa's democracy is much closer to an oligarchy, influenced and run by a small minority.

Despite these challenges, a popular movement, Equal Education, has found it possible to challenge the government on technocratic grounds. While the dominant belief in democratic theory is that technocracy and notions of bureaucratic expertise render broad-based substantive, popular participation nearly impossible, I argue that Equal Education's work demonstrates that with some ingenuity, citizens can convert the disempowering effects of technocracy into a site of empowerment.³⁷ Rather than try to shift the debate to the anecdotal, experiential grounds more familiar or comfortable for popular activism, Equal Education trains its activists to engage on the same statistics, laws, and policy language used by government politicians and bureaucrats.³⁸ This is not to say government officials then immediately accede to demands phrased in such ways. Officials often introduce other standards related to interests, authority, age, race, and more that must be met by would-be-participants, leading to a continued negotiation—but one

³⁷ For theoretical underpinnings of this belief, see Weber, *Economy and Society*; Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 4; Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2. For applied work, see, for instance, Frank Fischer, "Technological Deliberation in a Democratic Society: The Case for Participatory Inquiry," *Science and Public Policy* 26, no. 5 (1999); B Guy Peters, "Bureaucracy and Democracy," *Public Organization Review* 10, no. 3 (2010). For examples in developmental states, see Patrick Heller, "Moving the State: The Politics of Democratic Decentralization in Kerala, South Africa, and Porto Alegre," *Politics and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001); Geci Karuri-Sebina, David Hemson, and Jonathan Carter, "Putting People First Versus Embedding Autonomy," *Systemic Practice and Action Research* 23, no. 1 (2010).

³⁸ 'Government officials' is a phrase used here and throughout the rest of this work to refer to political as well as bureaucratic government employees.

in which government does not hold its standard trumps of expertise. These arguments are made across six chapters.

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

The second chapter shifts to look at the work of Equal Education in the context of these knowledge-based limitations on citizen engagement with government. The chapter provides the history, organisational structure, mission, values, and other relevant information regarding Equal Education. The chapter makes a theoretical argument for viewing activist organisations as vanguards in forging new practices of substantive citizenship, building on the anthropological literature on health and citizenship. The arguments of Steven Robins, Joao Biehl, and others ground an analysis of Equal Education's activist precursors and current peers. The chapter argues that though Equal Education sees its technocratic knowledge capabilities as a key part of its effectiveness as a mass movement, its approach also draws upon the kinds of politically and morally symbolic visual and emotive devices seen in other activist groups, making it a movement that strives for rightness as well as righteousness in the eyes of government officials and the broader public.

The third chapter focuses on key interactions between the government and these activists and citizens. The chapter contains mostly ethnographic material on particular instances in which government officials' knowledge practices and the activists' strategies appear at loggerheads, as well as interviews with government officials regarding their views on citizen participation. The manoeuvres by citizens and government to gain an upper hand in disagreements, especially government's willingness to render 'expertise' as a shifting target reveal much about broader patterns relating to knowledge and citizenship. Through an analysis of the national Department of Basic Education's public accountability documents and a spontaneous, chaotic school protest in Khayelitsha, the chapter finishes by arguing

that both technocratic and experiential knowledge are blurrier categories than posited by numerous theorists but most prominently by James Scott, possessed in part by both government officials and citizens, but in full by neither.

The fourth chapter is a deeper enquiry into what, aside from technocratic knowledge, either provides or erases the credibility of Equal Education's activists in the eyes of the South African government and society. This chapter examines interactions between activists and/or elected officials and bureaucrats in which the activists' credibility on grounds other than technocratic knowledge is called into question (e.g. on race, class, and personal experience), and uses this data to, establish how identity-based and experiential challenges to citizen participation show government officials' perceptions of the necessary conditions for active citizenship and how that shapes practices of democratic citizenship.

Chapter five offers an analysis of Equal Education's internal democratic practices regarding knowledge, and examines how expertise and credibility circulate within Equal Education itself. The chapter argues that that not only are identity and personal experience salient for Equal Education per government demands, they are constituent features of how individuals within the organisation relate to each other, and they shape both the power relations and the knowledge transfer within the organisation, thus affecting the organisation's campaigning work. This work contributes to the literature on social movements in South Africa by offering an in-depth analysis of the racial dynamics within a progressive, multiracial movement. The chapter shows that while race can affect trust and perceptions of credibility between different members of the organisation, talk of race often acts as a vocabulary through which to challenge unequal power dynamics in the organisation that are only partially related to race, if they are related at all. Equal Education's internal practices and handling of explicitly race-related issues underscores the importance of trust in internal organisational democratic practice and shows how particular institutional and individual actions establish that trust.

Chapter six analyses Equal Education's attempts to shift its own knowledge practices when its potential domain of contestation shifted from policy creation to policy implementation. The challenges of meeting the needs of a new domain of expertise highlighted potential limitations on citizen involvement in putting hard-fought for policies into actual practice. The chapter begins with Equal Education's

victory on its main campaign since 2009, on school infrastructure, and the government's institution of regulations regarding minimum norms and standards for school infrastructure. The chapter then assesses the organisation's attempts to support and monitor the government in its creation of provincial implementation plans for infrastructure, and analyses the challenges created by this different type of work for an organisation skilled in campaigning for policy creation. This is juxtaposed with Equal Education's successes in monitoring the provision of sanitation facilities in schools in Gauteng. I argue that Equal Education's experiences show that despite a depth of technocratic knowledge on policy creation, citizens are likely to find more spaces for participation in monitoring implementation and holding officials to account, rather than assisting with the implementation itself.

Finally, my conclusion offers some initial ideas about what these interactions mean for an understanding of substantive citizenship and democratic participation in an era of ever-increasing complexity. Contrary to the dominant thesis on the effects of technocracy on democratic participation (that is to say, it renders it all but impossible), I argue that the experiences of Equal Education demonstrate that technocratic substantive citizenship is indeed possible, and pioneer a new understanding of what it means to be an expert in the realm of government policy creation and implementation. However, by continuously attempting to meet government officials' conditions on citizens' participation, Equal Education may unintentionally embolden officials to make antidemocratic demands regarding the kinds of credibility required of citizens who wish to engage in the real substance of self-governance. Thus, while technocratic governance is not necessarily an anti-democratic space, citizens challenging the government on technocratic grounds may still prompt anti-democratic practices from government officials. Perversely, Equal Education's successes in challenging government officials on their own grounds may have also created exclusionary expectations on the part of those same officials.

The rest of this introduction is dedicated to covering the methodology, site and data of this research.

METHOD, SITE, AND DATA

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

As indicated by the discussion of democratic theory above, my approach is to develop broader theory out of the particularities of citizen participation in the South African education system. I use a single case study as the starting point for the theoretical discussion.³⁹ While it would be possible to attempt to answer the same questions without reference to a specific situation, such an abstract discussion would be compromised by the shortcomings highlighted by the democratic realists. Though the case is of empirical interest on its own, this project contributes to democratic theory beyond the specific situations in South African education. In this regard, I see work like Bonnie Honig's *Antigone Interrupted*, in which she uses the case of 1980s HIV/AIDS activism in the United States to develop bigger ideas about the politics of mourning, as a model for what follows.⁴⁰

³⁹ Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (2014).

⁴⁰ Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (2013).

Rather than relying on historical archives like Honig, I conducted interviews and ethnographic research. This project is not about macropolitics, at the level of parties, elections, etc., but about micropolitics, and the everyday interactions involved in the constant negotiations of what it means to rule and be ruled in a democratic state. The questions here require quotidian and mundane details in order to better understand the larger, more extraordinary whole. Following the actions of an activist group requires a capacity for spontaneity; work arises as needed, and projects are picked up because of ability sometimes as much as pre-determined strategy. Activist organisations are not known for their rigid fidelity to schedules, detailed strategic plans, and rules, and Equal Education proved no exception to that characterisation. As such, participant-observation, with its adaptable form, ability to witness details as well as query them afterward, possibility to see elements of which the subjects are themselves unaware, and (as a researcher) chance to move from an initial sense of strangeness to an eventual sense of normalcy and vice versa, was the ideal method to gather baseline data.

In the manner suggested by anthropologist and ethnographic theorist Clifford Geertz, I placed myself in 'the flow' and followed it.⁴¹ In this regard, the project may be seen as more similar to work by the political scientist Lisa Wedeen, who uses and encourages the involvement of ethnographic cases in political science to develop both general theories and causal explanations.⁴² My ethnographic evidence on Equal Education's work comes from three periods of participant-observation totalling roughly 11 months onsite (July 2011 to October 2011, March through June 2013 and January to April 2014), as well as from interviews and documents produced by Equal Education. I was based in Equal Education's headquarters in the township of Khayelitsha. Khayelitsha is a largely Xhosa-speaking, 99% black township of nearly 400,000 people outside of Cape Town in Western Cape, South Africa. More than half of Khayelitsha's 118,000 residences are informal structures, and its residents' median household income is only half that of the Cape Metro—R20,000 a year, or just over 3GBP a day.⁴³ As with any research, there are practical boundaries to the scope of the project.

⁴¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (1973).

⁴² Lisa Wedeen, "Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science," *Annual Review of Political Science* 13 (2010).

⁴³ Kate O'Regan and Vusi Pikoli, "Handover Statement by Commissioners, Commission of Inquiry into Policing in Khayelitsha Established in Terms of Section 206(5) of the Constitution," (2014). Conversion rate from January 2015.

Equal Education is a grassroots movement with a professional staff that assists in its work. It began by doing research on the problems facing South Africa's schools in 2008, gradually built up a mass membership of students and parents, and in 2012 held its first elections for the leadership positions in the movement, with most posts won by students and parents from the communities that its work serves. Its professional staff is subdivided into departments named for their functions within the organisation.⁴⁴ I was given permission to research the organisation beginning in 2011 by Doron Isaacs, the co-founder and at the time the Coordinator (head) of Equal Education, which was renewed for the two subsequent participant-observation periods by him as well as by Brad Brockman, the elected General Secretary from 2012-2015. They agreed to give me unlimited access to the organisation, which was affirmed by their colleagues in meetings of all staff and full-time volunteers at the start of each research period. There were various points where individuals in the organisation requested that I not be present (for instance, in management team meetings, which could involve sensitive personnel discussions), boundaries which I respected. When I negotiated my access, I made it clear that I could not guarantee that my discussion of the organisation would be fully positive, and from their side, Equal Education made it clear that they had no expectation of being able to censor this work.

I spent the most time on site with the Policy, Communications, and Research Department, but also spent significant time with the Youth and Community Departments. I went to all possible scheduled EE events, which included community forums, school library openings, youth mass meetings, staff seminars, internal strategy meetings, youth group meetings, and youth camp. I frequently joined EE staff and members on unscheduled or unplanned activities, which included anything from dropping off EE's student magazine at dozens of schools and libraries in Khayelitsha to EE's attempt to mediate between administrators, parents, students, and the police at a spontaneous Khayelitsha school protest that had rapidly turned militant. During my periods of participant-observation, I was at the office as often as any full-time staff member or volunteer, and having a desk at the EE office made possible critical opportunities to see EE's students and staff in action and witness their interactions with government officials.

⁴⁴ This is a brief overview of Equal Education's structure. More detail on the organisation's structure and demographics can be found in chapter two.

In exchange for unlimited access to EE's work, both internal and external, I contributed research and writing to several projects for PCR: a training manual for youth group leaders and activists; a 'shadow report' for South Africa's Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Basic Education, which assessed the Department of Education's activities of the past year against its stated goals; preliminary research on the state of sanitation in Khayelitsha schools, which was used in part for a parents campaign; and the revision of a draft report on textbook procurement and provision. I was also included in staff meetings and discussions, and sometimes asked to lead youth group sessions and mass meeting breakout sessions in collaboration with Xhosa-speaking facilitators who grew up in Khayelitsha. My project depended on the access EE gave me, and the data behind the arguments in this thesis would be impoverished without the activists' tolerance for my persistent questions. However, my collaborative and friendly relationship with the organisation's staff and members and my personal sympathy with EE's mission raise questions about my bias as a researcher, and the entanglement of my personal relationships and professional obligations.

Several aspects of this question of bias and objectivity are worth discussing. The first idea to note here is the well-established argument that no social science research can claim true objectivity; social science is imbued with the interpretation of the researcher, invariably coloured by his or her previous experiences and subjectivity. This concept is thoroughly discussed elsewhere, leaving no need to reinvent the wheel here.⁴⁵ The idea that no social science research can be completely objective does not imply that it cannot bring useful and important assessments of the world. I defer to Donna Haraway's argument that researchers should do their best to limit the influence of their biases by actively seeking counterpoints, and by disclosing relevant personal factors to readers so that they can assess the work accordingly.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See, for example, James Clifford and George E Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986); John L Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (1992); James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (2006); *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (1999); Graeber, *Direct Action; Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (2004); Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.Femaleman@_Meets_Oncomouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (1997); Sandra G Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (1986).

⁴⁶ Haraway, *Modest_Witness*.

In that spirit, my identity as a white, female, middle-class American with English as my first language shaped my perceptions of Equal Education as well as its activists' perceptions of me. There were, for example, instances where my American accent caused subtle but clear shifts in others' reactions to me once I began to speak, prompting a more immediate openness from some than might be given to white South Africans, as well as a level of curiosity about why I was there and working with and researching Equal Education in particular. I had the highest level of education of anyone in the organisation save the academics on EE's National Council, and two years experience in a non-profit consulting firm with very different organisational practices to Equal Education, leading some to treat me as a resource on a variety of issues, anything from how to deal with tricky colleague relationships to aspects of microeconomics to effective project management. Others treated me as roughly interchangeable with the numerous international and local volunteers who spend several months assisting the organisation in its research, mostly an asset in terms of what I could contribute to Equal Education's own research projects. On the basis of that research work, Equal Education and I also spoke about the possibility of me joining the organisation as a full-time researcher on completion of this doctorate, though for personal reasons on my side and a need to swiftly hire someone for the role on Equal Education's side, that did not move beyond the level of discussion. I spent a little under half a year volunteering with Zackie Achmat and the Treatment Action Campaign (EE's incubating organisation) in 2007 and 2008, where I first came across Equal Education in its developmental stages. My previous work for allied groups and my sympathy for Equal Education's mission certainly led some within the movement to view me as a comrade as much as a researcher, potentially prompting a higher level of generosity towards participation in my research. Though this might be the source of some critique of my work, intuitively, few choose to write on issues on which they lack opinions. Moreover, as David Graeber points out, a lack of support for a cause is not a neutral standpoint; it is a stance in favour of the status quo.⁴⁷ Additionally, support for a cause certainly does not preclude critical assessment of the work that it undertakes.

After spending nearly a year in total with Equal Education's staff and activists, some of them came to understand me as a friend, and I they, a tricky set of relationships to navigate as a researcher. Throughout all levels of the staff and

⁴⁷ Graeber, *Direct Action*.

volunteers, Equal Education's activists were kind and generous to me, both as a researcher and as a person. I spent time socializing outside of the EE office with leaders, managers, staff and facilitators. Discussions about Equal Education that took place in these out-of-hours social spaces were off record and not included in this research unless I requested explicit permission to use the material, given that these were scenarios in which people were more likely to regard me as a colleague or friend first and a researcher second. During EE's work hours, I frequently went to get lunch with the PCR staff and managers, as well as sometimes with the parent organisers. David Mosse rightly notes that maintaining critical distance can be challenging when researchers also consider their subjects to be colleagues and friends and vice versa, and justifiable criticism can still burn bridges, prompting researchers to shy away from recounting more complex or difficult situations.⁴⁸ My experience and portrayal of Equal Education is not exclusively positive. I had numerous conversations with staff members who were disillusioned with EE for various reasons, as well as with outsiders who had complaints about EE. I have included the relevant critiques in this thesis. Several of EE's senior managers also asked me to provide any feedback I might have for them based on what I had heard in my research, including negative feedback. To the extent that I was able to fulfil that request and keep my sources anonymous, I did so. These managers responded to some of the criticisms I brought up, and where those critiques are included, I have included their responses. I also provided a near-final draft to Equal Education to review. Its senior leaders returned some minor factual corrections, which have been incorporated into this draft, as well as some differing interpretations of events, which are also noted in the relevant locations.

My internal formal interviews were mostly with managers; these were the individuals with whom I had the least day-to-day contact. Perspectives of non-management staff and student members are mostly included in the participant-observation material, as I had frequent contact with them through this method and thus the opportunity to ask questions as they arose, rather than in a formal interview setting. Data regarding the activities of Equal Education and the attitudes of its staff and members not explicitly ascribed to specific interviews, documents,

⁴⁸ Mosse, *Cultivating Development*; "Anti-Social Anthropology? Objectivity, Objection, and the Ethnography of Public Policy and Professional Communities*," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12, no. 4 (2006).

etc. throughout the rest of this thesis are data I collected through my periods of participant-observation.⁴⁹

I attempted to balance what could have been an exclusively inside view of Equal Education with outside interviews and sources. I conducted a series of interviews with other education NGO staff members, a high-ranking former national bureaucratic education official and all of the heads of the Cape Town Metro Education Districts, in charge of several hundred schools each. I also sat in on education sector meetings outside of EE. While I came across no one with a fully negative perspective on EE's work, I certainly encountered criticism of EE, and have included those critiques in my data and conclusions. As I did not intend to conduct quantitative or statistical analysis on the information provided to me by interviewees, fully structured interviews were not necessary and would have limited the information I received. My interviewees clearly had their own ideas about the most interesting questions I could be asking them, and often the directions in which they tried to steer the interviews were as informative as their answers to the questions I walked in the door with. Topics covered (depending on interviewee) included attitudes towards government generally to gain a broader understanding of participant views, attitudes toward government in this particular realm, past interactions with government education officials, thoughts on the importance of a high quality education, and thoughts on Equal Education's work and citizen participation in education as a whole.

Minors who participated in my research are anonymised, as are any adult participants who requested to be. Quotations and instances from my participant-observation research are also anonymised. The research is, to a minor degree, politically sensitive both inside and outside of Equal Education. Equal Education's members and leaders are concerned to build and maintain a good reputation with the politicians and bureaucrats they seek to influence. Within Equal Education, as in any organisation, there are interpersonal politics and power imbalances. For all of these reasons, some participants preferred anonymity, and I have respected their requests. Interviewees who did not request anonymity are largely referenced with

⁴⁹ I have chosen not to cite this material explicitly for reasons of style and clarity, though it should be clear in each case that the information in question came from my fieldwork.

their real names.⁵⁰ Additionally, I anonymised contributions from some individuals who did not explicitly request it, but whose critical comment about the government or about Equal Education might pose future problems to them for the reasons stated above. Where I have included quotes and information from anonymous sources, I have endeavoured to provide the needed background information on their positions, demographics, or interests in the issues being discussed to the extent that such inclusions do not compromise their anonymity.

I was unable to obtain interviews with current officials at the national Department of Basic Education, the political and bureaucratic heads of the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), and the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Basic Education. Instead, I have addressed these government perspectives and corroborated interview and participant observation material regarding government and its representatives where possible via my own observations and publicly available sources: news articles, government department releases, government websites, minutes from Parliament Committee meetings, etc.

Other published and grey sources comprise the remainder of my evidence: social media from government, EE, and other concerned citizens; information released by various government departments; press releases from NGOs; and other academic work on the subject. Each of these sources has a slant (e.g., NGO press releases characterise issues and events in ways consistent with their overall causes, and statements by one government official may not be representative of the entire department's attitude), and I have sought to highlight these biases or deficits where appropriate. Social media in particular poses concerns about its veracity, and hence I have only used it to gauge opinion within particular demographics or to demonstrate the opinions of specific speakers, rather than taking it as factual or representative. To establish the historical context for my questions, I have drawn heavily on prior academic literature, as there is a wealth of existing work and time constraints prevented conducting intensive archival research in addition to my ethnographic research.

As with any case study, there are time and place limitations on the empirical evidence included in this research. My ethnographic data comes only from the

⁵⁰ A list of interviewees is provided following my bibliography, with participants listed by name or by position, depending on whether their comments are anonymised in the draft itself.

periods listed above between July 2011 and April 2014, during which Equal Education's work was mostly based in its Khayelitsha office in Western Cape, with occasional projects outside that area. In the last months of that period, Equal Education had begun to build up an office in Gauteng, whose work I only heard about from a distance. While I have included some information about the organisation's activities in the second half of 2014 and the first half of 2015 obtained through interviews, press releases, and news articles, this information is much more ad hoc in nature, and is largely included to provide further background for the reader rather than as the foundation of any of the central arguments of the thesis.

The differing types of data from this case make it possible to see more clearly the relationship between knowledge, identity, and active, substantive citizen participation in South Africa's basic education system. Though some elements of this account are specific to that governmental site in particular, or to South Africa, others offer theory building and modifying insights that can be seen or applied elsewhere. Ultimately, I argue that Equal Education's work demonstrates that citizens can reclaim bureaucratic and technocratic spaces in democracies as possible sites of active and substantive citizenship through the strategic use of knowledge similar to that possessed by those institutions. However, the possession of expert knowledge by citizens does not guarantee that participation on those grounds will be welcomed or accepted by the bureaucrats and politicians that they engage with. The personal, experiential, and identity-based grounds upon which those bureaucrats and politicians reject citizen participation make it clear that though government officials themselves may view expert knowledge as scientific or objective, in practice its invocation and its evaluation is not independent of the subjective, personal aspects of those citizens who offer it. Put another way, if one wishes to guarantee that democratic officials are responsive to substantive citizen concerns and engagement, it is not enough to speak truth to power, or even to speak truth in the manner of power; it also matters who is speaking, and to whom. This confluence renders expert knowledge an unpredicted and important asset in active citizenship's panoply of tactics, but one whose effectiveness often ironically rests on the subjective and personalised grounds which government officials are normally inclined to dismiss as irrelevant. The rest of this thesis is dedicated to elaborating how this occurs and what it means for the practice of substantive citizenship in democratic societies.

CHAPTER ONE

KNOWLEDGE PRACTICES: THEORIES OF POWER/KNOWLEDGE IN THE CONTEXT OF SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION

Government institutions have a substantial effect on how citizens participate in democracies. Institutions delineate points of interaction, such as voting, representative bodies, or forums for interaction like town halls. These institutions are established via law, custom, or both. In South Africa's case, many points of interaction are written into the law: the existence of elections, provisions for school governing bodies, and the constitutional right to freedom of assembly, for example. Others are provided for by the absence of laws regarding them: the ability to write letters to politicians and government bureaucrats to appeal to them in newspaper editorials, to discuss politics and policies should one happen to run into them on the street. The government representative's ability to both comprehend these actions and consider them to be legitimate approaches to the issue at hand are necessary conditions of rendering them effective. While nothing in the law prohibits sending a government official an abstract expressionist painting in the post, the existence of the act outside the spheres of both custom and easy interpretation likely leads it to have a low or non-existent political impact. This last example, though frivolous, speaks to a serious point: performances of citizenship are constrained not just by institutions, but also by the people comprising government itself. If a representative receives the aforementioned painting and interprets it as an act of artistic generosity, its effectiveness as a political act disappears.

Government officials, through the practice of their jobs, place substantive limits on citizenship. Those limits exist in addition to those specified by law and custom, and sometimes run contrary to exactly those laws and customs. This should come as no surprise to anyone who has ever been asked to pay a bribe to an official to receive a 'free' service guaranteed under the law. One underexplored way in which this transpires is how the knowledge practices of government officials shape substantive citizenship. This chapter articulates a definition of knowledge practices and an explanation of how they operate. This is done through first, a brief examination of Michel Foucault's later work on governmentality and the science of the state; second, an analysis of James Scott's work on expert versus local knowledge; and

finally, an account of the knowledge practices and resulting activism in pre-apartheid, apartheid, and post-apartheid education in South Africa.

KNOWLEDGE AS POWER AND PRACTICE: FOUCAULT AND THE SCIENCE OF THE STATE

Two of Foucault's major contributions to analysing knowledge within government systems were demonstrating that knowledge itself is a mechanism of power, and showing the related importance of the concept of 'population.' He analyses population in many of his works, but his clearest explanation is in *Security, Territory, Population*.⁵¹ His aim was to show 'the knowledge effects produced by the struggles, confrontations, and battles that take place within our society and by the tactics of power that are the elements of this struggle.'⁵² He differentiates between the different types of power he has studied in the past, moving from the sovereign, juridico-legal, and disciplinary strategies of power covered in *Discipline and Punish* to the population-based 'apparatus of security,' where this discussion will begin.⁵³ Knowledge practices are part of and particular to specific tactics of power which shape the institutions that exist within them; an apparatus of security, Foucault argues, is what characterises the power and knowledge practices of the modern state.

In an apparatus of security, Foucault claims, the above strategies of power are brought into the determination of a 'probable set of events,' and situated in a 'calculation of cost.'⁵⁴ This strategy of probabilistic aggregates differs from prior strategies of power in acknowledging continued deviation from the norm as well as establishing an acceptable level of deviation. Previous strategies set a binary between licit and illicit, then either punished accordingly or shaped individuals to the licit. An apparatus of security sees such goals as impossible and also unnecessary. The governmental apparatus of security takes what it is given, whether environmental, human, or otherwise, and attempts to work *with* the traits and tendencies of those elements, rather than against them, to form arrangements deemed acceptable by the government. Unlike discipline, which aims for narrowly defined perfection, security is a matter of 'maximizing the positive elements, for

⁵¹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 4.

⁵² Ibid., 3.

⁵³ *Discipline and Punish*.

⁵⁴ *Security, Territory, Population*, 4.

which one provides the best circulation, and of minimizing what is risky and inconvenient, like theft and disease, while knowing that they will never be completely suppressed.’⁵⁵

This format of power cannot exist without a certain kind of knowledge: ‘the emergence not only of the notion, but also of the reality of population. Population is undoubtedly an idea and a reality that is absolutely modern in relation to the functioning of political power, but also in relation to knowledge and political theory, prior to the eighteenth century.’⁵⁶ The calculation in managing a disease like smallpox is not to stop it in its tracks immediately—such a move is impossible—but rather to minimize its circulation, which limits its impact and perhaps provides for its eradication, thus ensuring that any loss remains at an acceptable level. Such decisions are impossible without the ability to think of ever-widening circles of social interaction, mandating that government reach the level of population, rather than the limited domain of discipline. This management does not rely upon a relation of dominance and obedience, but instead anticipates the natures of the elements themselves, and directs them in ways understood to be beneficial.⁵⁷

This set of strategies is what Foucault calls ‘governmentality,’ a system of governances whose roots are to be found in 18th century Western Europe and North America.⁵⁸ With governmentality came the beginning of ‘political economy,’ involving an attention to detail previously foreign to the state. It is inextricably ‘linked to a set of analyses and forms of knowledge that began to develop at the end of the sixteenth century and increased in scope in the seventeenth century; essentially knowledge of the state in its different elements, dimensions, and the factors of its strength, which was called, precisely, “statistics,” meaning science of the state.’⁵⁹ With statistics, one could catalogue information regarding the subjects of state power at a level that could be abstracted, manipulated, and generalised, enabling the use of political economy to determine the next action. To put a finer point on it, such a mode demands that the ‘knowledge involved must be scientific in its procedures. Second, this scientific knowledge is absolutely indispensable for

⁵⁵ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 106-09.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 100-01.

good government. A government that did not take into account this kind of analysis, the knowledge of these processes, which did not respect the result of this kind of knowledge, would be bound to fail.’⁶⁰ Absent this ‘science of the state,’ technocracy as we presently know it would be impossible. And absent this attempt to direct elements according to their nature, government harm reduction strategies, or cost benefit calculations, would be stripped of the legitimacy that they presently carry.

To illustrate with an example closer to the subject at hand, this kind of knowledge and management can be seen clearly in South Africa’s national curriculum reform since the end of apartheid. Teachers expressed strong opposition to the central, authoritarian-style curriculum under the apartheid system and a desire for more freedom to determine their own lessons, concerns picked up by both bureaucrats and politicians. Recognising that the ‘elements’ at hand were forced into a position contrary to their ‘nature’ (emphatic preferences, in this case), one of the early reforms made by education bureaucrats in the post-apartheid era was the introduction of outcomes-based education (OBE) in the Curriculum 2005 (C2005) strategy, allowing teachers the freedom to determine most of their own curriculum. OBE aligned with the democratic sentiment at the time and had been the subject of much statistical examination and research in other countries that had implemented it, such as New Zealand. While there was clearly some awareness in the education bureaucracy that the South African teacher corps was not as well-trained as New Zealand’s, the implications of that were deemed an acceptable level of harm.⁶¹ However, post-implementation, bureaucrats and politicians realised they had overestimated the capabilities of most teachers, who were struggling to develop their own lesson plans, materials, and curricula. After several years with the C2005 strategy in place, the bureaucrats concluded that they had miscalculated the degree of damage that would be wreaked by the element of (inappropriate) teacher training. Poor student exam results were judged to have gone beyond the acceptable levels of poor performance, and adjustments were made to provide more structure to the curriculum.⁶² In adjusting for their new understanding of teachers’

⁶⁰ Ibid., 350-51.

⁶¹ Ken Harley and Volker Wedekind, "Political Change, Curriculum Change and Social Formation, 1990 to 2002," in *Changing Class: Education and Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Linda Chisholm (2004).

⁶² Department of Basic Education, "Strengthening Curriculum Implementation from 2010 and Beyond."

abilities, the education bureaucrats increased their tolerance for harm to the democratic principles that guided the initial process. This sequence of changes was more complicated than this, but the above factors played a clear role in the bureaucrats' decision to cease relying on outcomes-based education in the national curriculum.

While population can be understood at a biological level, as in the case of epidemic management, Foucault notes that it can also be understood as 'the public,' 'the population seen under the aspect of its opinions, ways of doing things, forms of behaviour, customs, fears, prejudices, and requirements; it is what one gets a hold on through education, campaigns, and convictions.'⁶³ Foucault devotes little time to the idea of population as public, with their myriad opinions and (at least in the liberal tradition) influence over government, nor to an idea of government as an entity that exists to serve the people. The people exist as an object of power, and the individuals that compose 'the people,' also as singular objects of power. There is perhaps the implication that government cannot run roughshod over them—one can read Foucault's claim that 'population will be the object that government will have to take into account in its observations and knowledge, in order to govern effectively in a rationally reflected manner' to mean that not only must the population be known, it also must occasionally be reckoned with.⁶⁴ This is, to some degree, what happened with the series of curriculum changes. One of the necessary elements for the education bureaucrats to account for in their new education policy was the teachers' *desires* to teach and be treated in a particular way. This element could create significant obstruction if not directed or circulated efficiently, a phenomenon more commonly described as popular resistance, and which extends well beyond teachers.

Foucault also offers a brief mention of how we might think of 'politics' in a system of governmentality: 'governmentalization of the state is a particularly contested phenomenon, since if the problems of governmentality and the techniques of government have really become the only political stake and the only real space of political struggle and contestation, the governmentalization of the state has nonetheless been what has allowed the state to survive.'⁶⁵ However, this

⁶³ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 4, 75.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

characterisation is hardly demonstrated in the text—Foucault merely implies that if modern society exists within this apparatus of security, this governmentality, then questions of what we might call morality, justice, and/or first principles are subsumed by or always already rooted in this strategy of power.

On its face, this seems to be at odds with a liberal understanding of government, particularly democracy. In the above characterisation by Foucault, government may be ‘of the people,’ but it does not appear to be ‘by the people’ or necessarily ‘for the people.’ However, I would argue that Foucault’s views on governmentality are not irreconcilable with a notion of democratic governance, though they do make a concept of such governance more complicated. Much of the rest of this thesis is dedicated to understanding one such aspect of this process: attempts by the people to interact with and influence systems of governmentality. I argue that Foucault is slightly off the mark in identifying ‘governmentalization,’—that is to say, the *process towards* governmentality—as the only space of political struggle in modern society. While that may be one space of contestation, seen, perhaps, in phenomena like anti-bureaucrat or anti-intellectual backlashes in democratic societies (of which South Africa is only one of many cases), it is not the only space of engagement.

One of these spaces of engagement is at the level of governmentality itself, rather than just on the process towards it, or even just on the values that influence what counts as ‘beneficial,’ ‘efficient,’ or ‘productive’ in such a system. The people can and do engage on the grounds of the statistics, the science, and the technical judgments put forth by government agents on behalf of the state. This means that not only is the process towards governmentality up for contestation, so are the ‘beneficial’ ends that governmentality seeks to guide its constitutive elements towards as well as the calculations and assessments that lead them there. In a democratic society, there may also be an ability to contest what constitutes the nature of the elements at hand. In practice, this means challenging not just the end goals for which statistics are supposedly mobilised, but the statistics themselves. Foucault appears to assume that practices of governmentality prevent the public from being involved in the vast majority of government decision-making processes. However, he fails to address the possibility of citizens themselves using the kinds of knowledge and techniques behind an apparatus of governmentality to challenge government practices and decisions. To establish how that process takes place, we

must first increase the specificity of our understanding of Foucault's 'techniques of governmentality' or the analysis behind the 'apparatus of security' so that we may also see how these knowledge practices function to set the terms of engagement and how those terms can be adopted or challenged.

FROM PARADIGMS TO KNOWLEDGE PRACTICES: KNOWLEDGE IN GOVERNMENT POLICY

Thomas Kuhn's concept of a scientific 'paradigm' is a useful concept with which to start an elaboration on what I intend by 'knowledge practices,' but is ultimately an insufficient frame for understanding a set of knowledge practices outside the biological and physical sciences. Kuhn describes a 'paradigm' as 'the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community.'⁶⁶ This provides shared foundations on which further discussion can rest without having to repeatedly reconstruct those foundations, as well as a substantial basis for agreement between practitioners which is thus difficult to overturn. Kuhn's work also makes it clear that a paradigm implies a mode of communication; contained within it is way of speaking about that which is contained in the field, and conveying it to others.⁶⁷

Attempting to directly apply the notion of a paradigm to democratic policy creation and implementation quickly reveals two major differences from Kuhn's scientists. First, non-scientific theories or understandings of the world are rarely overturned or set aside in the way that paradigms are in the sciences. For instance, those who wished to use schools as sites to promote apartheid ideology could successfully argue for their own purposes without needing to demonstrate that more market-based understandings of the importance of schooling were *invalid*—these beliefs and values could co-exist in the same system.

Second, the adoption or non-adoption of beliefs, values, and techniques within a governmental branch is determined in part by forces external to the ideas themselves. Kuhn's scientific paradigms are evaluated by communities committed to certain precepts about scientific inquiry, including a commitment to a belief that science ought not bend to the will of politics. One may argue that many decades worth of history, philosophy, and sociology of science have shown that belief to be

⁶⁶ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 175.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

naïve, but it remains a lodestar of scientific practice.⁶⁸ Education policy in a democratic society, on the other hand, is transparently affected by politics. Insofar as those involved in policy creation concede that there is no objective *truth* of education, they must also concede that its formation is beholden to subjective judgments, here generally framed as in Foucault above by discussions of what is beneficial—to society, to the collective of students as future individual adults, to the economy, the list goes on.

Few, if any, practitioners have successfully challenged the trends of technocratic policymaking that run from Parliament through the national and provincial education departments down to the schools themselves. These departments and their officials are governed by statistics, by budgets, by studies, etc., themselves governed by convention, norms, bosses, and laws. Individual employees ought not last long in this environment if they refused to use these metrics to justify their decisions. This is admittedly a somewhat idealised description of what actually occurs—South Africa has its share of corrupt, insolent, or otherwise malcontented employees. These aberrations are to be expected, and are explored in future chapters, particularly chapters four through six. But in examining the South African government's own descriptions of how it governs, the information it takes into account in order to make law, and the information its various agents and representatives claim to use and demonstrate use of in making the decisions needed to provide public education (all of which are covered in the rest of this chapter as well as in chapters two and three), the evidence points conclusively to the clear if not totalising dominance of a set of technocratic knowledge practices used by both bureaucrats and politicians.

James Scott's *Seeing Like a State* offers further detail on these dominant technocratic knowledge practices, describing how knowledge is created, circulated, and used in modern governance, as well as on what is lost through these knowledge practices. Though Scott's book focuses mostly on what he terms 'high modernist' notions of social planning, he writes that his extreme examples are demonstrative of the broader principle that even at its most technocratic, social planning relies upon informal, local, practical knowledge in order to be at its most functional. The

⁶⁸ See, for instance: Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*; Latour and Woolgar, *Laboratory Life*; Woolgar, *Science, the Very Idea*.

danger of technocratic rational planning is not in its technocracy, exactly, but rather in its attempts to construe abstract technocratic planning as universal and inevitable, to the exclusion of other, potentially more useful forms of knowledge.

Scott categorizes the knowledge used in governance and policy creation as falling under one of two categories borrowed from the Greeks: *techne* and *mētis*.⁶⁹ *Techne* is technical knowledge, universal in its application, analytical in its form, a 'theoretical knowledge that may or may not have practical applications,' and 'characterized by impersonal, often quantitative precision and a concern with explanation and verification.'⁷⁰ It is the sort of knowledge involved in the 'science of the state' referred to by Foucault, through which government renders 'legible' its subjects through categorising them, simplifying them, and flattening out differences or complexity, allowing far more complex subjects and institutions to be fed into equations and manipulated in the name of planning and policy creation. The high modernism Scott describes in *Seeing Like a State*, with government almost entirely captured by *techne*, is a particular form of the governmentality discussed by Foucault above, but *techne* as a concept does not apply solely to high modernist planning. To the extent that the policy documents outlining the five year strategy for the Department of Basic Education described below are substantive rather than performative, they are clear-cut examples of *techne*.⁷¹ Equal Education's research reports, such as its report on school libraries, would also be classified as *techne*.⁷² While the education department's knowledge practices do not rise to the level of high modernism, they still systematically exclude non-technocratic forms of knowledge that might otherwise be incorporated into education policy and planning. In practice, no bureaucracy exclusively uses *techne*, including the high modernist planning projects that Scott describes—even the most *techne*-inclined governments and bureaucracies are still contradictory, complex, and rely to some degree on information beyond *techne*.

⁶⁹ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁷¹ Department of Basic Education, "Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025."; "Annual Performance Plan 2011-2012," ed. Department of Basic Education (2011); "Delivery Agreement for Outcome 1: Improved Quality of Basic Education."; "Strategic Plan 2011-2014," ed. Department of Basic Education (2011).

⁷² Richard Conyngham and Doron Isaacs, "We Can't Afford Not To: Costing the Provision of Functional School Libraries in South African Public Schools," (2011).

Mētis, on the other hand, is a more practical knowledge, the knowledge of common sense, local, particular, reliant on context.⁷³ Scott refers to indigenous agriculture methods as an example of mētis. While such approaches to cultivation have not been tested with the Western-style scientific method, they have been tweaked and honed over centuries in a given location. They may thus be a comprehensively better approach than scientifically tested but abstracted and universalised 'Western' agricultural strategies, or offer important modifications to those methods for the location in question.⁷⁴ Some of the student comments collected by Equal Education and submitted as public comment on a draft of a government policy on school infrastructure illustrate the category of mētis: how difficult it is for them to learn in buildings with leaking ceilings and no functioning sanitation facilities, what it is like to try to learn to read in a school where they only had shared access to one book for years, and the strategies for adaptation required by these conditions.⁷⁵ Thulisile, a student at Hopolang Combined School in Khayelitsha notes that the crowding caused by a lack of proper desks and chairs leads to rampant cheating in classes.⁷⁶ Phelokazi, a grade 11 student at Joe Slovo High School in Khayelitsha pointed out that the lack of proper science labs forced students to pay out of pocket for their electrical engineering experiments. Students who could not pay were failed repeatedly.⁷⁷ A particularly conscientious bureaucrat working through all logical possibilities might eventually reach the conclusions the students reached about the impacts of crowded desks or ill-equipped laboratories. However, the students' experiences of these conditions on a daily basis render them much more likely to be able to speak credibly on the effects of these conditions on their schooling, and how they can and cannot adapt to them. Mētis, at its heart, is experiential. It is the core of knowledge formed by individuals and societies over the course of living in the world. Scott rightfully challenges the aptitude of high modernist approaches to governance that ignore mētis, claiming that in attempts to devise policies or technical solutions, both an abstract and a 'thick' experiential understanding of the matter at hand is an asset.

⁷³ Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 311-20.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 312.

⁷⁵ Equal Education, "Appendix to Comment on the Draft Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure," (2013).

⁷⁶ Thulisile, "Submission on the Draft Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure," (2013).

⁷⁷ Phelokazi, "Submission on the Draft Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure," (2013).

While *techne*, or expert knowledge, is abstracted from its purveyors and challengers, *mētis*, or local knowledge can capture some elements of interpersonal knowledge. Specifically, *mētis* can include the knowledge of other people required for successful interactions with them. In Scott's formulation, this exists mostly at the level of systems and context: a soccer team needing to know not only the skills of the game, but also the skills of their opponents; Odysseus knowing to lash himself to the mast so as to thwart the Sirens singing him to shipwreck. My project moves beyond the scope of Scott's work, to look not just at the types of knowledge involved in making arguments, creating and implementing policies, etc., but also to look at the elements of what makes actors judge others to be credible participants in the policy creation and implementation process. Scott is largely focused on the 'what' of the knowledge itself, rather than the 'how' or 'by whom' involved in a complete account of the knowledge interactions between citizens and government, so the interpersonal dynamics involved in these interactions are not addressed in *Seeing Like a State*. The closest Scott's typology comes to addressing these ideas is, again, through *mētis*. Scott notes:

On a much bigger, higher-stakes canvas, war diplomacy and politics more generally are *mētis*-laden skills. The successful practitioner, in each case, tries to shape the behaviour of partners and opponents to his own ends. Unlike the sailor, who can adjust to the wind and the waves but not influence them directly, the general and the politician are in constant interaction with their counterparts, each of whom is trying to outfox the other.⁷⁸

This view understands activist/government interactions through the knowledge of other's tricks of the trade, resources, strategies and tactics. Scott's short mention of the role of *mētis* in politics includes neither much about the extended experience of others as actors, nor any notion of how political negotiations also take into account the identities of other actors, ideas I expand upon in chapters three through six.

In sum, a Foucaultian understanding of practices of governmentality is one in which government's agents conduct research on the nature of the elements at hand and use that data to shape the decisions made, aiming for the most 'beneficial' outcome, with the notion of 'beneficial' largely fixed on the supposed nature of the elements themselves. As predicted by Scott, South Africa's government officials rely on *techne* to undergird their decisions, policies, and actions. While individual

⁷⁸ Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 315.

actors or actions may deviate from this approach, methods of technocracy are dominant knowledge practices, in little danger of being overturned. If anyone wishes to influence policy or practice, they must act in ways consistent with that set of knowledge practices, or run the strong risk of their input being disregarded, excluded, or ignored, as the above modification to Kuhn's ideas would suggest. These theories either suggest that citizen engagement on these grounds is so thoroughly circumscribed as to be nearly impossible, or simply do not engage with the possibility of democratic, political participation on these grounds, ideas which the subsequent chapters challenge in depth.

One final set of elaborations upon and modifications to the above theories must be made before moving on to the historical roots of these knowledge practices in the South African education system, and it concerns the difference between what I will term substantive versus performative instantiations of expertise. In a substantive instantiation, expert knowledge is involved in an interaction in the manner described above—as a competent inclusion, rooted in what is understood to be a scientific or technical approach to the issue at hand. A performance of expertise implies all of the above, but is actually devoid of the substance of those knowledge practices. The signification of a particular set of knowledge practices is present in both, but the actual usage of them is only present in the former. To illustrate the difference, I offer a hypothetical about a government bureaucrat's assessment of textbook provision in a province. If the bureaucrat accurately assesses the need for textbooks in a given province, determines the sources of the failure to provide textbooks according to those needs, and makes necessary modifications to the existing policy, authoritative data of the state, and process for procurement and delivery, this would be a simplified version of what would constitute a substantive instantiation of expertise. A performative invocation of expert knowledge, on the other hand, is one in which it would appear that the above had happened, but in reality, the bureaucrat's assessment proved to be without content or rigor. He may have used technical words in his report implying that he was in line with the current trends in rigorous technocratic practice, explicitly claimed his expert status, or made assertions about his department's competency, capability, and provision, but a closer look reveals this to be a demonstration of technocracy without its normal substance.

This point is not about competency or the lack thereof, but rather about the actual practice of governmentality and its effects. The difference between performance and substance changes the interactions between governments and citizens. If bureaucrats or politicians are substantively practicing technocratic knowledge, active citizens can challenge them on those same grounds. If, on the other hand, a bureaucrat or politician is offering a performance of technocratic expertise, the grounds of interaction shift. Perhaps he or she will happily accept the additional information offered by citizens. But if not, citizen challenges grounded in evidence and expertise amount to little more than shadowboxing. If technocracy demystified reveals itself to actually be technocracy as mirage, engaging with it as though it is real has fundamentally different effects. Continuing engagement on expert grounds proves far more difficult if those grounds are themselves illusory. Further discussion of what this looks like in practice can be found in chapters three and four.

The rest of this chapter is dedicated to showing the historical roots of this practice in the South African education system, and the history of activism related to education under the undemocratic apartheid system. Subsequent chapters demonstrate how the exercise of this set of technocratic knowledge practices and their attendant invocations of identity and personal experience can be and are used to exclude citizen participation in democratic societies as well as what tactics citizens have at their disposal to resist their knowledge-based exclusion.

EDUCATION POLICY AS TECHNOCRATIC PRACTICE: THE EVOLUTION OF KNOWLEDGE PRACTICES AND CONCURRENT ACTIVISM UNDER APARTHEID

The first school to educate non-Europeans in South Africa was opened in 1658 to educate Dutch slaves brought to the Cape from other colonies. Expansion beyond slave education did not occur until the 18th century, when Protestant missionaries from the Moravian Church opened a school for Khoisan people living in the Cape.⁷⁹ Missionary education expanded its geography and audience through the 19th century, though the limited number of schools meant most black children never had the opportunity to attend. While these schools were diverse in their intentions

⁷⁹ Frank Molteno, "The Historical Foundations of the Schooling of Black South Africans," in *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans*, ed. Peter Kallaway (1984); Andrew Lewis and Johann C Steyn, "A Critique of Mission Education in South Africa According to Bosch's Mission Paradigm Theory," *South African Journal of Education* 23, no. 2 (2003).

and thus their pedagogy, at least some promoted liberal arts curricula and what later came to be called critical thinking skills.⁸⁰

By the time the British and Dutch colonisers formed the Union of South Africa in 1910, the education of black youths had a vocal set of white critics as well as proponents. The most common argument made by white critics against the missionary schools was that education equipped black people with the capacity to create trouble—that is to say, to resist their discriminatory social order—while white proponents frequently argued that the schools produced a cadre of ‘civilised’ African allies.⁸¹ For the first half of the century, these differences of opinion never rose to the level of national policy. This is not to say that mission schools were not places of contestation—Afrikaner nationalists had been interested in using education to further their ideology since the start of the Union, and mission schools were occasionally the target of protests by their students and parents over poor conditions and lack of funding.⁸²

Major changes to the status of black education did not occur until the National Party took power, promoting an ideology of apartheid and driven by a conviction in the superiority of white people and the need for racial segregation. ‘Native education’ was a key issue for the National Party, and in 1949 the government commissioned a panel led by Dr. W.W.M. Eiselen to examine the status quo and offer prescriptions for change. Eiselen and his colleagues found the mission schools to be underfunded and oversubscribed, with underpaid teachers and a dramatic undersupply of school slots for eager students. Additionally, there was an overall lack of systematic coordination.⁸³ The Bantu Education Act of 1953 (BE), created on the basis of the Eiselen Report, reflected some of the Commission’s suggestions on improving efficiency and spurring socio-economic development, but also included an emphasis on a racist ideology absent in the report.⁸⁴ While Bantu Education swiftly centralised and expanded schooling for black students, many

⁸⁰ Fiske and Ladd, *Elusive Equity*.

⁸¹ Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*.

⁸² Ibid.; Jonathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and Resistance in South Africa, 1940-1990* (1999); R. Hunt Davis, "The Administration and Financing of African Education in South Africa," in *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans*, ed. Peter Kallaway (1984).

⁸³ Cynthia Kros, "W.W.M. Eiselen: Architect of Apartheid Education," in *The History of Education under Apartheid, 1948-1994: The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened*, ed. Peter Kallaway (2002).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

other aspects of it were flawed as a result of the aforementioned racist ideology. The language policies made it difficult for students to achieve the fluency needed in either English or Afrikaans to land one of the few well-paying jobs legally available to black people, the curriculum propagated the National Party's racist ideas, and much of the curriculum was vocational in nature and did not encourage critical thinking. In the 1970s, ten times more was spent per pupil for white students than for black students.⁸⁵ In addition, the school boards supposedly created for community participation rarely encouraged it in practice.⁸⁶

The Eiselen Commission in 1951 marked the first instance of a national knowledge community related to black education in South Africa in government itself.⁸⁷ While the history of inequality and abuses under Bantu Education has certainly tainted the reputation of the 1951 Eiselen Report and of Dr. Eiselen overall, accounts from the time indicated that while Eiselen was in some ways sympathetic to arguments in favour of apartheid, he found many of the National Party's views on race despicable.⁸⁸ Though the system the report was used to justify was deeply unequal, the only major analyses dedicated to examining the report and the context in which it was produced conclude that Eiselen and his colleagues found a genuine lack in school provision and were motivated to act on grounds of efficiency and progress, as well as some sympathy for black students, rather than the explicitly racist ideology promulgated by Verwoerd and other right-wing elements of the National Party.⁸⁹ The members of the commission approached the question with the manner and content Foucault's arguments suggest they would: armed with statistics, ideas of the 'nature' of black youth, and a mandate to channel the elements involved (at a basic level in this case, state resources and black youths) in what they thought to be a socially beneficial manner—in this instance, making them into a gainfully employed, law-abiding class of African labourers.⁹⁰ Brahm Fleisch argues that that the Eiselen Commission marks the first point where black education was removed

⁸⁵ Fiske and Ladd, *Elusive Equity*.

⁸⁶ Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle*; Elaine Unterhalter, "Changing Aspects of Reformism in Bantu Education 1953-89," in *Apartheid Education and Popular Struggles*, ed. Elaine Unterhalter (1991).

⁸⁷ Linda Chisholm, "Continuity and Change in Education Policy Research and Borrowing in South Africa," in *The History of Education under Apartheid, 1948-1994: The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened*, ed. Peter Kallaway (2002); Kros, "W.W.M. Eiselen."

⁸⁸ "W.W.M. Eiselen."

⁸⁹ Brahm Fleisch, "State Formation and the Origins of Bantu Education," in *The History of Education under Apartheid, 1948-1994: The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened*, ed. Peter Kallaway (2002); Kros, "W.W.M. Eiselen."

⁹⁰ Fleisch, "State Formation and the Origins of Bantu Education."

from the control of ‘amateurs’ (missionaries and an emerging black elite) and placed in the hands of ‘experts’ (the bureaucrats on the Commission).⁹¹ Consistent with both intellectual policy trends at the time and the way that the apartheid state viewed itself, the Eiselen Report relied heavily on a modernisation narrative. This form of ‘scientific’ governmental social engineering devised by institutional experts, itself an instance of Foucault’s description of governmentality, was widespread in the continent in the post-World War II period. It was not specific to South Africa, or to education, but it did firmly take root in the South African education system. As Fleisch describes,

The commissioners believed that scientific ‘facts’ and technical expertise would provide the ‘solutions’ to the complex ‘problems’ of developing an education policy for ‘the Bantu.’ They subscribed to the view that the scientific method and social engineering applied correctly would usher in a stable social order. Values such as equality, individual rights, and democratic participation were ultimately subordinated to rational planning and bureaucratic efficiency.⁹²

These knowledge practices of modernisation, technocracy, and bureaucratic supremacy have carried through to the present day, ebbing and flowing in dominance over the course of time. These shifts in dominance occurred for a number of reasons. First, the members involved in the community changed—sometimes industry was present, sometimes it was not—and second, so did the values motivating the use of specific policy science, techniques and tools. As is seen below, the belief in and emphasis on tools and techniques understood to be scientific and technical in nature have nonetheless remained mostly constant since the Eiselen report, despite changes in the intended ends these techniques have been used to produce.

The knowledge practices demonstrated in the Eiselen Report’s modernisation narrative (cultural anthropology, rational planning and management efficiency) were also used by the far-right to achieve its racist ends. In the second decade under the Bantu Education Act, 1963 to 1973, there was continued expansion of primary and secondary school enrolment. Much of this expansion took place in the Bantustans, where the apartheid government sought to place civil servants. In the minds of many industry leaders, previously silent on black education policy, the reforms in this period were insufficient to keep up with the changing needs of

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 42; Unterhalter, "Changing Aspects of Reformism."

business, including the mass expansion of manufacturing and corresponding need for permanent skilled labourers. Thus, the era ended with the inclusion of industry leaders in the education policy community, and a strong push by those leaders to convince the government to tailor the Bantu Education system to provide a skilled workforce and increase economic growth.

Both the industry groups and the far-right nationalists ought be understood as having explicit political missions and motivations external to education policy itself—a manifestation of the difference between this community and Kuhn’s scientists. The successes of the industrialists shifted much of the discussion away from questions of how to best propagate apartheid ideology to questions of workforce and human capital, producing major reforms from 1973 onward. This enflamed the National Party’s far-right, who wanted Bantu Education to be used for the explicit promotion of their racial ideology. Shifting the system to focus less on maintaining segregation and more on providing for the needs of businesses in urban areas undermined the far-right’s project. They channelled their anger into a demand of symbolic importance: enforcing Afrikaans language instruction in schools.

In an attempt to placate this faction, the Bantu Education Department (BED) began to enforce the Afrikaans Medium Decree (AMD), which required half of all secondary school subjects to be taught in Afrikaans. This decision frustrated teachers, who often lacked the ability to teach in Afrikaans. It also angered students, who not only were commonly incapable of understanding their lessons, but were also bereft of the opportunity to learn the English skills they would need for the job market.⁹³ This series of demands and compromises between industry leaders and far-right ideologues as well as rising student discontent and political awareness (fuelled by the expansion of the Black Consciousness movement), culminated in the Soweto Uprising on 16 June 1976. What began as a peaceful march by students in the township of Soweto to protest the Afrikaans policy quickly became violent.⁹⁴ Upon the arrival of security forces, students started throwing rocks and the police intensified the violence by teargasing the students and firing live ammunition at them. Nearly 20,000 students participated in the protests,

⁹³ Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle*.

⁹⁴ Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (1983).

where they faced violent repression by the police. While official numbers indicate 176 students had been killed by the time the riots died down, community members and activists have estimated that up to 700 students were killed by the police.

The Soweto Uprising and subsequent riots throughout the rest of the country forced the government to grudgingly accept the demands for reform. Industry leaders and academics quickly asserted control and removed the AMD, increased programming for teacher training, ensured that the only arguments accepted as scientific were aimed at meeting workforce demands, and renamed the Bantu Education Department to be the Department of Education and Training.⁹⁵ As Unterhalter describes, education policy after Soweto was increasingly influenced by 'a grouping of financiers, senior military figures and high-level civil servants, who came to be referred to as the technocrats. Their approach was presented as a technical rather than an ideological "solution" to some of the problems apartheid confronted...' ⁹⁶ In presenting their solution as 'technical' rather than ideological, the technocrats were attempting to depoliticise perceptions of their work and construe it as objectively beneficial, but this is, of course, itself an ideological and political move. This group was sometimes divided on intended ends, but almost always united on their supposedly factual and scientific methodology. Their proposed solution, most clearly manifested in the Education and Training Bill of 1979, included provisions for parent and community participation in education, school health programs, and more. However, it still contained many elements consistent with the racist apartheid ideology, most obviously the continuation of racially divided schooling. As a result, most black and progressive groups rejected the majority of the new bill, and continued their battle for the schools.⁹⁷

Furthering the focus on the needs of South Africa's changing economy, and emphasising human capital theory (which argues for creating education systems which specifically provide students with skills useful for the labour market), another landmark government commission produced a report on how to reform black education to address growing economic concerns related to skills shortages in

⁹⁵ Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle*; John Davies, "Capital, State and Education Reform in South Africa," in *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans*, ed. Peter Kallaway (1984); Unterhalter, "Changing Aspects of Reformism."; Chisholm, "Continuity and Change in Education Policy Research and Borrowing in South Africa."

⁹⁶ Unterhalter, "Changing Aspects of Reformism," 64.

⁹⁷ Davies, "Capital, State and Education Reform in South Africa."

particular. The De Lange Report of 1981 argued for expanded vocational training, a single Department of Education to cover all races and ethnicities, and equal student expenditure regardless of race.⁹⁸ While the government was willing to make some improvements to black education, including significant funding increases, it ignored much of the De Lange recommendations.⁹⁹ Still, the 1980s continued the economically-oriented technocratic policy approach described by Unterhalter, seen both in the De Lange Report as well as the National Party's response to De Lange in their government White Paper on the Provision of Education in the Republic of South Africa.¹⁰⁰ The dominance of this technocratic approach was challenged most substantively in the late 1980s and throughout the negotiations to end apartheid by the nascent 'People's Education' movement. The next section traces the trajectory of education activism in South Africa to understand how this movement came to be.

HERITAGE AND LEGACY: EQUAL EDUCATION'S ACTIVIST PREDECESSORS

The first education protests on record in South Africa took place at the missionary schools in the first half of the 20th century. Missionary schools acquiesced to pressure from black parents to accept more students, stretching the same resources across more pupils. The drop in quality of life was such that localised student uprisings took place over issues like food quality and quantity.¹⁰¹ At one particularly intense uprising in 1946 at Lovedale, one of the flagship missionary schools, 157 students were arrested for stone-throwing and general revolt, sparking weeklong chaos at the school. This revolt supposedly took place over sugar rations, but as Hyslop points out, the sugar rations were generous, and were likely just a stand-in for questions of power and respect. In this era, the protests generally remained at particular schools. While African nationalist ideas likely fuelled the conflicts, on the surface protests targeted particular practical considerations.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*; Andre Kraak, "Discursive Shifts and Structural Continuities in South African Vocational Education and Training, 1981-1999," in *The History of Education under Apartheid, 1948-1994: The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened*, ed. Peter Kallaway (2002).

⁹⁹ "Discursive Shifts and Structural Continuities."

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle*.

¹⁰² Ibid.

The next notable set of protests were the ANC boycotts of Bantu Education in 1954, held because the new Act did not meet their demands for high-quality, universal, state-provided education. Despite criticism from the press and some opposition members of government, the boycott did not gain many supporters, particularly amongst students.¹⁰³ Jonathan Hyslop argues that the policy brought about three major improvements in the education of non-white students that may have placated potential protestors.¹⁰⁴ First, the Act significantly expanded access to schooling. Second, it created financial mechanisms that allowed the system to run more efficiently than the missionary schools. Third, it created new linkages between the needs of industry and the curriculum in schools. The expansion of access in particular was all the more important in light of the fact that missionary schools were nearing collapse for financial reasons and had garnered their fair share of popular discontent related to their conditions and management.¹⁰⁵ The ANC had called for a compulsory state schooling scheme and the sizeable proportion of black parents unable to send their children to missionary schools were eager for other educational opportunities.¹⁰⁶ Though some parents became active in hope of improving conditions for their children, nearly all protests and resistance died down by the 1960s due to a combination of heavy repression involving imprisonment and banning by the apartheid government, and government policies to 'reverse the flow' of urbanisation and send jobseekers back to the rural Bantustans, which led nearly two-thirds of African townships to decline in size.¹⁰⁷

By the mid-1970s, however, the townships were again prime sites of resistance. Protests gained momentum from 1973 to 1976, spurred by the workers' strikes in Durban. The Bantustan universities created to produce African bureaucrats were being subverted from within by the South African Students Organisation (SASO) and the promulgation of Black Consciousness thinking. SASO also encouraged university graduates to go out and spread Black Consciousness ideas through teaching in township schools.¹⁰⁸ The number of secondary school pupils increased by nearly sixfold in just over a decade, from 67,000 in 1965 to 389,000 in 1976.

¹⁰³ Ibid.; Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*.

¹⁰⁴ Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle*.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.; Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*.

¹⁰⁶ Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*; Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle*.

¹⁰⁷ *The Classroom Struggle*; Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*; Unterhalter, "Changing Aspects of Reformism."

¹⁰⁸ Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*.

This soaring secondary school enrolment both increased the number of students in a potentially activist milieu and amplified the strain on the already inadequate schooling system. As Hyslop notes, schools were places where youth experienced a common sense of disadvantage, and through that sense of inequality and disadvantage, forged a common identity with each other.¹⁰⁹ If the structural conditions produced by the Bantu Education system were not themselves the spark for the Soweto Uprising discussed earlier, they certainly created the powder keg that caught alight.

In this era, from the start of Bantu Education through the end of the 1970s, students were either not very active at all (1960s) or were directly targeting the apartheid system at the level of values—anti-racism, pro-democracy, etc. Students did make some direct and specific demands for policy changes—most famously regarding language policy and student representation in schools—but these specific policy demands were firstly, exceptions to the norm of values demands, and secondly, were still couched in broader values-based demands related to equality and democratic participation.¹¹⁰ While some of the challenge levelled by students in the Soweto Uprising against the Afrikaans Medium Decree was about the pedagogical usefulness of Afrikaans, most of the protest was about equality and resistance against a system that treated blacks as second-class citizens and abused their humanity.¹¹¹ Political questions continued to gain in importance to student activists from the end of the 1970s through the 1980s. For students who did not leave the country to join Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC, the apartheid government's responses in the wake of Soweto only radicalised them in their domestic fight, which took place at the level of value and belief, not technocratic policy.

As anti-apartheid activist and education leader Neville Alexander's published speeches from the late 1980s indicate, many students in the 1980s focused on the bigger political struggle, letting education drop into the background of their activist work.¹¹² They adopted the mantra of 'Liberation before Education,' believing that the fall of apartheid was imminent and that time ought not be wasted focusing on

¹⁰⁹ Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle*.

¹¹⁰ Brian O'Connell, "Education and Transformation: A View from the Ground," in *Apartheid Education and Popular Struggles*, ed. Elaine Unterhalter (1991).

¹¹¹ Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle*.

¹¹² Neville Alexander, *Education and the Struggle for National Liberation in South Africa* (1990).

particular pieces of the system when apartheid needed to be destroyed in its entirety. This stance alarmed older members of the struggle, unifying them to create 'People's Education for People's Power' as an alternative to the apartheid education system. People's Education never became more than a motivating philosophy and sometimes pedagogical supplement to the apartheid schools, and much of that work was not done by secondary school students.¹¹³ The 1980s thus did not do much to change the student activists' focus on large, fundamental values like full social equality and political rights. The brutality of apartheid South Africa halted any activist attempts at targeted education policy change. Beyond the dubious morality of working with a government that had no qualms hunting down struggle leaders in neighbouring countries as well as shooting and beating its own citizens in its streets, the apartheid government was hardly a good faith negotiator. For instance, at one point, apartheid bureaucrats agreed to meet with the National Education Crisis Committee to discuss policy reforms, and less than a year later, in 1988, the National Party had banned the organisation and arrested its leaders.¹¹⁴ Incentives for activists not to negotiate with government did not just come from government representatives. The level of militant resistance in the townships was such that anyone who could be perceived as collaborating with the state became a potential target of beatings or necklacings.¹¹⁵

The diverse nature of what People's Education meant to different groups and individuals makes it difficult to establish a single definition of the concept. This alone posed problems for this set of ideas' ability to become the dominant set of knowledge practices—its own advocates could not describe it consistently and advocate for it as such. Instead, as Shireen Motala and Salim Vally write, People's Education could be understood as:

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

¹¹³ Shireen Motala and Salim Vally, "People's Education: From People's Power to Tirisano," in *The History of Education under Apartheid, 1948-1994: The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened*, ed. Peter Kallaway (2002).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ This torturous method of killing suspected informants and apartheid collaborators involved filling an automobile tyre with petrol, forcing it over the person's arms and torso, and setting it on fire.

providing the basis for a future education system in a democratic South Africa.¹¹⁶

The fact that People's Education was many things to many people was an asset in its acceptance across ideological divisions in the anti-apartheid community, but was a hindrance in its ability to establish policy traction during and after the transition.¹¹⁷ Its supporters were unable to develop their influences of Freirean critical pedagogy and Marxist ideology into a full pedagogical theory, school curriculum, or alternate schooling system, all of which were goals voiced by parts of the movement.¹¹⁸ Some alternative schools were set up and attempts were made to develop schooling materials and a curriculum in accordance with principles set forth by the National Education Crisis Committee, the main stewards of People's Education. But, the alternative schools never became widespread and the curriculum and materials were never fully developed. As such, People's Education played a critical role in getting students to set aside chants of 'liberation before education' and go back to schools during the era of 'ungovernability.' However, People's Education was never understood as a proper alternative to the dominant knowledge practices at the time, the theories of human capital development.¹¹⁹ In the 1980s, the ruling party deepened its technocratic commitment and expertise, and successfully ensured the dominance of statistical, scientific, technical approaches to education policy linked to capitalist economic development and human capital theory.¹²⁰ Negotiators for anti-apartheid groups found themselves outmanoeuvred by the apartheid education bureaucrats and unable to either challenge them on technocratic grounds or successfully posit People's Education as an alternative.¹²¹

This is not to say that elements of People's Education were never picked up by some of the chief negotiators of the transition. Many of the goals of People's Education

¹¹⁶ Motala and Vally, "People's Education," 174.

¹¹⁷ Chisholm, "Continuity and Change in Education Policy Research and Borrowing in South Africa."; Fiske and Ladd, *Elusive Equity*; Motala and Vally, "People's Education."

¹¹⁸ "People's Education."; Alexander, *Education and the Struggle for National Liberation in South Africa*; Fhulu Nekhwevha, "The Influence of Paulo Freire's 'Pedagogy of Knowing' on the South African Education Struggle in the 1970s and 1980s," in *The History of Education under Apartheid, 1948-1994: The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened*, ed. Peter Kallaway (2002).

¹¹⁹ Motala and Vally, "People's Education."; Richard Levin, "People's Education and the Struggle for Democracy in South Africa," in *Apartheid Education and Popular Struggles: 1st Meeting: Papers*, ed. Elaine Unterhalter (1991).

¹²⁰ Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle*; Linda Chisholm, *Changing Class: Education and Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (2004).

¹²¹ Harley and Wedekind, "Political Change."

did make it into the policy documents released by COSATU and the ANC regarding education. In their review of COSATU and ANC documents, Motala and Vally highlight the contribution of People's Education to the ANC's negotiation stance, citing 'redress, equity, and participation' as goals taken up by the ANC.¹²² Still, in the end, People's Education was moderated and diluted by its own representatives, eventually falling by the wayside in the ANC in favour of ideas about macro and systemic change closer to Washington Consensus ideals than Marxist liberation pedagogy. Apartheid's old representatives, prepared from their decades of governing (however unequally) rather than theorising, and already steeped in technocratic modernisation discourse from their internal debates on the same, emerged as the decisive victors on education policy at the negotiation table. That trajectory has barely budged since the transition.¹²³ While values of equity and democracy are certainly present in departmental policy, its goals, outcomes, and overall strategy remain focused on technocratic outcomes like economic competitiveness and cost-effectiveness.¹²⁴

A consistent trend can be highlighted across the knowledge practices of government education policymakers from the start of apartheid through today. Regardless of the values and goals animating the discussion, the dominant tools and techniques have always been technocratic in nature. Even at the height of apartheid, bureaucrats placed emphasis on using information that they most closely understood to be scientific fact—at the time, physical and cultural anthropology, psychology, and management science. However, this trajectory also demonstrates that agreement on technique does not necessarily indicate agreement on the intended ends of that technique. Though the understanding of what constituted scientific practice changed over time—as did the members of the community, and their goals—reliance on what the community understood to be scientific information and practice has been a constant since the start of apartheid. My claim is not that these disciplines were or are scientific, or that they were value-neutral, as appeals to science and fact might imply. To the contrary, these appeals to science are obvious attempts to justify practices and decisions actually predicated on value judgments, with those values themselves predicated on

¹²² Motala and Vally, "People's Education," 185.

¹²³ Chisholm, "Continuity and Change in Education Policy Research and Borrowing in South Africa."; Fiske and Ladd, *Elusive Equity*.

¹²⁴ Motala and Vally, "People's Education."

particular notions of race, society, and the economy, a phenomenon also true of the practice of science itself.¹²⁵ Rather, my point is that both politicians and bureaucrats use these knowledge practices to gatekeep and set the conditions for the forms challenges must take. The technocratic knowledge practices, as is clear above, are not in any way objective—which ideas are claimed as scientific and at which points are themselves political questions. Despite shifting political trends affecting which specific ideas were considered, when a possibility to truly shift from technocratic ideals into a different set of knowledge practices presented itself, the movement best positioned to do so came to an abrupt halt when its own negotiators adopted those same technocratic ideals.

POST-APARTHEID PRACTICES OF KNOWLEDGE AND CITIZENSHIP IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

When full franchise was extended to the entire country in 1994, the African National Congress was voted into power with a strong majority. Their government changed the underlying ideals of the knowledge practices in the education system to emphasize non-racialism, non-sexism, and equality. They also changed the structure of the system, including eliminating the racially divided education departments. These changes to education policy and management went beyond bureaucratic reorganisation, and as with prior shifts, they had an element of political motivation. One change successfully advocated for by People's Education activists was the creation and empowerment of participatory boards in education. Prior to the transition, these structures either did not exist or were severely hamstrung by the limited powers they were ascribed as well as widespread perception that they were attempts to co-opt non-whites. Post-1994, community and parent engagement with schools became and continues to be a Department of Basic Education priority. The law that set up the present education system, the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA), provided for the creation of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) to create venues for parent and community participation. The law further specifies that parents should hold the majority of SGB seats, emphasising the importance of their involvement. Community members, teachers, and principals hold the remaining SGB seats.

¹²⁵ Latour and Woolgar, *Laboratory Life*; Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*.

School Governing Bodies are empowered far beyond similar structures found in the United States or the United Kingdom. An agenda of democratic inclusiveness motivated the ANC politicians' and bureaucrats' desire to give communities more of a chance to participate in their schools, but beyond this, concerns about white flight from the schools after the end of apartheid drove other politicians and bureaucrats to develop a series of policies intended to keep white people in the system. SGBs' expansive powers come from both motivations. SGBs have the ability to implement school fees in schools which are designated as fee-paying schools, the discretion to spend collected fees on the creation of extra teaching and staff posts as well as educational materials, and the power to set language policies. Until 2013, SGBs were also in charge of setting school enrolment numbers and policies. Questions of fees, teaching, and enrolment are central to schools' functioning and ability to fulfil their missions. SGBs are integral to school governance and their decisions have major impacts on learners. Each of the powers named above also allows affluent and/or well-educated parents at high-performing schools to organise their schools in such a way as to exclude students they deem to be undesirable, allowing some of the same educational discrimination and exclusion of the apartheid era to reproduce itself at school-level rather than department-level decision-making.¹²⁶

The SASA requires the Department of Basic Education and the provincial departments to provide training to SGB members so that they can be effective in their roles, lest the structural reform outpace the capabilities of those who choose to participate. Unfortunately, the departments do not appear to be effective on this front. In a study of SGBs, Nolene van Wyk found that only 27% of educators (including those who serve on SGBs as well as those who do not) believe their SGBs to be 'very effective' at discharging their duties, because many SGBs lacked interest in their jobs and had low levels of literacy and training. She also found that, contrary to the participatory aims of SGBs, principals tended to dominate SGBs, with their positions of authority prompting the rest of the board to follow them, rather than establishing a more collaborative culture.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ My gratitude goes to Doron Isaacs for these insights on the discriminatory effects of SGB powers.

¹²⁷ Noleen Van Wyk, "School Governing Bodies: The Experiences of South African Educators," *South African Journal of Education* 24, no. 1 (2004).

A brief review of the literature on SGBs also shows parent training and education is lacking.¹²⁸ Comprehensive department training for SGBs is rare, and where it exists, it is insufficient or tends to distort information. Boards in low-income areas tend to be particularly ineffectual, but parents from historically disadvantaged communities with children in former Model C schools¹²⁹ also see themselves as insufficiently equipped to participate and often select themselves out of the process. In an interview, Duncan Hindle, the most recent former Director General of Education (the head national education technocrat) argued that in their current state, SGBs neither improve the quality of school governance nor advance more democratic school governance. When I asked him to comment on participatory structures in the education system, he noted that SGBs had been put in place ‘in the bloom of democracy,’ which gave them ‘extraordinary powers.’¹³⁰ He continued,

In retrospect, I can say two things: where they have worked, they have worked exceptionally well, but in the vast majority of cases, they have not been a success. They are too powerful at both the former Model C schools, which have nearly turned themselves into private schools, and they fail in disadvantaged schools as well.¹³¹

Hindle argued that letting schools choose their own language policies and their enrolment levels was particularly detrimental:

In some parents’ minds, the government has abdicated power it could have and should have taken. Language policy is now decided by the SGBs, but parents don’t have the access to research, which shows that home language schooling for six years is the way to go. We’re asking people to take decisions on very complex educational issues that they aren’t prepared to decide on.¹³²

According to the former technocratic head of the education system, then, the participatory structures in the education system appeared to have over-empowered

¹²⁸ See, for instance, Fareed Adams and Yusef Waghid, "In Defence of Deliberative Democracy: Challenging Less Democratic School Governing Body Practices," *South African Journal of Education* 25, no. 1 (2005); Jan Heystek, "School Governing Bodies-the Principal's Burden or the Light of His/Her Life?," *South African Journal of Education* 24, no. 4 (2006); Vuzi Mncube, "The Perceptions of Parents of Their Role in the Democratic Governance of Schools in South Africa: Are They on Board?," *South African Journal of Education* 29, no. 1 (2009); Siphiwe Eric Mthiyane, "The Effectiveness of the Training of School Governing Bodies Provided by the KZN Department of Education: Perceptions of Parent-Members at Three Phoenix West Ward Schools of the Kwa-Mashu Circuit in the Ethekwini Region" (University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood Campus), 2006).

¹²⁹ ‘Model C’ was the bureaucratic classification for well-resourced, white public schools under apartheid. Former Model C schools are generally still South Africa’s top performing public schools today.

¹³⁰ Duncan Hindle, Former Director General of Education, Republic of South Africa. Interview, 02 Oct, 2011.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

the already powerful, and cut the disadvantaged adrift. Those with expertise or resources with which to develop it can use the highly participatory system of the SGBs to ringfence further advantage for their students. Those without, in Hindle's estimation, are left behind by the departments despite SASA's mandate to train them, and their lack of pertinent and necessary technocratic knowledge upon which to base their decisions often causes those schools to provide worse educations than if they were left to the technocrats.

Knowledge-based barriers to citizen participation in education also exist at the policymaking levels above schools. The technocratic knowledge practices highlighted in the prior sections of this chapter are still very much in place in the Department of Basic Education, as can be seen in the *Delivery Agreement for Outcome 1: Improved quality of basic education*.¹³³ This document is the highest-level representation of the DBE's strategy from 2011 to 2014, and was created as a part of President Jacob Zuma's public commitment to 12 major policy goals during the first term of his presidency. The *Delivery Agreement* is the result of a mandate for all government departments in charge of a policy goal to produce a document outlining their plan to reach their goals. The first paragraph of the introduction sets the tone for the rest of the *Delivery Agreement*:

Government has agreed on 12 outcomes as a key focus of work between now and 2014. Each outcome has a limited number of measurable outputs with targets. Each output is linked to a set of activities that will help achieve the targets and contribute to the outcome. Each of the 12 outcomes has a *Delivery Agreement* which in most cases involves all spheres of government and a range of partners outside government. Combined, these agreements reflect government's delivery and implementation plans for its foremost priorities.¹³⁴

The document continues, in paragraph three:

The *Delivery Agreement* provides detail to the outputs, targets, indicators, and key activities to achieve outcome 1, identifies required inputs and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the various delivery partners. It spells out who will do what, by when, and with what resources. The outcomes apply to the whole of government and are long term.¹³⁵

The style and emphasis on bureaucratic management, technocratic language, and the framing of many goals of the education system has not changed under the ANC

¹³³ Department of Basic Education, "Delivery Agreement for Outcome 1: Improved Quality of Basic Education."

¹³⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

government.¹³⁶ This should come as no real surprise; behaving as a modern government, engaged in the management of a country's population and resources, with all of the planning that entails, cannot be done without the techniques of aggregation, simplification, and manipulation so present in policy creation, regardless of who is doing the creating. The *Agreement's* 'High Level Problem Statement' focuses on education as a poverty reduction tool, discusses the 'performance' of the system based on test results, and situates the improvement of the education system as critical to the economic development of the country—phrases and framing that would not be out of place in the De Lange Report of 1981, or, for that matter, the Eiselen Report of 1951. Undeniably, many underlying political goals guiding education policy have shifted dramatically—but the practice of policy creation continues to emphasise technocratic techniques and outcomes.

Looking at policy reports and strategic documents as indicative of not just internal but also external knowledge practices runs the risk of confusing or conflating different spheres and audiences. The argument could be made that the *Delivery Agreement* and its associated documents were aimed at an exclusively policy-literate audience, and that interpreting them as a mode of communication for the general public is unfair to the DBE. However, Angie Motshekga, the Minister of Basic Education, made the case in her own public address on the occasion of signing the *Delivery Agreement* that this should be read as a document of public commitment and accountability. She called the signing itself a 'landmark in improving the schooling system of this country,' and remarked that it 'binds' her department and the provincial MECs 'to deliver an improved quality of basic education,' implying that these documents are one of the primary ways in which she and the departments she oversaw could be held accountable for their work. She explicitly highlighted the signing in the context of public concern about education, seen in the outpouring of commentary on the DBE's related *Action Plan to 2014*, saying that she is 'very impressed by the volume of responses received and the level of interest our people have shown in the need to improve the quality of basic education in South Africa.'¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Further discussion of the *Delivery Agreement* and related documents can be found in Chapter 3.

¹³⁷ Angie Motshekga, "Statement on the Signing of the Delivery Agreement for Basic Education," Public Address (2010).

If Motshekga's claims are to be believed, this document, in all of its bureaucratic and technocratic density, is the South African Department of Basic Education's public commitment to excellence, proudly linked to and downloadable from the top of the home page of the Department website.¹³⁸ Yet, the documents are written in a manner unintelligible to most South Africans. As subsequent chapters show, this is not an anomalous audience-misreading episode on the part of the DBE; it is a consistent theme of their interactions with the public, which in turn limits the public's capacity to engage with them. Despite the fact that the Department acknowledges in its own 'Problem Statement' that it is not providing the skills students need to live a life of 'meaningful citizenship,' its own interactions with citizens do not attempt to find common ground on knowledge and authority. Instead, its representatives refer to their own knowledge in authoritative dismissals of those whose democratic participation they deem unworthy.

Despite their claims to the contrary, the Department of Basic Education has made it difficult for citizens to participate either at the school level or the policy level in a meaningful way. The institutions at the school level are inadequate at best and destructive at worst, sometimes undermining schools instead of assisting them, and the Department's own attempts at making itself publicly accountable are abstruse and hard to follow even for those with technocratic or policymaking backgrounds. The existence of SGBs, aspirations of training programs, and explicit proclamations of a need for public accountability all seem to point toward an interest in public participation. However, as James Ferguson showed in his study of a development project in Lesotho, intention does not translate directly into practice. Disparate elements can coalesce into unpredicted events and effects. Ferguson notes that the 'multi-layered, polyvalent, and often contradictory' nature of institutions and the agents within them produces what he terms 'instrument effects,' or unintended effects of power.¹³⁹ In the case of the Department of Basic Education, the technocratic knowledge practices elucidated by Foucault and Scott, and consistently practiced over time even as the values underlying these practices have changed, have ultimately produced limits on substantive citizen participation in education.

¹³⁸ Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education, "Department of Basic Education, Home," Education.gov.za, <http://www.education.gov.za/>.

¹³⁹ Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, 17.

CHAPTER TWO

‘EVERY GENERATION HAS ITS STRUGGLE’: THE WORK OF EQUAL EDUCATION

CITIZENSHIP, THICK AND THIN

The last chapter discussed some historical antecedents to South Africa’s education policies under Jacob Zuma and Equal Education’s work as an education activist group in South Africa. This chapter examines the state of popular activism in South Africa from the 2000s to 2015 in order to situate EE’s work in the broader post-apartheid political context, and show how its strategies and tactics have repeated and expanded upon those of their forebears and contemporaries. Equal Education’s work demonstrates a particular approach to citizenship and democratic participation in South Africa. Equal Education practices citizenship through engagement, or activist citizenship. Its activism specifically uses technocratic knowledge normally considered to be ‘expert’ in nature and inaccessible to the general population. Unlike movements in public health that have used similar practices, Equal Education operates in a realm where policy ‘answers’ are less easy or obvious. It has thus relied more heavily on elements beyond ‘expertise’ such as moral and political righteousness to underscore the credibility of its activism.

This discussion takes place across four sections. First, I provide a brief overview of the literature on citizen participation in South Africa and abroad, focusing on ‘active citizenship’ as a useful explanatory concept for EE’s work. This is in contrast to ‘thin’ or procedural notions of democracy in which the will of citizens is expressed almost entirely through their votes and the work done by democratic representatives and bureaucrats on their behalf. I argue that such an understanding of democratic citizenship and participation prompts citizens to engage with bureaucrats as well as representatives, and build upon the work of James Scott to describe technocratic activist citizenship in particular. Second, I outline the work of two prominent, paradigmatic post-apartheid activist groups, Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM or Abahlali) and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) to demonstrate the spectrum of philosophy, strategy, and activity of post-apartheid activism, and provide a context for Equal Education’s particular form of technocratic, evidence-based active citizenship. This section also explains Equal Education’s founding as a group. The third section moves on to discuss the

location, history, structure, and composition of Equal Education, including the origins of its technocratic strategy. This serves to contextualise the fourth and final section of this chapter, on Equal Education's research and internal education activities. The whole of this chapter also serves as background and context on Equal Education and South African activist politics for the more specific discussions of Equal Education's activism in subsequent chapters.

Researchers across academic disciplines have closely followed South Africa's transformation of apartheid's exclusive notions of citizenship into a new, non-discriminatory conception of citizenship. This transformation of South Africa's legal regime has been accompanied, unsurprisingly, by a transformation of how citizens engage with government, including the forms and goals of activism. The forms of activism discussed in the previous chapter that existed under the apartheid system were focused on comprehensively overhauling the system—both the education system and the entire government—to reflect values of anti-racism and democratic participation, among many other goals. Absent a minority-controlled, oppressive state like that governed by the National Party, present-day activism is inevitably smaller in scale and more targeted in scope, as well as more moderate in method. After 1994, no institution nor institutional failure has been as unifyingly monstrous as apartheid. Legitimate criticism can be and is levelled at the national ANC government and the provincial governments, but is unlikely to reach the degree of popular protest that existed under apartheid. The major post-apartheid popular movements have been issue-oriented and limited in their number of active supporters, with the biggest movement aside from the trade unions, the Treatment Action Campaign, reaching roughly 16,000 regular members in 2006, towards the height of its support, out of a national population nearing 49 million at the time. Given the major change in political conditions, it is more useful to view the subject of this research, Equal Education, in light of its activist contemporaries, rather than its anti-apartheid predecessors. While the student activists of the struggle receive deserved admiration from the Equalisers,¹⁴⁰ can

¹⁴⁰ Other movements studied by the Equalisers in youth groups include a wide variety of South African student activist groups both large and small. These groups include the South African Students Movement (SASM), the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), the South African Students Congress (SASCO), the Pan-Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA), the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), the Cape Youth Congress (CAYCO), Port Elizabeth Youth Congress (PEYCO), and the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). The youth groups have also studied the historical trade union movement, and the anti-apartheid group the United Democratic Front (UDF).

serve as a model of what activism looks like and provide a source of legitimacy for their political claims to government and the rest of society, they largely do not resonate with most of Equal Education's activists as models for what Equal Education aims to achieve, and thus how to go about realising its goals.

Some of the literature on South Africa's transition from exclusive citizenship to inclusive citizenship has looked at legal conceptions of citizenship, as defined and refined by the Constitution, legislation and court decisions.¹⁴¹ More common, however, is an angle that looks to the practice of citizenship, particularly in the context of activism and social movements.¹⁴² The literature in the former category focuses on how the government has interpreted its obligation to its subjects; that is to say, what does the South African government owe the people within its borders? The literature in the latter category examines how the state interacts with its subjects, and the demands made upon government. These two approaches can be seen as two sides of the same coin, and indeed engage each other with relative frequency.¹⁴³ Alongside this dialogue runs a literature on institutionalized notions of citizenship, focused heavily on how it is taught to youth through school curricula.¹⁴⁴

In line with the literature on activism and practice of citizenship, I continue these approaches and understand citizenship to be the relationship between the state and its subjects, elucidated by both legal code and general conduct.¹⁴⁵ Citizenship has

¹⁴¹ Geoff Budlender, "Transforming the Judiciary: The Politics of the Judiciary in a Democratic South Africa," *South African Law Journal* 122, no. 4 (2005); Murray Wesson, "Reasonableness in Retreat? The Judgment of the South African Constitutional Court in *Mazibuko v City of Johannesburg*," *Human Rights Law Review* 11, no. 2 (2011).

¹⁴² See, for instance, William Beinart and Marcelle C Dawson, *Popular Politics and Resistance Movements in South Africa* (2010); Christopher Colvin and Steven Robins, "Positive Men in Hard, Neoliberal Times: Engendering Health Citizenship in South Africa," *Gender and HIV/AIDS: critical perspectives from the developing world* (2009); Faranak Miraftab and Shana Wills, "Insurgency and Spaces of Active Citizenship: The Story of Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign in South Africa," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 25, no. 2 (2005); Robins, "'Long Live Zackie, Long Live'."

¹⁴³ "'Long Live Zackie, Long Live'."; "From 'Rights' to 'Ritual': AIDS Activism in South Africa," *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 2 (2006); Colvin and Robins, "Positive Men in Hard, Neoliberal Times."; Steven Robins, Andrea Cornwall, and Bettina Von Lieres, "Rethinking 'Citizenship' in the Postcolony," *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 6 (2008).

¹⁴⁴ Penny Enslin, "Citizenship Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 33, no. 1 (2003); David Johnson, "Building Citizenship in Fragmented Societies: The Challenges of Deracialising and Integrating Schools in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *International Journal of Educational Development* 27, no. 3 (2007); Yusef Waghid, "Compassion, Citizenship and Education in South Africa: An Opportunity for Transformation?," *International Review of Education* 50, no. 5-6 (2004).

¹⁴⁵ James Holston, "Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship," in *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*, ed. Leonie Sandercock (1998).

both formal (legal) elements and informal (substantive) elements. While the legal elements are often straightforward in their writing, they may be less straightforward in their performance, requiring an examination of the substantive elements of citizenship, which include the ways in which the relationship between state and citizen operates in reality. A vanguard of the changing reality of substantive citizenship is 'active,' 'activist,' or 'insurgent' citizenship, best understood as citizenship through engagement with government. A critical attribute of this form of citizenship is that its practitioners take a participatory role in the creation and/or delivery of the services they receive. Authors writing on active/activist citizenship contrast this to a 'passive' role in which government's subjects simply receive services from government as given, without an attempt to shape or modify the services in question, at either an individual or a societal level. In the historical context of South Africa, the shift in the goals and tactics of activist groups during apartheid versus after apartheid can in many instances be understood as a change from active resistance to activist citizenship. This notion of citizenship does not preclude engagement with groups external to government (such as private companies) in the pursuit of political goals, nor does it preclude working alongside or with government against those external groups. Equal Education has, for instance, worked with government to resist the eviction of two schools from private land by wealthy landowners.

Activist understandings of citizenship examine the relationship between those who work to change the government or government policy and those who represent the government. It is worth noting here that 'working to change the government' need not be direct protest. Acting in a manner that in some way subverts government directives, laws, or expectations of behaviour is also understood to comprise activist citizenship.¹⁴⁶ A variant on this is anthropologist James Holston's work on 'insurgent' citizenship in Brazil, which generally fits within the same framework.¹⁴⁷ In the case of Holston's ethnography, his subjects created an 'insurgent' citizenship through forcing the government to recognize informal settlements as legal residences. Formal understandings of legality were subverted by mass, independent action to construct housing on the peripheries of the city, in which

¹⁴⁶ João Biehl, "The Activist State: Global Pharmaceuticals, AIDS, and Citizenship in Brazil," *Social Text* 22, no. 3 (2004).

¹⁴⁷ James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (2008).

residents built themselves housing, infrastructure, and communities that the state was then forced to formally recognise.

Much of the other ground-breaking work on 'active' citizenship in anthropology has been done in public health. Influential works cover a variety of strategies and tactics, as well as government targets. Adriana Petryna's work on Chernobyl and Ukrainian state/citizen relationships looked at how individuals created specific biomedical and historical narratives to make their medical ailments and complaints to the state compatible with state grants related to the Chernobyl disaster. This form of active citizenship required the individuals in question to develop a degree of biomedical knowledge sufficient to produce a plausible rendition of events and conditions.¹⁴⁸ João Biehl's and Steven Robins' work on HIV/AIDS in Brazil and South Africa respectively focused on both individual and systemic reforms.¹⁴⁹ Unlike in Holston's work on housing and property in Brazil, the public health authors explicitly focus on the use of technocratic or biomedical expertise in these campaigns, which will be discussed in more detail below as regards the work of the Treatment Action Campaign.

As discussed in the introduction and in chapter one, the use of biomedical expertise by otherwise non-expert citizens runs counter to how both democracy and bureaucracy have been traditionally been theorised. Foucault and Weber both argued that there was a lack of space for citizen participation in bureaucratic spaces, and that their very nature is to be depoliticising. Along similar lines, democratic theorists have argued that society's complexity is such that citizens would be unable to build the knowledge or expertise needed to participate in the actual governance of democracy—hence a reliance upon a fused system of democratic representation and bureaucratic expertise. Such a rendition of democracy does provide some opportunity for citizen participation, insofar as they are able to provide information on their own experiences, which is necessarily flattened or erased in the aggregation and manipulation of elements in the world required by statistical analysis.

The rest of this chapter is dedicated to showing how Equal Education has confounded both the assumptions of theories of bureaucratic knowledge and of

¹⁴⁸ Petryna, *Life Exposed*.

¹⁴⁹ Biehl, "The Activist State."; Robins, "'Long Live Zackie, Long Live'."

democratic participation in constructing a data-driven mass movement, a strategy that builds upon the prior work of HIV/AIDS movements in particular, but also sets them apart from groups with strategies that refuse to engage with government, rely upon *mētis*, or do not particularly premise their work on knowledge claims at all, each of which exist in various forms in the landscape of South African activism. While acting as an antagonist to the national and provincial governments some of the time for strategic reasons, Equal Education's practice of citizenship is also predicated upon an underlying desire to see the government succeed, viewing substantive democracy as the system with the most potential for progressive societal change.

COMRADES UP IN ARMS: POST-APARTHEID ACTIVIST CITIZENSHIP

Two prominent activist groups demonstrate divergent aspects of activist citizenship in the post-apartheid context: Abahlali baseMjondolo¹⁵⁰ and the Treatment Action Campaign¹⁵¹, a shack-dwellers' movement and an HIV/AIDS campaign respectively. At the height of their work, both movements were frequently in the press and served as the subjects of a good deal of academic research asking what each said about the nature of what it means to be a citizen in post-apartheid South Africa. Both groups are also useful in situating Equal Education's work because EE has been entangled with both, albeit in different ways.

Abahlali started outside of Durban in 2005, and has since expanded to townships outside Pietermaritzburg and Cape Town, with membership estimated at 25,000 active members in 2010 and 11,000 active members in 2015.¹⁵² It sees itself as a

¹⁵⁰ See, for instance, Jacob Bryant, "Towards Delivery and Dignity Community Struggle from Kennedy Road," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43, no. 1 (2008); Nigel C Gibson, "Upright and Free: Fanon in South Africa, from Biko to the Shackdwellers' Movement (Abahlali Basemjondolo)," *Social Identities* 14, no. 6 (2008); Raj Patel, "A Short Course in Politics at the University of Abahlali Basemjondolo," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43, no. 1 (2008); Richard Michael Pithouse, "Abahlali Basemjondolo and Struggle for the City in Durban, South Africa," *Cidades* 6, no. 9 (2009).

¹⁵¹ Robins, "'Long Live Zackie, Long Live!.'"; Steven Robins and Bettina Lieres, "AIDS Activism and Globalisation from Below: Occupying New Spaces of Citizenship in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *IDS Bulletin* 35, no. 2 (2004); Mandisa Mbali, "The Treatment Action Campaign and the History of Rights-Based, Patient-Driven HIV/AIDS Activism in South Africa," in *Democratising Development: The Politics of Socio-Economic Rights in South Africa*, ed. Peris Jones and Kristian Stokke (2005); *South African AIDS Activism and Global Health Politics* (2013); Steven Friedman and Shauna Mottiar, "A Rewarding Engagement? The Treatment Action Campaign and the Politics of HIV/AIDS," *Politics & Society* 33, no. 4 (2005).

¹⁵² S'bu Zikode, "Opening Address at the Cuny Center for Place, Culture, and Politics," Address (2010); Human Rights Commission, *Abahlali Basemjondolo Statement for the Human Rights*

movement of the militant poor and works to improve the conditions of the poor and to democratise society from the ground up, usually by rejecting party politics/elections and promoting direct democracy through community collectives and communes. The group organises marches, strikes, and other forms of protests against government and corporate activity that harms shack dwellers, such as disconnections from utilities and land seizure. It also employs a number of direct action tactics, such as land occupation and self-made electricity and water connections. Like many post-apartheid activist groups, it has frequently turned to the courts to achieve its ends. The movement has often been in conflict with the police in the areas in which it operates, and its members and leaders have at points faced severe violence and repression from the police and political opponents. A 2008 statement alleges not only police harassment but also torture of their members.¹⁵³ In 2014, one of Abahlali's local leaders was murdered in her Durban area home. The leader, Thuli Ndlovu, was shot seven times in what is alleged to have been a political assassination, following an extended period of threats and intimidation attempts by political opponents including local ANC members as well as the police.¹⁵⁴ AbM's philosophical stances lead their tactics to be more confrontational than other organised South African movements (especially in the Western Cape branch), which has at times drawn criticism from other activists. While AbM Durban's tactics of resistance are generally non-violent (i.e., land occupation, illegal electricity connection), violence has been deployed against the group by political opponents and the state.

In Western Cape, AbM's sites of violent contestation are a different story. In the fall of 2010, AbM Western Cape (WC) called for a month-long general strike, including road blockades usually made of burning tyres, rubbish, and stones to make the main streets in Khayelitsha impassable.¹⁵⁵ The Treatment Action Campaign, Equal Education, and COSATU, the umbrella group for most of South Africa's trade unions, condemned this violent general strike, releasing a statement characterising

Commission Hearings Relating to Access to Housing, Local Government and Service Delivery, 2015.

¹⁵³ Stephanie Lynch and Zodwa Nsibande, "Abahlali Basemjondolo & the Police: A List of Key Incidents of Police Harassment Suffered by Abahlali Basemjondolo," Abahlali BaseMjondolo, <http://abahlali.org/node/3245>.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Pithouse, "The Assassination Surge on Those Fighting Corruption," *Mail & Guardian*, 03 Oct 2014.

¹⁵⁵ AbM Western Cape, "Urgent Call (Week of Informal Settlement Strike)," Abahlali BaseMjondolo, <http://abahlali.org/node/7335>.

it as 'mindless violence' that would be counter-productive to the cause and punishing to the poor and working class people who live in those neighbourhoods.¹⁵⁶ The strike had killed civilians and destroyed property of poor Khayelitsha residents; while Equal Education was sceptical of the tactics regardless of location, the group's leaders also fundamentally disagreed with deploying violence in areas where it would be most damaging to poor people rather than to those with money and power. AbM is not the only prominent South African activist group to take illegal direct action—the Treatment Action Campaign, for instance, has had members arrested for occupying government offices, and for illegally importing medicines to treat HIV/AIDS—but it is the organised group that deploys these tactics with the most frequency, and is both philosophically and in practice the least willing to work with government institutions to produce change. As the attempt to make Khayelitsha impassable indicates, in its invocation of the 1980s militant anti-apartheid strategy of making the townships 'ungovernable,' AbM WC's strategies exist on the more militant end of the South African activist spectrum, beyond even Holston's 'insurgent' citizens, with whom they share many of their illegal land-occupation and construction tactics.

The introduction to the joint statement condemning the strike that Zackie Achmat offered on his blog epitomised the divergent strategies of AbM and TAC. He emphasised that he and other TAC activists had been arrested over the years of their work, but they had never raised a hand or thrown a stone. Non-violent resistance is a cornerstone of TAC's strategy, and has been since its start in Cape Town in 1998. This was likely an asset in garnering the global support that has helped fund their campaign and spread their ideas about how to approach the epidemic in countries throughout Africa and the rest of the developing world. TAC was the most outspoken and influential challenger to President Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialism, as well as one of the leaders of the global HIV/AIDS treatment access movement which fought against pharmaceutical companies around the world.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Zackie Achmat to Writing Rights, 13 October, 2010, <http://writingrights.nu.org.za/2010/10/13/unite-poor-and-working-class-people-reject-abahlalibasemjondolo%E2%80%99s-call-for-violence/>.

¹⁵⁷ Robins, "'Long Live Zackie, Long Live'. "; "From 'Rights' to 'Ritual'."

TAC's successes have been attributed in large part to its knowledge-based approach to activist citizenship. Robins makes the argument that the Treatment Action Campaign 'democratized' HIV/AIDS science by taking a medical understanding of how the disease worked, and rendering it in 'lay' terms for people of varying levels of education while leaving the scientific principles intact. According to Robins, the success of South African AIDS activism depended in large part on creating popular demand for scientific, biomedical treatment in the face of President Mbeki's AIDS denialism. Scientific education on the disease produced demands for biomedical treatment and popular support for its provision. TAC's education campaigns influenced both its own activists and government officials. Unlike Petryna's informants in the Ukraine, where much of what could be understood as their active citizenship operated at the level of individuals attempting to secure services for themselves, TAC's biomedical activism transformed what was provided through the South African public health system for all people living with HIV/AIDS. TAC's strategy of 'grassroots mobilization and treatment literacy campaigns,' allowed TAC 'to articulate new forms of health/biological citizenship and political subjectivities.'¹⁵⁸

This knowledge-based approach was not the sole source of their successes. TAC activists and other academics who have studied the movement have also concluded that a substantial influence on their success was also their ability to stake out the moral high ground on their subjects of advocacy.¹⁵⁹ The discussions of 'expert' knowledge and moral high ground in this literature are both of particular relevance to Equal Education's work, as EE also has a programmatic focus on training activists on technocratic issues as well as righteous claims. In EE's case, this takes the form of training on the Department of Education's structures and policies as well as academic research on education.

While TAC is still going strong, it is generating nowhere near the publicity it did under President Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialist reign, when it could present itself as a group of charismatic Davids fighting a set of bewildering and unyielding Goliaths. Since Jacob Zuma assumed the presidency, South Africa's public health policy has consistently followed the scientific consensus on how to approach the AIDS crisis.

¹⁵⁸ "'Long Live Zackie, Long Live'," 667.

¹⁵⁹ Friedman and Mottiar, "A Rewarding Engagement?"; "A Moral to the Tale: The Treatment Action Campaign and the Politics of HIV/AIDS," (2004).

By finally bringing policy and services in line with the overwhelming scientific consensus on how to handle the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the South African government acceded to TAC's demands—and in so doing, dramatically decreased TAC's public urgency and relevance. The spectre of denialism and deadly heterodox approaches to the disease that TAC had been fighting at a national level receded into rural homes, township shacks, and *sangomas*¹⁶⁰ huts. TAC has thus undergone a predictable but uneasy transition from vaunted public advocate to private mindset changer and government compliance enforcer. In addition to not being as comfortable of a role for an organisation accustomed to being at the front of South Africa's post-apartheid activist vanguard, it also appears to be less valued by its previous supporters. The international funders that kept the movement running at its height have drastically cut funding for the organisation. TAC was forced to embark on a public fundraising campaign in 2014 to stop its doors from shutting entirely, and was on a much reduced budget in 2015.¹⁶¹ This is despite a continued need for precisely these sorts of compliance enforcers, given continued problems with efforts to distribute ARVs and medications to treat co-infections through the public health system. Winning the policy battle through active citizenship does not necessarily translate to victory on the ground, as is discussed in more detail in chapter six.

Both Abahlali and TAC are and have been movements comprised of mostly poor and working class black South Africans. Both work largely on behalf of those same groups. Both movements rest on strong grievances with national government of South Africa as well as with provincial and local leaders, and strive to make those leaders work with them. And both have engaged in illegal tactics to advance their movements and better the lives of their members. Those statements of similarity mask strong divergences in the two movements' activist practices and beliefs about how to best be an active citizen in South Africa. In terms of legality, TAC's strategies have generally rested in a series of practices easily understood as civil disobedience, such as occupying government offices. Abahlali's activists, on the other hand, have not only utilised similar strategies to TAC, they additionally engaged in illegal action beyond classic civil disobedience strategies in pursuit of

¹⁶⁰ A Zulu term for traditional healers used widely throughout South Africa.

¹⁶¹ Steven Robins, "'Invisible' Aids Crisis Far from Over," *Cape Times*, 4 Nov 2014; Matthew Kavanagh, "Why We Cannot Abandon South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign (TAC)," *The Body*, 19 Nov 2014.

their goals, including road blockades and what the South African government considers to be crimes against the property of others. The two differ also substantially on the degree to which they support the South African government and encourage engagement with it and participation within it, as a result of their differing analysis of the nature and legitimacy of that government. In nearly every government election since its inception, AbM has encouraged its members to boycott the polls, save the 2014 election, which found it endorsing the Democratic Alliance—whose liberal politics are very different to AbM's—in an attempt to counter the ruling ANC. TAC, on the other hand, retained close ties with the trade union coalition COSATU, part of the ruling Tripartite Alliance with the ANC and the South African Communist Party, even during the era of the ANC's AIDS denialist policies. Though neither movement was supportive of at least some government policies and configurations of power, Abahlali's work has historically implied that South Africa's democracy and ANC rulers are illegitimate and cannot be supported in the absence of a comprehensive transformation of wealth and power in the country. Their only possible exception to this view of the government is their opinion on the judiciary, which they have turned to both to protect their members and to seek decisions on their political goals. Notably, South Africa's Constitution places its courts at a bit of a remove from democratic politics.

While many of TAC's leaders and members would welcome a similar transformation, its work has largely focused on specific policy changes rather than comprehensive systemic reform. It would be a mistake to see TAC as conciliatory towards government or the ANC specifically. But the way in which it has approached its active citizenship demonstrates a) a broad belief in a democratic governmental system that is nevertheless failing on the particulars and b) a need to address those particulars in the present regardless of views about systematic transformation in the future. This understanding of government and activism is rather different to Zackie Achmat's attitude towards the apartheid government; in that era, he was jailed after he set fire to his school as a young teenager in protest of the Afrikaans language policies.¹⁶²

This is in stark contrast to Abahlali's work, which demonstrates a belief that with all of this government's entrenched interests, engagement will not work and

¹⁶² Robins, "'Long Live Zackie, Long Live'."

nothing short of radical transformation is an acceptable solution for South Africa's current problems. Though TAC has more paid researchers involved with the movement, and a substantial number of middle class and white activists compared to Abahlali, the differences between the two cannot be reduced solely to the movements' differing race, class, and educational backgrounds—AbM has also historically had a number of white, middle class, well-educated activists and strategists involved in the movement, including university professors. Moreover, TAC's founders, leaders, and members on the whole are hardly clear-cut examples of what privilege looks like in South Africa, with its first chairperson a black gay man living with HIV/AIDS, and subsequent leaders mostly poor or working class black women living with HIV/AIDS. Still, TAC uses activist strategies that evince faith in the South African democratic system while AbM does not. This may be related to TAC's connections to and strategic adaptation of the tactics of HIV/AIDS activists in the United States in the 1980s and early 90s, who were read as militant in the context of that country at that time, but who still ultimately believed that American democracy could and would find ways to accommodate their demands, and who were ultimately vindicated in those beliefs. TAC's leaders studied this and other movements around the globe, as well as the current conditions in South Africa, concluding that their best strategic hope was through supporting the ANC government but not its policies. It is also likely that this belief in the promise of democracy and the potential of the ANC government is in part due to its leaders' struggle history and long-standing support of the ANC as a party. TAC was also founded to target international pharmaceutical drug companies; its protests of the South African government only arose with Thabo Mbeki's era of denialism. AbM has no such roots, and indeed their transatlantic knowledge transfer has gone in the opposite direction, with their tactics serving as inspirations to housing activists on the South Side of Chicago, who have illegally repaired, occupied and reallocated houses foreclosed on in the financial crisis of the late 2000s.

TAC's particular approach to active citizenship in South Africa has to some degree carried through to Zackie Achmat's subsequent endeavours, including Equal Education. Achmat stepped down as TAC's Chairperson when Mbeki's presidency was ending, argued that TAC needed fresh leadership at the national level. After stepping down, Achmat helped launch a series of new organisations, including the project that would become Equal Education. TAC's leadership and members are hardly novices at generating publicity as well as practical change, and their savvy

plus that of EE's own leaders ensured EE's launch did not go unnoticed. EE drew several leaders and board members from TAC's ranks, generated initial public and media interest in part through its TAC connections, and has operated in strong strategic alignment with TAC and its sister organisations since its founding. Another affiliated organisation, the Social Justice Coalition (SJC), arose almost purely from unpredicted need: the 2008 eruption of xenophobic attacks on non-nationals from other African countries living in South Africa's townships. SJC now works on a wide variety of basic needs in the townships, most notably on sanitation. Achmat's most recent effort, Ndifuna Ukwasi ('Dare to Know'), launched in 2011 with the mission of educating a cadre of new South African leaders focused on social justice. The social justice law organisation Section 27 (formerly the AIDS Law Project), run by a close collaborator of Achmat's and former TAC treasurer Mark Heywood also belongs in this tight-knit activist scene, though since the launch of Equal Education's own law initiative, the Equal Education Law Centre (EELC), there have been occasional territorial dustups between EELC and Section 27.

On the level of personnel, there are close linkages across these groups. Some staff members have rotated through more than one organisation, high-level leaders of each have served on each other's boards, staff from this network monitor each others' leadership elections, and members frequently belong to more than one organisation. On the level of coordinated action, staff from each organisation hold informative events for the staff and members of the others regarding their own organisation's campaigns. Announcements and press releases from any given organisation are often distributed internally and externally by the others. It is a default assumption that campaigns run by one organisation will be robustly supported by the rest, and it should thus come as no surprise that the groups share tactics and strategies. Since 2010 or so, Equal Education's star seems to shine most brightly in this constellation; it holds the biggest mass actions, appears most frequently in the press, and captures the highest level of national government attention.

Equal Education's work is demonstrative of one of the many ways for citizens to participate in post-apartheid South Africa's democracy. It is an outlet for activist citizenship, which adheres to the information and expertise-driven tenets of how to be a responsible and effective activist developed by the Treatment Action Campaign

before it. Unlike in the biomedical world inhabited by TAC, EE faces the challenge of implementing these approaches in a realm where there is nothing near a scientific ‘truth’ for it to base its advocacy upon. Equal Education’s work is still rooted in the sorts of technical expertise that gave TAC its political and moral heft. However, it has also needed to rely more heavily than TAC on methods of building support and legitimacy that extend beyond knowledge.

‘EVERY GENERATION HAS ITS STRUGGLE’: THE WORK OF EQUAL EDUCATION

Khayelitsha and neighbouring townships span the windswept Cape Flats on the perimeter of Cape Town, an enduring manifestation of apartheid’s geographically enforced racial exclusion. The drive from the modern glass skyscrapers, ocean, and mountains marking the city centre to Khayelitsha’s main taxi rank takes you past pricey houses in leafy suburbs with high-performing schools; past the grand staircases, Ionic columns, and red-tiled roofs of the University of Cape Town, one of South Africa’s top universities; past the gleaming Cape Town International Airport, recently upgraded for the 2010 World Cup; and past any number of men in blue coveralls waiting on the side of the highway for their lifts to work. The turnoff from the highway leads to Khayelitsha’s busiest intersection, home to a set of traffic lights that rarely work, potholes large enough to snap an axle if crossed too quickly, and butchers hawking braai meat and sheep heads. If you follow the main road past the minibus taxi rank, you will continue past the collapsing concrete pit latrine shelters built by the City of Cape Town as sanitation ‘solutions’; past a warren of informal shacks made of corrugated metal, scrap timber, and whatever other building materials can be found, wired to each other through tangles of unauthorised electrical connections; past the women hanging laundry on a line along the street; past the crew of lively kids in matching track pants and blazers, headed off to school; past the friendly woman selling *vetkoek*¹⁶³ out the front window of her home.

Here, on the northwestern perimeter of Khayelitsha, you will find the offices of Equal Education, just beyond where the asphalt of Capital Drive gives way to crumbled concrete, then sand and gravel, perched on the edge of what is politely labelled on maps as Washington Square, an open, sandy field littered with spare

¹⁶³ For the uninitiated: delicious, heart-destroying deep-fried dough, often filled with mince. The literal translation from the Afrikaans is ‘fat cake.’

tyres. The offices are recognizable as some of the only two-story structures in sight: two repurposed grey cinder-block units of four residential flats each, now housing one of South Africa's most vibrant social movements, and likely the only one in which nearly every department office possesses its own bathtub. The 35-minute driving commute from 'town' serves as a metonymic tour of the New South Africa's urban social landscape, with all of its paradoxes, contradictions, and staggering inequality.

The Treatment Action Campaign's longest running community offices and programs are also in Khayelitsha, and at its start Equal Education drew upon the knowledge and credibility TAC had established in the area as well as that of its own activists. Achmat believed that some of TAC's structure, strategies, and tactics could transfer to the realm of education, and thus radically improve the public schools easily accessible to South Africa's most disadvantaged youth. He recruited Doron Isaacs, a white law student at the University of Cape Town, to research the problems affecting South Africa's schools. Isaacs was the former national head of Habonim, a progressive Jewish youth organisation, as well as the founding chair of Students for Law and Social Justice, a leftist student organisation that is now national in scale. Isaacs soon brought on his law school classmate Yoliswa Dwane, a young black woman who grew up in Dimbaza Township near King William's Town in Eastern Cape before moving to Khayelitsha, and shortly thereafter they added former Habonim organiser and TAC researcher Joey Hasson; young TAC activist Nokubonga Yawa, who grew up in Cape Town's townships; and Lumkile Zani, a politically inclined man from Khayelitsha who was working as a cook at the time. Other additions in that first year were Lukhanyo Mangona, a math and science tutor in Khayelitsha who wanted to become more involved in education politics; Lwandiso Stofile, who lived in Khayelitsha and was running a youth community organisation called Africa Unite in the nearby township of Gugulethu; and Zingisani Nkanjeni, a Khayelitsha resident who had been involved with the ANC Youth League. Since EE's establishment in 2008, it has evolved and expanded substantially beyond Achmat's initial vision. Seven years on, Equal Education described itself as 'a movement of learners, parents, teachers and community members working for quality and equality in South African education, through analysis and activism.'¹⁶⁴ In its 'What Is EE?' explanation on its website, it cited

¹⁶⁴ Equal Education, "What Is EE?," Equal Education, http://equaleducation.org.za/what_is_ee.

‘unequal educational opportunities’ as ‘amongst the greatest obstacles to equality, dignity, and freedom in today’s South Africa,’ rhetoric echoed by its leaders and members in conversation and meetings. In the organisation’s philosophy, education is an end in itself as well as something that ‘helps one to understand and demand the full realisation of the rights enshrined in the Constitution.’¹⁶⁵ Literature distributed to members and curious outsiders speaks of education as critical to participation as a fully engaged citizen in South Africa’s democracy.

The group has campaigned for better schools at the local, provincial, and national level since 2008. It opened up a second office in Gauteng Province in 2012, and one of the original founders, Lumkile Zani, began a third office in King William’s Town, Eastern Cape in 2014. By 2014, Equal Education had a national following, with supporters in most provinces across the country. Some of its most successful actions in 2014 and 2015 took place outside of Western Cape. Though the nature of its work makes it difficult for the group to keep a representative membership roll, its leaders estimate the number of activists who routinely attend meetings across the country numbers to be between 3,000 and 4,000 people. Most of these activists are students, or ‘Equalisers,’ in the group’s terminology. Equal Education’s parent and community activists number in the low hundreds. The Equalisers have a variety of reasons for joining EE—one student leader told me with a smile that he initially joined for the attractive girls at the meetings. He added that he stayed because of the politics and the mission, the main reasons for participation highlighted by Equalisers in my informal conversations with them. EE takes action on issues students see as directly relevant to their lives. Students I spoke with over a number of informal discussions said it was rare that people took their political opinions seriously, and even rarer for them to invest resources in making them better advocates for themselves and their peers.

EE’s draw, according to the student member consensus, was that it cared about students’ opinions and wanted to help them express themselves now and in the future. Equalisers who have gone on to the nearby University of Cape Town, University of Western Cape, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, or other tertiary educational institutions often stay involved with the organisation. Dozens of these graduates now serve as facilitators for youth groups and camps. There are

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

also self-determined, elected student leadership structures at each school and in the organisation as a whole. Empowering these dedicated student members and leaders is central to EE's mission, and when opportunities to address national Department of Basic Education officials, provincial education officials, or MPs arise, current students and leaders who have come up through the student ranks are often at the front and centre of those discussions.

Equal Education is structured as a grassroots movement with a professional staff. Both the membership and the staff have separate hierarchies, despite some personnel overlaps between the two. A mostly-elected National Council (NC) governs both groups. The National Council has close to twenty members, a combination of representatives for geographic areas (broken down by province), interest groups within the organisation (in-school youth, post-school youth, parents, etc.), professionals co-opted onto the NC for their experience on specific subject (including activism and education expertise), and the elected Secretariat. The Secretariat is a subgroup of fewer than ten NC members who lead the broader NC, and make many of the governance decisions for the organisation. Some of the Secretariat positions are paid positions within Equal Education, and some Secretariat and NC members hold paid staff positions within Equal Education that are unrelated to their roles on the Secretariat and NC. The NC and Secretariat are majority black and the majority of their members are from poor and working class communities (like the student and parent membership of the movement), as a direct result of the way in which they are structured. In May 2015, the NC had 20 people, 3 of whom are white. Most of the NC members were longtime EE activists elected by the membership. There were also several members who were co-opted onto the NC by its elected members for their expertise, per the structure set out EE's Constitution.

Equal Education's membership elected the NC during its first National Congress in 2012. There the membership also adopted the first Equal Education Constitution, which laid out how the organisation structured and governs itself, including an allocation of roles between the NC and Secretariat. In theory, each had a particular set of powers, duties, and responsibilities, but in practice, the Secretariat tended to make decisions when they had to be made quickly, as its members are easier to gather for a meeting, and the NC tended to be in charge of bigger decisions and oversight. This was a matter of ongoing discussion within the Secretariat and the

NC, and the amended constitution adopted by the membership in July 2015 clearly delineated roles.¹⁶⁶

Equal Education's professional staff numbered between 40 and 70 people between 2011 and 2015, depending on whether one counted part-time employees, volunteers, and participants in Equal Education's more ancillary endeavors, The Bookery and the Community Librarians project (previously in-house, now independent projects to create libraries in public schools). The staff was largely black, working class or poor, and from Khayelitsha, with a secondary school education at most except where noted below. During my fieldwork, EE's staff was divided into several departments: the Youth Department; the Community Department; the Policy, Communications, and Research Department (PCR); the Finance Department; the Campaigns Department (whose work was folded into the other departments in 2015) and the General Secretary's Office. Each has different capabilities and responsibilities, and is overseen by one or two managers, who form an overarching team that runs EE's staff. The Policy, Communications, and Research Department had the highest overall education level—most of its permanent members at a given time possessed university degrees. As a department, it absorbed nearly all university volunteers from the nearby University of Cape Town and University of Western Cape as well as abroad, and its staff were most often found in front of computers. The Youth Department and Community Department staff, on the other hand, were more frequently in the middle of the action, so to speak, chatting and bantering with students and parents. The staff and volunteers of these departments organised and led the youth groups held each week during the school year for the Equalisers and the meetings of the parents' sector. The Campaigns Department wove together the work of all of these departments through staging Equal Education's protests, marches, and other campaign actions.

The Managers and PCR are easily the most educated groups, and also the whitest groups and the groups with the most affluent upbringing, though neither was majority white at the conclusion of my fieldwork in April 2014. In May 2015, the management team had 16 people, 4 of whom are white. Over the course of my fieldwork from 2011 through 2014, EE had anywhere from a half-dozen to a dozen white employees, each of whom either possessed or was working towards an

¹⁶⁶ "Interim Constitution," (2012).

undergraduate degree. The management and staff consistently had at least as many black employees with similar class and education backgrounds, sometimes many more. Over the course of my fieldwork, PCR went from being a majority white department to a majority black department. In March 2015, it was run by two black women.

The management answers to the NC and Secretariat, who set the organisation's strategy and goals for any given year. The aforementioned crossovers make things somewhat complicated in terms of assessing who holds what powers within the organisation—for instance, there are several NC members who are paid staff at EE, but do not hold management level positions. For their paid jobs, they answer directly to managers who technically answer to the NC as a collective at the level of staff accountability to the membership.

In the 2014 financial year, Equal Education had a budget of roughly R17 million, which came largely from major institutional donors based in South Africa and abroad. Its funder roster reads like a 'Who's Who' of philanthropy targeted at democracy, education, and civic participation: Atlantic Philanthropies, Open Society Foundation, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Bertha Foundation, Ford Foundation, Claude Leon Foundation, and the DG Murray Trust, among others.

Equal Education's activities can largely be categorised into two groups, regardless of department: a) knowledge generation and dissemination and b) action. These categories are interconnected in Equal Education's work, meaning that departments are usually engaged in both types of work at once. The two categories also inform each other—Equal Education does not, for instance, undertake 'pure' research work that cannot be used as the basis for some kind of action or campaign in the future. Moreover, mass actions or publicity actions often serve to more broadly disseminate EE's causes and research to the general public, meaning they could be grouped into either category. The following discussion of the organisation's activities in each category will also provide a history of Equal Education's work via the examples offered.

Equal Education's first cause was the 'Broken Windows' campaign, in which it equipped a number of students at a school in Khayelitsha with disposable cameras, and had them take pictures of things in their schools that they believed harmed

their ability to learn. One learner took a particularly striking photo of the broken windows at Luhlaza High School, creating the foundation for a campaign to fix her school's windows. After petitions, letters, and rallies directed at the WCED, the government body in charge of providing funding for Luhlaza, Equal Education secured R671,000 from the WCED for the improvement of the school.¹⁶⁷

EE's next campaign, driven by learners concerned about their classmates' and teachers' tardiness to school focused on driving down the rates of 'late-coming.' They quickly followed that campaign with the 'Campaign for School Libraries,' making the case that a school without a library is not much of a school at all. At the launch of the campaign, over 90 percent of the public schools in the country lacked functional libraries. This campaign was a success at raising awareness not just domestically but globally as well. EE's March for School Libraries in 2009 drew thousands of students and was front-page news in the *New York Times*.¹⁶⁸ The next year, the group followed up with a 10,000-student march to Parliament in support of the Campaign for School Libraries.

That campaign spawned The Bookery, created as an initiative within Equal Education to solicit books from publishers, the public, and corporate donors, and then work with schools to help them build libraries. As of January 2015, the Bookery had put in place 40 school libraries, and the libraries campaign prompted the DBE to adopt its first set of National Guidelines for School Library and Informational Services in 2012.¹⁶⁹ The Bookery libraries have high levels of use in the schools in which they have been placed, and the schools take obvious pride in them. The Campaign for School Libraries was eventually folded into a broader effort to convince the DBE to repair the most ramshackle of the country's schools and pass legally binding regulations on school infrastructure, known as the campaign for Minimum Norms and Standards for Basic Infrastructure.

The Norms and Standards campaign was Equal Education's longest and most involved campaign. Many of the mass actions were student-devised and driven,

¹⁶⁷ Phatiswa Shushwana, "Opening Speech," (2011); Equal Education, "Equal Education - Other Campaigns - Luhlaza's Broken Windows," Equal Education, <http://www.equaleducation.org.za/campaigns/other-campaigns/broken-windows>.

¹⁶⁸ Celia W Dugger, "South African Children Push for Better Schools," *The New York Times*, 24 Sep 2009.

¹⁶⁹ Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education, "National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services," ed. Department of Basic Education (2012).

such as a 100-student sleep-out outside of Parliament in winter 2011 to create visibility on the issue of school infrastructure. Students used the sleep-out to draw a visual analogy between their non-existent shelter from the elements in their open-air sleeping bags and the learning conditions of their fellow students in Eastern Cape, some of whom have to attend school under trees for lack of suitable classrooms. The Norms and Standards campaign also involved mass marches on Parliament, many editorials and press releases, and a ‘Solidarity Tour’ on which the organisation took a number of prominent South Africans and a large media contingent to schools in Eastern Cape so that they could see for themselves the absence of needed books and furniture, and the decrepit buildings with crumbling ceilings and walls. The Norms and Standards campaign culminated in EE suing the national and provincial departments of basic education over the lack of regulations. The DBE chose to settle the suit, agreeing to publish regulations. When it looked as though the DBE intended to put forward a series of regulations that were vague, underspecified, and thus legally useless, Equal Education organised a series of public hearings to solicit citizen input on the DBE’s draft regulations on infrastructure. The overwhelmingly negative public response prompted the DBE to comprehensively redraft the standards in line with the demands of Equal Education and the broader public. This revised draft was put in place as legally binding regulation at the end of November 2013. The campaign for Norms and Standards is the subject of further discussion in chapters three through six.

In addition to the central, organisation-wide campaigns discussed above, Equal Education addresses issues at specific schools on an as-needed basis. For example, in 2011, students and staff turned a trend of corporal punishment at one school into a potential legal action against the school as well as an organisation-wide discussion of the laws on corporal punishment and avenues of legal recourse for students who were being abused by teachers or principals. The parent and community group, for its part, embarked on a series of efforts to repaint the exteriors of schools in Khayelitsha in summer 2014. The effort provided an avenue for parents to take care of and take pride in their community’s schools and put forward a public face for Equal Education’s work.

Equal Education has undergone a number of internal debates about its purpose and future, based on ideological and strategic differences. Some leaders and staff believed Equal Education was an activist group, and to the degree that it provided services like an NGO would, it should do so with activist ends in mind. Other staff and leaders believed that Equal Education should be able to both provide services and act as a civil society agitator without any contradiction arising from that dual purpose. As the organisation has shifted from its founding structure as an NGO with a board to a mass movement with a representative council, the locus of power has also shifted. Following the 2012 Congress, in which the group elected the National Council and the Secretariat, the leaders understand the work of staff and volunteers as in the service of the movement. However, given that the staff are older than the student members, in many instances better educated, and work for Equal Education full time, some staff members do believe or act as if their opinions ought be weighted more highly when taking decisions. Those who believe in giving the staff more of a voice also tend to emphasise the importance of Equal Education's more NGO-like activity, the content of their daily jobs. The disagreements over what to do with The Bookery project (eventually spun off as its own independent non-profit in October 2013) illuminate one of the many ways in which EE sits somewhat uneasily at the intersection of distinct understandings of what it is and what it is meant to be.

Equal Education's staff interpreted The Bookery in two divergent ways. One camp understood The Bookery as a stunt with some substance behind it, a thumb in the eye of the Department of Basic Education. In this view, The Bookery was created to prove that it's just not that difficult to put libraries in South Africa's schools. Actually having libraries in schools also allowed Equal Education to better demonstrate the benefits of having libraries in township schools. Many schools already had a space for a library, and just needed the books and preferably someone to serve as a librarian. If a couple of EE staff members could put together that many libraries relying on donation alone, why had the DBE and provincial officials proved incapable of putting together libraries with the backing and resources of a large government department? In the second interpretation of The Bookery offered by EE staff, The Bookery is a form of service provision, intended to fill a gap in the government's provision of educational services guaranteed by the

constitution. In this way, it can be seen as a strategy more in line with traditional education NGOs in South Africa, and not with traditional activist groups, which normally agitate for others to produce change rather than acting as the change themselves.

It should be apparent that these two interpretations are not necessarily in tension—in its actual functioning, The Bookery certainly does both of the above. But when trying to clarify the strategic purpose of The Bookery, EE staff and leaders invariably prioritized one or the other of these interpretations as grounds for their arguments for its continuation, expansion, scaling down, or independence. A winter 2011 staff and volunteer lunch and meeting was held at the headquarters of The Bookery, located in downtown Cape Town just down the street from the national Parliament. EE's full-time and part-time staff often get brought on board to focus on a particular project, and orientation to the organisation as a whole can be haphazard—this meeting was intended to ensure everyone at EE knew The Bookery's origins, mission, function, and progress to date. The staff members in charge of The Bookery at the time, Cosmas and Themba, gave introductory speeches over lunch consumed at the tables ordinarily used to catalogue books, and then fielded questions from the rest of the staff. The question and answer session quickly became a full-scale discussion amongst EE leadership about the Bookery in front of the rest of the staff and volunteers, as questions intended for Cosmas or Themba were picked up by senior leaders and used to argue for scaling up The Bookery or spinning it off into its own organisation, a debate which caught most staff seemingly unaware.

The implications of the conversation were far more important than the surrounds of greasy, empty pizza boxes and stacks of slightly worn picture books indicated. The conversation was about The Bookery, but the conversation was really about the entire *raison d'être* of Equal Education, spilling over from leadership and board strategic planning meetings, feeding into subsequent all-staff meetings, and back through to the board. Did providing services undermine Equal Education's mission through moderating its demands and restricting its ability to manoeuvre throughout all levels of the school system? Or did it bolster its credentials by demonstrating it was not just a talk shop, and it was not going to leave all its members to simply fend for themselves in their own quests for an education? It

took another two years before EE's staff and leaders unified behind a consistent answer to these questions.

In some regards, The Bookery was one of the clearest demonstrations of Equal Education's approach as an institution of active citizenship. Rather than wait patiently for the WCED or the National Department of Education to provide libraries and books, Equal Education went on a campaign of providing the services themselves. Using a creative combination of governmental and non-governmental resources, Equal Education's active citizens worked to provide what should have been governmentally organised services for themselves and for their fellow residents. In so doing, they expanded and deepened their relationships with certain government officials (in this case, mostly school principals and teachers), but also seized control of their own constitutional rights, through providing books as well as training community members to serve as librarians in these newly created para-governmental institutions. Equal Education's Community Librarian project proved so successful that the WCED introduced its own variation on the programme, hiring residents from the communities surrounding schools and providing training similar to that provided by Equal Education.

In this initiative, a group of citizens developed a portion of the expertise of the state, creatively deployed it in a manner such that they in effect took over a role previously allocated solely to the state and its representatives, and eventually used that same expert knowledge to work with state representatives to reintroduce the newly-created capacity back into the state institutions that were obliged to provide it in the first place. The Bookery and the Community Librarian projects, over the course of the time that they were contained within Equal Education, were a theatrical proof point for Equal Education's activism, a demonstration of its technical and technocratic abilities, and a more straightforward service delivery project. By 2013, the leaders of Equal Education and The Bookery had begun to conclude that what had begun as a project of Equal Education was no longer an easy fit within the organisation. The Bookery had served as activist theatre so well that it no longer needed to do so. Moreover, some would-be funders of The Bookery were uneasy about or had restrictions against funding political or activist organisations, preventing The Bookery from receiving enough money to increase its size.

The list of tactics and strategies described in the campaigns above, of course, is not a list of purely technocratic activities. Knowledge alone has not carried EE to its victories. Part of Equal Education's success relies on its ability to draw upon and fit into a historical narrative of popular struggle and protest widely known and supported in South Africa. In my time with Equal Education's students and staff, I often heard them cite previous South African education activists and student activists as their personal heroes, especially the students involved in the Soweto Uprising of 1976. The aesthetic created by EE's talented graphic designer, Gill Benjamin, intentionally evokes iconic images of anti-apartheid activism, frequently using the classic image of a raised fist but with a pencil or book in hand. 'Every generation has its struggle,' the bright yellow t-shirts read.

The use of the word 'struggle,' the colloquial name for the fight against apartheid, is not coincidental. EE youth group meetings start and end with adapted anti-apartheid songs and *toyi-toying*.¹⁷⁰ The Equalisers have also created their own 'struggle songs' and dances for Equal Education—one particularly catchy tune devised for the Norms and Standards campaign ran through the vowels of the alphabet in order, and finished with a chorus of 'Sign it Angie!' imploring the Minister of Basic Education to take action on school infrastructure. Marches and mass meetings, too, were a mainstay of the anti-apartheid movement—struggle tactics serve as a wellspring of reliable public protest manoeuvres for many post-apartheid movements, EE included.¹⁷¹

Equal Education promotes these connections to history, with youth group leaders speaking frequently of the bravery and importance of the students in the Soweto Uprising and other student activism as inspirations to their own work. Materials produced by EE to train student members, youth group leaders, and staff trade heavily on stories of anti-apartheid student activism and herald Equal Education as the continuation of that proud and productive tradition. It is clear that the Equalisers and staff feel some amount of kinship with the protesters who came before, and see their work as similar in some ways. In this manner, a present-day

¹⁷⁰ The *toyi-toyi* is an originally Zimbabwean protest dance first used by the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), and later adopted by South African anti-apartheid activists. Commonly used in marches, it involves rhythmically stomping one's feet and sometimes chanting or singing protest songs.

¹⁷¹ Peter Alexander offers a longer list of these tactics, including militant tactics not used by EE, in Peter Alexander, "Rebellion of the Poor: South Africa's Service Delivery Protests—a Preliminary Analysis," *Review of African Political Economy* 37, no. 123 (2010).

movement, with very different goals, in a very different environment, is still able to present itself as the worthy heir to the valorous protests of yore. In its particular, selective, and edited evocation of these prior strategies and visuals, Equal Education is behaving in a political manner that is immediately intelligible and stirring to both the representatives of government, and the general public as a whole. Yet, there are fewer commonalities between Equal Education and previous South African student movements than one might imagine, despite having structurally similar participants and a focus on improving the education system. The songs, the dancing, the call and return chant of '*Amandla! Awethu!*'¹⁷² feel familiar to activists of a prior era who have visited Equal Education. But, the work itself is fundamentally different. Unlike the education activists discussed in chapter one, the initial group of which focused first on practical, parochial concerns, and later activists on broad, values-based political change, Equal Education's intervention often functions at the technocratic level.

The organisation has a well-tuned sense of theatre, spectacle, righteous indignation, and moral outrage. Their student spokespeople and leaders, who address all of Equal Education's public actions, are careful weavers of the personal and the technocratic, with statistics and studies providing the warp and details from their own impoverished schools the heartrending weft. No doubt, the movement gains attention at least as much for its ability to organise thousands of school-uniformed youth to peacefully take to the streets demanding a quality education as it does for its reputation as one of the most knowledgeable sources on education in South Africa. But importantly, that knowledge undergirds the whole structure of Equal Education's work, with the months leading up to an action focusing as much on making sure that members know the technical ins and outs of an issue as on the logistics of crowd marshalling and march permits that make public actions of this kind possible.

Equal Education has, consistent with its origins, functioned similarly to the post-apartheid activist groups that preceded it, particularly (and predictably) like its parent organisation, the Treatment Action Campaign. However, placing EE in the activist landscape is not as simple as merely trading out HIV/AIDS and health-

¹⁷² Translated, the Xhosa/Zulu chant is roughly 'Power to the People' and was the rallying cry of the anti-apartheid movement. The second word is sometimes spelled 'ngawethu.'

related causes and language for educational causes. EE has many historical antecedents, some more obvious than others. Equal Education's heritage places it at a series of interesting intersections of the worlds it has tried to navigate. EE's leaders place strong emphasis on knowledge and expertise when describing EE's activism, likely because they see it as an uncommon aspect of their work. However, the reality of their work is such that the conjunction of what might be understood as rightness and righteousness is at the heart of their success. While all of the above campaigns were grounded by a strong information base, they also involved elements of theatre, of spectacle, of visual demonstration. Though many other authors have gone into detail about the role of such tactics and strategies in activism, it is worth explicitly analysing their role in Equal Education's work, and the manner in which they interact with the technocratic expertise that EE prides itself upon.¹⁷³

Equal Education's effectiveness hinges upon its ability to persuade government officials and/or the general public of the worthiness of its cause. I argue that such movements broadly have three avenues of persuasion available to them, usually deployed in combination. The first, an argument of the harmlessness (in a literal sense) of their advocacy, is not applicable; the changes Equal Education has demanded have required large changes in policy and/or practice, and come with substantial attendant costs.

The second avenue is 'rightness,' or the ability to be scientifically or factually correct on a policy question where that information would largely determine the next course of action. This, as other authors have shown, was the cornerstone of TAC's most public and broadly supported work, to have the South African government distribute antiretroviral drugs through the public health care system. There was already extensive support for the government to take the actions necessary to halt the HIV/AIDS epidemic and appropriately treat those living with the disease. As a result, if TAC could point to the correct answer, thus demonstrating its 'rightness' in comparison with the decisions being made by

¹⁷³ See, for instance, Deborah B Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS* (2009); Benjamin Shepard, LM Bogad, and Stephen Duncombe, "Performing Vs. The Insurmountable: Theatrics, Activism, and Social Movements," *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* 4, no. 3 (2008); Graeber, *Direct Action*; "On the Phenomenology of Giant Puppets: Broken Windows, Imaginary Jars of Urine, and the Cosmological Role of the Police in American Culture," *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire* (2007); Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston, *AIDS Demo Graphics* (1990).

government, it would gain popular support, donors to continue its work, and additionally prompt government's representatives and decision-makers to realise the errors of their ways. The provision of antiretrovirals and medications to treat common co-infections through the public system was unassailable as medical fact, enabling TAC to stake out a near-unimpeachable level of 'rightness' in the public discourse.

The third strategy, what I label 'righteousness,' encompasses moral superiority or persuasiveness, as well as political legitimacy. As Friedman and Mottiar have argued, TAC did not just base its arguments on its scientific accuracy—the horrifying rate at which its members and others living with HIV/AIDS were succumbing to a treatable disease was an understandably robust foundation on which to argue that South Africa's HIV/AIDS policies were a cataclysmic moral failure.¹⁷⁴

Equal Education operates in a less conclusive policy environment than the one inhabited by the Treatment Action Campaign. Though TAC had to grapple with complex politics related to how to prioritize resources vis-à-vis treatment and prevention, which specific drugs to provide through the public system, etc., being able to clear the initial hurdle of rightness was an incredible boon to the movement. Equal Education, on the other hand, is able to bring information, evidence, and data to bear on their causes—but it cannot convincingly claim that it has the 'correct' answer on how to improve South Africa's schools. The purpose of education is subject to persistent social and political contestation, and even if society were to align on intended ends, there would still exist no clear understanding of how to achieve them. As a result, Equal Education could not simply take the model developed by TAC for use on HIV/AIDS advocacy and apply it to education advocacy.

Equal Education has instead made several important modifications to TAC's model, while still maintaining a core focus on rightness. First, it has drawn more substantially on the appeals of righteousness to compensate the lack of existence of a right answer. Righteousness politics in a democratic society functions both at the level of appealing directly to individual officials, representatives, or bureaucrats, as

¹⁷⁴ Friedman and Mottiar, "A Rewarding Engagement?"; "A Moral to the Tale."

well as at the level of generating broad-based support for a cause that might otherwise be easily written off as a special interests cause. The degree to which EE was able to draw public attention and capture the public narrative on education, particularly with its Norms and Standards campaign, was a demonstration of precisely this effect. The multi-page spreads in the Sunday papers during the solidarity tour included a devastating photo of South Africa's Archbishop Thabo Makgoba in his cerise clerical robes, sitting at a broken desk in a mud hut serving as a school. Twenty thousand young students marching on Parliament with fists raised to demand Norms and Standards made into most of the South African broadsheets. Even the first action EE took was visual: handing cameras to secondary school students to photograph their schools. The stills of the shattered windows at Luhlaza High, some window blocks without a single pane unbroken, created a visual foundation as well as an evidence base for EE's first set of demands on government. These campaign images do not exist independent of their related information bases. But affect, not just fact, has been a major source of Equal Education's power.

By drawing upon powerful visual imagery, familiar protest tactics, and strong moral and political rhetoric (calling their cause this generation's 'struggle,' for instance), Equal Education's work moves beyond knowledge and rightness into the realm of righteousness. Performative elements like the anti-apartheid rhetorical and visual vernacular make political and moral claims, and propel an information-based campaign that cannot rely on rightness alone through the final steps necessary to develop public legitimacy. These deliberate references to historical campaigns that many others have strong investment in and which have been found to be on the 'right side of history' place EE squarely in a tradition of morally correct behaviour that its audiences find easily legible, and for which they have been already primed to find moving. A partially appropriate analogue is again found in HIV/AIDS activism, this time in the work of Douglas Crimp and Deborah Gould about the images and emotions seen in ACT UP's US activism in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁷⁵ The visual vernacular of EE goes beyond this, however, through its incorporation of historical claims of political legitimacy in its modern campaigns of righteousness.

¹⁷⁵ Crimp and Rolston, *AIDS Demo Graphics*; Gould, *Moving Politics*.

Discussions of rightness/righteousness or fact/affect are no doubt more complicated than the above description and deserve a much longer treatment than they will receive here, particularly with regards to the recirculation of anti-apartheid imagery by post-apartheid activist groups in South Africa. However, this research is focused on the role of knowledge in Equal Education's work, not a comprehensive analysis of the full range of activist tactics used by it or other post-apartheid activist groups, and as such the above analysis is sufficient for the point at hand. Equal Education's work is not purely knowledge- or fact-based. Additional political and moral tactics are required for it to succeed in capturing the public imagination and the attention of government officials. This is especially true because of the fact that unlike other instances of activist citizenship discussed in the academic literature, Equal Education does not have the benefit of being able to claim grounds of rightness, leaving them to devise creative ways of demonstrating the moral righteousness of their causes.

This inability to stake a definitive claim to rightness in the manner of TAC also explains, to some degree, one of the aspects of what seems truly strange about EE; by and large, its work is not driven by conflicts with government over values. Equal Education seems to *agree* with the Department and WCED on almost any issue or ideal one can cite. Instead, Equal Education's mission in practice is to tell the Department how to do its job better. More than anything, it functions as a government accountability movement that happens to operate in the sphere of education, capable of going toe-to-toe with the Department on any number of legal or technocratic issues, much to the Department's frustration. Moreover, it does so in a manner evocative of the ruling party's previous history of resistance, using tactics, visuals, and rhetoric intimately familiar to many of its members. In the absence of an advocacy cause on which the group could be uncontestably correct, the path of next least resistance is to agitate for a cause that government has already deemed worthy and publicly committed itself to. Equal Education's focus on accountability is thus not accidental—it is the logical extension of attempting to apply a strategy of technocratic activism in a realm where few solutions, if any, are known for certain. When government offers low-hanging fruit to activists, by proposing and subsequently refusing to implement policies with intuitive, rational appeal, Equal Education can and does shine by confirming the greater public's intuitions through providing data and research, as well as by appealing to their moral intuitions. Such accountability activism also fits neatly into many citizens'

perceptions of the South African government as a lazy, incompetent, or corrupt steward of its resources. Rather than treating the entire system as fundamentally illegitimate in the manner of AbM, Equal Education channels similar views into transformative policy change, much as its earliest activists and leaders witnessed TAC doing with success. In these endeavours, Equal Education strives, and often succeeds, at merging strategies of rightness and righteousness through ensuring that its performances of affect and politics are undergirded by fact. The development, circulation, and dissemination of the research that enables EE's strategies of rightness is the subject of the next section.

POWER/KNOWLEDGE TO THE PEOPLE

Equal Education's activism, according to one of its informational videos, is premised on two fundamental elements: 'a serious understanding of policy' and a 'broad political education.' This education takes place weekly at 'fun but intensive meetings.'¹⁷⁶ The description neatly demarcates the two main types of knowledge work carried out by EE: generation and dissemination. From the start, EE has placed priority not just on having staff members capable of doing policy research and analysis, but also teaching that research and analysis to its student and parent members so that they too can conduct at least some forms of research and advocate to government using the same knowledge practices as government itself. Sometimes this requires teaching concepts to students that should have been taught in schools—statistics and fractions pose particular problems given the state of math literacy in the schools EE operates in—but youth group facilitators and parents' sector leaders work with members to ensure comprehension of concepts, not just soundbites or pieces of data.

EE's knowledge generation and dissemination is critical to its approach of knowledge-based activism, as the information provided by government education offices to the general public is, variously, dense, abstruse, or non-existent. Chapter one provided an introduction to this, in the discussion of what the Department of Basic Education considers to be its statements of public accountability. The government's own documents—the *Delivery Agreement* mentioned in Chapter 1, as well as the *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025*, the

¹⁷⁶ Equal Education, "Introducing Equal Education Pt1," (2010).

Strategic Plan 2011-2014, and its annual performance plans—will be discussed in further detail in chapter three. Here, it suffices to say that Equal Education considers making the status of education and education policy comprehensible to lay audiences a major part of its work.¹⁷⁷ EE staff wish government would release simpler, clearer versions of their reports and commitments for the public.¹⁷⁸ But department communications like this have never existed, and the staff members I spoke with were not hopeful it would occur. This lack fit a broader pattern of lack of documents from the DBE that the community could understand, which EE's Head of Policy, Communications, and Research, Yoliswa Dwane, cited as a constant obstacle to citizens being informed and taking action.¹⁷⁹

The majority of EE's formal knowledge generation occurs in the Policy, Communications, and Research Department. PCR, as it is known in the organisation, is normally constituted of several researchers (either full-time staff or university educated volunteers), a parliamentary monitor, a press officer or several, and at least one manager. Depending on the staffing configuration at the time, staff members may occupy or share multiple of these roles. The annual research agenda is set by EE's National Council, in consultation with EE's management, members, and the PCR staff. In addition to the annual research agenda, which is largely composed of major projects, PCR usually does several ad hoc projects per year prompted by concerns of the membership, such as its research on corporal punishment and on the legal status of pregnant learners. Equal Education's researchers have worked on two major reports, on the provision of school libraries and on textbooks. The school libraries report proved sufficiently popular and influential that it merited a second edition; the textbooks report is forthcoming. Both required extensive primary research on the part of Equal Education's staff, and provide detailed information about the provision of libraries and textbooks respectively that cannot be found elsewhere in the public domain.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Department of Basic Education, "Delivery Agreement for Outcome 1: Improved Quality of Basic Education."; Motshekga, "Statement on the Signing of the Delivery Agreement."; Department of Basic Education, "Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025."; "Strategic Plan 2011-2014."; "Annual Performance Plan 2011-2012."

¹⁷⁸ Dmitri Holtzman, Deputy Manager of Policy, Communications, and Research, Equal Education. Interview, 15 Sep, 2011.

¹⁷⁹ Yoliswa Dwane, Head of Policy, Communications, and Research, Equal Education. Interview, 29 Sep, 2011.

¹⁸⁰ Conyngham and Isaacs, "We Can't Afford Not To."; Catherine Boule and Michael Arnst, "Equal Education Textbook Report: An Analysis of Procurement and Delivery in South African Schools," (Forthcoming). It is worth noting here that I assisted in editing the forthcoming report on textbooks, though I did not contribute any research.

Equal Education strives to keep its researchers in a constant dialogue with its grassroots members. In its ideal form, this is not merely a one-way discussion in which the researchers transmit their research to the grassroots, but rather a continuous loop in which grassroots concerns inform the work that the researchers do. Equal Education's internal knowledge dissemination strategies are a cornerstone of how it organises and trains its members, and its external dissemination strategies form a crucial component of its public advocacy work.

Equal Education sustains its campaigns through numerous types of in-person gatherings: weekly youth group meetings throughout the areas in which it is active; mass meetings which happen at least termly and combine youth members across an entire locality (so, for instance, the whole of the Western Cape youth membership, rather than the smaller youth groups divided up by geographic areas or schools); sleep-away youth camps; parent and community meetings multiple times a month; and mass actions—marches, pickets, and the like. EE understands its student members, the Equalisers, to be the soul of the movement and the political future of South Africa, and thus invests a significant amount of time training Equalisers at the youth group meetings, and retreats. Its work with parent and community members, known as the Parents Sector, has also expanded significantly over time, with a committed team of staff and volunteers leading meetings for adult activists in the evenings and on weekends. While the learning agendas of the youth groups and the Parents Sector often differ, both rely heavily on information and knowledge provided to them by PCR. This is especially true in the lead up to major campaign actions, when the organisation focuses extensively on ensuring that its members can speak authoritatively on the issues at hand.

In the youth groups, EE trains its members on major issues in the South African education system. EE's youth groups follow a general curriculum by term or by year, which is supplanted by 'of-the-moment' issues as needed (such as when it became apparent that a special session was needed to address the illegality of corporal punishment in schools as discussed above). The volunteer facilitators of these youth groups are mostly but not entirely former EE student activists from the poor and working class black areas that EE serves, who have since left secondary education. In the first four years of the organisation, there were a very small number of white university students who have also volunteered as youth group leaders, many of whom were also involved in Habonim (the progressive Jewish

youth organisation at one point led by Doron Isaacs). Facilitators are selected by the Youth Department staff through a competitive application process. Some are students at nearby universities and technical colleges, others have continued on to work, still others are unemployed, but all have a longstanding involvement with the organisation.

For many youth group sessions, facilitators have ‘fact sheets’ for distribution to the Equalisers in their groups, which cover the session’s content. The Equalisers take turns reading the fact sheets aloud, asking questions of the facilitators as needed. After the material has been covered the first time, the group does some kind of fun activity intended to energise the members, check comprehension, and present the material in a different way for students who struggled with the written English. The Equalisers are then intended to take the fact sheets home as easy references for the future, though some inevitably get lost in the clutter of the average teenager’s life. The curriculum for winter 2011, by way of example, included sessions on unequal school conditions, teachers and the teaching profession, norms and standards for school infrastructure, and school governance and management.

The first of the winter 2011 series, a broad overview of the issues facing the education system entitled ‘Unequal Schools, Unequal Outcomes,’ serves as a good example of the form. The sheets are never longer than four sides of A4 paper, and provide graphics and visuals to assist comprehension of statistics and figures—mathematical concepts that many of the Equalisers have difficulty with due to poor quality maths lessons. The language is colloquial, and speaks to students’ own experiences. One passage about teacher distribution issues (that is to say, the concentration of highly qualified teachers in formerly white schools) could speak in the language of education policy, citing school environment, student to teacher ratios, workload, learner motivation, and salary. Instead, the passage reads:

Think about it, if you are a well-qualified and experienced teacher, where are you going to want to work? In Khayelitsha, where class sizes are huge, there’s lots of homework to mark and your fellow teachers are often grumpy? Or at Westerford, where classes sizes are small, there’s less homework to mark, your fellow teachers are happy and most importantly, where you get paid more?¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Equal Education, "Unequal Schools, Unequal Outcomes," ed. Equal Education (2011).

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

My experiences attending and sometimes facilitating youth groups made it clear that the issues themselves were well within the grasp of the Equalisers—given the self-selection involved, the students are unsurprisingly a bright, passionate, dedicated group. They occasionally struggled with English vocabulary words in the fact sheets, but that was to be expected given the quality of their education in English. Often, students who had trouble expressing themselves in English would switch to Xhosa, and then, as translated to me by my usual co-facilitators, drew powerful connections between the broader themes and their own experiences, asked thought-provoking questions, or offered creative possibilities for future actions on the issues presented.

One representative youth discussion took place at a mass meeting on the Norms and Standards in March 2014 at O.R. Tambo Hall, a sports and recreation building in Khayelitsha. Ringed by struggle-style murals on the walls of people marching with signs and raised fists, and under the watchful eye of a 20-foot-tall portrait of Nelson Mandela, roughly 500 students gathered. I was placed with a group of students from a secondary school in Khayelitsha, who took turns working their way through a series of activities about the regulations on school infrastructure they had fought for, newly signed into law. Their facilitator, Ntosh, a young black woman who had spent years in EE as a student and facilitator, and at the time had also just been hired as a Junior Youth Organiser, was intentionally making mistakes in her summary of the standards following a group reading, in order to check comprehension. Equalisers jumped in to correct all of her errors, and were very much on top of the specifics in a detailed policy document. Their discussion of the implementation timeline made it clear that they realised they would not be around to witness their hard-fought efforts in their own schools—but perhaps their younger siblings would, and so would the students at schools in even higher need

than their own. While there was a sense of pride and cheer at having succeeded in this long-running campaign, the students also expressed that they were not naively taking the battle as won. The discussion of the policy particulars quickly moved, as a result of the students' questions rather than the facilitator's guidance, to a conversation about what they could do as activists and what EE could do as an organisation to make sure the policy was actually implemented.

EE also has a full-time learning and training programme for post-school youth, the Community Leader (CL) programme. This one-year programme selects no more than 20 participants each year from EE's ranks of dedicated student leaders who have recently graduated from secondary school but are not headed directly to post-secondary education. The CL programme has changed in form over time, starting out with a joint focus on academic work and on leadership and activist training. Under this first format, CLs received intensive tutoring to improve their exam scores and thus increase their chances of acceptance to university. In exchange, the gap year students continued to lead within EE, coordinating actions and facilitating youth groups. After several years in that format, Equal Education's leaders determined that the split focus meant the program was not performing as well as it could on either front. Given that other organisations provided remedial matric training, Equal Education shifted the CL programme to focus exclusively on leadership, activist, and political training.

In CL training sessions I sat in on in 2014, two Equal Education activists studying for their undergraduate degrees at UCT (and members of an informal activist training group headed up by Rob Petersen, a struggle stalwart and member of the far-left Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC) led a series of group discussions on a dense selection of readings from Marx and Engels, including parts of *The German Ideology* as a basis for discussions of South Africa's economic inequality. Despite the fact that some in this group largely did not score highly enough on their matriculation exams to attend university, their questions about the text and their applications of the theory to present day South Africa demonstrated a high level of comprehension and critical thinking about the ideas contained within these complicated readings that often only appear on syllabi for advanced undergraduate classes.

In one April 2013 session, for instance, the CLs transitioned from a discussion about political power into a nuanced discussion about the lack of transparency and accountability in South Africa's parliamentary structures. After one CL raised concerns that South African citizens lack knowledge about both how the country's Ministers are selected as well as about much of their actual activities, another challenged the idea that South Africa's citizens held power in South Africa's parliamentary system in any real way, saying, 'Theoretically, across the world, we have power. But in reality, the parliamentarians do. We don't get to select *people* (emphasis hers). We can petition, and say we want change, but if the Parliament doesn't want it, it doesn't happen. So theoretically, we have power, but practically, we don't.' The CLs combine this education on progressive political and economic theory with knowledge of the specific issues affecting the South African education system to form the basis of the simpler and more straightforward learning activities they create and run for the youth groups.

Carrying out these internal knowledge and education activities requires the PCR staff and facilitators to work fluently in a number of experiential vernaculars and styles. The research team broadly understands how to write for policy-makers, practitioners, and academics with little instruction, thanks to their own education levels and membership in the social milieu that is the main audience for those materials. The department is staffed by graduates of the best universities in South Africa and abroad, plus a couple of American and/or British interns at any given time. However, though the head of the department, co-founder and Chairperson Yoliswa Dwane, is a Xhosa speaker who grew up in a township in Eastern Cape and presently lives in Khayelitsha, most of the team does not share the background of most of the grassroots activists. As a result, there is an intensive learning curve for them to figure out how to pitch the factsheets and pamphlets for the activists and local community. There has historically been high turnover in the Policy, Communications, and Research department. Additionally, during my research, there was only ever at most one researcher at a given time besides the department head who had grown up poor, or in a township or rural area in South Africa. Most researchers were white, more affluent than most of the country, or both. PCR's different demographics to the rest of the organisation are something EE's leaders are well aware of and working hard to counteract, but the organisation's limited budget and principle of limiting salary gaps within the organisation makes it very difficult for them to attract researchers who do not already come from more

affluent backgrounds, a phenomenon discussed in more depth in chapter five.¹⁸² As a result, many of EE's researchers did not start at the organisation with an easy fluency in how to convey these technocratic ideas to many of the activists at the grassroots level who had the disadvantage of attending schools that failed to teach them anything but the most rudimentary of literacy and mathematics skills. Most researchers needed to actively cultivate this skill set, ideally through engaging with the members for whom the materials are developed, and sitting in on or assisting in the activities for which the materials are used, thus learning the best ways for information to be transferred from the research staff to the membership.

The second aspect of information transfer is from the membership to the staff, meaning from students, parents, and community members to researchers. Equal Education's staff understand themselves as having an 'open door' policy—when members have concerns or want to learn more about an issue, they should bring them to the research team, which is at their disposal to dig up as much useful information as possible and spin it back to the grassroots via the fact sheets, pamphlets, youth camp curricula, etc. This open door policy, of course, requires people to walk in the door, which happened less frequently in 2013 and 2014 than it did in the earlier days of the organisation, because of the expansion and turnover of Equal Education's staff.

In the earlier stages of the organisation, through September 2011, there were a handful of senior staff members, mostly researchers, with whom student activists clearly felt comfortable. These staff members, who came from across both racial and class spectrums, were well known to the students thanks to their facilitation of youth groups, participation in mass meetings, and active attempts to get to know the student members. Students would come to chat with these staff members, unscheduled, about the issues they were facing in their schools—from the banning of Rastafarian students from schools until they cut off their dreadlocks, to a geography teacher who had been missing from the classroom for months without a substitute. In turn, these staff members, most of whom were quite senior in the organisation, ensured that these concerns got to the people best positioned to address them or took the issues forward themselves. Students were in the research

¹⁸² Dwane, "Interview with Yoliswa Dwane, Head of Policy, Communications, and Research, Equal Education."; Brad Brockman, 10 Jun, 2015, Online video conversation.

office most afternoons, chatting amongst themselves and with the facilitators of the youth groups, but also with staff members. During this period, there was a high level of attendance and participation by all staff (including these senior members) at youth groups, youth camps, mass meetings, etc.

By April 2013, half of these senior staff members frequently sought out by students had left their jobs at Equal Education, and the others, precisely because of their popularity amongst the grassroots activists, were elected to different positions in the organisation at Equal Education's first membership Congress in 2012. These latter staff members did not resign their previously held positions within the paid staff of the organisation immediately, though one eventually went on to make his elected job into a full-time job. The new, high-profile posts added additional tasks to these staff members' workloads and took them out of the office more often. At a practical level, this had the ironic effect of making them less present and accessible to the grassroots activists who elected them. Fewer students came into the research department's office space than had previously, and there were fewer instances in which a grassroots concern was successfully elevated to the research staff. Moreover, there was an overall decrease in the familiarity of the grassroots activists with the bread and butter issues of the organisation's campaigns during this period. The researchers and facilitators who replaced these staff members were not as engaged with the grassroots for the reasons described above, and the organisation took time to understand and adapt to the effects of elevating this set of staff members to higher positions with more responsibilities. The youth group facilitators and staffers at the start of 2014 echoed this concern.

Because of these worries, Equal Education implemented a new system for information flow at the beginning of 2014. Trying to compensate for the lack of informal contact that had propelled the organisation through its largely successful early years, EE developed a formal process through which the research team worked with the groups that had the most contact with student and parent members (the Youth Department, the Community Department, and the Community Leaders) to develop content and curricula tailored to their teaching needs. In EE's early years, the Youth Group facilitators had all been trained in how to devise their own activities for Equalisers to be used at youth groups and camps, a skillset that had fallen by the wayside by early 2013. In the preparation for the annual youth camp at the end of 2013, a manager in the organisation asked the

facilitators to devise the exercises for an Equaliser camp, and was met with blank reactions; the intentional centralisation of the process into the Youth Department to try to improve activity quality and the robustness of the research base had the unintended effect of distancing it from the facilitators who actually ran the youth groups and camps.

From mid-2014, the Deputy General Secretary, who was working closely with PCR at the time, and one of the researchers were sitting down for meetings every other week with the Youth Department staff and Community Leaders to work together on the activities for youth group, after which the researcher would collaborate with the Youth Department staff and Community leaders to draft any necessary materials for the activities. Equalisers and facilitators as well as all staff involved in the process were very positive about the early stages of this system, and based on my observation, it was more effective at informing the members about the issues. Participants in the process see it as a much more collaborative system, in which staff are able to draw upon their different strengths and be taken seriously as experts in their own domains. By 2015, this system had evolved into the Internal Education and Training Unit (IETU), a small group within EE headed up by co-founder Doron Isaacs, and whose mandate was in part to ensure that much of EE's knowledge work is done by staff who share the background of most of its members.¹⁸³ While IETU's knowledge work is somewhat centralised, in that its work is mostly carried out by a small core team, it is decentralizing in that it provides a catalogue of resources and support for those wishing to create youth group activities or carry out campaigns anywhere within the organisation. It is also structured to operate according to the input of youth group facilitators, and has held seminars with facilitators for that purpose.

In addition to this new process for youth groups, a new system has been created to better train and involve the whole staff in assisting with mass meetings. It was a longstanding requirement for the staff that did not normally work with the Equalisers (e.g. researchers, communications, and administrative staff) to attend all mass meetings, but by 2013, a significant number of these staff members skipped meetings. When they did attend, many tended to hang back at the edge of the crowd, and were not particularly informed about how to help out or what their

¹⁸³ Doron Isaacs, 17 Jun, 2015, Online video conversation.

roles were. This was not necessarily their fault, as they often received very little information in advance of the meetings, and what information they did receive often came immediately before the meetings without an opportunity to ask any much needed clarification questions. As a Youth Department staffer put it at the launch of the new system, ‘Last year, the staff would go to the mass meeting, and they would stay on the cheerleading benches, and watch things unfold. But we want staff to participate, not just watch. So we’re having this meeting to make sure that everyone knows what is going on.’ And indeed, following this training session, the rest of the staff was much more integrated into assisting with the activities at the mass meeting, garnering approval from students, the Youth Department, and the rest of the staff alike. The simple addition of this pre-meeting training session transformed both the attitudes of the rest of the staff towards their attendance at mass meetings as well as their experiences at the meetings.

While these more formalized systems of content development and interaction were no doubt an improvement over what was happening during 2013, these new systems had yet to compensate for many of the benefits that came from the informal direct interactions between members and researchers that occurred in the early days of the organisation. Still, creating a better conduit from members to researchers via the youth department and facilitators through improving the connections between the researchers and the youth department seems to have been a beneficial decision for both types of knowledge transfer. Without the frequent interactions between those two groups as a result of working together to create the curriculum and content for the youth groups, there would no doubt be even less information flowing back and forth between the thin research layer and the rank and file membership.

In addition to the youth groups, Parents Sector meetings, mass meetings, camps, and CL Programme, Equal Education also runs mandatory learning seminars for its volunteers and staff. These sessions may or may not be directly connected to the organisation’s main campaigns at the time—often, the seminars are intended to improve general knowledge about education, activism, or politics. Sometimes Equal Education staff will present on their current work; more frequently, outside speakers are invited to give a talk of 45 minutes to an hour, and field up to an hour’s worth of questions. As some demonstration of the wide variety of speakers and subjects covered in these seminars, over the course of my research included a

professor of mathematics education at the University of the Witwatersrand; Mary Metcalfe, an education professor, a former EE Board Member and later national Director General of Higher Education; Jay Naidoo, a prominent union leader during the anti-apartheid struggle; and a panel on the national budget which included the Chairperson of Parliament's Appropriations Committee, a budget researcher from the Public Service Accountability Monitor, and an economics lecturer from the University of Cape Town. The roster of high-powered visitors demonstrates Equal Education's prominence and convening power—speakers are compensated for costs, but not paid—and the questions they are posed by members and staff show the high levels of expertise possessed throughout the organisation, not just by its researchers.

One of the other roles in PCR straddling the divide between internal and external knowledge work is the role of the parliamentary monitor, who is tasked with keeping track of changes in the legislation governing schools, and sitting in on the meetings of the national Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Basic Education. EE's parliamentary monitor has a critical role in tracking legislative changes to be reported back to the rest of the organisation as well as witnessing the degree to which Parliament is holding the Department of Basic Education to account. One of the Portfolio Committee's main tasks is to act as the people of South Africa's representative oversight on the work of the Department of Basic Education. However, in all of the Portfolio Committee meetings I attended, this function was largely absent. While opposition MPs frequently ask questions, with the most hard-hitting normally coming from the opposition representatives in the Democratic Alliance, the ANC's representatives tend to either ask softball questions or make statements thanking the Department for all of their hard work and glorifying anything that could be considered an achievement of the Department—even if a more thoroughgoing look reveals said achievement to be more shine than substance.

One incident in 2011 recounted by an EE parliamentary observer found the Head of the Portfolio Committee, MP Hope Malagas, pulling him aside after a meeting to quietly but carefully put him (and thus EE) in his place. 'I hear you have been being very rude to my Minister,' MP Malagas said to him. 'If you continue to be rude to my Minister, our friendship will be over very quickly.' The 'you' in this instance was not the observer specifically, but Equal Education writ large. With this kind of

ranks closing, and a hierarchical party structure that places senior party members in ministerial posts and more junior members as the MPs in charge of monitoring them, the structure itself is not a recipe for success in accountability. The true monitoring and accountability functions, then, are largely left to outside groups like Equal Education. As a part of their work, Equal Education has researched and released several ‘Shadow Plans,’ described in more detail in chapter three, in which they compare the Department’s work over the prior year against the claims the DBE made about what it would accomplish that year. Though the portfolio committee has, on occasion, invited Equal Education to present its research and shadow reports, opposition MPs are generally the only committee members to engage EE’s concerns.¹⁸⁴

Equal Education’s internal knowledge work is combined with a robust programme of external knowledge dissemination, largely organised and overseen by the media officer and other members of PCR, who write press releases and op-eds, and control the organisation’s mainstream media contacts and social media accounts. The individuals actually providing quotes, speaking with reporters, and occasionally writing op-eds are a mix of elected parent and student leaders, EE researchers, and senior managers. Equal Education also runs training sessions and media programmes for its members; it has held radio training sessions, investigative and opinion journalism workshops, and has an ongoing documentary film initiative, *Amazi Wethu*, which was started in partnership with the New School in New York City. Equal Education has cultivated a strong presence in South Africa’s media landscape; its number is frequently the one called by newspaper, television, and radio journalists looking for comments on the latest issue in education. Its campaign for school infrastructure became so dominant that for several years, one could scarcely see a commentary piece on the education system that did not at least reference the need for upgraded infrastructure and regulations to hold the government to account. Prior to Equal Education’s campaign, these issues were far less frequently discussed in the press.

EE’s splashiest media success during the period of my research was its ‘Solidarity Tour’ in 2013, in which their leaders and a small number of staff members took a

¹⁸⁴ Portfolio Committee on Basic Education, Parliament of South Africa., *Equal Education Comments; South African Council of Educators & Umahusi Briefings on 2011/12 Annual Reports*, 12 Oct 2012.

number of South African public figures, including the Archbishop of Cape Town, authors, academics, and other intellectuals on a tour of schools in Eastern Cape, showing the vast difference between the rare, newly constructed schools and the all too common schools which were vastly overcrowded, under-resourced, and crumbling to the ground. The publicity from the several-day tour generated well over a dozen mainstream news articles, including at least one cover story, multiple articles per paper in some of the most widely read broadsheets in the country, and a multi-page spread in the most widely read Sunday paper in the country.¹⁸⁵

Following the media blitz, there was a public reportback event in the Book Lounge, an independent bookstore in the City Bowl that doubles as Cape Town's closest approximation of a literary salon—normally the site of author talks, book launches, and similar events. I arrived ten minutes early to find the venue jampacked with one of the most diverse audiences I had seen at any event in Cape Town—on metrics including age, gender, and class, in addition to race. All had gathered to hear fiction writer Zakes Mda, writer Sindiwe Magona, and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town Njabulo Ndebele speak about what they had witnessed in Eastern Cape's schools. I was unable to even make it in the front door to the venue, so overstuffed was it with curious members of the public. Instead, I found myself standing on the front step with retired Constitutional Court Justice Kate O'Regan, both of us craning our necks to hear the speakers. Despite the cramped, stuffiness of the room (an unintentional reproduction on a minor scale of one of the conditions of the schools being discussed), the audience was fiercely attentive. Upon the conclusion of the speakers' remarks, a huge number of hands shot up with questions. Equal Education's work and the conditions of South African schools had clearly captured the imagination of a broad swath of Capetonians, so eager to hear a public lecture on the subject that they patiently stood along the streets outside the venue, waiting for those who were actually able to hear to relay what was being said inside.

¹⁸⁵ See, for instance, Nashira Davids, "Is This Freedom?," *The Times*, 25 Apr 2013; Lubabalo Ngeukana, "Our Children Are Being Taught in Pigsties – Archbishop," *City Press*, 25 Apr 2013; Nashira Davids, "Education at the School of Pimples and Faeces," *The Times*, 26 Apr 2013; Pierre De Vos, "It's Not a Democracy If Our Children Aren't Equal," *The Daily Maverick*, 29 Apr 2013; Kate Wilkinson and Julie Campbell, "Eastern Cape's Forgotten Schools: Day 3," *Mail & Guardian Online*, 28 Apr 2013; South African Broadcasting Corporation, "Solidarity Visit Highlights School Infrastructure Crisis in E Cape," *SABC News*, 26 Apr 2013.

Equal Education's mission of engaging the public and organising citizens to advocate for improvements to the South African school system sets it apart from other education organisations in the country. I interviewed a number of different people working in the education NGO sector in South Africa, whom I reached either through their contact with EE, or, more frequently, through their participation in the BRIDGE Network, formed by some of the most prominent and long-standing education NGOs in South Africa to coordinate their efforts and share best practices. Mentioning Equal Education to my interviewees within the education NGO landscape produced three common reactions somewhat at odds with the perceptions of EE's own staff and members. These reactions occurred with each of my interviewees, without exception. First, my interviewees expressed some level of self-aware envy of Equal Education's profile. The education NGO sector in South Africa is not new—many of the organisations currently operating in schools have existed since the end of apartheid, or even before. To paraphrase one interviewee, his organisation has been doing great work in schools for decades, but no one seemed to pay attention to their work, or the education sector at all, until Equal Education came along.¹⁸⁶

The second common line on Equal Education is that it is not much of a collaborator. This may be related to the first point, about an envy of EE's outsized reputation in the sector. Employees of smaller organisations noted that they felt brushed aside, or like EE only came looking for them when it wanted something. Since this set of interviews took place, Equal Education created a position to focus exclusively on partnerships. However, that staff member has focused heavily on developing better working relationships with other organisations in Khayelitsha—not on developing closer partnerships with other education organisations. The third consistent reaction was a repeated question of whether EE is an “organisation or a movement”—the precise question at the heart of The Bookery debates. One of the more prominent education reformers in South Africa, LEAP School Director John Gilmour, believes that EE's reluctance to share its name or collaborate with others is indicative of it behaving more as an organisation than a movement. It seems to understand its brand as proprietary, and is a careful gatekeeper regarding who is or is not allowed to use the EE name. However, to Gilmour, this alienates

¹⁸⁶ Norton Tennille, Founder and Director of Institutional Development, South African Education and Environment Project (SAEP). Interview, 22 Aug, 2011.

the education groups he believes would be its natural allies, and leads them to regard EE with cynicism and scepticism: not signs of a broad-based social movement advancing causes with which each organisation in question agrees.¹⁸⁷ Equal Education, for its part, disputes these characterisations, noting that it has frequently sought collaboration, inviting people to its 2011 Summit on Quality Education and to its 2014 practitioners workshop on Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure, as well as hosting public events, teach-ins, and marches.

According to its potential peers in the education reform sector, then, EE is not a movement, it is an organisation, and not one known to play well with others. Ironically, it is precisely the characteristics that make it more akin to a movement than an organisation that alienate its education sector peers. Equal Education's leaders see it squarely in the tradition of activist movements. When I brought up the comments made by education organisations regarding their frustration with their inability to collaborate with Equal Education, the usual response was to question whether there was anyone out there in the education world with whom EE ought collaborate, aside from the academics with whom they frequently consult.¹⁸⁸ Who had as many members—or for that matter, any members, given that there are no other similarly structured education advocacy groups? Who did similar work? Who also had the goal of transformational, systemic change, rather than trading in small-scale gap-filling? EE is right that it stands alone in this regard. The other education groups were right to recognise a chasm between their work and the work of Equal Education. Equal Education's leaders understand it as a political, activist organisation, not an 'education' organisation alone. Unless these other groups were interested in similar political missions and causes, it was genuinely unclear to EE's leaders why or how they might collaborate.

Equal Education's body of work demonstrates the complex nature of what it means for citizens to participate in democratic decision-making in the 'new' South Africa.

¹⁸⁷ John Gilmour, Director, LEAP Science and Math Schools. Interview, 17 Aug, 2011.

¹⁸⁸ This list includes Mary Metcalfe and Paula Ensor, whose backgrounds and relationships with the organisation are mentioned in the main text, as well as Peliwe Lolwana (EE National Council member and Director of the Education Policy Unit at the University of Witwatersrand), Crain Soudien (Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town), Nic Spaul (Post-doctoral fellow in Economics at the University of Stellenbosch), Nick Taylor (CEO of South Africa's National Education Evaluation and Development Unit), Brahm Fleisch (Professor of Education, University of Witwatersrand), Ursula Hoadley (Associate Professor of Education at the University of Cape Town) and Jonathan Clark (Director of the Schools Development Unit and the Schools Improvement Initiative at the University of Cape Town).

Its strategies of activist citizenship are both continuous and discontinuous with the other groups that might be understood as its predecessors and contemporaries. Its work is more knowledge-based, and less radical than the apartheid-era education activists that came before it. Its strategies are more willing to engage government than those of Abahlali baseMjondolo, and less able to rely exclusively on the politics of rightness than the Treatment Action Campaign. Its approach is more activist and mass-based than any other group working to improve education in South Africa. But its work is not entirely novel or without precedent. It has combined the visuals, imagery, and rhetoric of the anti-apartheid struggle with the knowledge-based activism tactics of the Treatment Action Campaign, ultimately producing an evocative, visceral yet information-driven mass movement on government accountability in the education sector. Equal Education's knowledge-based activism does not, in the words of Kuhn, attempt a paradigm shift when it comes to what counts as expertise in the realm of education policy. Instead, it works to make society more broadly conversant and participant in the knowledge practices deployed by government as discussed in chapter one. Despite a lack of explicit clash with government representatives and officials regarding underlying values and overarching policy strategy in the education sector, government's failure to deliver on its promises and constitutional obligations still leaves ample opportunity for citizen contestation and engagement.

Equal Education's activism reveals a specific understanding of how government works and how it should work, and of the role of ordinary South Africans in that system. Equal Education's strategies would be useless, for instance, if there were no chance that government officials would ever pay attention to the technocratic expertise that its active citizens developed, or if EE believed that government officials had no intention of listening to the will of the citizenry beyond the ballot box. EE's strategies also indicate a more optimistic reading of governmental, social, and economic power relations than Abahlali's strategies do. Even in the face of repeated rejection or disregard by government officials, EE's response has been to scale up its attempts to engage those same officials, not to turn to civil disobedience or other illegal actions. This set of practices and strategies, in short, is predicated upon the South African democratic state as largely being one that *works* for its poor, working class, and otherwise marginalised people—or at least is capable of doing so—at the level of both representation and implementation of the citizens' will it represents. It is not precisely expected to work for the majority of South

Africa as it does for its elite few, many of whom are unfairly advantaged by government patronage and corruption. Indeed, to achieve the goals sought by Equal Education the government's treatment of the elite few must change as well. It is instead envisioned to work in much the same way that it does for South Africa's middle class, a government like that experienced by several of EE's early leaders and board members, TAC's early leaders and board members before them, and the US HIV/AIDS activists they followed the lead of before that: a government that largely delivers on its promises, acknowledges its citizens' frustrations, and attempts to resolve them. To the extent that government officials fail to meet these expectations, Equal Education's activists are there to spotlight their failures, and to use their own expertise to bring their vision for a truly egalitarian, democratic South Africa into being.

CHAPTER THREE

CONFRONTATION AND CONTESTATION: KNOWLEDGE IN PRACTICE

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

On 26 July 2011, I arrived at Equal Education's offices just before the start of the normal work day to find staff and volunteers piling into the only couple of cars there already. 'We were called by students at Chris Hani [Secondary School in Khayelitsha] about a big protest happening there,' an EE staff member said to me, and 'could [I] drive some more people over to help with whatever is happening?' We arrived to find hundreds of students in uniform locked out of their own school's security gates, rubbish strewn across the street, and a couple of very twitchy police officers standing nervous guard in front of the gates. Before the morning was out, Equal Education's activists and I had gone to the nearby clinic with a female student with a profusely bleeding neck wound, courtesy of a policeman's rubber bullet, heard a series of conflicting stories about the supposed beating of a student by the school's security guards as the reason behind a spontaneous protest, and been in a peaceful crowd fired on with rubber bullets by a newly arrived battalion of riot police—prompted by an outside agitator standing off to the side of the students lobbing a sizable hunk of concrete at the officers and connecting with a police van.

The events of that morning, described and analysed in greater detail later in this chapter, were one of the infrequent intersections of Equal Education's strategy of peaceful advocacy with the more spontaneous, informal, militant, and sometimes violent approaches present in South Africa's so-called 'service delivery' protests.¹⁸⁹ These more militant protests have become an ever-present feature of the social landscape in South Africa's townships in particular, indeed sometimes blocking the

¹⁸⁹ There is a large literature on these protests, including Alexander, "Rebellion of the Poor: South Africa's Service Delivery Protests—a Preliminary Analysis."; Alexander and Pfaffe, "Social Relationships to the Means and Ends of Protest in South Africa's Ongoing Rebellion of the Poor: The Balfour Insurrections."; Karl von Holdt and Peter Alexander, "Collective Violence, Community Protest and Xenophobia," *South African Review of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (2012); Lodge and Mottiar, "Protest in South Africa: Motives and Meanings."; Shauna Mottiar, "From 'Popcorn' to 'Occupy': Protest in Durban, South Africa," *Development and Change* 44, no. 3 (2013); Shauna Mottiar and Patrick Bond, "The Politics of Discontent and Social Protest in Durban," *Politikon* 39, no. 3 (2012); Lodge and Mottiar, "Protest in South Africa: Motives and Meanings."; Karl Von Holdt, "Insurgent Citizenship and Collective Violence: Analysis of Case Studies," *Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) & Society, Work and Development Institute (SWOP), The smoke that calls: Insurgent citizenship, collective violence and the struggle for a place in the new South Africa: Eight case studies of community protest and xenophobic violence* (2011).

roads needed to access Equal Education's headquarters in Khayelitsha. As noted in the introduction, these militant protests signal a different strategy of citizenship than Equal Education's evidence-based peaceful advocacy. For some, the lack of results produced by these more militant strategies has prompted a sense of hopelessness about the prospect of changing their own material conditions or the broader social order.¹⁹⁰ Yet despite the anger and frustration of many citizens, Equal Education remains committed to its strategy of peaceful, largely technocratic and legal engagement with government—and has been at least somewhat vindicated by the results of their strategy.

So far, this thesis has covered the knowledge practices that dominate the government's work on education and introduced a group of citizens dedicated to improving the government's education system, working under the banner of Equal Education. This chapter is dedicated to answering three central questions. First, how does Equal Education engage with government in the venues provided for it as well as venues which it creates? Second, given the common presence of more militant tactics in the South African protest landscape, particularly amongst the poor, urban and rural communities that comprise its membership, why does it utilise this set of strategies in particular? And third, what do these answers mean for active democratic citizenship in South Africa as well as for the relationship between knowledge and democracy writ large?

To answer these questions, this chapter provides a series of representative interactions between government representatives and members or staff of Equal Education in order to demonstrate that several of the theories related to citizen and government knowledge interactions do not reflect realities on the ground, and ought not be treated as axiomatic. Despite the assertions of politicians and bureaucrats, common perceptions of citizens, and the dominant arguments in the relevant literature outlined in the introduction and chapter one, government is not necessarily more informed than the citizens advocating for change in this case. Complicating the argument given by Scott in chapter one, active citizens are more capable of understanding and utilising the kinds of statistical and technocratic information, or *techne* often referenced as 'expert' than they are normally

¹⁹⁰ Mottiar and Bond, "The Politics of Discontent and Social Protest in Durban."

hypothesised to be, even in situations where the policy-making realm has no obvious 'answer' or 'solution.'

Given this, interactions between Equal Education and the government often followed a loose pattern. After being challenged by citizens on a matter of their concern and something the citizens perceived to be the government's responsibility, the government representatives would frequently draw on claims of expert knowledge as their move of first resort to dismiss citizen participation. However, activist citizens may know more than government politicians or bureaucrats about issues presumed to be the domain of government technocrats. If they wished not to acquiesce to activist demands, but found themselves unable, borrowing from Weber, to maintain a monopoly on power/knowledge over a given area of expertise, they frequently turned to other tactics to dismiss citizen participation, such as references to age, personal experience, identity, and the authority of their offices. These latter tactics and strategies do not appear to be the default options for representatives and officials looking to silence the public; they tend to emerge after a failure to successfully dismiss citizen participation on grounds of superior expertise. Moreover, identity and experience questions are themselves often bound up in the aforementioned claims of knowledge authority and expertise, as is seen later in this chapter and in chapters four and five.

Occasionally, government officials were willing to cede expert status to Equal Education, as the WCED was when it came to an informational video about textbooks that the activist group created. In other instances, bureaucrats and politicians appeared to lack actual technocratic expertise, but were well-versed in the form, such that they were able to offer a performance of it. Jean and John Comaroff as well as Jonny Steinberg have made similar observations about the South African Police Services.¹⁹¹ However, this observation functions somewhat differently in the realm of basic education, where the bureaucrats and politicians sometimes possess the expertise referenced by the form of these knowledge practices, and sometimes do not, but are often perceived to have the expertise they claim by the citizens they interact with. Regardless of what the knowledge practices of government are revealed to be in a given instance, the fact that Equal Education

¹⁹¹ Jean Comaroff and John L Comaroff, "Criminal Obsessions, after Foucault: Postcoloniality, Policing, and the Metaphysics of Disorder," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 4 (2004); Jonny Steinberg, *Thin Blue: The Unwritten Rules of Policing South Africa* (2008).

consistently chooses to engage with them on these grounds reveals their activism and understanding of democratic citizenship to be substantially different to the understandings outlined in the literature on the more militant, less organised uprisings against government that have become common place in South Africa.

Equal Education's thousands of members mostly share similar backgrounds to those engaging in the more informal 'rebellions of the poor,' Peter Alexander's more encompassing term for what are commonly called 'service delivery protests' in the South African media.¹⁹² Like those involved in the rebellions of the poor, most of Equal Education's activists are poor and working class black people from South Africa's townships and rural areas. Von Holdt and Alexander both argue that the informal, militant protests occurring throughout South Africa are driven by the vast swathes of the mostly urban poor left behind in the 'new' South Africa, which underwent substantial political change but little economic transformation.¹⁹³ Though von Holdt and Alexander disagree on some points about the informal protests, in their formulation, these protests are, in general: a) loosely organised, b) not continuously sustained over time, but rather ebbing and flowing as particular points of contention arise, c) unfunded, and d) highly local in their participants and aims. On each of these dimensions, Equal Education is clearly a different sort of protest group. It has a substantial permanent staff and membership in the thousands, sustains campaigns over long periods of time, often proactively rather than in reaction to events of grievance, possesses a group of domestic and international funders to provide an annual budget of over USD 1M, and is organised from the national level through a provincial level down to the school level. Though its campaigns can and do happen at that very local level of individual schools, the group frequently campaigns for change at the national and provincial level.

The education sector is not immune to 'rebellions of the poor.' The initial stages of the Chris Hani High School protest outlined above fit much more easily into that narrative of township uprisings than they did into work like that conducted by Equal Education. Parents and students protesting an overcrowded school in

¹⁹² Alexander, "Rebellion of the Poor: South Africa's Service Delivery Protests—a Preliminary Analysis."

¹⁹³ Ibid.; Alexander and Pfaffe, "Social Relationships to the Means and Ends of Protest in South Africa's Ongoing Rebellion of the Poor: The Balfour Insurrections."; Von Holdt, "Insurgent Citizenship and Collective Violence: Analysis of Case Studies."

Grabouw, Western Cape, utilised tactics common to these types of protest, like creating a burning barricade on a street after Western Cape Education MEC Donald Grant failed to meet with them about their concerns.¹⁹⁴ The Grabouw protesters eventually succeeded in producing ‘the smoke that calls,’ as an interviewee of von Holdt et al put it, and prompted engagement from the WCED.¹⁹⁵ Despite the differences between these more informal, militant protests, and the organised advocacy work done by Equal Education, the protesters share many aims, seeking political accountability as well as pure service delivery.

Equal Education’s reputation as an effective community advocacy group means that it is sometimes drawn into situations that began as informal protests, as it was with the 2011 protests at Chris Hani Secondary School. Its strategies and actions in these situations underscore how differently it understands government, democracy, citizenship, and activism in comparison to participants in the rebellions of the poor. Equal Education was called to Chris Hani Secondary School by its own members. Few details were given to the staff, only that there was a major situation developing, and the students thought EE could help them. Several carloads of EE staff and adult volunteers arrived on the scene to find one female student bleeding profusely and in need of medical attention. Hundreds of learners clad in Chris Hani’s bright teal and white uniforms were either shouting at a large group of armed police or milling aimlessly about the entry plaza to the recreation facility across the street, named after Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu. The metal gates of the school were closed, with a police car blocking them. Large rubbish drums had been flipped and their contents set alight, and several of the school’s windows were broken. Police tape cordoned off several hundred square feet in front of the school gate, and officers were using their rifles to gesture at learners who approached too closely for their tastes.

While the EE staff, volunteers, and I were at the school that morning, the police ordered the students to disperse. The effect was temporary. The students reassembled in front of their school no more than an hour later in the face of a large group of riot police, this time with newly made signs and placards, because justice

¹⁹⁴ Lauren Isaacs, "Violent Protest over School in Grabouw," *Cape Times*, 6 Mar 2012.

¹⁹⁵ Karl Von Holdt et al., *The Smoke That Calls: Insurgent Citizenship, Collective Violence and the Struggle for a Place in the New South Africa: Eight Case Studies of Community Protest and Xenophobic Violence* (2011).

had not yet been met. Someone who appeared to be unaffiliated with the protests threw a substantial piece of concrete at the police, hitting a police van. The police again opened fire with rubber bullets on the gathered crowd without warning, striking another student and causing the group of students to flee from the area.

The EE group and I managed to establish several things quite quickly: the protest erupted because two Bambanani (volunteer security guards) at the school assaulted a learner so severely he landed in the hospital, and were back at work at the school within days. The injured learner we saw upon arriving (who was immediately taken by one EE group to the local clinic) had been hit by one of the rubber bullets fired into the crowd of students by the police without warning (and, according to the learners, without provocation). Nearly every other question or detail was contested or unresolved by the school administration, different groups of learners, or both. For instance: the beaten student, Malibongwe, may have been beaten so severely his back was broken, he might have been paralysed, or neither of the above. There was no reason behind his beating, he was beaten because he refused to give up his headphones at the school gate, or because he refused to give up his cell phone during examination time. The Bambanani had not been arrested, they had been arrested and not charged, or they had been arrested, charged, and let go. The principal of the school ordered the beating, joined in the beating, stood by while the beating occurred without interfering, or been completely ignorant of the beating. The broken windows, rubbish burning, and subsequent tyre burnings that occurred after our arrival were the acts of students or were the acts of outside agitators just trying to cause trouble. Even well after the fact, many of these details—crucial to the school administration's, principal's, and learners' understanding of what unfolded—remained unclear.¹⁹⁶

Coming up with a coherent narrative was necessary for the WCED to ascertain whether disciplinary action was necessary for the principal and the Bambanani, whom the students insisted should be removed from the school. But, this was a truly disorienting environment, not conducive to establishing the 'truth' of what

¹⁹⁶ Equal Education, "Tragedy at Chris Hani School: Full Statement by Equal Education," news release, 28 Sep, 2011, <http://www.equaleducation.org.za/article/tragedy-at-chris-hani-school-full-statement-by-equal-education>; "Chris Hani High School Learners to March on Harare Police Station, Khayelitsha, Friday 14 October," news release, 14 Oct, 2011; Sibongakonke Mama, "Principal Flees Angry Pupils, Then Suspended," *The Star*, 28 Sep 2011; Nombulelo Damba, "Protest Enters 2nd Day," *The New Age*, 28 Sep 2011.

happened. Rumours circulated throughout the group of students, and presumably the school staff before, during, and after the protest. The Bambananis had every incentive to protect themselves and their jobs, and the presence of the trigger-happy riot police served to make the students both more jittery and more insistent that they were dedicated to a just cause. Tensions were high, and outcomes deeply important to both the students and school staff were at stake.

The episode is also revealing of Equal Education's relationship to the more militant notions of citizenship, and to the WCED's thoughts on spontaneous protests which draw on the tactics of the 'rebellions of the poor.' Equal Education's staff and leaders were expressly called in by its student members as mediators, and as calming presences in a tense, violent situation. It was expected by both the students and the WCED that EE's approach would be a pacifist one, and that the organisation's representatives would endeavour to work with everyone involved to find a solution, rather than act as an additional source of external pressure on the school and the WCED. Indeed, rather than encourage or inflame the protestors, EE's leaders used their semi-independent status to speak to and calm the riot police, de-escalating the situation. Once the situation was calmed, Equal Education took statements from the students as well as from the Bambananis and presented them to the WCED, facilitated discussions for the students to determine their demands for the situation's resolution which the students then turned into a petition to the WCED to remove the principal and Bambananis, and helped students organise a march to the Harare¹⁹⁷ Police Station demanding that the police take on the allegations against the Bambananis.

The students involved in the initial spontaneous protest saw EE's presence as a benefit to the situation, and otherwise would not have called them in. For the students, EE was able to act as a record-keeper, a calming force, and a credible witness. Similarly, the WCED officials thought interacting with a combination of EE representatives as well as students and parents from the school would be more fruitful than trying to resolve the situation with only the students and parents. This adds some credence both to EE's approach of fact-based engagement with government and to Alexander and Pfaffe's theory that many of the rebellions of the poor take the form they do as a result of lacking powers beyond 'disruptive

¹⁹⁷ A district in Khayelitsha.

power.¹⁹⁸ EE, capable of utilising a very different set of strategies to the informal protesters, was frequently vindicated in its version of citizenship, in which its members behaved as what they believed to be ideal citizens. This practice constructed and called into being a particular version of governmental authority and accountability which officials who claimed expertise were actually expected to possess it and act upon it.

What then, accounts for the divergence in approach between Equal Education's activists and those operating in less organised, more informal contexts? I argue the difference arises from a fundamentally different perception of the South African government and its representatives held by Equal Education's activists. Other differences, such as the existence of external funding, follow from EE's understanding of South Africa's government as a broadly functional but decidedly imperfect democracy that is largely responsive to citizens who work within state sanctioned means (such as petitioning, permitted marches, lawsuits, etc.). The protesters discussed by von Holdt and Alexander work within the law to a point, and then see more militant action as the only way to apply necessary pressure to unresponsive officials—consistent, as these authors point out, with a long tradition of these tactics' use in the protests against apartheid.

Equal Education's activism takes an alternative path, using politicians' and bureaucrats' own authority and proclamations of credibility against them in a variety of ways. Its activists draw on some of the same sources of authority and credibility as the government officials, that is to say, technocratic knowledge, to challenge the officials on their own ground. Equal Education has the resources to do this as a result of its well-educated members and staff who are able to transfer that knowledge and training to their less well-educated comrades.

The active cultivation of these resources is due to Equal Education's particular strategy, the genesis of which appears to be threefold: first, some of Equal Education's founding strategists witnessed a similar approach work for the Treatment Action Campaign in its fight for provision of anti-retroviral drugs through the public health system, offering a model for them to adapt as well as providing evidence to believe the government can and does (at least sometimes)

¹⁹⁸ Alexander and Pfaffe, "Social Relationships to the Means and Ends of Protest in South Africa's Ongoing Rebellion of the Poor: The Balfour Insurrections."

work in the manner in which their activism expects, including in poor townships and rural areas. Second, it has a number of more middle-class activists in its midst, who have seen the government behave responsively and responsibly towards those who choose to engage it through the official channels provided. The experience of the South African government for an affluent Capetonian, especially at the local level, is fundamentally different to experiences had by the average resident of Khayelitsha. Finally, numerous government officials, via the manner in which they have attempted to dismiss the participation of activists, have revealed what they conceive of as important to democratic participation: aggregate, comprehensive, or expert knowledge (as opposed to personal or anecdotal) knowledge about the subject at hand. This is at odds with the types of information possessed and utilised by the informal, militant protesters, which is mostly *mētis*.

The democratic *pas de deux* between Equal Education and government representatives reveals the exercise of democracy in South Africa in communities like those served by Equal Education to be—as in the dance—reliant on both of its constituent parts. The behaviour of both politicians and bureaucrats reveals them as unwilling or unable to produce an informed citizenry. Yet they demand its existence nonetheless, producing a realm in which the practice of democracy, at least according to those politicians and bureaucrats, is reliant upon external intervention. In this case, the intervention is the work of Equal Education.

Absent groups like Equal Education, the citizenry is left subject to dismissal from robust democratic participation on the grounds that they do not or cannot understand the issues of their concern—and so deference to citizens' input is perceived by government's representatives as dangerous and destructive. Provided someone is willing to dedicate time and effort to informing citizens on issues they care about, citizens can become experts on the issues of their concern. This does not, however, guarantee politicians' or bureaucrats' acceptance of their participation. It means only that the citizens can clear the knowledge bar claimed as imperative by government's representatives. Nor, for that matter, does this need imply that the intermediary is embraced with open arms by the government representatives whose paternalist views of participation construct robust democracy as reliant upon such actors, indicating that some of these politicians and bureaucrats would prefer to exclude citizen participation entirely, and knowledge serves as one of many useful methods of doing so. Both the government and Equal

Education use a series of mixed strategies that rely upon technocratic expertise and claims to identity, experience, and ‘local’ knowledge, cycling through different strategies in attempts to gain the upper hand. The story of this chapter, and the story of demands for expert knowledge-based participation in democratic systems, is the story of the circulation of multiple kinds of knowledge by different groups with different attributes, preferences, and systems, one in which government’s exhortations to specific types of participation do not imply its acceptance thereof, and in which relationships of reliance and necessity do not imply the absence of antagonism. In its education system, the representatives of the South African government implore citizens to participate, set the conditions for and claim to value that participation, and yet subsequently reject both citizens’ participation and the involvement of an institution designed to assist citizens in overcoming claims of their disqualifying ignorance.

Through its work, Equal Education has implicitly and explicitly given its partial acceptance of the terms provided by these bureaucrats and politicians, though it, too, sometimes refuses to behave as its government interlocutors would prefer. Fully aware that the rules of the game as specified by the DBE and WCED advance the authority of government representatives at the expense of the authority of its citizens, Equal Education has nonetheless made it part of its mission to beat South Africa’s education bureaucrats and politicians on their own ground. This is an intentional strategy by the organisation; in interviews, their senior strategists indicated that they believed government would never listen to a group of schoolchildren just voicing their own stories of the system that the bureaucrats govern. As co-founder Doron Isaacs explained,

When ‘kids’ speak about their personal experiences, there is a tendency to just pat them on the head. When arguments are produced that include data of a more academic nature, it’s not that the data simply speaks for itself. There’s implicit importance in the voice that speaks it, an implicit power in young people saying it themselves, even if others already said it. Early in our libraries campaign, we had a professor of library science writing op-eds, and it never went anywhere. But the image and the spectacle of young people mastering certain issues and backing up moral claims with expertise has a certain impact.¹⁹⁹

Isaacs’ comment emphasises expertise, but it also emphasises a political credibility that comes from being young citizens, not just experts. As important as the

¹⁹⁹ Doron Isaacs, Coordinator, Equal Education. Interview, 20 Sep, 2011.

expertise is, so is the fact that it is grounded in a mass movement of active citizens. In Equal Education's new staff orientation in April 2013, Operations Manager Michelle Adler introduced this reliance on research rather than personal experience as a practical necessity when working with government representatives:

You can't just go out and wave your banner. It has to be based on solid research. All of our campaigns are based on statistics, and data.... We go out and interview people. You have to be able to have these conversations based on fact, otherwise people chuck you out.

The PowerPoint slides she was speaking from spelled out what this meant in terms of explicit strategy and the organisation's understanding of how it contributed to the dialogue on education and empowered concerned citizens:

We build an understanding of the education system whilst drawing attention to problems faced by schools and their communities. Equipped with this knowledge, EE offers a new way for people to participate in the democratic system, and bring change to education and society.

Put differently, while speaking truth to power, Equal Education intentionally speaks truth in the manner of power. When politicians and bureaucrats find Equal Education's engagement politically or professionally useful, this can result in near immediate adoption of their causes. When it manifests in ways they find institutionally, systematically, politically, or professionally threatening, on the other hand, this often forces discussions begun on grounds of knowledge to move onto grounds of individual credibility, as seen throughout the rest of this chapter and in chapter four.

THE EDUCATION MINISTER AND THE STUDENTS: THE PEOPLE'S SUMMIT FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

A typical set of interactions between a politician and Equal Education's members can be seen in the People's Summit for Quality Education, hosted by Equal Education in June 2011 and intended to bring together students, parents, community members, educators, academics, civil society, and government to discuss the problems faced in the education system. It featured archetypal participants, with government represented by the political heads of the national and Western Cape education departments, and Equal Education by a number of secondary school Equalisers. The Summit focused on issues central to a major campaign, gave a glimpse of politicians' scripted and unscripted opinions of

government officials, and covered most aspects of how activists' attempts at participation on substantive policy issues are rejected by government.

360 delegates attended the Summit, selected via an application process in which 100 of the delegate slots were reserved for students. The Summit featured a variety of speakers—students, lecturers, education NGO leaders, EE staff members, and government officials working in education. Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga, and MEC Donald Grant, both gave plenary addresses. One of the Summit board members I interviewed, Gordon Inggs, noted that the decision to invite the Minister and MEC to speak, not just participate, was made in part to convey a show of respect for the eminent officials.²⁰⁰ The students I spoke with were particularly excited to hear from Minister Motshekga, and were pleased that she saw their group and causes important enough to address them and field their questions.

However, according to both students and civil society participants I spoke with, her speech was received disastrously. In the words of the Summit organizer, Jon Hodgson, the Minister

...gave the wrong kind of speech. She missed an opportunity to do what she should have done. The tone of the speech was not 'I am the minister, I will provide leadership and guidance, and I'll show you how to put your energy into this usefully.' The tone was quite petty at times...²⁰¹

While Hodgson did not give specific examples of this, the text of the Minister's speech contains multiple comments to which he might be referring.²⁰² Motshekga remarked on the importance of EE's participation in improving the education system, and commended them for their efforts at a general level. She noted the felicitousness of their choice of Summit date, which coincided with the 56th anniversary of the Freedom Charter, invoking both the proud activist history of the ANC as well as its commitment to education. As can be expected from someone addressing her critics, she devoted significant time to highlighting the accomplishments of her department, both under her own tenure and that of her predecessor. The students listened patiently, if perhaps sceptically. It was when she

²⁰⁰ Gordon Inggs, Board Member, People's Summit for Quality Education. Interview, 11 Aug, 2011.

²⁰¹ Jon Hodgson, Summit Organiser, People's Summit for Quality Education. Interview, 01 Oct, 2011.

²⁰² Angie Motshekga, "Address at the People's Summit for Quality Education," (2011).

reached a discussion of Equal Education's campaigning issues and how to think about student participation in the education system that she ran into trouble.

Motshekga appeared dismissive of EE's campaigns on libraries and school infrastructure, however unintentionally. She acknowledged the lack of school libraries (at the time of the Summit, fewer than 10% of schools in South Africa had both a dedicated library space and books with which to fill it), but then rejected their importance, saying:

Be rest assured, we share your frustrations on the length of time required to tackle infrastructure backlogs and other challenges flowing from the apartheid legacy. But I must say, I would rather have a school with a library that will last than one that is built on sand and falls in the wink of an eye. I would much rather have a school with a library corner, where books are shared and read, than one without any at all because we are folding our hands and waiting until there is a room called a library.²⁰³

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

We have an enormous challenge as a country. This challenge begins with teaching and learning how to read and write, count and calculate, reason and debate.... We can either look for scapegoats and evade responsibility, or we can all think and act as responsible citizens of a democratic country and grab the bull by the horns.²⁰⁴

This, the students interpreted as a direct jab, viewing it in context of the Minister's previous statements arguing that the Equalisers should spend less time agitating and more time studying. The students had recently conducted a widely publicised campaign on 'latecoming,' or the tardiness of both students and teachers. In the campaign, the students publicly held themselves responsible for arriving at school on time regardless of the issues they faced at home, and urged their peers to do the same in hopes of shaming their teachers into also arriving on time. Lectures about their responsibilities did not sit well with them, especially about the need for them to focus on their books—the absence of such books, of course, being a central point of their campaigns.

The question and answer period did not resolve the tensions that arose from the Minister's prepared remarks. The Minister's responses to student questions

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

revealed a fundamental disconnect between the Minister and the Equalisers. The Equalisers were offended that she did not receive their petition at the 2011 march in which they had led 20,000 of their peers to Parliament to advocate for Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure. Hodgson, the summit organiser, believed Motshekga

didn't know why it was such a big deal about her not coming to the march to accept the petition. She said she had a prior commitment, which is what happens when you're the minister—you have prior commitments, and it's disrespectful the way in which you're [the students] going on about it.²⁰⁵

Both the Minister and the students saw the other as being disrespectful, and neither was alone in their views. Katie Huston, young professional representing a longstanding and reputable South African education NGO at the Summit, characterised the questioning period as one in which the Equalisers effectively took turns yelling at the minister, which created a weekend-long debate amongst summit participants about whether they were 'being disrespectful or doing what they needed to do.'²⁰⁶ Though some academics and older education reformers saw the students' frustration as disrespectful or unreasonable, Huston defended the students: 'their militant rhetoric is fair and warranted—these kids have been completely cheated.'²⁰⁷ There are, unfortunately, no available transcripts of the question and answer session following the speech. However, all accounts I heard confirmed that the student activists grounded many of their questions either in statistics about the education system or their own personal experiences of their schools, often quite angrily describing the deficits in their own educations that the Minister had failed to fix. The counters from the Minister were either to reject their accounts as isolated incidents, or to argue that the students also had responsibilities that they were not fulfilling.

A handful of dynamics are at play here. First, and perhaps most importantly, there is an indication that the Minister does not believe the students have the needed authority or knowledge to speak on this topic; telling them that they speak only of isolated incidences implies that the students do not know the broader context—the kind of aggregate information that government deals in. Telling them they need to

²⁰⁵ Hodgson, "Interview with Jon Hodgson, Summit Organiser, People's Summit for Quality Education."

²⁰⁶ Katie Huston, Fundraising and Institutional Development Manager, South African Education and Environment Project (SAEP). Interview, 22 Aug, 2011.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

go back to their books is either a response with a straightforward meaning ('let the adults deal with this') or a more complex assemblage ('without learning your subjects, you will not be able to speak on this in a way I find compelling'), though the actual broader context made the comment particularly galling to the students. It is precisely this kind of patronising and dismissive remark that EE's leaders and members cite to explain why it is critical that they possess some form of expert knowledge—the average South African citizen is prone to dismissal on grounds of not knowing the subject at hand, but EE's members, most of whom are still in secondary school, are all the more vulnerable to such challenges as a result of their age.

At a different EE public event held in 2011 on the topic of libraries and creating a culture of reading, one of the speakers was Ntuthuzo Ndzomo, a member who joined EE as a young secondary school student and who was elected to EE's National Council in 2012. At the time of his remarks, he was a youth group leader and an undergraduate student at the University of Cape Town, from which he has since graduated. Ndzomo's speech moved from the personal to Motshekga's preferred broader context, saying that when he was a primary school student, he had access to one book—Roald Dahl's *Danny, the Champion of the World*. He shared it with three other students, and read it over and over, to the point that it was falling apart. When he reached secondary school, he again had only one shared book: *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee. There was no library at either school, despite the DBE claiming one existed at his high school—the teachers used it as a staff room and students were never allowed in. His experience was not atypical, he continued. The five public libraries in Khayelitsha were supposed to serve over 50 schools and the rest of the community. 54% of students in South African schools were forced to share books much like he did as a student several years earlier. The Minister's suggestion for the students to focus on their frequently non-existent books thus either underscored her ignorance of their lived experience, and was interpreted by the Equalisers as ignorant, insensitive, or an intentional provocation.

From this point of view, the Minister's comments about responsibilities functioned as an attempt to exclude participation in the public debates unless one went through Herculean efforts to fulfil responsibilities. As we will see later, fulfilment of 'responsibilities' (absent consideration of individuals' capacity to fulfil those

responsibilities) is not the only characteristic demanded by government representatives before acknowledging citizens' right to participate. The Minister's remarks also raise clear concerns regarding the way in which authority is challenged, with the statements about disrespect and rudeness indicating that the education officials believed the activists were not showing proper deference to their age, station, or the hard work that got them there. This, as will be shown below, is just as true for officials from the ANC as it is for officials from the Democratic Alliance, in charge of Western Cape—making the story more complex than a straightforward instance of a former resistance group turned political party's recourse to a particular narrative of history. Over the course of my fieldwork, politicians' and bureaucrats' references to their participation in 'the struggle' were rife no matter which political party individuals belonged to.

The interactions and public discussions outlined above are representative of the constellation of elements affecting Equal Education's ability to successfully advocate to government: not just knowledge and expertise, but also identity, age, and authority, all of which cause knowledge-based challenges to manifest in slightly different ways, and which will be discussed in more depth in chapter four. While the interactions at the conference alone are not enough to cement the importance of expert knowledge in these interactions, repeated instances where both elected and appointed education officials say these things more explicitly make it a persuasive interpretation of the significance of government knowledge practices and their effects on democracy and citizenship. The next series of interactions will trace these threads—expertise, the need to go beyond knowledge to participate as a citizen, and confounding factors for both.

KNOWLEDGE ABSENT A QUALITY EDUCATION

Minister Motshekga is not the only official to have ignored or refused to work with Equal Education (and the individual citizens that comprise it) on knowledge-based grounds. From the DA-governed side, the Western Cape's top bureaucrat in education has refused to turn up to meetings with Equal Education's members because according to one of her deputies, she does not have time for 'people who don't know anything about education.'²⁰⁸ The WCED, while seen as better

²⁰⁸ Isaacs, "Online Text Conversation with Doron Isaacs, Coordinator, Equal Education."

organised and more capable than the other provinces, has a chequered reputation amongst my interviewees inside and outside Equal Education regarding its interest in citizen and NGO participation. Some of this reputation ties directly to the WCED's allegations that those who are attempting to participate are ignorant or incompetent. Summit Organiser Jon Hodgson thought Western Cape MEC Donald Grant's Summit speech did the same thing that Motshekga's did. '[Both ministers] tell you about what they've achieved, and there's space to do that. But when it doesn't go beyond that, and that's the tack that people take when talking to people who want to work with you, that's a problem. It's a lack of engagement.' According to Hodgson, in the face of the audience 'asking specific questions about things that EE has complained about, like a widespread lack of textbooks in Khayelitsha,' Grant just did not engage.²⁰⁹ After the Summit, one of EE's researchers characterised Grant's speech as 'technocratically dismissive,' noting that he was 'talking down to learners like a school teacher.'

The WCED bureaucrats have behaved in similarly technocratic and dismissive ways. In September 2011, the WCED hosted a large forum entitled 'How we can work with NGOs and NPOs'.²¹⁰ Equal Education nearly did not attend the meeting, predicting it would be a waste of their time given the WCED's track record, but ultimately sent one manager, one staff member, and two volunteers. The meeting began with an introduction from the WCED's top bureaucrat, long-serving Head of Education Penny Vinjevold, a middle-aged, bespectacled white woman with an expeditious demeanour. Peering over her glasses at the high school auditorium filled with several hundred adults, mostly over the age of 30, she remarked, 'Those who think we're in crisis now weren't in Soweto in '76. Many people in this room, I see, started during what I call "the real crisis" in education.'²¹¹ My scan of those who were not old enough to be alive in '76, including Equal Education's four representatives, returned looks of astonishment, or, more commonly, scowls. The implication of her remark was not just that she felt some in the room had not sacrificed as much as she and the other people around in the 'real crisis' had, but also that the post-apartheid education system, which had provided a woeful education to several of the EE representatives present, was not sufficiently dismal

²⁰⁹ Hodgson, "Interview with Jon Hodgson, Summit Organiser, People's Summit for Quality Education."

²¹⁰ NPO is an abbreviation for non-profit organisations.

²¹¹ Penny Vinjevold, "How We Can Work with NGOs and NPOs," Public Address (2011).

to be deemed a ‘crisis.’ One EE community volunteer tapped me on the shoulder to call attention to the remark as an attack on Equal Education.

Though the meeting was titled by the WCED as a discussion about ‘how we can work with,’ those in the room, the consensus of the NGO representatives I spoke with after the meeting was that comments like these reinforced their belief that many employees of the WCED were arrogant and condescending to the people who might assist them in improving the province’s schools. The NGO representatives said they felt unwelcome in the WCED’s schools—and that their expertise, in many instances developed across decades of working in and with WCED schools, was not valued. This is, no doubt, a partially a territorial battle about responsibility and authority in the WCED schools. But, the meeting also showed the WCED bureaucrats thought those outside the government were less expert than they were, and that lack of expertise was definitively considered a barrier to participation by the government officials.

At one point in her speech, Vinjevold praised the expertise of a group outside the WCED but declined to name the organisation in question. ‘One of our NGOs, with whom we’re often at loggerheads, who we really battle with in the press, has developed a beautiful video about textbooks, and we couldn’t do better than that. And so with their permission, we just use that video.’²¹² Equal Education developed the video, and Vinjevold’s lack of acknowledgement of them was an omission its representatives did not appreciate. It was, however, a begrudging instance in which a representative of the WCED noted that someone else was more expert than the WCED in one of its domains.

Vinjevold’s speech came across as realistic about the challenges faced in the WCED’s schools, commenting that she was ‘deeply ashamed of the conditions of some of our schools that we send our children to daily’. She offered a story about ‘a very determined person in my office who came here from the Eastern Cape because she wanted better schools for her daughter, but my blood curdled when she said where her daughter went to high school. I want to be able to say that *all* of our schools are fabulous.’²¹³ Flashes of empathy and a sense of shared obligation and commitment led the audience members I spoke to have some forbearance for

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

Vinjevold's comments despite her initial provocations, as did the fact that she's widely acknowledged to be capable and talented, if difficult to work with.

While her Chief of Districts (a high-ranking provincial education bureaucracy post) at the time, Linda Rose, was often seen as just as capable, her remarks earned no such accommodation from the audience due to their perception of Rose's frequent condescension towards them. Based on the facial expressions around the room, her initial comments managed to anger almost the entire audience. Rose opened by saying that she often receives people in her office that she's never seen before or who represent organisations she's never heard of before. In her words:

When they sit on my couch, I ask them, 'What do you know about the Western Cape Education Department?' I'm surprised by how little people know about us and our values. The number of people who tell me they've been 'working in our schools' (scare quotes hers) for years, and know nothing about us! So it's important for us, in order to work with you, that you know something about us...²¹⁴

Her audience had expected her, given the cadence and pacing of her last sentence, to continue with '...and we know something about you.' Instead, she went on to say that the meeting was 'for all of *you* to be *knowledgeable* [emphasis hers] about what the WCED is doing. That way, you know what we're doing.'²¹⁵ People I spoke to after the meeting were frustrated by Rose's speech and those remarks in particular, calling them 'condescending', 'patronising', and 'disrespectful.' Beyond offending the NGO employees, many of whom had spent decades in these schools, the role prescribed for youths and parents, to the extent they were mentioned, was exclusively at the school level. Youths were called upon to be good students, and parents were requested to help their children learn or potentially serve on a School Governing Body. There was no mention made of involvement in education politics beyond the school level.

The political and bureaucratic heads of the DBE and WCED have made it clear that government gets to decide what constitutes legitimate and/or important 'knowledge' of schools and government's work to improve them. What matters to them is *techne*, and attempts to redefine or challenge them with alternative forms of knowledge are susceptible to being rejected outright, as the students' stories about their experiences of their schools were. This *modus operandi* makes for a

²¹⁴ Linda Rose, "How We Can Work with NGOs and NPOs," Public Address (2011).

²¹⁵ Ibid.

fascinating equivocation between either acknowledging when others know more than the government representatives do and thus deferring to that knowledge (the WCED using EE's textbook video, or adopting its model of community librarians in schools, for instance) whilst decrying the ignorance of citizens and civil society organisations focused on education. But, as the representatives of government claim to be and have the capacity and power to be the arbiters of knowledge-based legitimacy in these instances and interactions, their Janusian approach to would-be collaborators or critics prompted those collaborators or critics to attempt to conform to the knowledge practices, rather than challenge them.

A bit lower in the government ranks, where positions involve more interaction with the citizens they are supposed to serve, government bureaucrats' thoughts on knowledge and participation continued to be complicated and sometimes self-contradictory. I interviewed all four of the district managers in the Cape Metro region, who each oversaw 'districts' comprising roughly 200 schools. These bureaucrats, according to Equal Education and the other NGO representatives, sometimes paid them heed more often than their WCED bosses. One NGO interviewee who preferred to be anonymous explained that the WCED was 'a very individual organisation,' in which some district managers were credited with 'holding their struggle identity and credentials, but backing it up with bureaucratic performance.' Here, the claim to credibility is multi-layered, and rather similar to the WCED's top officials' understandings of their credibility—my interviewee was expressing admiration for the official's participation in the struggle, but also noting that such participation would not constitute credibility without competent performance as a government official.

Even district managers like the one described above, seen by citizens and NGOs as more amenable to their input, viewed community participation (that is to say, participation by citizens like those who are members of EE or of the informal movements—not by education NGOs) in schools as a double-edged sword at best, and a sword of Damocles at worst. Two district directors expressly equated acts of violence with community participation in schools and education policy, with Sanette Nowers of Metro Central answering a question about community participation with a story about some of her principals receiving death threats and being physically chased or forced out of their schools. Melvyn Caroline of Metro East similarly noted that he had been held hostage multiple times in community

forums or town hall meetings. In the interview with Nowers, this discussion of community violence arose almost immediately, indicating its primary importance to her as a form of interacting with ‘the community.’ Here we see the appearance of the sorts of community participation shown in the rebellions of the poor, where violence and hostage-taking of local representatives was considered a last resort but still made the list of tactics—a type of community participation very different to Equal Education’s. As context for this discussion, all of the Cape Metro districts include areas with high levels of violent crime, and militant protests like those described by von Holdt et al, Alexander, and Lodge and Mottiar are not uncommon. With genuine pain on their faces, Caroline and Nowers both recounted horrifying, wrenching stories to me about violence committed in their schools or against their students—a pupil who was shot in Nowers’ district, and a series of stabbings and a massive gang fight at Caroline’s schools. The levels of violence in these areas and schools are, for the bureaucrats trying to work in these areas, realities that they tried to challenge with their limited power and resources but which they often had to simply work with or work around.

Nowers, a middle-aged white woman, approached our interview with a stern warmth that likely served her well in her previous job as a school headmaster. Over the course of her move from two very innocuous questions to an answer involving substantial threats of violence to her employees, her tone shifted from casual and chatty to concerned and insistent:

SB: Could you please give me a general description of what you do as a district manager?

Sanette Nowers: I manage districts, not schools. There are 200 officials in Metro Central, some are office-based, and some are school-based. The only goal we have is to improve education—if we can get all schools to be good schools, we won’t need this office anymore. Good principals don’t need district officials to come tell them what to do. I work on the system, not in the system, though I do sometimes get involved.

I received an email this morning from a parent, and if they’re in touch, we’ll address it. Parents will write to anyone with a title, and then we must address it. We will go and investigate, we don’t ignore the community. This one didn’t like the answer, so they’re taking us to court. So, when a query comes in, I give it to the Circuit team manager, who would have about 30 schools, and then 2 IMG [Institutional Management and Governance] managers, who look at the schools themselves.

SB: Can you tell me a bit more about when you do work with or interact with the public, or the community?

SN: I don't deal directly with schools and the public, but I will get involved. What also happens, the community decides for good and bad reasons, mostly because they aren't informed, that they want to get rid of a principal. So they will chase him away, and if he comes back, they will burn tires and block gates. But it's the community. And the 'community leaders' are the ones who say they will kill them.

I came through education—I was a headmaster before this, I wasn't involved in having to negotiate with politicians, and with parents. Negotiation is a skill, you must have the training, the preparation. I do not know how to negotiate with people who are prepared to kill a person... it's a hostage situation... it's not the first time this has happened to me, and it won't be the last. The officials who took the principal said they were scared for their lives. You will find this in all Metro districts, and for me, it's so bad it's unreal.²¹⁶

At the time of our interview, Nowers was in her first year working as a district manager, and in her mind, still learning the ropes. Her remarks take violent responses to political and bureaucratic questions as terrifying but given in the environment in which she operates. To my knowledge, no principals had, in fact, been killed, but threats of extreme violence backed up by burning and barricades were predictably effective at getting undesired school officials to leave—a strategy nearly identical to those deployed in the rebellions of the poor against local ward councillors, for instance.

Melvyn Caroline, the other district head who raised issues of violence before a direct question about it, had been the District Manager of Metro East (which includes Khayelitsha) for nearly a decade at the time of our interview. Caroline completed nearly forty years of service in area public schools as a teacher and administrator, becoming a school principal shortly before the end of apartheid in 1992 and starting work for the WCED administration in 1999 as a Circuit Manager (one step down from a District Manager). Perhaps it was a difference of demeanour rather than experience that motivated Caroline's more sanguine attitude towards the violence and threats directed at school and district officials. Instead of Nowers' beeline to the subject, Caroline, an older, coloured gentleman with a genial, almost avuncular manner, only slowly wound around to it. Again without an explicit question about violence, and again in the context of community participation, he mentioned with an almost casual tone that he had personally been held hostage several times.

²¹⁶ Sanette Nowers, Director of Metro Central District. Interview, 15 May, 2013.

Melvyn Caroline: ...and on community involvement, we must convince the community to change. Sometimes we have meetings, and reach agreement, I go away thinking we've settled this, and then someone else who comes in who doesn't want it, and you're stuck again. How do you get community involved? It depends on how credible they see you, how much trust there is.

SB: How do you build that?

MC: Being there all the time, continuing to talk, not just telling people what they want, sometimes telling people what they don't want. But if a community calls and says we have a problem, you go. On Saturday, Sunday, in the evenings, you go in. Even when it's dangerous and even if you disagree, as long as you're honest in what you say and do, you get credibility.

But sometimes, it's tough. I have been held hostage a number of times, I've learned how to manage. Not completely, because anything can happen, but you learn how to manage.²¹⁷

He additionally mentioned two principals who had been ejected by community members—one at Chris Hani, during the incident described earlier in this chapter, and one at a school in Strand.

MC: If a community doesn't want a principal, isn't happy with a principal, they kick the principal out. This is a school, we teach respect for the law, and these communities are doing the opposite. This is not democracy, this is not respect for the law. In Chris Hani, we managed to bring the principal back because of some community support, but not in Strand, where the community is all against—there the principal was thrown out by force. He is guilty of some things, but not dismissible offenses. Now we have community meetings, and we're trying to figure out if this is going to be tradition—even though he's appointed by the representatives of the community, if you don't want him, he goes? That's against the law.

We must have the communities involved, with their support, because the police can't be there protecting him every single minute of the day. The relationship between the community and the district becomes critical there.

SB: Why don't they want him?

MC: We had a meeting, they would say 'Look here, we are black people. And if we say we don't want him, we don't want him. We'll look at the law later.' But they know the law.

SB: Will he stay?

MC: He's been struggling for a year. Nobody wants him, not the community, not the SGB, not the students, not the community.

²¹⁷ Melvyn Caroline, Director of Metro East District. Interview, 27 May, 2013.

Caroline returned to the subject of the principal in Strand after I asked him a question about how information fit into the relationship between the WCED, schools, and community members.

MC: Sometimes people don't have the right information. Do parents understand when their child will pass or fail? Do schools give full information? Some people say 'Oh, but they're illiterate,' but they understand money, they understand these things [trails off]. The principal that was kicked out in Strand had no respect, he treated people like they were stupid, and they're not stupid, they just don't have the same education. But if you don't treat people with respect, they will fight you.

I feel quite confident that we are a district that have the necessary respect for them, and that they respect us. And if we say improvements are happening, it's because we have community support.

Caroline's comments here are complicated, to say the least. In attempting to explain the recourse to violence in Strand, he asserted that the community itself declared its disregard for the law to be based in their blackness and in their ignorance of the law—and Caroline countered that he was confident that they knew the law and that what they were doing was both illegal and undemocratic. In the explanation for the violence that he offers as his own opinion, he located the source of the principal's rejection in the principal's treatment of community members as 'stupid'. The district, however, he claims treats this community, and all communities, with the respect that they are entitled to—and asserts that one source of community anger is a failure by the WCED or by schools to provide people with proper information. This second explanation aligns with Nowers' perceptions as well—that much of this violent participation takes place when 'the community decides [to resort to violence] for good and bad reasons, mostly because they aren't informed.' In both cases, this could either be information at a local, anecdotal level, such as in the case of the behaviour of a principal, or as a reaction to WCED policy.

By way of contrast to Nowers' and Caroline's stories of prevalent violence by communities in their districts, Heinie Brand, an older, professorial white man with a doctorate in education from the University of Stellenbosch, and the Director of the more affluent Metro North district, spoke of only two instances in which there was a breakdown in trust between one of his schools and the community it served, but in which there was no violence.²¹⁸ Glen van Harte, Director of the Metro South district, related many instances of community participation, some smooth, some

²¹⁸ Heinie Brand, Director of Metro North District. Interview, 29 May, 2013.

less so, but his only story of violence was his opening gambit in our conversation, prompted by my American accent. Van Harte, an ebullient, middle-aged coloured man with an impressive sense of theatricality and comedic timing, launched into a story from earlier in the day, about a group of American education students visiting one of his schools in Manenberg, a notoriously rough, gang-riddled area of the Cape Flats. In advance of the visit, word got out that 26 Americans were visiting, or rather, word got out that the 26s (a prison gang) and/or the Americans (a Cape Flats gang) would be there. A number of the students' parents and relatives ('real *skollies*,²¹⁹ in van Harte's words) turned up at the school waving guns and firing them into the air, proffering a serious show of territorial dominance until they were persuaded that the only 26(s)/American(s) to be found were a couple dozen terrified would-be teachers from the United States. This, it turns out, is what a district like van Harte's has for comedy—at least insofar as no one gets hurt.

Once van Harte's mirth at his story subsided, his opinion of community participation was enthusiastic. He lamented his schools' inability to elect School Governing Bodies because too few parents or community members turned out for elections, and was frustrated by the lack of parental participation in schools and in education broadly. He believed in governing his district by giving people agency and conveying a sense of respect for them, a philosophy he espoused as much for his employees as for the parents of children in the schools he oversaw. A brief, generic statement from me indicating my interest in popular participation in education prompted this response, after he explained his longstanding union activism:

van Harte: There's been a real decline in the unions. But that decline has also been seen in the way that parents are mobilised. School Governing Bodies had their roots in the 1980s, in PTSAs, they were born out of a need to be against the governing structures of the schools at the time. The current bodies have parents, teachers, and students. There are clear origins in the 80s. And then, you had no problem calling people to meetings, because it was considered to be clandestine, out of the ruling structures. Now, if you have SGB elections, you're hard-pressed to find the mandatory 10% of parents pitching up. You have to recall meetings, etc. Schools call meetings, and there's very little participation in how school is run, unless it directly affects individual kids.

The research we're reading says that the greater involvement of parents leads to greater outcomes for kids. The middle class does well because parents take education as a given. My mother made me get a teaching

²¹⁹ An originally Afrikaans South African slang word that loosely translates to 'gangsters'.

credential after my engineering degree, and I fell in love with it. It was a good backup, because I couldn't get a job in apartheid as an engineer.

I had a meeting yesterday with all 218 principals about creating family friendly schools. Parents came to me and the district because they don't get that family friendly face at the school. We want them to earn and own—a plaque that says this is a family friendly school. That's the right ethos to bring together outcomes. If you feel that you're a part of the school, you don't need to know about maths. 60% of the parents in this district are unemployed. But even if they don't know about maths, they're still not putting education first. They use schools to keep their kids safe, not to educate them.²²⁰

Van Harte's prior union participation and activism, and his attendant sense of history no doubt informed much of his positive attitudes towards community participation in education. But despite some of van Harte's peers viewing community participation in schools as a physical danger, the other three district managers also insisted on the importance of that participation:

Nowers: I have learned that you *must* involve the community, it's not just the parents, the whole community cares.²²¹

Caroline: In general, I would like to see a greater relationship between ourselves, the greater community, and the NGOs. We can teach as much as we can, but if the community is not on board with us, it makes it very difficult.²²²

Brand: ...you must recognise and align with organisations in the community. These are ward councils, youth leagues, and the ward council politics, etc., all of which can undermine SGBs.²²³

Despite stated beliefs in the importance of participation for both principled and pragmatic reasons (both were cited by all officials as reasons to seek community participation), the officials often found themselves stymied as to how to channel it in ways they found productive or beneficial. In their attempts to explain why citizen participation took forms that they considered unhelpful, the bureaucrats largely pointed to government officials' (sometimes including their own) perceptions of citizens as in some way ignorant, such as in the description offered Caroline above. For example:

Nowers: I was at a meeting earlier this year, and Melvyn [Caroline] had to run, because of the same scenario [of a principal being violently ousted]. Education is about children, about the future of the country. This is not productive. There are structures, they must work through the structures, the SGBs, talk to them. A group of people can't just decide, it's so

²²⁰ Glen van Harte, Director of Metro South District. Interview, May 17, 2013.

²²¹ Nowers, "Interview with Sanette Nowers, Director of Metro Central District."

²²² Caroline, "Interview with Melvyn Caroline, Director of Metro East District."

²²³ Ibid.

destructive. SGBs are community involvement. In a first world country, this would be much different.

In many of our Metro Districts, they are parents, and if they are illiterate/ill-informed, they are easily influenced by community members who sit on a stoop and just talk, and that is very hard. And sometimes we ask the head of education to remove the SGB powers.²²⁴

Brand: You fix [your relationship with communities] by trying to restore trust, by eliminating the sources of mistrust. If there is a mistrust about the use of finances at the school, you determine whether there is any substance to the allegations, yes or no. Communities can be very, very harsh on those issues. If they have a suspicion, they will not settle until you provide evidence that they are correct, or to the contrary.

Caroline, Nowers, and Brand mentioned either their concerns about the uninformed participation of citizens—violent and otherwise—though this of course was not their only concern. For Caroline, building relationships of mutual respect was also crucial, a theme seen in the demands of those involved in the informal protests as well. Again, van Harte was out of step with his colleagues, conveying a stronger sense of ambivalence about the need for participation versus a perception that such participation might come from a place of ignorance:

van Harte, answering a question about the effectiveness of School Governing Bodies: We know that the SASA [South African Schools Act] governance on SGBs doesn't work. The thinking might be to curtail the role of SGBs for the greater performance of the schools. It's fraught with all kinds of dangers, but so is the alternative, of the democratic process running in full regardless of outcome. So this office is trying to create a joint appointment process, with the SGBs. It's not allowed unless the SGB requests it, and so it's all based on relationships. So far it's working well, because we believe in the relationships.

van Harte, referring to recent curriculum changes: The idea—the political argument—is that for learners to participate, they must have a base level of literacy and numeracy, and if not, we're curtailing their involvement, they're always sitting at someone else's demands. But, the flipside is that if you can read and write and count, you do not necessarily get more people who participate, who care about democracy.

The provinces' mantra is that they must read, write, and count. And I think we must add that they must also become decent human beings. But values based education has become very unfashionable in this country. But two or three [Education] Ministers ago, Kader Asmal outlined what core values should be, given the ideals of the country. Nobody has that conversation anymore, because the conversation is about content, and that's the limit of it, but also the sadness about it.²²⁵

²²⁴ Nowers, "Interview with Sanette Nowers, Director of Metro Central District."

²²⁵ van Harte, "Interview with Glen Van Harte, Director of Metro South District."

Van Harte's comments about the change in curriculum were highlighting a deepening of technocratic emphasis in the management of schools as well as the national curriculum over the course of the twenty years following apartheid. Van Harte expresses ambivalence about this change; his colleagues, by and large, seemed to endorse the move.

Van Harte's comments about how schools should have a role in values as well as knowledge were also voiced by Brand and Caroline, who both believed that schools must teach democratic values to students, and Caroline going so far as to say that schools ought also teach these values to the community members they interact with. Though she answered similar questions, Nowers did not offer this opinion. All district directors voiced a desire for community participation. But all also expressed concerns that this participation would be coming from an uninformed place, and thus do more harm than good, whether at the level of schools and SGBs or district policy—providing justification for concentrating decision-making in technocratic bodies rather than the communities which were believed to be, depending on the director, emotional, apathetic towards the law, anti-democratic, ignorant (with some directors placing more weight on the communities for this, and others on the WCED and schools), or all of the above.

One particular WCED initiative drew ire from many parents and community members: a series of proposed school closures announced at the beginning of 2012. While Caroline's district was unaffected thanks to an expanding population, Brand and Nowers' districts were hit hard with proposed closures, and many citizens reacted with fury.²²⁶ Principals, teachers, and parents alike seemed caught off-guard by the announcement, and the WCED's strategy for public hearings did not improve matters.

The WCED held hearings to understand the sources of public frustration, which included the relevant district directors and several higher ranking bureaucrats in the WCED. But, the WCED representatives were prohibited from responding to comments made in these hearings by the Head of Department, no matter how personally slanderous or factually inaccurate. This resulted in a series of

²²⁶ Brand, "Interview with Dr. Heinie Brand, Director of Metro North District."; Caroline, "Interview with Melvyn Caroline, Director of Metro East District."; Nowers, "Interview with Sanette Nowers, Director of Metro Central District."

community meetings in which a set of bureaucrats were placed in front of a group of upset, sometimes furious citizens, and, rather than engaging them—expressing sympathy or empathy, challenging their renderings of the situation, offering further explanation of the WCED’s reasoning—sat in silence, then left. The district directors asserted that these policies were supposed to improve their ability to listen but instead served to incense those giving statements. Attendees walked away with no new information from the government about the closures, and sometimes left with a less accurate understanding than they entered with, thanks to the comments of other participants.

The so-called community participation was treated as little more than a venting opportunity for the citizens concerned about the closures, with their opinions subsequently disregarded by the bureaucrats ‘listening.’ Bureaucrats’ reactions to their opinions need not occur, as the community opinions were treated as irrelevant. The citizens were uninformed and thus could—and should—be ignored, and because the citizens were going to be ignored, it was thus unnecessary to inform them. The process was a splendid illustration of self-justifying technocratic logic, and, as it turned out, a demonstration of its limits in a putatively democratic society. Not only were the sessions a public relations and information debacle, they were also a legal disaster. The school closures were halted by a court interdiction because the WCED was found to have insufficiently consulted the relevant communities.²²⁷ This interdiction led to further consultation which was actually interactive, and which ultimately prevented some school closures.

Given the insistence of the bureaucrats about both a need for informed citizens and a need for relationships of mutual respect with the members of the communities they serve, the requirement to sit stonefaced and silent in front of those same communities is nothing short of bizarre. Sanette Nowers, in her interview, went into detail on this point. Nowers started her role as director of Metro Central just before the news regarding the school closures was to be released. She knew it would be a controversial set of decisions, though she agreed with the idea in principle. The population density of the Western Cape had shifted over time, and some of the school locations were illogical—300 metres away from another school with space, for instance. But, she knew it would be important to explain to people why their

²²⁷ Lisa Draga, Attorney, Equal Education Law Centre. Interview, 21 Jun, 2013.

school was the one to go. Though Nowers was new to the role, she was convinced that the silence policy was wrongheaded, and only became more certain of that after seeing it in action.

Sanette Nowers: I started in January 2012. I'm brand new, and the matric results come out on January 5. The HoD [Head of WCED, Penny Vinjevold] comes to visit on the same day. I heard this school must close, that one, etc. I wouldn't know, I trust your recommendations. The Circuit Managers know. But what would the criteria be? When and why? It makes sense to close some, surely. Communities move, the school becomes empty. One school went from 700 students to 180. It's taxpayer money, it's a building. Put it in another building, Bob's your uncle. But for a community, it's an institution. 'My father attended, my uncle attended...' and I feel what they're saying. But these schools don't have enough teachers—there's one with 7 grades and 6 teachers.

I wanted to know, where are these schools. Some are 300 metres down the road from another school with space. So the Minister [Provincial Western Cape MEC Donald Grant] writes a letter to these SGBs and principals to say that he *intends* [emphasis hers] to close the school. Not will, intends. And then the process starts, and there must be a meeting for the community, and there the fun starts. The community says that the MEC is doing it for his political career, but what does it do for him? And some of these 'community members,' it's not their community, they go from one school to another and talk about the schools. One girl stood up, and she was furious. When you have these meetings, you must not respond, you must just listen, and record. And this frustrated the community. They wanted to fight, to talk, they were angry about things that weren't true, if only we could stand up and say that [trails off] but we weren't allowed to respond, and it made them furious.

SB: Why weren't you able to respond?

SN: I phoned Ms. Vinjevold and said we couldn't do it this way—it is not good. I am new, but this is not good. Let them fight with us. And the process must be longer. And that's what happened, that's what the court said—that we did not consult.

SB: Did anyone in the district stand up and say why this is happening, to the communities?

SN: The MEC's letter said some reasons. Academic results, etc. But it was not enough. I wanted to go to the school and explain, talk to people, and I was not allowed. But maybe it was to protect me, because people do become violent. I wanted to talk to the parents [trails off].²²⁸

Nowers went on to say that while the initial screen should be done by the Circuit Managers (CMs) (directly reporting to her and the other district Directors, in charge of assisting roughly 30 schools each on behalf of the district), the CMs' reasons for closure should be told to the communities, and they should be allowed to object. Nowers recognised that communities take ownership of schools, and see

²²⁸ Nowers, "Interview with Sanette Nowers, Director of Metro Central District."

them as meaningful institutions; for her as a bureaucrat, the question was about efficient allocation of resources and high quality schools, but her comments made clear that she understood communities were inclined to view the closures differently. If Nowers were allowed to design the process, it would have run very differently, and people hopefully would have understood the decisions (and thus in her belief, been less angry):

SB: What would that look like, if you could design it?

SN: I will go in and do this personally, because I've learned that people change what is being said when they talk to others. I want to say it myself. I should know when things aren't good enough, have a stack of reports to take to the principal, and I must show it to her. It seemed to me that it was a surprise to the schools, teachers, and principals and communities this time around. We should have gone to the SGBs and said this is not good enough, you must do better—you must have a lot of communication.

At all those meetings, people said that 'we know you won't take this into consideration,' and we had to sit there poker faced. I ran after someone who left after one of those meetings to say that 'Sir, I support your desire not to have this school closed.' But they think you don't care.

SB: This silence strategy seems tone deaf?

SN: We weren't! I can tell you we weren't! But that brief, it said we must not respond. When things got bad, perhaps it was good that we weren't able to respond, because I would have told them to go to hell. At one, they said that I called learners potatoheads. I don't know this phrase, I don't know where it comes from. We must acknowledge that they are people, that there are problems. If I were one of them, I would have been so furious.²²⁹

Heinie Brand gave a similar account regarding what happened in his district, with one crucial difference—after much persistence, some communities were able to obtain the reasons for the closure of their schools. While this did not always cause them to support the closure, those who knew why their schools were being closed were more likely to accept the closures. Those without information or with misinformation continued to rage.²³⁰ The state, is, of course, not a monolith. The institutional and political experiences of the bureaucrats, including their professional experiences (like frequent interactions with community members), affected their interpretation of the right strategy for community consultation on the school closures. Different officials reacted both to different information and in different manners as a result.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Brand, "Interview with Dr. Heinie Brand, Director of Metro North District."

The process of the school closures is a clear example of why democratic participation in South Africa's education system breaks down. A set of bureaucrats seen as very capable, headed by Penny Vinjevold and John Lyners, her Deputy Head of Department who attended most of the school closure meetings, made a controversial decision believed to improve schooling, a decision freighted with emotion for those affected. The affected communities were given only the barest of information, in the most generic terms. When they attempted to learn more, in forums they believed were designed for exactly that purpose, it was WCED policy not to give them any information, even when explicitly requested, or when known misinformation was being spread. Unsurprisingly, the communities were furious, about the policy itself as well as the way in which they were being treated. And the high-ranking officials who designed the policy expected the citizen participants to know more than they did about the issue at hand yet refused to provide simple ways for them to receive that information, or, alternatively, were holding community forums despite regarding the community's views as irrelevant. The second irony here is that this strategy was supposedly undertaken to try to head off community anger—by keeping the officials from speaking, they would be unable to say anything that was off the cuff or react in anger themselves. Instead, the strategy further intensified already-existing mistrust over a hotly contested decision.

Equal Education and its affiliated Equal Education Law Centre (EELC) opted to support the closure of some schools but not others. EE and the EELC conducted their own investigation into the closures, and their research led them to adopt what was effectively a moderate position on the closures. Their refusal to take an existing side prompted nearly everyone already involved in the matter—the DA, the ANC, the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU)—to declare EE to be siding with their respective opponents. EE's stance aligned them much more closely with District Directors Nowers and Brand rather than with any of the existing political groups or the popular uproar against the closures. EE conducted community outreach work in the manner that Nowers argued in her interview should have been the process of the WCED. EE representatives sought the explicit reasons for each school closure (rather than the general set communicated to all of them), which required a significant amount of time and ultimately required EE and EELC to file a formal Access to Information request with the WCED. EE then informed the relevant communities of information they received as a result of the request, and talked with principals, teachers, students, and parents about their views on the

closures. The information EE uncovered prompted them to back the WCED on many of the closures. They chose to fight the closures that were based on underperformance of the schools, arguing that it was the Department's obligation to improve those schools, rather than simply close them. EE and EELC successfully prevented two of the three schools slated for closure based on underperformance from closing, and persuaded the Department to pay for new school uniforms for those learners who had to transfer to new schools as a result of the closures—a major expenditure for many of the families involved, yet something that the Department had not thought about.

EXPECTATIONS OF TECHNOCRACY

Despite the national Department of Basic Education and WCED officials' concerns about the ignorance of citizens, they also did not appear to be as expert as claimed to be. Moreover, for all of the government's worries about concerned citizens not knowing enough about education to participate, the government did not make it easy for one to become expert—or, for that matter, see it as important to do so. In 2010 and 2011, the national Department of Education put forth a slate of documents which they claimed were central to public accountability. This set of documents was placed prominently on the DBE's website, and the signing of the main document, the *Delivery Agreement* discussed in chapter one, was enough of a ceremonial event that Minister Motshekga delivered an address on the occasion.²³¹ In that speech at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, the administrative seat of the South African government, the Minister said of the signing, 'This moment is a landmark in improving the schooling system of this country.'²³² During the Minister's budget speech to Parliament in May 2013, the Minister again invoked the importance of this set of documents, declaring them to represent the vision of the DBE for the South African education system, especially the *Delivery Agreement*. She went on to note that these documents were 'published in the spirit of transparency and accountability.' The Minister explained in her speech at its signing, 'The *Delivery Agreement* we are signing is a negotiated charter reflecting the commitment of the key partners involved in the direct delivery process.' Referring to the public consultation process on the *Delivery Agreement* and its

²³¹ Department of Basic Education, "Delivery Agreement for Outcome 1: Improved Quality of Basic Education."; Motshekga, "Statement on the Signing of the Delivery Agreement."

²³² "Statement on the Signing of the Delivery Agreement."

related documents, she continued, '[w]e are very impressed by the volume of responses received and the level of interest our people have shown in the need to improve the quality of basic education in South Africa.'²³³ The *Delivery Agreement* was signed by the national DBE as well as all provincial departments of education, and seventeen additional national government departments whose work related to or affected the ability of the national and provincial education departments to reach the goals in the document.

The introduction to the *Delivery Agreement* proclaims,

This *Delivery Agreement* should be read in conjunction with the plan titled Action Plan to 2014: Towards the realisation of Schooling 2025 (published as Government Notice 752 of 2010), referred to as the Action Plan in the rest of this document. That document, which is the outcome of consultations with stakeholders, is envisaged as the Department of Basic Education's primary vehicle for communicating key sectoral strategies to stakeholders.²³⁴

The document does not explain which 'stakeholders' were consulted in the creation of the document. It does, however, later state that the DBE's success in achieving the goals in the document 'is dependent on good relations and ongoing collaboration with many organisations'. It enumerates these as '[t]he following stakeholder bodies: 'teacher trade unions', '[o]rganisations representing school governing bodies', '[n]on-government organisations and faith-based organisations working with schools', '[o]rganisations representing the business sector' and '[l]abour unions in general'.²³⁵

Taken at their word, the Minister and the Department considered this set of documents to be their commitment to public accountability, and their main way of explaining themselves to all who have a stake in the fate of South Africa's public schools. Moreover, it was this slate of documents that the representatives of the Department (the Minister, Director General, and Deputy Directors General) frequently referred to when making presentations to Parliament regarding the work and progress of their Department. Given such claims, one might expect the documents to be written in an accessible style, available in all of South Africa's official languages, and to contain a short, straightforward explanation of the

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Department of Basic Education, "Delivery Agreement for Outcome 1: Improved Quality of Basic Education," 3.

²³⁵ Ibid., 9.

Department's goals and plans for those without the time, energy, or ability to wade through lengthy bureaucratic documents.

Instead, the documents were complex and sometimes inscrutable—prompting Equal Education to write its own simple versions of some of the Department's goals to distribute to its members as described in chapter two. The *Delivery Agreement* and its related documents were only available in English. In addition, the kind of English it used was not straightforward—it is rife with bureaucratic rhetoric, of inputs and outputs, of subinputs, suboutputs, and outcomes. These were not the sort of documents that much of the public can follow, preventing substantive citizen participation on their content and attempts at accountability.

The *Delivery Agreement* and its connected documents were the subject of an intensive research effort by Equal Education during the second half of 2011. An EE funder, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, asked them if they would be in a position to put forth a 'shadow report' to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Basic Education to examine what progress the department had made against the goals it specified for itself. To complete the shadow report, Equal Education's researchers looked at all of the documents connected to the *Delivery Agreement* to ensure that they fully captured the Department's strategies and goals: the DBE's *Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025*, the *Strategic Plan 2011-2014*, and the *Annual Performance Plan 2011-2012*.²³⁶ Together, these documents provide the most comprehensive public overview of the Department's planned activities and goals across several years. A fifth document, the *Medium Term Expenditure Framework*, (MTEF) offered a budget for the DBE's work and thus some of the most specific details of its plans.²³⁷

EE's shadow report project began with a single researcher, Mongi Henda, allocated to the project. Henda came to EE with a strong background in South African civil society and government research, and was hired away by a widely regarded German human rights research organisation in the middle of the shadow report project. As the research got off the ground, it became apparent that this report would be too much even for Henda to wrangle with alone. He asked for assistance, and another

²³⁶ "Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025."; "Strategic Plan 2011-2014."; "Annual Performance Plan 2011-2012."

²³⁷ "Medium Term Expenditure Framework."

researcher was added to the project. This researcher, Jonny Wilkinson, a recent graduate of the University of Cape Town, quickly ran into difficulty attempting to ascertain the DBE's goals and strategies. To his mind, if the documents were read alone, they were broadly sensible, though vague, but when read side-by-side they were incoherent. None of the categories of the Department's intended actions were consistent. The Delivery Agreement offered 4 outputs:

- Output 1: Improve the quality of teaching and learning
- Output 2: Undertake regular assessment to track progress
- Output 3: Improve early childhood development
- Output 4: Ensure a credible outcomes-focussed planning and accountability system²³⁸

It then explained the importance of these outputs to their overall outcome: 'Improved quality of basic education' and offered a series of '[a]ctions needed to achieve each output.'²³⁹ While it is possible to take issue with the fact that these outputs are not mutually exclusive, or that they operate at different levels (for instance, undertaking regular assessment to track progress could be seen as a necessary component for improving the quality of teaching and learning), the outputs were reasonable elements for the DBE to focus on. Aside from the problems about the public's ability to understand the document, EE's only complaint at this level was that none of the outputs or suboutputs (the document's term for the actions needed to achieve each output) explicitly addressed its main campaign issue, infrastructure.

In the introduction to the *Delivery Agreement*, the Department directed its readers to the *Action Plan*, writing, '[t]hat document, which is the outcome of consultations with stakeholders, is envisaged as the Department of Basic Education's primary vehicle for communicating key sectoral strategies to stakeholders.'²⁴⁰ According to the introduction, the *Action Plan*

will serve as a key source for planners of envisaged targets and methodologies. In many ways, this *Delivery Agreement* extracts key issues contained in the *Action Plan*. The correspondence between the elements of the *Action Plan* and of this *Delivery Agreement* are explained in Appendix C [of the *Delivery Agreement*].²⁴¹

²³⁸ "Delivery Agreement for Outcome 1: Improved Quality of Basic Education," 1.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 3.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

It is here that the coherence begins to break down. The Introduction to the *Delivery Agreement* suggests that the reader should consider the *Delivery Agreement* to be a high-level version of more specific targets or strategies contained in the *Action Plan*. The *Action Plan* is organized by 27 separate ‘goals,’ the first thirteen of which deal with ‘*outputs* we want to achieve in relation to learning and enrolments’ [emphasis in original]. The word ‘output’ is used differently in this document than in the *Delivery Agreement*. In the *Delivery Agreement*, the outputs were overarching, high-level categories that covered substantial portions of the Department’s work. In the *Action Plan*, the outputs are highly specific, targeting performance in particular realms in particular grade levels. For example:

- 3) Increase the number of learners in Grade 9 who by the end of the year have mastered the minimum language and mathematics competencies for Grade 9
- 4) Increase the number of Grade 12 learners who become eligible for a Bachelors programme at a university²⁴²

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

- 14) Attract in each year a new group of young, motivated, and appropriately trained teachers into the teaching profession...
- 19) Ensure that every learner has access to the minimum set of textbooks and workbooks required according to national policy²⁴³

These are again a set of high-level goals that appear much closer to the four ‘outputs’ given in the *Delivery Agreement*. However, some of them do not align with the *Delivery Agreement*, such as Goal 24 (on infrastructure) and Goal 25 (on schools as sites of public health intervention).²⁴⁴

Given the confusing structure and fit across the documents, it should have been helpful that the Department provided Appendix C in the *Delivery Agreement*, the chart that was supposed to match all of these disparate elements together.²⁴⁵ The chart is a grid, with the *Action Plan* goals in rows, and the suboutputs from the *Delivery Agreement* listed vertically. Where they are connected, the department placed a dot to signify a relationship between the *Action Plan* goals and the

²⁴² "Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025," 2.

²⁴³ Ibid., 3.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ "Delivery Agreement for Outcome 1: Improved Quality of Basic Education."

Delivery Agreement suboutputs, but in many instances the dots made no sense. In some instances, achieving an *Action Plan* goal contributed to a *Delivery Agreement* suboutput. In others, the causality was reversed, and achieving a suboutput contributed to an *Action Plan* goal. And sometimes the dots appeared random, such as when managing to ‘Increase the number of learners in Grade 6 who by the end of the year have mastered the minimum language and mathematics competencies for Grade 6’ was purported to relate to strengthening the capacity of district offices.²⁴⁶ EE gathered most of its research staff to read through the documents, myself included. No one could produce a sensible interpretation of Appendix C.

Assistance could not be found in the *Strategic Plan*, which referred to the outputs from the *Delivery Agreement* but then added a new layer of complexity with five ‘programme objectives,’ five categories of work (like ‘Administration’ or ‘Curriculum Policy, Support, and Monitoring’) that both did and did not connect to either the *Delivery Agreement* outputs and/or the *Action Plan* goals.²⁴⁷ Nor did rescue come from the *Annual Performance Plan*, which ignored the outputs in the *Delivery Agreement* and the *Action Plan* goals and focused on the *Medium Term Expenditure Framework* and the five programme objectives from the *Strategic Plan*.²⁴⁸ It took EE’s four university educated, fluent English speakers several weeks to move from total bewilderment to a sensible baseline of what the DBE’s goals and strategies really were, and how they all fit together. Repeated calls and emails to the DBE to discuss the documents went unanswered. To say the least, most individual citizens do not have such resources.

It is not necessarily unusual for government documents to be incoherent, but it surprised Equal Education, especially given the bureaucrats’ own claims about their knowledge of the subject matter and their credibility. These documents were to be the cornerstone of Department strategy, and yet taken in sum, they actually made the case that the Department could not in fact be said to have a strategy. Some of the documents’ lack of clarity, no doubt, was due to actual incompetence. The rhetoric and the approach have the veneer of expert status, circulating the same kind of language and values from knowledge practices of bureaucratic rationality

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 29.

²⁴⁷ "Strategic Plan 2011-2014."

²⁴⁸ "Annual Performance Plan 2011-2012."

and statistical demonstrations of importance. However, that expert status was undermined by the failure of the documents to make sense even when read with full comprehension of those same knowledge practices.

Expertise is a tricky category for the Department. Bureaucracy in practice often does not resemble Weber's 'iron cage' of efficiency and expertise, or even Foucault's ideas of governmentality as discussed in chapter one.²⁴⁹ The episode involving the *Delivery Agreement* and the connected documents make clear that the Department did not always know what it was doing so much as it knew how to *look* like it knew what it was doing, so long as those observing its activities lacked either the resources or the expertise to look much beyond the surface. In its fidelity to demonstrating bureaucratic expertise, the Department captured most elements of the form; the rhetoric, the structure, the air of quantitative unimpeachability, the references to hallowed principles of efficiency and performance management, and the reductive aspirationalism of discrete targets to be achieved: x number of students with y level of competence by z year. The crucial missing element, however, was the actual content of these knowledge practices—a clear, focused, achievable and high-impact plan. Absent that, the documents appear less like actual demonstrations of expertise and more like performances in line with anthropologist Alexei Yurchak's characterisation of the official Soviet governmental speeches after Lenin: so riddled with empty repetition of the original instantiations of the practice that they had come to signify nothing more than an expertise in the form itself. The value then coheres in the performance itself, not in its content.²⁵⁰

As noted above, Jean and John Comaroff as well as Jonny Steinberg have made similar claims regarding the South African Police Services.²⁵¹ In these works, the police can be seen to play the part of policing, while not actually policing. At points, the work of the police appears as an elaborate charade, known as spectacle to both the performers and the observed, but it remains critical that the theatre occur; its absence would be a bellwether of social order's collapse.

²⁴⁹ Weber, *Economy and Society*; Graeber, "Beyond Power/Knowledge."; Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference*; Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 4.

²⁵⁰ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (2006).

²⁵¹ Jean Comaroff and John L Comaroff, "Figuring Crime: Quantifacts and the Production of the Un/Real," *Public Culture* 18, no. 1 (2006); "Criminal Obsessions, after Foucault."; Steinberg, *Thin Blue*.

In its research for the shadow report, EE showed that technocracy demystified was in fact a performance of the form of technocratic knowledge practices, not a demonstration of the content of those practices. Such performances of the form but not its content are not constrained to the episode detailed above. EE has often witnessed politicians and bureaucrats who were ignorant of the expert knowledge needed to carry out their jobs in the education sector. In one Portfolio Committee meeting, the chair of the Committee professed to have no idea what the South African Schools Act was, despite its status as the major law governing the work of her committee. In another instance, school officials insisted to EE students and staff that they were doing nothing illegal in administering corporal punishment to students, in flagrant contravention of the law. Though the Portfolio Committee often demonstrated its own lack of knowledge, a lack of expertise at the national level was not limited to them. National DBE Director General (the DBE's highest technocratic post) Bobby Soobrayan's use of complex and technical terminology in his reports was both a frustration and a running joke to the Portfolio Committee members; leading Soobrayan to crack in one session that he could not even excuse his running nose without elaborate technical terms. Soobrayan may have needed his technical terms to explain his ideas, or perhaps used them to demonstrate his own superiority in the performative manner of the policy documents or to make it harder for the Committee members to follow him and hold him to account. He and the Department also deployed an impressive degree of legerdemain in selecting what targets and goals would be represented in absolute numbers, and which would be represented in relative numbers—allowing for more plausible excuses down the road about why the targets were missed. But he too sometimes demonstrated a lack of knowledge on basic policy questions. A Committee member in a budget meeting I sat in on queried one of his less plausible claims about programme costs, and Soobrayan responded with a condescending—and patently incorrect—explanation about the difference between fixed and variable costs.²⁵²

It would, however, be too simple to declare the whole of government expertise as performance, or to dismiss those performances as farce. In the meeting with the WCED officials, none of the audience members I spoke to, including Equal Education's representatives, considered either of the top two bureaucrats to be incompetent. To the contrary, they were frequently complimented as highly

²⁵² Portfolio Committee on Basic Education, *4th Quarter Report*, 4 Jun 2013.

professional, talented, and dedicated, as were the directors of the Metro districts most of the time. Soobrayan's reports to Parliament also evinced at least some demonstration of competence at his job. More accurately, the education bureaucrats and politicians alike seem to have some level of actual expertise in the technocratic content that underwrites their claims to expertise, and in the instances where they lack the content expertise, they are well versed in the performance of the form of those knowledge practices, often allowing them to elide expertise-based challenges.

EE does not precisely believe that the government bureaucrats it engages with know what they're doing. To the contrary, the shadow report was created in large part because of a hypothesis that at least when it came to implementation, the bureaucrats were not performing at the level they ought be. But EE also believes that the bureaucrats should know what they are doing, in part because it is their job, and also because of their insistence that they are in fact the more knowledgeable group in their interactions with Equal Education. Equal Education's strategy also rests, to some degree, on an expectation that officials do care if they are exposed as incompetent, though EE rarely exposes them as such directly. The government is de facto reliant on EE and citizen groups to do some of its work, both in terms of the technocratic work itself as well as the community engagement and outreach, as seen in the school closures above. To maintain its ability to influence politicians and bureaucrats and not be shut out of participation, EE appears to have tacitly accepted the premise of not targeting individuals at the level of expertise unless there are also real questions about corruption, patronage, etc. Rather, EE's campaigns are styled as a need for more political will by members of the DBE and WCED—presentations of strategically useful semi-truths in a world far more complicated. Some bureaucrats are competent at some things some of the time—but few officials unequivocally clear the high bar of expertise that they set for the citizens they serve and to whom they are ostensibly accountable.

THE UNEASE OF EXPERTISE: WHO ARE THE TRULY KNOWLEDGEABLE?

The narrative of government knowledge practices from Scott and Foucault in chapter one presumes that government bureaucrats are authoritative on technocratic issues and questions, and citizens are the most informed as regards personal, experiential, anecdotal, or 'local' issues and questions. The experiences of

Equal Education's members and of the South African government's bureaucratic and elected representatives at the national and the provincial level challenge this wisdom. Equal Education's members, on issues from school sanitation to infrastructure, have demonstrated themselves to be well-informed regarding the service provision statistics, law, governmental structures, and more. The government's own representatives, whether elected or bureaucratic, have revealed themselves to be less knowledgeable than the standard democratic theory would presume—and on occasion, less informed than they themselves have claimed to be. Whether they work at the national or provincial level, or are elected officials or bureaucratic staff, representatives of the South African government working in education repeatedly speak of a desire for citizen participation—a desire that they lament often goes unattained.

Yet, to some degree, the concurrent expectations of these officials that citizens participate with particular types of knowledge and expertise rather than on their own terms causes this lack of participation. Either citizens do not participate at all, or their attempts to participate are dismissed by those same government officials as the efforts of people who 'don't know what they're talking about,' of people ignorant of how things work, or uncomprehending of the matter at hand. The more accurate way to understand most of these government representatives' calls for participation is not as a come one, come all invitation, but as an invitation with very particular knowledge-based conditions attached, in addition to the understanding of a need for respect on both sides. Alternatively, these government knowledge practices are sometimes performances of the form, rather than demonstrations of actual technocratic expertise. Moreover, opportunities to actually inform those citizens interested in participation often go unused or underutilised, such as in the case of the school closure forums, or the Delivery Agreement. At both the national and provincial level, the elected officials and bureaucrats in charge of South Africa's education system have consistently and steadfastly declined to provide citizens the very kinds of information that these same officials and bureaucrats then demand as a necessary condition of paying attention to citizen opinion.

This is not the end of the road for citizen participation in South Africa, however. Two divergent paths have emerged. One is the militant protest culture spoken of in the literature on rebellions of the poor, and the interviews about hostage-taking, and the other is the avenue of expert citizenship taken by Equal Education.

Recognising this proclivity on the part of government officials to dismiss the real concerns of citizens, Equal Education intentionally structured itself to counteract this technocratic tendency. The work and advocacy of its members demonstrates their ability to train themselves and each other on complicated, dense, technocratic material. In so doing, they render themselves capable of speaking truth to power in the manner of power. In assuming this function, the active citizens of Equal Education play a critical role in making substantive democracy function in this realm. The knowledge conditions implicitly and explicitly set by government representatives and their reluctance to assist the citizens in meeting those conditions leaves a substantial gap in the democratic process which would prevent substantive participation by citizens. The knowledge work of a mass movement like Equal Education fills what would otherwise be an irreconcilable chasm between actual citizen knowledge and the degree of knowledge expected of them by the democratic government intended to serve them. When Equal Education does this, however, sometimes that government expertise is revealed to be hollow, forcing Equal Education to adopt different strategies of active citizenship when their work is not accepted outright such as in the case of the WCED and the textbooks video.

While the knowledge work of mass movements like Equal Education acts as a useful stopgap solution to bureaucrats' and politicians' demands for citizen knowledge, it raises further questions about how democratic such a system is, given the extensive barriers to participation put in place by the government. Equal Education's strategies, as discussed above, indicate a belief that South Africa's democracy ought function as responsively and accountably for the poor as it does for the middle classes. But in its strategies to ensure this accountability, it also relies on knowledge strategies and tactics made possible and plausible by some of its members' middle-class experiences, approaches not available to groups without Equal Education's resources and educated staff members. Moreover, the willingness and ability to play by the bureaucrats' and politicians' unstated rules when it comes to knowledge, is still not necessarily sufficient for citizens to be taken seriously by government's representatives. The vignettes above are not merely demonstrative of negotiations waged on knowledge grounds; they are shaded with challenges to citizens' personal credibility on grounds such as age and race, the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘WHITE ADULTS ORGANISING BLACK AFRICAN CHILDREN WITH HALF-TRUTHS’: EQUAL EDUCATION’S EXTERNAL IDENTITY POLITICS

KNOWING LIKE A CITIZEN

Previous work on the use of knowledge by social movements has looked at the range of ways in which actors have deployed technical knowledge, experiential knowledge, or both. While there are clearly situations in which each of those or a combination thereof is a persuasive approach, there is also a question of when actors choose to accept or reject either form of knowledge as persuasive. This chapter will demonstrate one such condition of acceptance: the identity of the speakers in question. Assessment of personal identity is a strategic tool used by actors to determine credibility in interactions, which prefigures whether that actor can successfully deploy knowledge in that instance.

I use the word ‘credibility’ here in a common sense way in the context of the democratic negotiations discussed throughout this thesis—does this actor/speaker have what his/her audience considers to be the necessary attributes for taking his/her claims to knowledge and hence authority seriously? This chapter is concerned with instances where that credibility comes down to personal identity—where identity pre-empts or limits specifically the strategic use of technocratic knowledge by citizen activists. In so doing, this chapter expands the understanding of what elements of authority are contested in knowledge interactions between citizens and government. The data from my fieldwork show that in the instances where the personal identity of an activist is explicitly invoked by a government official, it is done in order to question the credibility of that actor to speak on a given subject. Previous chapters have shown, first, how government officials have attempted to dismiss substantive citizen participation in democratic policy creation on technocratic grounds, by claiming citizens do not understand the issues, and second, how Equal Education has addressed those challenges through educating themselves on technocratic issues. Previous chapters have also shown how other elements of credibility, such as political pedigree and experience, are invoked alongside these technocratic claims. This chapter looks at a fourth part of these activist/government knowledge exchanges: how, once those technocratic dismissals

fail, government officials sometimes continue to dismiss citizen participation by using citizens' personal identity as a condition for assessing the credibility of their involvement. The chapter examines the role of race and class in these interactions in particular as a result of their frequent invocation during my fieldwork, but other categories, such as age and gender, similarly serve as challenges to citizens' credibility.

Equal Education has frequently been forced to reckon with South Africa's particularly robust race and class politics. Inside the organisation as well as in their external work, the identity of the Equal Education's leaders and activists has never been far from the surface. Its promotional materials, interviews, activist meetings, and more make clear that its activists see their expertise-grounded approach as a clear source of credibility. This claim is not made to erase the credibility that comes from the identities and experiences of those involved. It does, however, indicate that one of the aspects of credibility EE thinks it has to offer in particular is expertise. This is itself a political statement through claiming expert status presumed to be out of the reach of poor, black youth in the townships and rural areas. The ever-present imbrication of identity in political negotiations is in part because knowledge is sometimes drawn from one's own experiences—what Scott calls *mētis*. Of additional theoretical interest is how Equal Education's work has demonstrated that knowledge-based credibility, whether experiential or technocratic, cannot in practice be decoupled from personal identity and experiences for any of the activists involved. The interwoven nature of these aspects of citizen credibility can be seen both in challenges made by outsiders like officials from the Department of Basic Education and the organisation's response (the focus of this chapter), and in EE's internal politics and dynamics, specifically through the way in which knowledge circulates in the organisation and the manner in which decisions are made (the subject of the next chapter). These personal characteristics do not arise explicitly in every knowledge interaction, but in the instances in which they are mentioned, they play a substantial role in directing the process and the outcome of the interaction. I will be referring to these characteristics as *personal identity*.

I include in the category of personal identity: a) individual attributes including but not limited to demographics like race, class, age, and gender, which affect perceptions of the likelihood of an actor to behave in a given way as well as

perceptions of whether an actor is judged to be credible at the outset of an interaction, and b) an individual's experiences which may inform the individual's practice and approach, as well as others' perceptions of that individual. This encompasses elements such as participation in the anti-apartheid struggle, growing up in a given community, attending a certain school, etc.

There is a subtle but important difference between personal identity and the experiential knowledge discussed in previous chapters. This can be illustrated in the difference between whether one has a child attending a given school, and the actual information derived from the experience of having a child attending the school. The former is personal identity, the latter is experiential knowledge. An individual may be assumed to possess experiential knowledge as a result of his/her personal identity, but self-identifying with a given attribute or being perceived by others to possess that attribute does not imply that an individual does indeed possess that experiential knowledge. Personal identity is not itself a type of knowledge; instead, it affects how others receive the knowledge an actor or speaker has to offer, and may also shape the knowledge one possesses.²⁵³

It is also important to note here that the elements of an individual's personal identity are not fixed categories which have some essential truth to them—they are socially constructed both at a general level and at an individual level over time and in moments of negotiation such as those discussed below.²⁵⁴ The relevant questions for ascertaining identity in this inquiry are first, 'how do others perceive a given individual?' and second, 'how do those individuals perceive themselves?' These answers often, but not always, overlap with each other in these discussions, but that does not render the answer any more or less essential or fixed than if there were disagreement on the answer. Rather, identity is intersectional, historically contingent, and context-dependent. Individuals, and those they interact with, may consider different components of identities as more or less salient in a given place,

²⁵³ These are well-trodden claims in much of social science; the authors cited here are a very small sampling of a much larger literature. See, for instance, Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*; Haraway, *Modest_Witness*; "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991).

²⁵⁴ As above, a small sampling of authors representing much larger literatures: Kwame Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (1998); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (2002); Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (1995); Deborah Posel, "Race as Common Sense: Racial Classification in Twentieth-Century South Africa," *African Studies Review* 44, no. 02 (2001); "What's in a Name? Racial Categorisations under Apartheid and Their Afterlife," *Transformation*, no. 47 (2001).

context, or time. Similarly, the invocation of identity in an interaction, whether implicit or explicit, does not change the ‘truth’ of what the speaker is saying or being challenged on. How that individual’s audience interprets the comment is what changes, and thus forms the basis for contestation. Finally, it is also worth noting that when I reference instances of ‘strategic’ invocation of identity below, I am not implying any judgment on whether that was done in good or bad faith, merely that it changes the terms of the interaction.

This insight about other elements involved in assessing the credibility of actors in democratic knowledge interactions builds on other anthropological work focusing on the use of knowledge in social movements. As discussed in prior chapters, a significant portion of this literature examines HIV/AIDS social movements in the US, Brazil, and South Africa, and the authors focus mostly on the movements’ use of technical or scientific knowledge.²⁵⁵ This literature largely covers first, the movements’ use of science and technical knowledge in their interactions with government officials and other ‘experts’, and second, the movements’ work to translate these scientific and technical insights regarding the biology and pharmacology of HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention into terms and references broadly understood by communities in which they operate, which lack strong scientific backgrounds. The second knowledge task requires some amount of experiential knowledge, but even in that work it is rooted mainly in the technical knowledge. Gould’s work on ACT UP does spend time examining how many activists’ gay and lesbian identity affected their work and vice versa. However, her focus is more on how that influenced the motivations and approaches of the activists, and less on how government officials saw them.²⁵⁶ By contrast, I seek to identify instances where Equal Education’s work involves technical and experiential knowledge, and where government officials chose to invoke the personal identity of the activists as relevant to their acceptance or rejection of that knowledge. To frame this discussion, I return to James Scott’s work on *techne* and *mētis* to identify the types of knowledge used by governments and citizens to make decisions.

²⁵⁵ Biehl, "The Activist State."; Steven Epstein, "The Construction of Lay Expertise: AIDS Activism and the Forging of Credibility in the Reform of Clinical Trials," *Science, Technology & Human Values* 20, no. 4 (1995); Robins, "'Long Live Zackie, Long Live'.": "From 'Rights' to 'Ritual'."

²⁵⁶ Gould, *Moving Politics*; "Life During Wartime: Emotions and the Development of ACT UP," *Mobilization: An international quarterly* 7, no. 2 (2002).

As discussed in chapter one, for Scott, *techne* is a category of knowledge necessarily and by design independent of the personal attributes of those using it. Scott's formulation of *mētis* accounts for some elements of interpersonal relationships, but these exist mostly at the level of context for skills. The closest Scott comes to looking at the actors themselves is to note that sometimes, like in politics and diplomacy, one might be able to influence the other actors—again a concern more about the context for the application of skills than about the attributes of those involved in the interaction.

I argue that this is an insufficient understanding of knowledge interactions. It fails to account for 'personal identity'. These identity characteristics are often used in practice to delineate who qualifies as a credible speaker on a given issue, especially as a method of excluding those whose voices are believed not to belong in the dialogue because of their identities. This is, of course, subjectively practiced and a source of contestation. Personal identity can act as a prior condition for assessment of arguments rooted in *techne* or *mētis*. Personal identity can also be invoked in the middle of interactions, as a method of excluding the information that has just been provided by the other speaker. Equal Education's members and staff have encountered this mid-discussion shift with some frequency after they have been perceived to outwit government officials or bureaucrats on more technical grounds. A typical exchange when personal identity is invoked has at least one of the actors involved asking not just 'what is this person telling me?' but also 'who is this person to be telling me this?' Personal identity, not just technical or experiential knowledge, forms an important basis for claims to or challenges of expertise between citizens and government, and for the exercise of authority by politicians and bureaucrats.

This chapter examines how these claims and challenges function in the interactions between various government officials and activists for Equal Education; in each instance, an official has seized upon specific identity characteristics of a technically capable individual (or group) as a means of dismissing their participation in education policy creation and implementation. Unsurprisingly, South Africa's particular forms of race and class-based oppression shape the forms taken by challenges to citizens' credibility. Race, and to a lesser degree but by extension, class, have historically served as axes upon which people were excluded from democratic participation in South Africa, with white people barring participation to

varying degrees by anyone not deemed to be white. Twenty years after the end of that system, race plays a different but still central role in public democratic dialogues. 'Whiteness' serves as a shorthand in the South African public sphere for assumptions of wealth, conservative politics, protective self-interest, and entitlement. Whiteness can cut both ways; it also often prompts assumptions about higher levels of education and expertise, and a presumed lack of knowledge about the realities of life for black South Africans. While race no longer acts as a legal bar to participation, it remains an important and complicated site of challenges to credibility, with blackness prompting its own set of freighted assumptions. This history of oppression also undergirds the significance of the government officials' claims to authority rooted in their participation in the anti-apartheid struggle. In the prior chapter, appeals to struggle history were used to justify the credibility of the officials themselves. In this chapter, challenges of personal identity are used by officials in an attempt to exclude the participation of citizens.

Two vignettes are particularly illustrative of the role played by personal identity in the complex knowledge negotiations between citizens and government officials. The first is an extended look at a back and forth over a Department of Basic Education press release issued while negotiating a settlement to Equal Education's lawsuit over the regulations for school infrastructure. The second examines a dispute over an absent geography teacher in a Khayelitsha secondary school. Both instances involve government officials rejecting the strategic use of expert knowledge by challenging the activists on personal identity grounds—a politician using race as the basis of the challenge in the first, and a bureaucrat lack of personal connection to the school in the second (which includes an underlying challenge on race and class). I argue that these manoeuvres as well as broader attitudes of government officials regarding the personal identity of would-be citizen participants seen in previous chapters establish undemocratic expectations for citizen participation by preventing most citizens from establishing themselves as 'credible' by the standards of the government officials.

Successful dismissals of citizen participation serve the interests of the officials in question by preventing them from being held to account by the citizenry, and thus minimizing the degree to which South Africa's democratic participation works as a check against officials' own power and authority. In these officials' challenges to citizen participation, few, if any citizens are fully credible to question or

successfully change decisions and practices of government officials, producing a democracy that is at best notional, and a far cry from the active, accountable, substantive democracy demanded and practiced by many of South Africa's citizens. These officials appear to hope for a docile citizenry that speaks only when spoken to. When confronted with a more participatory reality, the next move of these officials is to try to create a political environment that functions such that when these citizens speak, no one else is listening. As the discussion of the DBE's press release will show, such public rejections often amplify rather than mute the voices of their civil society challengers.

'YOU ARE MAKING A NOISE, @DBE_SA': THE DEPARTMENT'S TWEET REVENGE

Equal Education's central campaign from 2010 through 2013 was a demand for the government to pass regulations regarding Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure. The Minimum Norms is a set of regulations adopted by the Minister of Basic Education to outline the necessary infrastructure improvements for existing schools, and a timeline for achieving those improvements. A draft of the regulations was released by Naledi Pandor, the previous Minister of Basic Education in 2008.²⁵⁷ When Minister Angie Motshekga took over the Department, she repeatedly promised to revise the draft and release it as a final, binding regulation, but continually delayed doing so.²⁵⁸

EE's decision to advocate for comprehensive school infrastructure regulations beginning in 2010 was borne out of the successes of two earlier campaigns on broken windows and school libraries in 2008 and 2009, respectively. Equal Education held op-ed and letter writing campaigns, organised numerous marches of thousands of students and parents, slept outside Parliament to prove a point about the conditions in which some students were learning, and tried many other tactics. As a last resort after all prior demonstrations and negotiations had failed, Equal Education brought a lawsuit against the national DBE and the provincial departments of education, arguing that the regulations were a necessary component of South Africa's constitutional right to basic education. The

²⁵⁷ Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education, "National Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure," ed. Department of Basic Education (2008).

²⁵⁸ Equal Education, "High Court Says EE Matter Is Urgent! Equal Education Reopens Case against Minister Motshekga for Minimum Norms & Standards for School Infrastructure," news release, 13 Jun, 2013.

government chose to settle the case, agreeing to provide a preliminary draft for public comment and then a final draft to be instituted as legally binding by certain dates. After the first draft provoked substantial public complaint, the Department claimed that it could not have predicted such a strong negative reaction to its work, and requested that Equal Education agree to give it an extension on the timeline it had agreed to, a request to which the group begrudgingly acceded. More detail on this campaign and Equal Education's internal processes related to it is in chapter five.

During the period in which the DBE sought an extension and EE consulted its members on the request, the Department went on the public offensive. Early on the morning of 18 June 2013, the Twitter account of the Department of Basic Education of South Africa started rapidly updating with fragments of a press release just posted on the Department's website.²⁵⁹ In segments of 140 characters or less, @DBE_SA both unleashed a torrent of criticism at Equal Education and highlighted what the Department saw as successes improving school infrastructure across the country. While this was not the first time the Department had tweeted out a press release in such a manner, the inflammatory nature of this particular release quickly drew attention. Bite-sized snide comments such as 'It is interesting to note the sudden interest that Equal Education is taking in the education of the African child,' and 'Suddenly the NGO knows all about the challenges that African children face against the privileges they have enjoyed,' made the rounds of South Africa's Twitterati, prompting offense, mocking, and the occasional agreement with the comments. The scene-stealing tweet was midway through the release. The DBE followed an acknowledgement that when it came to its own work, 'more still needs to be done,' with a blindside against EE: 'However, to suddenly see a group of white adults organizing black African children with half-truths can only be opportunistic and patronizing.'²⁶⁰

On its surface, this set of tweets has little to do with knowledge, save the characterisation of EE as 'organizing... with half-truths,' a clear attack on Equal Education's substantive, technocratic expertise. However, a closer look reveals that

²⁵⁹ Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education, "Equal Education Is Disingenuous," news release, June 18, 2013, <http://www.education.gov.za/Newsroom/MediaReleases/tabid/347/ctl/Details/mid/2327/ItemID/3682/Default.aspx>.

²⁶⁰ "Department of Basic Education Twitter," https://twitter.com/DBE_SA.

the Department's tweets do offer further challenges to credibility and knowledge. By the Department's characterisation, those at the head of the organisation lack the personal experience for them to be taken seriously by the Department and the rest of South African society, explicitly on the grounds of their racial identity, and potentially implicitly on regards of their presumed class. Similarly, the students seem to be too young, that is to say, naïve, to avoid being misled by these older 'white' Svengalis, themselves presumed to be incapable of good motives.

The Department's fit of pique raised hackles across the Twitter, NGO, and media landscape, with tweets and op-eds solidly lining up in defence of EE. Given Zackie Achmat's seat on EE's National Council and prolific Twitter presence, it was unsurprising to see him respond to the 'white adults' tweet with 'Minister #Motshekga are you racist, or is this an errant official?'²⁶¹ Nomboniso Gasa, a black struggle stalwart first jailed at the age of 14 in the former Transkei for her activism, and now working as a gender and land rights activist, also joined the discussion, calling the 'sudden interest' tweet 'Offensive,' and 'cheap race baiting,' questioning the 'privilege' tweet with '& Your kids?' capping her comments with 'I thought I was beyond anger. I am not.'²⁶² Vusi Pikoli, the black former head of the National Prosecuting Authority, tweeted 'The late Arthur Chaskalson used to chair the EE Law Centre Trust and I was a trustee. What does it say about us? somebody must explain!'²⁶³ And Zakes Mda, a prominent black South African author who participated in Equal Education's Solidarity Tour of Eastern Cape schools, wrote 'I'd like to get from @DBE-SA a list of "white adults" who are organizing "black African children" & their citizenship. keen to write on this.'²⁶⁴

Equal Education staff and volunteers heard of the digital fracas upon arriving at work that morning, and reactions started out shocked and bemused, with one staff member wondering aloud, 'Was Panyaza drunk?' (referencing Panyaza Lesufi, then the main spokesperson for the DBE). In short order, the disbelief and humour tipped into outrage, culminating in a same-day call by Chairperson Yoliswa Dwane for the Minister to distance herself from the press release/Twitter comments. Dwane's statement begins by explaining that 'Every factual claim about the process

²⁶¹ Zackie Achmat, "Twitter Post," (2013).

²⁶² Nomboniso Gasa, <https://twitter.com/nombonisogasa>.

²⁶³ Vusi Pikoli, <https://twitter.com/VusiPikoli>.

²⁶⁴ Zakes Mda, <https://twitter.com/ZakesMda/status/347122009546829825>.

needed for the finalisation of Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure is wrong and misleading.’ EE released a second press statement filled with facts and data to support that claim and answer both the Department’s broadside about EE’s expertise and address the Department’s specific challenges on the substance. The immediate statement in the aftermath of the Department’s inflammatory tweets, however, focused mostly on the comments about race and disingenuousness:

As it happens the majority of EE’s leadership went to the very township and rural schools we are fighting to fix. A link to EE’s National Council, of which I am chair, can be found **HERE** [link]. At the same time EE consists of people of every background and we are very proud of this. Any person who commits themselves to advancing the daily struggles of poor and working class youth is welcome in EE. That these values exist is something that those responsible for education should celebrate, not attack.

The DBE’s statement is a very serious attack on non-racism, the Constitution and the legacy of Nelson Mandela. That it appears on a government letterhead is shocking. Cabinet will surely be concerned about this.

The statement is issued in the name of Minister Motshekga. We urge the Minister to urgently clarify whether she in fact wrote or had sight of the statement. We would like to give the Minister an opportunity to distance herself from such appalling racism, to retract the statement and to offer an apology to Equal Education.²⁶⁵

In just the short paragraphs quoted above, Equal Education’s press release served several functions. First, it reclaims its technocratic expertise, challenged by the DBE’s assertion about EE organising with ‘half-truths.’ Second, it makes clear that the Department is wrong about the race of its leaders. Third, it asserts that it holds a political ideology opposed to the relevance of that second point—the race of its members and leaders is irrelevant, so long as they hold values consistent with ‘advancing the daily struggles of poor and working class youth.’ Finally, in making that third point, EE relies less on setting out an explicit argument for non-racialism and more on appealing to prior authority and history, specifically Nelson Mandela and the Constitution, from which one can easily also infer the invocation of the struggle, the UDF, and a selectively rendered prior version of the ANC that did not play these games based on skin colour.

²⁶⁵ Yoliswa Dwane, "Equal Education Asks Minister Motshekga to Distance Herself from the Racist Statement Issued in Her Name " news release, 17 Jun, 2013.

Rather than provide the apology demanded by Equal Education, one of the Minister's spokespersons, Hope Mokgatlhe, claimed that the statement 'had no racist intentions' and that the statement would not be retracted because 'There's nothing racist' in the statement, with the caveat that 'Obviously people will interpret it differently.'²⁶⁶ What is meant the DBE's claim the statement is not racist? Though neither the spokesperson nor anyone else from the Department clarified what she meant by that remark, several possible interpretations come to mind. The first is that the Department read the statement as a series of simple facts, clarifying to the public that this group of activists was not simply a group of clever, charismatic, and sympathetic black schoolchildren from the townships. Another possible interpretation is that the Department did not believe that anything in the statement denigrated any racial group. Yet another possible interpretation would be that the Department/its spokespeople believed that one could not be racist towards white people, and did not see its comments about EE's student membership as racist. Finally, it might have simply been a strategic political response—in this reading, the initial allegations were a failed gambit, and this follow-up was the easiest path for the DBE to find its way out of the ruckus of its own making. Regardless, if anyone had a problem with the Department's press release, the spokeswoman encouraged them to approach the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) with a complaint. The SAHRC is an institution created by the Constitution to protect the dignity of South African citizens and ensure that they are treated without prejudice—elevating a complaint to the SAHRC would have been a bold move indeed, and even suggesting it might be interpreted as a challenge or a taunt to EE's leaders, both black and white.

Equal Education considered lodging a complaint with the SAHRC, and if they had followed the desires of their staff, they would have approached either the SAHRC or the Equality Court with a complaint. The possibility was discussed by the National Council, most of whom agreed with the sentiment behind going forward with a formal complaint, but many were also worried that such a complaint would distract from the real campaign on norms and standards, especially since EE clearly won this round in the court of public opinion, at least as seen in comments on Twitter, op-eds and editorials in broadsheets, and internet comments on those newspaper

²⁶⁶ Ilse Fredericks, "Motshekga Slammed for 'Racist Attack'," *Cape Argus*, 20 Jun 2013; Bongani Nkosi, "Motshekga Won't Retract 'Racist' Attack on Equal Education," *Mail & Guardian*, 19 Jun 2013.

articles. This is the same audience that would have been paying attention to the DBE's Twitter account and press releases—in both cases, a comparatively well-educated and affluent audience.²⁶⁷

Equal Education also released a second statement in response to the Department's tweeted press release, a day after the first. EE's statement begins,

Yesterday the Department of Education (DBE) issued an attack on Equal Education (EE), in the name of Minister Angie Motshekga, which was both racist and dishonest. We have dealt with the racism in a previous statement. In this press release we deal with the dishonesty. We will take each claim made by the DBE and show that it is false.²⁶⁸

Though this press release reiterates the concerns about the identity-based challenges, the point of the second statement was to debunk what the organisation saw as six factual inaccuracies in the DBE's press release. Equal Education issued detailed corrections on everything from the Department's description of the norms and standards case timeline to the claims of progress made by the department. One of the more detailed points read:

DBE claims: "The current government boasts of having delivered thousands of state-of-the-art schools for African children, and the Department of Basic education continues to acknowledge that more still needs to be done." And that: "As from July, the DBE will open one school per week in the Eastern Cape, in addition to brand new schools we have handed over to communities in Mthatha in the past 3 months."

Facts: In Parliament on 4 June the Director General Bobby Soobrayan reported that only 55% of South African schools comply with a "very basic level of school infrastructure". On the same day the Department reported that of the R2bn annual Schools Infrastructure Backlogs Indirect Grant only 37.5% was spent in the year. The DBE's Accelerated School Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI) program promised to have built 100 new schools by March 2013, and yet the latest report to Parliament shows that only 17 have been built. EE celebrates each new school the DBE opens, and even took a recent delegation of high profile South Africans to see one of these new schools. But the problem is being addressed too slowly, and one of the reasons is that there are no binding Norms and Standards.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Equal Education, "Equal Education National Council Minutes 17 June 2013," Meeting Minutes (2013); De Vos, "It's Not a Democracy If Our Children Aren't Equal."; Nkosi, "Motshekga Won't Retract 'Racist' Attack on Equal Education."; Michelle Jones, "Education Minister and NGO in Race Row," *Cape Times*, 20 Jun 2013; Victoria John, "Basic Education Lashes out at Equal Education's 'White Adults'," *Mail & Guardian*, 19 Jun 2013; Editorial Board, "Editorial: Your Comment, Mr Zuma?," *Mail & Guardian*, 21 Jun 2013.

²⁶⁸ Equal Education, "Equal Education Sets the Record Straight on the Norms & Standards Finalisation Process," news release, 18 Jun, 2013, <http://www.equaleducation.org.za/article/2013-06-19-equal-education-sets-the-record-straight>.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

The DBE succeeded in drawing public attention to questions of race and identity rather than technocratic substance, and certainly prompted engagement from EE on those grounds. But as this response and others within the same release show, EE was unwilling to fight the battle on those grounds alone. EE's response continued the use of a mixed strategy invoking technocratic knowledge as the basis for its legitimacy to speak on the norms and standards issue. The release from EE contains hyperlinks to government documents to cite factual claims; the DBE's release leaves its claims unreferenced.

Since all of this was happening during the extended negotiations over the timeline for the Minimum Norms and Standards draft, the Minister invited EE to a meeting in Johannesburg to discuss the norms and standards case less than a week after the press release was issued. The Deputy Minister as well as six provincial MECs also attended this meeting. EE's National Council discussed rejecting the invitation, both out of anger about the press release, and because of worries that getting involved in the process would allow the DBE to claim that whatever resulted necessarily bore EE's stamp of approval. Ultimately, the NC decided that the substantive and perceptual benefits outweighed the harms, and sent eight members of the NC to the meeting. Half of these NC members were black secondary school students or recently post-school youth; all but one of EE's representatives to this important meeting were black. Doron Isaacs, the sole white representative for EE, noted with some irony that the government had more substantially more white faces at the table than EE. At the meeting, which proved to be an emergency meeting for the DBE to save face after the substantial public criticism of the racial comments, EE's representatives raised the issue of the comments. They were told by the Minister, as relayed by Chairperson Yoliswa Dwane, 'I didn't see anything racist in what I said. And it is not the content of this meeting. That must be a different meeting.' Upon hearing this in a staff meeting, there was universal displeasure and dismay—black and white, young and old, the reaction was headshaking and a chorus of 'hayibo!' 'Yoh!' and 'No way!'

Despite the staff's overwhelming condemnation of the Department's statement, the organisation took over six months to decide whether to pursue a complaint and with whom. In January 2014, EE decided not to lodge a formal complaint. This decision was taken for two main reasons: first, the storm had largely blown over and offense had softened over time; and second, EE had succeeded in getting the

Minister to publish a robust set of standards by then, and was now attempting to pursue a more collaborative strategy. By this point, Equal Education wanted seats at the table for the implementation process of the infrastructure norms. Levelling a formal accusation against the Minister and the Department for behaving in a racist manner was not a winning strategy.

The Department's allegations about race created a broader publicity stir than much of the DBE's or EE's other, more technocratic discussions in the media, and even a broader stir than spectacles explicitly intended to draw publicity (the marches in the days prior, etc.). Allies came out of the woodwork to defend the organisation with such vigour because the comments were clearly read as insulting and/or undermining of the organisational mission. The offense caused was not purely based on dislike of factual inaccuracy (for instance, the false statements about who led the organisation), or the comments presumably would have been treated in the same manner as the factual inaccuracies regarding the court case—largely ignored by the Twitter commentariat and public, and given a quiet, rational mention in EE's press releases. Instead, a very public spat arose, in which the astonishing solution mooted by the spokesperson for Minister of the Department of Basic Education was to take the DBE to the Human Rights Commission with a complaint of racial discrimination.

The number of op-eds, comments, tweets, and blog posts about the racial comments dwarfed the coverage of EE's marches a day prior in Pretoria and Cape Town, where thousands of learners, parents and other supporters mobilised in favour of norms and standards on school infrastructure. Cynics, including some commenting on Twitter, might see that as the entire point. EE had staged visually compelling, peaceful marches of thousands of students in school uniform to Parliament and to the offices of the Department of Basic Education to demand that South Africa's learners no longer have to learn under trees, in structures that are falling in on their heads, or in rooms made of mud or asbestos with holes in the walls. The marches generated a decent, if not spectacular, amount of coverage, and came at an embarrassing time for the Department, as it had just gone back on a deadline it suggested in a court settlement. The DBE needed a distraction, quickly, and race issues are a tried and true strategy in South Africa for drawing attention away from uncomfortably well-justified political demands, qua Schopenhauer's famous formulation of *ad hominem*s as the last resort in an argument that one is

losing.²⁷⁰ For some, that was obvious from the get-go. One response to the tweet from a young black man following the feed read ‘Racist slant aside, I would like the DBE to address the issues:)’²⁷¹ Nomboniso Gasa’s response to the Department was simply, ‘*Uyangxola* [You are making a noise] @DBE_SA! Don’t you have work to Fixing education & all. I We can think for ourselves. Thank you @equal_education.’²⁷² Both tweets, from individuals unaffiliated with EE, make the argument that this manoeuvre by the DBE drew race into the equation in order to distract from the substantive, technocratic issues at hand.

Zackie Achmat and anyone else who had followed TAC’s advocacy work could hardly have been surprised—government representatives and allies had made nearly identical comments about the leadership structure of the TAC during its battle to secure the provision of antiretroviral treatment through the public health system. In that case, the claims were that white gay men were misleading black women, but the structure of the allegation was nearly identical, and similarly frustrating to TAC’s leadership—two black women, a coloured gay man, and a straight white man.²⁷³ At the time those claims were made about TAC, they were putting incredible public pressure on the Department of Health. Similarly, when the DBE came out with its release, EE had just held two marches to keep up the pressure on the Department. The giant, cartoonish balloon of the Minister they took with them to the Union Buildings in Pretoria probably did not do much to foster goodwill with the Minister, particularly when a photo of it made the front page of the Times newspaper. The marches also generated a television appearance in which EE representatives accused the Minister of lacking the political will to adopt the Norms and Standards. Some element of the press release may well have been due to a desire for a valve, any valve, to ease the pressure.

I argue, that DBE’s press release and its subsequent defence of it is demonstrative of complexity than Schopenhauer’s understanding of such comments as purely cynical, strategic calls. First, spokesperson Panyaza Lesufi, widely understood as the canniest shotcaller of the DBE’s communications team, and now Gauteng MEC

²⁷⁰ To be specific, Schopenhauer’s tongue-in-cheek manual on the art of winning debates listed thirty-seven tactics to try before attacks on the speaker’s identity, the thirty-eighth and final strategy. See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Art of Being Right* (1896).

²⁷¹ Jonathan Blanckenberg, https://twitter.com/DBE_SA/status/347000424525594624.

²⁷² Gasa.

²⁷³ Friedman and Mottiar, "A Rewarding Engagement?."

for Basic Education, claimed to be on vacation when the statement was drafted and issued by a less senior person. He told this to an EE staff member he had to debate on the radio immediately following the release, and according to this staff member, Lesufi also claimed to be furious to return to the aftermath of the release. The staff member, however, had his doubts about that assertion given that Lesufi's name appeared at the bottom of the release. Second, seeing this as nothing more than a cynical strategy assumes an impressive level of realpolitik on the part of the department—something that cannot be ruled out entirely, but which seems improbable, given many other ham-handed tactics and decisions over time. Finally, the Department's statement, put in context of similar prior public statements by other government officials and departments, and similar responses by individual bureaucrats to citizens attempting to hold government to account, indicates that there is something deeper to the story. Even if this was a purely cynical strategy, the mere fact of its ruckus-causing would nevertheless be revelatory of particular worldviews and understandings of how to play politics in democratic South Africa.

One of EE's leaders, co-founder Doron Isaacs, suggested to me in an interview that the DBE's press release and the Minister's backing of it followed in the tradition of a long line of allegations of black movements being animated by troublesome whites. This was a common way to understand black movements under apartheid, he argued, and was done in part to dismiss the agency of the black people behind the movements.²⁷⁴ Such claims obviously take on a different meaning after apartheid. The DBE's challenge and Motshekga's backing of it was an attempt to reduce citizen participation on particular lines, specifically the 'whiteness' of the people challenging her. The issuing of the claim in a press release is an indication that the DBE believed it would resonate with the public, as a result of South Africa's long history of racial grievance. Were her claims true, a group of South Africa's most privileged people were hijacking a movement of South Africa's most disadvantaged people, using black faces as window-dressing in order to discredit a majority black government. As it became clearer that apartheid was on the verge of ending, white South Africans left the country in droves, claiming that a black government would drive the country into the ground.

²⁷⁴ Isaacs, "Interview with Doron Isaacs, Deputy General Secretary of Equal Education."

The post-apartheid policies, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as the very minor economic redistribution meant that whites were, by and large, forgiven for their complicity with or participation in apartheid, with very little question for most of them. Since 1994, white voices have been disproportionately vocal about corruption as well as incompetence in South Africa's new democratic dispensation, with the convenient erasure by some of apartheid's corruption, race-based legalised patronage, and woeful services for 90% of the country. With that history in mind, it is not a far leap for government officials and many of their black supporters to be wary of white people in the social sector—who kept their wealth and their power at the expense of those many poor black people who would have benefitted from redistribution—and then, in the mind of some, still have the audacity to complain about a government doing its best to unwind the tangle of devastation that offered white people these positions of privilege to begin with.

For the Department and the Minister, it *was* about race, not just cynical politics, nor just race as a cipher for power and advantage, though those too likely played a part. When this historical understanding is combined with the ANC's tendencies towards loyalty and obedience born out of its prior incarnation as a banned resistance movement (where such paranoia about criticism and infiltration was in many ways justifiable), one can see a clear set of claims being made about who is a credible participant in South Africa's democracy. These claims do not sit easily within an egalitarian democracy, which will be analysed in more depth later in this chapter.

PARADIGMS LOST: WHEN KNOWING IS NOT EVERYTHING

The issues of identity and credibility are not limited either to EE's interactions with politicians rather than bureaucrats, or with ANC-run departments compared with DA-run departments. In 2011, a senior EE researcher with a law degree was contacted by a group of secondary school EE members because their school lacked a geography teacher. Their teacher had gone on maternity leave, and there had not been a teacher there for several weeks. The students said that they had gone to the principal about a replacement, but nothing had happened. The researcher called the government employee in charge of staffing at that particular school to lodge an initial inquiry, and then several days later to follow up. The bureaucrat stonewalled

EE's researcher, claiming there was no problem. The researcher responded with the relevant laws and regulations on the rapidity with which the teacher needed to be replaced, and the government-instituted replacement pools from which a temporary teacher could be drawn. With either the knowledge that the researcher was right (and thus equivalently expert) or ignorance of the laws (and thus the bureaucrat was less expert than the researcher), the bureaucrat turned to questioning the researcher on his stake in the issue: Was he a student at this school? Did he have a child who is a student at this school? The researcher answered that he was a researcher with Equal Education, a group working to improve the quality of South African schools. The bureaucrat became defensive. She first falsely declared that a replacement had been placed, and then started berating the researcher about his supposed lack of stake. The researcher stayed calm throughout the entirety of these interactions. But, once the government official started lambasting the researcher that 'this had nothing to do with [him],' she was yelling loudly enough that she could be heard by the rest of the office through the researcher's phone receiver, which he was sensibly keeping some distance from his ear.

In a short phone conversation, the authority to speak on a topic shifted from having the proper technical expertise on the issue to having the proper personal identity and stake in the issue, despite all of the government's proclamations of education as an issue that affects us all. The Minister herself declared in her Foreword to the DBE's Strategic Plan for 2011-2014 that one of the three 'cornerstones of our strategy' to improve the state of education in South Africa would be 'to involve all key stakeholders, *including the citizens*, in making education a societal matter' [emphasis mine].²⁷⁵ Chapters one through three have covered various instances in which the DBE and WCED have been structured to include citizen and community participation, a trend that Carolyn Hamilton argues is true of the South African state writ large.²⁷⁶

In practice, however, there is a difference between structures and individual behaviours. Through turns to credibility based on identity, experience, and interest instead of policy/technocratic knowledge, citizens' individual attributes that so

²⁷⁵ Department of Basic Education, "Strategic Plan 2011-2014."

²⁷⁶ Hamilton, "Why Archive Matters."

frequently gets dismissed as anecdotal or irrelevant returns to the picture, as a part of a dual standard even harder to achieve than technocratic expertise alone. Claims of superior knowledge-based expertise are often the initial move made by government to dismiss popular challenges levelled against them, but since they are not necessarily successful, they are not the only strategies used. This is not to say that government officials and representatives always and consistently attempt to dismiss citizen participation. From the WCED's textbooks video mentioned in chapter three to the Eastern Cape Department of Education's invitation for EE to participate in implementation planning for the norms and standards covered in chapter six, sometimes citizen participation is indeed welcomed. EE's belief that having a firm, expert grasp on the research and the law is in many ways validated by the instances in which their participation has been welcomed by national and provincial bureaucrats and politicians—when they knew as much or more as anyone in the room, like the textbooks video, or the school closures.

The welcoming of EE's input on various issues is not contingent upon the political party it is dealing with. It has been accepted on some issues by the ANC and rejected by the DA, as well as the reverse. Instead, the conditions of EE's acceptance appear to rely on a combination of self-interested factors as assessed by the official(s) in question. Will this make me look good or bad? Will it bolster or decrease my own credibility or authority? EE's technocratic knowledge provides points and methods of contribution that the informal protestors are unable to utilise. Offering additional information and expertise can contribute to the work of government in ways that burning and hostage-taking cannot. Given that EE is often externally agnostic about receiving credit for its achievements, this strategy allows for win-wins for the movement and for the government. But when it gets to the point where that same knowledge proves a threat rather than a boon to the authority of officials—which, notably, happens increasingly when issues are in the public eye and officials are indeed incompetent—knowledge alone cannot acquire EE a seat at the table. Instead, other factors, mostly identity- and experience-based, are used to dismiss EE's participation when government representatives are on the defensive in terms of the politics of rightness. As Director of the Western Cape Metro East District, Melvyn Caroline, put it,

Melvyn Caroline: [Equal Education] keep us on our toes.
SB: In a good way or a bad way?

MC: Yes, they are irritating, but in a good way. I can't say that they're a bad influence. If they battle for a Rasta learner, then it's irritating, because it's a slap in the face for that principal and school, but at the end of the day, we must respect diverse learners in schools and we must build into the code of conduct so that the schools can manage those situations.

Some moves to limit citizen participation may be out of a genuine concern about the harms of uninformed participation, as seen in chapter three. The irate bureaucrat in this case, however, demonstrably could not fall back on any such claim regarding the need for a new teacher; her manoeuvre was explicitly attempting to reject the participation of an informed citizen.

References and invocations of personal identity do not always happen on purely exclusionary grounds, but even seemingly positive references to personal identity can still serve to exclude. Several prominent anti-apartheid student activists who went on to become labour leaders describe EE in terms that characterise it as in the tradition of their own student activism, and see hope for an activist youth revival in EE's work. Jay Naidoo, the first General Secretary of the union alliance COSATU, and later the minister responsible for the Reconstruction and Development Programme under Nelson Mandela, came to Equal Education's offices in 2011 to speak on organising strategies at one of EE's staff and volunteer seminars. The event was filmed by a member of Naidoo's entourage, as he was in the midst of making a movie regarding his current human rights work. While some of the speech was clearly useful advice, other sections illuminated the tensions of the intergenerational activist connections: parts of Naidoo's speech appeared to frame his own activist work as a mould-maker for student activism, leaving some staff members and facilitators wondering if in his heavy emphasis on his past student activism and its present relevance, he was taking a bit of credit for their hard work.

Naidoo is not alone in seeing reflections of himself in EE's work, nor does he appear to be alone in his attempts to establish a kind of kinship or shared heritage with them. Zwelinzima Vavi, former head of South Africa's union alliance, COSATU, kicked off EE's campaign to minimise student late-coming with an address to learners and teachers at Chris Hani High School in Khayelitsha. Vavi's support was made all the more interesting by the fact that COSATU includes the major teachers unions, and he has castigated them for their own poor behaviour

regarding tardiness and attendance.²⁷⁷ Even Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshega drew clear parallels between EE's work and the work of the ANC-affiliated student activists who dedicated themselves to ending apartheid during her address at EE's 2011 Summit on Quality Education.²⁷⁸

EE's members are conflicted on these renderings of history, regarding them as flattering and inspirational, strategically useful, and occasionally frustrating. Sussing out the strategic advantage created by such historiographic footwork is trickier than it may appear at first glance. These affinities and endorsements have a clear appeal for EE. There are obvious reasons why one might want to be understood as 'a chip off the old block'—and thus reference shared heritage, ideals, or goals, or capture the golden aura of legitimacy cast by nostalgia's glow. Many of those connecting their pasts to EE's present are legends in their own right, with wisdom to share, and desirable affirmation to give—Naidoo's speech was a demonstration of this. Still, this active shaping of the family tree does not come without drawbacks; rendering oneself as heir necessarily renders the other party as elder, or senior, concomitantly creating the potential for infantilisation and intergenerational conflict as well as for the hoped-for sage advice, political connections, and blessings of legitimacy. EE's intentionally youthful profile already lends itself to such manoeuvres by anyone much over the age of thirty (the rough age of EE's two oldest leaders). EE's youthfulness may be one of its key credibility issues, and is used not infrequently in order to dismiss legally and politically legitimate claims, as done by both Minister Motshega and Head of Department for the WCED, Penny Vinjevold, in the speeches discussed in chapter three.²⁷⁹

The earlier chapters on knowledge occasionally noted instances where it appeared that there was something more than knowledge at play when government officials, elected and appointed, dismissed the participation of interested citizens. Sometimes, activists were dismissed based on an alleged lack of knowledge—a strategy the DBE and WCED again took in these cases, in claiming that EE was wrong on the facts regarding school infrastructure and progress made, and about the presence of the teacher. But in these instances as well as many others, knowledge was not the sole grounds of dismissal. In looking at those more complex

²⁷⁷ South African Press Association, "Teachers Must Commit - Vavi," *News24*, 08 Mar 2012.

²⁷⁸ Motshega, "Address at the People's Summit".

²⁷⁹ Ibid.; Vinjevold, "How We Can Work with NGOs and NPOs."

instances, as well as the internal dynamics of Equal Education, it becomes possible to understand the relevance of personal identity to these negotiations. In prior discussions of knowledge, a supposed absence of knowledge often perceived as ‘expert,’ implicitly defined as ‘technocratic’ by the Department, in accordance with its own knowledge practices, was the source of disregard. In the interactions above, the supposedly irrelevant personal identity of the citizens—the very same experiences and characteristics used to dismiss them for being biased or overly particular or anecdotal in their claims—are woven back into the interactions as grounds for rejecting participation. While this does not always occur, the frequency with which it does indicates that government officials often do not consider technocratic knowledge alone a sufficient basis for participation. This (like the prior chapters’ arguments regarding technocratic expertise) is not an argument that these beliefs are merited, or beneficial to democracies, in general or in South Africa in particular, but rather a detailing and chronicling of their existence.

The reasons given for rejecting citizens’ participation on grounds of personal identity are complex. Traditional identity categories (e.g., race, gender, class, and age) form part of the background on which citizens and bureaucrats judge the credibility of their compatriots and each other, as do actual lived experiences (where someone grew up, schools she attended, jobs she held, historically demonstrated levels of competence). Were race, class, age, and experience irrelevant to the credibility of Equal Education, so too would be the allegations of the Department of Basic Education—perhaps their comments would be seen as strange or as irrelevant as if the DBE had included an aside about the leaders’ preferences of ice cream flavours. But the reality of South Africa, present and past, is that these categories are meaningful and controversial. Their invocation cannot be read as benign—they are manoeuvres of power and authority, which serve to dictate the real terms of South Africa’s democracy.

In an attempt to account for why this occurs, Xolela Mangcu writes that these recourses to race in public dialogues form part of a broader trend of the ANC shifting from understandings of race underpinned by the philosophy of black consciousness or of non-racialism to what he calls ‘racial nativism,’ a discourse that prioritises black skin and struggle participation as the only relevant qualifications

for the possession of ‘wisdom and morality.’²⁸⁰ Those who cannot claim those attributes are dismissed from the conversation, as are those who do claim those attributes but go against the broader discourse. The DBE’s press release is easily categorised as such a discourse. By Mangcu’s description, racial nativism is reductionist, revisionist, anti-democratic, and undermines many of the principles for which the ANC had previously fought with such dedication. Mangcu’s characterisation of the ANC as a nonracial movement is also a selective reading of history, like the similar claim made by EE in response to the Department’s press release. Still, without wading into the debate about when the ANC was or was not a movement of nonracialism, Mangcu’s argument about why he sees the ANC as racially nativist at present is worth addressing:

As with many other societies that have gone through such transitions from dictatorial rule, South Africa is going through various forms of denial—mainly denials of white complicity to one of the worst crimes against humanity. There is a certain smugness and lack of contrition in the white community that is oftentimes quite breathtaking. It is as if there was no social catastrophe that literally consigned half the population to indigenes. I am not even talking the language of apologies and reparations but an instinctive defensiveness and solidarity and ultimate denial.

This culture of denial and racial solidarity among whites provides the backdrop for understanding why black nativist leaders are able to entrench themselves further in power. The can always point to white people and say, ‘See, look how they deny what they did to us. Look at how they continue to abuse and disrespect black people.’ That kind of rhetoric can be quite seductive for a formerly oppressed community, especially when backed up by evidence of denial.²⁸¹

For black officials and government representatives who lived through apartheid, and in many cases actively fought against it, one can understand a certain frustration, even fury, at the perception being told what to do by some young white adults who have not endured the racial injustices of the past or the present. If Mangcu’s logic—initially applied to Thabo Mbeki—holds here, the attempt to exclude Equal Education’s participation because of the race of some of its leaders and staff members is, in part, an argument of knowledge. It is an argument that the ‘white adults’ could not possibly know what it is to live as a black person in South Africa.

²⁸⁰ Xolela Mangcu, *To the Brink: The State of Democracy in South Africa* (2008), xiv.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

This was the argument offered by Ntsikie Dlulani, a young black woman from Khayelitsha who was in her second year studying for an undergraduate degree in accounting at Cape Peninsula University of Technology when we spoke in 2015. Dlulani has been with EE since she joined as an Equaliser in 2008, and has held various leadership positions in the movement, including as the representative EE's student members on the board in the organisation's early days. Her comments are representative of the attitudes of many towards the press release:

Politicians, people who have power, they try to use race as a weapon to let down people. EE, we have young black people who have power, who are leading, and really changing things. Some people in EE have disagreed with me on this, not many. But they're not with EE anymore. Some people think that we are trying to expose them. But we are trying so hard to have a relationship, to work together, to be united to try to fix the education system. They tend to see social movements as a problem, especially if they are run by white people. The white people do come from different worlds—so I think maybe they were trying to say, 'how can this rich white guy lead, it must be mistruths.' But we are an NGO, we use analysis, and information.²⁸²

Claims like those in the press release are not purely claims of knowledge. They are also a claim of grievance, of suffering, and a lack of proper recompense on the part of those who wrought such heinous wrongs in the past and/or continue to benefit from them now. Such a claim is made all the more salient by the history Mangcu chronicles of black-led civic organisations falling prey to what he calls 'technocratic creep' over the course of the late 1980s and through the 1990s, one outcome of which was the recruitment of many black civics leaders into government, and the substitution of the voices of black activists with those of technocratic white professionals in many realms. The civics were then largely relegated to 'the softer issues of community participation.'²⁸³

Though such challenges may make intuitive sense for politicians in particular, given the politicians' perception of these arguments' resonance with their electorate, that lens is the wrong lens through which to view Equal Education on several levels. While EE has had a number of white researchers, and some white leaders, it is, at its core, a mostly black mass movement in which the white people who are a part of the movement are dedicated to the empowerment of the members. Equal Education is intentionally structured, however imperfectly, to

²⁸² Ntsikie Dlulani, 5 Jul, 2015, Phone conversation.

²⁸³ Xolela Mangcu, *The Democratic Moment: South Africa's Prospects under Jacob Zuma* (2009), 27.

democratise the technocratic knowledge possessed by its researchers, both black and white, and foster the development of young black leaders. As the organisation matures, more and more of its members have risen through the ranks to become leaders and staff, and many of the leaders and staff, white and black, who have been around since its founding have stepped back to let its grassroots members lead. To the extent that the DBE is expressing genuine concerns regarding the importance of black leadership, Equal Education appears to be a part of the solution, not the problem.

The picture painted by Mangcu of this nativist public discourse and public morality is a bleak one. For some, race does matter in much the same way Mangcu claims. Goodwill Yeleko, a young, black EE parent organiser in his mid-20s at the time, told me that it was very important in his community organising work to have black people front and centre as the face of Equal Education in order to establish trust with community members outside EE.²⁸⁴ However, there is reason to believe such arguments lack purchase with the students Equal Education works with and seeks to influence, many of whom cite EE's white activists as mentors and friends, as well as consider them equals in the movement. EE's membership and leadership on the whole believes strongly in a non-racial South African democracy, which does not exclude or dismiss perspectives based on skin colour alone (more detail on this can be found in chapter five). That the overwhelming consensus amongst those of any racial background who were paying attention to the racial scuffle between the DBE and Equal Education, both inside and outside EE, was to see it as a cynical ploy by the department and side with Equal Education demonstrates that these arguments are not necessarily persuasive to their audiences at present.

Another possible interpretation of the DBE's race-related comments is one offered by Karl von Holdt regarding the public health system in South Africa, discussed to some degree in the introduction. Von Holdt argues that one of the factors in South Africa's failure to become a functioning developmental state is that in its bureaucracy, technical knowledge is seen as white, and thus the source of deep ambivalence for black officials and elected representatives. This, he posits, is rooted in the colonial and later apartheid history of such types of knowledge, in which it

²⁸⁴ Goodwill Yeleko, 25 Mar, 2014.

was used to control and oppress black people.²⁸⁵ While provocative, the application of this specific attribute of the public health bureaucracy is a poor fit for South Africa's education system. There are, no doubt, similarities to be found; both were created as racially segregated systems under apartheid that provided comparably excellent services to whites, both needed to incorporate a large number of badly trained black professionals into an integrated system post-apartheid, both have affirmative action policies in place regarding whom they hire. But crucially, the way in which these systems seem to treat technocratic expertise is fundamentally different.

In 2011, Equal Education hosted former National Director of Higher Education Mary Metcalfe as a seminar speaker. Metcalfe, a middle-aged white woman, delivered a seminar about the education bureaucracy, and took von Holdt's thoughts about the health bureaucracy as a starting point. Von Holdt's point about technocratic knowledge being a source of ambivalence for black bureaucrats was a section with which Metcalfe took great umbrage, saying it did not align with her perception of any of the staff and officials she had collaborated with in the Department of Basic Education, or the officials she continued to work with after she left the government and took up work as an education professor at the University of Witwatersrand and technical assistance provider to districts. Metcalfe believed most of von Holdt's conclusions about the sources of bureaucratic incapability in public health also applied to the education sector. This one, however, she did not just see as inaccurate as regards the education sector—based on her tone of voice, she found the suggestion borderline insulting.

Metcalfe's conclusions based on her experience as one of the top officials within the education bureaucracy align with my perceptions of it as an outside observer. Unlike von Holdt, my project was not to understand the causes of bureaucratic inefficiency in the education system, and so I do lack some of the more 'inside' data that he used to draw his conclusions. However, at least in their public work and their interactions with interested citizens, the DBE and the WCED appear to highly value technocratic knowledge, including in interactions where few others are watching. The DBE's presentations to Parliament celebrate their own technocratic

²⁸⁵ Karl Von Holdt, "The South African Post-Apartheid Bureaucracy: Inner Workings, Contradictory Rationales and the Developmental State," in *Constructing a Developmental State in South Africa*, ed. Omano Edigheji (2010).

competence with frequency and fanfare—and their claims of expertise are frequently, though not always, justified. In instances where officials or representatives for the WCED and DBE have introduced elements of personal identity into the discussion, it has been in addition to, rather than instead of, claims of technocratic expertise. The DBE's press release that brought race into the equation, for example, also spent much of the release highlighting its own bureaucratic and technocratic expertise, and alleged that the work of Equal Education was based on 'half-truths.' Equal Education rightly challenged the claims about the norms and standards as incorrect, but other claims made in the release about the DBE's achievements were accurate. Though some of the DBE's data and claims were undeniably spun in the DBE's own favour, this is not, as von Holdt writes of the health system, a realm in which black professionals reject technocratic measures of competence as too white or colonial. Rather, the DBE makes claims about technocratic competence as sources of its own authority.

In some instances, as discussed at the end of chapter three, this is performance rather than substance. In many other instances, however, there is a real credibility to the claims of competence being made, and a pride taken in the demonstration of that competence. Throughout the national DBE and WCED, care has been taken to hire those who can do their jobs well. By and large, the DBE and WCED's claims to authority are couched in competence, not just identity, as Foucault and Weber predict they ought be. It is only when those claims to competence are revealed as shaky in comparison to similar claims to knowledge-based authority made by outside challengers that the grounds of credibility shift.

PRACTICES OF EXCLUSION: PRECLUDING KNOWLEDGEABLE CITIZENSHIP

This chapter opened with a discussion of James Scott's categorisation of governmental knowledge as falling under either *techne*, the technocratic, scientific, aggregate knowledge generally possessed by governments, and *mētis*, the experiential, local knowledge commonly possessed by citizens. Through the discussions of the norms and standards campaign, the subsequent Department of Basic Education press release, and the other examples in which DBE and WCED officials and bureaucrats have drawn personal identity and experience into negotiations over knowledge, the chapter has made two main points.

First, negotiations over knowledge are not solely negotiations over knowledge. Governmental officials understand these contestations through historical and social frames, which render salient questions of personal identity. Personal identity re-enters the equation partially as a stand-in for personal experience and the experiential knowledge derived therefrom, but is not a one-for-one analogue. Identity categories may serve as reasonable estimations of the experiences someone has had in life, but that estimation is approximate indeed. Assuming a person's experiential knowledge based on his or her identities (self-identified or perceived) has the potential to miss the mark in both directions: either assuming either too much or too little knowledge on the part of someone on as a result of that person's perceived identity. A white EE staff member from an affluent background likely possesses substantially more knowledge of Khayelitsha's schools, including at the level of *mētis*, than would a black person of the same class and age who grew up in an affluent household, attended South Africa's private or high-performing public schools, and who does not work in an education-related occupation.

Moreover, the invocation of personal identity, whether related to race, age, struggle credential, or some other aspect, is not exclusively a claim about what knowledge someone brings to bear on a given issue. Importantly, it also speaks to relationships of power, drawing on historical wrongs, tradition, presumptions of valour, and other unequal social conditions. It is an invocation of credibility, or of the lack thereof. As argued above, bringing an element of personal identity into a discussion is not an innocuous move; intended or not, it brings with it a corresponding social weight.

Second, the inclusion of these identity characteristics in assessment of citizen credibility substantially raises the bar that must be met by those who consider themselves citizen experts or expert citizens, as opposed to just citizens or just experts. Claiming credibility on the grounds of technocratic knowledge and on the grounds of being an interested citizen leaves one open to criticism on either claim, rather than just one, as the above set of interactions have shown. The outcome of the invocation of personal identity in questions of knowledge and expertise is not the substitution of identity for knowledge, but rather the addition of it to the already existing standards for knowledge. When technocratic expertise proves to be a draw between government officials and activists, each seeks recourse in other realms. For activists, this is often through using the strategies of rightness and

righteousness discussed in chapter two—showing broad support (e.g., the 20,000 person march), providing compelling spectacles (e.g., the photos of the broken windows, or the sleepout in front of Parliament), or demonstrating that services government fails to provide are not, in fact, that difficult to provide (e.g., the Bookery). Government, for its part, renders citizens' legitimacy to contribute on substantive issues as an ever-shifting target, determined variously by technocratic expertise, identity, and experience, which are rarely independently sufficient. Hence, countering expertise with expertise often produces extended negotiations, which does provide activists with more strategic opportunities (for instance, Equal Education followed its technocratic arguments about libraries with public spectacles enforcing the importance of books, and then demonstrated that building libraries in schools was not that difficult by creating them itself). Ultimately, the technocratic manoeuvring by Equal Education strengthens its abilities to address government by allowing citizens to demonstrate their own expertise to the broader public as well as the government, and by adding another tactic to EE's already expansive arsenal of activist strategies.

When this participation improves rather than detracts from government officials' claims to authority and credibility, they often accept these interventions. If this active participation acts as a concerning challenge, on the other hand, it is rejected by some officials in an attempt to reassert control. Unfortunately for the government officials seeking a more passive or docile citizenry, attempts to discredit the expertise of civil society challengers can serve to amplify rather than quiet their voices. Whatever benefits these negotiations might be to an organisation like Equal Education, it also seems probable that they decrease the ability of citizens writ large to substantively participate on the issues that affect them. If, in order to participate, an individual must be a) technically knowledgeable about the issue, b) have personal experience of the issue, and c) have a personal identity that, in the subjective standards of the government official, renders their knowledge and experience salient, very few individuals are ever 'credible' in the eyes of the officials. To be sure, not every official holds these views. Several of my government interviewees said that they welcomed participation from groups like Equal Education, as allies on the same side of a monumental battle for South Africa's future, like Director Melvyn Caroline above, and Directors Sanette Nowers and

Glen van Harte in chapter three.²⁸⁶ But judging by the actions of other officials, these interviewees' views were not always shared, importantly not by those at the top of the national Department of Basic Education.

Beyond revealing ways in which government representatives mobilise knowledge practices to their strategic advantage, the above interactions also demonstrate that knowledge is not everything. When factors like age and experience are combined with an emphasis on efficiency and professionalism, officials may find it difficult to concede issues to a group of youths, however well-versed in the issues. While having former activists in government may make them sympathetic in some ways, it also opens the door for those former activists to dismiss EE's members as the (in their minds) currently unready heirs to their legacy, or, conversely, to find it difficult being on the other side of the activist/government divide. References to race, age, experience, and identity obstruct citizen participation, sometimes through shading challenges on expertise, and sometimes functioning as fallbacks when officials find themselves caught out on the technocratic knowledge.

Returning, then, to Foucault's arguments about governmentality provided in chapter one, some significant elaborations must be made. First, one must acknowledge the presence and effects of politics in these spaces. While the politicians and bureaucrats do use expert knowledge and the science of the state much like Foucault and Scott suggest they would, neither of their theories take into account what occurs when such systems of knowledge are forced to reckon with popular participation. For Foucault, this is because the subject/object of state power is so circumscribed as to leave only space for the most minimal manoeuvring and modification by the citizen, leaving the citizen with little choice but a highly inward, self-focused approach to navigating power, the quietism described in the introduction to this thesis.²⁸⁷ For Scott, there is next to no discussion of politics, and an implied assumption that what citizens can add to bureaucratic planning exists solely at the level of local, experiential knowledge, or *mētis*. Assuming or concluding that citizens are incapable of participating on the grounds of technocratic knowledge allows for an elision of that concern; if citizen participation

²⁸⁶ Nowers, "Interview with Sanette Nowers, Director of Metro Central District."; van Harte, "Interview with Glen Van Harte, Director of Metro South District."; Caroline, "Interview with Melvyn Caroline, Director of Metro East District."

²⁸⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 3; *Ethics*.

is excluded from technocratic spaces, and technocratic spaces are realms of depoliticisation, then the implication of citizen participation in those spaces is necessarily moot. However, as chapters two and three have shown, though the space for subjectivity is indeed circumscribed by technocracy, and in much the way Foucault describes, citizens can and do use expert, technocratic knowledge to participate in these spaces (and in an important addition to the existing literature on biomedical activism, they can do so even when government policies are under serious social and political contestation and cannot be reduced to scientific truths). With that established, the question then becomes how to think about the intersection of governmentality with existing real-world democratic politics.

I argue that Equal Education's work at least reveals, and perhaps itself produces, a substantial, new modification to the systems of governmentality described in chapter one. Where those systems required the reduction, flattening, and erasure of difference of the objects of the state (thus allowing people and resources managed by state power to be easily calculated, algorithmically manipulated, and steered towards some beneficial end), the officials and bureaucrats discussed in this chapter reveal themselves to be partially continuing that trend, and partially up to something different. The use of, claims to, and performance of technocratic expertise remains in the frame in these interactions, and continues to delineate the space for and set the terms of engagement. But when the politicians and bureaucrats encounter substantive challenges on those grounds of expertise, they make expressly political and self-interested moves which explicitly return the individual, personal variables that the technocratic systems of governmentality described above do their best to eliminate. Systems of governmentality, even without this manoeuvre, of course, can never completely eliminate these individual, personal elements. But the clear and deliberate recourse to those attributes is something unpredicted by the theorists on the subject, and which radically changes the grounds of citizen engagement, producing both the extended negotiations on grounds of both technocratic expertise and personal identity described above, as well as a different set of expectations for substantive citizenship in democratic society. It is also worth highlighting here that liberal democratic theory, with its notion that modern society is simply too complex for citizens to engage with government at the level of expert knowledge also fails to account for these interactions, behaviours, and effects, both through incorrectly presuming an impossibility of citizen expertise, and also by assuming a default 'neutral' citizen

whose democratic participation is theorised to be independent of his or her particular attributes. Equal Education's work, in short, has not just forged new understandings of citizenship; it also produces and exposes increasingly complex and unforeseen systems of identity-salient governmentality, where technocracy is, to borrow a phrase, no longer the only game in town.

As might be expected given the justifications and explanations above, politicians and bureaucrats are not the only people whose understandings of knowledge are shaped by personal identity; Equal Education's internal wrangling with the same is the subject of chapter five.

CHAPTER FIVE

KNOWLEDGE, IDENTITY, AND TRUST IN EQUAL EDUCATION'S INTERNAL DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES

EQUAL EDUCATION'S INTERNAL CURRENCY: TRUST

Until this point, the thesis has focused on the currencies that Equal Education has traded to achieve external credibility: knowledge, both expert and local, and personal identity and experience. This chapter shifts focus to the internal currency that makes EE's external work possible: trust. Equal Education's external work requires information to circulate effectively within the organisation between the membership and the staff researchers, and, as the organisation has transformed from an entity closer to an NGO into a mass movement, the underpinnings that allow that circulation have changed over time.

Equal Education's leaders, staff, and members come from a diversity of backgrounds on most fronts imaginable, of which their racial diversity is one salient factor amongst many when ascertaining the relevance of their activists' identities to their work. As a large, multiracial, member-driven mass movement, Equal Education's internal practices are of theoretical relevance to this thesis' questions about knowledge and democratic citizenship in several ways. First, Equal Education's model of expert citizenship as the foundation of a mass movement requires the membership to develop that expertise in some manner. As Equal Education's members are, in general, precisely those failed by the education system, and thus institutionally excluded from access to expert knowledge, the movement relies on bringing in people who frequently do not have the same background as many of its activists to act as researchers and to produce and circulate knowledge within the organisation. Equal Education's unorthodox strategy, then, is largely reliant upon its ability to work across differences of race, class, and education that continue to have great salience in South Africa writ large. The organisation's general successes in its work and relevance in the public eye are testimony to its ability to navigate this difficult terrain. Understanding how this occurs is critical to understanding how EE's technocratic prowess fits into the broader landscape of knowledge and identity in South Africa.

Second, as discussed throughout this thesis, race remains an explosive element in South African society. It cannot be assumed either that a pro-poor activist group comprised mostly of black people has space for comparatively affluent whites, or that a philosophy of multi-racialism or non-racialism translates into practice without difficulty. Equal Education is a group composed of people from many different backgrounds, whose work is affected in manifold ways by their identities. Conversely, it also ought not be assumed that breakdowns will occur. Many other groups share Equal Education's position, with a diverse group of people contributing to a political project structured to benefit a particular set of marginalised people. The lessons offered from its experience are likely of analytical relevance to other, similarly situated groups or movements. Finally, questions about Equal Education's interpersonal identity dynamics are also ultimately questions about whether, in its attempts to empower some of South Africa's most marginalised citizens, Equal Education ultimately reproduces amongst its own ranks the unequal knowledge dynamics it seeks to eradicate.

For the reasons articulated above, questions about Equal Education's internal practices, whether about knowledge circulation or about decision-making practices, cannot be answered without scrutinising the ways in which its activists collaborate across differences. As in the previous chapter, race, and sometimes class, pose the most difficult challenges to this collaboration, and prove the most contentious within Equal Education. But inside the organisation, much of what might initially appear to be the prominent forms of contentious racial politics in South Africa described in the previous chapter instead reveals itself to be a set of challenges about trust, respect, and power that often have little to do with race. Unlike von Holdt's concerns about knowledge and race outlined in the previous chapter, when race is invoked inside EE, it is not done in opposition to technocratic knowledge as a 'white' knowledge. Nor is race invoked in the exclusionary, black nativist manner described by Xolela Mangcu, or in the racialised nationalist manner outlined by Ivor Chipkin below. Rather, since Equal Education's members generally subscribe to philosophies of nonracialism and welcome non-black comrades in the movement, invocations of race inside Equal Education mostly act as challenges to the normative subjectivity of whiteness (that is, experiences generally only experienced by whites, but assumed by whites to be universal, and their lack of comprehension of existences outside the realm of their own experiences), and to anti-democratic decision-making processes inside the organisation. Though this

may to some degree be the result of self-selection (poor, black members actively choosing to opt into an organisation in which there are some prominent white leaders), I argue that this is not the sole reason for Equal Education's ability to work across differences. Equal Education's members and leaders have actively worked to establish trust with each other, through a number of means.

As in Equal Education's external work, knowledge and personal identity are both factors that affect power and credibility within the organisation. Unlike the external realm, where government officials have incentives to shut down criticism and eliminate threats and challenges, people within Equal Education, whether staff, members, leaders, or some combination thereof, are all ostensibly on the same side, share the same mission and goals, and try to be broadly democratic in the functioning of the movement. None of this, however, means the divides disappear, or that pre-existing privilege ceases to complicate relationships between its activists. Instead, additional trust-generating behaviours are necessary. In Equal Education's early days, these took the form of mentorship and friendship, and as the movement has grown large, it has required equitable self-sacrifice by the organisation's founders, leaders, and most privileged and educated staff members. At points, these behaviours have faltered—most clearly in the group's transitional years after it held its first democratic elections for the leadership, but while that first group of democratic leaders was still finding its footing. Their missteps, and reflections upon them, are some of the clearest demonstrations of how trust is a crucial component for Equal Education's functioning. The relationship between trust and knowledge in Equal Education's work is not unidirectional. Trust is a necessary component for the knowledge circulation discussed above, but knowledge circulation is also one of the constituent parts of trust building. When the organisation takes decisions against the membership's will, particularly without informing the membership of relevant expert information, trust within Equal Education suffers—creating a loop in which future knowledge circulation also suffers.

The discussion of these arguments begins with a brief reminder of Equal Education's demographics and moves on to summarise the academic literature on racial and other identity divisions in past and present diverse social movements in South Africa and abroad. It continues on to the theories of trust and credibility-building across difference advanced by Danielle Allen and Francesca Polletta, and

uses those as a starting point to analyse the racial undercurrents in EE's knowledge transfer processes and decision-making. In addition to differing from other chapters in its internal rather than external focus, this chapter differs by using two anomalous events as the source of its analysis, rather than representative events. On these subjects, the events that most demonstrate what counts as 'situation normal' within the organisation are those that throw normal into relief, and shed light on the ordinary through the existence of the extraordinary. One of these examines EE activists' reactions to some of the group's leaders ending an activist camp early due to inclement weather. The event per se had nothing to do with race, but it constituted an occasion when racial politics within the organisation were explicitly evoked. The other vignette discusses Equal Education's decision-making processes in the context of whether to give the Minister of Education an extension on the final draft of the Norms and Standards on School Infrastructure. In its illumination of Equal Education's internal democratic practices, this event is also demonstrative of the different types of knowledge held throughout the organisation, and further blurs the categories of knowledge offered by James Scott, discussed in previous chapters. The chapter concludes by analysing the elements within EE that enable its activists to trust across difference, and thus minimise, but not eliminate, divides of knowledge, identity, and experience in the organisation.

Given the freightedness of race and identity, as well as the uncommonness of the enquiry, I preface the rest of the discussion by noting that Equal Education's experiences on issues of personal identity are of theoretical relevance in large part because the salience of race is *not* extraordinary in comparison to other similarly situated groups in South Africa. As its co-founder Doron Isaacs pointed out in an interview,

It would be totally naïve to expect that in South Africa, where race has been the definition of life, and remains significantly so, that contention around that tension would not surface at an organisation as diverse, and as large, and as politicised as EE. It shouldn't surprise us in the least, or upset us. And it doesn't. It's something to be worked through.²⁸⁸

The fact that this research is asking these particular questions about Equal Education and its work should not be taken as an indication that its activists are more likely than others to see events, difficult and otherwise, through the frame of race, that its activists are any more sensitive or insensitive than others when it

²⁸⁸ Isaacs, "Interview with Doron Isaacs, Deputy General Secretary of Equal Education."

comes to race-related subjects, or that the organisation suffers from racial divisions more than any other multi-racial movement in South Africa. If anything, I argue that Equal Education's activists often, if not always, handle issues of race in a less contentious manner than society writ large, at least when it comes to power relations within the group. That these topics generally have not been robustly interrogated in research on other activist groups or social movements in South Africa indicates the underdeveloped state of the field and the difficulty of researching these questions, not anything particularly problematic within Equal Education's ranks.

The internal dynamics within Equal Education are uncommon perhaps only in the number of white and coloured individuals making the trek to Khayelitsha on a daily basis to work in a political movement alongside black colleagues, in service of black youth. As mentioned in previous chapters, Equal Education, over the course of my fieldwork, had anywhere from several to a dozen full-time employees and volunteers out of up to seventy people total who would both identify as and be assumed by others to be white. Out of this group, at most five were part of the management team of roughly fifteen people at any given time. Most white staff members and volunteers grew up in 'middle class' families that, to EE's membership, would be understood as rich. All of these white employees also have at least an undergraduate education, and some have graduate degrees. The white people who are paid staff occupy some of the most highly-'skilled' positions in the organisation, and as a result are in the top quartile of EE's salary brackets. EE's top salaries are lower than their professionalized activist peer organisations, and much lower than other NGOs and the academic and private sectors—for instance, between one fifth and one sixth of the top salaries in the country's top non-profit legal advocacy groups.²⁸⁹ Those in the top quartile of the salary bracket earn enough to live with housemates in one of the less expensive neighbourhoods in Cape Town's city centre, and own/lease a used or inexpensive car. Compared to their peers from similar backgrounds and with similar levels of education, EE's salaries afford employees in its top quartile of pay an austere lifestyle. It goes without saying that this still renders these employees wealthy in the world in which EE operates.

²⁸⁹ This salary comparison was provided by Doron Isaacs upon a review of an earlier draft in August 2015.

EE can have difficulty retaining highly-educated individuals, regardless of race, for a long period of time. As Yoliswa Dwane, Head of Policy, Communications, and Research, as well as the elected Chairperson of EE explained,

This is not a research organisation full stop. The way we operate is quite different, and not similar to the academic field's research, or their reasons for it. Who are the people you want to employ? Generally middle class young people, and Khayelitsha is out of their comfort zones. There's also a different organisational culture. People have their own imaginations of what this organisation or what this research job would look like. You have to understand members, work with members. We need people who connect to the cause, but beyond that when people are at a distance, they think they will fit in, but when they enter, their views of the real politics of it don't work. One major mistake is seeing education as a simple public good. We want to empower people, want them to take part, hear from learners what do they think.²⁹⁰

Dwane's comment about 'their views of the real politics' of EE is a comment on EE's status as a membership-based activist organisation, rather than a simple think tank or research unit. Some researchers enter expecting the organisation to give them more power and influence, when in reality it is deliberately structured so that the staff is there to advance the interests of the membership. EE additionally has particular difficulty attracting and retaining well-educated black employees from less affluent backgrounds. These individuals do not have familial financial security nets to rely upon if needed, and may also be in the position of needing to support members of their close or extended family. As EE's General Secretary, Brad Brockman, explained in an interview,

I want to say something about PCR specifically. It really pains us, and Yoli [Chairperson and Head of Policy, Communications, and Research Department], that we've found it very hard to attract black university graduates. We can't pay people competitive wages. We as an organisation need these skills, but we're also very conscious of disparities in salaries. If we increase salaries at the top band, this increases the disparities. Last year, we made sure we increased the bottom salaries.²⁹¹

He added that the top salaries that same year were only provided a cost of living increase, whereas salaries in their bottom bracket, such as those of the Community Leaders, were increased by a substantial percentage. The ratio of the top salary to the bottom salary is roughly 5:1, a fact its leadership takes pride in and strives to maintain.

²⁹⁰ Dwane, "Interview with Yoliswa Dwane, Head of Policy, Communications, and Research, Equal Education."

²⁹¹ Brockman, "Interview with Brad Brockman, General Secretary of Equal Education."

EE has had at least as many, and usually more black employees earning these top salaries and living in similar material conditions. Most of these employees also came from more affluent upbringings than the membership, possess equivalent levels of education to their white colleagues, and also choose to live in 'town'. There are a couple of notable exceptions to this—black employees who grew up in poor and working class townships in Cape Town and elsewhere, succeeded in getting a good education, and have decided to continue living in the townships. These employees compose the small minority of EE's management team that continues to live in Khayelitsha, where the organisation is based. The rest of EE's staff (between 30 and 50 people, depending on when one is counting, and whether part-time staff and volunteer facilitators are included) are black and live in Khayelitsha or one of the nearby townships.

That the racial dynamics are fraught in such a scenario, in which the white colleagues are universally well-educated and thus better paid, as well as often higher-ranking, should be unsurprising. Yet despite both the prevalence and the importance of these dynamics of race, class, and education in post-apartheid social movements, there has been a paucity of research on this in the literature on contemporary social movements in South Africa. Equal Education is not the first nor is it the only post-apartheid multiracial social movement. Its incubating organisation, the Treatment Action Campaign, is just one prominent example out of an array of small to large post-apartheid activist organisations in which individuals from many different background—but with a common agenda—have worked alongside each other to pursue a common set of goals. The title of Ashwin Desai's *We Are the Poors* arises from a rallying cry amongst Chatsworth housing activists who renounced their ethnic or racial identities in favour of a point about their common class position and solidarity ('We are not Indian, we are the poors.' 'We are not African, we are the poors.').²⁹² Common ideology and common goals, however, do not necessarily translate into cooperation across gulfs of individual difference, as many accounts of social movements (the US civil rights movement in the 1960s, the US women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the anti-globalization protests in the US and Canada in the early 2000s, and the anti-apartheid student movements and union movements) and community organizing

²⁹² Ashwin Desai, *We Are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (2002), 44.

groups have shown.²⁹³ Conversely, these gulfs of individual differences do not necessarily become movement-consuming chasms, as the success of groups like TAC has shown.²⁹⁴

The wealth of empirical literature on social movements in South Africa generally deals with race in one of three ways. First, some sources choose not to mention race at all, aside perhaps from remarking upon the races of the participants and organisers (implying, one might note, that the writer presumes this information to be important for some unspecified reason). Several overviews of social movements take this strategy.²⁹⁵ Movement-specific literature that follows this route includes pieces on the Treatment Action Campaign and the Anti-Privatisation Forum.²⁹⁶

Second, some sources note the subject at a glance and move on. Usually, this is done by a short mention—one or two lines, a page at most—of the obstacles posed by race internally or externally for the movements in question. Greenberg's treatment of the Landless People's Movement (LPM) is emblematic of this group. He mentions landlessness as an effect of historical racial oppression as one of the reasons for the movement's existence, notes its continuing presence in LPM's internal politics, and makes a call for racial divisions to be overcome while still eliding any mention of how its activists are either presently handling race or might successfully handle it in the future. His discussion of the issue spans a paragraph:

Systematic discussion about the relationship between race and landlessness has been limited to sporadic political education workshops in parts of the country, and has occasionally been placed on the agenda at national and some provincial council meetings. While it appears that there is value to creating fora where issues of race (amongst other topics) can be discussed at a theoretical level, there is a tendency for such discussions to become abstracted from practical activities. The relationship between racial oppression and land dispossession, and the consequent ways that the

²⁹³ Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (2001); Francesca Polletta, *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (2002); Graeber, *Direct Action*.

²⁹⁴ Robins, "From 'Rights' to 'Ritual'."; Friedman and Mottiar, "A Rewarding Engagement?."

²⁹⁵ Tom Lodge, *Politics in South Africa: From Mandela to Mbeki* (2003); Adam Habib, "State-Civil Society Relations in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (2005); Richard Ballard et al., "Globalization, Marginalization and Contemporary Social Movements in South Africa," *African Affairs* 104, no. 417 (2005); Adam Habib and Rupert Taylor, "South Africa: Anti-Apartheid NGOs in Transition," *Voluntas: international journal of voluntary and nonprofit organizations* 10, no. 1 (1999); Patrick Heller, "Democratic Deepening in India and South Africa," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 44, no. 1 (2009).

²⁹⁶ Kristin Endresen and Astrid Von Kotze, "Living While Being Alive: Education and Learning in the Treatment Action Campaign," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 24, no. 5 (2005); Sakhela Buhlungu, "Upstarts or Bearers of Tradition? The Anti-Privatisation Forum of Gauteng," in *Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Richard Ballard, Adam Habib, and Imraan Valodia (2006).

ongoing struggle against racial oppression and its legacy are carried out in the particular struggle for access to and redistribution of land, is dynamic and can only be determined through praxis.²⁹⁷

Other examples in this category include Britton's and Hassim's analyses of funding in women's organisations, Croucher's nearly non-existent coverage of race in her overview of South Africa's gay rights movement, an arena historically and presently ridden with race and class politics, and Mbali's brief acknowledgment of the existence of race and class issues within the Treatment Action Campaign.²⁹⁸

Miraftab and Willis take a slightly different approach, explaining that the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC) has somehow found ways to work across deep social and racial divisions in the townships that it serves.²⁹⁹ The comment implies a possibility or a probability that there was a potential for that bridging to have failed. Yet, the authors do not go on to explain how AEC avoided failure, save a passing reference, as in Desai above, to shared struggles and causes.

In rare cases, the 'diversity' of the movement is cited as a strategic or tactical advantage, as in Oldfield and Stokke's work on the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign. According to Oldfield and Stokke, the racial diversity in the movement, as highlighted in Miraftab and Willis, also provides a diversity of methods of action throughout the network, in which some neighbourhoods/groups try to engage with government structures to achieve their ends, while others draw on more overt methods of resistance against government. They write: 'racial difference' is one of many differences that is 'not an absolute obstacle to the development of political strategy and practice at a Campaign scale. Instead it has provided at times an impetus for innovation where organisations learn from each other and generate more effective local and citywide strategies and networks.'³⁰⁰ Like in Greenberg, as

²⁹⁷ Stephen Greenberg, "The Landless People's Movement and the Failure of Post-Apartheid Land Reform," in *Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Richard Ballard, Adam Habib, and Imraan Valodia (2006), 143-44.

²⁹⁸ Sheila Croucher, "South Africa's Democratisation and the Politics of Gay Liberation," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002); Hannah Britton, "Organising against Gender Violence in South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32, no. 1 (2006); Shireen Hassim, "Voices, Hierarchies and Spaces: Reconfiguring the Women's Movement in Democratic South Africa," *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* 32, no. 2 (2005); Mbali, "The Treatment Action Campaign."

²⁹⁹ Miraftab and Willis, "Insurgency and Spaces of Active Citizenship."

³⁰⁰ Sophie Oldfield and Kristian Stokke, "Building Unity in Diversity: Social Movement Activism in the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign," in *Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Richard Ballard, Adam Habib, and Imraan Valodia (2006), 120-21.

well as Miraftab and Willis above, the substance of this innovation and how and why this collaboration occurred goes undefined and unexplored.

Third and finally, a minority of sources do attempt to address race in a more substantial manner. This usually takes the form a) of more explicit and detailed mention of the kinds of racial problems that exist within the organisation/movement under discussion, and/or its partners, but not an explanation of how the organisation has resolved or attempted to resolve tensions, as in De la Rey's call for a more intersectional women's rights movement or Mindry's overview of women's rights organisations; b) a recognition that race plays a role in the work of the movement(s) in question, but is largely subsumed by other more salient factors like class, as in Desai and Pithouse's work on housing; or c) arguing that, despite expectations, race has not played much of a role in a given organisation, as in Friedman and Mottiar's work on the Treatment Action Campaign.³⁰¹ To the extent that these pieces cover the issue, they do not attempt detailed analysis of why race-based conflicts do or do not exist. While these are the most substantive accounts to be found, they still mostly provide surface level accounts and analysis of the role played by race in the movements they discuss. Friedman and Mottiar's work is the most developed, though it offers interview material only from TAC's leaders to substantiate their conclusion that at the time they were writing, race was not a contentious matter within the Treatment Action Campaign.

Thus, the existing research contains an unexpected gap. Race is a prominent lens through which to view the world for South African citizens, an omnipresent aspect of political discussion, and considered to be an important structuring element of both the goals and functioning of social movements and NGOs, yet inquiry into precisely what this looks like on the ground, why it looks as it does, and how it functions in social movements is minimal at best. Though the above-cited works are only a selection of the work done on social movements, they are a representative sample of my more comprehensive readings, covering both

³⁰¹ Cheryl De la Rey, "South African Feminism, Race and Racism," *Agenda* 13, no. 32 (1997); *ibid.*; Friedman and Mottiar, "A Rewarding Engagement?"; "A Moral to the Tale."; Ashwin Desai and Richard Pithouse, ""What Stank in the Past Is the Present's Perfume": Dispossession, Resistance, and Repression in Mandela Park," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, no. 4 (2004); Deborah Mindry, "Nongovernmental Organizations," "Grassroots," and the Politics of Virtue," *Signs* (2001).

theoretical approaches used and social movements researched.³⁰² The second approach, a perfunctory mention of race, is the most common but all of the above leave a great deal unsaid about how and why this important element of social and political interactions affects social justice work in the post-apartheid era. Any one of these approaches would be inadequate in explaining the challenges faced by Equal Education with regards to developing relationships and facilitating internal knowledge transfer, as well as the formal and informal solutions they have devised in order to establish trust and build credibility across substantial individual differences. The below thus draws upon work about historical multiracial movements in South Africa as well as empirical work and theory from the United States, another society with a long, intertwined history of activist citizenship and racial oppression.

The historical work on movements in South Africa covers the subject of race with more rigour than the research on contemporary movements. Work exists on race relations and tensions inside anti-apartheid organisations, from SASO's split from NUSAS to the UDF to the ANC, though this work covers the subject in a fundamentally different context from the 'Rainbow Nation'.³⁰³ The most detailed and most applicable of this work is the research on the participation of white trade unionists working in black trade unions from the early 1970s through the 1980s.

Buhlungu's 'Rebels without a Cause of their Own', one of the most analytical pieces on this subject, argues that while other authors on the subject assume that white people within black trade unions were able to transcend racial divisions, this was generally not the case for a number of reasons. First, as white people came almost entirely from middle-class backgrounds and had more formal education than others in black trade unions, they were given positions of power and leadership,

³⁰² Other works examined include Richard Ballard, Adam Habib, and Imraan Valodia, *Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (2006); Adam Habib, *South Africa's Suspended Revolution: Hopes and Prospects* (2013); Peris Jones and Kristian Stokke, *Democratising Development: The Politics of Socio-Economic Rights in South Africa: [Proceedings]*, vol. 64 (2005); Beinart and Dawson, *Popular Politics and Resistance Movements in South Africa*.
³⁰³ Saleem Badat, *Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid: From SASO to SANSCO, 1968-1990* (1999); Gail M Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology*, vol. 19 (1979); Daniel R Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968-1977* (2010); Anthony W. Marx, "Contested Citizenship: The Dynamics of Racial Identity and Social Movements," *International Review of Social History* 40, no. S3 (1995); Anthony W Marx, "Race, Nation, and Class Based Ideologies of Recent Opposition in South Africa," *Comparative Politics* (1991); Martin Plaut, "Debates in a Shark Tank—the Politics of South Africa's Non-Racial Trade Unions," *African Affairs* (1992).

seen as ‘intellectuals’, and stood at a social distance from their black counterparts in the union leadership. Their inability to speak the languages of the workers also cut in two ways, ensuring that they maintained a monopoly on the more theoretical and strategic side of black unions’ work, but isolating them from the workers and the organising side of union leadership. This ultimately paved the way for a largely separate organic development of black intellectuals in the unions, who eventually took the place of the white intellectuals. Buhlungu’s account of the 1970s and 1980s trade unionists shares some parallels with the dynamics of Equal Education, discussed below.³⁰⁴

Other substantial accounts of inter-organisational personal identity politics have been written about groups in the United States, as a result of that country’s oppressive racial history and on-going concerns regarding structural racism and other forms of discrimination. Two oft-cited ethnographies of social movements are of particular interest in this regard—David Graeber’s *Direct Action*, and Mark Warren’s *Dry Bones Rattling*.³⁰⁵ The first is an account of the organizing work leading up to the 20,000-person anti-globalization protests at the 3rd Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001. Graeber details the internal strife along race, class, and gender lines in the New York City Direct Action Network, one of the key organising groups in the New York City area. The groups were able to resolve some identity-based concerns through their consensus-based decision-making processes in which the identity-based concerns were openly discussed amongst group members. However, other divides and conflicts were irresolvable thanks to the unwillingness or inability of activists with more racial, class, and gender privilege to understand and take action on these concerns. A number of activists who were in basic ideological agreement with the Quebec City protests dropped out entirely, or formed separate factions in which they felt that they were not being discriminated against and in which they believed their identity concerns were adequately addressed.³⁰⁶

Warren’s ethnography of the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation in the 1990s, a large, church-based community organising group operating in many Texas cities,

³⁰⁴ Sakhela Buhlungu, "Rebels without a Cause of Their Own? The Contradictory Location of White Officials in Black Unions in South Africa, 1973–94," *Current Sociology* 54, no. 3 (2006).

³⁰⁵ Graeber, *Direct Action*; Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*.

³⁰⁶ Graeber, *Direct Action*.

also addresses racial tensions within the network, which uses churches as its bases for organising. Some racial divides were prompted by perceptions of differing interests between the Latino groups that formed the organisation's core and the black groups that the organisation also wished to include. Other conflicts appeared to be rooted in the differing religious traditions of the Latino and black groups discussed. Despite devoting a good deal more ink to racial divisions within the organisation than the contemporary South African accounts, Warren's final suggestion of why the group was able to overcome these differences exists at a relatively surface level: 'common religious values' as an 'initial basis of trust for multiracial cooperation.'³⁰⁷ This conclusion does not move much beyond the South African literature's claims of 'common cause', if at all. Moreover, Warren notes that relationship building across races was still 'fairly superficial' because of the avoidance of 'open discussion of racism both internally and externally.'³⁰⁸

Despite containing franker and more detailed discussions regarding race and other identity divides than the accounts of present-day South African social movements, both Graeber and Warren's accounts draw short of attempting detailed explanations of how cooperation manages to arise and succeed in environments in which participants see themselves as saliently and unchangeably different from others in the movement along one or more identity-based axes. Yet, in both instances, at least some participants managed to overcome these differences that they themselves judged as important, and to cooperate, if only to some degree, with other participants they were initially disinclined to collaborate with. What, then, makes possible those instances of collaboration? And why do they fail in other instances?

The theoretical work of two other authors looking at cases in America, Francesca Polletta and Danielle Allen, and a South African theorist, Ivor Chipkin, is partially illustrative, and will guide the rest of the discussion of race, identity, and other differences inside Equal Education. Though Polletta's work is largely historical, several of her theoretical points regarding social relationships and participatory democracy within the organisations can bring useful analytical tools to bear on the case of Equal Education. Writing generally of the cases she studies (the Student

³⁰⁷ Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 106.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Students for a Democratic Society, and the US women's rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the Industrial Areas Foundation and Direct Action Network in the 1990s), she argues that social relationships are foundational to participatory democratic systems used to govern organisational decision-making. According to Polletta's research, social relationships 'have provided normative frameworks for deliberation' and elements of the social relationships (whether mentor, friend, etc.) carry through to the manner in which participants in social movements relate to each other.³⁰⁹ Rather than the traditional characterisation of these relationships as harmful to the effectiveness of movements, Polletta argues the reverse—that while these relationships do, in some ways, constrain the approaches participants take to the work, they also provide critical foundations for trust in contentious times, or during instances in which participants would otherwise be disinclined to trust each other. This concept, of organisational functionality founded on the trust generated by interpersonal relationships applies to Equal Education's work, in particular its knowledge transfer, and is a crucial component of establishing activists' comfort and trust across differences, as will be shown below.

Polletta's subjects largely had the benefit of pre-existing relationships on which to base trust. But what of those cases without? It is the question of how to establish political trust that Danielle Allen picks up in *Talking to Strangers*, an attempt to understand how citizens in democratic societies can overcome longstanding patterns of civic alienation and distance between diverse and adversarial groups.³¹⁰ She takes as her starting point the decision to racially integrate schools in the United States, and analyzes how this reframed and shifted understandings of who counted as a citizen in America and how they were counted. Allen argues that as a political form, democracy necessarily requires sacrifices on the part of some citizens for the gains of others, and that as a result, its central challenges include ensuring that the same group does not sacrifice all or most of the time, and that when citizens do find themselves sacrificing, they understand why and have found ways to come to terms with their losses. Often this requires their fellow citizens to make sacrifices themselves, both small and large, to demonstrate their own

³⁰⁹ Polletta, *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting*, 3.

³¹⁰ Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (2004).

goodwill and their fidelity to the system (evidenced by their willingness to lose in the future), and thus their trustworthiness.

Allen's work directly analyses why some groups are able to successfully build trust across racial groups in a society in which one group—white people—is systemically advantaged at the expense of all others. This first requires ensuring that one's self-interest in a democratic setting is rendered in an equitable manner, but that is not enough. The critical question thereafter is how to behave with vulnerability and build goodwill in order to generate trust, such that each loss does not cut others as deeply. Allen notes that in these interactions, provision of knowledge alone is not enough to build trust. Those in positions of frequent privilege must actively sacrifice for others, not just attempt to share aspects of that privilege.

Allen sets out a number of ways in which to do this, drawn from an eclectic mix of influences: the historical events she's examining, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Aristotle, most prominently. Though Allen does draw on history as the impetus for her inquiry, her work is largely an attempt to theoretically derive the types of characteristics that may be trust-generating (e.g. sacrifice and equitable self-interest, as mentioned above). By contrast, my account of similar concepts related to Equal Education's internal democracy for the rest of this chapter moves from the ground up. I look at actual practices that have worked to generate trust across difference in scenarios which include a) broad ideological agreement, but b) disagreement on the particulars thereof, and c) substantial interpersonal differences between the activists. While some of these practices do indeed align with Allen's hypothesised characteristics of sacrifice and equitable self-interest, other successful trust-generation strategies practiced by EE's leaders also involve understanding the benefits and limitations of, as well as the complex interactions between, different types of knowledge. Some of the most explosive internal politics have arisen when individuals and groups coming from different race and class backgrounds have failed to understand, acknowledge, or accommodate divergent conclusions drawn from differing knowledge frameworks, which are inextricable from personal identity.

Equal Education's most respected leaders and staffers routinely exhibited trust-generating practices regardless of race and class: making clear sacrifices for the rest of the group, intentionally and visibly ceding decision-making power and positions

of authority, attempting to build consensus on issues, publicly acknowledging the limitations of their own perspectives and understanding, and publically accepting and apologizing for mistakes, including those pushed for by other members of the leadership. The white and affluent staff members who had the most success working across differences of race and class did this frequently.

Finally, drawing on Ivor Chipkin's work on South African nationalism, I argue that this is done in an internally democratic realm in which participants are called into actively practicing citizenship, rather than necessarily viewing themselves as always already a part of a particular faction with pre-defined interests. If successful, this environment and set of practices 'short-circuits,' as Chipkin puts it, the formation of a racialised national identity reliant upon racial essentialism and nativism as discussed in chapter four.³¹¹ Behaviours that do this focus on respect, egalitarianism, open inquiry, and a willingness to listen with an open mind to those with whom one disagrees. Much of the time, this is how Equal Education functions as an organisation. However, when these elements fade, for reasons of exigency, carelessness, or even ambition, other frames of interpretation may become more dominant. Failing to maintain this internal culture of egalitarian citizenship creates an environment prone to explosiveness rather than the open discussion that normally characterizes the movement's knowledge transfer and decision-making.

In sum, as a multi-racial membership organisation with a politics of expert citizenship, political goals that largely serve black youth, and a membership largely composed of black youth, Equal Education's activists have been forced to find ways to navigate South Africa's complex post-apartheid racial politics. The previous chapter argues that EE's ability to negotiate this treacherous terrain is one of the sources of its successes in challenging government policy. I argue below that such successes would not be possible without an ability to do this within the organisation as well, and the ability to build trust and credibility across differences between its researchers, leaders, and its rank and file membership. Absent this trust and these relationships, the knowledge-based activism at the heart of EE's mission and values would be extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, as it requires trust in those who have received advantages that the membership have

³¹¹ Ivor Chipkin, *Do South Africans Exist?: Nationalism, Democracy and the Identity of the People* (2007), 213-14.

not. When Equal Education has been less successful at this, it has found itself without a reliable flow of information about the motivating concerns of its grassroots activists, and without the capability to transfer insights and knowledge from its research department to the rest of the membership—in short, short on causes to act on, and short on the members and data with which to act upon those causes.

Unlike organisations which attempt to cultivate this trust and understanding via specific activities, trust-building in Equal Education happens via its everyday practices. This is in direct contradiction to Warren's assertion that such collaboration will not arise without targeted activities on the subject.³¹² Equal Education has very few so-called 'consciousness raising' activities like those spoken about by Greenberg in his work on the Landless Peoples Movement, in which individuals are asked to directly interrogate themselves, their privilege, and their positionality inside and outside the organisation.³¹³

There was one such activity at the staff retreat in 2014, and it was received with some level of bewilderment by the staff. The organisers of the activity, which was explicitly about power and privilege, noted that issues of power and privilege clearly affect EE's work, both inside and outside the organisation, and that it is rarely discussed within the organisation. While the structure of the activity could have been used to explicitly ask staff members to examine their own forms of privilege or self-ascribed identity categories and discuss them, the resulting discussion instead focused on a very abstracted understanding of power. More frequently, individuals who occupy more disadvantaged race and class positions in society (the Equalisers, the Community Leaders) are led to interrogate the circumstances and justice of that reality, but this too is rarely a specific focus of EE's activities, at least not on the level of individual positioning rather than historical trajectories. I make no claims here about whether this is an optimal approach. Rather, the below is an account of the strategies that do exist and an argument only that some of EE's strategies and practices are at least partially effective in establishing the trust, credibility, and relationships that facilitate knowledge transfers and enable decisions to be made. While their approach means

³¹² Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*.

³¹³ Greenberg, "The Landless People's Movement and the Failure of Post-Apartheid Land Reform."

that few explicit discussions occur on the subject, privilege is instead addressed through behaviour, making it clear when practices fail to live up to espoused philosophies.

FLOODS, APPLES, AND PUPPETS: THE 2013 CAMP'S DECISION-MAKING BREAKDOWN

As mentioned in the introduction, EE is a grassroots movement with dozens of professional staff members, and an elected National Council. For the most part, the organisation comes to major and minor decisions with little protestation. If agreement cannot be reached, my interviewees both inside and outside of management concurred that the process used to make decisions is usually seen as fair by all in the organisation, and non-consensus decisions are rarely the subject of anything more heated than polite debate. Though there is sometimes grumbling within the staff about not being given enough authority to do their jobs in the manner they see fit, and within the membership about the National Council making decisions that they would have approached differently, this discontent largely stays at low-level grumbling, and the system keeps humming smoothly along. However, when exceptions to this general trend occur, they can be forceful and divisive, prompting previously unseen fissures to appear on the surface. While these ruptures are infrequent, when they occur they have revealed tensions, frustration, and anger, and have prompted reflection throughout all levels of the organisation. These exceptions to the general rule demonstrate a great deal about the divides within the organisation that affect Equal Education's internal cohesiveness and thus its ability to successfully conduct its organizing work. The decision to end the 2013 summer youth camp early due to weather concerns was one of those rare exceptions. The account of this series of events is the consensus of accounts given in EE staff meetings, provided in organisation-wide emails, and personal accounts given by staff members and facilitators who were in attendance. Inconsistencies and disagreements in the accounts are also noted.

Every summer school break, the organisation holds a retreat, normally at the campsite of Habonim, the progressive Jewish youth organisation formerly led by EE co-founder Doron Isaacs. 'Camp' has come to involve hundreds of Equalisers, facilitators, and staff members, and is a logistical feat on a large scale. It is intended partially as a fun time away for its dedicated members, but it is also one of the only opportunities the movement has for cross-provincial bonding between members,

and condensed activity and teaching time. This camp was intended to discuss the recently finalized Norms and Standards, and work on the organisation's strategy for implementation moving forward. The Norms and Standards were instituted at a time in which EE does not run its normal youth group schedule, thanks to the school calendar and exams, and so this camp was critical for informing members about the victory and what it meant for the campaign and movement. The task of organising and running camp normally falls on a small committee of EE leaders, Youth Department staff, and Community Leaders assembled for the purpose, known as the 'camp executive.' The 2013 camp executive happened to be entirely comprised of black staff and leaders (though this was not by particular design, nor is that always the case) and involved individuals from a mixture of class backgrounds.

The plans to celebrate Equal Education's campaign victory and strategise about the next steps were disrupted by heavy rainfall immediately prior to the start of camp, and during the camp itself, which began to flood the accommodation of some students. While the camp executive initially attempted to move these students to a different building, it became clear that more flooding would occur, and more students would have to move, to the point where they would run out of high ground. The camp executive, with the backing of Equal Education's elected General Secretary, made the decision to cancel the remainder of camp, due to very real health and safety concerns. The rains came to flood all of the accommodation, some meeting halls, and the kitchen, prompting its electricity to trip on and off and spoiling the perishable food in the refrigerators. One section of the campsite flooded so badly that it overwhelmed the sanitation facilities and raw sewage was running through the area. Even before the flooding became catastrophic, some students had very reasonably voiced complaints about the cold and the damp and asked to go home, and others were starting to fall ill. The weather forced the camp executive's hand; cancelling the rest of camp was the only responsible decision.

After the executive had assessed the damage, the probability of things getting worse, and made the decision to cancel camp, they informed the heads and deputies of each student grade group, making sure at least one was present from each grade group. The heads and deputies, who were either facilitators or Community Leaders, were then tasked with informing their respective facilitators and students. Ntshadi Mofokeng, the Head of the Youth Department and a member

of the camp executive explained the process she and her colleagues set up for communicating a decision they had taken very reluctantly, and which was sure to be controversial:

We discussed how each of their areas on site were affected by the rain and what was the atmosphere amongst equalisers and facilitators. I then explained that it was not feasible to continue camp and that we had taken a decision to end camp. We discussed this for some time with everyone having an opportunity to explain how they felt about this decision and what fall out they foresaw. It was not an easy discussion and those who felt that camp should not be ended were able to express that. However, we asked the heads and deputies present whether they would be able to communicate this decision and we offered to support them, if they'd like that. No one asked for a member of the camp exec to accompany them. We discussed how to answer difficult questions that might be posed and clarified the reasons for ending camp. Together we outlined a process of heads/deputies meeting with their facilitators first and explaining everything we had discussed and how this difficult decision was taken. Only after getting the facilitators on board would the decision be communicated to Equalisers.³¹⁴

Given the chaos of the situation, the camp executive and the group heads were not able to follow this process exactly; some facilitators were informed of the decision at the same time as the Equalisers, and were thus not necessarily already supportive of the decision prior to informing the students. These facilitators also did not have the opportunity to voice their frustrations at the initial meeting announcing the cancellation. Other facilitators were somehow completely missed in the initial communication, including the communications to the Equalisers, and were blindsided by the Equalisers' anger over a decision they did not realise had taken place.

Predictions that this decision would be badly received were swiftly proved correct. When the head of the Grade 11 group informed students of the decision and asked them to pack and leave, some students refused to go. And some facilitators not included in those initial meetings were extremely frustrated that the decision to cancel camp had been taken without their input, despite being in broad agreement with the decision and the logic behind it. To those facilitators, this was just one of many instances where they had to enact decisions in which they were not involved. They knew this decision was going to be badly received—indeed, it was already being badly received—and were not pleased that they were again going to be sent out as emissaries to explain actions that were both not of their own making and against the will of the membership. The same had occurred in the wake of the most

³¹⁴ Ntshadi Mofokeng, Online Communication, 11 Aug 2015.

contentious decision in EE's recent history, the National Council's decision to act against the opinions of the membership on a time extension for the Minister on the Norms and Standards regulations, discussed in further detail below. In the words of one facilitator I spoke with, 'This is not the first time EE has taken a decision without us, and asked us to be puppets.'

The facilitators had had enough. They demanded a meeting with the camp executive, asking for a better explanation of the decision, as well as an explanation of why they were not consulted. They were rebuffed in this request, told 'this is not the time,'—at this point in time, the camp executive and General Secretary of EE were meeting with Equalisers who had similarly declared their frustration—and asked again to go and round up the members. The facilitators, as a group, decided this was unacceptable, and indicated that they would be unwilling to tell the students to pack up and leave unless a meeting was held. Lwando Mzandisi, a long-time member, youth group leader, and young black leader within EE presently completing training to be a teacher bridged the divide between the camp executive and the facilitators, and called everyone together for a meeting. This young leader with a great deal of trust and respect throughout the organisation was a part of the so-called 'senior team' for this camp, a rung down from the camp executive, but with more authority than the group of facilitators. From his point of view, there had been a tremendous lack of communication between the two teams as well as the facilitators, and he believed that the facilitators deserved an opportunity to express themselves.³¹⁵ At the meeting, Ntshadi Mofokeng, the head of the Youth Department explained the decision again, and took a round of comments and questions for the facilitators.

A facilitator from Johannesburg brought up the 'white adults' quote from the Department of Basic Education's press release and defended by Minister Angie Motshekga, saying 'You all are proving Angie correct, with what you are doing.' While that was not necessarily the attitude of the facilitators present, no one openly challenged or disagreed with that facilitator's opinion in front of the camp executive. It is also worth pointing out that, as with the DBE's challenge regarding EE's overall leadership, the camp executive was *not* white—they and the General Secretary were young black leaders and staff members, and some had been elected

³¹⁵ Lwando Mzandisi, 3 Jul, 2015, Phone conversation.

to their positions by the EE membership. For their part, the camp executive heard out the facilitators' concerns, said they would consider them, and again implored them to help gather the students. When some of the facilitators continued to be reluctant and resistant, as this was not the open dialogue they were looking for, the leaders of the camp executive handed the meeting over to an affable, well-respected, older black staff member of the Youth Department, who again explained the decision to the facilitators and asked for their help. After the facilitators were still demonstrably reluctant to assist, a more junior, younger black staff member of the Youth Department and camp executive became exasperated, and snapped.

According to one facilitator (in this case, a young, black, post-school individual) during an interview:

Facilitator: Then [the junior Youth Department staffer] speaks, and repeats the reasons, and then says something along the line of 'If you don't want to help, we have staff here.'

SB: What was her attitude at this point?

Facilitator: It was partly a gamble, and partly cutting loose. [Another member of the executive committee] tried to stop everyone from walking out after her comments, but between [the Youth Department Head] and [the junior staff member], it was clear the meeting wasn't happening, so we left.

Around lunch, [the junior staff member] comes around, and says 'I'm sorry for what I said, but I meant what I said, except for the part where I said I didn't need your help.' We just looked at her, and didn't really think that she was serious and whatnot.

There was a clear breakdown of trust between the leaders in the organisation and the facilitators, the group with the closest relationships with the Equalisers. As Ntsikie Dlulani, another long-time member and facilitator characterized the relationship between the three groups, 'If the management says do something, Equalisers will do it, but they might be sceptical. They trust the facilitators a lot.'³¹⁶ In this particular case, the breakdown was so substantial that when the facilitators refused to round up the students, the students had organised themselves around a collective refusal to leave. Some individual Equalisers had begun looting the kitchen, and were throwing apples at the man who ran the kitchen in protest of the decision. According to the facilitator quoted above about the frustrated junior staff member, some Equalisers went to get their things, but others, especially the boys in

³¹⁶ Dlulani, "Interview with Ntsikie Dlulani, Facilitator at Equal Education."

grade 11, rebelled. They took food from the kitchen, everything from apples to fish oil. When the facilitators asked them what they were going to do with it, the boys responded that January is a tough month, no one has money. And some of the facilitators, still at this point refusing to help gather the students, looked on and shrugged in response. Other facilitators and grade leaders assisted in gathering students, and wanted to get away from the conditions themselves. Eventually all of the students were rounded up and persuaded to get on buses back to their homes.

When staff members on the camp executive recounted these events to the rest of staff during Equal Education's first staff meeting of the year, many staff members moved first to ask about punishment, rather than about what went wrong and how it could be done better in the future. The EE leadership and camp executive, on the other hand, mostly challenged these calls for punishment, and acknowledged that some of this was their own fault and that frustrations had been building for quite a long time. Their desire was to gain a better understanding of why all this happened, and how it could be avoided in the future. Below is an excerpt from the discussion at the staff meeting, following the summary of camp provided to the staff. I have anonymised the speakers in the meeting, but, given the present questions about race, power, and decision-making, I have identified speakers by their race, role at Equal Education, and role in the camp, if any.

Black staff member of Youth Department and member of camp executive: We decided to cancel the rest of camp partway through because of terrible weather and flooding. Campers were *toyi-toyi-ing* in response, but it came out that this wasn't just about our camp, it was about broader issues about how decisions are made in the organisation. We tried to send the message that at that moment, we had to get all 500 people home safe, and we could deal with other concerns later. But there are issues with how decisions are taken, and some measures have been taken to ensure that we don't have future issues.

Young, white staff member: We've all heard about the *toyi-toyi-ing*, and the bags being thrown off buses, apples being thrown, and food being stolen. What is EE doing about that? Especially since some facilitators are involved?

Black manager and member of camp executive: We don't really have a lot of procedures in place to deal with it. We've received a letter from the facilitators listing their grievances, and they've said that they won't facilitate youth groups until they're addressed. But we have grievances too, and these things must be worked out.

White staff member of Youth Department: We worked very hard for camp and this was a sad day. Not because it was cancelled, but because of how it was dealt with.

Black parent organiser: Did you sit down and try to create a plan to involve Equalisers and facilitators?

Black staff member of Youth Department and member of camp executive: The Jozi facilitators have written a letter addressed to the NC, and the Western Cape facilitators have also written a letter that we have yet to see. The response will deal with what is in the letter.

Black manager and member of camp executive: This was a health and safety issue, there wasn't a lot of room for debate. But our understanding from our facilitators is that it's about more than that.

Black parent organiser and elected NC member: It would have been very bad publicity for us to have gone on with camp. The media is watching.

Black manager, outside Youth Department: The report says that there were Equalisers including facilitators. Equalisers are members, facilitators are staff. The NC or Secretariat can deal with members, managers and the disciplinary committee can deal with staff. We need more explanation of who started things before moving forward.

Black post-school youth organiser and facilitator: What is meant by 'dealing' with members and facilitators?

White manager, outside Youth Department 1: In both instances, this is a long-running issue. We've been talking about the behaviour of staff and facilitators for six months now. The decision to leave was emotional. It's going to be very difficult to pinpoint who threw three apples, etc. I hope that we receive a set of things that we can realistically change, and that similarly, that we can change the culture of how staff and facilitators behave. I'm not convinced this would be a breach of contract. We all want to resolve these issues and move forward.

....

Black manager, outside Youth Department: So no one is going to face consequences from this?

White manager outside Youth Department 1: The process is underway, and we will see.

White manager outside Youth Department 2: If we find out that there are people who are employed, and behaved in a seriously problematic way, this person will be dealt with. But it's also clear that our people and our members have serious problems, and we don't want to just shut that down, and just discipline them and say 'you're wrong'.

Black manager and member of camp executive: The people who tried to steal from the kitchen, we know who they are, they will be dealt with. Instances where people were found with alcohol, those will go to the disciplinary committee.

As is evident from the meeting, the calls for punishment were not coming from those in positions of power or privilege within EE. To a person, the leadership, black and white, reacted to everything bar obviously illegal activity as a reason to

think harder about their own behaviour, and how to avoid such decision-making errors in the future.

The facilitators went on strike and boycotted Equal Education activities, until they were able to have meetings with the National Council regarding the issues they raised in their letters of grievance (one from each organizing region). Though the issue of race and power was raised at the meeting at the camp between the facilitators and the camp executive, and was not challenged by the facilitators present, it was absent from their letters. Lwando Mzandisi, the mediator between the camp executive and the facilitators, did not find that surprising: 'You know, when things escalate like that, people start talking about race, because some people have more power than others. Yes, the camp was flooded, but they didn't talk to the facilitators and they needed to.'³¹⁷ Mzandisi, who grew up in Khayelitsha and has been with Equal Education in various roles since 2008, went on to say 'For me, race has never been a problem. I have never felt it was an issue.... I've never felt it. Maybe some people have a problem, but not me. We do not have a problem with it when it comes up.'³¹⁸ Other young, black, longtime facilitators and members agreed with Mzandisi on this front, including many who stayed silent when the Johannesburg facilitator cited the DBE's allegation in the camp meeting.

Instead, the facilitators' letters focused on what they saw as a concerning trend to consolidate decisions at the top of the organisation, and then send the facilitators as ambassadors for decisions that they disagreed with. The facilitators' letters from both Western Cape and Gauteng explain that their actions at the end of the 2013 camp were in response to what they saw as a culmination of a year and a half-long trend of cutting them out of the decision-making process. Quoting from the Western Cape letter:

When we joined Equal Education, our main goal was to help create a lasting change in the educational development of the previously disadvantaged child. The gist of the movement was to eradicate inequality and injustice within the current state of the South African education system, through activism and thorough analysis. We have had many successful campaigns through this foundation, but since our first national congress in June 2012, it appears that the gist of the movement has shifted from what it used to be.

The reason for such a shift is that the organization has discarded the notion of equality and a just Constitutional method of activism and is now ruled by

³¹⁷ Mzandisi, "Interview with Lwando Mzandisi, Former Chairperson of Equaliser Leadership Committee and Former National Council Liaison."

³¹⁸ Ibid.

the ‘powers that be’. It has come to a point where this kind of unfair activism has affected the productivity of the core basis of the movement: the youth department. The youth department has been infested with a sense of dictatorship in such a way that its core members find it unsuitable to work under.

....

It has come to a point where it is no longer about equality and the power of the masses, but rather about what the powerful minority see fit for the movement. We as the Western Cape facilitators feel that we are not being considered when major decision making takes place at the youth department, and that we are being used as puppets to execute whatever action that our ‘superiors’ see fit. This is brought about by a major abuse of authority, such as that which was displayed at our national camp. What the management did was a complete outrage, as the Equalizers’ voices were silenced. The Equalizers were very angry about what happened at camp, so much so that they have become demotivated to continue with the struggle.

In addition to the concerns about ‘dictatorship’, ‘a powerful minority’, and being used as ‘puppets’, the Western Cape facilitators also noted that they felt the camp executive was ‘very rude’ to them. The Gauteng letter contained similar concerns and rhetoric—a lack of ‘consultation’ on important decisions, failing to avert foreseeable problems because the camp organisers did not talk to those on the ground, and a sense that the executive ‘insulted [the facilitators] when [they] contested the decision.’ In their final paragraph of grievances, the Gauteng facilitators say,

The Youth Department and the camp executive does not take into consideration our concerns and input in the movement but plays dictatorship on us currently which that as a result has left some of the members questioning if they still belong in a movement which speaks about Equality when it is no longer placed into action internally.

In response to these letters, the members of the National Council in each locality made themselves available for meetings with the facilitators, and worked out agreements on many of the facilitators’ requests—including more training and focus on the facilitators’ work in the format of a facilitator camp.

Still, not all was smooth. Some facilitators who were at the 2013 camp and involved in the strike were dismissed without reason given, according to one facilitator who stayed on with Equal Education. It may well have been that these facilitators were not performing well in their jobs, but according to this facilitator, the dismissed facilitators were not told that in advance of their dismissal. In the estimation of this facilitator, at least some of the dismissals were directly related to the strike, though the facilitator also noted that many of those involved with the strike continued on as facilitators. Prior to the dismissal of these facilitators, there had been discussions

within the Youth Department that some of the facilitators were not taking their jobs seriously or doing their work properly, so it is also possible that this had nothing to do with the strike. Equal Education's leaders strongly disagree with this facilitator's account. I include the facilitator's comment not as a representation of the truth, but as an indication of what discussions amongst some of EE's lower-ranking activists looked like at this point in time—the existence of such rumors is demonstrative of the low levels of trust that existed at the time. Moreover, the identity divides within the organisation were sufficiently deep that when a decision was disagreed with, at least some members did not find it *prima facie* unreasonable to tie disagreements to racial differences and tensions, and the differences in personal experience implied within—even if, as in the case of the DBE's comments, that was not an accurate reflection of who was involved.

Facilitators and leaders I have spoken to since have characterised the events of the 2013 camp and the subsequent facilitators' strike as both a low point in the movement's history, as well as an important lesson and turning point on how to move forward more democratically and in a more trust-generating manner. For instance:

Brad Brockman, General Secretary of EE: That for us was a really important event, the ways in which campaigns and governance played out in the organisation. We recognized the ways in which we hadn't done things correctly. The structures were and are there for us to be able to consult members and involve them in important decisions. The difficulty for us can partially be traced from the shift of being an NGO to being a social movement. We want the members to feel ownership of the organisation, and that they have meaning in the organisation. And we in the current leadership feel it is our responsibility to set the direction of the campaigns and ensure that the strategy and tactics we use are effective. We would admit that we haven't fully cracked the transition into a social movement. I take that at least partially on my shoulders.... I think the time of the facilitator strike was our lowest point, but I think things are much better than they were then. [gives long list of student leaders and facilitators who have moved up the ranks in EE to take bigger roles and responsibilities]. And I think people who are here now are generally happy. Some of the people involved then aren't around anymore—not because we've told them to leave, of course.³¹⁹

Ntsikie Dzulani, facilitator and former General Secretary of Equal Education's Leadership Committee (student leadership group): People took this camp negatively, but I was very impressed by how the Equalisers and the facilitators reacted. It showed how powerful they were, it was a powerful action—they elected themselves and organised themselves to talk to Brad [Brockman, the elected General Secretary of EE] and they were respectful to

³¹⁹ Brockman, "Interview with Brad Brockman, General Secretary of Equal Education."

each other, and listening. They don't need us to always be there for them. They used all the tactics and strategies we taught them.... It was hard, and other people were angry at them, but for me it was positive to see these young leaders standing up because they did not understand the decision.

SB: Do you think these issues were resolved?

ND: Yes. They called a camp with all the facilitators to speak about what happened. We want leaders who learn from their mistakes, not people who think they are perfect. We want people who listen and learn, so we both sat down, and listened, and learned, and it was peacefully resolved. Things are getting better.³²⁰

For the facilitators, it was important that they were heard and involved in decision-making, not just that the decisions taken were ones that they would agree with. The meetings immediately after camp with the National Council, and the subsequent facilitator camp were places where Equal Education's leaders stood up in front of its membership and admitted to having gotten the decision-making process wrong, and pledged to do differently in the future. These actions were, in the minds of the facilitators, important actions and practices for recalibrating the relationships of power in the organisation. These ideas of power and consultation were how most facilitators understood the problems and their frustrations with camp, and also how they understood the Johannesburg facilitator's quotation of the DBE's comment—not through a lens of race, despite its societal prevalence as a frame of analysis as discussed in chapter four and above.

'YOU CAN'T BUILD SCHOOLS WITH BROKEN PROMISES': EQUAL EDUCATION'S INFRASTRUCTURE CAMPAIGN

Equal Education's student members have amassed a significant amount of expertise on South Africa's political system and on education in particular, through their youth groups as well as through their own work. They often play a role in developing their own learning agendas, and their depth of policy knowledge is impressive, as discussed in chapter two. Still, Equal Education's model is reliant upon EE's researchers and leaders keeping its membership in the loop. When that knowledge transfer breaks down, as it did in a decision taken in March 2013, the membership's trust in Equal Education's leaders and staff also breaks down, prompting a decline in the information circulation that is the lifeblood of the group's advocacy work. Members become less willing to come forward about issues

³²⁰ Dlulani, "Interview with Ntsikie Dlulani, Facilitator at Equal Education."

in their schools or invest time and energy in the group, and the organisation is bereft—on all sides—of the kinds of information it needs to conduct its advocacy.

This vignette additionally demonstrates how the division between *techne* and *mētis* breaks down when they are used in practice. As outlined in chapter four, Scott shows instances in which actors can use ‘mixed’ knowledge strategies by drawing upon both *techne* and *mētis* to make arguments or decisions. Going a step farther, I argue that while Scott’s typology is a useful heuristic, in practice, it is not just that both strategies can be used concurrently, but that often times the line between the two is suspect at best. The following events from Equal Education’s campaign on school infrastructure demonstrated this.

In 2012, Equal Education sued the Department of Basic Education and the provincial departments of basic education to ensure the creation of Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure. This lawsuit followed on a multi-year campaign, during which Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshekga had repeatedly assured Equal Education that the norms and standards would be put in place as a legally binding regulation. Despite these assurances, between 2008 and 2012 there was no visible movement by the Department to do so.³²¹

The Department and Equal Education settled the suit out of court, with deadlines established for a first draft, a consultation period, and a final draft. Equal Education’s members were optimistic but wary about this outcome. This Department and this Minister had repeatedly failed to act on promises to the public on this issue as well as others, and their hopes were not high. Equal Education’s short campaign video in support of the court case on norms and standards, released in November 2012 and still loudly cheered by hundreds of student members half a year later at a March 2013 Cape Town public meeting on the norms and standards, encapsulates why.³²² The video moves from a set of damning statistics regarding infrastructure in schools across the country, and follows it with the harms to learning created by these infrastructure failures in the first minute

³²¹ Equal Education, "High Court Says EE Matter Is Urgent! Equal Education Reopens Case against Minister Motshekga for Minimum Norms & Standards for School Infrastructure."; Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education, "National Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure," ed. Department of Basic Education (2009); "The National Policy for an Equitable Provision of an Enabling School Physical Teaching and Learning Environment," ed. Department of Basic Education (2010).

³²² Equal Education, "Build the Future," Video (2012).

and a half. The subsequent three minutes are reserved for a critique of Minister Motshekga's administration. The video quotes Motshekga as saying that there 'is no crisis in education' despite the prior dismal statistics on access to water and sanitation, illiteracy levels, and more. It also highlights the Minister's failed promise to Equal Education to institute Norms and Standards by April 2011, a deadline missed by a year by the time Equal Education decided to bring the Minister to court. Despite this history of 'broken promises,' as the video put it, facilitators and organisation leaders implored the members to be patient. Equal Education's leadership and lawyers, in particular, believed that the Minister and her advisors would abide by the settlement in good faith, and so did not push for the initial settlement to be made a court order through which the Minister and others could be held in contempt of court.³²³ The assumption made by EE's lawyers and leaders was that despite Motshekga's failing to pass the norms and standards before, she and her lawyers had agreed to a timeline they found reasonable in a court of law. EE's membership had behaved as active citizens, using a series of formal and informal channels to hold a public official to account for a plausible promise to enact a beneficial public policy.

In settling the case, the Department agreed to publish a first draft of the standards for public comment by two months after the settlement. Thus, when the Department offered an inadequate first draft that brought criticism from across the education spectrum, the membership's belief that the Department would issue high quality Norms and Standards without a major fight was nearly non-existent.³²⁴ The members viewed the shoddy first draft as proof that this Minister was not behaving in good faith and was not taking them, their demands, and their court case seriously. Thousands of learners, parents, teachers, and community members across the country attended public meetings hosted by Equal Education to provide submissions on the Minister's first draft. The public meeting on 30 March 2013 in Cape Town drew between 400 and 500 people, mostly youth members of Equal Education. Not a single speaker over several hours spoke in support of the draft—

³²³ "Equal Education National Council Minutes 17 June 2013."

³²⁴ Library and Information Association of South Africa, "Comments from LIASA on the Draft Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure, Notice 932 of 2013," news release, Oct, 2013, <http://www.liasa.org.za/node/1198>; Michelle Jones, "Motshekga Slammed over Minimum Norms," *The Star*, 24 Jan 2013; Marion Walton et al., "Submission of Comments on Draft Norms & Standards for School Infrastructure," (2013); Andile Makholwa, "Analyst Criticises Time Frame Set for School Standards," *Business Day*, 20 Sep 2013.

instead, critical comments were cheered by the audience, sometimes so loudly that the speakers could not be heard.

A secondary school student from Thembelihle High School, one of EE's main schools offered a view that was typical of the dozen or so students who spoke on behalf of their school memberships at the meeting: 'I do not know what Angie thinks, but maybe her heart beats the other way around to us. This is not about money, this is about the money that is dedicated to us. There's no way you can improve the graduation rate without improving the schools.' Speakers repeatedly commented that 'Angie would not send her children to our schools,' and 'she must do something to fix this draft.' Several of the post-school youth leaders suggested to me that the Minister released this bad draft either because she did not take the work seriously, or in order to stall for time. The questions of care and respect are, in some ways, in line with the demands for respectful dialogue and interaction raised in chapter three, but also to some degree a public shaming of Motshekga's perceived dereliction of duty. A 'lack of care' here is used to denote both a failure to carry out the tasks assigned to her office—a professional and a democratic failing—but also a moral failing, in the abandonment of South Africa's youth to a fate they regarded as unacceptable. This latter challenge is not a technocratic one, but easily fits into EE's politics of righteousness. The disappointment with the draft, on the other hand, was decidedly an expert claim about rightness.

Instead of returning with an improved final draft by the deadline specified in the settlement, the Minister asked for an extension just six days before the final draft was to be completed. She requested an answer from Equal Education more quickly than it would have been able to give her in consultation with its membership, and so Equal Education delayed its answer to her slightly in order to hold a mass meeting of its membership to discuss the request, meet with its lawyers, and hold a National Council meeting in order to reach a final answer. This sequence of consultation became a source of disagreement and disillusionment within the organisation.

Equal Education's lawyers were unavailable to meet with the National Council until very shortly before the deadline, meaning that the leadership went to the membership first, asking them to vote on the issue in an emergency mass meeting, and then sought the advice of their lawyers. General Secretary Brad Brockman

briefed the Community Leaders, facilitators, and Youth Department staff before the meeting that this was not to be a binding vote, but rather a way for the National Council to get a sense of the opinions of the membership. The final decision would be taken by the National Council, Equal Education's elected leadership.

Unfortunately, at the mass meeting, it was not specified at the meeting whether the vote by the membership would be a binding vote, or whether it was a survey of opinion. The staff and facilitators who led the mass meeting discussion groups were instructed not to be directive in their discussions with the membership, and not to advise them of their personal opinions. The majority of this group, closest to the membership in the organisation, indicated that they thought the Minister did not deserve an extension. The views of these groups tend to be more moderate and conciliatory towards the Minister than do the total membership's views. If the facilitators and staff were skeptical of an extension, the membership was likely to reject it unless given strong reason not to. However, it also seemed likely that the lawyers would advise Equal Education to grant an extension.

At the mass meeting, as with all EE mass meetings, the room was buzzing. Hundreds of student members gathered in the large meeting hall of Thembelihle High in Khayelitsha, an expansive space with concrete floors and rough brick walls that doubled as the school's gymnasium, judging by the lines on the floor and the basketball hoops pushed off to the side. Thando Dyamara, a dynamic, thoughtful post-graduate member of Equal Education's National Council ran the meeting. As is standard practice for EE events, he and other facilitators kicked off the gathering with songs, chants, and dancing, leading the crowd in its kaleidoscope of school uniform colors in an escalatingly exuberant set of movements and harmonies. A half dozen pigeons that had enterprisingly made their way into the hall flapped overhead, occasionally sending a stir through the crowd when they strafed someone's head. The mood became somber, however, when the main subject of the meeting, the potential extension for the Minister, was announced. Facilitators and staff were assigned to groups of Equalisers to explain the Minister's request for an extension, and refresh them on the campaign and court case to date. Included in their materials was a copy of the Minister's letter requesting the extension, which students in the group were to take turns reading aloud. Then the groups discussed the letter. Suggested questions for the group facilitators to ask were:

1. What are your views on the letter Angie has sent?
2. Should EE grant Angie the extension? Why? Why not?

3. How does this affect you as an Equaliser and as a scholar?
4. What do you think about the minister's justification, that the current draft is not adequate enough for adoption?³²⁵

In the group I was assigned to, the facilitators did not attempt to overtly or covertly sway the membership in any direction, but other facilitators told me they did say whether or not they would grant the Minister the extension if given the opportunity. Given that the predominant view amongst facilitators and staff was to deny the Minister the extension, it seems likely that to the extent that persuasion by facilitators was used, it was used to sway groups against granting the extension. After the situation was explained in the small groups, the leadership asked the membership to vote on whether to give the Minister an extension of even one month, by putting paper slips with their votes into cardboard boxes at the front of the meeting hall. Roughly 800 members attended the mass meeting, and voted seven to one against giving the Minister any form of extension, a landslide show of no leniency for a government official that the membership felt had not earned it.

Equal Education's lawyers, on the other hand, came to the opposite conclusion. While they may have agreed with the sentiment, and the anger and frustration evinced by the membership in both the discussions of the request and the vote itself, they felt that the court would be unsympathetic to a decision not to grant the Minister's request. EE's lawyers advanced the following argument in favour of granting the extension: first, South African courts have a history of deferring to the technocratic expertise of departments when it comes to the actual business of governing, and so if the Minister insists that she needs additional time to create good regulations, the court is likely to side with her. Second, given the first point, Equal Education will only come across as obstinate and unreasonable by refusing the request, and may even seem to be prioritizing pettiness against the Department over actually improving the education system by forcing the Minister to finalize the norms before she believes she has time to make them of a sufficiently high quality. Third, in the lawyers' opinion, the Minister's new appointee to write the standards was known to be a man of great competence and integrity. Provided he was given the appropriate autonomy with which to do his job, the norms and standards

³²⁵ Equal Education, "Agenda for Khayelitsha and City Bowl Mass Meeting, 14 May 2013," (2013).

should turn out as well as Equal Education had originally hoped, despite the setbacks and delays.³²⁶

Based on their lawyers' advice, the National Council decided with great reluctance to grant the Minister an extension of one month, after which the Minister immediately countered with a request for six months. The members and facilitators took this as a sign that they had been right all along. This was just one more delay on top of nothing but delays, they believed, and it was likely that the Minister would continue such ploys until EE became so disheartened it gave up entirely. After receiving this request, Equal Education's General Secretary, Brad Brockman, wrote to the membership to explain the National Council's decision, the Minister's response, and called for protest marches in several cities to increase the pressure on the Minister. They also petitioned to re-open the original court case, and sought their lawyers' advice again.

Equal Education sent representatives to meet with the Minister and most of the provincial education MECs, as discussed in chapter four, but were unable to reach an agreement on the deadline. The parties returned to court on July 11, and agreed to an end of November deadline for the Minister to issue final, binding norms and standards. Per their lawyers' recommendation, Equal Education had a judge declare this deadline to be a court order, unlike the previous settlement. This unusual move meant that the Minister could be held in contempt of court for any further delays without robust justification, an enforcement mechanism not normally thought necessary in mutually agreed court settlements. Indeed, this time around, the Minister adhered to the terms of the settlement, and published a finalized set of Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure on 29 November 2013. This draft, in the estimation of Equal Education and its lawyers, was generally strong, and EE began in earnest to work on ensuring its proper implementation, the subject of chapter six.³²⁷

This massive victory, three years in the making, did not come without costs. The ambiguity of the membership vote meant some members thought that their National Council had betrayed them in offering the Minister an extension. To these

³²⁶ "Equal Education National Council Minutes 17 June 2013."

³²⁷ Yoliswa Dwane and Brad Brockman, "Regulations Relating to the Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure [the 'Norms and Standards']," 12 Feb 2014.

members and facilitators, such behaviour was to be expected on the part of the Minister—but having their express will overridden by the organisation’s leadership was something that had never happened before, not on so obvious or massive a scale. Given how fluid EE’s active membership is, it is difficult to quantify how many Equalisers simply quit coming to meetings after this sequence of events, having concluded that EE was just using them as window-dressing to bolster the credibility of the decisions that it was going to make regardless. According to several youth group facilitators, some members did indeed quit for precisely those reasons. Though Brockman issued his explanatory letter, and the organisation sent members of the National Council to meetings to explain the decision and why they decided to go against the membership’s vote, these explanations and assurances were met with open scepticism and distrust by some members. In this uncommon instance, Equal Education’s leadership inadvertently behaved toward its members somewhat like the government frequently behaves towards EE—favouring legal-technocratic expertise over the mētis-driven opinions democratically voiced by the membership. The organisation, to be sure, was in a difficult position with their initial time constraints, as well as those of their lawyers. Additionally, their elected head, Brad Brockman, had attempted to make clear that the vote was for input, rather than something that would bind the National Council to a particular decision. The wisdom of the National Council and the lawyers proved correct, allowing them to obtain their desired results in court. And after the Minister rejected the initial one month extension, the organisation did initially take the hardline that its members wanted, and went back to court and to the streets. But the membership still felt that they had been pushed aside. Facilitators I spoke to indicated that had the sequencing been different, and the National Council had first sought the guidance of its legal counsel, then gone to the membership with a recommendation, the outcome likely would have been different. In one representative comment, long-time activist, student leader, and facilitator Ntsikie Dhlulani explained,

Like 80 or 85% of the students said ‘No, do not give the Minister the extension’—and the NC did not consult the lawyers before the meeting. The Equalizers were angry about that, ‘How can you come and ask us when you know you will take the final decision?’ [The leadership] realized that was a mistake, and in the future, they said they will go to the lawyers first. And we don’t know the law better than the lawyers—they must just tell us what they think.³²⁸

³²⁸ Ntsikie Dhlulani, 5 Jul, 2015, Phone conversation.

Instead, the events surrounding the Minister's request for an extension prompted months of lingering resentment and skepticism amongst some members.

The divided opinion regarding what to do with the Minister's request is a demonstration of how complex these knowledge negotiations can be. Though EE's leaders, members, and lawyers were aligned on *techne* regarding the need for the policies themselves—the technical knowledge of the need for these improvements to be made to schools, the harms caused by the current conditions, and the insufficient nature of the Minister's draft are all claims rooted in *techne*—that element of *techne* was the least important aspect of knowledge in these negotiations. The processes of government—the laws, the operations of bureaucrats and courts—can also be treated as *techne*, but it is here that things start to become blurred. The above demonstrates that treating this system as though it operates according to clear and known rules, as the definition of *techne* would demand, would be a mistake. The bureaucrats not only cast aside their own rules and prior statements, they cast aside those they swore to in a court settlement.

Some form of *mētis* was needed to bolster understanding, but again conflict arose. The lawyers argued that both their technical knowledge of the law and their experiential knowledge related to how the judges were likely to decide meant that EE should agree to the extension. The membership argued that based on their experiential knowledge of how the Minister and the Department have behaved on this issue for the past several years, they were absolutely not to be taken at their word. And while the issue never went to the courts, if the lawyers were proved correct, the experiential knowledge used by the judge would have found in favour of the Department, deferring to them on grounds of technical expertise. Some members of the National Council found this logic head-spinning, since the poor technical quality of the first draft was the very reason the Department asked for an extension. None of these elements is clearly separable from the others, and moreover, none of them can reasonably be called more knowledgeable than another—they speak to entirely different, conflicting bodies of knowledge on precisely the same questions, pace Scott. The National Council, in explaining the decision to the membership, deferred to the 'expertise' of the lawyers, who were some of the country's top public interest lawyers. But the membership is also knowledgeable, in their case on the evasiveness of the Minister and the Department on this issue, which Equal Education's leadership also broadly agreed with. They

too thought that the Minister was not to be believed, and offered the initial one month extension for the sake of appearing reasonable to the court and the public in the future, not because they necessarily thought it would have been met by the Minister. Their insight was affirmed by the fact that as soon as EE granted the Minister an extension, she immediately requested an extension six times the length granted. In this issue, it is not possible to parse what counts as more knowledgeable—only that the lines between *techné* and *mētis*, over the course of the negotiations, had melted away almost completely, leaving only a judgment call for the National Council about what type of knowledge to prioritize.

BUILDING CREDIBILITY AND TRUST ACROSS SOCIAL DISTANCE AND DIFFERENCE

In its early years, EE was able to rely on the personal connections between individuals in different departments, and across differing layers of power in the organisation to smooth over controversial decisions or individual mistakes, as described in chapter two. Those connections were one of the key ways in which EE stayed true to its intended goals of being an information-driven grassroots movement, and through which they built the credibility needed for members to trust them with difficult decisions. But maintaining such close connections across all members and leaders of a much larger organisation poses a prohibitive challenge. Moreover, the manner in which power operates within a now democratically governed movement and as such the selection of leaders and processes of decision-making are far more complex than the DBE's simplistic and divisive charges, and requires a closer look at the vignettes above.

In both vignettes above, a rift opened up between the leadership/management and lower ranking staff/volunteers/members. White leaders were involved in the source of the breakdown only in the second issue, the decision to grant the extension for the Minister. Yet, the comment about 'white adults' was invoked in the decision-making breakdown at camp involving only black leaders, and I heard of no one race evoking race as a source of dispute or disagreement in the decision about the Minister's extension. White leaders and staff members have been involved in any number of mistakes and unpopular decisions without others invoking race as a frame through which to understand the situation. For example, one of EE's largest marches had substantial problems with a lack of properly trained march marshals, a situation that posed dangers to those present, and it was

not treated as a racist mistake. Clearly, Equal Education is capable of navigating difficult situations or decisions without prompting race-related commentary. Moreover, in the camp closure, the facilitators' letters and my subsequent interviews made it clear that many members of the aggrieved groups did not see the issue through the framework of race.

Returning to Buhlungu's arguments about the relevance of race in the black trade unions of the 1970s and 1980s, it is now possible to pull out parallels and differences regarding the sources of the precarious and contradictory positions of the white activists in the unions he researched and Equal Education's modern-day wrangling with similar issues. Like Allen, Buhlungu's analysis zooms in on trust, vulnerability, and sacrifice as critical components of understanding the interactions between these groups. Though the white union intellectuals behaved in ways that made them subject to justifiable critique by black unionists, these white trade unionists were making substantial sacrifices to participate in the cause. Their participation rendered them social pariahs and subjected them to potential arrest, banning, and/or death.³²⁹ This, obviously, is not true of Equal Education's white activists. To the contrary, their work is generally considered socially laudable. Throughout my research, when I mentioned my subject in casual conversations with South Africans outside EE, the reaction was normally unprompted compliments about the organization—corporate lawyers, university professors, suburban pharmacists, and professional artists alike admired the activists' work and their efforts to improve South Africa's education system. To the extent that EE's activists are making tradeoffs in their material comfort, it is a matter of turning down a very comfortable life for one that is only somewhat less so for the duration of their time with the organisation. After they leave the organisation, that same social lauding of their work often translates into future professional opportunity—for instance, subsequent posts for some of EE's white activists and staff include a Constitutional Court clerkship, a corporate law job, and a position with a prestigious international NGO. This professional advancement has also been true of their equivalently educated black colleagues, who have moved on to prominent positions elsewhere in the NGO sector in South Africa and abroad, an international graduate school scholarship, and other similarly prestigious roles. This advancement, of course, is not solely limited to their participation in Equal

³²⁹ Buhlungu, "Rebels without a Cause of Their Own?."

Education—the highly-educated white and black people walked in the door with strong credentials—but demonstrates that unlike the white unionists, those who have chosen to work for Equal Education appear to have professionally benefitted rather than suffered from the decision. The white activists, like the rest of their colleagues, subject themselves to some level of physical insecurity, given the crime that exists in the area that they travel to daily for work. However, their modes of transit (generally private cars) and point-to-point existence in the township also renders them much more secure than their colleagues who take buses, minibuses, or walk. On a short trip from the office to get lunch from a nearby Khayelitsha takeout shop, one of the two parent organisers I was with expressed some surprise that I had chosen to walk with them. The weather was beautiful, the stroll wasn't particularly long, but according to the two parent organisers, the white staff members 'never' chose to walk rather than drive. Their brief comments revealed how they perceived most of their white colleagues to experience the townships—from the relative safety of private cars, rather than on foot like most of Khayelitsha's residents. In short, it is unlikely that these activists build much trust as a result of perceived sacrifice (one of Allen's sources of trust and credibility building) at least not when it comes to sacrifices made at a broad, societal level.³³⁰

Buhlungu also highlights the exclusivity of the knowledge possessed by the white activists in the apartheid-era black trade unions. Often they alone possessed university educations, access to wide networks of activist academics, and the language and reading skills needed to understand many of the theoretical texts that were informing the strategies of the movement.³³¹ While it is true that the white activists in Equal Education are universally well-educated, they are far from the only activists for whom that is true. Technocratic, political, and strategic knowledge are also possessed in spades by Equal Education's black leaders and staff members. Though this is concentrated more heavily in the leadership and management ranks than it is in the general membership, it would be inaccurate to understand these types of knowledge as 'white' inside Equal Education. As the letter from the Western Cape facilitators describes Equal Education and their participation in it, "The gist of the movement was to eradicate inequality and injustice within the current state of the South African education system, through activism and

³³⁰ Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*.

³³¹ Buhlungu, "Rebels without a Cause of Their Own?."

thorough analysis' (emphasis mine). To the extent that racial conflict and tension exists inside Equal Education, it is not over technocratic knowledge and technical expertise as a domain of whiteness—many of these same facilitators rightly see themselves as possessing technocratic expertise regarding the South African education system.

Another dynamic highlighted by Buhlungu is the social distance that existed between the white and black trade unionists. This argument has some resonance inside Equal Education, a mass movement where the repurposing of anti-apartheid struggle songs and dances is part and parcel of the fun and bonding that happens at nearly every gathering, and at every protest, and in which some of its white employees are constantly found standing awkwardly on the sidelines of this joyous resistance. As mentioned before, Equal Education's handful of white staff members and leaders universally have access to what would be understood as a middle class existence in South Africa, which is untrue of the vast majority of EE's members and volunteers. They live at a remove from their employer constructed by the apartheid system itself, with the forty minute drive between town and Khayelitsha traversing different modes of existence. While the black staff and leaders living more middle class lives often possess what is effectively a double fluency in their understanding of the lives of the members and of the white staff, few of the white staff and leaders can claim the same. Their knowledge and understanding of Khayelitsha and the conditions of those who live there is largely through their work, not through some form of more comprehensive social integration. There are, of course, exceptions to this trend, with some white staffers and leaders spending their weekends or evenings in the townships with friends who live there and vice versa. And, there are numerous friendships throughout the organisation that decrease the social distance spoken of by Buhlungu—but it remains in place in a less complete form.

As with Buhlungu's research subjects, this social distance is exacerbated in part by the inability of many of the white activists of Equal Education to fluently speak Xhosa, the home language of most of the membership in Western Cape. Unlike Buhlungu's subjects, Equal Education actively tried to remedy this by offering Xhosa classes at the office and making them mandatory for any staff who did not speak the language. Also unlike Buhlungu's subjects, most of the membership possess substantial English language skills (though some students can be too shy to

speak it) and all of the black staff/volunteers speak fluent English, not just the higher-ranked individuals.³³²

While there are lessons to be taken from Buhlungu's research when examining present-day social movements, it is clear that white activists working in Equal Education occupy a fundamentally different position to their historical predecessors. While they lack the credibility that might be ascribed to them by tremendous sacrifice, their knowledge is not contentious as a result of its exceptionalism, and they are more socially integrated with (and thus comprehending of) their black colleagues in the management, leadership, and membership. And, as is mentioned in work regarding other present-day social movements in the United States and South Africa, whites and blacks within the movement are aligned on a set of common causes. Additionally, I argue that there are three additional elements that contribute to a broad culture of understanding, forbearance, and forgiveness in Equal Education.

First, as is discussed in Polletta's work, there are sets of interpersonal relationships that go beyond simple professionalism or ideological alignment. Polletta speaks of the additional elements to the relationships between the activists she studies (friendship, mentorship, etc.) as beneficial to the causes they serve in that they knit groups together more tightly, and 'have provided normative frameworks for deliberation,' bolstering the organisations' effectiveness.³³³ I argue that in the case of Equal Education, these additional relationship elements create a degree of trust, credibility, and thus forbearance when it comes to potentially contentious situations that could be viewed through the lenses of race, class, or both.

Numerous white staff members and leaders were friends with many of the black leaders, management, lower-ranking staff, facilitators, and volunteers—they would have drinks together on Friday evenings, meet up to socialize outside of work hours, invite activists from the townships for meals and to stay over at their homes, go for lunch together and offer to bring food back for others, etc. They were also long-time mentors of many within the organisation, beginning as youth group facilitators very early on, and working with many of the black youth who would go on to become facilitators and leaders themselves. Those students or facilitators they

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Polletta, *Freedom Is an Endless Meeting*, 3.

mentored or with whom they were friends were unlikely to view mistakes or controversial decisions in a racially charged light. Numerous younger black leaders in Equal Education specifically cited various white mentors and facilitators as part of the reason they continued on with the organisation—their work as mentors served as inspiration for their mentees to take on similar work, and their dedication to the cause prompted some who would have left long ago for various reasons to stay on as facilitators and staff.

I asked Luzuko Sidimba, who joined EE as an Equaliser in Khayelitsha in 2008 and has since advanced through the organization to become its Head of the Community Department in Western Cape to name whom he considered to be mentors, and whom he felt he learned the most from. He offered a list: ‘Joey [Hasson], for sure. And Yoliswa [Dwane], Doron [Isaacs], and Michelle [Adler].’³³⁴ Three of the four people he cited, including the one he named as most influential for him, are white. Similarly, Ntosh Mkhonto, who started as an Equaliser when she was growing up in Khayelitsha and nearby township Langa and is now a Junior Youth Organiser, described several white EE activists as either major influences on her political awakening or mentors for her as she advanced through EE’s ranks:

NM: Advanced facilitators, Nthuthuzo, etc, they made us listen when our teachers couldn’t—we trusted them, we believed them. Wynberg [High, where she attended school] had almost everything, but the library was always closed. When [youth group facilitator Daniel] Mackintosh told us ‘you should read your school’s policies,’ we didn’t even know what that is—and we read, and learned the school’s constitution by heart, and used it to challenge teachers who were defying it. So the following year, the school didn’t issue the constitution and tried to make a lot of changes.

In grade 12, we organized ourselves, using a reading that Mackintosh gave us—I don’t know, I think he had a few interesting ideas about things—and we started organizing ourselves and told them that they would march if they didn’t give a constitution to the students. The principal said it was illegal, and we said no, we won’t do it during school hours, but we’ll make things difficult, and call the media. There was no constitution by the time of the march, and they couldn’t suspend people because the students would come to the EE members and ask them whether things were legit.

....

And I became a facilitator, the grade 8s, and I got very used to working with grade 8s, and those same kids. When they put me with the grade 11s at camp, I nearly died. These old kids, yoh! Yolanda, the camp head, was very patient with us. But at the end of the day, we came up with one of the best programs, and you couldn’t believe it was yours, it was so good. And every camp you go to, you learn something new, about yourself, and your team, and how to work with people.

³³⁴ Luzuko Sidimba, 3 Jul, 2015, Phone conversation.

My facilitating years were very nice, I had some of the best people as mentors, or heads, the old facilitators, I never had the new ones, only one last year.

....

NM: One of the things that sucks about this new program [for developing youth group and camp curriculum] this year is that you are given programs. When we were facilitators, we wrote our own, and you could see what kind of a writer you were, and what kind of a thinker you were, and you learned a lot.

SB: Why was there a change?

NM: Well, I think it's easier [than the old system], but I think it's also because [the new facilitators] haven't been to facilitator camp. The old system is what [Daniel] Mackintosh, and Adam Sack, and Kevin Sack did for us. But things have changed, and we shouldn't complain.³³⁵

In this facilitator's recounting of her political and facilitating experiences at Equal Education, again three of four of her most formative mentors were white. While the experiences recounted above took place in the early days of the organisation, her appreciation for their efforts and influence on her carried forward. She also continued to find white mentors in the organization, including the editor of EE's newsletter:

SB: Now you're a junior organizer—what does that mean?

NM: More work! But I'm happy, so far so good. For some reason, being a junior organizer makes me really miss Heidi [Swart, the former editor of EE's newsletter who had left the organisation at that point, and who worked closely with EE's young activist journalists]... She used to mark my writing, and I would send her emails at 10 at night and she would still help.³³⁶

Comments like those made by the two activists quoted above were common amongst those I interviewed and interacted with—white activists within the organisation were recognised and appreciated by many of EE's young black leaders, many of whom joined as students, for the time, energy, emotion, and care that they put in to their interactions with the Equalisers. These informal relationships—which went above and beyond professional obligations—have also facilitated a substantial amount of knowledge transfer over the years, as students turned to those whom they knew or with whom they felt comfortable with concerns or questions about their schools.

³³⁵ Ntosh Mkonto, 25 Mar, 2014, In-person interview.

³³⁶ Ntosh Mkonto, 25 Mar, 2014, In-person interview.

Second, the leaders of Equal Education largely engage in behaviours understood by Danielle Allen to build trust and credibility in situations of difference, whether that's based on race, gender, sexuality, class, or another factor. I witnessed many instances in which leaders, white and black, would intentionally not offer their opinions on issues at the start of discussions, or sometimes at all, in order to encourage younger, lower ranked staff, facilitators, volunteers, and members to speak their minds. This was true in anything from the organisation's multi-year strategic planning meetings, in which large decisions such as whether to expand geographically (and to where) were being made to discussions about themes and strategies for the organisation's next public action. While leaders might attempt to frame conversations to ensure that particular questions were addressed, they often attempted to give others the chance to make decisions, actively ceding power and indicating their intentions to be bound by the will of the membership, rather than claiming decision-making authority on the grounds of their own roles, expertise, or authority.

Another behaviour in line with this was the tendency of white leaders and staff to provide relevant information on the questions at hand, in the event that they possessed it. Allen highlights this as a helpful but often insufficient method of building trust, as it says little about what level of vulnerability one is willing to bear, or the level of sacrifice he or she is willing to make for others.³³⁷ It is thus worth noting that frequently, those who provided such information would again step back and defer to others when it came to decisions on what to do with it. This is not a claim that this was done on all occasions, nor that the balance was perfectly struck. Still these attempts to actively rebalance power relationships within the organisation were expressly noted, and appreciated, by those who were not a part of the leadership or management of Equal Education.

This set of behaviours contributes to the third and final element that diffuses tensions created by differences within the organisation, a culture that attempts to encourage practices of democratic citizenship and respect as discussed by Chipkin above. Contrasting this set of practices to the kinds of practices associated with a racialised, nativist understanding of national subjecthood, Chipkin writes:

What counts is a series of processes (rituals, ceremonies) through which the individual comes to see that he or she really is like those around him or her,

³³⁷ Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*.

that they are all equal in worth, and that despite their differences, they share with each other a deep solidarity. This is how an election functions; even if its effects are short lived.... Is this not the challenge of democracy: to regularize such encounters so that they are part of the ordinary lived experience of people? Is this not the proper measure of deliberative or participatory democratic forums? They socialise individuals according to democratic norms and values. There in the forum, one is called to listen to the other, to accord him or her with respect, and even when one disagrees forcefully with what he or she says, open oneself to his or her thinking.³³⁸

Equal Education, through the functioning of its political work, attempts to function in this way much of the time. Though the staff is hierarchical, in that there are managers to whom employees must answer, to the extent that everyone is understood to be a part of a democratically governed movement, opinions of the staff, facilitators, and volunteers are solicited and respected in staff meetings, regardless of the speaker's position in the organisation. One of the more frequent commenters in staff meetings, whose ideas were often implemented, was one of the junior members of the administrative staff.

Similarly, when the organisation was functioning at its best according to those who have participated for many years, facilitators were provided the skills and knowledge needed to run their youth groups in the manner they saw fit, and usually ran them as environments of discussion and open inquiry, rather than authoritarian knowledge transmission—much like how they themselves determined the agendas for the youth groups. The quotes from the interview with Ntosh Mkonto above begin to highlight this element of interaction, and she continued on to put a finer point on it, speaking about the process created to develop content for youth groups in 2014:

SB: Some of the PCR people are saying that this new youth group system was to try to improve the content of youth groups, do you think that's working?

NM: Yes, I think that's working a lot, it was good for the CLs and Junior Youth Organisers to have that meeting with Doron, to have that big brainstorming session. It would be good for the facilitators too, and to have this on a bigger scale, and you participate. Doron likes people who ask questions about issues, and so you get to see things that you're thinking of, and that you don't know how to fit into youth groups.³³⁹

This underscored a culture of collaboration, respect, and open inquiry at the level of both the facilitators and the Equalisers. The 2014 system of developing content

³³⁸ Chipkin, *Do South Africans Exist?*, 213-14.

³³⁹ Ntosh Mkonto, 25 Mar, 2014, In-person interview.

for the youth groups is an excellent example of this; at the first session, the Community Leaders and Junior Youth Organisers worked with the research staff and a couple of EE's leaders (including a couple of white staff members and leaders) to brainstorm ideas for youth group content, which they later whittled down into a topic list and order. Most of the ideas that made the cut were provided by the CLs and junior organisers, not by the researchers or EE's leaders.

The absence of these collaborative, inclusive, inquisitive attitudes and practices was highlighted by both the collective letters from the facilitators and by my individual interviewees as a source of the eruption at camp. As one facilitator I interviewed put it,

When you ask some things, you don't get your answers now, you get them after everyone has edited them... and yeah, we think we shouldn't ask questions. It's the people who aren't asking questions who get paid. And these changes (trails off) they didn't happen when it was [facilitator names three white facilitators who helped run EE's early youth work].

How do these three elements relate to the incidents described above? First, I argue that they are foundational elements of an institutional culture within Equal Education that makes such fractiousness the exception, rather than the norm. Next, I argue that they demonstrate why many black members, facilitators, and leaders did *not* see these instances through the lens of race, but rather through lack of consultation and input in the first instance, and incompetence and an inappropriate approach to knowledge, in the second. As it turned out, many of the facilitators present in the camp meeting were frustrated with the facilitator from Johannesburg for bringing the Minister's comments into what they saw as questions related to power and decision-making in the organisation that were unrelated to race. Their concerns, effectively, were that the leaders in the group were striking the wrong balance on the points made by Allen and Chipkin—on sacrifice, vulnerability, and egalitarian culture—not that there were too many whites in the organisation or that they were making all of the decisions.

Finally, it is worth noting that while the above elements are factors in how the individuals in the movement interpret events and information, so too are the attitudes, behaviours, and frames that they encounter in the rest of society. Unlike Chipkin, who seems to see a frame of egalitarian democratic citizenship as mutually exclusive with a racialised frame, the behaviours and attitudes of the activists

demonstrate that individuals need not be comprehensively given over to one or the other. These frames both shift over time as a result of frequent practice or the development of relationships, and can be simultaneously held by one individual, with one invoked in a given situation, and the other in a different situation.

Moreover, this chapter shows that another element in this relationship, who possesses *techne* as opposed to *mētis*, and the line between the two, is not as clean or simplistic in practice as Scott makes it out to be. In the cases given by Scott, the focus is on the ultimate decisions made by governments, largely understood as monolithic entities that implement what they see fit, rather than on the negotiations of government representatives and bureaucrats with the citizens whose wills they are tasked with implementing in democratic societies. When the focus is on those negotiations, what one might count as *mētis* versus *techne* becomes difficult to parse, leaving a series of claims to expertise often animated by some amalgam or fusion of both technocratic and experiential knowledge.

These arguments have important implications regarding how to interpret these contentious moments and discussions in the context of knowledge in Equal Education, which appear, at least at the surface, to deal with the kinds of identity questions raised by the Minister and DBE and discussed in chapter four. While I cannot claim to speak for all of those in the movement, my interviewees and the sense that they had of their compatriots was not that there was an element of racial nativism, as described by Xolela Mangcu in the ANC's recent politics, nor that there was a major racial rift in the organisation. They were, however, in agreement that race—as well as other elements of identity-based difference—sometimes produced tensions or discomfort between colleagues and comrades, as in the rest of South Africa. White people were described as sometimes ignorant of how they came across to black members and staff. A sample of comments on the issue:

Brad Brockman: You know, we as EE are not insulated from the broader politics. I guess my own opinion is that the organisation is diverse in terms of race and class. There is a perception that the kind of—and I think it would be held more by the younger, by the facilitators—that the whites in the organisation are working in comfortable jobs, in research, finance, management... So there's that. And it's complicated by the fact that most white people here are university graduates. But if you look at the figures of the management team, and the National Council, the numbers are quite overwhelming [in favour of black people holding more leadership roles].³⁴⁰

³⁴⁰ Brad Brockman, 10 Jun, 2015, Phone interview.

Luzuko Sidimba: There aren't any problems with race in EE, not to me. Maybe to some there is a problem, but when I talk to other comrades, they don't seem to think so either.³⁴¹

Doron Isaacs: The best will in the world doesn't change the fact that the way that wealth and power in South Africa is distributed is significantly unchanged... You don't take that personally when people raise vital, necessary anger... that's the kind of consciousness we're trying to raise, so when it catches you in the back of the head, you can't take it personally. But we couldn't have built EE if the whites in power were unapologetic, or entitled... the organisation would not have gotten off the ground. In my experience, people sense this very quickly, when others are patronising, when they're not their political ally, their comrade. That when the lines are drawn, this person will not stand by me.... I don't think EE should have no white staff members—the question is the balance of power. The most important thing is the politics of the group, and the second is about the balance of power. It's pointless having the perfect racial and class profile and getting the politics wrong.³⁴²

Ntsikie Dlulani: Personally, [the Department's press statement] didn't affect me in any way. When people aren't doing their job and want to get out of accountability, they tend to turn to race.....People come from rich families and still work here. There are people who have jobs at EE who don't have degrees but have been hired. It is up to you to educate yourself as much as you can along the way. It is not about race, or it shouldn't be.³⁴³

The difference in this attitude towards race when compared to the nativism evinced by the Minister and her team can be underscored by noting that in Equal Education, those who believed white people behaved in ignorant ways still disagreed that Equal Education was a racist organisation. Nor is Equal Education an organisation where, in the manner of von Holdt's bureaucrats, technocratic expertise is seen as 'white'. The National Council, which took the ultimate decision on the Minister's extension, had 17 black members of 20 total. While personal identity no doubt influences initial and subsequent interactions inside EE, and presumably does in other movements as well, it does not function as a barrier to the acceptance of knowledge and participation inside the organisation in the ways that it is invoked outside the organisation. Instead, trust, built through mentorship, friendship, equitable self-interest and sacrifice, serves as the internal currency that enables Equal Education to conduct its external knowledge-based advocacy so effectively.

³⁴¹ Luzuko Sidimba, 3 Jul, 2015, Phone interview.

³⁴² Doron Isaacs, 17 Jun, 2015, Online video interview.

³⁴³ Ntsikie Dlulani, 5 Jul, 2015, Phone interview.

CHAPTER SIX

‘BUILD OUR FUTURE’: KNOWLEDGE IN POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Thus far, this thesis has focused on knowledge in three ways. First, chapter one discusses how people acquire new knowledge practices and how these knowledge practices set the terms of substantive citizen engagement with government in the context of South African education history. Second, chapters two and three discuss technocratic versus experiential knowledge, the blurriness between those categories, and how government officials attempt to exclude citizen participation on knowledge-based grounds, as well as Equal Education’s ability to navigate both forms of knowledge. Third, chapters four and five discuss the interpersonal, contextual factors of personal experience and identity that preclude, limit, and affect people’s receptiveness to knowledge-based credibility, and how these, too, shape the grounds for active citizenship.

Though these are all different approaches to understanding the role of knowledge in democratic participation, they share a common thread: all ask ‘What is to be done?’ rather than ‘How can it be done?’ They exist in a largely ideal policy realm, and establish priorities, rather than offer detailed plans. ‘How,’ the next logical step after establishing ‘what,’ was a question infrequently answered by both Equal Education and the government in their public dialogues with each other on the Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure. The exceptions in this regard were to point out projects where the ‘how’ had either succeeded or failed—the National Department of Basic Education highlighting how many schools they had built,³⁴⁴ the Western Cape Department of Education noting libraries they constructed,³⁴⁵ or Equal Education calling out government for having failed to build as many schools or libraries as they had set out to build.³⁴⁶ Even in these exceptions, ‘how’ these states were reached was rarely considered.

³⁴⁴ "Over 1500 Schools Built in E Cape," *South African Government News Agency*, 21 Feb 2014.

³⁴⁵ Western Cape Department of Education, "'Thank You Small Library Project' Upgrades Four City School Libraries," Western Cape Provincial Government, <http://www.westerncape.gov.za/news/thank-you-small-library-project-upgrades-four-city-school-libraries>.

³⁴⁶ Equal Education, "Equal Education School Infrastructure Overview & History," Equal Education, <http://www.equaleducation.org.za/campaigns/minimum-norms-and-standards>; "Equal Education Campaigns Libraries and the Bookery Overview," Equal Education, <http://www.equaleducation.org.za/campaigns/bookery-1/overview>.

Characterising the ‘how’ of government implementation knowledge is a question that likely falls into the same kinds of discussions that ‘what’ does in the prior chapters (technocratic versus experiential, activist usage, interpersonal credibility), but verifying that is an inquiry outside the scope of this project. This chapter focuses on a different question, specific to the role played by the kinds of knowledge spoken to by the question ‘how can it be done?’. This chapter examines EE’s involvement in the government’s attempts to implement the Regulations on Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure. It asks why, despite Equal Education’s policy expertise, assisting in implementation planning proved more difficult than they predicted. Then, in looking at Equal Education’s successes in conducting ‘social audits’ of services promised by government, this chapter interrogates what lessons can be learned about citizen participation from Equal Education’s experiences working on the implementation of the policies they fought for.

ENACTING THE NORMS AND STANDARDS: KNOWLEDGE IN IMPLEMENTATION

Equal Education’s campaign for Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure (discussed in chapters two through five) culminated in the national Department of Basic Education releasing the ‘Regulations relating to minimum uniform norms and standards for public school infrastructure’ on 29 November 2013.³⁴⁷ This document lays out legally binding requirements and timelines for the provincial departments of education. The objectives of the regulations stated in the document are:

- (a) to provide minimum uniform norms and standards for public school infrastructure;
- (b) to ensure that there is compliance with the minimum uniform norms and standards in the design and construction of new schools and additions, alterations, and improvements to schools which exist when these regulations are published; and
- (c) to provide for timeframes within which school infrastructure backlogs must be eradicated.³⁴⁸

The regulations go on to mandate specific improvements to school infrastructure to be completed on a three year, seven year, ten year, and seventeen year timeline,

³⁴⁷ Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education, "Regulations Relating to Minimum Uniform Norms and Standards for Public School Infrastructure," ed. South Africa Department of Basic Education (2013).

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 6.

with the most pressing improvements (for instance, replacement of schools made of mud and/or asbestos and provision of water, electricity, and sanitation) to be completed on the three year timeline, and the least pressing to be completed on the seventeen year timeline (for instance, the provision of sports facilities). These timelines do not prohibit well-equipped provinces from bringing their infrastructure into compliance on a faster timeline—higher-performing provinces like Western Cape and Gauteng may well complete this work more quickly than the scheduled timeline—but provinces must complete the work by the deadlines specified in the regulations or they would be in violation of the regulations and susceptible to legal challenges.

The regulations also required that each province submit a plan for adhering to the regulations within a year after the regulations' release, and on an annual date thereafter. According to the regulations, the plan must:

make provision for, but not be limited to, the following: (i) the backlogs at district level that each province experiences in terms of the norms and standards; (ii) costed short, medium, and long-term plans with targets; (iii) how new schools should be planned and maintained and how existing schools are to be upgraded and maintained; and (iv) proposals in respect to procurement, implementation, and monitoring.³⁴⁹

Upon release of the Norms and Standards, Equal Education quickly agreed that one of its priorities for the next year would be to create a 'shadow plan' for at least one of the provinces. There was some precedent in such a move, in Equal Education's annual 'shadow report' to Parliament (discussed in detail in chapter three), in which Equal Education submits an alternative annual report to the National Parliament on the activities of the DBE in a manner similar to the report submitted by the DBE itself. The idea was that a 'shadow plan' for the norms and standards in one province would fulfil a similar accountability function.³⁵⁰ EE also referred to these as 'People's Plans' on some occasions.

Equal Education's National Council adopted a series of priorities for 2014, with the first priority being to 'Ensure that Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure are implemented in the provinces.' The goal to draw up alternative plans alongside the provinces was described as such:

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 9.

³⁵⁰ Equal Education, "Departmental Planning Notes: Notes and Presentations from Staff Camp, February 2014," Strategic planning document for internal circulation (2014).

Put together “People’s Plans” for School Infrastructure in certain provinces. The plans will be drawn up through consultation with students and parents in affected schools and communities, and with the assistance of experts familiar with the departments.³⁵¹

Equal Education’s initial planning for the implementation of Norms and Standards assumed that provinces would not wish to involve them as contributors to the actual plans. In a discussion document for the National Council in the meeting that eventually led to agreement on preparing alternative plans, EE’s General Secretary’s office seemed to expect that provinces were unlikely to even release their own plans to EE willingly, a hypothesis later proved correct by the fact that it took the department nearly two years to release the plans.³⁵² Referring to the provincial plans, the discussion document notes ‘We’ll have to write to every province to ask for these after a year. If provinces don’t respond or refuse to give us access, we’ll have to use PAIA [the Promotion of Access to Information Act]. We should make all implementation plans publicly available, as well as the progress reports.’³⁵³ PAIA is a government transparency and freedom of information law through which most government materials are available to citizens. The document also suggested that Equal Education would need to use PAIA just to acquire information from each province on what schools needed which improvements. The basis for this pessimism was in part a manifestation of *mētis*, experience with the DBE’s and WCED’s historical track record of reluctance when it came to handing information over to Equal Education. It was also likely based in a meeting hosted by the DBE before the publication of the final regulations. The Department invited representatives from Equal Education as well as from the provincial departments of education. The provincial representatives, all high-ranking officials in their respective departments, were apprehensive about the requirements of the standards, and the manner(s) in which they might be held personally or professionally responsible for clearing their provinces’ school infrastructure backlogs.

It was an unexpected turn of events, then, when officials from the Eastern Cape Provincial Treasury asked to meet with Equal Education and the Eastern Cape Department of Education about the Norms and Standards during their planning

³⁵¹ "2014-2015 Priorities," Strategic plan for internal circulation (2014), 1.

³⁵² Tebogo Monama, "Education Norms, Standards Plan out Soon," *The Star*, 8 Jun 2015.

³⁵³ Equal Education, "National Council Workshop, 10 January 2014," (2014), 10.

process.³⁵⁴ Not only was Equal Education sceptical about the prospects of getting any information regarding norms and standards, it had also assisted a group of learners at Moshesh Secondary School in rural Eastern Cape in suing the ECDOE over the conditions in their school.³⁵⁵ In settling the suit, the ECDOE agreed to work with the learners and Equal Education to improve the conditions at Moshesh. Still, Equal Education's representatives had the sense that the ECDOE's willingness to involve EE in improving the issues at Moshesh was begrudging. While there was thus precedent for collaboration between Equal Education and the bureaucrats at the ECDOE, a new, unprompted invitation to do so was nonetheless surprising to EE.

Prior to this invitation, Equal Education had not collaborated with government on such detailed implementation planning. Equal Education had successfully worked with government departments on advocacy work (for instance, with the WCED on a video about textbooks), and implemented programming that government departments then chose to adopt (on seeing the successes of the Bookery, the WCED now partially funds its community librarian programme). But the group had only engaged in collaborative planning with government departments on a minor scale, such as assisting with the WCED's transportation planning and school uniform provision, in the wake of the school closures, or with textbook provision in Western Cape in 2010. And working with Eastern Cape, of all departments, would be a tremendous challenge.

There are two quick and dirty ways for a civil society group to calculate the potential impact of its work, neither of which stands particularly well on its own. The first is a measure of magnitude—how much need is there? The second is a measure of probability—how likely is this effort to succeed? By the first measure, there could be no better department in South Africa with which Equal Education could contribute to implementation planning. By the second, there could be no worse.

³⁵⁴ Equal Education separately arranged to meet with provincial education bureaucrats and political education department heads in Mpumalanga, Gauteng, Western Cape, Free State, and KwaZulu-Natal

³⁵⁵ Yoliswa Dwane, "Supporting Affidavit," Supporting affidavit in the case between Equal Education and the ECDOE regarding Moshesh High School (2012).

As Equal Education frequently highlighted in its materials, the Eastern Cape was the province with the worst educational infrastructure in the country. Between poor governance and service provision under apartheid and absorption of those same bureaucrats who had previously failed to deliver into the new bureaucracy, Eastern Cape was starting at a large disadvantage compared to provinces like Western Cape and Gauteng. According to the DBE's most recent survey, conducted in 2014, South Africa had 23,742 schools, 862 of which lacked access to water, 1366 lacked electricity, and 643 of which lacked access to sanitation facilities. Of those schools without the most basic of facilities, 582 of the schools without water, 550 of the schools without electricity, and 519 of the schools without sanitation were located in Eastern Cape. Eastern Cape had 5,469 schools in 2014, meaning 11% of its schools lacked water, 10% of its schools lacked electricity, and 9% of its schools lacked sanitation facilities. Looking at the numbers as a share of the most deprived schools in South Africa, Eastern Cape contained 68% of the schools without water, 40% of the schools without electricity, and 81% of the schools without sanitation facilities.³⁵⁶

The new regulations on infrastructure were designed to have the biggest impact in places like Eastern Cape in their first three years—places where even the most basic elements of school infrastructure (e.g., buildings without gaping holes in their walls) could not be taken as given. It was precisely this state of affairs that motivated EE to select Eastern Cape as the site of their Solidarity Tour, in which they invited high-profile South Africans to visit schools and raise awareness of the desperate state of school infrastructure. The amount of need in Eastern Cape, in short, was enormous.

The probability of success, on the other hand, was the reverse. From 2011 through 2013, the Eastern Cape Department of Education had been placed under national administration due to its inability to run its own affairs.³⁵⁷ The massive infrastructure backlog was only one of many manifestations of the ECDOE's failures. Other demonstrations that the ECDOE might not be the easiest of partners to work with included the province's inadequate teacher placement and

³⁵⁶ South African Press Association, "Scores of Public Schools Lack Basic Services – Motshekga," *City Press*, 18 Sep 2014.

³⁵⁷ Bekezela Phakathi, "Eastern Cape, Limpopo Education Back on Track, Says Motshekga," *Business Day*, 12 Sep 2013.

allocation,³⁵⁸ repeated last place provincial rankings on South Africa's final secondary school matriculation exams,³⁵⁹ and its inability to know the answers to some of the most basic of questions about schooling in the province. One Equal Education researcher mentioned, in the casual tone that one might use in describing the current weather, that the ECDOE did not know where all of its schools were located. Startled, I checked to make sure I had heard the researcher correctly, and that the statement was not exaggeration or hyperbole. I was assured it was not.

Some of the ECDOE's troubles, no doubt, were due to the incompetence of well-meaning but badly placed, trained, or supported bureaucrats. In her 2011 seminar for EE described in chapter four, Mary Metcalfe, an education professor and former EE board member, addressed problems faced by the Eastern Cape education bureaucracy. She gave a series of explanations for why the compromises made to end apartheid harmed the Eastern Cape's bureaucracy in particular. First, Eastern Cape was created by combining a large number of already dysfunctional homeland bureaucracies with part of Cape Province. Most of the competent Cape Province bureaucrats opted to go to Western Cape, draining the region of a good deal of knowledge and expertise. Second, the settlement guaranteed the jobs of the former homeland bureaucrats (largely originally hired for reasons of cronyism and patronage), meaning that they could not be replaced by more competent officials. Nearly two decades on, many of these officials still remained, in Metcalfe's estimation, effectively retired in place. New, dynamic, young employees found themselves unable to advance, prompting them to quit and harming the potential for future recruitment of the talent that could help transform the Eastern Cape bureaucracy. This falls short of much of the rest of the South African public sector when measured against the idealised version of bureaucratic competence described by Foucault in chapter one, or Weber in the introduction. Still, reports from Equal Education's representatives indicated that there was a group of younger bureaucrats who seemed competent and eager to do their work.

Other troubles in Eastern Cape reflected graft and corruption at an extreme scale, all the way to the highest level. Portia 'Pankie' Sizani, the wife of eventual ANC

³⁵⁸ Dianne Hawker, "EC Schools Sue Education Department over Teacher Salaries," *eNCA*, 26 Nov 2013.

³⁵⁹ Lubabalo Ngeukana, "Mixed Reaction to Eastern Cape's Matric Results," *City Press*, 7 Jan 2014.

chief whip Stone Sizani, who served as the ECDOE's MEC (political head of department) until 2012, has been dogged with corruption allegations. Portia Sizani is alleged to have filled the ECDOE's payrolls with hundreds of 'ghost teachers,' when she was serving as the province's Early Childhood Development district coordinator. These 'ghost teachers' were real teachers whose details Sizani used to apply for and fill positions without their knowledge. Then, upon payment into their accounts, Sizani would allegedly notify them that a mistake had been made and that they must pay her back. The ghost teachers never set foot in the schools from which they were nonetheless drawing salaries totalling over R1.2M, much of which then allegedly went straight back to Sizani.³⁶⁰ Even with the most efficient, effective, well-resourced bureaucracy, the infrastructure issues faced by Eastern Cape would be an uphill battle. The ECDOE's actually-existing resources rendered that uphill battle just this side of a Sisyphean challenge.

Equal Education knew this from the start. Between EE's work with the ECDOE on the Moshesh settlement, the carefully orchestrated Solidarity Tour, and PCR's research into the deficits in Eastern Cape and diligent monitoring of negative news articles on education coming out of Eastern Cape, one cannot accuse EE of having rushed into meetings with the Eastern Cape with blinders on. But the ECDOE was not the only institution in this arrangement that could be characterized as lacking the necessary competence to succeed in a project of this scale. One of the supreme ironies in all of my fieldwork was the decision of government bureaucrats to include Equal Education in their work at this particular point in time. The group had fought for years to be taken seriously on policy grounds, to little obvious effect. The infrastructure regulations did not come about because the provincial departments of education or the national Department of Basic Education had finally come around to seeing the activists, organizers, and researchers as experts in their own rights—after a long string of public activism from EE on the subject, the Minister eventually issued the regulations under the threat of the force of law. So why now, in a process and on a project in which they had minimal expertise, was EE being invited in as a group of experts?

³⁶⁰ South African Press Association and M&G Online Reporter, "Sizani Fraud Case Postponed Again, Equal Education 'Concerned'," *Mail & Guardian*, 2 September 2014; Kathryn Kimberley, "Court Hears More Details from Ghost Teacher," *Business Day*, 28 Aug 2014; "Principals Tell of Ghost Teachers, Appointed with Falsified Details," *Business Day*, 20 Aug 2014.

CONTRACTORS OR CONTRACT READERS?: PLANNING OR MONITORING FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

EE had never needed to think about logistical planning or implementation on either the level of scale or detail required of the ECDOE to comply with the infrastructure regulations—the Bookery was its largest implementation project to date. Additionally, the work required a knowledge of fields in which Equal Education had no substantial prior experience: national and provincial budgeting, the processes of the provincial department of public works, and the private construction industry. When EE agitated for the norms and standards, the argument was based largely on educational studies showing the pedagogical benefits of improved infrastructure and demands for dignity, not, for instance, on large-scale construction plans and budgets.

Equal Education, however, is an organisation that prides itself on its ability to ‘get smart quick’ on any issue sent its direction. This would not be the first time that EE made a foray into a big issue that it previously knew little about—the movement’s historical successes relied on precisely such moves, such as its research on the provision of school libraries, or the textbook procurement and provision system. When its researchers were invited to meet with the officials from the ECDOE, Eastern Cape Provincial Treasury, and the National Treasury, they were curious about where they and the rest of Equal Education might be able to help in the effort. Still, early comments by research staffers indicated that they thought this shift was one different in magnitude and in kind than their previous efforts. This work would require EE to learn a voluminous amount about the construction industry both in South Africa writ large and the Eastern Cape in particular, as well as about the minutiae involved in creating a satisfactory bureaucratic plan for the construction of hundreds of new schools and the upgrading of hundreds of others.

In keeping with its grassroots, participatory approach, EE’s strategy prior to the ECDOE reaching out was to develop ‘People’s Plans’ in consultation with students and parents in the regions EE was writing the plans for. Though EE’s strategic priorities for 2014 do not offer many specifics on what these would look like, or how these would be compiled, the researchers and activists I spoke with believed the process might be somewhat similar to the outreach and consultation efforts Equal Education made after the release of the first draft of the norms and

standards for school infrastructure, though the scale might be smaller. In this prior effort, staff and activists had gone to all of the provinces in which EE was active, and held teaching sessions and town hall meetings on the norms and standards, ultimately soliciting input from students, parents, teachers, and community members on the draft.³⁶¹

After it began to look like Equal Education might have a chance at materially affecting the plans drawn up and submitted by Eastern Cape to the national Department of Basic Education, their rhetoric started to slide from ‘People’s Plans’ to ‘Shadow Plans’.³⁶² Discussion within PCR (the department driving the norms and standards work, along with the Equal Education Law Centre) began to centre on how the researchers could learn more about all of the areas mentioned above as expertise deficits, rather than developing a process for soliciting community input to put together ‘people’s plans.’ The invitation from Eastern Cape prompted a shift from community participation on an accountability effort to a concentration of technical expertise in the hands of a few staff members—a very different mode of operation for Equal Education.

PCR’s first all-staff meeting in 2014, following the release of the final regulations on infrastructure but prior to meeting with anyone in Eastern Cape, was held in EE’s ‘conference room,’ an aspirationally-named room barely big enough to hold PCR’s half-dozen or so members at the time. Surrounded by painted cinderblock walls, a threadbare carpet, and with chairs crammed so tightly that multiple people had to leave the room to let anyone else in or out, PCR staff worked through the strategy of ensuring the implementation of the biggest policy change to South Africa’s education system in several years. The first agenda item was on the merits of people’s plans vs. shadow plans vs. attempting to actively assist provinces in drafting their plans.

One of the managers expressed a view that the rest of the department nodded along with: ‘We try, as far as possible, to be helpful to the government. That doesn’t mean there won’t be little battles or whatever, but for me, one step better than a shadow plan is for us to be involved.’ From there, the discussion moved to discuss what Equal Education might be well-placed to do for provincial departments. For

³⁶¹ Equal Education, "National Council Workshop, 10 January 2014," 10.

³⁶² "Departmental Planning Notes: Notes and Presentations from Staff Camp, February 2014."

instance, one suggestion was that EE could use its impressive media reach to publicize a given province's categorization of schools into the year categories specified by the regulations (improvements needed within three years vs. seven, ten, or seventeen), and solicit feedback from schools, parents, and teachers about whether their schools had been rightly categorized, thus assisting with a major data problems facing Eastern Cape at the least. Though one staff member was worried that the departments might get defensive because they were not in possession of that information, another staff member pointed out that getting that information would be critical to the departments' success in implementing the regulations, and it was more likely that they would be grateful for the help.

The next question raised in the department meeting was 'So what is a shadow plan?' That question drew the following set of responses:

Manager 1: So a plan would say, in order to comply with the minimum norms and standards, this is what you would have to do, including costing. ...I think if we're serious about getting these norms and standards implemented, we must get the big construction companies on board, not just the little ones that constantly fold in Eastern Cape.

Manager 2: All of these little BEE [Black Economic Empowerment]³⁶³ companies were not doing their job, read the Auditor General's report.

Researcher 1: In these tenders for hospitals and schools, low-level companies are getting high-level jobs.

Researcher 2: And there aren't other BEE companies that can do this?

Manager 2: Some companies are capable of building one school, but then after they have that track record, they get given ten schools.

Researcher 3: We've requested lots of information on this.

The exchange was unable to clarify just what such a plan would look like, with the researchers aware that they were headed into unfamiliar territory. Aside from repairs to its own offices and discussions of building a new office in Khayelitsha, EE had not engaged with construction companies—and why would it have? Moreover, EE's (accurate) perception was that it was unlikely that Eastern Cape had the capacity for this effort at this point in time, at least if they continued to rely on the companies that they had historically used. The researchers thought that Eastern Cape and potentially KwaZulu-Natal were both poised to fail to meet the DBE's mandatory timeline. Though there was still some discussion of a 'social audit,' in which students, parents, and community members would take stock of their schools and verify that they were on the appropriate upgrade list (named as one of

³⁶³ A government program that encourages entrepreneurship and economic development efforts from individuals belonging to groups discriminated against under the apartheid system.

the departmental priorities for 2014), PCR had already begun to mentally and verbally consolidate future work on the implementation of norms and standards in the research team and the EELC.³⁶⁴ As will be shown below, despite increasing momentum towards locating much of this effort with the hired research staff, Equal Education also maintained a desire to find opportunities for popular, grassroots participation and thus to keep the broad membership and public involved with the infrastructure campaign.

In the first half of 2014, Equal Education's work on norms and standards took two main forms: first, meeting with the Eastern Cape on their actual implementation plan to be submitted to the DBE, and second, planning and hosting a conference on how to implement the norms and standards. These projects ran concurrently and largely involved the same staff members, though a different manager took responsibility for leading each initiative. The two initiatives also shaped each other to some degree. The Eastern Cape engagement informed the content that Equal Education staff members felt it was important to include in the conference and who needed to be in attendance. The conference, for its part, was intended to help educate Equal Education staff members on how to best work with and support the ECDOE's plan-writing. The section that follows will outline each of these initiatives and examine how knowledge and participation shaped each initiative.

Equal Education's first meetings with the Eastern Cape bureaucrats responsible for writing the infrastructure plan took place on 25 February 2014. The meetings were hosted at the offices of the ECDOE, and included representatives from the ECDOE, the Eastern Cape's Provincial Treasury, and the National Treasury (NT). Equal Education sent three members from PCR to the meeting: one manager and two researchers.³⁶⁵ No grassroots members of Equal Education were in attendance, though one of EE's representatives held a dual role as an elected representative of Equal Education on the Secretariat and National Council. Over the course of their time in Eastern Cape, Equal Education's staff had three separate meetings. The first was a formal meeting which involved representatives from all of the above institutions, and the second two meetings were more informal, smaller meetings between EE's representatives and individuals from the ECDOE.

³⁶⁴ Equal Education, "Departmental Planning Notes: Notes and Presentations from Staff Camp, February 2014."

³⁶⁵ "Secretariat Meeting Minutes, 12 March 2014," (2014).

The first of the three meetings was a forum for the NT to deliver feedback to the ECDOE on infrastructure plans it had previously submitted to the NT for funding. Equal Education's notes from the meeting explain:

A new method of allocating revenue/conditional grants is being phased in, and is to be implemented by the different provincial departments' infrastructure planning and delivery units. The aim of this process is to achieve better value for money from investment in provincial infrastructure. It is aimed at institutionalising proper planning.

This method entails provincial departments giving NT detailed infrastructure delivery plans two financial years before the actual allocation of the funds. Which means the plans being considered at the meeting were infrastructure delivery plans for the 2015/16 financial year.

The planning is over a period of two financial years and the relevant Division of Revenue Act determines the process to be followed in each phase. The meeting dealt with year 1- Infrastructure and Procurement Planning. NT reviews the planning documents; they consider the effort made by the department in compiling the documents, whether the projects the department wishes to undertake are supported by a sound planning process, the readiness on the part of the department to implement these projects.³⁶⁶

According to EE's notes from the meeting, the process is for the NT to assess the year 1 plans and determine whether they are sufficient to be sent on to year 2 of the bidding process. The ECDOE's plans were judged worthy to be passed on to year 2, but barely. The NT had expressed concerns about the state of the Eastern Cape's infrastructure plans. The threshold for succeeding in year 2 would be higher than the threshold for year 1, and the Eastern Cape's plans would fail the next year and thus be denied funding. The NT encouraged the ECDOE to make use of their colleagues at the provincial treasury—plans written in collaboration with provincial treasuries have historically been more rigorous and successful, according to the standards of the NT.

According to the ECDOE, they faced several substantial challenges in their planning process—first, roughly a fifth of its districts (the organisational level below the provincial departments of education) were refusing to engage with the department for political reasons; second, many of the Eastern Cape schools exist on land controlled by traditional authorities, requiring the ECDOE to liaise with the relevant traditional leaders as well as the Eastern Cape's Department of Public

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 4.

Works, the latter of which the ECDOE alleged had failed to do its part in the process.

In sum, even before starting to engage with the planning required for compliance with the infrastructure regulations, the Eastern Cape was falling behind on its work on school infrastructure, due to both lack of capacity and politics. This could be seen on the ground. According to the DBE, Eastern Cape was scheduled to construct 49 schools in the 2012-2013 financial year. However, they only managed to construct 17 schools, achieving only 35% of the work they were scheduled to complete. In that same year, they underspent their R95M infrastructure by R23.2M, meaning the ECDOE had to return 24% of the infrastructure budget to the National Treasury due to lack of use, but not due to lack of need.³⁶⁷

The next meeting was between Equal Education's representatives and two bureaucrats from the Eastern Cape Provincial Treasury. According to Equal Education's notes on the meeting circulated to its National Secretariat, the ECT's representatives were concerned about the ECDOE's poor planning skills. Though the department had hired a number of promising new staff members, the Treasury's staffers believed that it would take awhile for the new staff to adjust to the way things are done at the ECDOE and in the provincial government writ large, and so they had not seen immediate improvement in capacity because of the new hires. Finally, the Eastern Cape Treasury representatives noted that they were eager to have future meetings with Equal Education's representatives about the norms and standards and their financial implications, a statement of enthusiasm for their presence that Equal Education's representatives were unused to hearing. Equal Education has not had a historically contentious relationship with either the national or provincial treasury departments—if anything, EE's conscientiousness and creation of external pressure made the NT's job as an internal government compliance agency with regards to the ECDOE easier. In this manner, Equal Education's goals and interests were in many ways more aligned with both treasury departments than was true across all of the participating government departments.

The final discussion was between Equal Education's representatives and the ECDOE's Deputy Director General of Educational Planning, Evaluation, and

³⁶⁷ Bongani Nkosi, "Eastern Cape School Chaos Continues," *Mail & Guardian*, 12 Jul 2013.

Monitoring. This meeting was aimed at outlining how Equal Education could work with her infrastructure planning team, how EE might continue to be involved in the Eastern Cape's infrastructure planning work, and what kinds of assistance the ECDOE might need from EE. The conclusion was that a longer meeting would need to happen between EE's representatives and her infrastructure planning team, with a date to be set in the future.

After the meetings with the ECDOE, National Treasury, and Eastern Cape Provincial Treasury, Equal Education's representatives debriefed the rest of the PCR department about the meeting, including their hesitations and concerns with the work. One of the three, speaking candidly of the obstacles, explained:

What discouraged me about the EC meeting with the department is that norms and standards will not be implemented within the timeframe. They just don't have it together (trails off) and I thought 'shit, we're gonna suffer here.' They're going to struggle to put together those plans, and so if we can find plans from other places (trails off) and they'll struggle with procurement, and building.

Another EE representative at the ECDOE meetings suggested that perhaps getting engaged with the NT was the way to go—they were clearly organized, prepared, and seemed competent in comparison to what the EE staffers thought of the ECDOE's work, at least as shown in this meeting. In short, unlike the ECDOE, at least the treasury was full of fellow experts. However, there were worries that this would be read as going around the backs of the ECDOE, and that EE did not know enough about the present state of affairs at the ECDOE to meet with the NT and accomplish much in the meeting. In particular, the first representative quoted above believed,

We have to understand the issue of capacity in the provinces. Closure of schools, land issues, capacity. The issue of mobility is big. There are guys there who have been there for decades [in the ECDOE] and they don't seem interested in what is going on. They seem glad they're leaving.

Ultimately, the researchers concluded that at least for now, if they were given the opportunity, the right way forward in their assistance to government would be to work with the Eastern Cape's infrastructure team. Though there were certainly obstacles beyond EE's lack of technocratic expertise, they believed that the invitations extended to them were in earnest, and that they would be able to contribute to building competence in Eastern Cape.

Successfully engaging with and supporting the Eastern Cape on implementation work in this set of meetings required Equal Education's representatives to possess knowledge on, at a minimum, the NT's planning processes, the current overall state of the infrastructure backlog in Eastern Cape, and an ability to read and understand highly technical planning and budgeting documents. To engage well, it appears that Equal Education's representatives would have also needed to understand how to undertake large-scale budgeting, and be able to comprehend and navigate the Eastern Cape's interdepartmental bureaucratic politics as well as the rural politics over land control in Eastern Cape. Equal Education's highly capable, well-trained staff possessed some, but not all of this knowledge, much of which falls in fields that they had not been previously required to understand. The former work about budgeting falls into the kind of technocratic expertise that its researchers excel at. The latter, interpersonal and political knowledge, is probably some of the most difficult to obtain.

Though Equal Education's researchers might have been able to master at least the former category of knowledge, its grassroots members would require a great deal of training to be able to participate effectively in these meetings. Some of the most technical knowledge, such as the ins and outs of the National Treasury's planning process, and the ability to create one's own planning and costing documents was likely beyond many of Equal Education's members without years of targeted training, thanks to the poor education in mathematics afforded them by their schools. If the organisation was to engage with Eastern Cape at this level at this point in time, Equal Education assessed, it would be an activity for their researchers and managers, not their grassroots members.

This conclusion is in contrast to Equal Education's attitude on high level meetings about the drafting of the norms and standards, to which Equal Education sent nearly a half dozen leaders of their grassroots sectors as a part of their team to meet with the Minister of Basic Education and the provincial officials. The accounts of that meeting relayed to me indicated that the grassroots members were engaged and active in challenging the Minister and the provincial representatives on some of the finer points of the norms and standards draft and the needs of South African schools. Thus, we see in these two meetings with government officials and bureaucrats a substantial difference in the perception of the ability of EE's grassroots members and leaders to actively participate, on the grounds of

knowledge and expertise. Though policy advocacy and creation is often dense, complex, and technically driven, Equal Education has determined how to train its members to be active and engaged in the process. It has not determined how to do so when it comes to implementation planning, on the other hand. This is partially because the difficulties facing Eastern Cape are not purely about expertise—though these problems of moribund bureaucracies, corruption, and conflicts with traditional authorities are realms of *mētis* in which EE’s grassroots members may, as seen in chapter five, be more knowledgeable in many cases. But it is also because the kinds of knowledge required to implement rather than to create policy are multiple and dense.

That is not to say, however, that there was no space for popular participation in the implementation of the norms and standards, either in the imagination of EE or in actual fact. Here it is worth returning to the ‘social audits’ mentioned above as one of EE’s strategic priorities on the norms and standards for 2014. Though the phrase no doubt existed elsewhere before it entered Equal Education’s vocabulary, it was introduced to Equal Education through an activity undertaken by one of their partner organisations, the Social Justice Coalition. The Social Justice Coalition was born out of an intent to protect immigrants from the rash of xenophobic violence in 2008, and moved on to focus on improving the conditions of township dwellers, particularly in the Cape Metro, and most specifically in Khayelitsha. Equal Education has worked closely with the SJC, including on joint campaigns, such as the Campaign for Safe Communities, which included a large-scale independent inquiry into the state of policing in Khayelitsha.

In April 2013, following extensive work attempting to improve sanitation conditions in Khayelitsha, the Social Justice Coalition undertook a project evaluating the township’s temporary sanitation facilities. In this ‘social audit,’ a detailed citizen accountability project, over sixty of the SJC’s grassroots members and leaders as well as some participants from EE were trained by an external group on how to read government tenders, contracts, and requirements. Their experiences in the project offered valuable lessons on both the technical and political aspects of the work. The City of Cape Town’s contract with Mshengu Toilet Hire, the company responsible for providing port-a-loos in Khayelitsha for locations that lacked permanent sanitation infrastructure, was distributed to the group and used in these exercises. After ascertaining Mshengu’s obligations as

outlined in the contract with the City, the SJC members went out into the community and measured what they found against what Mshengu was legally bound to provide. The contract specified items such as the ratio of families to toilets, the frequency with which the toilets ought be cleaned, the manner in which they ought be secured to the ground, and the amount of space that ought exist around the toilets. In addition to observing a sampling of the areas covered by Mshengu, the SJC members also talked with local residents in each area about their experiences of the services provided by Mshengu.

The SJC sent its results to the relevant departments at the City of Cape Town, the provincial government of the Western Cape, and to Mshengu itself. They found the Mshengu-provided sanitation facilities to fall far short of the specifications of the contract, in nearly every area sampled, and on nearly every metric. In addition to sending the findings to the above parties, the SJC invited the government and Mshengu to send representatives to a public forum in which the social auditors would report back more extensively on what they had found, and hear a response from the government officials and Mshengu.

The SJC hosted its report-back session on Freedom Day, 27 April 2013, in the large, drafty, brick auditorium of Matthew Goniwe High School in Khayelitsha. There was an audience of roughly 150 people in haphazardly arranged rows of plastic chairs, mostly SJC members and community members, as well as a reporter from E-News, the largest TV news network in South Africa aside from the government-owned SABC. Also present were the Spokesperson to the Office of the Premier of Western Cape, the Western Cape's Manager of Human Settlements, three representatives of the government of the City of Cape Town, and the Operations Manager of Mshengu Toilet Hire. The Social Justice Coalition additionally had a panel of independent observers (more accurately, not explicitly affiliated friends) present, to act as inquisitors of both sides as well as interlocutors. Equal Education's Chairperson, Yoliswa Dwane, was in attendance as an independent observer, as was Mike Louw, one of COSATU's³⁶⁸ top people in Western Cape. Clearly, the process of the social audit was deemed rigorous and the results politically important enough to draw

³⁶⁸ The Congress of South African Trade Unions, a member of the Tripartite Alliance with the ANC and the South African Communist Party, and at the time the umbrella for nearly all trade unions in the country.

some of the government's most powerful political and bureaucratic representatives at each level.

For the first portion of the meeting, the SJC auditors reported the results of their investigation. The auditors spoke in Xhosa, and their comments were translated into English by Amelia Mfiki, a TAC leader, and Nolubabulo Mgogoshe, a staff member in EE's Youth department who was volunteering her time. The auditors reported what they had found with a high level of specificity, frequently referring to the contract and why their observations indicated that the contractor was not meeting its obligations. After the auditor spokesperson for each section finished giving the technical results, the SJC opened the floor to the audience for community members to speak out about what the stated numbers had meant for them in their lives, the *mētis* of the situation. Residents spoke of the indignity and shame caused by a lack of adequate sanitation facilities. They spoke of the health problems caused by the lack of cleanliness in some toilets and the noxious industrial chemicals used to clean others, as well as their inability to use the toilets at night because of fear for their safety. All of the stories were appalling, from a human dignity perspective, but one story was particularly shocking. A middle-aged resident of Greenpoint section, attired in a kitchen apron and hairnet told her story, through tears, of how just the week before she was attacked and raped when she went to use the toilet at night. The assault happened in an area she would not have needed to walk through if the facilities near her home were functional. The testimony from the residents wove the statistics back into the fabric of residents' everyday lives, and spoke powerfully to the impact of the contractor and the city's failure to deliver safe, clean sanitation facilities in Khayelitsha.

In the meeting itself, the SJC's ability to speak both to both the technical, expert understandings of contract fulfillment and in the vernacular of citizens' lived experiences of those broken contracts seemed to draw only mixed interest from the government representatives. The Western Cape representatives sounded a note of concern, and promised to take the issue forward in the department of Human Settlements and in the Premier's office. The City employees, on the other hand, offended the audience through both their lack of attention and their callous responses to the troubles described by the SJC and the residents who spoke out. Throughout the statements by the auditors and the residents, they were on their phones and chatting with each other, rather than paying attention to the speakers.

One might attribute this to their inability to speak Xhosa—and indeed, they did pay more attention during the translations.

However, it's also worth noting that the City representative with the most authority over the matter, a white woman who was the Executive Director of Utility Services, was cracking jokes to the other city employees and using her smartphone even during the testimony of the woman who was assaulted, who was visibly and audibly struggling to get through her comments without breaking down completely. This same director went on to explain away the City's failures entirely in reference to whether the City was getting 'value for money,' without a single mention of the dignity concerns raised by the residents. Those seated near me in the audience commented on how disrespectful this Director was being to the woman who was assaulted, and were noticeably appalled and offended as it became clear that the Director's remarks intended only to dismiss, not address, what the SJC and residents saw not just as a failure to get 'value for money,' but a source of personal trauma and an affront to their dignity, safety, and health.

Over a year later, it was unclear what the social audit had accomplished in terms of real transformation of the City and Mshengu's practices. The SJC still decried abysmal sanitation conditions in Khayelitsha, and the audit was publicly dismissed by a City sanitation official as a self-serving publicity stunt rather than an attempt to generate change. Had the SJC intended to actually improve conditions, the official argued, it would have reported the conditions in real-time, rather than compiling a 'dossier' of out-of-date information.³⁶⁹ In this conflict, the SJC and the City of Cape Town appeared to be in a standoff.³⁷⁰ Though there has been accountability in terms of exposing the City's dereliction and negligence to the public eye, it had not translated to changes on the ground. The officials' attempts to dismiss the results of the audit appear to fit into the tradition of government officials swatting away expert knowledge provided by citizens (in this case, the clear and specific violations of the city contract) when it makes them look bad rather than bolsters their reputation or assists them in their work, as in chapter four. The most conciliatory officials were those who did not have direct oversight of this

³⁶⁹ Ernest Sonnenberg, "Ernest Sonnenberg, Mayco Member for Utility Services, Responds to SJC," *GroundUp*, 1 October 2014.

³⁷⁰ Fergus Turner, "Activist Group Accuses City of Failing to Monitor Toilet Contracts," *GroundUp*, 13 May 2013; Social Justice Coalition, "Report of the Khayelitsha 'Mshengu' Toilet Social Audit," (2013).

programme and were not responsible for its execution, and the most combative were those directly responsible.

These results do not eradicate the participatory possibility of social audits, or their potential for impact. Social audits can act as important accountability tools in the implementation of government policies, under certain circumstances. In a situation where government officials have explicitly asked for help and assistance, like the ECDOE's request for assistance on their infrastructure work, such 'social audits' seem more likely to be received with some measure of gratitude rather than anger or defensiveness. This, at least, was Equal Education's hope when they included a social audit of school infrastructure on their list of strategic priorities. Equal Education envisioned social audits of school infrastructure as a) a point of entry to educate students, parents, and community members about the content of the norms and standards regulations, and the timelines on which they are entitled to see improvements to their schools, b) a way of involving students, parents, and communities in taking responsibilities for the improvement of their schools, and c) a way of assisting the provincial departments of education in compiling and verifying their lists of what schools were in need of which repairs (and thus on what timeline).

SOCIAL AUDITS AND SANITATION: HOLDING THE DEPARTMENT TO ACCOUNT IN GAUTENG

As a part of its work to ensure that the provincial infrastructure improvement lists were accurate, EE dedicated one of its staff members from the campaigns department to head up a team of university volunteers to call schools and verify their conditions. Alongside her efforts, EE intended to publish the lists in local newspapers, encouraging community members, teachers, and principals to call EE if their schools were looked over or misclassified, and to look into setting up a text messaging service through which individuals could report errors or problems for free. The Treatment Action Campaign had set up a similar system as a part of its campaign to monitor medicine stockouts in public clinics across the country.³⁷¹

Equal Education had reason to have faith in the power of social audits. Part of the organisation's strategy for 2014 was reinvigorating their grassroots activism by

³⁷¹ Equal Education, "National Council Meeting, 21 June 2014," (2014).

running local campaigns focusing on pressing issues at the school or town level. In the Tembisa branch in Gauteng, this took the form of conducting an audit of the sanitation facilities at 11 Tembisa schools. The Tembisa Equalisers drew upon the model used by the Social Justice Coalition to catalogue the provision, functionality, and cleanliness of their schools toilets, sinks, etc. in November 2013. In this campaign, the activists demanded government produce a plan to fix school sanitation—they did not take it upon themselves to come up with the plan.³⁷² The results of their survey prompted the Gauteng MEC, Barbara Creecy, to publicly promise to fix the sanitation problems in Tembisa's schools. She even indulged in a bit of political theatre on the subject, donning overalls and rubber gloves to scrub down school toilets herself.³⁷³

After MEC Creecy did not deliver on her promise as promptly as hoped, the Gauteng Equalisers kept up the pressure. They announced their intention to march to the offices of the Gauteng Department of Education on 13 September 2014, then run by newly appointed MEC Panyaza Lesufi (former spokesperson for the national Department of Basic Education). Two days before the scheduled march, MEC Lesufi committed a budget of R150M to sanitation upgrades in 580 schools throughout Gauteng province, including all of the schools in Tembisa by 30 November 2014. MEC Lesufi also released the plans for sanitation improvements scheduled for completion in Tembisa, an uncommon show of government transparency. The march went on as scheduled, with 2,000 members in attendance. MEC Lesufi, well-schooled in public relations through his previous role as DBE spokesperson joined the march himself. Sporting an EE 'Build our Future' t-shirt, he accepted the students' memorandum at the Gauteng Department of Education's offices. The students monitored the MEC's compliance with the promise and plans, conducting an audit on 48 of Tembisa's 51 schools—which serve nearly 50,000 students—in November 2014. Their audit found improvements at each school visited, a significant victory for their campaign, though it also found outstanding issues that still needed to be addressed at 44 of the 48 schools.³⁷⁴

³⁷² Brad Brockman, "The School Sanitation Campaign in Gauteng: An Historic Achievement for EE," 15 Sep 2014.

³⁷³ Thando Kubheka, "Public Schools Ready for Teaching," *Eyewitness News*, 12 Jan 2014; Lehlohonolo Tau, "Schools Are Ready to Roll," *The Times*, 13 Jan 2014; Heidi Swart, "Equal Education Press Statement 16 January," news release, 16 Jan, 2014; Nombulelo Nyathela, "Equal Education Marks World Toilet Day by Releasing the Results of Its Audit of Tembisa School Toilets," news release, 19 Nov, 2014.

³⁷⁴ "Equal Education Marks World Toilet Day."

The General Secretary of Equal Education, Brad Brockman, praised the process and successes of the Gauteng sanitation work in an email sent to all leaders, staff, facilitators, and partners:

It is also clear that the Gauteng comrades managed to do certain key things very well in this campaign. These include: identifying the right issue - one that our members and other students feel strongly about, and on which tangible action can be taken; conducting rigorous research into the situation at schools, and developing an understanding of the underlying factors, as well as what interventions can remedy the situation; making an effort to inform and involve Equalizers throughout, including by getting them to do research, clean toilets, educate and mobilise other students; articulating the issues clearly and powerfully, in a way that resonates with ordinary people, and articulating demands that are practicable; making effective use of the media; persisting – even when prospects for success looked doubtful; and finally, by mobilising our members and bringing them out onto the street in a powerful show of force on Saturday.³⁷⁵

In May 2015, the Gauteng Equalisers conducted an even larger social audit on school sanitation. The Gauteng Equalisers' numerous marches and audits drove MEC Lesufi to create a five-year plan for sanitation in Gauteng schools, and The GDE appeared to find their assistance valuable in a department that lacks the ability to monitor conditions at all of its schools.

Alongside this popular effort, Equal Education planned a conference on the infrastructure regulations to convene experts from all sectors needed to successfully implement the norms and standards. The conference was named after Michael Komape, a six-year-old child who died a horrific, tragic death in Chebeng village just outside of Polokwane on only his fourth day of school. Reports indicate that the zinc sheet being used as a toilet seat collapsed under Michael, trapping the child in a pit latrine. Michael's father was one of the speakers and attendees at the conference, hosted jointly by Equal Education and the social justice legal groups Equal Education Law Centre, Section 27, and the Legal Resources Centre.³⁷⁶ The conference was conceived of as a way for practitioners and researchers from the public sector, private sector, and civil society to meet each other as well as better understand the roles played by each in the implementation of the norms and standards.³⁷⁷ In reality, the final agenda had a roster of speakers and sessions in which civil society and the public sector were both robustly represented (with the

³⁷⁵ Brockman.

³⁷⁶ Koketso Moeti, "Teachers, Students and Parents Demand Toilets and Libraries for Schools," *GroundUp*, 16 Jul 2014.

³⁷⁷ Victoria John, "School Infrastructure: How NGOs Are Planning to Get the Message Across," *Mail & Guardian*, 17 Jul 2014.

balance tipping towards civil society speakers), and the private sector was largely absent. Still, the conference was structured to allow groups that had previously engaged with infrastructure and other implementation challenges (civil society healthcare activists, for instance) to share their accumulated experience and wisdom.³⁷⁸

Equal Education also ensured that the knowledge shared with their leaders, staff, and activists over the conference did not stay with the select Equalisers, parents, and facilitators in attendance. Shortly after the conference, they held a well-attended, day-long workshop for their members (parents, students, and community members alike) in which attendees focused on different insights from the conference. Example topics included the legal implications of the ways the standards were written; budgeting, monitoring, and procurement processes; and opportunities for community involvement. The sessions were scheduled such that there was ample opportunity to ask questions and better understand the presentations—the majority of the time in each session was set aside for questions and discussions generated by the members in the audience. The afternoon was dedicated to breakout sessions in which the members could discuss a strategy to move forward suggested by the movement leaders, and critique, comment, modify, or add to the strategy, with the sessions facilitated by staff members from EE and EELC. The movement leader I corresponded with about the post-conference workshop was excited about what he saw as the high amount of learning which took place, and the energy, enthusiasm, and ideas generated in the breakout sessions.³⁷⁹

Despite the initial momentum behind having EE's researchers attempt to collaborate with the Eastern Cape on its infrastructure planning, the effort ultimately did not go particularly far. What exactly that collaboration would have looked like remained unclear, as both sides appeared to lose enthusiasm for the possibility. Equal Education concluded that such an effort was not just beyond its present realm of expertise, it was beyond expertise that it wished to develop. The membership had started to become disengaged, after several long, difficult years of the same campaign. The group pivoted to focus on school-level efforts—the kinds of small-scale campaigns that invigorated the early days of the organisation and

³⁷⁸ Equal Education, "Norms and Standards Implementation Conference: Draft Programme," (2014).

³⁷⁹ "EE-EELC Norms and Standards Implementation Workshop," (2014).

helped develop its ranks of student leaders, as well as explicit accountability campaigns. The Gauteng sanitation campaigns were in line with both of these strategies, and the organisation continued its work monitoring Eastern Cape through its newly established office in King William's Town.

POLICY EXPERTISE VS IMPLEMENTATION EXPERTISE: WHAT TO DO OR HOW TO DO IT?

At this point, it is worth stepping back from the particulars of school infrastructure improvements, sanitation, and social audits to examine what this cluster of stories and experiences demonstrates about knowledge and participation in government implementation work. This chapter is dedicated to a better understanding of the kinds of knowledge involved in answering 'how' government makes things happen on the ground. The above stories are a demonstration of how, despite Equal Education's wariness, skepticism, caution, and even cynicism regarding the effectiveness of various government institutions on the ground, its leaders and staff members still underestimated the challenges faced in implementing their victorious signature campaign. There seems to have been an attitude of 'we'll figure that out when we get there,' regarding how the norms and standards would actually be implemented, as demonstrated by Equal Education's researchers' first strategy meeting.

To some degree, this is to be expected—what resource-strapped activist group has the time and money to traffic in hypothetical 'what ifs'? In the event that the 'if' in question never transpires, that's wasted money, effort, time, energy, even emotion. Equal Education had also made no claims about knowing the cost of implementing the infrastructure regulations, or the ability of the provincial departments to comply with them. This question never came up in the time I spent with Equal Education or in the time that I spent following the issue in the news from afar. I suspect that if it had, the activists would have declared the issue to be a question of fundamental rights, and argued that if the national and provincial departments found themselves lacking in their ability to deliver, it would be the government's legal and moral responsibility to fix that problem. It is not Equal Education's responsibility, even as the most active of citizens, to do the government's work for it—even if EE choose to at points, such as in its work with the Bookery, cleaning school sanitation blocks, or painting schools. EE's work is to force the government to act, not to implement policies themselves.

Moreover, this entire campaign was based on holding the Department of Basic Education accountable for what it had previously promised to do. If the Department, under the guidance of prior Minister Naledi Pandor, thought that the Norms and Standards were not only possible, but something that she ought make mandatory, presumably the provinces had the capability to follow through or could be assisted in obtaining that capability. Equal Education's activists and leaders did not expect miracles overnight, and agreed in principle with a staggered timeline for the Norms and Standards to take into account both the budget and capacity for the work. Admittedly, South Africa is a country with many progressive laws on the books that it falls hopelessly short of implementing (starting first and foremost with its impressive slate of socioeconomic constitutional rights). Though the Department itself had promised to bring forward regulations on school infrastructure that would force provinces to improve the conditions of schooling, it too may have over-estimated the abilities of the provinces, constrained by party politics, corruption, special interests, and incompetence, particularly in places like the Eastern Cape. Or it saw the implementation of the regulations as convenient buck-passing, washing its hands of the problem when it stopped being a policy question (a national task) and became an implementation problem (a provincial task).

I would also argue that it was to the strategic advantage of Equal Education to maintain a 'costs be damned' stance in their advocacy. It allowed them to stake out a purer, more ethically founded campaign than if they had become mired in a series of cost-benefit calculations, the near-inevitable outcome of putting a price tag on the infrastructure fixes up front. Costs necessarily imply tradeoffs. The instant Equal Education's opponents and critics had a monetary number to work with, they would have had an opportunity to ask whether that amount of money would be better spent on these infrastructure improvements, or on 'what really matters' (with some other educational issue, or an entirely different public expenditure like housing highlighted as 'what really matters'). With money absent from the discourse, Equal Education was able to continue running a 'moral campaign,' much like TAC before them, where instead of activists in 'HIV Positive' t-shirts taking to the streets demanding their government not abandon them to a needless death, school children took to the streets in their school uniforms to demand the most

basic of conditions needed for them to learn.³⁸⁰ Keeping the budget and capability questions off the table enabled critical ‘righteousness’ campaigns by EE on issues where they themselves might have been caught out by counter-campaigns of ‘rightness.’

In addition to the strategic advantages demonstrated above, this set of vignettes also reveals some of the limits of public participation in democratic decision-making. Earlier chapters spoke of Equal Education’s ability to mobilize its members to speak authoritatively on the issues facing the educational system, using the same rhetoric and data marshaled by policy makers to justify their decisions. As technical as their understanding is in some regards, it falls short of the level of technical detail required to actually implement those policies—which is to be expected. While the policy debates unquestionably involved technical, factual, and legal details, details which the average student or parent in Khayelitsha would ordinarily be dismissed as ignorant of, those debates did not require advanced understanding of how to write a budget, or an understanding of the supply and demand functions and capacity constraints of Eastern Cape construction firms. Implementation required this more advanced technical knowledge and more. And, it operates in a realm where neither moral legitimacy nor personal experience can stand in as a substitute. The moral righteousness of a demand to learn in a school building whose roof will not fall in on its students matters not to the question of whether anyone is actually capable of fixing the roof (with all of the backwards tracing through bureaucratic planning and allocation that issue involves). Neither does the statement that the roof is presently caving in on one’s head matter if no one can fix it. So here, it seems that there is another limit to Equal Education’s strategy of educate and advocate, or of speaking truth to power in the manner of power. Implementation of its policy victories is a realm that Equal Education’s leaders, actively or de facto, concluded was largely beyond the ability of its activists. Equal Education could pressure the state, but it never intended to replicate or replace it, save in small-scale proof-of-concept initiatives like the Bookery. Nor could it, it seems, without concentrating expertise and thus the work in a few key individuals and reducing popular participation in the process—in short, without adopting traits it actively seeks to counter in the state itself.

³⁸⁰ Friedman and Mottiar, "A Moral to the Tale."

The above conclusion hedges with the word ‘largely’ for a reason. Based on its experiences going back to its very first ‘broken windows’ campaign as well as the experiences of its sister organisations, Equal Education concluded that there was still space for activist participation in data-gathering and monitoring activity related to the norms and standards. The provincial departments with the highest level of need were also the most likely to be unaware of precisely where that need existed and to what degree—which schools needed to be fixed, in what manner. Equal Education thus encouraged continued public and activist participation in the implementation of the infrastructure regulations through encouraging people to report on the needs faced by their schools—work that the public would be unable to do or would be much worse at doing if they were ignorant of the content of the norms and standards. And so Equal Education devised an education program to inform potential citizen monitors to roll out to places with the highest levels of need for infrastructure repair, and to encourage communities to take active involvement in the ‘service delivery’ in their areas. In reporting infrastructure flaws, many of these active citizens would indeed be more informed than government on the issues facing the schools in their communities, but would be focused on accountability, rather than replication or replacement of what ought be state functions.

As for the more complicated question of how to turn all of that activist and community generated data on their schools into real improvements in those same schools, it’s fair to say that Equal Education is much less confident on how to answer that question than they were about the need for the norms and standards intended to produce those changes. Here, their ignorance is in some regards little different to the easily overwhelmed bureaucrats actually tasked with the change. In previous situations—school libraries, school infrastructure policy, others—Equal Education’s leaders, staff members, and activists demonstrated that they could and would learn more than their counterparts in government. But, at least in the beginning of EE’s attempts to bring this hard-fought policy victory to fruition, one of Equal Education’s most informed staff members was forced to respond to my question of how to go about doing this in the same way as the government bureaucrats responded to her: with a shake of the head, a wry smile, and a disappointed shrug. The difference, of course, is that implementing the norms and standards was never supposed to be Equal Education’s job.

CONCLUSION

NEW FRONTIERS OF CITIZENSHIP

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

Sure, learners can say ‘I need a desk, I need a chair,’ but we also need to engage with government to change things based on the way government operates. Government will never take seriously someone who says ‘I want a desk tomorrow.’ We very much understand things in terms of ‘building a movement.’ It’s unrealistic to expect you could pull any and all members out and have them talk eloquently. The marches and demonstrations show this is mass based. This is how you show that thousands of others support these issues.³⁸¹

Simply demonstrating that there is a broad base of students and citizens interested in and taking action on issues of education is not enough to be effective. Those citizens must be capable of speaking to government in the manner in which government speaks to them, using the same knowledge practices and techniques that render claims comprehensible in a way that government officials must act on or lose authority. Otherwise, their active citizenship is vulnerable to swift rejection. Conversely, it is not enough to simply be a think tank, deft at policy but without popular support and necessary credentials. Because aspects of experiential knowledge (struggle credentials, belonging to a disadvantaged community, age, and more) subtly creep into even the ways in which government dismisses participation on what are ostensibly grounds of expertise, the activists too must be diverse in their abilities, leading to the mix of classic activist tactics in the manner of Alinsky with the ability to play the knowledge game as well as government does itself, sometimes better.³⁸²

Bureaucratic technocracy, then, is not necessarily as democratically impenetrable as is often suggested, even in the absence of more direct forms of democracy

³⁸¹ Holtzman, "Interview with Dmitri Holtzman, Deputy Manager of Policy, Communications, and Research, Equal Education."

³⁸² Saul D Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (1971).

suggested by Habermas.³⁸³ Nor is it necessarily depoliticising in the ways suggested by Foucault, Weber, Scott, Ferguson and others.³⁸⁴ Rather than rendering issues devoid of values and beliefs subject to social debate, in this case the existence of a technocratic paradigm has enabled Equal Education to reinsert itself into the realm of policymaking, a manoeuvre that ensures space for the political even when high-level questions of value are agreed upon, and which is in its performance a demonstration of the political values of participation and democracy.

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

To make this work, Equal Education has had to rely on different internal currencies than those which garner them external credibility, namely a variety of trust-generating behaviours practiced by its members and leaders, including mentorship, friendship, and sacrifice. Historically, when Equal Education's activists have failed to practice these behaviours, it has found itself at its lowest points regarding both internal knowledge transfer within the organisation and its ability to continue its external work.

There are also limits to how far this strategy can be extended. Equal Education's forays into the realm of implementation, rather than just policy creation, went beyond the bounds of its capabilities as an organisation of expert citizens, as opposed to a think tank or community of experts. When it comes to the actual implementations of hard-fought policies, the most effective role for expert citizens

³⁸³ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2; Weber, *Economy and Society*.

³⁸⁴ Scott, *Seeing Like a State*; Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*.

appears to be in stock-taking, monitoring, and vigorously holding government to account—not in assisting government in the actual implementation.

Importantly, participation alone may not improve outcomes. Equal Education has made a definitive contribution in citizenship education, in creating avenues for participation, and in holding government to account. But, they are not the only public actors in the system, and as in the case of School Governing Bodies, participation absent education can generate worse outcomes, like those on school language policies and enrolment caps. Even on issues of ‘local’ knowledge, citizens don’t always have the information they need, as in the example of the Chris Hani protests. But, when the bureaucracies are themselves inexperienced, common in developmental states, technocratic citizen input can be highly useful as in the case of the EE textbooks video or libraries report.

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

Left unchallenged, this protean approach to citizen participation creates a standard that is nigh impossible to attain. The only citizens taken seriously are the super-citizens, those who have overcome dramatic disadvantage in order to know more than those who govern. This standard cannot be democratic. Those who lack the demanded identity are excluded pre-emptively. Those who possess the right set of characteristics and wish to participate are forced to turn to civil society organisations in the mould of Equal Education, which lack sufficient scale to

empower more than a select few to meet the standards demanded by government representatives. While it is too early to tell how this approach of playing by the government's rules (at least some of the time) will work out in the long term, the aforementioned disadvantages raise the concerns posited by Wendy Brown's work on American social movements that made initial trade-offs in favour of immediately productive outcomes, only to find that their own strategies had trapped them in ultimately destructive modes of existence later on.³⁸⁵

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

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

³⁸⁵ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (1995).

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