

The spatial practices of school administrative clerks: making space for contributive justice

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This article discusses the work practices of the much neglected phenomenon of the work of school administrative clerks in schools. Popular accounts of school administrative clerks portray them as subjectified – assigned roles with limited power and discretion – as subordinate and expected to be compliant, passive and deferent to the principal and senior teachers. Despite the vital role they play in schools, their neglect is characterised by their invisible, largely taken-for-granted roles in a school's everyday functioning. This main aim of this article is to make their everyday practices and contributions visible, to elevate them as indispensable, albeit discounted, role players in their schools, whose particular expressions of agency contribute qualitatively to a school's practices. Using the theoretical lens of 'space', and based on in-depth semi-structured interviews in the qualitative research tradition, the article discusses how selected school administrative clerks' production of space exceeds their assigned spatial limitations, i.e. they move beyond the expectations that their work contexts narrowly assign to them. They resist the contributive injustice visited upon them and through their agency they engage in spatial practices that counters this injustice. They carve out a productive niche for themselves at their schools through their daily practice. This niche, I will argue, embodies practices of 'care', 'sway' and 'surrogacy,' understood through a vigorous 'production of space'. Through these unique spatial practices they reflect their agency and their appropriation of existing spatial practices at their schools. Thus, they produce personalized meanings for their existing practice as well as generate novel lived spatial practices.

Key words: School administrative clerks, space, spatial practices, lived space, contributive justice

Introduction

The article aims to contribute to our analysis of social justice by suggesting that we broaden our focus on social justice to include issues of contributive justice. It highlights how those who are denied contributive justice do not simply lie down and accept their fate but that they actively counter the contributive injustice visited upon them. Contributive injustice is where workers' opportunities for self-development, gaining self-esteem and recognition by others is thwarted by the unequal division of labour that assigns them simple, mindless, and routine tasks (Gomberg, 2007; Sayer, 2009, 2011). I agree with the assertion by the proponents of contributive justice that the unequal division of labour leads to the curtailing of opportunities for self-development for those who are denied complex work (Sayer, 2011). However, I posit that administrative clerks do not passively accept this inequality of opportunity but through their agency, reflexivity and tactics, carve out spatial practices of self-development and, in the process, gain self-esteem and recognition at school level.

Literature on the practice of school administrative clerks in South Africa is sparse (Van der Linde, 1998; Naicker, Combrinck & Bayat, 2011). These clerks suffer inequalities of opportunity because of the division of labour which relegates them to a role that offers low remuneration, little recognition and limited participation. Studies of the roles of administrative clerks in schools (Casanova, 1991; Van Der Linde, 1998; Thomson, Ellison, Byrom & Bulman, 2007; Conley, Gould & Levine, 2010; Naicker, Combrinck & Bayat, 2011), higher education institutions (Szekeres, 2004; Mcinnis, 2006; Whitchurch & London, 2004) and businesses (Fearfull, 1996, 2005; Truss, 1993) found that they are regarded as marginal and invisible even though their contributions are essential for the smooth running of their workplaces. Secretarial work is regarded as a ghetto occupation (Truss, 1993; Truss, Alfes, Shantz & Rosewarne,

2012). It is precisely this low esteem and lack of recognition attached to it as an occupation that confirms that those who fill these roles are subjected to contributive injustice.

This article sheds light on school administrative clerks' spatial practices within the exigencies of their everyday professional contexts. It highlights their noteworthy contributions to the on-going functioning of the school, especially the surreptitious and sometimes very concrete impact on the lives of students, teachers, the principal, parent governors and auxiliary staff. In authoring their spatial practices they counter and subtly resist the marginalisation and contributive injustice of their occupation. The article reveals their largely invisible spatial practices and unacknowledged contributions to the daily operation of their schools in which they engage to counter contributive injustice.

Since the recent emphasis on 'space' in social studies (Harvey, 1989; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1989) and education in South Africa (see Jacklin, 2004; Fataar, 2007, 2009; Dixon, 2007), researchers contend that we cannot ignore that human behaviour and space are interrelated and overlap. The theory of the production of social space argues that space is not empty or devoid of formative power. It opposes those arguments that consider space to be a container in which events occur and takes a perspective that space is firmly intertwined with social events. Space is thus regarded as constitutive of social relations.

Jacklin (2004) draws our attention to the constituent nature of spatial practices in the pedagogical routines of teachers and students in classroom contexts. Dixon (2007) argues that there is a relationship between classroom order and spatial organisation and that social space is used to manage, regulate and produce specific kinds of students enmeshed in knowledge and power constructions. Fataar's (2007) spatial lens highlights the agency and reflexivity of students from 'other' social spaces as they move to middle-class social spaces and the bodily adjustments they make to fit into these spaces. My article builds on their perspectives of the constituent nature of space of everyday practice.

The data was collected from a qualitative research study of three administrative clerks in public schools in the Western Cape. There was one male and two women participants. They are referred to as P, M and F. The research included both semi-structured interviews with them as well as participative observations at school. The data was analysed thematically through the spatial lenses discussed earlier. There are other themes in the data but I focus on those yielded by the specific lens used in this paper. I spent one school term observing the three administrative clerks at their schools, during which time I interviewed them over several days. I also interviewed their principals as well as members of the teaching staff. I spent several days at the schools making observations, taking field notes and interviewing the administrative clerks about their practices as they worked.

In the next section I advance my theoretical lens and thereafter use it to analyse the data collected on the spatial practices of the three school administrative clerks. Three sets of spatial practices are identified through which administrative clerks counter their experiences of contributive injustice and through it contribute significantly to the functioning of the school and the positive experiences of students, teachers and the principal.

Theoretical considerations

Social justice is considered to be primarily about distributive justice – concerned with what people get. Of late it has been complemented by cultural/identity recognition and political participation perspectives of social justice (Fraser, 2008). A further development around the ideas and theories of social justice is the contributive justice perspective. Contributive justice asks us to turn our attention away from what people *get* to what people *do*. Focusing on what we do is based on the Aristotelian perspective that what we *do* has as much an influence on the quality of our lives as what we *get*. Thus, the contributive justice perspective urges us to consider social justice as arising from the variety and quality of practices that workers are able to engage in (Gomberg, 2007; Sayer, 2009).

Contributive justice is a normative framework which suggests that the unequal divisions of labour within an organisation and within the economy subject workers to unequal opportunities for realising their potential. This is an Aristotelian approach which emphasises the human development of dispositions and abilities through work and practice.

The type of work one does is directly related to the psychological and economic rewards that one receives which, in turn, have an effect on our well-being (Sayer, 2011). Work is not only a source of economic rewards but also of fulfillment, whether through self-satisfaction or recognition by others. The contributive justice argument is that the type of work that one does, affects what one can become, how one views oneself and is viewed by others. It shapes the capabilities of the individual (Sayer, 2011). For example, the administrative clerk develops her financial management skills through doing the budget of her school, feels a sense of accomplishment for doing a complex task and is lauded by the school management team. If she is only restricted to capturing financial data, her financial management capabilities would be limited, her sense of accomplishment would be less than in the previous example and this basic task would not get her much recognition. Sayer (2009:1) citing Gomberg (2007) argues that:

as long as the more satisfying and complex kinds of work are concentrated into a subset of jobs, rather than shared out among all jobs, then many workers will be denied the chance to have meaningful work and the recognition and esteem that goes with it.

Contributive justice is where workers receive the types of work that enable them to develop their capabilities, receive internal goods of satisfaction and external goods of recognition (Sayer, 2011). However, most schools are organised with an unequal division of labour. This unequal division of labour situates the administrative clerk in an occupation that is assigned routine and mundane tasks. They have fewer opportunities for developing their capabilities, gaining satisfaction or receiving recognition. The argument is that the unequal division of labour leads to inequality in the development of capabilities. Murphy (1993) cited in Sayer (2011) mentions studies that those who do complex work see their capabilities improve over time, whereas those who are subjected to routine work capabilities stagnate and deteriorate. However, I propose that administrative clerks do not let the division of labour dictate their practices, but through their agency, carve out practices that allow them to counter the contributive injustice of their occupation.

A focus on agency locates administrative clerks' daily practice as practice oriented towards personal action and meaning making. In foregrounding school administrative clerk's agency, I do not deny that they develop certain routine and habitual actions through role internalisation. However, within the everyday complex interplay of people, situations and events, administrative clerks exercise creative expressions of agency even if they are circumscribed and largely discounted. It is apparent that their exercise of agency is coloured by context, relationships, culture and existing spatial practice, aspects of which the analysis below sets out to capture. I am specifically motivated by Archer's position on agency which she views as an outcome of reflexive internal deliberations within oneself around a course of action in relation to personal projects (Archer, 2007). These internal conversations and deliberations about personal projects lay the foundation for the production of administrative clerks' spatial practice.

I theorise space using Schmid (2008) and Zhang and Beyes' (2011) reading of Lefebvre. The premise is that human beings produce social space through their everyday spatial practices and they, in turn, are shaped by it. This novel approach shifts the focus from material space to the practices that constitute or produce social space. I forward the argument that administrative clerks exercise agency in their production of space. They are not the only producers of space – certainly the principal and teachers as well as students produce spatial practices – but my focus in this article is on the administrative clerks.

Lefebvre (1991) argues that social space is produced through three dialectically interconnected processes. The spatial triad of 'spatial practices,' 'representations of space' and 'spaces of representation,' or, 'perceived' (production of material), 'conceived' (ideological-institutional) and 'lived' (symbolic-experienced) space respectively. The triad corresponds to Lefebvre's three-dimensional conceptualisation of social reality: material social practice, language and thought, and the creative poetic act (Schmid, 2008).

Spatial practices are in reference to the material dimension of social activity and interaction. It is the activities, networks, relations, interactions that are constitutive of all spaces. The empirical relationship between the body and its physical environment is referred to as perceived space (Lefebvre, 1991:39). Perceived space is concrete, tangible and recognised directly through the senses. The representations of space, i.e. conceived space, emerge at the level of discourse and speech and constitute conceptual frameworks of material spaces. These are the maps, plans and organisational charts

and organograms that aim to structure or construct spaces (Schmid, 2008). This is the intellectual and conceptual language or discourse of a particular space.

The lived space “dimension denotes the world as human beings experience it through the practice of their everyday life” (Schmid, 2008:40). It describes what a particular space means to an individual. Representational spaces or lived spaces overlay “physical space, making symbolic use of its objects” (Lefebvre, 1991:39). This is the experiential dimension of space. However, it is important to note that the three spaces are not separate realities but rather “features of a single – and ever-changing – reality” (Lehtovuori, 2010:55).

Fiske’s (1988) conceptualisation of the ‘locale’ as the micro level of spatial practice, where those in subordinate positions in society ‘produce’ their own meaning of images and events in everyday life, exemplifies the insertion of agency into the production of space. The locale is the space of agency and ‘little victories’ (Fiske, 1988). De Certeau (1984) sees space as the micro relations, where the subordinates spatially appropriate their conceived spaces ascribing new meanings to spatial practices. “The work of de Certeau ... frames the everyday as the sphere of creativeness par excellence ...” (Brownlie & Hewer, 2011:248). Thus, users or consumers of space do not passively enter spaces, but produce their own lived space by negotiating, changing and ‘metaphorizing’ spaces, thereby producing singular concretions at the same time that they are subjected to the framing of the conceived space.

The “production of space is an embodied process” (Zhang & Beyes, 2011:17). It is to be found in the moment of bodily action. Thus, “bodies ... ‘produce’ or generate spaces” (McCormack, 2008:1823). What the body does in a particular material space is what the space becomes in that moment. It is what we pay attention to when we research space (Zhang & Beyes, 2011). There is a generative relationship between space and the bodily movement therein (McCormack, 2008). So my focus on the production of space is on bodily movement, i.e. spatial practice as embodied action.

The spatial practices of administrative clerks are dialectically produced. The office space is conceived by educational authorities as a space of routine and mundane activities. The administrative clerks reproduce the objectives of the designers of the conceived space and employ their agency and tactics to construct their personalised spatial practices with their attendant lived space experience. Their spatial practices are everyday practices influenced by what is expected of them as well as what they intend to accomplish through their practices. This can lead to spatial practices that have one physical form for the principal, school management team (SMT), school governing body (SGB) or educational authorities but multiple meanings for the administrative clerks themselves. Social space is thus a spatial production fuelled by *both* structure and agency, domination and appropriation, and power and resistance (Lefebvre, 1991). The production of the spatial practices of administrative clerks is simultaneously fuelled by their conceived, perceived and lived space.

My premise is that administrative clerks’ agency gives rise to their creative poetic spatial practice: a new spatial practice, a new meaning for an existing spatial practice or a modification of an old spatial practice. Through these novel spatial practices and lived space moments, administrative clerks counter the contributive injustice of the unequal division of labour.

In the next section, I briefly introduce the three administrative clerks and their school contexts. Thereafter, I identify and discuss three major sets of their spatial practice: spatial practices of care, spatial practices of sway, and spatial practices of surrogacy. These spatial practices reflect their agency in countering the contributive injustice of their occupational role.

Introducing the spatial practitioners

In this section, I introduce the three administrative clerks and their schools. This provides us with the contextual backdrop to make sense of their spatial practices.

M has worked at Y primary school (YPS) since 1999. She started off in the position of personal assistant to the principal and became the school secretary/administrative clerk when the senior administrative clerk retired in 2004. She grew up in the area and attended the school as a child. She has a matric certificate and worked in secretarial and administrative positions for more than ten years before she joined the school.

She is currently the only administrative clerk at YPS. She has a close relationship with the principal, Mr K. He is a disciplinarian who runs the school with a firm hand. M is a member of the SGB and acts as both secretary and treasurer to the SGB. She actively participates in its meetings. She is not part of the SMT.

P was part of the community committee that initiated and urged the educational authorities to establish a primary school in the area. Subsequently, he worked at the school soon after the school was established in 2001. He is the more senior of the two administrative clerks at the school. He has a friendly relationship with the principal and with most of the teachers. He is currently a member of the SMT. He was previously a member of the SGB and served in the capacity of financial officer which he still occupies even though he has resigned from the SGB. The principal depends on him to do many of his administrative and managerial tasks. P has an honours degree in social development and is currently doing his masters' degree in public administration at a local university.

F has been an administrative clerk since 1997. She has been at her current school since 2002. She is one of two administrative clerks at the school. She serves on the SGB and had previously served on the SMT. F handles the school finances. She has a somewhat turbulent relationship with some of the teachers. F has completed an adult basic education and training diploma course and has been teaching adults. She is currently registered for an undergraduate degree in education at a distance learning university. During the course of the research study the incumbent principal resigned and an acting principal was appointed and thus F's spatial practice became even more important and pivotal. The acting principal relies extensively on her experience and knowledge to manage the school. They have a congenial but not close relationship.

The three administrative clerks have many years of experience working in three primary schools that impose different constraints upon their spatial practices. They have served and continue to serve on the SMTs and SGBs of their schools. I contend that it is their many years of experience, as well as the varied types of work they are engaged in, which has given rise to their spatial practices that will be discussed in the next section.

Towards contributive justice: the spatial practice of three school administrative clerks

The contributive justice thesis emphasises that the work we do affects the extent to which we are able to realise and develop our capacities and gain internal and external goods. In the following section I demonstrate how administrative clerks engage in spatial practices that are instances of agency within a circumscribed role. These spatial practices counter the contributive injustice of the administrative clerks' role and occupation. Spatial practices are the locale of agency and tactics of appropriation. These spatial practices are not only beneficial to the administrative clerks' development, but are integral and essential for the running of the school.

Their spatial practices are simultaneously an outcome of their conceived, perceived and lived space. The conceived space refers to the discourses and designs of the educational authorities of what should occur in the school office space. At school, the space designed for the administrative clerk is the school reception, office or administration block. This conceived space forms part of a broader conceptualisation of schools as spaces where the principal does all the strategic planning and thinking and the administrative clerks simply execute all the routine tasks. It is the space where the administrative clerks work is conceived as routine non-essential, non-pedagogic or involving non-strategic tasks. Yet, as I show below, this study has found that their hub is vital as a space of thought, creativity and strategy.

Perceived space refers to the immediate bodily feedback of enacting spatial practices. It refers to those bodily sensations that accompany three spatial practices of the administrative clerks, i.e. their everyday perceptions of the school space. An example of this is their routine response to a student requesting their help. In the spatial practices highlighted below, I provide examples of students' and teachers' routine perceptions of the administrative clerks' spatial practices.

Lived space is the affect and personal meaning making – the meaning ascribed to the spatial practice. It refers to the affective dimension of their spatial practice. In the next section their affective experiences are described as important to their spatial practices.

I highlight three sets of spatial practices. These spatial practices of care, sway and surrogacy are particular spatial practices that demonstrate how administrative clerks' agency in the form of spatial practices dialectically interacts with the conceived space which gives rise to particular lived spaces. It shows how the agency inspired moments of spatial practices operate side by side with the subordination of the administrative clerks. These practices demonstrate instances of spatial practices that counter, but are also intertwined, with the hegemonic conceived space.

Spatial practices of care

'Spatial practices of care' refer to the practices of administrative clerks where they interact with students, teachers or the principal, with care and affection in their spatial domains. Students regularly come to M when they feel ill and she responds by undertaking a range of practices that reflect her care. This is akin to Hochschild's (1983) emotional labour. She asks them to sit on the couch in the reception foyer and attends to them when able. She touches their foreheads to check their temperatures. If she decides that they are ill she informs the teacher and then, depending on the severity of the illness, informs the parents. Sometimes after some attention, students feel better and return to class without further intervention. M's emotional work is embodied. This means that she responds to students' cries for help with motherly postures and expressions.

P has assisted a number of novice teachers and helped them with their assignments. He reads their assignments and gives them feedback. He even assisted a teacher in preparing lessons related to budgeting and accounting. He also assisted teachers with word processing and using the computer lab. His caring for the students extends to him prodding and urging the principal to do more to improve the quality of teaching at the school, which sometimes leads to a fractious relationship with the principal. He expressed that he felt he had let down the school when he resigned from the SGB.

He is always ready to go the extra mile because he cares about the students. The school is facing a great deal of social problems and he is currently participating in the School as a Sign of Node Care and Support (SNOCS) initiative. He says that students are being abused sexually, emotionally, physically and verbally. SNOCS aims to identify these students and help them. He is involved in several community projects that aim to uplift the community around and within the school.

F also engages in practices of care. Commenting on an interaction where she had played a significant role in the decision taken, she describes her lived space experience: "Yes, at the end of the day you also feel good because you were helping someone else and not just that you doing the job. And you doing it because it's your passion and it is your work". F cares about the students and receives them warmly when they come to pay their school fees. She is welcoming if they request any assistance and sees herself as contributing to their development. She says: "I like working with the learners and ... [when] one or two or some learners come visit that was at the school and finished with high school and ... tell you that they achieved so much in life, you feel ... you were a part of their education, you feel so good". She also provides the SGB chairperson with food and spent many afternoons making the SGB chairperson feel comfortable in her new position.

Poor students receive food and money from M. In one incident she bought a pair of shoes for a needy student. She provides support for the teachers, giving information about educational authority-related matters such as issues regarding salaries or how to access the web-based Integrated School Administration and Management System. All of these practices go beyond her job description.

Pedagogic support

A subset of their practices of care is their pedagogic support for students. When students come to M's office complaining about other students, M tries to teach them to be fair and kind towards one another. She models good behaviour to them. When students are hungry or she knows that their parents are in need, she provides money or food and assigns the hungry students to receive food from the school kitchen.

M's school is a bilingual school that has many foreign language speakers. The policy of the school states that foreign students must not be placed in bilingual English and Afrikaans classes. When she

encountered a foreign learner who had been placed in a bilingual class, she immediately brought the matter to the attention of the head of department (HOD), who moved the learner to the English class.

P's pedagogic concern extends to leading and coaching students outside of the school curriculum and formal structures about being aware of their bodies and themselves. He acts as a life skills mentor. His involvement in such activities is based on his personal project of wanting to make a difference in his community. This is what drives him in many of his spatial practices.

F regularly assists students with their projects especially where they need information from the Internet. She would search and download information for them even consulting with their teachers to ascertain what information they needed.

M, F and P produce these spatial practices of care because they perceive the "school as a home away from home". Although their principals consider their spatial practices as contributing toward a better functioning school, for them, these spatial practices make them feel better about themselves and who they are or want to be. This means that they derive internal goods of satisfaction from embodying spatial practices of care. In producing a caring social space they are appropriating the office space and using their agency to transform it through their bodily action into spaces of care, hope and potential. They are poaching conceived spaces with their tactical spatial practice. Through their spatial practices of care, these three administrative clerks simultaneously embody their workspaces as spaces of care and work.

Spatial practices of sway

'Practices of sway' are practices where the administrative clerks manoeuvre themselves into positions where their everyday practices allow them to transform moments of their spatial practice into moments of influence. These spatial practices are deliberate manoeuvres by the three administrative clerks to influence decisions at school. It includes coaxing, lobbying and negotiating.

F lobbied and was influential with a previous principal who allowed her to be part the SMT meetings. He needed her insight and support as he was new to the school. Via his support she attended and influenced the school management. She remarks about the influence she used to have: "... the ... senior teacher comes in – 'nee juffrou, ek gaan nou eers my regterhand vra' [no teacher, I am first going to ask my right hand]. Then he will call me in: Mrs F, what do you think of the idea? What should we do now?" This previous principal acknowledged that she used her position on the SMT to influence decisions that improved the effectiveness of the management of the school.

Once he left, she lost much of her direct influence on the SMT, yet she continued to influence the school management in more subtle ways. For instance, F proposed that Mr P, a retired educational authority official who had been the Institutional Management and Governance (IMG) manager assigned to the school, attend the recruitment and selection meetings to ensure that the school followed the educational authorities' policies and procedures.

F not only briefs the SGB chairperson before SGB meetings on the correct policies and procedures, but also on what she can expect from the principal and teachers. She acts as an 'unofficial' adviser to the chairperson. She has influence in the SGB meetings since she is responsible for school finance, which includes drawing up the budget. She also influences the SGB by proposing how the funds should be spent. She is very forthright in the meetings having developed her confidence over her many years of experience.

F's spatial practices of influence and sway were evident when she tactically manoeuvred herself to appropriate the school office spaces (SGB and SMT meetings) as spheres of influence for herself. These opportunities for self-development, satisfaction and recognition have increased especially with the appointment of the acting principal who now relies upon her for direction and guidance.

M also embodies practices of sway. She has made herself indispensable to the principal and teachers through the spatial practice of doing some of their administrative and even personal tasks. This seems to be a tactic that all the school administrative clerks embody. They are prepared to do extra tasks, whether through subtle coercion or through commitment, which gives them room to negotiate influence within their social spaces.

M describes her influence on decision making in the school saying: “Mr K [the principal] won’t have me in the school management team meetings but he ... discuss(es) what was discussed at the meeting or ask(s) me, ‘have you got money for this’ or ‘what do you think of this’... so I play a huge part in the decision making”.

M’s school is a fee-paying school. According to the South African Schools Act 1996 (SASA), parents can apply for a full or partial exemption from school fees. M’s official task is to record all the applications and present them to the SGB. However, her practice goes beyond this expectation. She has developed techniques and tactics to gather information about parents who apply for the fee exemption, noting among other things the quality of their clothing and the cars that they drive. During the fee exemption application process studies the bodily practices of the parent applicants when they deliver their fee exemption documents as well as observing their children’s attire to ascertain their financial status. She then produces a comprehensive summary of what that family or individual should receive in terms of a fee exemption. Once she has gathered all the relevant documents, as prescribed by the SASA, she presents her data along with her interpretation and recommendation regarding an exemption based on her visual analysis of the bodily movements of parents, students and the spaces they occupy.

P has been influential both on the SGB and the SMT. He requested to be on the SMT even though this is conceived as the teachers’ and principal’s space. He says: “I asked ... to be part of the SMT and the intention was that being an administrative clerk is not challenging for me and it doesn’t give me any opportunity, maybe to give my views on the way the school is being run.” Once on the SMT, he influenced the principal’s decision to adopt a standard agenda for the SMT meeting. On the SGB, he worked tirelessly to inform the parent governors about correct policy and procedure. Whenever they would decide something that was contrary to the education authorities’ policies, he would explain why that decision was incorrect. For example, with the appointment of a second deputy principal, the SGB wanted to appoint a junior teacher, even though there was a more senior teacher who was qualified for the post. He intervened and explained to them that this was not correct procedure. He exerted his influence and experience on the SGB to ensure that the new post selection was done correctly. However, because he felt that the principal was commandeering the SGB, he stepped down from the SGB.

F was on the SMT and is currently on the SGB. She remarked that teachers and even the principal did not follow the local educational authorities’ policies and procedures. The school had experienced money going missing and many procedures were being ignored. She said that she constantly had to fight the tendency by staff to do their own thing, especially if it was contrary to the educational authorities’ policies. She says she would reproach them: “... you don’t come with you[r] knoeieri [cheating and corruption] and then I must go and explain to the [education] department this and that. I am not going to do that and I am not going to allow it. When I see, I see right through you. Don’t come with an agenda and I say it just like that in the meeting”. This shows the extent of her influence.

M acts as a sensitive conduit between the principal and the teachers, where she selectively communicates the information that she informally acquires, to the principal. Sometimes she omits information that she knows will upset the conservative principal in order to keep the organisational climate favourable. F passes on important ‘insider’ information to the new SGB chairperson not only to socialise, but also to alert her to vested interests in school decisions. But F also does it so that she may have influence with the SGB chairperson. P’s son attends the school, so he cares about the school’s success. He constantly passes on information to the principal in the hope that the principal will consider some of these suggestions (for instance, doing something about the poor annual national assessment scores of the school’s students). When P was a member of the SGB he made it his duty to inform parents of what was happening in the school, at a day-to-day level, so that they could make ‘better’, more informed decisions.

All three administrative clerks have been given or have taken responsibility for financial matters at the school. Through their ‘control’ of the purse strings, they influence financial decisions. Whenever the principal wants to access petty cash, he has to go via the administrative clerk. Teachers know that they will have to go via the administrative clerk if they want to solicit petty cash for purchases or local travel related to the school.

These spatial practices of sway reveal the tactics they employ to increase their participation in decision making. It demonstrates how they have extended the range of their tasks in order to develop their capabilities and gain internal and external goods. From the above, we note that the administrative clerks engage in a multitude of spatial practices despite the limited tasks assigned to their occupational role and, in so doing, counter the contributive injustice of their ghetto occupation.

Practices of surrogacy

'Practices of surrogacy' refer to those practices where the administrative clerks act as a substitute for the principal or the management of the school. These spatial practices include making management-related decisions when the principal is absent as well as making important management-related decisions while the principal is present at school.

When the principal is physically absent, all three school administrative clerks are able to reproduce the spatial practices required. This also applies to when the principal does not do his job. For example, P will gather and compile the documents that the educational authorities require and make sure they are correct and submit them to the correct recipient. When the principal is absent, M and F support the deputies and HODs, if the latter are not familiar with the task at hand. F is an important surrogate for the acting principal when she is faced with something with which she does not have experience. All of the school administrative clerks know the requirements of the educational authorities and their principals well enough to be able to act on their behalf.

Whenever the administrative clerk is absent from the school, the principal and even the teachers complain when they return. One of the teachers commented: "If [the administrative clerk were to] leave now ... I think we will be lost ..." This is because so many of their tasks cannot be done without information or insight from the administrative clerk. Their spatial practices have become integral to the work of the other stakeholders at school. When P was absent from the school for a few days due to study leave, he came back to school and found that the requisite forms for the submission of the financial subsidy application for Grade R, that had been due while he was on leave, had not been submitted. Even though this task is the responsibility of the principal, he waited for the administrative clerk to do it. The reason he did not do it was because P had exercised his agency and done many of the principal's work in the past and now the principal had become reliant on him.

P does the finances even though he is not officially the financial officer. He also assists in the computer laboratory as the Local Area Network administrator, helps with the school policy documentation, helps administer the school feeding scheme and assists with fundraising. All these activities are not part of his contracted work description but derive from the fact that the principal or the responsible person is not doing his or her job.

At the SGB meetings, P endeavoured to inform parents about their rights and responsibilities as well as the policies and procedures of the educational authorities. He acted as their facilitator. This is the responsibility of the principal and the educational authorities but he stepped in. He transformed the SGB meeting space to include a pedagogic space. The IMG manager responsible for P's school says that P is practically "running the school".

F does the management-related tasks that are necessary at the school, even though these tasks are not part of her remit, taking on some of the responsibilities of the acting principal. Because the school does not have sufficient students to qualify for a deputy principal, she does some of what would have been the deputy principal's work. This arises out of her need to extend her capabilities but is chiefly a response to the urgency and immediacy of the situation at school. This sense of immediacy of problems that crop up at school is what honed the spatial practices of surrogacy of the administrative clerks. In the aftermath of funds going missing from the school premises, F insisted that nobody else be allowed to deal with finance matters at school other than her. Despite grumbling from some of the teachers, she was given this responsibility and most of them are satisfied with her financial management.

F's spatial practices extend outside the school sphere. She is the coordinator of the school's fundraising efforts. She has coordinated the high tea fundraiser of the school for the past few years. She raised about

R25 000, which is the biggest fundraising contribution on the budget. She visited donors to collect donated goods and to drop off letters of thanks. This takes place both during school hours and in her personal time.

Because principals have to see to many different responsibilities, the administrative clerks sometimes fulfil the managerial school requirements and the on-the-ground activities of the school. In doing all of these management-related tasks, the administrative clerks' spatial practices counter the inherent contributive injustice of their occupational role. These spatial practices complement their existing capabilities as well as help them to develop new capabilities. This self-development affords them respect and recognition from their peers.

Main conclusions

I used the normative framework of contributive justice to analyse the spatial practices of administrative clerks in public schools in the Western Cape. I found that even though administrative clerks were thought of as non-teachers and non-managers their spatial practices included pedagogic and managerial practices.

Even though administrative clerks suffered contributive injustice through the unequal division of labour of their occupational role, which relegated them to doing mundane and routine tasks, they countered this injustice and engaged in complex practices that led to self-development, self-satisfaction and recognition by those around them. This article confirms that administrative clerks are producers of, as much as they are positioned by their school space. As producers of their social spaces, I argue that they counter the unequal division of labour which denies them opportunities for self-development, satisfaction and recognition. In producing their personal, yet social spaces, they reflect their reflexively arrived at personal projects. They do not resist the contributive injustice inherent in their occupational role merely to counter managerial control, they resist to achieve self-development and to gain internal rewards of satisfaction and external rewards of recognition by their peers.

Through their spatial practices of care, sway and surrogacy the school administrative clerks countered the contributive injustice – by using their spatial practices to generate new spatial relationships with the teachers, students and principals. This led to their deep participation in the school and substantial benefits for the functioning of the school. Their novel spatial practices can be seen as personal projects that they want to see come to fruition at school as well as reactions to the spatial practices of the principal, teachers or the educational authorities representatives.

Administrative clerks, as they go along every day, change their spatial practices, invent new ones, and appropriate existing spatial practices. As they do that, they deploy their agency toward an imagined space – a space of possibility. Through their creative acts of bringing about new practices in the midst of existing spatial practice, they have appropriated and transformed their spaces of work into spaces of care, and in doing so they have transformed their spaces of subordination into potential spaces of participation.

Administrative clerks' occupational role provides them with lowly tasks which limit their ability for self-development. Yet, this investigation into their spatial practice shows them to be active agents, i.e. active readers, interpreters, articulators of space while simultaneously still having to reproduce the demands of their conceived space. This research demonstrates that administrative clerks, even as they occupy marginalised positions, engage in spatial practices that increase their capabilities, recognition and participation. It demonstrates that the lived spaces of administrative clerks are filled with little victories. One of the most important findings is that the administrative clerks' spatial practices, with tangible effects, are precisely successful because it is unrecognised and remains invisible. If it becomes visible, it may be shut down and troubled by the authorities. I view their spaces as spaces of enablement, operating in the shadows.

Administrative clerks are placed in particular spaces and are expected to enact particular spatial practices. Yet, they have agency (however circumscribed) and embody subjective understandings of their spatial practices amidst institutional expectations. In this study M, F and P creatively embody spatial practices that reflect citizenship behaviour, kindness and care while, at the same time, being very competent at the work that they are required to do. In doing so, they counter the contributive injustice of their occupational role and make space for contributive justice in their schools.

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