

The influence of union leadership on principals' identity

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Abstract

To date, few studies have been conducted to investigate the influence of union leadership on the roles of the principals who are union leaders in South African schools. This study investigated the influence of South African Democratic Teacher Union (SADTU) leadership in determining the identities, perspectives and leadership styles of principals who are union leaders in urban schools. The study specifically sought to ascertain whether the unionization discourse constructs principals' identities and, if so, how it does this and what consequences this may have on the principals' leadership style in urban schools. The literature review focused on the origins of the policy of apartheid in South Africa and its political effects on education and contextualized the historical and political development of the SADTU union. The research was grounded in the social constructivist tradition, using an ethnographic research design, with participant observation and focus groups as data collection strategies. Data were analyzed using critical discourse analysis to construct four core themes, namely, shop-floor unionism discourse, perceptions of educational authorities, rationalizing discursive strategies and democratic discursive strategies in urban schools.

Keywords: Ethnography, identity theory, unionization, Critical Discourse Analysis

1. Introduction and rationale for the inquiry

In this article we describe how identity is forged in education unionization in general and trace specific leadership

characteristics of principals who are union leaders. As is commonly known, principals are continuously faced with making decisions, acquiring information and implementing educational policies, the effectiveness of which might be tainted by union bias and favoritism. The purpose of this ethnographic study was, therefore, to portray the influence of SADTU union leadership and tracing the identities, perspectives and leadership styles of the principals who are union leaders. The research question that guided this study was, what characterizes the development of the identity of principals who hold positions of leadership in educator unions? The key research question was supported by two sub questions, what is the discourse, which is manifest through language, systems of beliefs, attitudes and values of the principals who hold positions of leadership in educator unions; and what character-inferences can be made of the principals who hold positions of leadership in educator unions from this description? Data were analyzed for discourse using Critical Discourse Analysis. Four data themes, shop-floor unionism discourse, perceptions of educational authorities, rationalizing discursive strategies and democratic discursive strategies, were theorized.

2. Theoretical framework: identity theory

The theoretical framework entails the identity theory of Stryker and Statham (1985) (cited in Owens, Stryker & Goodman, 2006), a sociological perspective that explains how the identity of an individual develops, focusing specifically on social and conscious discursive interaction between the individual and the community that shapes it. The identity theory of Stryker and Statham (1985) is similar to the constructs of other socio-constructivist perspectives, namely, 'symbolic interactionism' (Woods, 1996:7); 'social interaction' (Burkitt, 2008); 'socialization' (Giddens, 2006:32) and 'discursive totality' (Danielewicz, 2001:11). These perspectives trace their roots to Mead's inner dimension (1934), Goffman's social dimension (1958), Freud's consciousness (1914) and Althusser's interpellation (1971) (see Woodward, 2004: 12-18). As such they explain how "a social structure organizes the self and social behavior through the production of patterned interaction" (Cast, 2003:41). The core tenets of identity theory are socialization and social interaction, consciousness, dialogue and discourse, and socio- and context specificity. According to Burkitt (2008: 3) people (including principals who are union leaders) "are born in social relations with others and the self is formed through social relations with others and through the relations to the own self". This socialization and social interaction construct the identities in a manner that is reciprocal between the own identity and the identity of the society that shapes it (Guibernau, 2007). This "does not just involve copying; it involves taking up that identity to [ourselves]" writes Woodward (2004: 17). This process occurs in a manner that is similar to the Freudian (1914) "unconscious connection between child and parent" and it serves "as a mechanism of individual socialization that influences the formation of an individual's consciousness" (Korostelina, 2007: 18). Dialogue and discourse make it possible for us to comprehend, interpret and modify the identities that exists out there, we then identify and project ourselves in those identities that we choose while, at the same time, we discard those that we do not like (Burkitt, 2008: 188). Socio- and context- specificity confine this process of identity development to a specific society and context because, in identity development, "language and thinking must be the same" (Woodward, 2004: 15).

Basics assumptions of the identity theory embrace a belief that identity develops in "groups or social contexts in which significant processes of socialization occur" (Giddens, 2006:166). It is a "social object that is negotiated through social interaction" (McCall, 2003:3). The development of identity occurs "in volatile states of construction or reconstruction, reformation and erosion, addition and expansion" (Danielewicz, 2001: 3). Identity formation is reinforced through discourse and the "ways in which language functions in specific social or institutional contexts

and on the social and ideological relations that are constructed in and through language” (Williams, 1983:39). Language and discourse are crucial in identity formation. This view is reinforced by Riley (2007:83) who pointed out that “children raised [outside language speaking community] do not acquire language, though they have the capacity to do so, and for that reason, they fail to form selves”. Identity development, therefore, entails the internalization of the discourse within which that identity is made meaningful and possible. The internalization of discourse also entails the internalization of the “system of beliefs, attitudes and values that exist within particular social and cultural practiced” which form part of that discourse and language (Danielewicz, 2001:11). That is why this inquiry sought to determine the development of the identity of the principals who are union leaders from the discourse of their unions of choice.

The principals we observed, in matters such as subjective language use and social practice, revealed patterned behavior that were similar to the social discursive practice which form the wider context of unionization in the largest teacher union. Data sourced and analyzed from both the participant observations and focus groups interviews helped in understanding their selves, of being principals who are union leaders. It was in understanding the selves of these principals, as evidenced in their subjective language use and social practice that their identities as principals who are union leaders emerged.

3. Teacher unionisation in South Africa

Unionization in South Africa prior to 1994 was differentiated and developed predominantly along racial and political inclination, a division that reflects the general history of the people of South Africa. This was as a result of the Industrial and Conciliation Act (1924), which developed dualistic industrial relations (Webster & Adler, 2001) and the policy of apartheid (1948) which increased separation in all spheres of life (Horrel, 1964:157). In the education sector, the Bantu Education Act (1953) entrenched the racially based and politically inclined unionization by separating schools along racial and ethnic lines (Kallaway, 2002:2). These policies of separate development developed “legacies of racially based paternalism and authoritarian” in public service (Adler, 2000:2) which was characterized by “legislative exclusion” and “denial of substantive and procedural rights” (Macun & Psoulis, 2000:91). The legislative exclusion and denial of substantive and procedural rights ultimately produced a high level of distrust and adversarialism that fuelled militant unionizing efforts by the black workers in general (ibid). In the education sector, this resulted in the unionization of the predominantly black and oppressed teachers becoming politically inclined, militant and geared towards the overthrow of apartheid (Garson, 2000:205). These teachers formed militant trade unions and adopted the popular programme of the African National Congress (ANC); the Freedom Charter, as a guiding policy (Webster & Adler, 2001:127). The South African Democratic Teachers’ Union (SADTU), an affiliate of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and an ally of both the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), was formed under these socio-political and economic imperatives. Its mission was, therefore, to fight for labor related issues as well as general oppression (Garson, 2000:204). Its political inclinations is manifested in union activism to resolve industrial problems.

The SADTU was born out of the amalgamation of COSATU-driven teacher trade unions that supported the ANC in the historical National Teacher Unity Forum in October 1999 (Sono, 1999:170). SADTU, therefore, had a “socialist

vision of the economy”, in tune with the SACP and the ANC, to whose policies and principles it adheres (Finnemore, 2002: 86). Letseka, Bantwini and King-Mckenzie (2012: 1197) reinforce this view as they declare that SADTU was opposed to the race-based professional associations and had broader issues than salary concerns. SADTU sought to “eradicate apartheid and vigorously strive towards a free, non-racial, non-sexist, compulsory and democratic single education system” (Garson, 2000:204). Chisholm (1999:114) reiterates this view and declares that the younger and more radical element of SADTU who grew up in the struggle of the 1980s “described themselves as ‘workers’ and this worker identity was used to tackle issues with industrial action and collective bargaining. Thus, SADTU became politically inclined and geared towards the overthrow of apartheid. The union, therefore, is characterized as a social movement union as it “transcend the narrow confines of collective bargaining and work place demands [and] engage with the wider political struggles for democratization in all spheres” (Webster & Adler, 2001:122). It embarked on the struggle against the oppressive conditions created by apartheid, “the twin grievances of capitalist exploitation and apartheid,” and “sought both economic and political solutions to their members’ problems” (ibid.). Consequently, the union became highly political and subscribed to union activism as a strategy to resolve industrial problems. The characterization of SADTU as a ‘social movement unionism’ (Webster & Adler, 2001:122) or ‘political unionism’ (Southall & Webster, 2010:135) arise out of “three identifiable different political traditions within the labor movement which have historically shaped the different perspectives on its relationship with the national liberation struggle,” headed mainly by the then banned SACTU and the ANC. The three different political traditions are (i) the national democratic tradition, (ii) the shop floor tradition, and (iii) the black consciousness/Africanist tradition (Webster & Adler, 2001:127). It is particularly within the national democratic tradition and the shop-floor tradition that the characterization of SADTU is best defined. As a national democratic tradition labor movement, the SADTU union “engaged with nationalism as a means of transforming the factory base” (Southall & Webster, 2010:132), and, as such, the union adopted “political unionism” and mobilized the oppressed in keeping with the ANC’s Freedom Charter (1955) (Webster & Adler, 2001: 127). This stance “was premised on the assumption that South Africa would not be understood in class terms, but that political change necessitated a national democratic struggle to liberate South Africa from white rule that was seen as a form of ‘colonialism of a special type’” (Wolpe, 1988). Hence the politics of SADTU and the consciousness of its members are always linked to struggles over the class and ethnic forms (Freund, 2007:199). The union perceives the struggles in factories and townships as indivisible, and it believe that it has an obligation to take up community issues (Southall & Webster, 2010: 136). This adoption of the national democratic tradition “created [over the years] an enormous potential for labor militancy on the part of [its] downtrodden workers” (Freund, 2007:200). It was because of this that in the last quarter of the century the SADTU union had a significant impact on the politics of the country (ibid.).

SADTU is also characterized as a shop-floor union because the union, just like all other unions affiliated to COSATU, developed its own democratic structures “around the principle of worker control, accountability and the mandating of worker representative” (Southall & Webster, 2010:137). Hence SADTU is also accredited with inculcating working-class leadership (ibid.). This view is reinforced by Freund (2007:211) who declared that shop-floor unions developed “... the doctrine of worker democracy, which itself rested on the diffusion of shop steward organization, shop steward and regional councils, and shop steward education.” A central practice of this doctrine are ‘report backs’, or mass meeting in which members made clear their position on issues (ibid.). Webster and Adler (2001:126) note that shop-floor unions were “accountable to the workers, and empowered them in production, direct intervention directly in industrial action over wages, conditions and production”. Shop-floor

unions' leaders were drawn from the shop stewards (ibid.). The shop stewards became involved in the community as the national struggle intensified in the early 1980s. This move resulted in the emergence of the working class movement and the re-emergence of national democratic tradition in community-based unions (Webster & Adler, 2001:127), thus creating a fertile ground for the formation of the politically active COSATU (1984), (Adler, 2000: 10). The national democratic and the shop floor traditions, inherent in the unionization of SADTU teachers, create a unique socialization environment that fosters and nurtures the development of patterned behavior and identity amongst them.

4. Conceptualisation of identity

Identity is generally conceptualized as the emerging “of a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation, defining what it means to be who one is in that role or situation” (Cast, 2003:43). Woodward (2004:1) contends that “identities are formed through interaction between people”, and Guibernau (2007: 10) reinforces this view when he declares that it “emerge within a system of social relations and representations.” Moya (2006:97) reiterates that it develops “from the dialectic between how subjects of consciousness identify themselves and how they are identified by others” because its development “requires the reciprocal recognition of others” to be effective (ibid.). Identity development is, therefore, a conscious exercise. This conceptualization of the development of identity is closely aligned to the theoretical perspective of the identity theory of Stryker and Statham (1983) (*as quoted in* Owens, Stryker & Goodman, 2006:87). The conceptualization, together with the theoretical frame, appropriately befit the social interaction and socialization, symbolic interactionism and discursive totality that broadly define the socio-historical and context-specificity unionization process of SADTU union teachers. The unionization of SADTU teachers can best be understood in relation to apartheid and the public sector (Posel, 2000: 41). This relationship was, at best, the relationship of the oppressor and the oppressed and it was entrenched, largely, through the industrial and Conciliation Act (1924), the apartheid policy (1948) and the Bantu Education Act (1953). These historically oppressive environments, coupled with a political discourse that sought to overcome them, has “socially constructed the identity” of the principals who are leaders in the SADTU union (Riley, 2007:83). The identity of these principals “emerge[ed] as a result of communicative interaction with other [teachers]” who are like them in their unions of choice (ibid.). As a consequence, the principals not only have similar identities with these teachers, but their identities are also the same as that of their union; they all share the same discursive practice, perspectives and behavior.

5. Research design and methodology

This inquiry examined a particular social phenomenon rather than test hypotheses (Flick, 2009:233). The inquiry used an ethnographic research design (Lao-tzu, 2010: 1) from a social constructivist perspective (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999:48). An ethnography “gives voice to the people to tell their own credible, rigorous and authentic story... in their own local context, typically relying on verbatim quotations and ‘thick’ description of events” (Lao-tzu, 2010: 1). Atkinson and Hammersley (1998:110-111) reiterate this view as they point out that ethnography is for “investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case, in detail” and it works primarily with “unstructured” data that “involves explicit interpretations of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations” (ibid.). The social discursive

practice, which form the wider context of unionization and which is considered significant in influencing the subjective language use and social practice of the principals who are leaders in the SADTU union, was ethnographically portrayed, and the identity of the principals was captured in discursive practice as reflected in their language and behavior. The principals who are leaders in the SADTU union who participated in the inquiry were homogeneous (Patton, 2001: 116) and they were purposively selected (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001: 28). These school principals formed the sample of the study and their unions formed the sites in which the research was conducted. The ethnographic descriptions depicting both the culture and the social discursive practice of the SADTU union and the subjective language use and social practice of the principals who are leaders in SADTU, indicate how the identity of these principals is influenced and matching to this union.

The data were elicited from field-notes and field texts were collected using both the participant observations (Bernard & Ryan, 2010: 41) and focus groups interviews (Smithson, 2008: 358). The data were analyzed to “discover patterns and themes” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999:2) using the recursive analysis (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999: 11) and discourse analysis (Weiss & Wodak, 2003) foregrounded by Fairclough (1992), as the methodological frame to produce results. The inquiry specifically used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to “place [the] discourse formations [of the principals who are union leaders] in a wider social context” of the SADTU union (Billig, 2003: 42). CDA was relevant as it “focuses on both discursive practice which constructs representations of the world, social objects and social relations, including power relations, and the role the discursive practice play in furthering the interests of particular social groups” (Phillips & Jørgensen (2002:4). Recursive analysis helped to re-orient and refocus both the research study and ourselves as primary instruments who captured, handled and transcribed data (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999:15). CDA assisted to discover the constitutive role of discourse i.e. its “constructivist position” (Riley, 2007:83), in influencing the development of the identity of the principals who are leaders in the SADTU union. This is because discourse “constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997:258). Parker (1994:245) reinforces this view when he declares that discourse “constructs objects and an array of subject positions”. CDA as methodical frame, therefore, is closely aligned to the theoretical perspective of the identity theory that guided this inquiry. CDA therefore, helped us to discover how the SADTU union discourse constituted the identity of the principals who are leaders in this union because discourse “is a form of social practice, rather than a purely individual activity” and is also “a mode of action; one form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other, as well as a mode of representation” (Fairclough, 1992: 63).

6. Analysis and findings

The inquiry used descriptive and process coding to systematically code the field texts in order to construct core categories which were developed into themes (Saldaña, 2009). The analytical framework that determined how data were selected, understood and interpreted was based on the principles that (1) CDA addresses social problems; (2) power relations are discursive; (3) discourse constitutes society and culture; (4) discourse does ideological work; (5) discourse is historical; (6) the link between text and society is mediated; (7) discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory; and (8) discourse is a form of social action (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997:271-280). The basis of analysis was “the link between language use and social practice”, and it was done at both the micro level of “instances of language use” by the principals who are SADTU union leaders and at the macro level of the SADTU union’s “social discursive practice” which forms the wider context of unionization (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002:69). The actual

analysis process involved the reading of transcripts, often citing verbatim from text, and theorizing themes as evidenced in the data according to the identity theory framework. This enabled a discursive analysis of identity, to elucidate how the principals who are union leaders forge identity in their wider context of unionization, which shift beyond the boundaries of what is normally known as “unionization”. The immediate and wider unionization context shape the principals perceptions of themselves as principals and their management and leadership styles in their daily engagement with their teachers, SGB’s and department of education officials and teaching as a profession. The following four discursive themes, shop floor unionism discourse, perceptions of educational authorities, rationalizing discursive strategies, and democratic discursive strategies were theorized using the CDA analytic framework.

6.1 Shop-floor unionism discourse

Participants used discursive structures that demonstrate strong identification and solidarity with members, emphasized togetherness, accountability, consultation, involvement, equality, sameness and unity. It also showed that they believe in collective decision-making and in checking the accuracy or correctness of their decisions as leaders of other teachers who are SADTU members. Such discursive structures, that emphasize the building of democratic shop floor structures around the principle of worker control, accountability and the mandating of worker representatives, are common in unions that subscribe to shop floor unionism (Southall & Webster, 2010:137). The discursive structures seek to produce and reproduce equal power relations amongst union members in general and amongst ordinary members and their leaders in particular (Weiss & Wodak, 2003: 14). Thus the actual speeches of the participants are reinforced and reproduced by the wider cultural and institutional ways of using language in social movement unionism.

6.1.1 Principle of worker control, accountability and mandating of worker representative

Participants demonstrated that the general membership of SADTU exercises a strong control over them as principals and as union leaders and, as such, they account to this general membership. This is in line with the principle of worker control and accountability. This doctrine of worker democracy is located in the diffusion of shop steward organizations and shop stewards and regional councils. It gives the general membership power in the general management and running of this union and of schools as places of employment (Freund, 2007:211). In their own words, a participant points out that...*as SADTU union we have structures in all the schools; we have the site as the basic structure. As principals we are saying the site steward is also the principal of the school; we are equal with the site steward* (Participant 5), and often we ... *had to listen to two bosses; the union and the employer* (Participant 6).

This doctrine of worker democracy, which was overwhelmingly laden with involvement and consultative strategies, was also evidence in the discourse of these participants especially when they conduct disciplinary procedures for their SADTU members:

If a member has done maybe unprofessional things... bring in the site steward because they are almost at the same par, it becomes easier if they speak to him or her in the site level... because they are able to discipline each other in a SADTU union manner (Participant 5).

Participants subscribe and identify with the doctrine of worker democracy and accountability, notwithstanding their positions as school managers. At times this surpasses their subjective roles as school principals and compels them to be unionists although

... as a principal you will always be wearing the hat of the Department and you have got the responsibility to execute towards the employer whom you are representing at school level. But at the very same time you have members whom you are representing at union level... so you must marry the two (Participant 1).

6.1.2 Political and economic relations discourse

As social movement unionism adherents (Webster & Adler, 2001:122), participants demonstrated their subjective commitment towards fighting for their members' interests on both the labor-related issues as well as on general economic and political issues as their concern is that *...the socio-economic problems in our society are also a challenge to educators (Participant 7)*. Thus, participants believe that *SADTU played a significant role from nineties towards nineteen ninety four; mobilizing people to vote for ANC as well, so that there is a change in our country (Participant 7)*.

6.2 Perceptions of educational authorities

Participants constructed their perceptions of the educational authorities in ways that demonstrated their deep-seated subjective distrust and resentment. They use discursive strategies that indicated that authorities are unsupportive, autocratic, non-consultative and non-involving, top down and largely anti-unionistic. This discourse is in line with how language and body language construct identities and contribute to the resistance of the political and ideological discourse that sustains inequalities and injustices in the unionized environment of these participants (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002:69). It historically arose in education circles during the apartheid era, when the education system was largely discriminatory and its administration oppressive (Horrell, 1964:87-88). The discourse thus sought to lay bare the hidden effects of power which "stigmatize the vulnerable, excludes the marginal, naturalizes privileges, and contrivance ideology as common sense, defines the terms of political debate and subvert resistance" in the unionized world of these participants (Fairclough, 1992:67).

6.2.1 Anger towards remaining apartheid educational leaders

The participants demonstrated deep-seated distrust and resentment discursive structures towards the authorities' non-consultative, non-involvement and undemocratic leadership style which they perceive as anti-unionistic as they *...always carry top down directives...and, as a results, the participants...hardly interact with [them] in terms of taking the information upwards. It's always top down (Participant 6)*. The top down leadership style arises because *...unfortunately the Departmental officials, they still have an attitude against SADTU and SADTU union principals, to say they are radicals, they are not interested in quality education... (Participant 1)*. As a result, *it's not hard to see that at meetings with Departmental officials SADTU union leaders as principals are in loggerheads with Departmental officials because we don't meet on the same levelled playing field (Participant 2)*.

6.2.2 Frustration and anger towards ex-union leaders who are now in education leadership

Participants also demonstrated deep-seated anger and distrust towards the educational authorities that were once in positions of leadership in the SADTU union. These are described, as *...the re-invigorated comrades; they were our comrades some of them, who are still wanting to come back to the union to take decisions for us while they are in the Department. Those ones are very dangerous...because, Participant 7 points out, they...got absorbed into those positions and become employers, and we are distant. You see, we will never be together at any given stage* (Participant 5). The educational authorities that were once in positions of leadership in SADTU... *that got to those positions [of educational leadership], they get absorbed into those positions and become employers, and we are distant. You see, we will never be together at any given stage* (Participant 7). The ex SADTU leaders are now... *actually the employers...because... if you go up there you must become an employer...* (Participant 3). The ex SADTU union leaders also carry... *top-down leadership. They just simply distance themselves* (Participant 7).

6.2.3 Frustration with educational authorities' lack of long-term curriculum plans

Participants also demonstrated anger and frustration towards poor curriculum planning and implementation and poor human resources relations. The department fails on... *the point of a teacher development...* (Participant 5) in spite of the fact that the curriculum... *may be changing again* (Participant 1). As a result of this... *most schools are still battling really with the new curriculum...* (Participant 5). Curriculum changes are introduced although...*they do not want to pilot them* (Participant 4), and, piloting... *only becomes a smokescreen* (Participant 8)

6.3 Rationalizing discursive strategies

Participants drew on discursive strategies that rationalize and justify their involvement in union activism and their choice of SADTU as a union of representation. Their discourse, thus, is based on militant and radical discourses that are associated with “protest action, marches, rallies, strikes, and occupations” (Garson, 2000:209). It has drawn on the discourse that is associated with “rolling mass mobilization, protests campaigns, political mobilization, stay-aways, boycotts, political affiliation, mass action campaigns, strikes, fights for the general liberation of the oppressed” (Sono, 1999:180). The discourse historically arose out of politically inclined unions who were militant and geared towards the overthrow of apartheid (Garson, 2000:205).

6.3.1 Majority rule discourse

Participants constructed their discourse in ways that glorify and celebrate the joining of SADTU, a union with a very large membership and which can bull-doze anyone. In their own words the participants feel that *...joining SADTU union is the beginning of wisdom...because... SADTU takes care of members over and above everything...and SADTU... is giant in nature ...and when... SADTU says: “we are going to the streets,” that is going to happen right now* (Participant 1).

6.3.2 Democratic and economic emancipation discourse

As social movement adherents, participants construct their discursive structures in ways that indicate that they also “transcend the narrow confines of collective bargaining and work place demands [and] engage with the wider political struggles for democratization in all spheres” (Webster & Adler, 2001:122). This is informed by the belief that “South Africa would not be understood in class terms, but that political change necessitated a national

democratic struggle to liberate South Africa from a white rule” (Webster & Adler, 2001:127). For this reason the participants feel that... *as a union we've had an agenda of transformation towards the democracy that we are in right now* (Participant 5). That's why...*SADTU played a significant role from the nineties towards 1994; mobilizing people to vote for ANC as well, so that there is a change in our country* (Participant 7).

6.3.3 Freedom Charter and the South African Constitution Discourse

The participants' discursive constructs indicates that they identify with the ANC's popular programme, the Freedom Charter (Webster and Adler (2001:127) as they... *are in line with the Freedom Charter*, and also... *are democratic in nature* (Participant 1)

6.4 Democratic discursive strategies

Participants' discursive structures indicate that they are socialized and nurtured into the collective social relations of just, equal and democratic discourse that formed the broader societal level of all the social movement unionists (Giddens, 2006).

6.4.1 National democratic discourse

The political objective of social movement unionism is to achieve political and economic liberation in all spheres of life (Webster & Adler, 2001: 122). Thus, the participants perceive themselves as...*democratic in nature* (Participant 1), and they...*don't deviate from this* (Participant 5). The democratic discursive constructs are learned, reproduced and sustained through social movement unionism because...*these principals who were brought up by SADTU... still carry the mandate, and they don't become bossy... even if they are in these positions of power* (Participant 3).

6.4.2 Consultative and Professionally Inviting Discourse

Participants construct their discursive structures in ways that indicate that they subscribe to a leadership style that is inclusive, consultative and involving. This is...*the skill that one has learned [from SADTU of] trying and forge unity; in fact conflict resolution skills, and the consultative process in the decision making processes* (Participant 1). Participant 2 also shared that such behavior is... *learnt...not to be the aggressor*. These democratic and consultative discursive structures of social movement unionism arise and are, as such, informed, by the doctrine of worker democracy inherent in this form of unionism (Freund, 2007: 211).

7. Concluding remarks

The findings demonstrated that the principals had the proclivity to rely on the social constructs of the SADTU union to forge their identities as principals as leaders. This is evident from the theoretical and empirical discussion in this article and it expands the understanding of identity formation in the context of unionization. The findings also confirm the view that there are predominantly two different unionization trends in South Africa, which have

developed in line with political orientation and race, presenting a dichotomy of political unionism and professionalism. The SADTU union developed from the former trend, which was mainly led by the historically oppressed blacks and a few anti-apartheid whites, and was generally regarded as militant, politically and subscribing to social movement unionism (Finnemore, 2002). The findings, in this way, expose the power relations that operate in the unionized environment and, as such, provide practical implications for education policymakers and planners, workshop organizers and the Department of Education (DoE). These findings attend to the role of unions in shaping the consciousness of the principals who are leaders and, by extension, the teachers who are led by these principals for effective implementation of educational change and policies.

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