
Is poverty alleviation bad for women and girls?

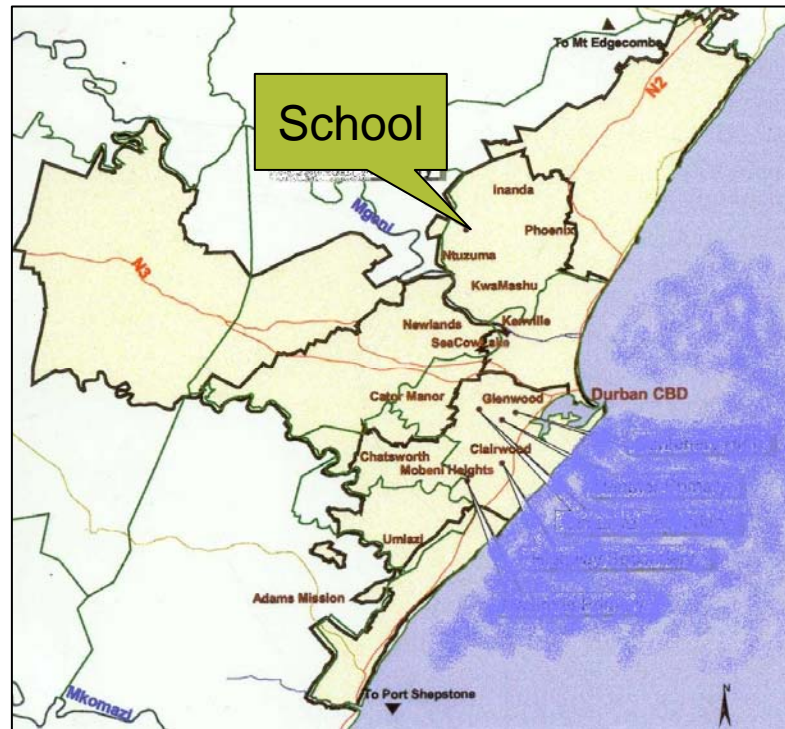
Views of poverty and gender in a South African primary school

Based on our theoretical framing...

- How are poverty and gender understood, and understood to be interlinked at school level?
- Do schools in poverty contexts take an interventionist, institutional or interactionist approach to poverty and gender inequalities?
- “...processes [in institutions] to address these have thus far remained undocumented”

(Unterhalter 2007 p.155)

South African school case study – in a peri-urban area 20 kms from Durban city centre on the east coast of South Africa



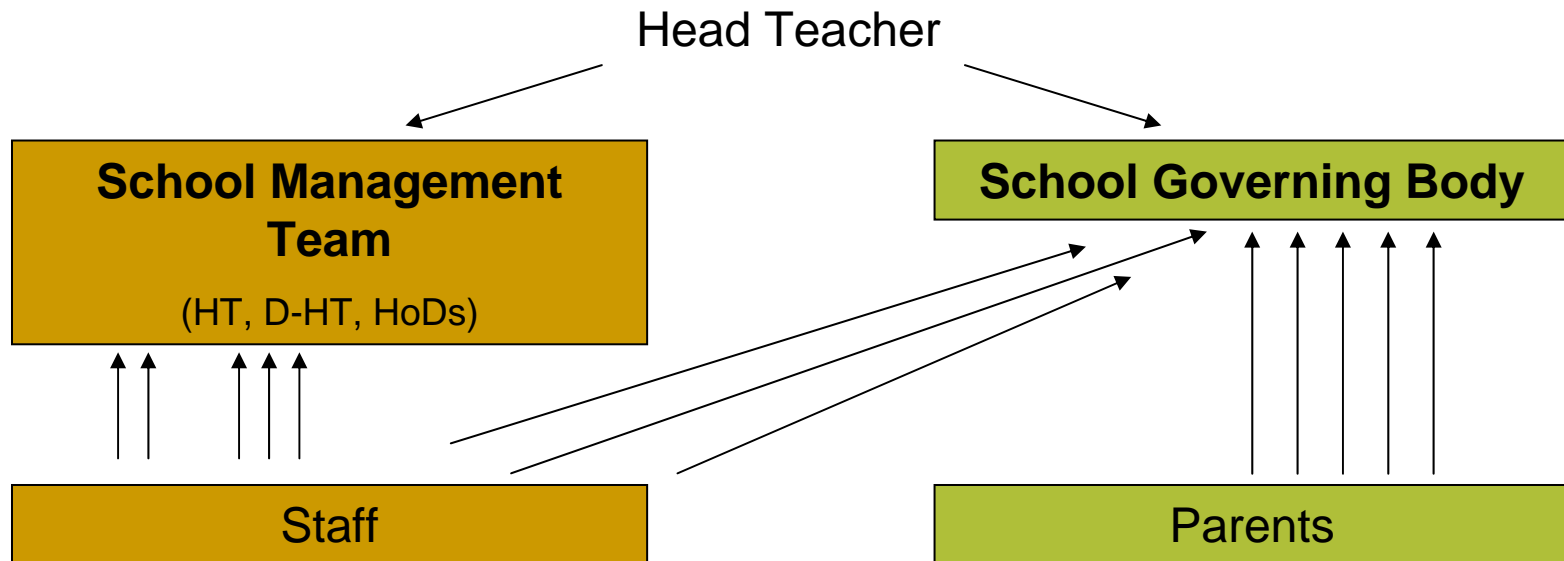
Gender Equality

- Head-teacher: “*We have never dealt with gender because we have got more females than males.*”
 - Interventionist approach
 - Gender equality means balancing numbers, an equal allocation of places at school, etc.
 - Reporting statistics about the school & poverty and contesting the school’s community-related ranking elicits no State response...
 - Despair, powerlessness and burden
 - Vertical dislocation between national and institutional levels
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Gender Equality

- But what happens when we look beyond the intervention of reporting on the balance of numbers?
 - An interview account about a transgression that happened during the time of a former head teacher
 - brings to the fore gender relations and the regulatory framework of governance/management
 - illuminates the intersection of poverty and gender to reveal horizontal dislocations between the school and the community
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School Governance & Management structures that regulate decision-making

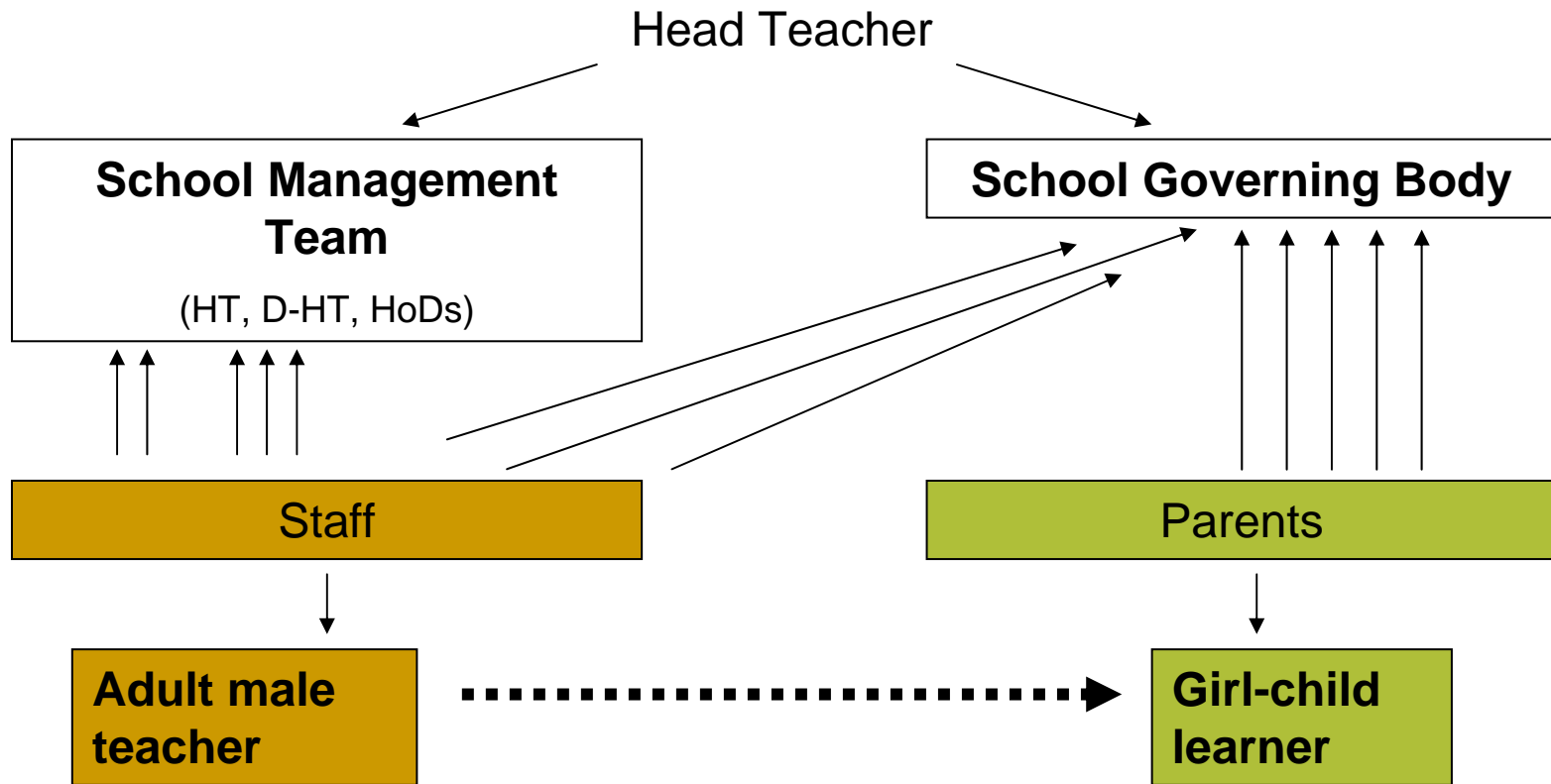


The Transgression

Head Teacher:

- *The parent raised [the matter about] her child. It seems as if there is a teacher who like to touch her. They have got that relation which she don't understand it because even the teacher do come to school and sometimes do a favour for her, you see.*
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The Transgression



The fall-out

1. Now you find that that teacher was at school on the time and then you find that as the male teachers came together and discuss about the issues. We don't want a teacher who will do things like making friends with the learners because the parent will take as if there is a close relationship between a child and a teacher. ...it concerned the male teachers. ...we dealt with the problem through the right channel because these are the people who are doing the wrong thing.
 2. ...the parent raised that in the parents meeting but [the parent] was called to order [and told] that if you have got a problem we have got the way of approaching the issue. In the parents meeting we got concern of one of the teachers who doing the favour of 1, 2, 3. But it's not happening in our school because we got the younger ones, because of the age.
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The fall-out

3. But in a staff meeting the principal did raise the thing that these things must not happen. We are not expecting these things though we don't have the witness or the evidence of the thing. Because even the parents is just talking about the discovery of seeing, not getting the gist of the story.
 4. [The women staff members] were grumbling like hell. They caused a lot of nonsense... that they wonder if that thing is true because they don't believe it can happen in our school because we have got the younger girls. So they grumbled... saying that we must not do that. In other words they were advising us that it must never happen to us, to our school, through the male, see, because it was the first time.
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The fall-out

5. ...they did discuss that thing in the governing body, because the parents were present during the utterance that was done by the parent in a parents meeting.
 6. So now the principal asked the parent to come to see him in the office so that they will deal with this problem.
 7. But the principal came back and told [the SMT] what happened to the parent and then he came to the staff and then tell to the staff what happened and what are the expectations of that action.
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Shifts

- Mute counting and balancing of numbers → women 'grumbling like hell'
 - Structured governance → call to follow 'order'
 - Public service transgression → 'favour'
 - Accountability → collusion
 - Governance structures designed to open up (cosmopolitan) participation → Reduced by management to a private localised problem
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Poverty, gender and resistance

- The 'favour' – evidence from other participants (and researchers) is that such transgressions are common when women and girls are poor
 - Although national policy condemns teacher-learner relations, local practices may condone them
 - The mother's chosen site of resistance sought to pursue accountability and power through the regulatory framework
 - But the institutional reaction shows that the gendered experience of lived poverty and bondedness holds little meaning compared with the impoverishing of the school's reputation – which is not permissible
 - Hence, the resistance rubbishes the mother's complaint and reduces it to a private matter;
 - Hence, the mother and her child's interests given a shroud of silence; no further pursuit of the male teacher's professional misconduct and adult-child transgression
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Conclusion about the school case study

Understandings of gender and poverty reveal horizontal dislocations between the school and the community

But using methodology with aspects of action research carries social justice potential

Head teacher's reflection on the incident:

We don't have even the policy that how the male should behave in a school situation.

Deputy Head teacher's reflection at the report-back meeting:

We were not aware that we were not doing any justice to this category of gender.

