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Missed Opportunities: The Rhetoric and Reality of Social Justice in Education

Abstract

This article examines the paradox of post-apartheid education policies which established the formal basis for social justice and equity through legislation while in reality these laudable goals remain unattainable and elusive.

The article is informed by and builds on the conceptualisation and analysis of the barriers to social justice and equality in education by global and local critical, post-colonial and political economy of education scholars. It critically outlines the key arguments and studies around these concepts and attempts to show the strengths and limitations of their analyses.

Conceptual coherence was achieved through a theoretical framework which focuses on social class, community and critical education policy. An original contribution is made by extending and adapting some of these views, beyond their initial application, to support the education initiatives of South African social movements in poor communities. In concert with the latter, local education policy analyses will be critiqued for not paying sufficient attention to issues of social class, context and community voices in education.

1. Introduction

It is easy to become despondent about the state of education when we read about practices involving rampant fiscal malfeasance, the dismal state of infrastructure and facilities in many of our schools and the abysmal performance of our learners in international benchmark tests. Over two decades since the first democratic elections in South Africa, the combined weight of apartheid's legacy exacerbated by omissions in policies and tardy implementation over the past twenty-three years have meant that the promise of a quality public education system remains a chimera. While a mélange of new official policies in every conceivable aspect of education exists and racially-based laws have been removed from the statutes, the education system as a whole reflects and reproduces the wider inequalities in society.

Toward the end of 2008, ex-Robben Island prisoner and educationist Neville Alexander and other key educationists launched the Public Participation in Education Network (PPEN). In its 'Call to Action', PPEN declared that the failures evident in the education system had induced cynicism among various communities and even among educators, school managers and other public officials. It warned that these sentiments would further entrench the sense of powerlessness and a loss of hope about the possibility of meaningful outcomes for society as a whole. While a minority of schools, mostly situated in middle-class and rich communities excel, South Africa essentially has a two-tier education system. PPEN asserted that schools were not failing individually; rather, the nation was failing them collectively. PPEN's declaration (Vally, 2009) read in part:

> South Africans face an important moment in our history... our education system is in crisis. It is not a technical problem to be solved by experts but a national disaster requiring our collective efforts. The majority of children in South Africa are not learning to read and write with any confidence. Too many schools are bleak and uninspiring places for our children and teachers. If we do not act decisively now, we run the risk as a nation of 'getting used to this'.

Alexander expanded on the nature of the crisis identified by PPEN, but also discussed ways of reversing this trend. In an article originally entitled 'The Truth about Education in the New South Africa', published as 'Schooling In and For the New South Africa', (Alexander, 2010) lamented that

> … fundamental mistakes of a conceptual, strategic and political-pedagogical character [policies such as Outcomes Based Education, teacher redeployment and others critiqued by Alexander at the time] were made in the process of transition from apartheid to post-apartheid education during the period 1993-1998 approximately. Not everything was wrong, of course, but many of the beacons that should have facilitated a soft landing for the new system were placed wrongly.

He continued this metaphor by explaining how subsequent attempts to correct the deficiencies "were doomed to fail, precisely because they did not replace these beacons and, instead, themselves became no more than decoy beacons that had to end up in numerous but related crash landings" (Ibid: 7). Alexander identified and discussed a few key omissions and mistakes, including the failure to move away from the spatial apartheid location of schools which perpetuates racial and class divisions and the unequal allocation of resources, the inadequate professional development of teachers, and the blind spot of language policy in schools. Alexander spent many years promoting early childhood development, reading and multilingualism in schools explaining its importance for cognitive development, overcoming divisions and building national unity but also explained why the promotion of African languages was also about addressing the skewed and unequal power relations in our country.

Besides Alexander a number of educationists have written about the problems besetting the post-apartheid education system in South Africa. They include writings on educational management, school governance, curriculum, language, assessment, equity, teacher education, early childhood development, adult basic education and many other issues involving the process of educational reform in post-apartheid South Africa. These texts have also dealt with external influences on the education system and system change, arising from the wider remit of state policies such as the financing of education and the democratic state's orientation to educational investment, labour markets and globalization (Sayed & Jansen, 2001; Motala & Pampallis, 2002; Chisholm, 2004; Vally & Motala, 2014). Yet few of these texts and policies have dealt specifically with the existence of social classes for the unfolding reform process in the aftermath of the pre-1994 negotiations and the importance of community participation. Where class is referred to, as in the case of Chisholm (2004) the discussion is essentially about the effects of educational reform on social class formation in the post-apartheid period and Chisholm's major conclusion relates to how present policies favour an "expanding, racially-mixed middle class." (p. 7).

Neglecting social class has contributed to the failure in addressing and overcoming the deep inequalities that characterise the South African education system. In a linked way it is imperative to question how and why social movements and social actors on the ground, who initially exerted a strong influence on policy formulation and critique, were largely marginalised once policies were institutionalised. The trajectory of the latter trend, related to the class nature of the post–apartheid state and the political economy of the transition from apartheid to democracy, I argue, is key to the seemingly intractable problems we face.

Critical policy analysis usefully views the terrain of the state and therefore policy formulation processes as spaces of contestation and negotiation. The conceptualisation and analysis of the barriers to social justice and equality in education and the relationship between the state, civil society and class interests are informed and sustained by a tremendous body of work produced by global critical, postcolonial and political economy of education scholars. These are discussed more extensively in the next section.

Reframing policy and the policy web from a political economy perspective requires us to name classes, racialized and gendered issues of power and control in education institutions; to differentiate between the practical, symbolic and transformative functions of education policy and decision-making without losing sight of the role of education in the construction, prescription and circumscription of individual identities, desires, and subjectivities (Mehta & Ninnes, 2000). In this sense, theory that allows us to see beyond the symptoms and shows connectivity between the different issues is important.

Much of the policy research conducted in South Africa to date has primarily identified the lack of implementation and/or financial constraints as the biggest barriers to education reform, without fundamentally challenging or questioning the original policy assumptions. I suggest that policy texts cannot be read separately from their implementation, nor can they be delinked from political and financial commitments to support them. Policy must also factor in, from the outset, personnel allocations, lines of authority, clear accountability, time frames and mechanisms of implementation. Most significantly for this article, I argue that policymaking cannot exclude those who are most affected by them from generating policy or the development of solutions. By meaningfully and respectfully ensuring that the perspectives, life experiences and ideas of communities of the marginalised are incorporated in policy related research, policymakers can take local challenges into account and better deliver on what is needed.

In order for policy aims to effect change, policy design and implementation has to reflect the needs, understandings and social realities of its primary constituencies – not merely powerful stakeholders, protected interests groups or articulate policy crafters – "good policy" should be measured by its relevance and applicability. Educational reforms should be accompanied by a wider range of redistributive strategies, democratic participation, political will and clear choices about the social ends policy interventions seek to achieve.

Commenting on the link between schooling and the socio-economic background of learners, Patrick Watkins (2010:13) explains that,

> ...the learning process is not only affected by the quality of schooling, but also heavily influenced by the socio-economic background and environment (health, books at home, help from the community, to name but a few ingredients). So, when it comes to education (as in many other fields) equity is not enough. Quite to the contrary, giving everyone the same amount and quality of education regardless of children's backgrounds is profoundly unjust and a recipe for reproducing inequalities.

Various articles (Vally, 2007; Spreen & Vally, 2006) describe how communities have documented the failure of existing policies intended to remove social and economic barriers that prevent poor children from accessing and completing basic education. They also show how social movements can facilitate direct and expanded participation of poor and disadvantaged communities in education policy making. Before discussing the role of social movements and community participation in education policy processes attention will be paid to the relationship between social class and education.

2.   Social Class and Education

In the seventies and early eighties the local and global literature on the political economy of education and the relationship between social class and education was extensive. Key texts included Richard Sennet and Jonathan Cobb's 'The Hidden Injuries of Class' (1973) with its examination of the consequences of anti-academic, anti-school behaviour among inner-city youth; Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis's 'Schooling in Capitalist America' (1976) which explained working class failure as the *raison d'être* of the capitalist system; and Paul Willis's 'Learning to Labour' (1981) which showed how working-class teenage 'lads' consciously

resisted and rebelled against schooling and classroom authority yet continued to reproduce social class relations. The 'correspondence theory' of Bowles and Gintis (1976:131) and others in this period explained how schools reproduced the social relations that capitalism required.

Correspondence theory was critiqued for ignoring the agency of those involved and the capacity of people to resist the system. The theory was also seen as overly deterministic and mechanistic for focusing primarily on the power of economic structures to influence education. The work of later writers such as Henry Giroux (1983) and Michael Apple (1996) explored the complex inter-relationships between class, 'race' and gender in education and the dynamic relationships between cultural reproduction and economic reproduction. These writers also documented resistance and contestation to class, social and cultural oppression in education settings.

The theoretical approach of these writers allowed for addressing the entire nexus of relevant issues in which education is one strand in the plethora of economic, political, class and racial policies and social forces that impinge on the everyday lives of working class students in South Africa.

In an article on class, 'race' and state in post-apartheid education we made clear (Motala & Vally, 2010) that "throughout the period of the 1970s up to the early 90s, debate about class analysis characterized a vast array of writings including historical studies, sociology, political science and economic analysis in particular" in South Africa and the new sociology of education movements in Europe and North America. Analytical educational analysis in this period in South Africa revolved around the debate between liberal and radical discourses. The latter partly critiqued the liberal approach as inadequate in that it examined education separately from the wider economic, political, social and cultural context. The radical approach emphasised class, its intersection with 'race' and largely argued for using the tools of political economy. For instance, Cross and Chisholm (1990:43) insisted that instead of placing the "moral and legal responsibility for separate schooling at the door of the National Party and Afrikaner ideology" as adherents of liberal ideology did, the social policy of education and schooling was predicated on reproducing a super exploited black migrant work force and a stable white working class. Both Molteno (1990) and Christie and Collins (1990) used a political economy framework to analyse the historical foundations of schooling in South Africa. Referring to Bantu Education, Christie and Collins (1990:182) asserted that "...the central continuing feature remains, namely that schooling for the indigenous people of South Africa is in the main for the purpose of reproducing a certain kind of labour, as required by the particular form taken by the accumulation process at a particular time".

The dominance of the radical discourse in education declined post-1994. Cross *et al.* (2008:20) provide a few specific factors which contributed to this regression: 1.) A decline of the practice of critique particularly with regard to the role of the state; 2.) Disregard in scholarly work for issues of social justice and human rights that dominated radical discourses in the struggle against apartheid; and 3.) an almost unproblematic acceptance of neo-liberal approaches and positivism in social research. Cross *et al.* (2008:24) also mention the exodus of intellectuals from the academe to "government and bureaucracy to the detriment of scholarly work." The saliency of social class in education certainly remained explicit in a few circles in the South African post-apartheid academy, particularly for those employing a Bernsteinian approach focused on the curriculum and classroom processes around the relationships between social class, patterns of language use and socialisation (Bernstein, 1971). I am though concerned with class as it relates to democratic education policy processes and community struggles beyond the classroom and its attendant impact on schooling generally.

We lamented the fact that social class as an analytical and conceptual category "has been a casualty of the post-apartheid period" (Motala & Vally, 2010:93):

> Post-modern theory, in vogue during this period, was used as a justification for the retreat from class, made even more seductive by its coincidence with the negotiated settlement and the illusionary 'miracle of the New South Africa'. It could be argued that intellectuals in South Africa have themselves been complicit in the elision of class as an analytical category, quite often consciously and disparagingly. There is also the possibility of timidity in the face of the avalanche of academic and public voices representing capital, which have made any reference to class, seem both archaic and 'ideological' as though these voices are themselves not ideological.

Analyses of social issues including education in the post-apartheid period are dominated by an uncritical focus on racial factors often ignoring the underlying class issues. This is not meant to imply that racial and gender issues are mere distractions from basic issues of economic inequality. John Saul in his essay, 'Identifying Class, Classifying Difference' (2006:64-5) shows that grappling with the relationship between these social categories is not limited to South Africa:

> Himani Bannerji has underscored the 'absurdity' of attempting to see 'identity and difference as historical forms of consciousness unconnected to class formation, development of capital and class politics.' But in doing so she also emphasizes the impossibility of considering class itself outside the gendering (and 'race-ing') that so often significantly characterizes it in the concrete.

Joan Hanafin and Anne Lynch (2002:36) in a paper that presents the views of working-class parents on home-school links partially attribute the "disappearance of social class as an issue in the debate on educational failure" to the shift of focus on the debate centred on school effectiveness. They make the point that within this debate "the voices of parents of educationally disadvantaged pupils are not heard" (Ibid: 36). The literature which sees social class as one of the most important determining factors of accomplishment in the educational arena and still one of the best predictors of who will be successful is present though not as extensive as its importance might merit (a few examples are Drudy & Lynch, 1993; Power, 2000; Rothstein, 2004). Despite the continued salience of social class in education, Tom Nesbit (2006:171) in an article on adult education titled 'What's the Matter with Social Class?' questions why social class is "rarely as well considered as the related vectors of gender and race". Nesbit (2006:185) examines the intersections of class and adult education and argues that social class analysis can also expose through careful scrutiny:

> ... the superficiality of a variety of currently prescribed educational reforms: the individualizing of educational opportunities, increased commercial involvement determining educational goals, privatization of schools and colleges, a return to so-called basics, the streaming of learners of all ages into cultural or functional literacies or core competencies, and the increasing pressures to work harder and longer.

Nesbit implores educators to "reassert a class-based approach ...that is grounded in the struggles of those who seek to build a fairer, safer, and more democratic society for all" (Ibid: 185).

Apart from notable chapters in Chisholm's 'Changing Class' (2004) particularly an article by Crain Soudien (Ibid: 89-114) and Ken Harley and Volker Wedekind (Ibid: 195-220) scant attention is paid directly to issues of social class in education over the past twenty three years. Grappling effectively with contemporary education problems requires bringing issues of class and community back to the forefront in theorising and understanding education policy in the South African context.

3.   Social Movements and Community in Education Policy Making

Those involved in education social movements in South Africa previously expected that the new political dispensation would translate into a better and more equitable education system. It seemed almost as if civil society was collectively holding its breath. A plethora of new educational laws and policies boosted this hope. The prevailing and misplaced assumption was that after the 1994 elections the new political dispensation would automatically translate into a better society and educational system. Most of the active participants in these education social movements during apartheid were demobilised in the early nineties. Ballard (2005) shows that this phenomenon of demobilisation is not unique and Mamdani warns of the postcolonial "marriage between technicism and nationalism" resulting in the demobilisation of social movements (Mamdani 1996:21). It took four years before social movements were re-constituted. Ballard (2005:83) writes:

> The new generation of social movements appeared in earnest once the ANC's second term in office began. The Treatment Action Campaign (formed in 1998)... Anti-Eviction Campaign, Anti Privatisation Forum, Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (2000) the Landless People's Movement, Coalition of South Africans for the Basic Income Grant (2001) and the Education Rights Project (2002), have been amongst the more enduring and visible struggles to have reconstituted a vibrant oppositional civil society. Countless unnamed small scale and ephemeral struggles have also emerged across the country.

Although many of these movements emerged as issue-based around areas such as electricity and water cut-offs, environmental justice, privatisation, evictions and landlessness Ballard (Ibid: 85) argues, Further movements such as the Education Rights Project and the Treatment Action Campaign address other aspects of state delivery around schooling and health. These all relate to the inability of people to pay for what they need and the failure of government to supply it at affordable prices. While these appear to be narrow single issue struggles, they reflect the systemic nature of poverty and underpinned by high levels of unemployment.

In South Africa, social movements differ in their class composition, ideology and actions. Many, but not all, of the new social movements characterised by mass mobilisation are employing the methods of critical pedagogy. As Mody (1991:29) puts it, "their process is Freirean reflection and action, their direction is horizontal, their leadership is internal and their end is an equitable economic and social whole where the individual is one active subject".

Over the past decade significant debates and scholarship on South Africa's social movements have centred on the relationship of social movements with the state, the limits of local and single-issue struggles, the leadership of social movements and the expansion of rights through litigation (Ballard, Habib & Valodia, 2006; Pithouse, 2006; Sinwell, 2011; Bond, Desai & Ngwane, 2012). These writings record considerable tensions and contradictions within and between social movements yet they nevertheless constitute attempts by communities to collectively improve services and public goods through active citizenship.

It is important to link the concept of 'community' in concrete ways to issues of social class, history and the structures and relations of power. In many ways community 'participation' in education has been limited to school decentralisation initiatives in South Africa. Lewis and Naidoo (2004) explore the relationship between decentralisation, democracy and participation. Their paper discusses the limitations of decentralisation as a way of solving problems of democratic participation. They conclude by asserting that the technocratic character of school governance in South Africa makes it inaccessible to the majority of its communities, disempowers the poor, illiterate and marginalized and serves as a barrier for the full participation of people for whom it was intended.

More broadly, Hemson (2007:9) examines the often repeated view by government officials that there are formal processes laid down in policy and statutes for participation but argues that these are validly regarded by social movements to be non-existent or ineffective and that existing formal democratic structures of society are not opening public decision-making to the historically dispossessed." Similarly, a study of community experiences which attempt to engage with local municipalities in development planning and policy processes found that "insufficient consideration has been paid to public participation, and that existing policy frameworks, institutional mechanisms and programme interventions are failing to comply with government's constitutional and statutory obligations in this regard" (Buccus, Hemson, Hicks & Piper, 2008:1). The latter study found that the "poor and marginalized have the least impact on policy and development planning" and new approaches to participation are required since the existing formal mechanisms are "inadequate, inaccessible and disempowering" (Ibid: 11). It also revealed that legislation allowing for 'public participation' through ward committees or community public meetings (called *Izimbizo*) were instead forms of consultation widely seen as formalities, rather than the actual participation of local communities in decision making or implementation.

In his conclusion Hemson (2007:14) shows that the poor exhibit high levels of support for social movements that act in their interest: "... [the] poor appear ... more engaged than the middle class in forms of public participation, even though the middle class has a high level of participation through, for example, school governing bodies, environmental issues and in suburban security groups." Perhaps the reason for higher forms of participation in school governing bodies by middle class constituencies can be found in the study below.

Grant-Lewis and Naidoo (2004:7) after investigating local participation in school governing bodies assert that the ...South African government's efforts to broaden participation in educational governance is serving technocratic, efficiency ends rather than broadening participation in any authentic way. To date SASA (the South African Schools Act) is not translating into the empowerment of school communities or stimulating substantial organisational changes. Rather, the initiatives are serving to reinforce existing patterns of power and privilege in schools and in the broader society. Our study suggests that the main reason for this is that, at all levels of the system, devolved school governance and participation of the school community in decision- making is being interpreted in a strikingly narrow way. The capacity to influence decision- making has been viewed in a formal, quasi-legalistic way restricted to institutional roles defined externally or defined by the most powerful actors at the school.

Clearly the over-reliance on the formal structures of school governance to promote community participation is found wanting. Grant-Lewis and Naidoo show how community engagement is narrowly limited to parental engagement related to fundraising and argues that a technical and corporate model of school governance that protects sectional and exclusive interests will perpetuate inequality.

An analysis of the politics of education and education policy needs to include not just formal policy making apparatus but also the policy arenas created by social movements and organised civil society (Torres, 2000). These policy arenas constitute an alternative form of 'public' space where actors can dialogue, debate and mobilise on social issues (Alvarez *et al.* 1998); Nancy Fraser (1989) calls these alternative spaces and discourses that occur at the margins 'counterpublics' and 'counterdiscourse'. These alternative policy arenas tend to pay more attention to historical and cultural contexts in which education policies are formulated and implemented as well as problems of unequal distribution of resources and social discrimination. They provide spaces for the validation and insertion of subjugated knowledge and experience into public discourse. In doing so, they present new and dynamic understandings about the classed nature of policymaking and practices of deeper and direct forms of democratic participation for both organised civil society as well as the individual citizen. In fact, the creation and maintenance of these alternative policy

arenas re-situate the politics of education at the juncture of the state and civil society. Thus, the politics of formal and alternative policy arenas are presented as two partial and complementary sources of insight into the politics of education representing as they do two very different centres and relations of power (Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). A brief analysis of these power struggles and public participation in educational policymaking in South Africa is provided below.

4. Policy development in post-apartheid South Africa

Initially, policy making reflected a "negotiated compromise" - a careful balancing act between contradictory political imperatives, chiefly social justice and economic development. This attempt at consensus without addressing the social and class cleavages in society left an indelible imprint on the evolution of policies. The eagerness to overcome the legacy of apartheid, coupled with overwhelming public enthusiasm shielded the early stages of the policy process from scrutiny. As a result, policy development churned ahead under the assumption that there were no conflicting interests once 'stakeholder' consensus was reached. Scant attention was paid to what should be considered a central issue in understanding education and societal transformation - the effect of class and status, poverty and inequality on the implementation and impact of education policy. The banal reality is that the single factor which more than any other determines a school's performance is its intake - the children who go there. Generally, a school based in a poor community will struggle with its children, while one that is based in a more affluent area will prosper. Children in South Africa face a plethora of social problems, including hunger, poverty, illness and violence- particularly those children who live in rural areas and urban townships. Statistics from UCT's Children's Institute (Berry *et al.*, 2013) show the extent of the problems: 60% of the 18,5 million children in SA live in households that earn about R600 per month and 27% suffer from malnutrition. Central to this argument is the question of why, despite the products of tomes of policy texts, inequality still persists in South African schools and society[1].

The view that implementation needs to be built into policy formulation from its inception rather than as an afterthought was well received by South African policy analysts, as was the notion first credited to Ball (1994) that policy should not be seen solely as 'text'. An additional concern for several analysts was that the policy development process was mediated by a variety of responses and pressure groups wherein the interests of an expanding black middle-class and whites assumed precedence. Drawing attention to the relationships among 'race', social class and education, a few chapters in Chisholm's *Changing Class* are devoted to understanding the changing political economy and the role played by a broader array of social actors. These new actors, Chisholm explains "can exist inside and outside the state and act as classed, 'raced' and gendered beings who themselves have changed in the context of broader social change" (Chisholm, 2004: 16).

The major argument in the book *Education and Equity* by Motala and Pampallis, (2001) is one that builds on Elmore's backward mapping approach by questioning the earlier assumption that policies failed because bureaucrats and education planners accepted policies uncritically without attention to implementation. Motala and Pampallis also include an incompetent bureaucracy, the absence of systemic planning and the scarcity of resources as explanations for the failure of policies. They insist that the process of implementation must be examined in relation to the very policies from which it is derived and this consanguinity between policies and their implementation must be analysed simultaneously. One problem of policy formulation has been the inception of policy lodged within a set of distinct

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1   Despite significant attempts to equalize funding and resource allocation, material inequalities between schools continue to be stark. According to the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, South Africa needs 3 000 more schools and 60 000 classrooms. The infrastructure backlog includes 14 989 libraries and 18 258 laboratories (Department of Basic Education, 2012

discourses and frameworks (particularly growth, skills and economic development) which shaped the subjective and analytical views of the nature and purpose of education. These discourses and frameworks have been characterised most by their tremendous shifts. For Enver Motala, these shifts reflect

> the disjuncture between active and formal democracy, between mass mobilization and formal representation and the containment of the 'ends of politics to the means of administration' policy driven by pragmatism instead of reflection and theorizing …where managerial imperatives emphasizing the discourse of outcomes, the measurement of inputs, budgetary parameters, normative guidelines and user fees, hold sway over rights (as quoted in Vally, 2001:2).

The key conclusion in Chisholm's book is that "educational development and the emerging system have favoured an expanding, racially-mixed middle class" (2004:7). She further argues that while this may not have been the conscious intent of policy - 'redress for the poor' suggests quite the opposite - "there is no doubt that the resulting social change is considerable in achievement and direction, but is characterized by the putative and loose coupling of a democratic project of deracialisation with neo-liberalism" (Chisholm, 2004:7).

It was assumed that one area for leveraging new forms of power was educational decision-making and the formation of school-governing bodies (SGBs). Yet, the dissimilar realities of 'race', class, gender and geographical location were not factored into the democratic functioning of school governing bodies or the politics behind stakeholder decision - making. The system of open public responses intended to give broad stakeholder input favoured white interest groups and the emerging black middle class. These groups, although numerically small, were better organised and more vocal in their negotiations, while groups who sought more radical changes were less visible and tended to rely on their representatives in government to champion their interests. In the opening chapter of Sayed and Jansen (2001:3) the point is made that the "demobilization of the mass democratic movement in policy change is not disconnected from the lack of understanding and resources required to influence the formal processes of policy enactment." The state quite consciously, instead of incorporating the views of civil society and social agents, "seemed more receptive to advice from consultants who use theories and methods found with the world of human-capital approaches and rates of return analysis" (Vally & Spreen, 1998: 436).

In their eagerness to participate in the international political and economic arena, policy planners adopted educational reforms that emulated those in industrialised countries. The influence of private international consultants in diluting social justice issues in policy formulations should not be underestimated. An interview with one finance specialist who played a critical role in the adoption of the user fees school funding model is revealing:

> I did play a role in influencing the governance debate … by arguing that we needed to keep whites and articulate blacks within the public sector as an arena for state influence. Hence, the soft option in financing alternatives that did not force the strong redistributive thrust of the Task Team. This I presented to …the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee. The Committee was sceptical at first but later realized that this matter affected not only white children but children of civil servants working in government. The notion was that there was a need to keep the black middle class involved in and as advocates for the public schooling sector"(Sayed & Jansen 2001:276).

Some analysts make the deprecatory observation that the black political elite desired the continuation of the former Model C schools in order to be able to "silently permit their own class interests to be taken care of without confronting their own, largely poor, constituencies" (Karlsson *et al.* 2001:151).

In order to advance human rights, address poverty and inequality, provide access to quality schools and thus social justice and equity to all South Africans an entirely different set of mechanisms and structures for 'participation' must be established. By ensuring 'voice' in policy related research, policymakers should take local challenges into account and better deliver on what is needed. Often, statements of rights and rights discourse, while providing a useful universal framework as a reference point do not automatically translate into rights on the ground.

Despite South Africa's compendium of laws and policies ostensibly aimed at giving effect to rights to, in and through education, these rights do not exist in practice. Amartya Sen (2004:315) lyrically comments that human rights are often "confined within the juridical model within which it is so frequently incarcerated". The research outputs of the three year (2003-2006) Right to Basic Education (RBE) project and the Education Rights Project (2002 to the present) both of which I coordinated are pertinent in this regard. The studies provide some factors that obstruct the full realisation of the right to basic education linked to the key issues of concern of this article - social class and community. Articulating with the Education Rights Project (ERP), the RBE study suggests the importance of an active and responsible citizenry who understand the law and its limitations and are willing to insist on their rights and mobilise when these are not forthcoming. The RBE initiative allowed space for the coordinators of the ERP and some of its reference group members to reflect and engage with scholars outside of the ERP.

The RBE project aimed to critically appraise the broader socio-economic and development context and its bearing on the normative and regulatory framework of the right to education beyond policy and legislation. Central to the research agenda of the RBE project was an examination of the extent of a culture based on human rights, democracy, and critical citizenship in the socialisation of learners and whether such a culture is appreciated by educators. There was also the strong belief that the exercise of rights cannot be achieved effectively under conditions that deny the citizenry its right to be heard and the freedoms associated with the right to participation in public life. Therefore, notions of consent, agreement, representation, participation and accountability were problematized in the RBE. It called for an evaluation of the broader questions of development, democracy and the political economy of rights in post-apartheid South Africa, and a problematization of the role, purpose and content of basic education.

The limitations of rights framed as legal and justiciable phenomena in effecting redress and equity, and the instrumental link between education and the economy, received considerable attention. Similarly, the structure of the education and training system and the role and possibilities for agency in advancing education rights were keenly interrogated. Central to the arguments of many of the studies is the importance of understanding and engaging with the relationship between human agency and social change, and the role of research and researchers in this endeavour. In this regard, a significant portion of the empirical research was based on participatory research methods in which the voices of school community representatives were fore-grounded.

Despite good intentions, and undoubted advances in schooling after 1994, the data from this project recorded persistent inequalities in education and continued violation of rights. The analyses provided insights into why the quality of learning and teaching, social justice, democracy and human rights are compromised for many of South Africa's citizens. The study showed that the current interpretation and implementation of the right to basic education through formal policy and legislative frameworks fall far short of the needs of South Africans and the fulfilment of their potential. The project also generated valuable and rigorous insights into how the situation can be improved, through a combination of educational reforms accompanied by a wider range of redistributive strategies, democratic participation, political will and clear choices about the social ends policy interventions seek to achieve.

The goals of education, it was argued, cannot simply relate to the objectives of economic growth, productivity or the enhancement of 'human capital'. An analysis of the various development paradigms pointed to the dangers of such a reductionist view of the role of education in development and the consequences of the commodification and marketization of education based on a narrow human capital view of education. Such an approach, it was felt, prevents education as a public good from providing opportunities and capabilities for life chances to those who have been historically denied such opportunities. In this respect the project was, not uncritically, privileging the views of Amartya Sen (1999) on the relationship between development, education and capabilities. The concept of 'human rights as capabilities', proposed by Sen (1999) is defined as 'the substantive freedom of people to lead lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have' (Sen, 1999:293). Sen (2003) also points to a range of issues affecting basic education, including human insecurity, deprivation, illiteracy and innumeracy, barriers to access, the inability of poor communities to invoke their legal rights, health and gender discrimination.

5.   Conclusion

In flagging the ideological implications of post-apartheid policy choices this article makes the case that the omission of class analysis and meaningful participation of poor communities in policy has contributed to the failure to adequately address the profound inequalities that beset the present South African education system. The article also explored the 'glossy rhetoric' of education policies and legislation with its attendant emphasis on the discourse of human rights, social justice and democratic citizenship and the actual realisation of this promise. In doing so it also served as a commentary on the discrepancy between the existing normative framework of society and its reality or the disjuncture between the policy as text and the reality as lived.

I argue that extant post-apartheid educational analysis is limited since it does not deal with the deeper implications of social class and its meaning for educational reform. The article contrasted contemporary discourse with the pre-1994 dominant view in the anti-apartheid movement which recognised the salience of class and which valued class analysis. It explicates how class is significant not only in itself but relationally in its connectedness to questions of 'race' and gender and that education analysis in South Africa about these categories is rarely connected with questions of class. The article explains why class analysis would enhance knowledge of specific local school communities both individually and in relation to society. It also implies a critical ability to interact with the experiential knowledge of marginalised communities and embraces the praxis of some initiatives in the educational field that engage democratically with working class communities. It views this dialogical interaction as an important development that must be extended methodologically and theoretically.

There is also a case to be made for a critical policy orientation and an understanding of the wider conditions affecting policy. Conventional frameworks of policy-making derive from presumptions of 'organized rationality' that tend to ignore or underplay the political nature of decision-making and contestation about education. It was clear prior to 1994 during the melée of constitutional negotiations and the 'negotiated compromise' as well as after, that contestation between different social actors took place on the policy terrain.

Absent from many analyses is the significance of resurgent social movements which challenge and protest inequalities including educational inequalities. This article posits the view that:

> policies must be judged from the vantage point of practices on the ground, everyday life, rather than glossy political rhetoric, ideal-type statements of intention, blueprints or 'magic silver bullets'. This view largely eliminates from scrutiny the communities and their organisational manifestations… (Spreen & Vally, 2010: 434).

The praxis of social movement provides us with rich insights into the complex process of the democratisation of education. It confirms that deep social divisions in South African society are reflected both at the 'chalk-face' and in the socio-economic reality of communities and that poverty and social inequalities do create differential conditions of access to quality education.

The collaborations inherent in community organisations and education social movements such as the ERP, Equal Education and the Public Participation in Education and between progressive academics, non-governmental organisations and research centres based at universities with communities whose education rights are being systematically violated is an integral part of the work of the democratisation of education. These efforts have increasingly given communities the tools to inform, direct, own and use research to claim a space in the formal policy arena and to demand accountability from state actors. The intention here is not to romanticise the capacity of communities to conduct research but to underline the very real possibilities for social and institutional transformation through expanding the social capital at the disposal of working class communities. This collaboration can support not only the deconstruction of official or expert power - in the political and the academic domain – but also support new understandings of how to wield power in less oppressive and more reflexive ways. Yet, policy changes are most likely portrayed as a consequence of the state's own careful study of and responsiveness to problems. Ballard (2005: 94-5) does make the point though that the social movements have:

> influenced state policy through, in effect, making certain courses the state wanted to pursue more difficult for them. Social movements are setting boundaries and limits to state activity (or inactivity) that might not otherwise be there. Resistance comes to redefine what the government sees as the path of least resistance, so to speak. Pro-poor policies suddenly seem attractive in comparison to being tied up in expensive and time consuming court proceedings or being faced with hostile protestors.

Community initiatives and the efforts of civil society while exposing the classed nature of policymaking and practice also provides tentative possibilities for deeper and direct forms of democratic participation in education.

Despite many unanswered questions, the experiences of the ERP since 2002 have taught us the following (Fine, 2009:186) that the '"thick desires', "to be educated or to educate, to work in ways that are meaningful, to engage with politics, to be treated with respect, and to speak with voices that will be heard" exist in poor and working class communities of South Africa. The research has also shown that that the exercise of rights cannot be achieved effectively under conditions that deny the citizenry its right to be heard and the freedoms associated with the right to participation in public life.

The troubles and struggles of individuals and communities to educate their young in very trying conditions, to make the hard - won constitutional right to education a reality, are vividly portrayed in community testimonies. These voices help us take a step back to understand the failures of policy, as Apple and Beane (1999) suggest, outside its "glossy political rhetoric" and place them in the gripping "details of everyday life" in order to fulfil the promises of South Africa's constitutional democracy.

Although many of the social movements are not always able to provide sophisticated alternatives to the status quo, it is precisely the constituencies they represent, that have brought about the most significant changes in this country. Popular energies, which once sustained the powerful pre-1994 education social movements, are again resurgent. These new social movements have established continuity with past struggles but have also shed the disarming and misplaced hope that changes to the political dispensation and a progressive constitution is sufficient to realise socio-economic rights, democratic citizenship, social justice and equity.

6.   References

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