

Between the Vision of Yesterday and the Reality of Today: Forging the Pedagogy of Possibility

Professorial Inauguration, Salim Vally

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Neville Alexander often mentioned the biblical axiom: “Where there is no vision, the people perish”. He considered the aphorism one of “the most insightful and profound tenets” of the Cape African Teachers’ Association, an organisation that inspired him in his youth to activism and influenced his abiding interest in education. Alexander used the line from Proverbs 29, verse 18 whenever he expressed indignation at the social malaise he witnessed. In his last book, *Thoughts on the New South Africa* (Alexander, 2013: 39) published posthumously, he wrote:

“ Our real concerns are the palpable signs of social breakdown all around us: the ever more examples of greed and corruption involving public figures, who are expected to be the role models for our youth; the unspeakable abuse of children, of the aged and of women; the smug dishonesty, indiscipline and slothfulness of those who are paid to render public services...the unthinkable violence in so many communities; the abuse of drugs...the trashing of the public health system; in short the general mayhem and apparently suicidal chaos that ordinary people experience in their daily life”.

He lamented the fact that “Suddenly, as though by some sleight of hand, our role models changed. Far from the cooperative, street committee, shop-steward, comradely ethos that had made the country both ungovernable and irreversibly democratic, we were, and are, enjoined to be ‘like them’, like the entrepreneurial, individualistic whiz-kids of the neo-liberal epoch” (Ibid, 42). Admonishing those responsible, he believed that “... they have lost us the moral high ground, even the bit of it that we seemed to occupy for a few brief moments after Madiba’s release from prison” (Ibid, 43).

The Vision of Education for Liberation

The vision Alexander referred to existed while I was growing up politically in the stirring and fearless years of the 70s, including the watershed moment of the 1976 Uprising, certainly in the maelstrom years of the 80s and even the expectant early 90s before it began to ebb away.

In fact, as Enver Motala and I wrote in the edited collection *Education, Economy and Society*, all the South African educationists of the past that we venerate today, besides Alexander, such as I.B. Tabata, W.T. Thibedi, A.C. Jordan, Rick Turner, Ruth First, Archie Mafeje, Robert Mangaliso Subukwe, Zeph Motapeng, Fatima Meer, Dennis Brutus, Mathew Goniwe and Abu Asvat and numerous others representing the diverse traditions in the broad liberation movement had a very different vision of the society that exists today (Vally and Motala, 2014).

Their legacy gave rise to vibrant and vital education social movements in South Africa’s recent past intended to instil in society the importance of knowledge as essential to the development of a citizenry and for the fullest expression of the potential of individuals (Vally and Motala, 2014). They believed in a purposeful education which recognises that the role of education and training also

crucially involves understanding the values and belief systems in society, rebutting 'race', gender, ethnic and other stereotypes; the ability to evaluate ideas and systems critically, for transformative and critical thinking; the ability to communicate socially and to work for oneself and for society, and indeed to stimulate 'intellectual curiosity'. One which saw the potential role of education and training systems, in which a framework for state-directed support for working class and poor communities can be achieved and where a wide range of socially useful activities which are amenable to educational interventions exist. These include interventions in health-care, early childhood development, care for the aged, frail and disabled, locally based economic activities, co-operative development initiatives, cultural initiatives and other activities specifically directed at engaging communities in the process of development. Not the banal, reductive paradigm which is today the hallmark of the dominant approach drowning out important ideas on education and society.

In our book we argued, following from our struggle history that the purpose and value of education is much broader and should be linked to our rich tradition of educational praxis based on social justice and democratic citizenship and not reduced solely to the needs of economic growth. Knowledge, skills and the competencies derived from education and training processes are of course critically important for all societies and the well-being of nations. However, the reduction of their value to the labour market needs of employers, to the exclusion of their wider societal purposes, is a serious limitation on their social role.

Taking issue with the human capital theory rationale behind the dominant view of education, the economist, Chang, has similarly argued that the links between education and raising the productivity of an economy is tenuous at best and that the reasons to invest in education do not rest in the common-sense and instrumental and economic rationales for education. He argues:

...there are many subjects that have no impact, even indirectly on most workers' productivity – literature, history, philosophy and music, for example. From a strictly economic point of view, teaching these subjects is a waste of time. We teach our children those subjects because we believe that they will eventually enrich their lives and also make them good citizens. Even though this justification for educational spending is increasingly under attack in an age in which everything is supposed to justify its existence in terms of its contribution to productivity growth, it remains ... the most important reason to invest in education (Chang, 2010:182).

South Africa has a proud legacy of education for liberation comprising a history of resistance in and through education. This resistance generated various popular epistemologies and pedagogies including the 'peoples' education movement', 'worker education' the 'popular adult and/ or community education movement' and 'education with production'. There were also many community-based initiatives around early childhood development, reading and literacy.

People's Education

In the 1980s up to the early 1990s the concept of Peoples' Education, in contrast to the apartheid education system, captured the imagination of many South Africans. It promised liberation from an authoritarian and unequal education system to one which could provide an alternative and a basis for a future democratic system. It was defined variously as "an educational movement, a vehicle for political mobilisation, an alternative philosophy, or a combination of all three" (Motala and Vally, 2002:174).

A significant influence on and the forerunner to the People's Education movement of the eighties were the ideas and methods of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire's ideas were introduced to the University Christian Movement and through it to the South African Students Organisation (SASO) as early as 1970. Although the state banned Freire's books, hundreds of copied versions of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* were clandestinely distributed at black universities and "eagerly studied by the young activists of the Black Consciousness Movement" (Alexander, 1990:22). SASO students and others applied Freire's ideas to many literacy and other 'conscientisation' projects in urban townships and rural areas. The appeal of Freire's pedagogy to educational activists and theorists resided in fact that:

Freire's anti-capitalist social theory accorded with the experience of and the insights at which the liberation movement in South Africa in general and the educationists active in it in particular had increasingly arrived at;

The situation out of which Freire's pedagogy had been formed resembled that which existed in South Africa's ghettos and homelands;

Freire's pedagogical method of combining education/culture with conscientisation and politicisation accorded with the views of the BCM and was subsequently adopted by the broader liberation movement.

The specific organisation of the struggle in the late seventies and especially in the eighties as a grassroots movement anchored in groups and projects in the 'community' brought with it an exceptional sensitivity regarding democratic principles. This sensitivity reinforced by Freire's pedagogy became integral to the practice of People's Education.

People's Education was seen as the means to build alternative governance structures in education and for promoting critical thinking and analysis. Critical thinking in this sense should not be confused with what is traditionally thought of as merely problem-solving skills, but rather, critical in this sense implied being able to understand, analyse and most importantly affect the socio-political and economic realities that shaped our lives. The emphasis on democratic governance was expressed in the call for the establishment of Student Representative Councils and Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSAs) different from the functioning of present day School Governing Bodies. The concept of democracy, access and equity emerged in the call for a unitary anti-racist and anti-sexist schooling system, an end to sexual harassment and corporal punishment, better resource provisioning, different curriculum and free compulsory education.

From the mid-1980s, supporters of People's Education were not only concerned with the transformation of schools; they also provided the impetus to the formation of hundreds of non-governmental education organisations and also actively challenged academics and the academy around three key areas: "1) accountability within the university and communities around them; 2) implementing People's Education in the universities themselves and 3) support for developing People's Education in schools through the production of alternative courses and teaching methods". (Motala and Vally, 2002:183).

While radical interpretations of People's Education remained dominant throughout the better part of the 1980s, liberal views on education gained cachet from the beginning of negotiation between the ANC and the apartheid regime in the early 1990s. The role of civil society organisations and even the language of People's Education become increasingly marginal to the overall project of education change. The discourse and content shifted substantially from radical demands which focused on social engagement and democratising power relations, to one which emphasised performance,

outcomes, cost effectiveness and economic competitiveness. Many of us who opposed this trajectory were attacked and sectarianism began to emerge. In a collection of his essays, published as *Sow the Wind*, Alexander (1985) wrote,

“The sectarian and totalitarian hubris that seduces some people who disagrees with one’s ideas to brand one immediately as ‘an enemy of South Africa’ or as ‘an enemy of the people’ is without any doubt the greatest danger to our liberation struggle. My appeal to such people is to allow history to decide the questions on which we disagree fundamentally. My appeal to them is to remember the words of the prophet, ‘For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind’”.

After an unhappy stint as a secondary school teacher in Eldorado Park (unhappy partially because the principal was close to apparatchiks from the House of Representatives and employed uniformed soldiers to teach in the school) and after a short period at the wonderfully creative *Learn and Teach* literacy organisation I was employed by the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers’ Union (CCAWUSA) as an education official in 1984 (a case of from classroom to class struggle).

Workers’ Education

Similar to the invaluable education I received because of my activism in the South African Students Movement (the high school counterpart to SASO), my decade long involvement with union education left an enduring and endearing impression on me about the importance of non-formal education. The educative role of social movements and social and political activism is often overlooked. In our recent book, *History’s Schools – Past Struggles and Present Realities* (Choudry and Vally, 2019) we showed that social movements are not only significant sites of social and political action, but also important, albeit contested and contradictory, terrains of learning and knowledge production.

A significant feature in the period I joined the union was that some of the key shop-stewards were involved in the 1976 Uprising. Also new forms of worker self-education emerged, in particular, shop-steward councils and all-night seminars known as *siyalala-la!* (Vally, 1994). Important processes of informal education took place in the shop steward councils and later education committees linked to councils were also formed. All these education initiatives were influenced by the growth of broader political struggle from the early 1980s onwards, and expressed a desire on the part of workers to shape and influence the nature of this struggle. This period saw the growth of militant civic, youth, and student struggles in which workers became increasingly involved. Through their informal learning experience as well as the intensive education carried out in shop-steward councils and elsewhere, worker leaders gained confidence to engage with their unions’ leadership on controversial organisational and political issues.

CCAWUSA and other independent unions stood out because of their ability to be accountable to their membership. The rank-and-file membership played an active role in the campaigns and decision-making processes of the unions. Political militancy as well as success in redressing the day-to-day grievances of the membership characterised the union movement. Education intervention was geared toward mass collective involvement in recruiting membership, producing militancy and laying the basis for building strong democratic organisations by providing the skills necessary for this.

CCAWUSA developed a systematic, structured education programme including an induction course for new members; programmes for shop stewards and officials and advanced courses on collective bargaining, legal issues and political economy. Labour support groups and NGOs also assisted the union through specialised courses. Every local also elected a local education committee.

Education in CCAWUSA though was not limited to the structured programmes. For instance, the local shop-steward councils were the ‘melting pot’ for ideas and actions that later developed into national campaigns. The local was a “vibrant centre for worker education and activity” (Vally 1994) and could not be ignored in the formulation of national union policy. In addition, the experience of building and controlling organisations collectively as well as making independent decisions was considered to have enormous educational value, particularly in increasing the level of self-confidence amongst workers.

A broader understanding of worker education was advanced (Hlatshwayo, 2018). Worker education was not only the structured education programmes but also its extension through pamphlets, the union newspaper, plays, and songs. For instance, the Johannesburg local of CCAWUSA, together with the Film Resources Unit (a library of progressive videos) embarked on Video/Film evenings open to all members and their families. Besides watching the film, the audience would hold a discussion led by a worker educator who researched the topic. Another example was the circulation of ‘Book Boxes’ or a mini library to locals and factories. This initiative introduced by the Community Resource and Information Centre (CRIC) would supply labour magazines, African literature, books on political economy and union skills on a loan basis. The International Labour Resource and Information Group’s (ILRIG) booklets on international worker struggles were also eagerly read and discussed.

It is essential to include as education the day-to-day struggles of workers - the grievances, disputes, strikes and how they were handled. In short, the realities of life, struggle and employment, which Marx called the harsh but hardening school of labour are equally to be understood as educative. It is in this area that vital experiential learning took place (Vally *et al*, 2013). The strike, solidarity actions and workplace occupations were perhaps the most important learning moments.

During the height of the struggle in the 1980s, the labour movement played an educative role not only for organised workers, but also for many other sections of the black working class. Workers brought to community organisations traditions of participatory democracy, accountability, worker-leadership and mass action as well as a critique of capitalism and a growing vision of a transformed socialist society. The development of its vision of worker education was also closely linked with community and school struggles for a People’s Education. Unsurprisingly, unions were referred to not only as a ‘school of labour’ but also as ‘laboratories of democracy’, where workers could test out new ideas, arrived at new understanding, and develop and enrich collective practices (Vally, 1994). Grossman (quoted in Cooper *et al* 2002:120) writes, “Workers searched memory, each other, history, the world, political texts, for ideas and knowledge, bringing everything into their intellectual embrace”.

They came up with the concept of ‘moving meeting’, turning buses and trains into vehicles of mass education to popularise the campaigns. Education work within COSATU also built on the growing tradition of worker cultural initiatives: at COSATU second congress in 1987, there were poetry readings, worker choirs, plays and art exhibitions. The mid - to late 1980s saw the emergence of over 300 cultural locals within the federation and the rapid growth of workers’ theatre (Vally, 1994). Worker plays gave expression to the feelings of alienation of workers in factory conditions and their bitter experiences of racism, poverty and arbitrary dismissals.

At the very moment at which workers were participating in mass action on a larger scale than ever before in South Africa’s history, a very different process was getting under way. By 1988, it was clear that the broad liberation movement was being led to a course of negotiation with the apartheid state. The labour movement came under pressure to review its role, as well as its strategies for change and its vision of the future (Cooper *et al* 2002:123). In line with the newly dominant politics

of a negotiated settlement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the trade union leadership responded by shifting its declared vision from that of opponent and adversary towards a stated goal of 'equal partner' with business and government. This involved participation in tripartite negotiating forums over policy development for a post-apartheid era. Increasingly, the leadership of the labour movement insisted on partnership with the former 'capitalist enemy' and a common commitment to international competitiveness and appeals for foreign investment. These changes were to have two significant kinds of impact on worker education. First, the priorities, form of delivery, and key target audience of trade union education were shifted. Second, the labour movement was to become increasingly involved in workplace training issues guided by a new commitment to increased productivity (Cooper *et al* 2002:123).

Today, workers' education is a shell of its former self. This decline – with some notable exceptions - must be situated within a wider socio-economic crisis manifested in unprecedented inequality, high levels of unemployment, retrenchments and conditions of precarious work integral to the state's neoliberal trajectory over the past 25 years.

Many in the trade union leadership are also implicated in diminishing worker education through a combination of business unionism, bureaucratisation, malfeasance and the sacrificing of internal trade union democracy. These developments have hastened the de-politicisation of worker education when it exists, and the promotion of a narrow, 'human capital' approach to education based 'on management terms'. The latter prevents workers from being critical and conscious agents and more often than not depends on private or 'outsourced' providers of education and 'skills' training. (Koen M, *et al* 2018).

I argue that the nature of the negotiated settlement between the erstwhile dominant liberation movement and the apartheid regime, the continuation of the class character of the state (despite the discourse of human rights and development) and the incorporation of South Africa into a global market economy ruptured the education principles and practices established by civil society, trade unions and social movements in the 1970s to the early 1990s. To locate and understand the present reality including inequalities means locating and understanding the straightjacket of dominant class relations and the class formation of the present state. Understanding these social processes will reveal how the once hegemonic education vision in the liberation movement, although co-opted rhetorically and institutionalised, does not translate in reality into tangible benefits for the majority of the poor.

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). The initial hope for change from above was misplaced but by 1998 civil society began to move from a sense of disillusionment and powerlessness to a situation where it tentatively began to reassert itself.

It took four years before social movements were re-constituted spurred on by the neoliberal macroeconomic policies of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) in 1996. 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.

Shortly after the first democratic elections, I was poached from the union movement into academia by the then director of Wits University's Education Policy Unit, Professor Linda Chisholm. I am not sure if she recalls but my first act, having just heard Edward Said's Reith Lectures, was to place above my desk these lines: "Nothing in my mind is more reprehensible than those habits of mind in the intellectual that induce avoidance, that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take. You do not want to appear too political; you are afraid of seeming controversial; you need the approval of a boss or an authority figure; you want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope is to be asked back... to remain within the responsible mainstream; someday you hope to get an honorary degree, a big prize, perhaps even an ambassadorship" (Said, E, 1994:74). The poster accompanied me to UJ in 2009.

Since the outset my research responded to and was shaped by larger cultural, political, social, historical and economic forces, both within and outside of education. My scholarship, rooted in a critical tradition across disciplines, saw educational research as a practice that is intimately connected to the larger society.

In commenting on early policy developments, I co-authored an article sardonically titled: '*In the Shadow of GEAR: Between the Scylla of a blurred vision and the Charybdis of obstructed implementation*' (Vally and Spreen, 1998) we suggested it was not credible to blame the crisis on poor implementation alone and that the technically rational search for best practice innovations which were 'cost-effective' or 'efficient' did no more than tinker with the fundamental educational and social problems in question. Further, the rationale that 'the policies are fine we should just get implementation done' ignored the mainsprings of a system and its policies that maintained, reproduced and often exacerbated inequalities.

Poverty and Inequality Hearings

My early research involved convening the education leg of the Poverty and Inequality Hearings – an initiative of Chapter Nine organisations and civil society modelled on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and as the primary researcher on racism, 'racial integration' and desegregation in South African public schools. The latter was commissioned by South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and involved over a hundred schools. Both these endeavours provided compelling reasons why I have maintained in all my research outputs since, an explicit focus on the relationships between power, knowledge and the state in education, and the need to grapple with issues of class, 'race', gender and spatial stratification in education and society.

The initial impetus for this renewed activity began with the Poverty and Inequality Hearings organised by the South African Non-Governmental Coalition (SANGOCO). Between 31 March and 19 June 1998 over 10 000 people participated in the campaign by attending the hearings, mobilising communities or making submissions.

The Hearings were organised thematically and were held in all nine provinces, dealing with employment, education, housing, health, the environment, social security and rural/urban development. These hearings were supplemented by background papers compiled by NGOs and research organisations. Research focused on the legacy of poverty and inequality in each sector and its impact on people's lives, the extent to which current practices and policies contributed to improve conditions, and recommendations on the measures required to assist groups to access their socio-economic rights. They were structured to enable investigating access to education from early childhood development to higher education as well as education facilities, infrastructure and state support to impoverished communities.

In addition to the verbal testimonies, co-ordinators received scores of written submissions from parents, teachers, and school governing body members, early childhood education and adult education and training provider groups. These ranged from carefully worded, logically argued views of research organisations to the poignant testimonies of some of the most marginalised such as child workers and prisoners.

The poor identified a range of obstacles preventing the eradication of poverty. At the conclusion of the nationwide Hearings the convenors arranged a list of responsibilities for politicians, government officials, the private sector and civil society in order to ensure that the fight to end poverty becomes the nation's priority. For government officials and politicians these included reversing the neo-liberal macro-economic strategy, increasing social spending and meeting basic needs; renegotiating the apartheid 'odious' debt and releasing this money for poverty eradication as well as treating individuals and their concerns with respect and dignity. Unfortunately, the Hearings arrived at a *cul-de-sac* in the absence of grassroots community organisations to take the demands forward despite, in the glare of the media at the conclusion of the initiative, various state officials' promises.

Racism, 'Racial Integration' and Desegregation in South African public schools

In essence the report showed that the handling of desegregation in most South African schools was firmly rooted within the assimilationist framework and a narrow multiculturalist model (Vally and Dalamba, 1999). Many egregious instances of racism were found but also that the shadow of apartheid ideology (Carrim, N *et al*, 1993) continued to cast its Stygian gloom not any longer through racially explicit policies, but by proxy and exclusions such as language restrictions, spatial segregation and high fees - all related to social class. We wrote that racism in education does not constitute an autonomous form of oppression, but rather is inextricably linked to power relations and reproduced in conjunction with class, gender and other inequalities. It is a structural problem not limited to interpersonal interactions. Despite the requirement of long-term structural change to effectively eradicate the scourge of racism, I do not wish to imply that inequalities in schools cannot be mitigated in the short term. On the contrary, as far as desegregation is concerned a number of strategies can be employed – in fact must be implemented if fundamental rights are not to be breached – even within the constraints of present social relations. Ultimately though, the wider context in which racism and segregation is generated is vital; even if sound anti-racist educational policies for the classroom, corridor and playground are developed, this will not be enough to eradicate racism from education. What happens outside the school gates will inevitably affect the gains made in schools. Although the report recommended ten key concrete and achievable interventions, none of these realised.

The Right to Education

In the past decade, my research efforts focused on issues that influence the implementation of the right to basic education through formal policy and legislative frameworks and whether the latter falls short of the needs of South Africans as well as the constitutional imprimatur around their fulfilment. I have been preoccupied with framing questions such as whether or the extent to which the right to education impacts on the development of democracy and social transformation in South Africa, what are the obstacles and impediments to the fulfilment of educational rights and what is the relationship between the state and civil society in educational policymaking and the meaning of this relationship for the establishment of democracy in education.

Through qualitative, specifically ethnographic and participatory action research approaches, my research looks beyond schools and classrooms, and takes into account issues such as structural inequality, poverty and forms of resistance to oppression and unequal material conditions in education and across society. Critical social theory provided me with an interdisciplinary and humanistic approach to examining and interpreting educational policy issues. It draws on sociological, historical, and philosophical approaches in an attempt to examine the social, historic, class, racial and gendered aspects of policy formulation.

My abiding interest has been to combine academic research with social intervention and to create synergy between socially engaged scholarship and community concerns. This critical praxis embodied in the leitmotiv of the research centre I now direct, 'Reading the word and the world, changing the text and the context' flowing from Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy resonates with me.

Besides the various scholarly publications and research projects, I have also energetically convened many colloquia, workshops and seminars with and beyond the academy in pursuit of these goals. Academic research has encouraged scientific rigour, reflection and enquiry while community and societal engagement has in turn provided rich experiences. My research often through collaboration with civil society, some state officials and colleagues globally is aimed at promoting respect through the lens of education rights and the wider goal of social justice and transformation for those marginalised in a society still divided by the shibboleths of the past and the social cleavages of the present. Besides the various scholarly publications and research projects, I have also energetically convened many colloquia, workshops and seminars with and beyond the academy in pursuit of these goals. Academic research has encouraged scientific rigour, reflection and enquiry while community and societal engagement has in turn provided rich experiences.

Education Rights Project

My scholarly research outputs on education rights, community participation and transformation are related to my role as coordinator of the Education Rights Project (ERP) from 2002 to the present date. I have interacted with close to three hundred communities around various aspects of education rights. Many of these communities, assisted by the ERP, used participatory action research to strengthen their campaigns (see Ramadiro, B. and Vally, S, 2006; Ramadiro, B, 2007 and Jenkins, D, 2008). The ERP also collaborated with public litigation organisations and academics to advocate on specific issues. An example was the campaign on the cost of school education and the subsequent change in policy on user fees.

While all the campaigns and initiatives overlapped and fed into each other, for the sake of coherent presentation they are divided into the following sections: 1. Movement Building and Education Rights Workshops; 2. The Cost of Education Campaign; 3. Adult Basic Education Campaign; 4. Large

Scale Projects with communities including the KZN-ERP Project; 5. Surveys - Perceptions of High School Students and their understanding of education rights, attitudes to schooling and the violation of human rights; 6. The Education Rights of Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants; 7. Case studies in Durban Roodepoort Deep and Rondebult ; 8. Education Rights Booklets; and 9. ERP involvement with Learners and Youth.

The ERP has also produced twenty-one accessible booklets often with communities of interest on various aspects of education rights. At least 30 000 copies of each of the booklets have been printed. Particular attention is given to the accuracy and veracity of information provided in the booklets and they are always reviewed by officials or experts in particular fields before they are printed. The ERP is in possession of correspondence and evidence attesting to the fact that the booklets are relied upon and used not only by community members, learners and educators but also by education non-governmental organisations, the education department's district, provincial and national education officials and academic researchers.

Importantly, the research and the form of publications are influenced by attempts to engage with the important constituencies affected by policy (see Hlatshwayo, M., Mohta, S. and Ramadiro, B, 2005). Consciously, research by the ERP and the publication of research such as these booklets attempts to be accessible to wider audiences than conventional research can be. In the case of social-policy research there are many possibilities for the publications of research and many modes of doing so. In fact, these modes are demanded by the very process of engagement. In addition to the production of written work for the research process itself (training and induction of researchers, to clarify the objectives of the research for relevant communities) there can be a welter of writings emanating directly as a result of the research. These could include policy briefings for decision-makers, media writings, issue papers, monographs and conference presentations. All of these forms of written work feature in the ERP praxis and its dissemination.

Some questions for further research pivot around the role and responsibilities of university - based researchers in community education struggles, the 'insider' – 'outsider' relationships in participatory action research, how can social justice - oriented researchers and analysts, be more effective in policy change and how do popular educators engage with oppressive social relations in intersectional ways that simultaneously address gender, 'race', social class, disability, migration and spatial inequalities?

Limitations of the Rights Discourse

Despite many unanswered questions, the experiences of the ERP since 2002 has taught us 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. 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."

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 (Appadurai, 2006). The research also underlines the importance of rights awareness and the kind of human rights education that stresses the indivisible nature of human rights and the interconnectedness between education, economic, social and political rights.

The collaboration between the academy and communities whose education rights are being systematically violated are an integral part of the work of the democratisation of education. They have in a limited way given communities the tools to inform, direct, own and use research to claim their space and voice. The research and experience of the ERP with community members also showed that the omission and elision of social class and community will continue to impoverish education policy and practice.

We have also learnt that the discourse of rights, championed as the mainstay of South African public institutions and the Constitution, has often served to promote a fiction and understood the limitations of rights if it is framed merely as a legal and justiciable phenomenon in effecting redress and equity. Acting as if certain rights exist for all in an equal way inhibits people's ability to recognise when they are in fact illusory and why society does not act to protect these rights. A single mother in one of South Africa's dusty townships or impoverished rural areas cannot be said to have the same power of political persuasion or opportunity compared to a suburban corporate executive. These are real distinctions that give some people advantages and privileges over others.

Educational rights cannot be divorced from wider socio-economic rights. Achieving curricular goals and the rights of citizens to a meaningful education will depend upon confronting for example, patterns of poverty, inequality, discrimination and social exclusion. It is also necessary to caution against an uncritical use of human rights instruments without applying them to pedagogical practice, an over-reliance on legal experts and ignoring the agency, struggles and activism of rights claimants and holders. Legal mechanisms and human rights instruments must be understood within the larger realities of power and social relations.

REALITY

It is easy to become despondent about the state of education when we read about practices involving rampant fiscal profligacy, the dismal state of infrastructure and facilities in many of our schools and the abysmal performance of our learners. Over two decades since the first democratic elections in South Africa, the combined weight of apartheid's legacy exacerbated by neo-liberal policies over the past twenty-five years has meant that the promise of a quality public education system remains a chimera. While a mélange of new official policies on 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. Access to schooling has increased and there is gender parity but quality education for the vast majority of the population remains elusive. Although a minority of schools in South Africa can favourably compare with the best in the world quality education remains unequally distributed along social class, racial and spatial lines.

There have been tremendous changes at the level of policy, but whether these policies have resulted in meaningful changes for the majority in reality is the question we need to pose. The education system continues to be based on social class. In the post-apartheid era, education, far from becoming the great 'leveler', in fact continues to reproduce inequalities in society. Another change has been that as in other areas of society, a small layer of black people from the middle class have been added to those who were erstwhile beneficiaries and continue to be today.

Toward the end of 2008, some of us 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. We argued that 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) deplored the fact 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, 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.

Identifying the Problems

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, professional development and support, 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, labor markets and globalisation (Sayed and Jansen, 2001, Motala and Pampallis, 2002; Chisholm, L, 2004; Tikly, L, 2011 and Vally and Motala, 2014).

Early on we realised that education while a necessary condition cannot on its own address the social problems our society has to confront. It is not a panacea. It is abundantly clear amongst critical educators that reforms directed at the educational system alone are inadequate and that successful education reforms must be based on an understanding of the contextual and structural character of poverty and inequality. These cannot be resolved alone through education policy reform from above including the equalisation of educational finance across the system – previously based on racial categorisation.

The patent failure of the public education system to provide quality education for the majority of learners has spawned a number of atavistic suggestions to change the situation including nostalgia for the apartheid system including the crude resort to an apartheid-like disciplinary regime and the privatisation of education. Firstly, it is wrong and irresponsible to trivialise the legacy of the apartheid education system. This is not to deny that policies and practices over the past twenty-five years have in some cases exacerbated this legacy. We also have the dangerous situation where failure by the state to implement its own policies such as learner-centered education has resulted in many incorrectly blaming what they consider as an all too powerful human rights culture for undermining discipline and respect for authority as they understand it. This often involves for example, the nostalgic call for a return to the apartheid-era authoritarianism characterised by the ‘fundamental pedagogics’ of didactic and choral recitation, ‘talk-and-chalk’ rote learning, corporal punishment and blaming teachers and learners (and not systemic inequality) for educational shortcomings. (Porteus et al, 2001; Vally, 2005). While self-discipline and accountability to the community is essential, learner-centered practices need not undermine but could instead enhance respect and self-discipline in the classroom.

Focusing on OBE which was introduced as an incredibly complex and grandiose curricular approach resulted in the neglect of all other aims of education, and the focus on outcomes helped create a climate where the only things that matter are those you can measure. There was the view that teachers in poorer communities had to be creative in “mustering additional resources and inventing alternatives” but without adequate training and resources to sustain their initiatives, this was akin to providing teachers with ‘a lamp and three wishes’ thus ironically OBE largely benefitted teachers in well-resourced schools (Vally, S, and Spreen, C.A, 2010).

Separating off social inequality and focusing on outcomes and tests was a strategic error. The day-to-day contextual realities of teaching and learning in South Africa, the continuing school-community inequalities, and issues related to the enormous ‘poverty gap’ across the schooling system matter tremendously. Scant attention has been paid to what should be considered a central issue in understanding the past twenty-five years of education policymaking - the effect of poverty and inequality on the implementation and outcome of education reforms in post-apartheid South Africa. South Africa has very high rates of child poverty. According to UCT’s Children’s Institute (Hall, K, 2018:140) in 2017, 65% of children lived below the upper-bound poverty line. Using Statistics South Africa’s lower-bound poverty line (which does not provide enough for basic essentials), 50% of children (9.8 million) were poor in 2017, and 36% (7 million children) were below the food poverty line, meaning that they were not getting enough nutrition (Ibid).

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.

Although prolific in quantity and rich in their theoretical and analytical contributions, many volumes of educational analyses leave a major gap in understanding policy in practice. Poverty and inequality undermines education, and in South Africa the majority of children live under conditions of protracted poverty. Regardless of how enlightened a curriculum might be or teachers motivated, none of this will matter if a child comes to the classroom hungry. By obscuring this simple reality, we miss the real issue.

There are those who complain that we are not getting 'bang for our buck' and spending too much money on education without the requisite 'returns'. It is true though that much of the money from our fiscus does not reach the intended beneficiaries and it is not simply a question of 'throwing money at the problem' – wastage and corruption must be addressed. Today the vast majority of our public schools do not have libraries, many are overcrowded and there is a huge backlog for buildings, capital expenditure and school maintenance. Consider the view of an OECD report (OECD, 2013) concerning expenditure on education in South Africa relative to other countries:

In 2010, public expenditure on educational institutions and administration represented 5.9% of GDP. About 2.5% of GDP were spent on primary education, 2.0% on secondary, 0.64% on tertiary, and 0.06% on pre-primary. Expenditure as a share of GDP was slightly higher than in Mexico and about the same as in Brazil or an average OECD country (World Bank, 2012). These figures are often quoted to make the point that there is no apparent under-funding of the education system. However, this view is inaccurate as the proportion of the population aged 0-14 years in South Africa (29.9% in 2011) is much higher than in OECD countries (e.g. 18.4% in France and 20.1% in the United States). This share is somewhat higher than even some other emerging countries, such as Brazil (25.0%). Even more strikingly, half of the South African population is less than 24 years old, many of whom should be attending an educational institution. Public resources spent per pupil would need to be increased by 30% at the primary level and by 20% at the secondary level to match the OECD average level of resources per pupil.

My doctoral thesis tried to make sense of many of these issues and the paradox that while post-apartheid education policies established the formal basis for social justice and equity through legislation, in reality these laudable goals remain unattainable and elusive (Vally, 2013).

Social Class and Community Participation in Extant Post-Apartheid Education Policy

The thesis builds an argument around social class, political economy and community participation situated in critical education policy analysis as the theoretical approach. Critical policy analysis views the terrain of the state and therefore policy formulation processes as spaces of contestation and negotiation. It also allows insight beyond the symptoms of educational inequality and dysfunctionality and shows connectivity between education policy and social relations of power.

The study suggests that what has been missing from most analysis of transitional policymaking in South Africa is a careful examination of social class, and particularly how and why social movements and social actors on the ground, who were initially central to policy formulation and critique,

became 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 is explored in detail in several of the chapters in the thesis.

One of the questions explored is whether the elision of social class analysis and meaningful community participation in education policy deliberations has contributed to the failure in addressing and overcoming the profound inequalities and social cleavages that characterise the South African education system.

The thesis also demonstrates how experiences of transformational education and activism actively seek to disrupt the dichotomies between formal and informal educational arrangements, the public and private spheres, and cultural and political spaces. The role of local education activism in South Africa has been relatively under-researched and largely ignored by mainstream education policy theorists. Solutions toward addressing the numerous problems in education require the voice, knowledge, experience and information gathered by locally-based social movements and therefore the vital advice for critical educators to graft “fine-tune attention to shouts and whispers of resistance onto a wide-angle landscape that links political and cultural economies to everyday life in school and community” (Anyon, 2005:34) is so pertinent. The thesis concludes by suggesting that educational reforms that seek to address social cleavages 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.

Social Class

As outlined in my thesis 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. Apart from Linda Chisholm’s book ‘Changing Class’ (2004) and notable chapters in the book particularly a contribution by 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-five years.

Elsewhere in an article on class, ‘race’ and state in post-apartheid education we made clear that, “throughout the period of the 1970s up to the early 90s, debate about class analysis characterised 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 (Motala and Vally, 2010). 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) as well as Christie and Collins (1990) used a Marxist 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 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.

Initially, the post-1994 period signaled a pre-occupation with the immediacy of the reform process in which 'consensus', 'mediation', 'reconciliation' and 'social compact' were given primacy, and strengthened because of the relationship between these reform processes and the ideological ascendancy of particular globally hegemonic capitalist approaches to 'modernisation' and 'development'. We regretted the fact that social class as an analytical and conceptual category "has been a casualty of the post-apartheid period" (Motala and 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 illusory '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. The epic histories of class struggles and the associated political, social and economic analyses representing the viewpoint of Marxism appears to be transcended in this period by other "free-from-class" analytical paradigms both in South Africa and elsewhere. In our view, this is consistent with the decline of the scholarship which represented the strength of such analyses, itself a victim of the self-censorship imposed by scholars on any work that overtly recognized the importance of social class.

Analyses of social issues including education in the post - apartheid period is 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 inequality. Lest I am misunderstood the view of the Trinidadian Marxist C.L.R. James quoted in Walter Rodney's seminal work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, is apposite here,

The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental. (Rodney, 1972, p. 100).

While 'race' on its own is not an adequate explanation for exploitative processes or for the structural attributes of capitalist political and economic systems that does not automatically imply that it has no explanatory value in relation to 'class' and the process of exploitation. Indeed it is precisely because racist policies and strategies have come to be used in societies, both for capitalist accumulation and for engendering social conflict, and by the ruling class of global hegemonic states like the US to advance their global exploitative interests, that ideas about 'race' (and other such discursive categories) have such powerful meanings in the public consciousness, in global politics and ultimately in the control over resources. 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 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 and 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).

Towards the Pedagogy of Possibilities

False Solutions (Forging): Privatisation of education

Given the desultory state of public education, calls for the privatisation of schools in all their permutations are receiving greater resonance. Advocates of right-wing reform in South Africa stridently demand a variety of responses ranging from outright privatisation of education and the withdrawal of the state, to various versions of market-friendly policies. Thandika Mkandawire, adapting Gramsci’s famous aphorism refers to this predatory maneuvering as, “The pessimism of the diagnosis and the optimism of the prescription” (Muller, 2012).

Policy makers and analysts in South Africa are wont to borrow policies and their prescriptions largely from Europe and North America, regardless of the vastly differing histories, contexts and circumstances. These imitative approaches are adopted uncritically. In effect although many of the borrowed policies have been shown to be ineffective in the very countries of their origin, they continue to be purveyed as policies and ‘best practice’ useful to development elsewhere. Such policy borrowing is fostered, regrettably, not only through the work of ‘expert’ consultants (often from developed economies) but also by ‘native’ researchers who have little regard for the critical literature on this issue. They are intent on providing ‘solutions’ based on these ostensible ‘best practices’ – some of which have been severely criticised by researchers in the very countries of their provenance.

The upshot of neoliberal discourse concerning education in South Africa as elsewhere has been to ignore the problems faced by public schools and to promote market solutions through private schools, public-private partnerships, vouchers, charters, and the like. It is falsely argued that privatisation provides choices to parents, makes schools more responsive, and produces greater cost efficiencies and even better quality education. This approach is derived from the idea that the state should have as little as possible to do with the delivery of education and other services which are best left to market mechanisms for their resolution. This proposed 'market solution' to our education crisis, even with state regulation, is less a case of a pragmatic attempt at resolving the problem than a case of ideological wishful thinking and in most cases a justification for profiteering.

In the US, privatisation advocates found a home with 'free' market bodies such as the Heritage Foundation, the CATO Institute and others. These 'think tanks' incubated a generation of academics and journalists who promoted privatisation as 'common sense' to the general public.

In South Africa, the key evangelising organisation promoting market fundamentalism in education and other social sectors is the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE). The likes of Pauline Dixon, Michael Barber, the John Templeton Foundation and James Tooley are their main sources of inspiration (CDE, 2015). The CDE's efforts are replicated by some academics and pro-business, 'independent' think tanks. Their research is reflected eclectically in a wide range of policy documents, strategies, public events and pronouncements, all of which have in the main adopted an aggressive approach supporting privatisation and promoting 'low-fee' schools (Ibid).

An editorial in *The Economist* (2017) on South Africa's schooling system provides a useful example of the functioning of the echo chamber. The editorial recycles tired arguments but more insidiously, its shallow causal narrative feeds into proposals for the privatisation of education. In essence, it is a classic bait-and-switch manoeuvre applied to schooling. The *Economist* as well as other pro-business media outlets form the 'echo chamber' of business philanthropies and ignore fundamental issues in their haste to promote privatisation, in all its permutations, as the proffered solution (Vally, 2018). The editorial largely blames teachers and teacher unions for the state of affairs. Impropriety, malfeasance and the quality of teachers are severe problems but it is sophistry to propose privatisation as a solution for these egregious issues and it is rich to blame teachers and teacher unions alone.

South Africa has seen a mushrooming of private schools in recent years. Curro Holdings - the biggest for profit school group in South Africa – has 127 schools today and projects that it will have a student enrolment of 90 000 by 2020¹. The World Bank's IFC participated in the development of the Curro group and in 2010 approved a 10-year loan of \$9.7 million to support Curro's strategic expansion (World Bank, 2012). Ominously, the Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF) via their asset manager the Public Investment Corporation (PIC) together with Old Mutual Life Assurance Company has invested R440 million in Curro Holdings (Moneyweb, 2014). The latter's revenue in 2017 amounted to R 1 051 million².

Old Mutual and the GEPF formed the R1.2 billion Schools and Education Investment Impact Fund in 2011 to which GEPF contributed R1-billion and Old Mutual R200-million³. The latter fund has

¹ <https://www.curro.co.za/corporate/information/core-business/>

² <https://www.curro.co.za/media/201425/curro-interim-results-30-june-2017-presentation.pdf>

³ <http://ww2.oldmutual.co.za/old-mutual-investment-group/insights/insights-details/more-than-r60-million-investment-set-aside-for-quality-education>

invested in the following 'low cost schools': Prestige Schools, Royal Schools, BASA Educational Institute Trust and Meridian Schools, a subsidiary of Curro Holdings.

Spark Schools are managed by the company eAdvance, established in 2012. In 2014, Pearson invested R28million in Sparks Schools through its Affordable Learning Fund (PALF)⁴. Spark Schools has ambitions to run 64 schools in the next decade and to launch schools in Rwanda, Nigeria, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya and India. In 2015 Spark Schools charged fees of about R15 750 (or roughly \$1000) a year excluding the non-refundable registration fee and other levies. In a country where 40% of the working age population is unemployed (using the more accurate broader definition of unemployment) and where 78% of the adult working population earns a personal monthly income of R2000, attending Spark Schools, one of a chain deemed 'low cost', is not an option for the vast majority of the population. It is clear that 'low cost' schools are attempting to find a market amongst the growing black middle class in the post-apartheid period.

There are other South African companies with huge profits in the education sector including Pioneer Academies founded by Chimezi Chijioke a former head of McKinsey's African education network. Revealingly, one of the founders of the fast growing Future Nations School (Pty) Ltd, Sizwe Nxasana, was previously the state appointed chairperson of the tertiary National Student Financial Aid Scheme. The Future Nations School is a subsidiary of the Sifiso Learning Group and has ambitions to "build a string of affordable, independent schools in the country and the rest of Africa" (Mail and Guardian, 30/06/2016). The group operates a portfolio of companies that include: Future Nation Pre-Schools, Sifiso EdTech, Sifiso Publishing and Sifiso Education Properties⁵. Nxasana, a former chief executive of the FirstRand Bank and his wife Judy Dlamini, chairperson of the pharmaceutical company Aspen, are the founders and sole shareholders of the company (Ibid).

The Adverse Consequences of Privatisation

Public education has developed over more than a century to become a core part of the work of governments especially because it is very much an aspect of their democratising mandate in providing a basic human right to all members of society. Nowhere is there an example of a country with high educational outcomes where the provision of basic education has been in private hands. Yet there is now an increasingly insistent view suggesting that the privatisation of education, whether through high-cost or low-cost private schooling, charter schools or the voucher system, is the solution to the problems of education systems. However, the purveyors of these ideas do not speak to the adverse consequences of privatisation.

Of these perhaps the most troublesome relates to the value systems inculcated by the privatisation of education and the power it vests in unaccountable and undemocratic corporate interests already hugely dominant in the world (Spren and Vally, 2014). Corporations and their 'experts' have a large part to play in the development of the curriculum, in shaping the orientation and outcomes of education, and determining the 'suitability' of teachers and administrators associated with the rationalisation of costs and the determination of what is 'relevant' and what is not. In effect it converts education into a commodity to be purchased and sold in a highly commercialised and competitive market. These characteristics of privatisation are further augmented by:

⁴ <https://medium.com/pearson-affordable-learning-fund/spark-schools-flies-onto-series-b-d9464b4ce255>

⁵ <http://futurenationschools.com/about-us/who-we-are/>

- The absence of a national curriculum or forms of assessment which engender wider social outcomes and goals necessary for social cohesion and consistency;
- The effects on the (already parlous) state of the public system, which ends up catering to only students from the most deprived communities;
- The removal of especially middle-class children from the public schooling system based on the criterion of affordability and ostensible 'choice' and their separation from a wider network of social engagements and interactions;
- The obvious effects on deepening social inequality and stratification amongst the citizenry whatever the putative 'gains' of private education;
- The frequently continued use of public infrastructure and almost invariable reliance on the best publicly trained teachers. There is little or no training of teachers in the private sector and consequently the privatisation of education plays a parasitic role by depending on the public provision of qualified teachers;
- The stimulation of perhaps the greatest outbreak of corruption in the public service as the empires of many billionaires will attest, through textbook provision, standardised tests, school meals and other outsourcing measures; and
- Most importantly, the engendering of competitiveness and individualism as the overarching values in society.

Steven Klees's caution is apposite:

Thirty+ years of neoliberal policies have often left public schools over-crowded, with poorly trained teachers, few learning materials, dilapidated facilities, and often not close by. It is no wonder that some parents opt out. However, while it is rational for disadvantaged individuals to sometimes send their children to private schools, it is poor public policy—it serves only a few, it increases inequality, it ignores the public interest, it neglects public schools, and it devalues teachers. Privatization is said to meet the growing education gap (which resulted from years of attack on the public sector), but all it does is replace an attempt to develop good public policy with the vagaries of charity or the narrowmindedness of profit-making (Klees, 2017: 7).

Neoliberal globalisation's narrow focus on business and the market system continues to undermine and distort the purposes of good quality public education. It has the potential to negate the struggles for a fair, just and humane society, substituting these for unaccountable and avaricious global autocracies based on the power of money. We simply cannot abandon the public mandate of the state if we are to have any hope of achieving the goal of a democratic and humane society, free of corruption, accountable public services promoting decent employment and socially useful work, the provision of 'public goods' and the development of a genuinely democratic society for all citizens. And for public education to work we need motivated, professional and happy educators, competent managers and state officials, adequate resources and infrastructure, a conducive community environment, addressing the social context and consequences of poverty and proper enforcement of standards. For many communities in South Africa there is a realisation that the struggle against apartheid education is not over – this time against class apartheid.

Universities

The corporate agenda is not limited to schools and our forthcoming book, *Universities and Social Justice* (Choudry and Vally, forthcoming) discusses the trend around the world. Here I'll merely mention the issues in broad outline. Universities are confronted by renewed privatisation, intensive marketisation and a challenge to the very notion of the university as a mechanism for addressing social inequality and facilitating the circulation of knowledge.

The late Toni Morrison presciently and lyrically counseled some time ago that

'There will be more of the language of surveillance disguised as research; of politics and history calculated to render the suffering of millions mute;...arrogant pseudo-empirical language crafted to lock creative people into cages of inferiority and hopelessness... whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity driven language of science;...It is the language that drinks blood, laps vulnerabilities, tucks its fascist boots under crinolines of respectability and patriotism as it moves relentlessly toward the bottom line and the bottomed out mind... typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not, permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas. (Speech of acceptance, upon the award of the Nobel Prize for literature, Morrison, 1993, p. 18).

Increasingly, universities are recast from a public to a commodified sphere, with students as consumers and staff as sales consultants replete with corporate values and corporate planning frameworks. In the face of mass unemployment, aligning skills to the competitive global 'new knowledge economy' has become the obsession of most nation states. Solidarity and learning that addresses the self to public life and social responsibility to robust public participation and democratic citizenship is marginalised. Subjects and disciplines that have a purchase in the marketplace are valued more highly, even as critical education scholars have challenged dominant market capitalist orthodoxies that have become ascendant in framing understandings about the relationship between higher education, society and the economy. (Baatjes, I., Vally, S and Spreen CA, 2012).

Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) address academic capitalism whereby academic staff are channeled into entrepreneurial ventures as part of the university's income-generating ethic and the embedding of universities within the logic of academic capitalism. The relevance of academic work is linked to productivity as measured by rating and ranking scales. The theory of academic capitalism aims to explain the integration of the university into the global economy, more specifically how faculty, students, administrators and academics use "a variety of state resources to create new circuits of knowledge that link higher education institutions (HEIs) to the new economy" (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997: 210). It reflects the encroachment of the profit motive into the academy, and represents "a shift from a public good knowledge/learning regime to an academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime" where students become consumers and institutions the marketers (Ibid). Kelsey (2008) notes how the international trade, investment and economic architecture such as the World Trade Organisation's General Agreement on Trade in Services and provisions in other regional and bilateral agreements have been driven by a rapidly growing corporate global educational services sector including some universities. This development further commodifies education and limits emancipatory possibilities.

An increasing number of university administrations ardently promote the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution (Maharajh, 2018). While technology and the development of technological skills are important, Bell (2019) cautions "But not within the existing economic system and the political and

social framework that sustains it". We also need to equip students to ask critical questions (including about the political economy of technology itself, and the pedagogical and social implications of educational technology) which they can only do through critical consciousness, to engage in democratic debate on this issue and to make informed choices about social priorities.

Undoubtedly, despite these negative developments globally, progressive spaces, while constrained, do exist in the academy and individuals in many universities are able to connect with community organisations and social movements and accomplish valuable counter-hegemonic work. Often these spaces have been won through struggles supported by student organisations, staff unions and associations, and by pressure from organisations outside. They must be expanded through a vigorous defence of higher education as a public good and a sphere of critical democratic citizenry, and resistance against commercial and corporate values that shape the form, purpose and mission of our institutions. The emphasis on technical rationality, simplistic pragmatism and undemocratic managerial imperatives must be countered. Proactively, initiatives should include linking programmes, projects and resources to community needs and struggles.

The Skills Mismatch Argument and Human Capital Theory

A legion of commentators largely employed by financial institutions, tediously feed South Africans a daily diet of market fundamentalism through the print and electronic media. Their mantra is usually a permutation of the following clichés: 'We must be competitive and entrepreneurial'. 'We need more skills'. 'Education fails to provide young people with skills for employment'. 'We need more investment and economic growth' (Vally and Motala, 2014). Rarely do we hear dissenting voices and the simplistic statements and platitudes of these 'experts' are seldom challenged by journalists.

In a situation of mass unemployment and inequality this pre-emptive discourse is seductive, playing, as it does, into the anxieties and ambitions of both parents and young people. Sears (2003:78) argues that:

Students facing a dismal market are likely to be more sympathetic to the idea that education should provide them with competitive advantages. Parents may have some sympathy for [this discourse] as they seek out opportunities for their children to succeed...Vocationalism is a central means by which education is being reoriented towards the market. The goal of lean schooling is to teach students how to realise themselves through the market, both by marketing themselves and meeting their needs through the market.

This seemingly common-sense approach places the burden of responsibility squarely on individuals and their 'deficits' while obscuring the real obstacles to procuring decent and remunerative employment. The 'transition from school to work' (Sears 2003:80) problem is then simplistically reduced to inadequate career planning models and the lack of 'entrepreneurial skills'. The common-sense view is promoted as neutral, objective and ideology-free. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci explained how certain conceptions take on a hegemonic status promoted by the ruling class. These shared views cohere into 'everyday wisdom' and are rarely challenged. Hegemony relies in the first instance on securing some degree of consent from the ruled and primarily on subordination through ideas though it is built on a foundation of economic inequality. Relatedly, Beattie (2019) in a significant recent article on neoliberalism's psychological effects titled 'The road to psychopathology: Neoliberalism and the Human Mind', the author revealingly begins his article with an epigram attributed to Margaret Thatcher: "Economics are [sic] the method; the object is to change the heart and soul" (see also Mishra, P, 2017).

The emphasis placed on the relationship between education (schooling and post-schooling in the main) and the economy is invariably about how education and training both at the individual and systemic level can enhance the possibilities for jobs. It is regarded as both a consequence of economic development through the growth of the economy and as necessary to stimulate and enhance the very possibilities for aggregate economic growth through education and training.

In this view, the main proposition is the idea that there is a great shortage of skills in South African society which is accentuated in particular ‘critical areas of shortage’ making any possibilities for economic advancement unimaginable and that the education and training system is hopelessly out of sync with the demands of the local and global economy. The cause of unemployment, in general, is put at education’s door, more broadly arguing that education is not teaching what the economy needs. It is unfortunately true that many children and youth in South Africa leave school without the basic skills necessary for life and work. But as Steven Klees explains “the mismatch discourse is usually less about basic skills and more about vocational skills. The argument, while superficially plausible, is not true for at least two reasons. First, vocational skills, which are often context-specific, are best taught on the job. Second, unemployment is not a worker-skills supply problem, but a structural problem of capitalism” (Vally and Motala, 2014: vii). While focusing on education institutions and the supply-side the more useful and important question is the demand-side one, usually ignored by human capital theorists, regarding how can we create decent jobs that require valuable skills. The human capital discourse also ignores the value of education outside of work.

Siyabulela Mama’s (2019) recent article on the skills mismatch argument is pertinent:

...South Africa has been flooded with a number of retrenchments recently with capitalist enterprises like ArcelorMittal South Africa, Hulam, Group Five, Basil Read, MultiChoice, Sibanye-Stillwater, Tongaat Hulett, Standard Bank and Absa and others shedding jobs. Amongst those who are retrenched here are highly skilled workers with no jobs to go to in the foreseeable future and this shows that in the current system, even skills cannot protect you from unemployment and poverty. Yet the explanation of why this is happening hides the real causes of it because the acute problem of youth unemployment (including graduate unemployment) which is supposedly one of the biggest priorities in the country is usually and falsely assigned to a lack of skills and work experience which is also blamed for poor economic growth.

We need to respond to the question of how – in addition to the broad and multifaceted purposes of learning for social justice and citizenship, education and learning can support the development of useful livelihoods and income generation, based on collective and cooperative work that is socially useful and necessary for sustaining and reproducing societies and protecting the environment.

The alternatives we talk to in the conversation about solidarity economies, cooperatives and its related concepts, raise questions about how these radical approaches to learning and work can be taken forward to make a real impact on the very nature of power and the structures that deepen the socio-economic and political crisis faced by South African society.

Forging Pedagogies of Possibility

Today, besides facing an unprecedented ecological crisis brought about by unbridled capitalist exploitation of our planet (which some have called the Capitalocene instead of the Anthropocene –

Moore, J, 2016), progressive struggles must contend with other serious challenges as the latest wave of nationalist, racist and pseudo-populist politics seek to divide and rule communities and countries already fractured by years of social and economic upheaval, repression and growing inequality. These political agendas divert attention away from the real causes of today's social and economic problems.

As scholars of education and participants in many struggles for change in recent decades, many of us sense – and most certainly, hope – that notwithstanding the anti-intellectualism that sometimes permeates communities and broader society, that new generations of young people, dissatisfied with inadequate explanations for the state of the world, are seeking ways to change it. I have encountered many young people who are hungry to learn how activist-scholars envisioned alternatives and possibilities, all as part of developing their own political, social and environmental activism – a major motivation for writing our book *History's Schools – Past Struggles and Present Realities* (Choudry and Vally, 2019, *op.cit.*).

An unjust world is not inevitable. We are often accosted with the demand to produce an alternative or an emphatic TINA (There Is No Alternative) argument. The riposte to this is THEMBA (There Must Be an Alternative) or TAPAS (There Are Plenty of Alternatives). The praxis of all the movements I mentioned earlier gave rise to many possibilities which although often tentative, could have been developed further. In some cases, clear alternatives were squandered. For example, on the question of the 'clustering' of schools, Alexander, working with progressive urban planners, published a book entitled *Taking South African Education out of the Ghetto: An Urban Planning Perspective*, (Smit and Hennessy 1995) in which a detailed plan for overcoming the spatial apartheid nature of the city of Cape Town, acting as a pilot for other cities in South Africa, could be approached. The plan argued in considerable detail how the establishment of well-equipped schools at important nodal points on the main transport arteries of the city could enable "all children, regardless of colour, language group or place of residence" to attend such schools. Alexander (2010: 8) lamented that:

Although complimentary copies of the book were made available to some individuals in the new bureaucracy, and the approach was discussed with and positively received by cabinet ministers and urban planners involved in rethinking the apartheid city in Cape Town, it had very little impact at the time because of the timidity and tentativeness, i.e., lack of clarity and vision, that characterised the first years of the transition. Yet, unless we get back to this approach, complemented by and working in tandem with some of the other foundational changes that are required, social and racial integration among poor and working class children will remain a dead letter for decades, if not centuries...

Alexander was also exasperated by the lack of support he received around the importance of mother-tongue instruction and the development of historically marginalised languages. There were many other frustrations encountered and as a country we are impoverished as a result. Alexander's approach was the idea of concrete alternatives and demonstrable possibilities in the present. His was an approach that went beyond social critique and academic analyses – beyond the boundaries constructed by the requirements of conventional scholarship since engagement was inseparable from serious scholarly activity. For Alexander the academy had the responsibility to stimulate activism and democratic practice both through the rigorous production of knowledge and the practice of teaching but also its accountability to communities.

Another example is the possibilities produced by the 'education with production' movement. It held the view that education can bring together the worlds of intellectual and physical labour, and

overcome the separation of 'head and hand' that characterises so much of the present education and training discourse separating the academic from the vocational.

A leading proponent of education with production, Patrick van Rensburg, after returning from exile bemoaned the fact that:

Whereas in the past, liberation movements in Southern Africa had radical visions of broad socio-economic and political policy, and of education systems that would promote and serve them, today the various governments they gave rise to have almost all settled for the prevailing neo-liberal realities of a global free market...Most South Africans have tunnel vision about formal education and the capacity of matriculation to secure jobs. Many of its jobless fall prey to a burgeoning education industry, and to the diploma disease...In the course of its struggles, the ANC had looked with interest at alternatives in education and health and medical provisions. It would have looked at the potential of alternative technologies, alternatives in agriculture and alternative energy, especially in rural development, but also in housing and job-creation initiatives in towns and cities... South Africa seems now to hold alternatives in contempt, seeing them as beneath its dignity as an advanced industrialised country (Rensburg, 2001:130-131).

Several implications flow from the points I have raised in this address as they relate to unemployment, poverty and inequality. We need to explore more fully the relationship between the alternative livelihoods, citizenship-based, cultural and solidarity economy activities in which especially the most marginalised sections of society are engaged *together with* the learning that takes place in the alternative activities of such communities. Such an exploration would provide a stronger theoretical, practical and organisational basis for a more robust and meaningful curriculum – not determined by the requirements of capitalist labour markets but by the requirements of a democratising society. Moreover, the alternatives suggested relative to work and learning should be consistent with progressive ways of thinking about sustainable planetary ecology. Given the urgency of dealing with climate change an eco-pedagogy is also necessary.

The education philosopher Greene (1988:12-13) in her seminal book, 'The Dialectic of Freedom' suggested, as early as 1988, that the purpose of education was to provoke individuals to deal with serious social issues yet,

...Little is done to counter media manipulation of the young into credulous and ardent consumers...[and] that human worth depends on the possession of commodities, community status, a flippant way of talking, good looks...In the face of all this, school people are asked to increase academic rigor, ensure the preparation of a work force for 'high technology'...Confronting some of the most tragic lacks in society, some of the saddest instances of dehumanization, they offer promises of 'career ladders, 'board certification',... talk resembling what Kundera calls "kitsch."

The pressure of competitiveness, marketing pressure and the seduction to own the latest car, biggest house, the temptations of conspicuous consumption not helped by the example of yesterday's struggle icons is great. So how can educators empower young people to see through the deception and glitz, to see the values of solidarity, justice, the fight against discrimination and inequality as the primary ones. How can educators open students to the possibility that there may be more fulfilment to be discovered in living in a just society that "enough is as good as a feast" than living in an arrantly inequitable one? How can we help to recognise the violations in the continuing

violence against women, children, LGBTI+ people and those we deem 'foreign' scapegoated because of politicians' incompetence?

Paulo Freire in his seminal work *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* calls on us to imagine a world that is less ugly, more beautiful, less discriminatory, more democratic, less dehumanising, and more humane. Donald Macedo (2005:11) in his introduction to *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* writes that in his work and in his life, Paulo teaches us and the world—with his hallmark humility—what it means to be an intellectual. As always, he teaches us with his penetrating and unquiet mind the meaning of a profound commitment to fight social injustices in our struggle to recapture the loss of our dignity as human beings. "We need to say no to the neoliberal fatalism ... informed by the ethics of the market, an ethics in which a minority makes most profits against the lives of the majority. In other words, those who cannot compete, die. This is a perverse ethics that, in fact, lacks ethics. I do not accept . . . history as determinism. I embrace history as possibility [where] we can demystify the evil in this perverse fatalism that characterizes the neoliberal discourse."

In forging meaningful alternatives and possibilities for education today means we often have to look back. I have just read a book titled *Under-Education in Africa: From Colonialism to Neoliberalism* (Hirji, 2019). The book recounts how after independence, students together with some progressive staff members such as Walter Rodney, John Saul and others contributed to making the University of Dar es Salaam a beacon of progressive scholarship. They championed decolonisation and while critically supportive of President Nyerere's humanism and policies of *Ujamaa*, also warned of the dangers of neocolonialism - their critiques celebrated as the 'Dar es Salaam Debates' remain germane to revitalising the African academy today. The legendary magazines they produced *Cheche* and *MajiMaji* discussed in the book should be seen as exemplars of socially engaged and rigorous scholarship exposing the poverty of many academic journals today. It is a remarkable collection and in these bleak, dire and precarious times, with constant assaults on reason and education for liberation, it is an antidote to despair. Hirji's injunction, not to lose hope is also a clarion call to action and a firm belief that, to quote Hirji, "...the struggle is a long term one; there are bound to be ups and downs. But ultimately, Africa and its people will triumph".

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