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

Salim Vally
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9156-1775
University of Johannesburg, South Africa
svally@uj.ac.za

Abstract

In this article I discuss the vision of education for liberation during the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. The article focuses specifically on "People's Education" and "Workers' Education". Instead of an instrumental role for education reduced solely to the labour market requirements of business, economic growth and international competitiveness, I argue that the purpose of education is much broader. Embedded in a rich tradition of an educational praxis based on social justice and democratic citizenship, the popular movements associated with people's and workers' education generated alternatives to apartheid's legacy on education. In contemporary South Africa, this apartheid legacy is exacerbated by post-apartheid policies rooted in neoliberalism. While post-1994 education policies established the legislative framework for social justice, equity and adequate resources remain unattainable and elusive. In the face of the desultory state of schooling and the failures of neoliberalism, the article takes issue with the proffered solutions advocated by proponents of neoliberalism, including strident calls for the privatisation of education and resorting back to an apartheid-like disciplinary regime. In forging a pedagogy of possibility, social class analysis and effective community participation in education policy deliberations would need to be reinserted into the conversations about redress and education reform if the country is to overcome its inequalities and social cleavages. To this end, alternatives and possibilities raised during the struggle against apartheid are reiterated, re-examined and offered as prisms through which an alternative education can be practised.

Introduction[1]

South African activist-scholar Neville Alexander often mentioned the biblical axiom, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Alexander 2013, 22). He considered the aphorism one of "the most insightful and profound tenets" (22) of the Cape African Teachers' Association, an organisation that inspired him in his youth to activism, and that influenced his abiding interest in education. Alexander used the line from Proverbs 29 whenever he expressed indignation at the social malaise he witnessed. In his posthumously published book, *Thoughts on the New South Africa* (Alexander 2013, 39), 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, "[s]uddenly, 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" (2013, 42). Rebuking 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 [Nelson Mandela's] release from prison" (2013, 43).

The Vision of Education for Liberation

The vision Alexander referred to existed in the stirring and fearless years of the 1970s, including the watershed moment of the 1976 Uprising, certainly in the maelstrom years of the 1980s and even in the expectant early 1990s before it began to ebb away.

In fact, Enver Motala and I explained in our book *Education, Economy and Society* (Vally and Motala 2014) that all the South African educationists of the past that we venerate today such as I.B. Tabata, A.C. Jordan, Rick Turner, Ruth First, Archie Mafeje, Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, Zeph Mothopeng, Fatima Meer, Dennis Brutus, Mathew Goniwe, 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, 16):

> Their legacy gave rise to vibrant and vital education social movements in South Africa. They believed in a purposeful education which recognises that the role of education and

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[1] This article is based on the author's professorial inauguration delivered at the Council Chambers, University of Johannesburg on 4 September 2019.

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 exist.

This is not the banal, reductive paradigm that is today the hallmark of the dominant approach drowning out important ideas on education and society, including the development of a socially conscious and critical citizenry. The neoliberal approach to education centres on the commodification of education and the privileging of subjects, programmes and disciplines that largely benefit business at the expense of the arts, humanities and the social sciences. The "efficient" and "effective" delivery of education and other services are also left to market mechanisms such as privatisation 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.

Privatisation does not solve the problems in education; rather, it makes them worse (Spreen, Stark, and Vally 2014). 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 for these unaccountable and avaricious global autocracies based on the power of money. If there is to be any hope of achieving the goal of a democratic and humane society, then abandoning the public mandate of the state is not an option.

Following from a history of struggle against apartheid, the purpose and the value of education are much broader, and as our history shows are linked to a rich legacy of educational praxis based on social justice and democratic citizenship. This purpose and this value cannot be reduced solely to the needs of economic growth and international competitiveness as neoliberalism attempts to do. Clearly, knowledge, skills and the competencies derived from education and training are critically important for all societies and for 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 such as meeting the aspirations for social justice, human rights and the promotion of the cultural life of communities, is a serious limitation on their social role.

South Africa has a proud legacy of education for liberation comprising a history of resistance in and through education. This resistance generated popular epistemologies and pedagogies including the "people's education movement", "workers' education", the "popular adult and/ or community education movement", and "education with production".

This is not self-indulgent struggle nostalgia or romance, but to show that alternatives and possibilities arise out of concrete engagement in social struggles. In *History's Schools: Past Struggles and Present Realities* (Choudry and Vally 2019), mention is made of Svetlana Boym's distinction between critical or reflective nostalgia, and a nostalgia that sees itself uncritically as truth and tradition and which includes nationalist myth making.

People's Education

In the 1980s up to the early 1990s the concept of People's Education, in contrast to the apartheid education system, captured the imagination of many South Africans. The concept promised liberation from an authoritarian and unequal education system and in its place one that 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).

Significantly, a forerunner to the People's Education movement of the 1980s was 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. Freire's books were banned by the apartheid state, but hundreds of copied versions of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 2005) were clandestinely distributed at black universities and "eagerly studied by the young activists of the Black Consciousness Movement" (Alexander 1992, 22). SASO students and others applied Freire's ideas to many literacy and other *conscientisation* projects in urban townships and rural areas. Freire's pedagogy appealed to educational activists and theorists because his anti-capitalist social theory accorded with the experience of and the insights at which the education activists in the liberation movement had increasingly arrived. The Brazilian's pedagogy arose out of conditions similar to those that obtained in South Africa. Also, the specific organisation of the struggle in the late 1970s and especially in the 1980s as a grassroots movement anchored in groups and projects in the "community" brought with it a sensitivity about 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. The emphasis on democratic governance resonated with 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 curricula 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 for the formation of

hundreds of non-governmental education organisations and 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).

Chisholm and Fuller (1996) argued that radical interpretations of People's Education remained dominant throughout the better part of the 1980s. However, liberal views on education gained cachet from the beginning of negotiations between the African National Congress (ANC) and the apartheid regime in the early 1990s (Chisholm and Fuller 1996). The role of civil society organisations and even the language of People's Education became increasingly marginal to the overall project of educational change. Discourse and content were prioritised rather than radical demands; that is, the focus shifted from social engagement and democratising power relations to demands that emphasised performance, outcomes, cost effectiveness and economic competitiveness.

Workers' Education

Similar to the invaluable education through activism in the South African Students' Movement (the high school counterpart to SASO), union education has left an enduring and endearing impression about the importance of non-formal education. Back then in the 1970s and early 1980s, social movements and political activism evolved into sites of learning and of knowledge production with long-lasting educative consequences.

A significant feature in the early 1980s was that some of the key shop stewards were involved in the 1976 Uprising. Informal education took place in the shop-steward councils. Later, education committees linked to these councils were also formed (Vally 1994). Influenced by the expansion of the political struggle from the early 1980s, workers began to shape and influence the nature of the 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 in community forums, worker leaders gained confidence to engage with their unions' leadership on contested organisational and political issues.

The leadership of independent unions stood out because of their willingness 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 towards mass collective involvement in recruiting members, producing militancy and laying the basis for building strong democratic organisations by providing the skills necessary for this.

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 and hardening school of labour, are equally to be understood as educative. It is in this area that experiential learning took place (Vally, Bofelo, and Treat 2013). The strike, solidarity actions and workplace occupations were perhaps the most important learning moments.

Established traditions of participatory democracy, accountability, worker leadership and mass action as well as a critique of capitalism were brought by rank-and-file workers to community organisation. Community and school struggles for a People's Education were accompanied by the development of worker education. Unsurprisingly, unions were referred to not only as *schools of labour* but also as *laboratories of democracy*, where workers could test new ideas, arrive at new understandings and enrich collective practices (Vally 1994). An intellectual embrace was in the making: "Workers searched memory, each other, history, the world, political texts, for ideas and knowledge, bringing everything into their intellectual embrace" (Grossman quoted in Cooper et al. 2002, 120).

As a consequence of the dominant politics leading up to the negotiated settlement in 1994, the trade union leadership in the late 1980s and early 1990s changed its adversarial vision towards a quest for an equal partnership with business and government. These changes were to have a significant impact on worker education. The priorities, forms of delivery, and key target audiences of trade union education shifted. The labour movement also increasingly became 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 post-apartheid 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, the sacrificing of internal trade union democracy, and the promotion of a narrow, "human capital" approach to education dependent upon private providers of education and "skills" training (Koen et al. 2018).

I argue that the nature of the negotiated settlement between the erstwhile dominant liberation movement (the African National Congress) and the apartheid regime (the National Party), the continuation of the class character of the state (despite the normative discourse of human rights and development), and the uncontested absorption 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 to understand the present reality, including inequalities, means locating the straightjacket of dominant class relations and the class formation of the present state. Understanding these social processes will reveal why the once dominant education vision in the liberation movement, although co-opted rhetorically and institutionalised, does not translate into tangible benefits for the majority of the poor.

After 1994, education activists had expected the new political order to usher in a more equitable education system. They hoped that a better education system was in the offing because a democratic government would respond to the needs of ordinary people. Boosting this hope was a plethora of educational legislation that was passed by the new South African parliament. 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. But this was not to be. Most of the active participants in these education social movements during apartheid were demobilised in the early 1990s. Ballard (2005) has shown that this phenomenon of demobilisation is not unique, and Mamdani has warned of the postcolonial "marriage between technicism and nationalism", resulting in the demobilisation of social movements (Mamdani 1996, 21). While the hope for change from above was misplaced, by 1998 civil society had begun 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 reconstituted, in part in response to the neoliberal macroeconomic policies of the government's Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) in 1996.

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 2003). In our view, the crisis could not be blamed on poor implementation alone. Moreover, 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.

The Poverty and Inequality Hearings and the Education Rights Project

My early research while based at the University of the Witwatersrand's Education Policy Unit involved convening the education component of the Poverty and Inequality Hearings—an initiative of Chapter Nine institutions and civil society modelled on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I was also tasked with conducting research on racism, "racial integration" and desegregation. This was commissioned by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and involved over 100 schools. Both these endeavours provided compelling reasons why I have maintained in all my research outputs 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. In essence the SAHRC 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, Makwanazi, and Nkomo 1993) continued to cast its gloom, no longer through racially explicit policies, but by proxy and exclusions such as language restrictions, spatial segregation and high fees—all related to social class. What happens outside the school gates will inevitably affect the gains made in schools. Although the report recommended 10 key concrete and achievable interventions, none of those were implemented.

Over 10 000 people attended hearings, mobilised communities or made submissions to the Poverty and Inequality Hearings organised by the South African National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO) in 1998. These submissions ranged from carefully worded, logically argued views of research organisations to the poignant testimonies of some of the most marginalised.

While the poor identified key obstacles preventing the eradication of poverty, and while the convenors of the Poverty and Inequality Hearings arranged a list of responsibilities for government officials in order to ensure that the fight to end poverty becomes the nation's priority, the hearings arrived at a cul-de-sac and state officials' promises did not materialise.

My shift towards research on education rights, community participation and transformation is related to my role as coordinator of the Education Rights Project (ERP). During this time, I interacted with several hundred communities around education rights. Many of these impoverished communities, assisted by the ERP, used participatory action research to strengthen their campaigns. The ERP also collaborated with public litigation organisations around specific issues such as the cost of school education and user fees.

Fine's (2009, 186) description of the inner cities of the US where there exist "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" also applies to poor and working-class communities of South Africa. These working-class voices help us understand failures of policy and implementation, as Apple and Beane (1999, 120) suggested, outside their "glossy political rhetoric and place them in the gripping details of everyday life". These voices underline education rights, and that these rights cannot be divorced from wider socio-economic rights.

Research undertaken by Appadurai (2006) has also shown that the exercise of rights cannot be achieved when conditions deny citizens their right to be heard and the freedoms associated with the right to participation in public life. 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 is an integral part of the work to democratise education. This collaboration has, 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.

But the discourse of normative rights, often championed as the mainstay of South African public institutions and the Constitution, has often served to promote the fictitious idea that the limitations of rights are solely a legal and justiciable phenomenon in effecting redress and equity. It is premised on the assumption that certain rights exist for all in an equal way. This inhibits people's ability to recognise when they are in fact illusory and why society does not act to protect these rights. For example, 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 with a suburban corporate executive. These are real distinctions that give some people advantages and privileges over others.

As previously mentioned, education rights cannot be divorced from wider socio-economic rights. Confronting patterns of inequality and social exclusion may go some distance in achieving curricular goals and the rights of citizens. 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 are better understood within the larger realities of power and social relations (see Madlingozi 2006; Spreen and Vally 2006; Vally, Thapliyal, and Spreen 2013; Zembylas and Keet 2018).

The state of education may be characterised by rampant fiscal profligacy, the dismal state of infrastructure and facilities in many of our schools, and the perceived abysmal performance of our learners. 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 continues to reflect and to reproduce the inequalities in society. Access to schooling has increased and there is gender parity, but quality education for the poor, which in South Africa's unequal society are the 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*.

After 1994, policy changes have occurred, but have these policies resulted in meaningful changes? The stubborn reality persists: the education system continues to be based on

social class. In the post-apartheid era, education, far from becoming the great *leveller*, 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 has been added to those who were erstwhile beneficiaries and continue to be today.

Towards the end of 2008, the Public Participation in Education Network (PPEN) was launched. PPEN, an action-oriented group of educationalists, declared in its "Call to Action" that the failures in education had induced cynicism among various communities and even among educators, school managers and other public officials. PPEN drew attention to the pervasive sense of powerlessness and loss of hope about the possibility of meaningful outcomes for society. It asserted that schools were not failing individually; rather, the corporatised state was failing them collectively.

Alexander discussed ways of reversing this trend and identified a few key omissions and mistakes, including the failure to move away from the spatial apartheid location of schools that perpetuates racial and class divisions, the inadequate professional development of teachers, and the "blind spot of language policy" in schools (Alexander 2010).

Alongside Alexander's commentaries, other educationalists have also written about post-apartheid education. They include writings on educational management, school governance, curriculum, language, assessment, equity, teacher education, professional development and support, early childhood development, and adult basic education (Chisholm 2004; Motala and Pampallis 2001; Sayed and Jansen 2001; Tikly 2011; Vally and Motala 2014). Early on, it was realised that education, while a necessary condition, cannot on its own address the social problems society has to confront. It is not a panacea.

The failure of the public education system to provide quality education for the majority of learners has given rise to recidivism, the crude resort to an apartheid-like disciplinary regime and the privatisation of education. Failure by the state to implement its own policies has resulted in many analysts incorrectly blaming what they consider 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 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. While self-discipline and accountability to the community are essential, learner-centred practices need not undermine but could instead enhance respect and self-discipline in the classroom.

The move by the state to introduce "Outcomes Based Education" (OBE), which was introduced as an incredibly complex and grandiose curricular approach, helped create a climate where the only things that matter are those that can be measured. 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 (Spreen and Vally 2010, 434).

Attempts by the post-1994 South African state to ensure educational redress are hampered by the very high rates of child poverty. According to the University of Cape Town's Children's Institute (Hall 2018, 140), in 2017, 65% of children lived below the upper-bound poverty line. 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. Regardless of how enlightened a curriculum might be or how motivated teachers are, none of this will matter if a child comes to the classroom hungry. Empty bellies cannot sustain policies. 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" (*The Economist* 2017). While it is true that much of the money from the country's fiscus does not reach the intended beneficiaries, it is not simply a question of throwing money at the problem—wastage and corruption must be addressed. Today, the majority of South Africa's public schools are without libraries, many are overcrowded and there is a backlog for buildings, capital expenditure and school maintenance.

Besides expanding on the elision of social class, my work examines the role of local education activism in South Africa, a relatively under-researched area largely ignored by mainstream education policy theorists. I argue that educational reforms seeking to address social cleavages should be accompanied by a wider range of redistributive strategies, democratic participation, political will and clear choices about the social outcomes that policy interventions seek to achieve.

My doctoral study 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 goals remain unattainable and elusive (Vally 2013). The thesis suggests that what has been missing from most analyses 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, which is 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 the study.

My view is that the elision of social class analysis in educational policy forums, combined with a lack of meaningful community participation, has contributed to the failure to address and overcome the profound inequalities and social cleavages that

characterise the South African education system. The doctoral thesis sought to disrupt the dichotomies between formal and informal educational arrangements, the public and private spheres, and cultural and political spaces. The role of localised education activism in South Africa has been under-researched and largely ignored by mainstream education policy theorists.

Despite the lacunae in policy research, some good work has been done. In 2004, Lewis and Naidoo explored the relationship between decentralisation, democracy and participation. Their article discussed the limitations of decentralisation as a way of solving problems of democratic participation. They argued that School Governing Bodies largely serve to reinforce existing patterns of power and privilege in schools and in the broader society. They concluded by asserting that the technocratic character of school governance in South Africa makes it inaccessible to the majority of its communities and disempowers the poor. More broadly, Hemson (2007, 9) examined the often repeated view by government officials that there are formal processes laid down in policy and statutes for participation, but argued that these are validly regarded by social movements as non-existent or ineffective and that "existing formal democratic structures of society are not opening public decision-making to the historically dispossessed". Similarly, a study of community experiences where attempts were made to engage with local municipalities in development planning and policy processes found that "insufficient consideration has been paid to public participation, and that existing policy frameworks, institutional mechanisms and programme interventions are failing to comply with government's constitutional and statutory obligations in this regard" (Buccus et al. 2008, 1). The latter study found that the "poor and marginalized have the least impact on policy and development planning" and new approaches to participation are required since the existing formal mechanisms are "inadequate, inaccessible and disempowering" (2008, 11). It also revealed that the ward committees or community public meetings (called *Izimbizo*), through which legislation allows for "public participation", were instead forms of consultation widely seen as formalities, rather than the actual participation of local communities in decision-making or implementation.

Solutions towards addressing the numerous problems in education require the voice, knowledge, experience and information gathered by locally based social movements. Here, the vital advice for critical educators to graft "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 pertinent. I hold the view that educational reforms seeking to address social cleavages should be accompanied by redistributive strategies and democratic participation.

Social Class and "Race"

Foregrounding class and community concepts in theorising and in understanding education policy in the South African context would go some distance in grappling with contemporary education. Apart from Linda Chisholm's book, *Changing Class* (2004),

scant attention has been paid directly to issues of social class in education over the past 25 years.

Elsewhere in an article on class, "race" and the state in post-apartheid education (Motala and Vally 2010, 93), we remarked 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". We regretted the fact that social class as an analytical and conceptual category "has been a casualty of the post-apartheid period" (2010, 93).

Postmodern theory, in vogue during the late 1990s and early 2000s, was used as a justification for the retreat from class analysis, and it was made even more seductive by its coincidence with the illusionary "miracle of the New South Africa". Intellectual complicity contributed to the erasure of class as an analytical category, often consciously and disparagingly. Archaic public and academic voices representing capitalist interests, and without any reference to class, spoke to the "non-ideological" reforms needed to build education. A return to the "true values" of social democracy was called for, as if these voices were not ideological. In my view, a decline of the educational scholarship based on class started to take root, and the self-censorship imposed by scholars on any work that overtly recognised the importance of social class took precedence.

But this self-censorship is not meant to imply that racial and gender issues were mere distractions from basic issues of inequality. The view of the Trinidadian C.L.R. James, quoted in Walter Rodney's seminal work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1983, 100), 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.

Racist policies and strategies, for capitalist accumulation and for engendering social conflict, are used by the ruling classes of hegemonic states such as the United States to advance their global exploitative interests. Their manufactured ideas about "race" (and other such discursive categories) have acquired powerful meanings in the public consciousness, in global politics and in the control over resources. Not surprisingly, grappling with the relationship between these social categories is not limited to South Africa. John Saul (2006, 64–65) wrote:

> 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.

Towards a Pedagogy of Possibilities

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 such as the Free Market Foundation, the South African Institute of Race Relations and the Centre for Development Enterprise stridently advocate proposals ranging from outright privatisation of education and the withdrawal of the state to various versions of market-friendly policies (Vally and Motala 2014). In opposing these proposals, Thandika Mkandawire, adapting Gramsci's famous aphorism, refers to this predatory maneuvering as "[t]he pessimism of the diagnosis and the optimism of the prescription" (quoted in Muller 2012).

Policy makers and analysts in South Africa tend to import and borrow policies and their prescriptions largely from Europe and North America, regardless of the vastly differing histories, contexts and circumstances. In effect, although many of the borrowed policies have been shown to be ineffective in the very countries of their provenance, they continue to be purveyed as policies useful to development elsewhere. Such policy borrowing is fostered not only through the work of "expert" consultants but also by "native" researchers who have little regard for the critical literature on this issue. One consequence is that South Africa has seen a mushrooming of private schools in recent years. Increasingly, public money subsidises private schooling (Vally 2018).

Privatisation is poor public policy, and Klees's (2020, 15) caution is relevant here:

> 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.

For advocates of neoliberal globalisation, the virtues of business and of the so-called "free market" system are the mantra of their new world order. These advocates continue to undermine and distort the purposes of good quality public education. They have the potential to negate the struggles for a fair, just and humane society, substituting for these unaccountable and avaricious global autocracies based on the power of money.

In light of capital's moves to configure the world in its own image, education activists cannot abandon the public mandate of the state if we are to have any hope of achieving a society free of corruption, accountable public services that promote decent employment and socially useful work, the provision of *public goods* and the development of a genuinely democratic society. And, for public education to work, we

need motivated, professional and happy educators, competent managers and state officials, adequate resources and infrastructure, and a conducive community environment that addresses the social context and consequences of poverty and proper enforcement of standards.

The corporate agenda is not limited to schools. Our book, *Universities and Social Justice* (Choudry and Vally 2020), discusses the trend around the world. Here, I will mention the issues in broad outline. Universities face 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 (1993) presciently and lyrically counselled some time ago during her Nobel Prize acceptance speech:

> 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 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 … [It] cannot permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas.

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 address the self to public life, and social responsibility to robust public participation and democratic citizenship are marginalised. Subjects and disciplines that have a purchase in the marketplace are valued more highly.

An increasing number of university administrations ardently promote the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution or 4IR (Maharajh 2018). Technology and the development of technological skills are important, but as Bell (2019, 2) cautions, "not within the existing economic system and the political and social framework that sustains it". Students need to be equipped 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, progressive spaces, while constrained, do exist in the academy. Individuals in many universities are able to connect with community organisations and social movements, and they can accomplish valuable counter-hegemonic work. These spaces could be expanded through a vigorous defence of higher education as a public good and a space for a critical democratic citizenry, and through 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 could include linking programmes, projects and resources to community needs and struggles.

Through print and electronic media, mainstream commentators and free-market "experts" tediously feed market fundamentalism with a crass mantra, which 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" (see Vally and Motala 2014). In a country marked by 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. Rarely do we hear dissenting voices, and rarely do we challenge the simplistic statements and platitudes of these "experts" (Duncan, Bond, and Vally 2014).

In this misnomer called free-market discourse, the burden of responsibility for failure rests on individuals. A seemingly common-sense approach obscures the real obstacles to procuring decent and remunerative employment. The "transition from school to work" 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. These shared views cohere into "everyday wisdom" that relies on securing some degree of consent from the ruled. Relatedly, Beattie (2019), in a significant recent article on neoliberalism's psychological effects titled "The Road to Psychopathology: Neoliberalism and the Human Mind", 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 2017).

The causes of unemployment are put at education's door. Education, according to these advocates of neoliberalism, is not teaching what the economy needs. While it may well be accurate to say that many children and youth in South Africa leave school without the basic skills necessary for life and work, this mismatch discourse is arguably less about basic skills and arguably 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 important question would appear to be on the demand-side, which is usually ignored by human capital theorists: how can we create decent jobs that require valuable skills and value education outside paid work?

In opposing these somewhat tedious arguments advanced by neoliberal and human capital advocates, Siyabulela Mama's (2019) recent article on the skills mismatch argument and youth unemployment is pertinent, particularly about alternatives such as solidarity economies, cooperatives and climate justice jobs.

Forging Pedagogies of Possibility

Today, humans face an unprecedented ecological and health crisis brought about by unbridled capitalist exploitation of our planet—some have called it the Capitalocene instead of the Anthropocene (Moore 2016). In our book (Choudry and Vally 2020), we are conscious that "progressive struggles must contend with other serious challenges as the latest wave of nationalist, xenophobic, 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." In this period, marked by an assault on education and on reason, increasing inequality, devastating unemployment and the rise of obscurantist, xenophobic and misogynistic discourse, militarism, as well as the unprecedented ecological crisis, meaningful education interventions that address these exigencies are necessary.

An unjust world is not inevitable. We are often admonished with the demand to produce an alternative, or confronted with 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. Alternatives and possibilities raised during the struggle against apartheid must be re-examined.

For example, on the question of the clustering of schools, Alexander worked with progressive urban planners (Smit and Hennessy 1995) on a plan for overcoming the spatial apartheid nature of the city of Cape Town, acting as a pilot for other cities in South Africa. 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) commented:

> 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 proposed concrete alternatives and demonstrable possibilities in the present. Going beyond social critique and academic

analyses—beyond the boundaries constructed by the requirements of conventional scholarship since engagement was inseparable from serious scholarly activity—he combined theoretically plausible arguments with the actually existing realities of contemporary pedagogical practices. For Alexander, the academy not only had the responsibility to stimulate activism and democratic practice through the rigorous production of knowledge and the practice of teaching, but also it had the responsibility to be accountable to communities.

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. Climate change denialists and many who think that we will find technological solutions via 4IR should bear the following in mind: in order to keep warming below 2 degrees Celsius would require 10 new carbon capture plants to open every week for 70 years. There are currently 18 plants worldwide. In the meantime, the United Nations thinks that by 2050 there will be at least 200 million climate refugees and in the worst-case scenario a billion. The poorest countries, which have caused the least pollution, will bear the brunt of the suffering and already do (see, for example, Gooding 2019).

The pressure of competitiveness and marketing, the seduction to own the latest car or biggest house, and the temptations of conspicuous consumption are not helped by the example of yesterday's struggle icons. So how can educators empower young people to see through the deception and glitz, to see the values of solidarity, justice, and 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 where, as Alexander (2013, 44) argued, "enough is as good as a feast", than living in an inequitable one? How can we help to recognise the violations in the continuing violence against women, children, LGBTI+ people and those we deem "foreign" who are scapegoated because of politicians' incompetence?

To answer at least some of these questions, Paulo Freire called on us to imagine a world that is less ugly, more beautiful, less discriminatory, more democratic, less dehumanising, and more humane. Macedo (2005, 11) wrote in his introduction to *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that Freire, with his hallmark humility, taught us what it means to be an intellectual. Freire taught us the meaning of a profound commitment to fight social injustices in the struggle to recapture our lost dignity as human beings. "We need to say no to the neoliberal fatalism 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" (2005, 11).

The structural conditions imposed by neoliberalism and its dismissal of the link between poverty and inequality to education, together with deeply entrenched institutional factors, have a profound impact on development which impedes the possibilities for progressive and transformative education and training. It is also true that the social

fragmentation consequent on the racist policies of the apartheid state and the intractability of its effects which have passed into the post-apartheid state cannot be wished away. Yet, as in the struggles against apartheid education, in the post-apartheid era organisations such as the ERP, PPEN and Equal Education offer valuable lessons. The collaboration between progressive academics, non-governmental organisations and research centres based at universities with communities whose education rights are being systematically violated is an integral part of the work of the democratisation of education. These efforts have increasingly given communities the tools to inform, direct, own and use research to claim a space in the formal policy arena and to demand accountability from state actors.

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

Events in the recent past among youth and students are certainly suggestive of a new generation, in the now very popular epigram of Fanon, attempting to fulfil its mission. It does signal a new consciousness among important layers of youth, students and workers, but also exasperation with the sophistry of the ruling party, frustration at thwarted hopes, the everyday injuries of mere survival under racial capitalism, the failure of an economic system which increases inequality and unemployment, the venality of politicians and the brazen excesses of cronyism.

With all its contradictions and complexities, the FeesMustFall movement has opened up critical debates at a number of institutions—not just universities—about the purpose of education in relation to the idea of transformation and decolonisation in a situation of the global marketisation and corporatisation of education. These debates are not just about colonial and apartheid era statues since they relate to a raft of other issues all of which go to the root not only of education but also of society, including symbolic representation, structural racism and interpersonal prejudice, class inequalities, demographic issues, heteronormativity, patriarchy, "whiteness", the culture of institutions, language, culture and knowledge, the questioning of the curriculum, power and history. The debates and alternatives suggested could be built upon towards the achievement of free quality public education from pre-primary to higher education.

In forging meaningful alternatives and possibilities for education today, we often have to also look back. The book *Under-Education in Africa: From Colonialism to Neoliberalism* (Hirji 2019) 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. These intellectuals championed decolonisation and, while critically supportive of President Julius Nyerere's humanism and policies of *Ujamaa*, they also warned of the dangers of neocolonialism. Their critiques, celebrated as the "Dar es Salaam Debates", remain germane to revitalising the African academy today. In these bleak, dire and precarious times, with constant assaults on reason and education for liberation, the book is an antidote to despair. Hirji's injunction not to lose hope is also a clarion call to action and is rooted in the firm belief that "the struggle is a long term one; there are bound to be ups and downs. But ultimately, Africa and its people will triumph" (2019, 259).

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