

GRADE 12 EXAMINATION RESULTS' TOP 20 POSITIONS: THE NEED FOR THE CREATION OF SUSTAINABLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN ALL SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Why do African learners continue to be underrepresented in the top 20 positions of the Grade 12 examination results, and what can be done to remedy the situation? Yosso's notion of community cultural wealth shows that it is because our education continues to exclude the African learners' ways of knowing and being that the situation remains as it is. Analysing discourses of top performing white former Grade 12 learners, their teachers, their parents and their former African classmates, indicate that including modes of knowing of all learners in the curriculum irrespective of their race, class, disability or gender may help to create more socially just schooling, which is reflective of sustainable learning environments.

Keywords: community cultural wealth, critical discourse analysis, cultural capital, education for social justice, learner performance, sustainable learning environments.

1. INTRODUCTION

Africans who constitute over 91% of the total population in the North West province of South Africa (where this study was conducted) hardly ever make up 5% of the learners who achieve the top 20 positions in the Grade 12 examinations results in that region (Mahlomaholo, Mamiala, Hongwane, Ngcongwane, Fosu-Amoah, Itlhopheng, Mahlomaholo, Mokgotsi and Kies, 2010). This is, in spite of the fact that South Africa, since the advent of democracy in 1994, set for itself the objective of advancing the agenda for social justice anchored on the principles of equity, freedom, peace and hope.

To understand what social justice refers to, Gerwitz (1998) provides a list of at least five forms of oppression which it (social justice) negates, namely: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. Based on the above, social justice can thus be understood as the removal of all the above irrespective of whether they occur at the level of the individual, the institution or even the social or cultural group (Adams, 2007). The above forms of oppression point to two ways in which social justice can be conceptualised, namely: as either redistributive or relational (Gewirtz, 1998). Understanding social justice as redistributive would be limited to ensuring that the Africans have equal access, for example to: property, material and non-material resources to the same extent as their white compatriots (Hardiman and Jackson, 2007).

However, a more complete understanding of social justice is one that includes redistributive elements but also goes beyond these to include the aspect of relationships of respect and fairness among people (Hardiman and Jackson, 2007).

The years of the apartheid regime were marked by institutionalised disrespect, exploitation and the marginalisation of Africans as individuals and as a social and cultural group (Bereng, 2007). This period involved ideological control as well as domination of the social institutions and resources by the white section of the population at the expense of the Africans (Duncan, 2005). This resulted in the conditions of privilege to the former as the agent group of oppression, and the disenfranchisement and exploitation of the latter as the target group (Hardiman and Jackson, 2007). These social distinctions, in spite seventeen years of the new democratic dispensation, continue to bedevil South African society (Duncan, 2005). The agent group continues to define and name reality, especially concerning the language of teaching and learning in schools, the content of the curriculum, as well as the economic power, to mention a few (Apartheid Project, 2009). Social justice therefore could be understood as reversing the situation in an additive manner so that the Africans' way of knowing and being is part of the curriculum as well. This as a starting point could help stop the exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence meted out against Africans as the target group (African National Congress, 2009).

Evidence that there is a social justice agenda to facilitate the above is contained in the stipulations of the Constitution, the many legislative imperatives and policy directives of the new South African state (for details see Mahlomaholo, 2010). In pursuance of this objective therefore, as well as in keeping with practices, experiences and research findings across the globe (for details see Mahlomaholo, 2010), South Africa (including the North West province) has identified the provision of quality education for all as central to the whole national transformation project from the apartheid past towards a socially just society (Buanews South Africa, 2008; Department of Education, 2009). The main argument is that through the provision of quality education for all it will be possible to redistribute privileges, wealth, health, jobs and job creation opportunities, material and non-material resources, as well as relationships of power equitably and fairly among all citizens towards a socially just nation (Gewirtz 1998). This intent has led to the phenomenal increase in the national, thus provincial budgets for education. As an example, in another study it is noted that:

... there has also been massive injection of funding into this 'education project' by the democratic government to the tune of close to 6 % of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the North West Province for example, spent R2 725 per learner in 1998 and this has increased to R 7 740 per learner in 2008, irrespective of race or class... these levels of funding that encompassed all learners were not known as the white child was subsidised to 15 times the amount spent on an African learner before 1994 (Mahlomaholo, et al., 2010: 13).

The above notwithstanding, the social injustices of the apartheid era continue to rear their heads and are manifest in the exceptionally high levels of failure rates and early school leaving, as well as attendant poverty among Africans in the North West province (Mahlomaholo, et al., 2010). Even in instances where African learners are taught in the same classrooms, by the same teachers, through similar curriculum content (as it is the case in the former exclusively white model C schools), African learners still do not perform to the same high levels as their white counterparts (Mahlomaholo, et al., 2010). The Grade 12 examination results, which are the barometer of how well our education system is performing, attest to the continued underrepresentation of African learners in the top 20 positions of high performers and the question therefore remains: why is that so and how can the problem be resolved? Asking these questions is important for the attainment of a socially just society where the distribution of resources and relationships of respect and dignity among people are fair and just.

2. AIM AND OBJECTIVE OF THIS PAPER

In this paper I argue that the recurrent social injustices reflected and reproduced through the underrepresentation of African learners in the top 20 positions in the Grade 12 examination results are the residues of our racist apartheid past that continue to couch and inform our educational discursive practices. In order to contribute meaningfully towards the amelioration and the resolution of these, I propose that sustainable learning environments for social justice be created in our schools, using Yosso's (2005) notion of community cultural wealth as both the theoretical framework and the guiding principle. My proposition is based on the fact that Yosso's theory provides a basis for including Africans' 'way of knowing and being' in the curriculum in a manner which is compatible with the already existing Critical Cross-field Outcomes – CCFOs as defined in South Africa's educational legislative imperatives and policy directives as being to:

Identify and solve problems in which responses display that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made; Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, community; Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively; Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information; Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation; Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others; Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation. Bender, Daniels, Lazarus, Naude and Satter, 2006: 40 – 45).

3. COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Yosso's (2005) notion of community cultural wealth finds its explanatory power when one looks at it against the background of Bourdieu's (1986) idea of cultural capital.

For example when the latter is faced with the problem of African learner underrepresentation in the high performing category as indicated earlier, the explanation would be found in the perceived deficiencies which these learners are assumed to have compared to their white counterparts (Cross, 2005). The argument would be that African learners do not have the requisite habitus or cultural and individual disposition to education to the same extent that their white counterparts have it (Cole, 2004; Cross, 2005; Sue, 2005). In fact, many studies (see for example Bettinger and Bridget, 2009; Brussow, 2007) have been conducted to demonstrate how African learners because of their inferior culture, poor schooling and subaltern socio-economic backgrounds lack the requisite readiness to tackle complex subject contents and learning at subsequent levels of education.

On the other hand white learners, who have enjoyed a privileged existence from birth, through to well-resourced schooling for generations, are assumed to have the necessary orientation to schooling to do exceptionally well therein (Utsey, Ponterotto and Porter, 2008). They are regarded as having the required cultural capital because they come from and live within the same social circles of privilege and are therefore compatible with the culture of their teachers and the curriculum; thus, their positive disposition (Gewirtz, 1998). Against this dominant position, Yosso (2005) contends that irrespective of one's background there is still a wealth of culture that every one of us has which we bring to the classrooms, and the difference in performance might be due to the extent to which that wealth is valued (or not) in schools when it comes to assessing what constitutes useful knowledge (Cole, 2004; Delgado, 2002; Utsey, Ponterotto and Porter, 2008). Yosso (2005) goes on to show how the underclass learners, who are usually at the bottom rung of the academic performance ladder, still show exceptional navigational capital when finding their way around complex and often dangerous contexts in their neighbourhoods. These learners are able to navigate themselves around extreme instances of poverty and deprivation and still manage to eke out an existence there-from (Gewirtz, 1998). They also were found to have a lot of strength of character that kept their hopes and wishes alive for a better future in spite of the vicissitudes besetting their lives (Cole, 2004). They had this aspirational capital (Yosso 2005) that insulated them against the helplessness of their situations. This strength seemed to derive from their very close linguistic, social and family networks (capitals) that continued to validate them in spite of being undermined, neglected and sometimes marginalised in formal schooling (Yosso, 2005). These learners could also find strength from their preparedness and capital to resist and to stand up against these forms of social injustices (Gewirtz, 1998). These capitals, according to Yosso, were unfortunately not recognised and capitalised upon in schooling which seemed to be oriented more towards the cultural capital of the white learners away from the cultural wealth of the subaltern learners.

According to Yosso therefore, African learners may be underrepresented in the top performing positions not because of their inferior cultural capital but because their community cultural wealth is not valued as it is authored in contexts different from those appreciated and reinforced in formal schooling (Miller and Donner, 2000).

Ladson-Billings(1998) in agreement with Yosso argues that African learners are actually owed huge amounts of educational, social and economic debt because their experiences, fears, and aspirations have, for a very long time been undermined, excluded and marginalised from mainstream schooling. This debt which is directly linked to the history of the social injustices of colonialism, apartheid and racism has to be addressed if social justice is the ultimate objective of education (Bulhan, 1993; Cabral, 1994; Gewirtz, 1998; Loring, 2005; Nicholas, 1993). A regime of truth created in institutions of learning such as schools which served to exclude African learners, still continues to inform educational theory and practice to date (Bulhan, 1993; Cabral, 1994; Cole, 2004; Fréjuté-Rakauskienė, 2006; Keswel, 2004; Nicholas, 1993; Utsey, Ponterotto and Port, 2008). The solution seems to lie in the creation of sustainable learning environments in schools.

A sustainable learning environment, as an example, would therefore be a school, which through its socially just classroom practices, makes it possible for all learners to achieve beyond what could have been imagined as their fullest potential (Mahlomaholo, 2010; Makhalemele and Molewa, 2005; Malcolm, 2004). It is that caring and empowering environment where teachers play their facilitation roles effectively, taking each learner's background knowledge into consideration as a basis for creating learning opportunities and customising the learning content thereto (DoE 2009; Eylon 2004). In sustainable learning environments teachers are able to operationalise the objectives of socially just, learner-centred learning, to their fullest (De Corte, 2000; De Corte, Verschaffel, Entwistle and van Mirriënboer, 2003). In such environments teachers are experts in their subject disciplines and in effective pedagogy to deliver them (DoE, 2009; Duit and Treagust, 2003). They ensure that learning is supported in the home, in the school and in the community generally. What learners know from their homes is thus valued and validated as true and useful knowledge at school.

4. METHODOLOGY

Empirical data presented and analysed in this paper were obtained as part of the study commissioned by the NWED (Mahlomaholo, et al., 2010). The NWED had given the necessary permission for the interviews to be conducted after informed consent was obtained from the parents and the former teachers of the top 20 learners in the 2009 Grade 12 examination results, as well as the learners themselves. All these participants were white.

Thus, in order to get a balanced picture, I also obtained permission and informed consent from the 10 African learners who were their classmates at some of the same 25 NWED former model C schools which consistently obtained the top Grade 12 examinations results over the past 10 years at least. The African learners had obtained good Grade 12 pass results and were studying at the North West University (see Mahlomaholo, et al., 2010). Anonymity was assured, and all the relevant ethical considerations were observed so as not to harm the participants in any way possible. They were assured that they could refuse to respond to questions or even drop out of the study without any adverse consequences.

I conducted individual telephonic interviews with only 10 of the top 20 learners when it became apparent from their conversations that their reasons for performing exceptionally well in their studies were mostly identical. They also provided similar reasons for the under representation of African learners in the top 20 category. These 10 white learners were at different universities across South Africa and were spread out over a number of academic disciplines. The interviews lasted for an average of 20 minutes. I also talked to the parents of these 10 top performers telephonically for close to 15 minutes each. I then physically visited the schools of the respective top 10 learners to talk to their teachers in person. These interviews lasted an hour at most. Finally, I conducted a focus group interview with 10 African learners at the North West University for close to 2 hours. For all these conversations I used Meulenberg-Buskens' (1997) Free Attitude Interview Technique (FAI) wherein I asked two main questions, namely: why are you performing as well as you are and why are there so few or no African learners in the top 20 positions of the Grade 12 examination results in the NWED? I followed up the responses with clarifying questions and reflective summaries to encourage and focus the conversations respectively. All interviews were tape recorded for transcription and closer analysis later. Then I analysed each transcription using Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis strategies (Mahlomaholo and Nkoane, 2002; Van Dijk, 2007; 2009). This enabled me to use the spoken/written word as evidence as I proceeded to the discursive practice and social structural levels to unearth the deeper meaning making repertoires of each participant. To present the findings, I found Yosso's notion of the 6 capitals, constituting community cultural wealth, very useful as organising principles for the themes that emerged from the analysis of all the above-mentioned conversations.

5. THE FINDINGS AND THE DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Alienating Context

During my visits to the schools of the top performing learners referred to above (former model C schools), I noted that the surroundings were especially supportive of white, and not so much of African learners: thus, the socially unjust and differentiated performances under scrutiny.

As a starting point, the language of learning, the discursive practices (or culture) and the teaching corps at these schools were exclusively white. A teacher at one of these schools explained that they had actually identified one African person to join their teaching staff in the future, but that at that moment, he was still undergoing training at the local university. This person was chosen from among the former learners at the same school because as one of the teachers explained:

Quotation A: We are under pressure from the government to appoint people from other racial groups, but we do not want the SADTU type African teachers here. We wanted somebody who knew the culture of this school and who would adhere to it. You see, we do not want trouble makers. We want hard working teachers who are subject content specialists and have the necessary teaching skills as the rest of us.

Furthermore, the names on the lists of honour and the pictures on the walls in the identified schools' hallways were those of former learners, teachers and parents, all of whom were white; these constituted the influential constituency in the local business, economic and school settings. The African learners, on the other hand, constituted less than 25% of the total learner population at these schools. No picture of an African teacher, parent or learner was hung on the walls. This was a clear deficit on the part of the African learners already.

5.2 Navigational Capital

The above quotation A demonstrates that African learners enter the socially unjust learning processes as outsiders, from a position of disadvantage. White learners are more privileged; they already know the context of learning which is totally compatible with and similar to their own homes. This gives them power to perform well. They can both physically and cognitively navigate their way around these familiar terrains. Some of the teachers are actually their parents or family friends. They all move in the same social and cultural circles. One teacher even remarked that:

Quotation B: African children who come to this school come from township schools and as such, come here with a backlog in as far as the medium of learning is concerned. They arrive here not able to speak the language well. We try our best to bring them up to scratch, but as you know it takes time to achieve these kinds of things. Even just the culture of learning; they are not used to the high standards of hard and independent work which we try to cultivate here. They take time to adjust to that culture. We have to organise extra tuition for them which most of the time they are not able to utilise because of transport problems. They use taxis to commute from home to school and these taxis cannot wait for them if they have extra work to do at school; besides, they also come from far and they say they are afraid to arrive late at their respective taxi terminuses for fear of being mugged or raped. So there are many problems.

Based on the above, it is easy to agree with Bourdieu (1986; Laureau, 1987; Lin, 1999) about the deficiencies and deficits which African learners have in terms of their cultural capital; thus their underrepresentation in the top performing categories.

However, one has also to be aware of the power of the discourses and the distorted ideologies of our apartheid past at play here which continues to define Africans in negative terms (Apartheid Archives Project, 2009). African teachers are seen as less competent and as trouble makers. African learners are regarded as obviously having a background of disadvantage generated in their dangerous neighbourhoods; thus their struggle to adjust to the superior culture of schooling (Apartheid Archives Project, 2009). This perspective forgets to give these African learners credit for having survived and resisted the odds of crime, poverty and exclusion to the extent that they are still present in the same classrooms with their more privileged counterparts who have not had to overcome so many odds. In fact, none of the parents and/or teachers interviewed was able to see how much the African learners had already achieved in terms of their navigational capital that saw their being able to find their way and learn in contexts that unjustly treated them as foreigners in terms of language and culture (Bulhan, 1993; Cabral, 1994; Cole, 2004; Fréjuté-Rakauskienė, 2006; Keswel, 2004).

Evidence for the existence of this navigational capital among African learners becomes apparent from quotation C below where one of them notes that:

Quotation C: We live in these two different worlds. From the afternoon until the following day we have no access to information as in the internet. We are very busy most of the time with household chores. I have to go to the shops to buy this and that for the family. I have to clean the house, wash the dishes and generally do real work. When I finally have to start with my homework I have no energy left. My white classmates do not have to do all these; there is a domestic worker, there is unlimited access to the internet, and there are serious social networks of her parents who make sure that she does not fall by the wayside. There is positive pressure all the time for them to do well and succeed. But for me if I work hard, I really look like a freak in the township. Every other girl my age has a baby or is about to have one. Education is not so important because there are other ways of getting money.

This African learner, in spite of the negative stereotypes shared earlier about African learners, seems to know the reasons militating against her academic performance. She has managed to navigate her way around the obstacles and has developed some sort of schedule that enables her to manage her time effectively to an extent. That she has managed to gain a pass in Grade 12 that enabled her to study the Sciences at a university demonstrates how successful she has been thus far, to find her way around the new and sometimes alienating university environment. These African learners have had to overcome their own under-resourced home backgrounds, as well as at the former model C schools, but this capital is not recognised nor built upon at school.

5.3 Resistance Capital

The same quotation C above shows how African learners have developed mechanisms to resist their own marginalisation and powerlessness and the challenges are many. For example, there is no time to study and there is no ready access to recent and useful information.

There is no enabling environment at home that encourages her to do well. In fact, the pressure is not to study, but this learner has resisted all these distractions. Her resilience has enabled her to emerge victorious. If the situation had been more supportive, it is possible that her performance would have been better. On the other hand, these learners continued to strive for better education; they continued to resist the attempts and processes that worked to undermine them and their ways of being.

In her own words she recounts how she joined the former model C school with a deficit in terms of what was required. Such a situation would normally discourage a learner to the extent that she would leave school. However, in her case she persevered in spite of her obvious limitations.

Quotation D: I started school in Grade 1 but when I finally arrived at these former model C schools I found out that all my white classmates had good preschool education where they learnt and studied and read and conducted projects. You know, in our townships even when children go to preschools, they merely go there to eat and sleep and occasionally recite a few things because invariably, people who conduct classes at these crèches are not even teachers, let alone qualified as such. It is a big drawback for us not to have proper family support and good basic and foundation knowledge which our white friends have had. We already come to school from behind and it is not easy for the majority of us to catch up.

5.4 Aspirational Capital

From the above quotation D and the subsequent one, African learners demonstrated great hope that one day their future would improve. They were even ready to sacrifice the immediate comfort of their familiar language and neighbourhood in pursuit of education at these former model C schools (Utsey, Ponterotto and Porter, 2008). They ventured into the unknown and sometimes not very welcoming environments. They achieved some success which could increase with time. In fact, African learners are not mere victims; they are aware of the odds they face and they seem to be trying hard to overcome them. One of those interviewed went on to note that:

Quotation E: Even at these former model C schools you find that there is a culture which is entrenched there. They know one another. I mean, the children and the teachers and the parent communities have been together and interacting with one another for so many years, whereas with us it is just me and my poor black friends who, just like me, have just arrived and have no significant roots in the school. I may hide it, but somehow I feel as if I do not really belong. It is not as if people are racist or something, but it is that feeling that all symbols here are not reflective of me, my people and where I come from.

The African learners' way of knowing and being are not reinforced, valued and/or validated at these schools. They have to assume a different identity for them to keep their aspirations alive.

5.5 Familial and Social Capitals

Another important factor that requires attention is the involvement of parents and families in the education of their children. White teachers and their learners have confirmed almost unanimously that the parents and families were there for them all the time and that was why the latter managed to perform as well as they did. They were there to provide linguistic grounding, a basis for social networking and the provision of material resources such as computers at home with access to internet facilities. Parents provided them with role modelling experiences of hard work and aiming very high in life, as well as continuing to provide emotional support. One of these high performing white learners observed that:

Quotation F: My parents are my heroes. They always show me the way. They have helped me to see and know the differences between good and bad; that is, between hard work and laziness. When I have not done my homework, they would be there to remind me to look at my time table and encourage me to be focused.

The above was confirmed by one of the teachers who continued to also raise very important issues about African parents, in these words:

Quotation G: I know that this is controversial, but I have to say that black parents are not always there to support their children. At some stage the school did send letters to invite the parents of some of the black learners who were having problems with their studies. Out of a total of five, only one parent came and this was after two week.

To corroborate the above, one African learner decried her situation thus:

Quotation H: Our own black families are not able to support our own learning to the same extent that white families do for their children. For example, at home my mother arrives very late from work and she is a single parent and there is nobody to support me and make sure that I do my homework after school.

African learners, under these circumstances, indicated that they had to improvise and 'create' their own family by establishing closer relationships with their peers and their peers' parents to make up for this limitation. They went beyond their 'normal' family bounds to seek support, even from their teachers at times.

5.6 Linguistic Capital

The African learners interviewed were able to interact and communicate with a wider circle of social networks, comparatively speaking, because many of them were fluent in at least four languages. The only problem is that the mentioned circle is invariably in the underclass, less recognised and not an influential social category. Unfortunately, because these languages are also not valued and validated as media of learning and of the economy, African learners do not derive the necessary mileage from this competency. This fact, more than anything else, attests to the way their community cultural wealth continues to be disregarded and undermined.

One learner concluded the conversation with this observation:

Quotation 1: For you to succeed at school you have become like white, which thing you can never achieve because there are real white learners who are anyway, ahead of us already. Can we catch up? Not in a million years! We take time to adjust to the experiences and the languages of the school while our white compatriots are already way ahead. It is sad but that is the reality of the situation.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Responding to problems of an alienating context

To resolve these anomalies may require improving the socio-economic status of African learners and their families. More opportunities for entrepreneurship, as well as jobs for the African parent communities may also have to be made available in order to enable them to support their children and to be there for them in their learning. If these cannot be achieved immediately, it would thus be important to recognise that African learners are owed a huge amount of debt (Ladson-Billings, 1998), to the extent that in spite of their being in the majority in the country, they are still invisible in some schools and are underrepresented in the top achieving categories. This realisation should encourage schools to provide extra effort to scaffold them to levels of performance they are capable of, but are hitherto denied them due to our unfortunate history. Schools, as explained earlier in this paper, have to be more invitational and empowering to all learners if the principles of social justice are to be successfully operationalised (Aldridge, Fraser and Ntuli, 2009). The learner and teacher populations at schools have to be made representative of the national demographics. Closer partnership between schools and African communities need to be forged so that the fears, experiences and aspirations of the latter can find expression in what goes on in the schools under discussion. In fact, creating such sustainable learning environments seem to promise a more socially just education and society (Eylon, 2004).

6.2 Navigational Capital as basis for improvement

Schooling currently seems to represent a foreign environment to African learners mainly because there are no concerted efforts to fully implement and operationalise the CCFOs. The data above show that African learners, like every other learner, already possess a wealth of knowledge which only needs to be recognised and validated. For example, one of the CCFOs requires that learning should result in citizens who can identify problems and solve them in a manner showing that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made. African learners have shown their capability in this direction in terms of the six capitals discussed above. Curriculum and its provision only have to build onto these competencies and refine them in terms of school-based knowledge.

6.3 Aspirational capital as basis on which to build

For African learners to perform as well as others, it would seem that schools would also have to be converted into sustainable learning environments where all people are valued; their background, their hopes, their aspirations and their achievements recognised and validated equally (Eylon 2004). Schools should be encouraged to forge closer ties with all parent communities irrespective of race or social class so as to enable all learners to experience a sense of social justice which seems to be so fundamental in generating a sense of belonging and an ownership of the learning processes (Auerbach, 2001).

Teachers from all racial groups also have to be included as staff so as to debunk myths and negative stereotypes, provide role modelling and generally, empathy with learners coming from different socio-cultural and economic contexts. Issues of race and the competency of teachers need to be discussed openly and challenged head-on for the sake of a better and socially just educational provisioning (Fréjuté-Rakauskienė, 2006). There has to be focused attempts to encourage collaboration among all learners and teachers, but most importantly, with the African communities, so that all learners can see themselves as members of teams and school organisations. This approach will assist in keeping the African learners' aspirations alive and for them to see themselves as valued members of their schools and communities.

6.4 Familial and Social Capitals

What seems to emerge from the above discussions is the value and importance of the support which the families and parents give to their children in order for them to do well at school (Auerbach, 2001). However, African learners do not seem to have this in sufficient quantities. This calls for schools through committed teachers and parent organisations such as the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) to compensate for this need if the social networks of extended family arrangement among African communities are unable to fill this gap. Schools, as the CCFOs dictate, have to attempt to contribute to the full personal development of all learners, as well as the social and economic development of the whole society. Schools have to find ways of visiting parents in their own homes and communities so as to ensure their involvement in the learning of their children. Creative strategies should be initiated to encourage African parents in particular, to become part of the educative process.

6.5 Linguistic Capital

Given the situation described above, it seems imperative for schools to create sustainable learning environments marked by social justice where distributive and relational forms of justice are the guiding principles.

I refer to distributive justice because all learners need to be understood in their own right and in the context of their own language(s), thus giving them equal rights, privileges and opportunities to succeed. I also refer to relational justice by way of pointing out that respect and dignity may return to African learners' heightened performance only once their languages are accorded the same status as all the others; that their ability to speak more languages than one is valued and validated formally in schooling. The languages of African learners which constitute the reservoir of their way of thinking and of doing could also open up many possibilities for knowing content and knowing one another as equal citizens of a democracy as envisioned in the critical cross-field outcomes of learning and in the constitution of the land. Teachers have to take the lead to know and understand the languages of the African learners as well.

7. CONCLUSION

The above discussion has attempted to explain why, in spite of South Africa's concerted efforts to create a more socially just schooling and social system, we are not totally succeeding. One example to illustrate this point is that of the continuing racially differentiated representation of learners in the top 20 positions of the Grade 12 examination results. Learners who do perform well at this level are assured admission to the best universities and to lucrative work positions and these continue to be white. More enabling educational legislative and policy imperatives have been promulgated towards ensuring equity and social justice. This has been buttressed by massive financial resources being allocated to equalise educational provisioning which is considered to be the leading catalyst of social change. In this paper I have argued that we need to broaden the spectrum of success to include African learners who are in the majority in the country by recognising, valuing, validating and capitalising on their community cultural wealth in the creation of socially just and sustainable learning environments.

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