

SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR AND THROUGH SUSTAINABLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

If our intention as parents, educators, educationists, researchers and community members is to create sustainability in the learning environments, then social justice is where we should start and where we should aim. Social justice implies that learners and teachers have to be treated fairly and with respect in terms of the distribution of educational and other supportive resources. It furthermore implies that teachers also have to be treated fairly and justly. Thus respect, mutual validation and beneficitation among all participants have to inform the relationships within such learning environments for them to be sustainable and free of inequities, strive, desperation, marginalisation, oppression and depression to mention a few. The above definitely lead to a socially just and democratic citizenry which is the outcome which all nations, especially ours, aspire for.

Milton Molebatsi Nkoane builds on this discussion by providing this volume with the vocabulary to use when researching and talking about social justice as the genesis, process and end product in the creation of sustainable learning environments. Nkoane articulates the voice of the volume clearly as he reflects on the achievement of the democratic citizenry as the ultimate end product in the creation of sustainable learning environments. It is in that space of democratic citizenry where social justice informs the discourses of all. In his own words Nkoane argues that;

...framing social justice in education, I argue here that it can be understood as a set of interrelated practices and education practitioners should organise themselves against any form of exclusion or marginalization, with reference to feminists and postmodernist discourses. ...I suggest that educators should be instrumental to eliminate inequalities. These should be characterised by anti-sexist, antiracist and anti-homophobic curricula...

Latching onto the above, Dennis Francis and Adré Le Roux show how using life histories of student teachers, teacher educators can thus be able to understand how the former's identities, agency, hence social justice education can be constructed successfully for the creation of sustainable learning environments culminating in democratic citizenry. Suriamurthee Maistry concretises Francis and Le Roux's ideas by focusing on what he calls "the integrated pedagogy and curriculum" of social justice which this student teacher might be exposed to if the aim is the cultivation of the abovementioned democratic citizenry through the creation of sustainable learning environments. His argument is that for the social justice project to survive, the curriculum and pedagogy have to trouble commonly held beliefs about disciplinary knowledge so that myths can be exploded and new ways of knowing can be explored for the aspirant student teacher in particular.

Sechaba MG Mahlomaholo informed by the above presents a case study of African learners who are exposed to similar conditions of schooling with their white peers but do not succeed to achieve the same level of academic excellence. Through analysis of discourses from the spoken word, through discursive practices and arriving at the social structural level of analysis, he realises that the African learners carry with them a 'huge debt' owed to them through years of colonialism and apartheid education. To achieve a socially just education hence society free from such differentiated performances, he suggests that sustainable learning environments be created as the antidote. Dipane Hlalele takes on the same theme and realises how the spatial location of learners sometimes creates problems of exclusion from requisite educational opportunities. In his case rural learners are such a category and then his paper suggests psychosocial support as one way in which they can be lifted out of the situation of helplessness. Then Ncamisile Mthiyane's concern is with orphaned learners who are in the same situation as the rural learners. She suggests that self-awareing strategies could assist in the creation of sustainable learning environments leading to social justice.

In conclusion Johnnie Hay interrogates both the biological (medical) and the ecosystemic models as bases and contexts for supporting learners whose academic performance may be lower than expected as discussed above. Towards the achievement of a socially just society through an inclusive education, Hay proposes the integration of both models “according to which the training of multidisciplinary education support services staff should proceed”.

Guest Editors: Sechaba MG Mahlomaholo, Milton M Molebatsi and Dennis Francis