

Can Neoliberalism and School Choice Address Persistent Inequities and Proxies for Segregation in Post-Apartheid Schools?

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Abstract

This paper examines the consequences of school choice policies in post-apartheid South Africa and the reasons these policies have largely failed to achieve greater educational equity – their stated purpose. I highlight recent incidents of racialization, including the arbitrary use of language policies to refuse the admission of Black children to affluent schools to illustrate that school choice in educational reform may not be the answer to school integration and equitable educational opportunities. I argue that neoliberal policies in South Africa have not fully addressed critical issues of equity in education after the demise of apartheid. The reforms encouraged school choice as a mechanism to desegregate schools. Yet the problem of inadequate resources in segregated Black schools and arbitrary language-based admission policies that are used as proxies for racial exclusion in formerly White-only schools have not been directly confronted.

Keywords: Afrikaans; Black schools; formerly White-only schools; Language policies; Neoliberalism; Post-Apartheid South Africa; Racism; School choice;

Introduction

The year 2019 marks the 25th anniversary of the official abolition of apartheid, a hegemonic government system that enforced the institutionalization of White supremacy (Mothlabi, 1985). Different political commentators have analyzed socio-economic progress since 1994 as well as the areas in which this new democracy still struggles, for example the increasing poverty among Black, Brown, and poor communities (Bond, 2005; Desai, 2002). While the political campaigns gearing up for the national elections of May 2019 made all kinds of promises about better lives for all, there were also troubling racial incidents in the nation's schools as the 2019 school calendar begins, which very few of these parties pay attention to.

On January 9, South African news outlets reported on an incident at Laer Skool Scheizer Reneke, an elementary school in the North West Province, where a White teacher was caught on camera segregating children in a kindergarten classroom based on race (Singh, 2019). It was reported this White teacher was immediately suspended while the racial segregation allegation was investigated. According to the news, this teacher was caught on camera grouping together White students at the front of the room while also grouping Black students at a separate table at the back of the room, an act reminiscent of segregation practiced under apartheid schooling.

Just on the heels of the Laer Skool Scheizer Reneke incident, on January 10th, another elementary school in the Limpopo Province was accused of racism. SABC news (2019) reported that some Black parents who had applied for their children to be admitted at Laer Skool Marbel Hall had their children placed on the waiting list, while White students gained admission right away (South African Broadcasting Corporation Digital News, 2019). These admission complaints have become a pattern every beginning of school year. For example, in January 2018 several local news outlets reported on Hoërskool Overvaal in Vereeniging denied admission of Black students (South African Broadcasting Corporation Digital News, 2018). This school is historically designated as White-only and served mainly Afrikaans speaking White communities under apartheid. According to the South African Broadcasting Corporation Digital news, the Ministry of Provincial Education accused this historically Afrikaans-speaking school of sowing

racial divisions when it reopened in the 2018 academic year by refusing to admit 55 Black students who speak English.

As reported by the South African Broadcasting Corporation Digital News, 2019, the Provincial Ministry of Education was quoted saying that Afrikaans is a separatist language with a legacy of “sorrow and tears” that was used as a tool of segregation and discrimination during apartheid. Rightly so, the Provincial Ministry of Education accused Hoërskool Overvaal, its School Governing Bodyⁱ, as well as the White parents in that community of using Afrikaans language as a proxy for racial discrimination to deny English-speaking children, in this case mostly Black, their right to education. The admission policy as stipulated in the South African Schools Act (1996) does allow parents to apply for their children’s admission to any closest public school irrespective of the language they speak. This policy was meant to address decades of educational disparities under apartheidⁱⁱ.

I begin with these recent school admission controversies to show that school choice as an education reform policy in South Africa has failed to address the issue of education equity as it has in other countries with deep-seated history of racism and colonial hegemony (Burch, 2017; Gonzalez, 2017; Lipman, 2011; Ndimande & Lubienski, 2017, Windle, 2017). The purpose of this paper is to examine these educational inequities mainly caused by inadequate resources in Black township schools. Another problem is caused by some White principals who use arbitrary language policies to deny Black children access when they participate in school choice.

I argue that inequalities of resources between Black public school and formerly White-only schools in post-apartheid South Africa do not only symbolize racial inequalities in education, they are also related to neoliberal education reforms that emphasize school choice, which does not address issues of racial inequalities in education. For example, Black schools still have larger class size, lack science laboratories and related facilities, and their spending budget is much less than formerly White-only schools (Ndimande, 2006). First, I discuss a brief history of educational inequalities under apartheid, including the complicated history of Afrikaans language in South Africa. Second, I discuss the recent education reforms in post-apartheid South Africa and problematize its focus on school choice rather than the historical resource inequities between public schools that serve Black communities and those that serve White communities. Third, I argue that school choice has obscured and distracted us from the real problem of resources and thus implicitly perpetuates racial discrimination and the denial of educational access to Black children in South Africa.

The History of Education in South Africa and the Role of Afrikaans Language

The history of education in South Africa and the role of Afrikaans language was characterized by racial laws of segregation and discrimination under apartheid. Apartheid was a hegemonic government system that enforced the institutionalization of White supremacy and racial discrimination (Biko, 2002; Motlhabi, 1985). It legislated and enforced racial categories - Blacks, Coloured, Indians, and Whites - which were also stratified in terms of relations to the social structures, for example, White children had greater access to education as opposed to the children of other racial groups. This racial classification system guaranteed that White supremacy and privilege were maintained, while Blacks, Indians, and Coloured people were treated as second-class citizens. This system was the major factor that created and reproduced deep-seated racial inequalities in South Africa.

Under apartheid, education played a major role in creating racial inequalities and producing White racial dominance. Christie and Collins (1984) assert that this system of education was by far the most repressive education system South Africa had ever experienced:

[It] stipulated that all black schools would have to be registered with the government, and that registration would be at the discretion of the Minister. This measure enabled the government to close any educational [programs] which did not support its aims...The Act

gave wide powers to the Minister of Bantu Education, including control over teachers, syllabuses [syllabi], and any other matter relating to the establishment, maintenance, management and control over government Bantu schools (p. 171).

Christie and Collins (1984) further explained that by 1959 virtually all Black schools (except for a few Catholic schools) had been brought under the central control of the Native Affairs Department and operated in accordance to the laws of Bantu Education. There is a distinction between apartheid education and Bantu education. While apartheid education was a system that enforced segregation of schools among racial groups, Bantu education was an education program enforced in Black schools, an education program that provided inferior education to them.

While the implementation of Bantu Education was mainly ideological, it was also economic. It systematically created social inequalities and poverty among the oppressed because it was designed to restructure the conditions of social reproduction of the Black working-class, stabilizing a Black, urban under-class of semi-skilled laborers in growing industrial cities (Fleisch, 2002). In fact, Kallaway (1984) argued that Bantu Education was aimed at shrinking the minds of Black children by denying them intellectual challenges:

Like the segregated and inferior schooling before it, the new system was intended to prepare Black children for subordinate positions that awaited them in such a way that they were appropriately equipped with limited skills as well as ready to resign themselves to their exploitation (p. 94).

Through both explicit and hidden curricula, Black students and teachers were coerced to become docile supporters and transmitters of the state ideology of social inequality (Kallaway, 1984; Nkomo, 1990). For instance, Nkomo argued that Bantu Education's aim was "to socialize black students so that they can accept the social relations of apartheid as natural. That is, to accept the supposed superiority of whites and their own 'inferiority'" (p. 2).

At the same time, Afrikaans language was enforced as the language of instruction in Black township schools. The history of Afrikaans language in South Africa is complicated and complex. This language was developed within the colonial context and was largely a colonial language. There are different views about the origins of Afrikaans in that country. One of the views is that it originated and developed in the Cape colony as a combination of languages spoken by East Indians, African slaves, and Indigenous KhoiSan people (Alexander, 1989). Other views argue that Afrikaans was derivative from Dutch as early as the 18th century. For instance, du Plessis (2003) maintains that while Afrikaans is influenced by other languages, such as French, German, Khoe and African languages, it largely was influenced by Dutch.

However, in this paper I am not so concerned about its origins as I am about its hegemonic function. The enforcement of this language was perceived by Black teachers, communities, and students as another form of educational subjugation. In fact, Afrikaans was enforced as the official language, not just in public schools, but in all governmental institutions. Fierce oppositions to Afrikaans and an inferior education led by Black students erupted in 1970s (Christie, 1985; Hartshorne, 1992; Naidoo, 1990; Nkomo, 1990). Protests took different forms: some were inside schools while others were linked to broader anti-apartheid events outside schools (Christie, 1985). The historic protest was the 1976 Soweto uprising, where Black students revolted against the use of Afrikaans language as a mandatory language of instruction in all school subjects. Students argued that this was the language of the oppressor and demanded it to be removed as the language instruction. The state police responded with violence and massacred thousands of unarmed Black students on that day. It is, however, ironic that more than four decades later, Afrikaans is still used as a proxy to deny Black children access to education as recently witness at Hoërskool Overvaal and other elementary schools.

Education Reform in Post-Apartheid South Africa

The post-apartheid government adopted a democratic Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996), whose purpose was to transform the long-standing racial inequalities in the nation. It instituted socio-political and economic changes, including changes in education. Since education was crucial (Nkomo, 1990), the government introduced the South African Schools Act (SASA) (South African Schools Act, 1996) whose goals are to repeal all forms of discriminatory education and address the needs of schools that were marginalized under apartheid.

As in many nations where policies for equality of education are being implemented, new challenges soon emerged. Township schools, mostly in poor neighborhoods, that served Black children remained entirely racially segregated and lacked educational resources (Jansen & Amsterdam, 2006; Ndimande, 2006; Vally & Dalamba, 1999). For example, Black schools still have larger class size, lack science laboratories and related facilities, and their spending budget is much less than formerly White only schools (Ndimande, 2006). The funding issue soon became problematic because the government policy to fund all public schools equally turned out to be unfair and biased against historically Black schools. These schools were grossly underfunded under apartheid, while historically White schools enjoyed an abundance of resources, and these accumulated differences continued. Several scholars (Jansen & Amsterdam 2006; Moll 2000; Motala, 2006) have argued that equal funding of schools does not necessarily correlate with equity in resources. Even with the government's recent "pro-poor" funding policy, (Jansen & Amsterdam, 2006; Ndimande, 2006; Sayed & Motala, 2009), inequalities in resources between formerly White-only schools and township schools persisted.

In addition, the school reform policies did not mandate the desegregation of schools. There was no busing, for example, as in the U.S., nor was there a strong rezoning policy that would "force" the issue of Black students accessing schools with better resources (White schools). In theory and according to the law, parents could choose to send their children to any school regardless of race. In practice, White schools determine who gain access to their schools through self-created policies based on high tuition, exclusive language policies ...from which student would be chosen. (Ndimande, 2006, p143).

Although the intention of choice was to implement desegregation, no White parent chose to send their children to Black township schools (Vally & Dalamba, 1999). According to Pampallis (2003), approximately 28% of all South African schools were desegregated, but Black schools did not desegregate. As Pampallis (2003) stated, "Most of the schools that remain uniraical are schools catering to Africans in townships, informal settlements, and former homelands, largely because their paucity of resources makes them unappealing" (p.153).

Education reforms that encourage school choice are influenced by neoliberal policies which focus on consumer choice and competition among individuals and schools (Apple, 2006; Lipman, 2013; Lubienski, 2003). Such policies pay little or no attention to important issues that relate to equitable opportunity in education; for example, equitable resources and access to public schools do not favor some parents over others. School choice policies simply encourage competition, but do not consider those parents who may not be able to navigate the education markets because of their material conditions, for example, working class parents who do not have connection or network with communities whose children attend better schools and often times lack information about such schools. Hence school choice has obscured the difficulties faced by marginalized parents in a country with the history of racial inequalities, such as South Africa.

School choice has created educational problems in South Africa as it relates to issues of access to schools where some White principals and parents prevent the admission of Black children. I believe racializing attitudes are enabled by reforms based on school choice, which do not address the core issues that prevent education equity. I discuss this problem within three

interrelated neoliberal functions that education in South Africa (and in other countries where such policies have been implemented) promote. The first context is the international trends in politics that influence neoliberal social policies. Second, I discuss the philosophies that undergird school choice policies, the ways in which they impede democratic reforms, and their effect on marginalized and Black communities. Third, I problematize the role of neoliberal policies in post-apartheid South Africa and the influence of school choice on education.

International Trends in Education Reform

To understand the South African education reform policies, one must situate the discussion within emerging trends in international politics. South Africa is not immune to international contexts; some of our educational reforms and curriculum policies after 1994 - for example, the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) curriculum—were largely due to the influence of countries such as the United States, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand (Jansen, 1999). In addition, the Department of Education relied heavily on overseas consultants to guide education policy reforms. As Jansen (2002) noted:

The role of American William G. Spady cannot be underestimated in providing to the Department of Education a neat and elegant language for making the consumption of OBE accessible to practitioners. Overseas consultants played a crucial role in developing options for the financing of public education. The role of international consultants is particularly revealing of how international specialists come to influence local policy. Christopher Colclough and Paul Bennell were the two influential finance specialists influencing school funding policy (p. 204).ⁱⁱⁱ

Hence, some parts of the educational reforms were very much associated with and influenced by the international discourses of economy, race, culture, gender, class, and politics.

The economic front in South Africa is associated with global economic institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with goals related to "assimilation" to the global economic culture, rather than policies that address local economic problems within the local contexts. In fact, Giroux (2008) pointed to even harsher realities of the impact of the WB and IMF on other nations, particularly on poor nations: "The restrictions that the IMF and World Bank impose on countries as a condition for granting loans not only impose capitalist values, they also undermine the very possibility of an inclusive and substantive democracy" (p. 4).

In the South African context, Devan Pillay (2002) lamented the following:

The [South African] government has to please a range of interests, including its working-class mass base, the emerging Black elite, predominantly White big business and its allies, and the global investment community. Like other center-left parties, the ANC (African National Congress) has found it difficult to avoid the allure of the global economy, and the logic that all economic and social policy has to be subordinated to the need to attract foreign investment to build the economy. (p. 24)

Brock-Utne (2000) criticized the policies of the World Bank and the IMF in the entire global South. Her argument is that Economic Structural Adjustment Programs (ESAP) introduced in the global South have done more harm than good. Both the WB and the IMF supported and promoted the ESAP. Brock-Utne (2000) argued that the ESAP has been presented as a medicine to some problems in African countries, but do not address the causes of the problems. We [the people of poor countries] are always told that the ESAP would lead to the best economic growth in African countries. We are also told that the ESAP intends to enhance export growth and subsequently the growth of the entire nation. Yet it is also important to remember that the 21st century socio-economic problems of the global South do not exist outside that history of colonial imperialism.

In this context, the global South does not denote nations that are geographically located in the South of the equator. Global South are nations that endure colonialization and European imperialism. These nations are also referred to as “developing countries” yet we must be mindful of the ideological, political, historical, and economic meanings of such a term. Walter Rodney reminded us that the term “developing” became a substitute for the term “underdeveloped.” As argued by Rodney, the term “developing country” was used to erase the unpleasantness attached to the term “underdeveloped country,” yet they both carry the same meaning (Rodney, 1972). Therefore, global South nations are connected to the history of colonialism and imperialism of the past centuries.

The Politics of School Choice

Milton Friedman, an economics professor at the University of Chicago, published an influential essay in 1955 in which he argued that, in order to improve public education, government should not be involved in the running of the schools. Instead, he argued, government should only provide funding for education. He promoted the idea that private agencies should be responsible for running the schools. Friedman’s ideas became popular and have since influenced a number of policy makers and some parts of government. A few decades later, Chubb and Moe (1990) advanced Friedman’s arguments. Like Friedman, Chubb and Moe argued that public schools could be run efficiently if handed over to private agencies. They argued that public schools lack strong organizational structures, which is the result of government intervention and people in government who profit from public schools. For the proponents of this discourse, providing school choice to parents is the best way to access better education, where children and parents can become consumers in the education market.

As a result of this influence, school choice has rapidly expanded as an education policy to reform public schools in many nations around the world. See, for instance, Gonzalez (2017) for school choice policies in Chile; Ndimande (2006) and Pampallis (2003) in South Africa; Corwin and Schneider (2005); Lipman (2011; 2013); Lubienski (2001; 2003) and Miron, Welner, Hinchey, and Mathis (2012) in the United States; Lauder and Hughes (1999) in the United Kingdom; Whitty, Power, and Halpin (1998) in England, Wales, Sweden, Australia, and New Zealand; Windle, (2017) in Australia; and Yoon (2017) in Canada. In the United States, for example, Chicago public schools were rapidly shut down to pave way for private charter and private schools, especially during the tenure of Rahm Emanuel (Lipman, 2011; 2013).

Proponents of school choice further argue that choice will give parents control (in terms of decision-making) over particular schools to the benefit of their children’s education (Chubb & Moe, 1990). They claim that in contrast to traditional public schools where elected politicians have control over educational policies (or in the case of South Africa where schools were demarcated based on race), parental choice related to market-driven schools would improve the education system. Unlike in countries such as the United States, school choice in post-apartheid South Africa was largely a movement from Black township public schools to suburban White public schools, which were desegregated after 1996. Choice did not, however, preclude the movement from public to private schools (Independent Schools in South Africa). This neoliberal agenda for education reform has paved the way for the proliferation of private charter schools in the U.S. (i.e., for-profit schools) and public charter schools (i.e., supported by public funds) to compete with traditional public schools (Sarason, 1998).

Generally, school choice proponents believe that a market-oriented approach would benefit schools and reward parents who could compete “on the level playing field” in which the choice system should operate. A market-orientated approach promotes competition between schools through national testing systems, national curriculum standards, and the relaxation of certification requirements for teachers (Ball, 2003; Lauder & Hughes; McNeil, 2000; Zeichner & Ndimande, 2008).

While this education reform model continues to grow in many nations, it is also questioned and criticized for its contradictions by (re)producing education inequalities. For instance, Miron, et al. (2012) stated the following:

The allure of school choice is, in part, ideological. But the allure is also linked to a very real problem: there exists tremendous variation among neighborhood schools in terms of quality and resources, and access to those neighborhood schools depends on wealth. Lower wealthy families are less able to purchase a residence in the catchment (enrollment) area of high resource, high quality neighborhood schools. Breaking the link between residence and school assignment would seem a logical way of addressing this problem. (p. 1)

Lubienski and Ndimande (2017) have also presented a counter argument regarding school choice. They argue that school choice and competition are not effective remedies for the intractable social and educational challenges in the 21st century, over which parents have little control. They further argue that nations with a history of deep-seated institutionalized racial divisions and social inequalities have seen such policies operate in both intended and unintended ways. School choice takes away support for the common good and replaces it with competition to get into better schools. Since school choice involves competition, it ultimately protects the interests of wealthy communities and neglects the poor; as is evident in this context where the most affected schools are those that serve marginalized children.

The notion that “public education is bad” and “private is good” has been challenged. In the U.S., for instance, research shows very little evidence that school choice or charter schools increase students’ educational outcomes, including the positive social effects of alternative education. In fact, evidence shows to the contrary. Lubienski and Lubienski’s (2014) show that public schools actually do better than private and/or charter schools. Further, they provide valid criticisms regarding the ability of those in control of schools of choice to engineer their criteria for admission, which can have the effect of excluding children by social class, ethnicity special needs, poverty. The findings in the U.S. are similar to that of racial exclusion in South Africa. Simply put, social inequalities can be reproduced through such school admission policies.

Neoliberal Social Policy in Post-Apartheid South Africa

A question ought to be asked: How is it possible that a nation like South Africa, just emerging from apartheid, associates itself with neoliberal ideologies in its reform policies? Bond (2005) argued that even before the dismantling of apartheid, the South African economic landscape had drastically shifted from what he referred to as a popular-nationalist, anti-apartheid project toward the global economic framework largely influenced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund^{iv}. This economic shift subsequently influenced the country’s social policy toward neo-liberalism (Bond, 2005; Desai, 2002; Garson, 2002; Gumede, 2005; Monbiot, 2004; Pillay, 2002). For instance, at the initial stages of the democratic government in 1996, post-apartheid South Africa adopted a neoliberal policy called Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) as the country’s economic policy. According to Gumede (2005), this policy recommended the complete privatization of non-essential state-owned corporations. This policy exacerbated the economic hardship of most marginalized and poor people, especially those living in the townships. For instance, when water was privatized, the effects were soon felt when the water rate was increased in the township of Soweto (Garson, 2002; Monbiot, 2004). Water supply was cut off for most of the residents whose bills were not paid. Although this economic policy was reformed in 2005 and renamed the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative South Africa (ASGISA Annual Report, 2007), the underlying tenets of neoliberalism are still its guiding principles.

The effects of neoliberal ideology on social policy were soon noticed in education as well. In an article titled “The Education Business: Private Contractors in Public Education,” Pampallis (2004) shows how the government has contracted external educational agencies to undertake tasks previously performed by the National Education Department. Although in 1987 this

outsourcing of government responsibility was on a small scale, the role of non-governmental agencies to provide service in the education sector increased after 1994. As Pampallis (2004) stated:

After 1994—for reasons different to those put forward in the 1987 White Paper...government increasingly engaged external educational agencies to undertake a growing range of tasks previously conducted by the education department or not done at all. These agencies included a variety of education NGOs...parastatal organisations such as the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), a growing number of new for-profit educational consultancies, individuals operating as educational contractors and university academics. They also included large multinational consultancy companies...contracts are usually given through the process of competitive tender which treat the various agencies on a more or less equal basis. (p. 422)

The challenges of education reform, especially the insufficient resources in Black township schools should be viewed within this public/private nexus as well as racial exclusion.

The main agenda of neoliberalism is the privatization and marketing of the public sphere so that individuals must compete for their own social mobility and success (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2003; Chomsky, 1999; Lauder & Hughes, 1999; Whitty, et al., 1998). It is claimed individuals would be rewarded according to their ability (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000) to compete in the “free and neutral” terrain called the market.

The neoliberal ideology dates back to the writings of theorists and philosophers such as John Locke and Adam Smith, who argued that the market forces and competition would bring prosperity, liberty, and democracy, if unfettered by government intervention (Chomsky, 1999; Eitzen & Zinn, 2012; Giroux, 2008). Yet others argue that neoliberalism does not consider the unequal social field of power in which this competition takes place. Nor does it recognize the historical social exclusions by which the marginalized groups have been disadvantaged. As Giroux (2008), argued, neoliberal ideology allows a handful of private interests to control much of the life possibilities of those who are socially marginalized. In fact, McChesney (1999) argued that neoliberalism across the world is opposed to participatory democracy and helps to create individuals who feel demoralized and socially powerless.

For neoliberals, as pointed out by Apple (2006), “Public institutions such as schools are ‘black holes’ into which money is poured—and then seemingly disappears—but which do not provide anywhere near adequate results” (p.38). Such ideologies put lots of pressure on institutions supported by public funds, calling for reductions of support for the common good. The neoliberalism problem in South Africa can be best described by Saavedra and Perez (2018) who argued that global North neoliberalism operates as a form of neocolonial imperialism that continues to perpetuate hegemonic relationship with global South populations.

Concluding Remarks

I would like to conclude by describing an incident that occurred at an historically Afrikaans-speaking White school in Vryheid. Although this incident occurred more than a decade ago, its effects are still a vivid reminder that school choice has not done an adequate job to reform education in countries with a history of deep-seated racial discrimination. In the years 1995 through 1998, just after the democratic elections of 1994, a racially charged conflict took place at Vryburg High School, a predominantly Afrikaans-speaking public school in a small White conservative rural town of Vryburg, in the North West province. The conflict started when Black students from Huhudi, a nearby Black township, had to be integrated to Vryburg High School because of an overcrowding problem in their township schools (Odhav, Semuli, & Ndandini, 1999). Upon integration, the school principal, with the help of the predominantly White School Governing Body, arbitrarily used the school’s language policy to exclude Black students.

In addition, the school increased fees in what appeared to be a proxy for access and denial to poor Black students. Vryburg was in the national news following this divisive racial clash at their school. This issue eventually went to court where the Constitutional Court subsequently ruled in favor of the White principal. According to Jansen (2004), this is a specific case where conservative Afrikaner parents in this predominantly White public school sided with their White offspring in trying to deny access to Black students. How many other “Vryburg” cases exist, asks Jansen, that people do not hear or read about?

These are some of the barriers in education reform that cannot be resolved by school choice policies. Black children who are overwhelmingly served by schools with inadequate resources are negatively affected. As Borhat’s (2004) study of labor market and unemployment trends in post-apartheid South Africa shows, schools affected by lack of resources tend to produce students with poor academic skills, which drastically diminishes graduation rates. According to Borhat, the drop-out rate is high (47%) among Black South African children who attend inadequately resourced schools. This fact, in turn, reduces these students’ chances of entering college and lessens their opportunities to enter the skilled and white-collar labor market. Even more troubling is the increasing rate of unemployment among students from historically Black schools. Chomsky (1999) pointed out that “Neoliberal doctrines, whatever one thinks of them, undermine education and health, increase inequality, and reduce labor’s share in income” (p.32).

I also want to point out the glimmer of hope in this new democracy of South Africa. Reversing long standing policies that have brought racial discrimination for many decades is a daunting task. Although the school choice policy has resulted in unintended inequalities, there are other policies for children that have been successful in ameliorating inequalities. For example, the Children’s Rights Act (Children's Act, Act No. 38, 2005) has brought back the rights of marginalized children and families that were denied opportunities in the past (Swadener & Ndimande, 2014).

It is also true that the effort to desegregate schools was a partial victory in the struggle toward equal educational opportunities. But this effort was susceptible to subtle hegemonic tendencies. Apple (2003) reminds us that the processes of discursive and social disarticulation and re-articulation of power, such as partial victories like the desegregation of public schools, can be pulled back so that their critical potential gets lost. The creation of the "common sense" around markets and individual success can work in retrogressive ways in which social inequalities are (re) produced, as school choice seems to be producing an unintended result in South Africa. Although partial victories are noticeable, neoliberalism poses a big threat. It can mask the deep-seated wounds of colonialism and apartheid in a nation making a slow transition to transformative democracy.

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Biography

Bekisizwe S. Ndimande attended school under apartheid education in South Africa. He is currently an associate professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Dr. Ndimande's book, *Privatization and the education of marginalized children: Policies, impacts ad global lessons*, (co-edited with Dr. Chris Lubienski) was published by Routledge in 2017.

ⁱ A School Governing Body (SGB) is an equivalent of the School Board in the United States, although the SGB's powers do not equal those of the School Board. The SGB comprise of

elected members, the principal and co-opted members. Elected membership comes from parents who have children in the school, teachers who teach in the school, and selected students in the eight or higher grades. This Body functions within the confines of the South African Schools Act of 1996.

ⁱⁱ For the upcoming 2020 public school registration, the Ministry of Education in Gauteng Province has introduced the online registration system in an effort to centralize admission and make it transparent to mitigate manipulation by school principals and School Governing Bodies.

ⁱⁱⁱ I am immensely appreciative of the contributions by international researchers and scholars toward the improvement of socio-economic and educational conditions in South Africa and in other Sub-Saharan countries. I am simply raising a point of how the international context and influence has also played a role in shaping local social policy outside the local context.

^{iv} Bond (2005) in particular, provides an insightful analysis of these economic policy changes from apartheid to democracy, especially the introductory chapter, “Dissecting South Africa’s Transition.”

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