
Citizenship and children's education rights in South Africa

Salim Vally

Abstract

This article attempts to understand citizenship and children's human rights in the context of poverty and inequality in South African society. It reviews some of the policy texts pertinent to Early Childhood Development, particularly Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education and White Paper 6 on Special Education. The article speaks to the discrepancy between the existing normative framework of society and its reality. It seeks to do this through a discussion of the 'glossy rhetoric' of education policies and legislation informed by human rights, social justice and a democratic citizenship discourse and the actual realization of this promise.

Introduction

In the book 'Upside Down', the South American writer Eduardo Galeano in his usual lyrical style, writes of the abominations confronting children today as he divines another possible world, one which has its priorities right, a world which should be put 'right side up' (Galeano, 1998). He explains how today's world hands down a death sentence to thousands of children every hour through hunger and disease. Galeano laments that the poor are mostly children, and children throughout the world are mostly poor. "Among the system's hostages, they have it the worst. Society squeezes them dry, watches them constantly, punishes them, sometimes kills them; almost never are they listened to, never are they understood" (Galeano, 1998, p.13). They are manual labour on farms and in cities or domestic labour at home, serving whoever gives the orders. They are little slaves in the family economy or in the informal sector of the global economy where they occupy the lowest rung of the world labour market.

South African children are not an exception. Nearly 60% (11 million) of all children in South Africa live in dire poverty on less than R200 per month

(Berry and Guthri, 2003). For these children, the noble and admirable words in our Constitution that grandly proclaims that every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care and social services is often hollow. In Southern African countries a new cruel twist has been added through the HIV/AIDS pandemic, infecting and affecting millions of young lives.

Karl Eric Knutsson (1997) in his seminal book *Children: Noble Causes or Worthy Citizens?* also makes the salient point that if we wish to understand the situation of a substantial number of children today, we need to look at childhood in all relevant contexts, including processes which influence the conditions of childhood. For Knutsson, the starting point is the environment of 'many poverties'. The landscape of these poverties embraces knowledge, health, and the lack of power over one's own life, social relationships, deficient habitats and the poverty of damaged environments. Knutsson emphasizes "these poverties contribute to the poverty of confidence and the poverty of self-respect and dignity" (Knutsson, 1997, p.20).

In 1998, the Poverty and Inequality Hearings (Chisholm, Motala and Vally, 2003) heard verbal testimonies and received written submissions that provided new insights into the problems confronting children in South Africa. It provided evidence that the inability to afford school fees and other costs such as transport, learning materials and uniforms, were major barriers to formal education for a significant number of families. In one of these submissions, Marcus Solomons, once a political prisoner on Robben Island, and now working for the Children's Resource Centre, argues that children learn primarily through play and yet that activity "which is essential for the development of the child, is for the majority of the children in South Africa, accomplished in the most unhealthy, increasingly dangerous and most unstimulating of environments" (Chisholm, Motala and Vally, 2003, p.472). Solomons points out that the Cape Peninsula has twelve impeccably groomed and manicured golf courses ranked amongst the best in the world. Yet there are no parks for children on the Cape Flats that even come close to the quality and facilities of these golf courses. He indignantly concludes that "what this in effect means is that the average white South African male in the Cape Peninsula (with a few black males joining them of late) has much more playing space than the average black South African child. We cannot think of a better example to demonstrate the immorality of the situation in this country at present" (Chisholm, Motala and Vally, 2003, p.472).

The historical neglect of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in South Africa continues ten years after the first democratic election. According to the South African Human Rights Commission's Fifth Economic and Social Rights Report, "There is nothing in [the Financing Review of Public Schools] on the funding of [ECD] for ages 0 to 6. Currently only 13% of children have access to this crucial level of education, which, according to international research, is vital in preparing learners for subsequent success. [Ad hoc] pilot schemes and vague undertakings made by the DoE to comply with the Education for All targets are not enough" (SAHRC, 2004, p.28).

Many studies have revealed the pedagogical importance of pre-primary education and the correlation between its absence and school failure, dropout and high repetition rates (see for instance Halpern and Myers, 1985; International Development Research Centre, 1983). The lack of access to quality ECD not only impacts negatively on children's development, but also on the ability of the primary caregivers (usually women) to pursue their own income earning, educational and other activities. Despite this understanding, provinces continue to devote meagre resources to ECD. It is also unconscionable that the previous minister of education, Kader Asmal, in his *Tirisano* statement of educational priorities, ignored ECD. The relegation of ECD was consistent with Asmal's confident assertion that, "We in the Ministry are convinced that success in our new policy areas such as ABET and ECD depends much on our success in getting basic education right. We must concentrate on the schools . . ." (ANC, 1998, p.12).

Many thought that Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development (DoE, 2001a) heralded a new dawn for ECD. A critical analysis of this White Paper is thus necessary.

Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education

This White Paper suggested a national schooling system of provision based on a Reception Year for children aged five. A small community-based component was also mooted. Subsidies would be allocated on the basis of 70% of the cost per learner of public primary schools or 54% of the cost per learner in public secondary schools. The White Paper also proposed that all children entering Grade 1 by 2010 would have participated in an accredited Reception Year programme.

In a comprehensive analysis of the White Paper and the policy process leading up to it, Porteus (2001) argues that an unresolved tension between two models of ECD provision existed from the beginning of the formal policy process. These models are:

- Community-based and multi-aged, based on integrated intersectoral provision, and
- School-based emphasizing the provision of a Reception year for one age group.

For Porteus, these two models represent profoundly different ways of conceiving of ECD services. She also questions the way in which the decision to base ECD provision largely in schools and around one age group was made. Prior to the White Paper, a national audit to quantify the scope and nature of ECD service provision and a national pilot project based on the audit was embarked upon. Porteus points to various conceptual weaknesses in the audit and implementation limitations in the pilot. The auditing process focused on verifying the existence of sites from outdated lists rather than aggressively seeking to identify services previously not registered. The audit found that 83% of the 23 482 sites were community based, and almost the same number multi-aged (3-5 years). A mere 17% were school based (DoE, 2001a). Despite these findings, the National ECD Pilot Project was restricted to considering reception year services for five-year-olds and minimal state funding. The criteria for choosing sites in the pilot excluded most services in informal settlements and rural settings. Those sites that were not registered with the government and those that did not have at least 50% of children in the 5-6 year-old age range were eliminated from the pilot. Also, sites that received welfare grants and were part of the nutrition scheme (targeting the lowest income groups) were excluded. Despite the research bias in favour of Reception year programming, over a three period most provinces agreed on the importance of the community, intersectoral support, the non-institutional nature of quality services, multi-age models and the central role of community practitioners.

Contrary to these findings, the ECD policy as conceptualized in White Paper 5 revolves around Reception Year provisioning. This prompted Porteus to speculate that a decision was made before the research was complete and that the proposals in the White Paper undermine “. . .the best advantages of community based centers . . . (the mobilization of community energies) . . .” and embraces the worst aspects of community ECD provision “. . . the low

costs (reflecting neglect rather than purpose) . . .” (DoE, 2001a, p.16). The latter refers to the most problematic aspect of the community based sector, that of systematically underpaid practitioners. The White Paper also does not explore alternative models such as the Impilo Pilot Project in Gauteng, which put forward a financially viable proposal for intersectoral, and multi-age community based family and child centres, providing a model for comprehensive ECD service provision - a model which UNICEF’s ‘State of the World’s Children Report’ saw fit to recognize.

Education White Paper 6: Special Education-Building an Inclusive Education and Training System

Published in July 2001 this White Paper (DoE, 2001b) was preceded by a National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and a National Committee on Education Support Services. Based on deliberations by these bodies, the Education Ministry released a Consultative Paper on Special Education in 1999. White Paper 6 is informed by various submissions made as a result of the Consultative Paper. The proposals in White Paper 6 are directed toward establishing an inclusive education and training system providing more support within mainstream schools for learners with mild to moderate disabilities. Such ‘full-service’ schools will be phased in over time, beginning with the districts involved in a national district development programme. The intention is to convert, in a phased way, approximately 500 out of 20 000 primary schools to full-service schools. It is envisaged that learners who require low-intensive support will receive this in ordinary schools and those requiring moderate support will acquire this in full-service schools. Those who require highly intensive support will continue to receive this in special schools.

Although White Paper 5 mentions a ‘special programme’ targeted at four-year-old children from poor families and/or infected by HIV/AIDS, White Paper 6 is silent on this issue. This is a serious omission given that studies have shown the vulnerability of children below the age of five. It is estimated that the infant mortality rate below five will more than double by 2010 to stand at 99,5 per 1000 (Berry and Guthri, 2003).

Despite the vision of an inclusive system which goes beyond narrow categorization of medical disabilities and learning needs arising from physical, mental or neurological impairments, and now encompasses socio-

economically deprived learners, its implementation is in doubt. Implementing the limited proposals of White Paper 6 still entails considerable costs. Funding implications include the recruitment of about 280 000 out-of-school learners, sustained advocacy, the provision of necessary physical and material resources to convert schools to 'full-service' and, most importantly, the requisite professional development of staff. Given the emphatic dismissal of additional funds to the national education budget in the fiscus, a fully inclusive system is not feasible in the short term. The Department thus proposes a time frame, which will only fully realize its objectives by the year 2021.

Evidence in other countries that have moved toward integration and inclusion suggest that these policies have not produced the kind of changes envisioned (Tshoane, Tleane, Vally and Jansen, 2001). Nor have they sufficiently satisfied the disability rights movement, who see the changes as piecemeal and limited primarily as a result of insufficient resources to accommodate students with disabilities in regular classrooms. Also, the focus of attention is the individual child and not on the education system as a whole, which perpetuates disadvantage. Failure to address these issues results in depoliticising education reform and converting decision making into technical problems to be resolved by experts. These issues are even more acute in South Africa where general inequality is rampant and schooling even for 'able' learners perpetuates unequal social relations which shape and sustain injustice.

Citizenship in South Africa: legislation and policies

Since 1994 a plethora of policies such as the two White Papers discussed above, and legislation have been formulated and which speak to issues of children's human rights and democratic citizenship. While I outline some of the egregious policies that encapsulate the official conceptualization of citizenship, I examine whether these notions address the power relations that saturate society and its educational provisions, the 'storylines' that help shape who we take ourselves to be and become and whether our differences become inequality and hierarchy (Walker, 2001).

Education policies in South Africa, to a lesser or greater extent and through various permutations, encompass and reflect elements of social justice, the need to be internationally competitive (with emphasis on science and technology to develop requisite 'productive' skills) and the imperatives of fiscal restraint (expressed as cost-containment measures and the increasing

marketisation of education). These directly relate to global trends and have the effect of undermining social justice in education often framed in a human rights and democratic citizenship discourse.

A founding principle of our Constitution is common citizenship and the equal enjoyment of an array of citizen rights including freedom of belief, religion and opinion, expression, assembly and association. A range of socio-economic rights including education and the rights of children are emphasized. One year after the first democratic elections the White Paper on Education and Training promised the overhaul of curricula. The new curriculum emphasizes “common citizenship” and the learning area ‘Human and Social Sciences’ aims to produce “responsible citizens in a culturally diverse, democratic society”. A specific outcome in this learning area is active participation in the promotion of a democratic, equitable and just society. Another is that learners will be helped to exercise their responsibilities and rights as citizens.

Enslin (2003) writes that schools are to contribute to citizenship and democracy education through more than the formal curriculum. The South African Schools Act provides for democratic governance of schools with educators, learners and primarily parents working in partnership with the state in deciding the policies and rules that govern their schools. Also relevant to the preparation for citizenship was the initiative of the Minister of Education that established a working group on Values in Education in February 2000. It identified six core values to be encouraged in learners: equity and equal rights, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability and social honour.¹ Based on a report of this group, a Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy was issued the following year by the Department of Education. The Manifesto articulates a framework for values in education which is both attentive to citizenship and strongly focused on the constitution.

Enslin’s analysis does not take into account the disjuncture between the policy as text and the reality as lived. Furthermore, a few educationists have compellingly shown how Curriculum 2005 has worked “counter to its transformatory social aims” (Harley and Wedekind, 2004, p.211). I support

¹ Although the working group was circumspect about the dangers of a xenophobic nationalism and a narrow patriotism, it saw the need to celebrate national trappings such as the flag, anthem and coat of arms in order to build a common identity. It also made the controversial recommendation of a weekly pledge of allegiance at school assemblies (since discarded). Besides being uncomfortably reminiscent of Republic Day vows, the bland pledge might have reduced the intention and substance of the working group’s sentiments to mere ritual without meaning.

the view of Apple and Beane who write that the most powerful meaning of democratic citizenship is formed “not in glossy political rhetoric, but in the details of everyday lives”(Apple and Beane, 1999, p.120). For instance, while School Governing Bodies are portrayed as organs for participation in local, democratic citizenship, the reality is that the decentralizing function of these statutory organs has become a burden for poorer parents.

School Governing Bodies (SGBs) face an invidious situation. To protect the revenue-raising power of the school, it is in their interest to minimize the enrolment of non-paying pupils. For schools serving impoverished communities, the burden of establishing, retrieving and exempting parents from paying fees is particularly onerous. SGBs have become cost and budgeting centers. Many parents on these bodies view their role as co-opted and glorified fund-raisers rather than co-decision makers in educational matters. Many point out that the state is shedding its responsibility for the provision of education and transferring it to the SGBs. Recent amendments to education laws, and developments in the provision of educators confirm this view.

Allowing exemption from paying user-fees to some parents is generally fraught with many complications. Some of these include the fact that procedures involved in obtaining the exemption are often cumbersome; the School Governing Body is often unco-operative, resisting the loss of (scarce and valuable) income; and parents are reluctant to seek rebates as they fear that their children might be ostracised or victimized. Although the South African Schools Act and the Admissions Policy for Ordinary Public Schools make no provision for free basic education, they nevertheless prohibit the turning away of learners whose parents cannot pay, even while these parents can be sued for non-payment; preventing learners from sitting for exams; withholding the reports of learners; excluding them from social and cultural activities at the school; or discriminating against them in any other way. Mandla Seleoane exposes some of the problems associated with this approach.

First it requires a lot of courage to parade one’s poverty, and it borders on the insensitive to expect people to. Part of the argument for enforcing socio-economic rights is precisely that poverty erodes the victim’s dignity and sense of worth. To say that people will only access education for free if they can show that they are poor is out of synch with the rationale for having a justifiable system of socio-economic rights. The approach we have requires people to parade their poverty, the very thing that socio-economic rights are meant to protect them against (Vally, 2002, p.6).

Not only are there various illegal sanctions imposed on poor parents but many simply refuse to forego their dignity, since a condition for receiving an exemption from paying school fees depends on demonstrating their poverty. It is no accident that the National Department of Education's (NDE) Report to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) attributed the high drop-out rate partially to poverty. According to the NDE, while about 1.3 million learners enrol every year for school in Grade 1, only about 570 000 – fewer than half – make it through to Grade 12).

While the infusion of human rights, social justice and conceptions of democratic citizenship in the new curriculum are positive,² the reality is that under conditions where teachers are not provided with adequate training and resources to sustain this initiative, it is akin to providing teachers merely with 'a lamp and three wishes'. It is clear that the conditions and context for effective implementation of both the new curriculum and values in education are not in place in most schools. The rationalization of teachers and the decentralization of the financial affairs of schools have aggravated the extreme resource shortages and the lack of teacher preparedness.

Human rights and education

The human rights approach to education requires recognizing education as a fundamental right that gives rise to governmental obligation to respect, ensure, protect, and promote that right. Rights-based education entails safeguards for

² The Wits Education Policy Unit (EPU), South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), Centre for Education Policy Development, Evaluation and Management (CEPD) submission to the committee that reviewed Curriculum 2005, is also pertinent in its contention that "there is a danger that teachers can practice *laissez-faire* curriculum development which pays little attention, compromises or even excludes content related to human rights and social justice" (2000, p.2 of submission).

Suggestions by the Wits EPU/SAHRC/CEPD submission around content prescription on human rights education and a compulsory anti-discrimination component in pre-service education and in-service courses were not engaged with. For the Wits EPU/SAHRC/CEPD (2000) the practices of human rights education should be:

enabled both through a cross-curricula approach and a dedicated learning area. Given our historic context, human rights education should not be diluted into soft curriculum options, but rather practiced within a strong enabling framework. The two approaches reinforce and are complimentary to each other and also reduce the possibility of marginalizing the field. We might reach a stage in our future where the need for a dedicated area will be obsolete, but for now it is imperative that we maximize the entry points for the practice of human rights education into the formal education and training sector.

the right to education, human rights in education, and the advancing of all human rights through education. National and local governments have the duty and obligation under international human rights standards to guarantee that education is available, adaptable, accessible and acceptable. Accessibility encompasses three dimensions. It includes economic and physical accessibility as well as the repeal of discriminatory measures and barriers to education, implying, *inter alia*, that education institutions should be within reasonable proximity and should be affordable. One of the mechanisms to create equal opportunity is to make education compulsory and free. Acceptability means that functioning education institutions and programmes have to be available in sufficient numbers. It also implies that institutions and programmes should have buildings to afford protection from the elements, adequate sanitation facilities, clean drinking water, trained teachers, teaching materials, libraries, and laboratories. Both these guarantees of accessibility and acceptability do not fully exist in South Africa. Much research over the past few years has shown how the user fees funding mechanisms at schools serve as exclusionary devices for huge numbers of young people (see for instance Vally, 2002).

The Department of Education's own School Register of Needs Survey (2001c) also shows that the guarantee of accessibility does not fully exist. The Needs Survey released at the end of November 2001 estimated that 27% of schools have no running water, 43% have no electricity, and 80% have no libraries. Only about 8 000 out of over 27 000 schools in South Africa have flush sewer toilets while close to 12 300 schools use pit latrines and 2 500 schools have no toilets at all. Even in schools that have toilets, 15.5% are not in working order. Schools requiring additional classrooms number over 10 700. The Survey also revealed that the number of state-paid educators has decreased dramatically by 23 642 while School Governing Body paid educators have increased by 19 000. Clearly a labour market involving the purchase of teachers has gained momentum as the state is determined to reduce personnel expenditure, and teacher shortages become more severe as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and previous rationalization policies. A consequence of this trend, while saving the state a salary bill of many millions, is the increasing disparities and inequalities between schools. It is largely schools that serve richer communities that can afford employing additional teachers to supplement the number of state-paid educators. The survey also showed that the number of schools that reported weak or very weak buildings increased from 4 377 in 1996 to 9 375 in the year 2000. Transport to and from schools remains a serious concern for learners in the rural areas. Provinces with a high number

of rural schools, such as the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo have thousands of learners who walk for long distances. It is not uncommon for learners to walk for 10-20 kilometres to get to school (Vally, 2002).

The human rights framework also recognizes the link between the right to education and other human rights. This is because education operates as a multiplier, enhancing the enjoyment of all individual rights and freedoms where the right to education is effectively guaranteed, while depriving people of the enjoyment of many rights and freedoms where the right is denied or violated. The quality of education, particularly in countries like South Africa is also a human rights issue. For instance, while the high enrolment rates in South Africa are positive, this is eroded by the conditions of schooling for many young people. To put it starkly, getting young people to school is important but does not make sense if the young women who get there are then raped. Also, the high enrolment rate does not reveal the ability of the system to retain learners.

Human rights and democratic citizenship

The interrelationship between education and democratic citizenship becomes even clearer when it is looked at from a human rights perspective. At the most basic level, economic and social rights have both direct and indirect effects on democratic citizenship. They have direct effects in that they ensure minimum equality of access to civil and political rights for all citizens. Any significant denial of the necessities of life (such as education or employment opportunities) involves a diminution of citizenship for those so denied, both in itself, and by impairing their capacity to engage in civil and public life on the same terms as others. Thus, social and economic rights should be seen as necessary conditions for citizens to exercise their civil and political rights.

In an insightful analysis of South Africa's macroeconomic strategy and its implications for human rights and democratic citizenship, Oupa Lehulere (1998) makes the point that:

we are presented with a one-way traffic: free markets produce democratic freedoms, but the democratic processes of society must not interfere with the markets. Instinctively and subconsciously, we shy away from a critique of the impact of GEAR-type macroeconomic strategies on first generation rights because we reproduce the assumptions of the dominant paradigm about free markets and freedom.

Lehulere emphasizes that the relationship between first generation or political and civil rights, and second generation or socio-economic rights, must be asserted in a fundamental manner. He believes that the obstacles for the achievement of socio-economic rights begin of necessity to undermine first generation rights. He argues, for instance, that the decision-making processes that led to the adoption of neoliberal policies had to be insulated from mass pressure and therefore needed to be secretive and undemocratic. The fact that GEAR and neoliberalism have corroded and continue to corrode South Africa's democratic institution can lead to many turning away from democratic institutions and cultures. Gear's failure to deliver on socio-economic rights is, as it turns out, its greatest blow to first generation rights.

South Africa's negotiated settlement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Bill of Rights clauses in the Constitution and the establishment of Chapter Nine institutions like the South African Human Rights Commission, the Commission for Gender Equality, the Public Protector and others have provided a fairy tale façade often serving to disguise the often vicious nature of the society we live in. This reality is obscured by the language of rights that mask privation by presenting values that are unattainable for the majority. These values are then meant to be the pillars upon which our society is constructed. Deprivation of the right to eat, work in a dignified way and the right to shelter, health and education surely nullifies the illusions of employment equity, equality and freedom. Acting as if certain rights exist for all inhibits peoples' ability to recognize when they are in fact, illusory, and why society does not act to protect these rights. A single mother in Soweto compared to a Sandton corporate executive cannot be said to have the same power of political persuasion or opportunity. These are real distinctions that give some people advantages and privileges over others. The fiction that promotes the view that real differences between human beings shall not affect their standing as citizens, allows relations of domination and conflict to remain intact.

Felice (1996, p.34) recognizes that "ruling ideology often in the form of rights, disguises reality, blurs perceptions and creates illusions". It therefore becomes vital to disclose the discrepancy between the existing normative framework of society and its reality. This realization comes with an understanding that protecting human rights should take into account that the most pervasive and chronic forms of distress are a consequence of economic, social and political structural circumstances that impact upon groups, as well as upon individuals.

This view of collective rights is opposed to the liberal conception of rights based on the notion that those who succeed in society do so because of their own individual attributes and those who fail to do so because of their deficits and weaknesses. This view is possible because the philosophical foundation of the dominant human rights discourse sees human beings as individuals instead of as social beings – products of a web of relations: social, economic and political from which social relations arise.

Falk, in his preface to Felice's book, concurs that neo-liberalism as an operational ideology, despite its pretensions of expediently promoting democracy, is radically inconsistent with the defence of human rights, if human rights are perceived in relation to suffering rather than as "abstract ground rules governing the relations of individuals to the state" (Felice, 1996, p.xii).

Conventional wisdom asserts that education can serve as the life raft to rescue people from the sea of protracted poverty. A colder and more simplistic extension of this theme contends that in post-apartheid South Africa, opportunities abound and the poor have only themselves to blame. This 'blaming the victim' or deficit argument accepts uncritically the prevailing rhetoric of political liberty and fails to comprehend the obstacles of what Amartya Sen calls, substantial "unfreedoms". While conceding that individual agency is central to addressing deprivations, Sen argues that there is deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements. It is the argument of this article that while enthusiasm for education abounds amongst the poor, various social and economic relations, influences and factors prevent the overcoming of deprivation. This, despite progressive legislation and our Constitution that guarantees the right to basic education and democratic citizenship.

At the beginning of this paper, Galeano's quote referring to the children of the world ended with the lines "almost never are they listened to, never are they understood". In South Africa today, some are beginning to listen and understand. A recent children's participatory process facilitated by the Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security (ACCESS) established that the most common concerns of vulnerable children are hunger and the inability to pay school fees. The problem is particularly stark for those who live in compromised home environments, children with disabilities and chronic illnesses, those living on the streets, in informal settlements, children of farm workers, refugees and those affected by HIV/AIDS. The plaintive

voices of children, collected during the ACCESS research are extremely suggestive of the “unfreedoms” confronting the poor:

The teachers shout at you. They say that we cannot sit on the seats at school because we don't pay school fees. The teachers like to swear at us. They don't have a good way of approaching children. They keep on teasing us about the school fees. It is not nice because we also like to pay, we just don't have the money.

The big challenge in our school is the pen, crayon, etc. If we don't have these things we are not allowed to come to school. Teachers beat us for that. Our teachers don't understand that we don't have money. Our parents and aunts also shout at us when we ask them to buy things for school.

I will be happy if I can have money for transport because I am far away from school. I walk a long distance to school and I pass next to the dangerous place and I walk a long distance to school.

My problem is I don't even have a chance to read my books. After school I go to work. When I come back from work I already feel like sleeping and I just sleep because I am tired. I wake up late. I am always late here at school. I've never been early. Another problem is that I am always tired, I am always tired.

My problem is that I don't have parents. My parents are no longer living. So I don't get things the way I used to when they were still living. Even the money that I work for I give my sister to go to school with. She goes to school far away and needs money for transport. Then I end up getting these few cents.

We lived in a good house in Dobsonville. I lived with my mom and my two brothers and it was nice until my mother lost her job. She disappeared for a few weeks. I needed bus fares and fees for school. I stopped to go to school totally because my mom wasn't there and we lost the house, we lost everything. We moved to this one roomed house because it was the only thing we could afford. I was feeling so bad, I was thinking of committing suicide. I had the whole plan of how to kill myself. We lost that house and had to move to the shelter here in town. (Shirin Motala, ACCESS Board Member. Presentation to the Education Rights Project's Reference Group. ERP minutes, 2003).

Throughout the country, initiatives such as ACCESS, the Education Rights Project, and a number of new social movements have used the democratic space available today to increasingly create a groundswell of support for human rights in education. The praxis of these organizations is based on an understanding of democratic citizenship that speaks to peoples' lived experiences. In my interaction with people involved in the ECD sector, numerous accounts of hardship, dashed expectations and encounters with an

uncaring, aloof, and sometimes a callous bureaucracy are often mentioned. Increasingly though, silent apathy and hopeless resignation is giving way to creative initiative and courageous attempts by young people and their parents to continue the long South African traditions of democratic participation from below. More and more people are realising that ultimately, redressing the historical neglect of ECD and addressing the landscape of 'many poverties' will depend on the capacity of the poor and their supporters in different sectors to mobilize, co-ordinate their struggles and become a powerful social movement.

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Salim Vally
Education Policy Unit
University of the Witwatersrand

vallys@epu.wits.ac.za