

Liberating Voices for Equity – Exploring Cultural Minority Students' Experiences in an Integrated Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This study foregrounds cultural minority learners' voices in the exploration of accomplishment of socio-cultural redress in basic education. The resonating global call within the socio-cultural movement is for the inclusion of marginalised voices and epistemes in curricula reformation and transformation overtures. Heeding the latter, this study within the context of decolonisation, ethical professional practice and equity sought to establish experiences of cultural minority learners' experiences in an integrated South African school. Conceptually framed within Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) as strategy for pedagogical equity and pursued through a naturalistic methodology scaffolded by observation and interviewing the study elevates cultural minority learners' voices about the pedagogic setting. The study found that minority students regarded the architecture of teaching and learning context as structured by their teachers as: marginalising; alienating, disenchanting; emasculating; constraining, not attendant to their intrinsic motivation needs nor their socio-political identities. Findings revealed that though the legislated architecture for equity through cultural inclusivity exists vestigial classroom practices not attuned to these aspirations for equity still persist. Such findings highlighted the need for an escalation of deliberate interventions to overturn these historically nuanced inhibitions to create equitable pedagogic settings.

Keywords: Diversity, cultural minorities, Multicultural classrooms, Student culture, Student experiences, Student voice

INTRODUCTION

Current curriculum reform is calling upon teachers to achieve a sense of cultural justice in their classrooms. Contemporary curriculum reforms have as one of their foundational tenets the respect for socio-cultural plurality. These curricula emphasise and acknowledge the role of diverse interactions of all multi-cultural identities in the creation of hives of productive activity in pedagogic settings. Scholarly work contends that foregrounding the sociocultural in

education, as well as the effect of the learner's voices inclusion in teaching and learning has premium for equity, social justice, successful learner achievement and affect outcomes (Castelli, Ragazzi & Crescentini, 2012; Gay, 2018; Ismail, 2015). The call has been for education to activate and capture learners' voices in order to understand their mindsets and hearts as they traverse schooling (Furman and Barton, 2006). Such calls are not solely premised on principles of sound pedagogy, need for academic improvement or ethical professionalism for teachers but an espousal of inalienable human rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights and progressive national constitutions for the safeguarding and promotion of human dignity, freedom and equity. Dignity, freedom and equity have as their foundational tenets the respect for socio-cultural plurality and the achievement of a sense of racial-cultural justice. The latter sense in education proffers platforms for learners to deploy their voice, give meaning to their own experiences concomitantly becoming change agents dedicated to questioning, defining and transforming the structured injustices that threaten their community. Thus, consideration of learner voice in education reform makes schools critical democratic spaces, vehicles for social justice and public responsibility.

Both progressive and critical visionaries of education continue to advocate for the solicitation and consideration of learners' voices for engagement and emancipation respectively (Zadja, 2010). The overarching conviction is such considerations being that equity cannot be established without interrogating the epistemic diffusion and elements typifying scholastic systems. Implicit in these considerations a call for the creation of platforms upon which professional introspection with regards to teaching for diversity occurs. This study is premised on this call and in a visceral sense serves as an impetus for professional development, in pursuit of quality, minority-conscious pedagogical implementation as aspired for in curriculum reform initiatives. This augurs well with the professionalism required of education practitioners which is holistic and is holistically attendant to the needs of the student namely intellectual, emotional, personal and cognitive. Thus, in this research as researchers we are of the view that a new pedagogical normal goes beyond digitisation of curriculum but pursues the re-engineering and reformatting of the totality of the educational socio-cultural fabric inclusive of learning spaces in ways that embrace the idiosyncratic socio-cultural identities of those systemically marginalised and excluded from education by reason of being cultural minorities.

Whilst exploring progress made in cultural integration in previously desegregated this study sought to elevate cultural minority learners' voice to glean their perspectives on aspired for equity in a new democratic post-colonial dispensation. It was envisaged that gleanings from this study would have the potential of informing on the progress of the inclusion projects and progress towards equity in education in general.

STUDY ASSUMPTIONS

There are four assumptive propositions that undergird this work. Firstly, effective learning does not and cannot stand outside the teaching and learning environment as it is always a part of that environment. From this positioning we need to know that teachers as learning mediators are responsible for structuring this environment through their reflexivity and agency (Melchin & Picard 2008, 18).

Our second proposition is best captured by (Thésée 2006, 25);

The colonial enterprise and natural sciences, mutually, have shaped and controlled the deployment of one another... This is neither accidental nor coincidental. While the old colonial power advanced unheeded, the neo-colonial power proceeds more cautiously, hidden under polymorphic masks. The most powerful of these masks frames an epistemological figure which implies knowledge.

The standard account of knowledge in this proposition is a Foucauldian coupling of knowledge and power. In order for teachers to teach they must have the *power* to teach and this power comes from knowledge. This knowledge is the knowledge of what constitutes equity pedagogy, who students are and how science is experienced by these students.

Thirdly, the crisis in science education is not about the content but the context. It is about the teaching and learning context. The science curriculum viewed within the global theory (Turnbull, 2000) involves the acquisition of requisite science concepts that are held as knowledge everywhere. According to the global theory such knowledge can be assembled in myriad ways whilst contributing to the creation of a single, non-disparate and non-dichotomous knowledge space called science.

Emergent from the propositions above is the fourth proposition which is informed by the conviction that any science can be taught to any child as long as the teaching and learning context is structured appropriately. This is premised on the notion that an inherent curiosity exists in all students and so is a desire for mastery and competence in domains of varying degrees of freedom and mutual synergies.

RATIONALE OF STUDY

The second decade of this millennium has witnessed an emergent outcry for deconstruction and reconstruction of learning spaces in a context of post-colonialism. This outcry has gained traction in higher education with a disconcerting disquiet in basic education formations. The latter prompted a question whether the disquiet was a result of the equity having been accomplished in the basic education sector inclusive of primary, secondary and high schooling. Was it proof that the teaching and learning context in basic education was free from knowledge parochialism. These are the questions that prompted this investigation. It was the quest to address these questions in an attempt to understand the experiences of cultural minorities in pedagogic settings for redress. This study therefore heeded the call by (Lemke, 2001) that students' experiences needed to be researched to work out the best ways to integrate science and science curricula to better serve the needs of all the students amongst whom differences exist. Thus, this study became a venture into epistemic social justice in both a testimonial sense and hermeneutic sense (Fricker, 2007). This venture was also motivated by research findings which point to the limited impact of interventions aimed at equity and their uneven success (Ismail, 2015). Such findings have led scholars to call for the activation of critical voices to promote an education that is dynamic whilst resonating with the aspirations for social justice and equity (Ismail, 2015; Mitra, 2004).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching is a triadic relation and a tri-polar process involving the source of teaching, the student and a set of activities and their manipulation to bring about the achievement of

objectives by students as identified by the teacher (Bhowmik, Banerjee & Banerjee, 2013). Such an understanding of teaching has historically led to a call for teachers to create climates which are tolerant and purposefully promote harmonious interactions between themselves and students, irrespective of biological and social-cultural endowments (Johnson, 2011). These calls are based on the link established between student socio-cultural identity, teaching, and learning (Lee, 2007). The ability to connect these three has been regarded as the panacea for challenges in science education as the connection creates contexts that are relevant to and reflective of student realities. Research indicates that when socio-cultural identity and related experiences are linked to pedagogy they enhance student self-esteem and support healthy identity formation (Gay, 2018). Despite this potency, the challenge for equity pedagogy is how can minority students’ experiences everywhere be linked to pedagogy when they have not been established or their existence confirmed? How can the science teachers integrate what they don’t know? How can they attend to the realities of students whose reality as constituted by their engagement with the pedagogic setting remain masked? We are reminded of the futility of attempts to teach without this knowledge by Wu (1999, p. 535) who posits, “you can’t teach what you don’t know”. How can the science teaching and learning context be relevantly structured without knowledge of the experiences of the minority students and be expected to serve them well?

Works that centre the socio-cultural in the development of viable teaching and learning environments have described this context in a number of ways: *culturally appropriate*; *culturally congruent*; *mitigating cultural discontinuity*; *culturally responsive and culturally compatible* (Ladson-Billings 1995, Gay 2018) or *culturally responsive pedagogy* (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Such works are built on: the eradication of deficit-based ideologies of marginalised students; disruption of the euro-centric, the emergence of a critical socio-political awareness challenging and disrupting inequity and a recognition of the complexity of culture and its potential in enhancing educational excellence (Howard & Terry 2011). The dominant notion in this type of teaching is that students' experiences, ways of being and webs of meaning are critical ingredients in structuring the teaching and learning context. The implicit argument being that conducive classroom contexts can be nurtured by a deepened understanding of the students’ ways of being.

Teachers who practice culturally responsive pedagogy build upon the varied lived experiences of all students. They bring the curriculum to life through the provision of platforms for students to prove their academic competence (Villegas & Lucas 2002). Such platforms establish and nurture co-operative learning environments and high agentic expectations (Johnson, 2011). In encouraging cultural competence these teachers reshape the prescribed curriculum and seize every opportunity to help students be themselves. Such a pedagogic setting makes learning culturally relevant and intrinsically motivates all students as they see themselves enacted within the curriculum.

Schooling as a formal project is not a mere socio-political movement but in some cases been deconstructive machinations poised at supplanting native webs of meaning and knowledge systems. The possibility of a deconstructive agenda sets the trajectory for equity in education. In this case education has to challenge colonial epistemes and interpretive systems through rendering value to the cultural capital and freeing voices of all those in scholastic systems, particularly those historically marginalised. Equity as used in this study is a multidimensional

global concept which developed from the concept of equality, triggered by the question, “Equality, yes but Equality of what?” and “Where does equality end and “fair” inequality (equity) begin (Castelli et.al, 2012, p. 2245) for social justice? Whilst equality promotes equal treatment for all despite variances in starting points, equity recognises and circumvents the inherent reproductive capacity of equality which perpetuates initial inequality (Benadusi, 2006). Through the deployment of various strategies equity strives to “make equal” groups with different predispositions and endowments (Castelli et al. 2012, p 2245). Such strategies include equity as: equal opportunity/access, equal treatment/pure meritocracy, equality between social groups with advantage for the disadvantaged and equal opportunity for success (Maitzegui-Onate & Santibanez-Gruber, 2008). According to Marginson (2011) whichever strategy is deployed the spirit behind equity remains the advancement of human freedom and optimisation of individuals’ chances pursuant of their full potential through maximising learning opportunities, deployment of deliberate compensatory measures to guarantee success for those whose sociocultural capital has limited currency in specific pedagogic settings.

Recognition of the centrality of the context in the conveyance of equity education has led to calls for teachers to create teaching and learning contexts which are tolerant and purposefully promote harmonious interactions irrespective of biological and cultural endowments (Johnson, 2011). Such overtures are deliberate reversals of Fricker’s (2007) concept of *epistemic injustice*. Epistemic injustice is the suppression of the Other’s voice through the marginalisation, non-recognition and misrecognition of the knowledge of themselves and their webs of meaning (LeBlanc & Kinsella, 2016). The absence of epistemic justice in education therefore translates into what Medina (2012) refers to as testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when an actor is not recognised as a giver of knowledge owing to an identity prejudice held by the regulator of a context. Hermeneutical injustice on the other hand occurs when collectives are marginalised due to contextual prejudiced structural arrangements (LeBlanc & Kinsella, 2016). However, it is important that both forms of epistemic injustice mute the students’ voice, a situation which led Ladson-Billings (1995) to contend that it was opportune to insert education into the socio-cultural rather than inserting the socio-cultural into education.

The unmuting and activation of learners’ voices in curriculum design and implementation has been advocated by extensive research in education (Mitra, 2004). Dating to Dewey’s 1899 *transformed recitation* the progressive argument has been that learners’ voices through dialogical engagement have a place at the table of knowledge generation through inputting new lines of thought and inquiry (Furman and Barton, 2006). Beyond empowerment and the struggle for human rights learner voice now extends to the solicitation of learners’ voices in shaping curriculum reform and the development of strategies for improvement of the scholastic system (Fielding, 2011). In education the concept of voice has been described in two ways. Voice is regarded as learners’ collective perspectives, expressed endowments and opinions related to scholastic systems. Secondly, voice is conceptualised as teaching and learning methodologies that are based on learners’ expressed choices, interests, passions, and ambitions (Mitra). Voice as conceptualised by Mitra (2004, 651 - 688) has four attributes namely, voice as individuated; as collectivised expression, voice as perspective and voice as participation. The individuation of voice necessitates a solicitation of individuals’ views to inform the development of meaningful, liberating, and engaging educational experiences (Nieto, 2015). Recognising the crucial role of learners’ voice Soo Hoo (1993) cautions educational researchers

not to overlook student collective input by referring the latter as treasure in the backyard particularly cognisant of the reality that learners’ views are often on target in terms of current thinking in education (Naidoo & Kapofu, 2020) and are disruptive to sedimented unquestioned *venerable assumptions* (De La Luz Reyes, 1992).

Researchers like Fielding (2011), SooHoo (1995), Mitra (2004) and Rudduck and Demetriou (2003) found that the inclusion of learners’ voices in issues of school governance, curriculum and instruction allowed mutual symbiosis between learners and other stakeholders in the scholastic system. The inclusion of learners’ perspectives yielded school improvement, positive curriculum transformation, better learner-teacher interactions, promoted learner agency whilst fostering their sense of autonomy, competency and connectedness (Mitra, 2004). Positing voice as participation Furman and Burton (2006) extend the concept into the domain of artifactual enactment as each learner authors their life worlds. In this instance voice ceases to be an abstract concept as it becomes what the learners actually do as they impact their lives and those of other actors in their contexts (Furman & Barton, 2006). Voice as participation also involves negative participation such as disengagement as learners choose not to engage with the teacher or the discipline.

METHODOLOGY

Coupling our conceptual frameworks with our methodology implied using multiple data collection methods which included participant observation, focus group/cogenerative dialoguing, and an unstructured interview with one key participant (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2018) whom we considered the leader amongst minority students at Wingate High school (WHS)*. Secondary sources of data included non-intrusive auto-biographical notebooks completed by the students; archival material from students’ files which included incident reports and statements of events.

The Setting

Wingate High School (WHS) has been in existence for more than five decades and established to meet the educational needs of English-speaking white South Africans who inhabited one of the country’s sprawling port cities. The suburb from which the school derives its name has remained predominantly white despite the influx of other ethnic groups who bought or lease properties in the suburb. The year 2002 saw WHS opening up admission to all cultures in response to the political reforms ushered in by the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994. Aspirations for equity were embedded within the legislative framework that instituted integration. Architects of the new constitutional arrangements envisaged that the opening up of educational spaces for all cultures would provide for the flourishing of all cultures through the attribution of equivalent value to all cultural capital. In such a context “each social group is seen as having contributions of equal value to make to all other social groups in the larger social unit” (Vandayer, 2003, p. 194). This was the supposed general architecture of schooling arrangements in desegregated contexts, but was this the situation at NHS for cultural minorities? How far had NHS progressed in realising the vision of a ‘new’ South Africa for all its inhabitants, particularly those cultural minorities who had been historically excluded from these contexts?

Participants

When this study was conducted WHS had a total learner population of eight hundred and ten learners and about forty teachers of whom only three were of non-white. White English-speaking learners were the cultural majority with over five hundred learners. Cultural minorities made up a third of the learner population with most of them being of Asian descent (about three quarters of the cultural minority population) and the remainder being of African descent. For the purpose of this study we sought to capture the voice of cultural minorities from knowledgeable participants. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) posit that sufficient understandings can be generated and valid interpretations made from knowledgeable participants. Knowledgeable participants in this study were sampled using criterion-based purposive sampling. Participants had to be from cultural minorities, had been at WHS for over a year, doing grade eleven science they were supposed to be able to demonstrate an understanding of the study, by being able to read and sign their consent forms. They were expected to be able to communicate verbally in the language of teaching and learning at the school, which was English.

Using the criteria above, information from students' files and observations in science classrooms ten students were selected and deemed adequate as posited by Maughan (2003). These students were presumed representative enough and displayed socio-cultural consciousness of the classes. Cognisant of the need for homogeneity we drew five students from each of the two science classes whilst maintaining gender balance. One student was later purposively chosen as a key participant. This individual (*Top Dog*) came across as the spokesperson of the minority students during co-generative dialoguing and the minority students seemed to venerate him (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2018).

Data Collection

Data was collected in three phases. Phase one involved six monological observations in the two science classrooms over the first school term. Each observation session lasted approximately fifty-five minutes which was the duration of the science lessons. In this phase access to learner file was granted and secondary data were collected from these files and incident reports records kept at the administration office.

Phase two involved seven focus groups or co-generated dialogues with ten cultural minority grade eleven students from the observed classes. The seven co-generated dialogues were held over the second school term (April-June). A complete week from the 12th of May to the 16th of May was devoted for dialogues one to five. The last two dialogues were held on the 20th of May. All dialogues were video-recorded and transcribed verbatim into electronic word documents. After conducting the dialogues with the ten students in the second school term an unstructured interview with one of the students (*Top Dog* - pseudonym) whom we identified as an extreme case during the dialogues was conducted. He happened to be saying more in the dialogues and was highly regarded by other cultural minority students.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with the importation of all electronic transcripts to QSR NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software programme. All transcriptions at this point were filed in the system as sources. This categorisation by sources made data handling easier without analytic dissociation. Using NVivo data were typologically coded. This study sought to elevated cultural

minority students' voice and provide an opportunity for them to articulate their lived experiences at WHS. In resonance with this posture data analysis optimised the elevation of these voices without external validation as the latter was deemed to be voice suppression. From data analysis, emergent themes included minority students' experiences of; themselves as a cultural minority; the school system; their teachers; other students; science education and academic success.

STUDY FINDINGS - MINORITY STUDENTS' VOICED EXPERIENCES

Findings have been arranged thematically into the following, that is, experiences of: being a cultural minority, school system, pedagogy, academic success and science education at WHS.

Minority students' experiences of being a cultural minority

Observations and dialogues indicated that the minority students at WHS valued their being and were comfortable in their skin and way of doing things.

We are urban and black, we are different...Being black and in an urban area, I think the difference between us, and other underprivileged black kids is that we have more opportunities to explore life and they don't have all those opportunities. Let's put it this way, we are different, we live in different worlds and everything is so different (Top Dog, Dialogue, 12th May.).

Cultural minority students described the many ways they were different and privileged as remarked by Big Sho, *"We have an upper hand over black kids in rural areas. We don't have to walk long distances; we don't have to walk to school. We have a lot of privileges"*. Such privileges according to Flambo V entailed *"Recreation...we have more opportunities for recreation, we can go to malls, clubs and the infrastructure is different; we have better services, better health care"*. Another dimension of privilege according to Magic was *"we are exposed to the internet, mobile phones..."* (Dialogue, 12th May). In the same dialogue Shy-Girl brought up the language / accent aspect *"I'm different from a girl from the rural areas from the way I speak...they get lost, they are confused from the way I speak"*. Encapsulating their privilege and affirming themselves as better than their rural peers, Just-Lungi claimed that cultural minorities had *"swag"* (colloquial for class) because they dressed different, had all the urban niceties and *"they listen to listen to RnB (Rhythm and Blues), house and rap"*. During this first dialogue (12th May) what emerged was that they regarded themselves as socio-economically privileged relative to their rural peers an aspect which hinted of in-group cultural disaggregation.

Other than the socio-economic attributes the students also spoke about their political self. *"There in the poor communities they have rights, but they don't know much about them like we do"* (Flambo V, Dialogue, 12th). According to Just-Lungi, *"here we fight for our rights...we take advantage of everything..."*. With regards to their rights they claimed that their political understanding was *"very high and we tend to use it as an advantage..."* (Big Sho, Dialogue, 12th May). Commenting on how this knowledge was an advantage Top Dog posited, *"Here if they (teachers) hit us (figurative), we will fight back, straight up, that's how it is. We guys, we fight back, and we will lose our own cool and fight you"*. (Dialogue, 12th May).

Minority students at WHS seemed to regard themselves as politically conscious a variation which they posited placed them at a higher pedestal than their peers elsewhere.

An interesting finding about the political self was that it was a contradicted and a paradox. The latter is gleaned from Top Dog's interview remarks:

I see being a cultural minority as being just a privilege, it's being different from other races. It's like from a long history, a period in which we were fighting, and we are still fighting. We are still coming up...we are fighting...to be there on top! ...it's not over yet...we want to be on top of the food chain. They respect and are afraid of us at the same time (Top Dog, Dialogue, 12th May). Even though Top Dog expressed the notion of privilege, his rationalisation ceased to be on superior social identity but on a qualitative non-substantive variable, skin tone and tenacious engagement in the struggle against the very variable that purported privilege was premised. It was ironic that despite having espoused a positive self-image and holding assumptions of a superior socio-cultural identity, minority students still had to *"fight and were coming up"* (Top Dog, Dialogue, 12th May). It seemed cultural minorities students were pursuing a social utopia which would render them genuine superiority. An important aspect that emerged from Top Dog's remarks was the notion that being at the apex of the food chain, would earn them respect. Thus, what they longed for and were struggling to attain was respect. The challenge in science classrooms for cultural minority students seemed to be how to affirm themselves in a context that valued eurocentrism and forms of being other than them. It was in this positioning that the participants made the following remarks about themselves, *"It's not easy... because we are taken advantage of...I say it's not easy, because other people would like to take advantage of black people"* (Big Shaw, Dialogue, 12th May). Further affirming this positioning, Big Man posited, *"It's not easy... You have to work for everything, you wanna have and believe in. You can't just get it from anyone. You must work hard because we don't have big opportunities like other races"* (Dialogue, 12th May). Bringing a historical perspective to this positioning, Naughty-By-Nature remarked, *"It's like back in the days ...our parents really didn't have what white people had. White people had money and White people our age inherit money and we don't have stuff like what the other guy has"* (Dialogue, 12th May).

The common strand in all these remarks was that students equated their identity to constant struggle, in spite professing it to be a privilege. It was within the ambits of this positioning that they registered their willingness to soldier on and fight as articulated by Magic, *"it's time to show other races that we can do it..."* (Dialogue, 12th May). So strongly held was their social identity that students relished their struggles and seemed to gloat about their invincibility whilst lauding the possibility of being victorious. They cherished and revelled in the thought that they were more resilient than any other cultural group, *"Any other race group that would deal with what we are going through will be on the ground, DEAD. I'm just like, we are strong, we are black, we are black"* (all clapped in confirmation) (Top Dog, Dialogue, 12th May).

The fact that cultural minority students had a historical reference to their agency pointed to their time orientation. They operated within a continuum of the past and the present with their thinking being influenced by how things used to be as they grappled and worried about their present circumstances. Most critical was that as their countries came from a confrontational history, their past orientation also explained their confrontational approach and fighting spirit. The past thus normalised the present in simple actions like their seating positions in class as pointed by Just-Lungi whilst explaining why they sat at the back of the classroom: *"I think we are accustomed to sit at the back it has become normal. Sitting at the front just doesn't feel right, people before us were sitting at the back"* (Dialogue, 16th May).

Voice as participation revealed two things about cultural minority students as they sat at the back of the class. There were some who would keel over and sleep throughout the lesson and the other extreme which was the majority was of those who would do other things like completing assignments or doing their homework or engaging with their phones. On the 11th of March the science teacher had to remove a Mathematics book from a student who was doing her homework as she taught. It was with this second extreme that there were lessons disruption hence limited learning opportunities as observed from a filed statement of event by Flambo V: I was completing an assignment while the teacher (an experienced white lady) was going through a test that I didn’t write due to me being absent on the 13/02/. I was asked to put it away, which I did, then asked the teacher what I should be doing. The least she could have done was to give me a question paper. I was then told not to ask stupid questions. My reply was then “How is that stupid”. I was then told to “Shut my mouth” which I find very offensive because why should I respect those who talk to me like I am nothing. So, I told her to ask me nicely or maybe say keep quiet. I was then told to ‘Shut my mouth” again. Because she didn’t agree to ask me nicely she then said something about me being a kid and I was told to get out. I refused then the grade controller was called. He told me to take my attitude and put it where it concerns somebody else, so I told him it won’t fit. If my own mother doesn’t believe in telling people or me to shut up then why should I have to take it from a teacher! (Flambo V Statement of events, 14th February).

The overarching observation was that whilst seated at the back the cultural minority students engaged less productively with their teachers, participated less, did not ask and rarely answered questions in the lessons observed. We noticed that at times the teacher would spread her questions, but they kept quiet until she moved on to some other students or just proceeded to answer the question herself. Confirming this observation, “*we don’t (ask questions) because they don’t pay attention to us anyway*” (Just-Lungi, *Dialogue*, 16th May). Further confirming this enactment Big Man posited, “*we don’t ask because we are afraid to be wrong and everyone (the whole class) will laugh at us*”. Through these rationalisations cultural minority students sat at the back and the teachers taught at the front.

Minority students’ experiences of the school system

From their narratives cultural minority students espoused independence, competence, self-determination and in the science classrooms, observations were that they acted as they pleased. They were tardy and confrontational towards their teachers. They displayed reluctance to conforming to the dictates of WHS and the classroom precepts informing student conduct. Cultural minority students cast themselves in the following manner as they talked about the Deputy Principal who happened to be white:

He thinks he came to change us to something he wants. We follow the school rules and code of conduct, but he brings his own things...I don’t like him because he thinks he is the man. He thinks he knows everything, but he doesn’t know. Many things he doesn’t know, and he needs to know them. And when the time comes, he will find out, but I will be long gone. He doesn’t respect us... (Big Man, *Dialogue*, 13th May).

Weighing in Just-Lungi commented “*he thinks he owns the school, and everything belongs to him basically. It’s his way or no way. He underestimates us*” (*Dialogue*, 13th May”. Whilst pointing out mistakes that teachers make in dealing with students who are cultural minorities, Top Dog posited:

The mistake that teachers make is to bring down us and make us '*cheap*'. When you do that it never ends it's a long process because you will fight the whole year with that person...and while you are fighting him, he will influence someone else to act just like him and that person the next person and it will keep going down until there are too many of them. That's a virus, a deadly virus (Interview, 2nd September).

Placing these remarks in the context of structuration it emerged that the educational environment, as structured by WHS demanded absolute compliance. However, cultural minority students endeavoured to claim space in this power structure hence they voiced underestimation, invincibility, disrespect and prolonged fighting with embodiments of power in the bureaucratic arrangement. It seemed they had laid claim to space in the social field (WHS and science classrooms) and seemed to have placed themselves on par with those in authority. Through this self-aggrandisement they talked disparagingly about authority figures and believed they co-administered the school with senior management. It appeared this belief of having power governed their lives and its operationalisation allowed them to be on the offensive or defensive and constructive or destructive depending on how they judged the context in terms of their agenda. During the third focus group (13th May), these students made some statements that affirmed this experience as Big-Sho posited:

In high school, I try like everybody else to be friends with teachers, but it doesn't work. I'm stubborn, it's the way I am. If I wanna listen to you, I will listen to you, if I don't want to listen to you, I don't. That's just the way I am (Dialogue, 13th May).

On who he was prepared to listen to, Big-Sho remarked:

It's like a teacher that respects me, and I respect them back. And if I show respect and the teacher goes like, stuff you, I don't respect you, I'm the teacher I will do whatever I want to do. He can't do that after I have been nice to him... (Dialogue, 13th May).

The implication of Big-Sho's remarks seemed to be that cultural minorities had the power to choose to engage and who to engage with as well as the quality of the engagement. It emerged that for them to engage *respect* was a non-negotiable, which was ironic because their engagement at times was observed to be disrespectful. They were not prepared to productively engage (*being nice*) with those who did not acknowledge (*stuff you*) or underestimated their agency. The notion in the statement "*it's the way I am...that's just the way I am*" and "*he can't do that*" seemed an unpreparedness to relinquish their power through conformity and compliance, even if it meant being closer to the teacher and enhancing their learning opportunities. The socio-cultural significance of this posture was that these students became prepared to sacrifice their education to preserve their power. The latter aspect was posited by Flambo V in the same dialogue when asked what cultural minority students did when they realised they were wrong, "*you can't own up, ... you are stubborn, you are always gonna be right, you don't own up, especially to a white person. You mustn't own up. It's like that*". From his remarks Flambo V reaffirmed the undesirability of owning up as symbolised capitulation of power and their niche in the power discourse. The remark "*especially to a White person*" brought up the influence of historicity in student socio-political identity as justification for their actions as posited by Magic "*they did it to us and in this school here we wanna show it to them, that we are capable of doing it too. It's our time*" (Dialogue, 12th May). So powerful did they assume themselves to be, that Big Man claimed that they were running the school, "*you know how the school is run, we run the school our way and they run the school their way, that's true*" (Dialogue, 13th May). This belief in having the

power was later on affirmed by Top Dog as he categorically stated, *“it’s that attention, it’s wanting to be that person that everyone speaks about, you wanna have that certain amount respect; you wanna be different from everyone basically you wanna be the principal in a way”* (Interview, 2nd September).

Cultural minority student experiences indicated a desire to be different and a valuing of their autonomy. In wanting to be like the Principal, they expressed the desire for the triad of autonomy, self-determination and freedom which explained the observed futility of disciplinary measures implemented by the school. For them disciplinary measures were punitive for their expressions of autonomy, agency and competence. Thus, students experienced punishment as being meted on them for who they were and not for acting in certain ways. Thus, cultural minority students saw the school management and their science teachers as not being just their teachers but white teachers and symbols of the subjugation of the cultural minorities collective in the past. Believing that they were now free and powerful, the students seemed no longer prepared to own up because yielding to authority was a symbolic reincarnation of historical cultural emasculation, *vassalation* and subservience.

Cultural minority students’ experiences of pedagogy

During the third and fourth dialogue students related their experiences as they engaged with their teachers. Below are some of their responses:

Naughty-By-Nature:

I have experienced things like I wouldn’t say racism but being treated unfairly. I don’t know maybe it’s because I’m Black. I don’t know, but as I explained in the incident that happened with me in class. I was late and was kicked out and the following day I was early, and another student was late, but was let into class and it was not a problem. I then raised the issue with the teacher, and she kicked me out... (Dialogue, 13th May).

Big-Sho:

My experience has been bad, I have been going off to sleep. I like the teacher who is on point and keeps to what she is teaching and does not drift... So, this year I have been sleeping. The teacher is boring, and she is telling us about life stories and what happened to her. So, it’s getting mixed up because she teaches one thing and notes and then tomorrow something else. So, we get lost. We are lost (Dialogue, 15th May).

Top Dog confirmed Naughty’s experiences of unfair treatment as he related his own experience and hinted the criminalisation of cultural minority students. He however, trivialised the whole experience and presented it as humorous:

The fact is in this school they misunderstand me a lot. They actually like, as you recall the incident that recently happened, just something very small, which got bad, but the white guy was left just to walk, but because of who I am in this school, I think more attention was paid towards me (Interview, 2nd September)

It was not only in teachers’ actions that the students felt they were treated differently and unfairly but also in word. Cool Guy spoke of how the science teacher described him, *“she said I looked like s***(expletive). Well I do accept it because my shirt was hanging out of my pants but that’s not the way to speak to a student”* (Dialogue, 13th May). Magic also brought up his experience in the same regard, *“how can you call me a moron? A moron! You don’t call your child*

a moron! It's not a nice word". Top Dog confirmed cultural minority students' derision as he intimated on their criminalisation:

We are tired of being or feeling misunderstood. Like we are seen as animals basically, that's how we actually feel. We are always the number one suspects, no matter what. You know I had my bag down here by the stands and my white friend's bag was there, and Cool Guy's was also there as well. A teacher comes running down...He recognises my bag, he searches and searches, skips the bag of the other guy and goes to Cool's bag...that's when we ask okay, why us? You should see how much we try...but they will keep suspecting us (Interview, 2nd September).

Top Dog also painted a picture in which the teachers not only treated cultural minority students unfairly but also used negative words with regards to their academic potential:

Yes, they tell you, you are going to fail. The moment they tell you are going to fail, that just kills your confidence. You just tell yourself I'm not gonna study this subject. I'm fine, I'm gonna fail it anyway. Why bother even trying when you know you will fail the thing anyway...it doesn't affect us anymore...That's the attitude (Dialogue, 15th May 2014).

A disconcerting aspect with the alleged negative rhetoric was that it was tragically futile but ruthless. It was futile because the science teachers' intention seemed poised at motivating them but for the students it turned out to be derogatory and demotivating hence not accomplishing the intended effect.

From dialoguing and interviews, three issues seemed to characterise black student experiences with the science teachers. Firstly, they were not managing the content. Secondly, they felt that their teachers did not care enough. Lastly, they felt they were being treated differently and unfairly. When these three issues are placed in the context in which academic results superseded relations the contextual challenges faced by the students became apparent. Minority students were expecting to be made to feel comfortable in spite of them not producing the valued results. They expected teachers to package science more creatively for their motivation whilst treating them kindlier in their failure. However, observations were that at WHS teaching was preoccupied with the regimentation of students in the rigours of the discipline, a context which seemed tragic in light of minority student expectations. Resultantly, the context as structured by science teachers was experienced negatively by cultural minority students, an aspect which can be conceptualised as a *reconstructed segregation* experience for them. In this context those negatively labelled culturally as less than ideal, were made to realise that they did not belong in this pedagogic setting, which is symptomatic of denial of access. For the cultural minority it seemed the mainstay of the science classrooms was reductionism through denying the expression of other ways of valuing, being, knowing and acting.

Cultural minority students' experiences of academic success

During the sixth dialogue we discussed student values, interests and relationships. During this dialogue the students responded to the statement "*I wanna be*":

Cheeky-Lwa: I wanna be a psychologist. I have to work hard, that's what I want to be.

Cool-Guy: I wanna make a name for myself.

Shy-Girl: I want to fly, but then it won't work out because of my height. I'm too short to be a pilot, so I am going to be a geologist.

Flambo V: I wanna be rich. I am going to a veterinarian or farmer.

Just-Lungi: I just wanna be more like my father (a doctor), persevere a lot

and be like him. He is my mentor. He has achieved a lot in life.

Big-Sho: I wanna be a financial planner and most importantly, I wanna be happy.

From their remarks students who were cultural minorities espoused futures of good lives in professions that required academic success despite the observed chasm between their aspirations and academic performance and classroom actions. It was difficult to reconcile whether they had overstated their ambitions and aspirations in their narratives, or did not know what constituted success or their narratives were genuine, but they had reconfigured their dreams at WHS. It was from the need to explore minority students' notions of success that they were asked what constituted success for them:

It's achieving what you like. It's being better than you were in the past. Let's say you planned to be an entrepreneur and you become one, that's being successful. Once you put your mind and you realise your plans, that's success (Naughty-By-Nature, Dialogue, 20th May).

This generic understanding of success by students was also confirmed by Flambo V in the same dialogue when he defined success as *"It's your goal you want to achieve. It's like a dream and once you overcome (realise) that dream, that's success"*. From these remarks it was that apparent students understood success. Having established their generic understanding of success they proceeded to articulate what academic success at WHS entailed for them:

Cheeky-Lwa: Success is achieving 50% and above in all your subjects.

Just-Lungi: Success is getting a better degree. That's success and 2A's maybe.

Flambo V: Success is passing all my subjects and getting A's, and leaving school with a name and all teachers knowing that I was a good guy. Such that when I come out of school it will be like here is this cool guy, that's success.

Cheeky-Lwa: Success is to get high marks, like 60% and above. I don't aim for 90% because I can't reach those marks. I can only reach 90% in isiZulu. Not that I don't like but because I know even if I work hard I won't get 90%, I know, I won't.

What emerged from this dialoguing was that cultural minority students were fully aware of what constituted success in the school context. They also seemed fully aware of the utility of academic success in actualising their dreams in future. Even though they knew that 30% was a pass mark according to the national assessment standards, none wanted to get a mark below 50%, a minimum mark for university entrance. This showed that students were fully aware that performing below 50% would limit their life opportunities. However, aware of their constraining context and consequent inability to meet the valued standards they reconstructed academic excellence and pegged it at passing, a standard they were most likely to reach and reduce the risk of disparagement. In trying to reduce the risk of disparagement cultural minority students made a failure a matter of choice as posited by Naughty-By-Nature "I don't get high marks because I don't like high marks. If I wanted a 90% I would get a 90% because I know myself, I can get anything I want... (Dialogue, 20th May).

Trivialisation of academic success in the face of failure seemed to allow students to retain their dreams, act in ways that limited their chances of success and rationalise their lacklustre academic performance. It seemed such a posture had utility in the reduction of trauma associated with academic failure as well as positive reinforcement. The facade of the insignificance of high academic success or the inconsequent nature of their academic failure

minimised the impact of their potential failure and the relegation of their sense of competency to fallacy. What is tragic is that minority student remarks attest to the apparent evaporation of their dreams. By contending that they would succeed in the future students nudged and deferred their success into an arena in which they believed they would have the capital to transact. This arena was also beyond the context they were failing in - an aspect which did not allow the evaluation of their competency in that context. The impossibility of pre-emptive evaluation of their competence in a futuristic context allowed them to retain a sense of competence, though deferred. Thus, cultural minority students' voice as perspective on academic success was both a façade for trauma avoidance or alleviation on one hand and on the other a tried solution in the face of the threat of vilification, denigration and invalidation.

Cultural minority students' experiences of science education

Cultural minority students' voices on science education seemed entwined with the nature of relations they had with their science teachers and pedagogical experiences. The following excerpts capture students individuated voices as they expressed what they thought of science in this case life sciences as a subject they were learning.

Cool-Guy

Science is a very difficult, very difficult concept, the teacher does not have time to explain properly to you because it's like the teacher is teaching new things every day. It's very difficult and there are too many notes and it's difficult to understand because it's too complicated.

Big-Man

And science has too many big words, similar words, but different meanings. I really want to pass science; I'm not going to use it in future but I wanna pass it.

Top Dog

We will never pass the subject. We just go down the stream God-knows. That subject is hard. I don't know whether it's the teacher, me or the subject. I'm just lost. It's just hard. The majority of our students in this school and even the matriculants, we all battle with that subject. Like no one here has made a 50% in sciences, it's the hardest ever. Science is hard, we try so much sometimes but we just don't get through. We need help. There are no two ways (no option). We need someone who can explain this in more detail, you know, like give us your time to explain (Dialogue, 15th May).

Findings indicated that in spite a superior social identity and a sense of power, cultural minority students in grade eleven science classes at WHS regarded the subject as difficult. The difficulty they attributed to multiple factors which included terminology, difficult abstract concepts and pedagogical approaches. Responding to how they wanted science to be taught they posited:

Cheeky-Lwa

Affirmative action. We need affirmative action, someone who will push us because most of the teachers just don't care. Yeah, they don't, I mean you wouldn't care if it wasn't your child.

Top Dog

I need somebody who is not gonna give up on me. Somebody that's gonna tell you to push. Somebody who is gonna walk that extra mile with you. Explain science, teach it to you.

Cool-Guy

I need a teacher who motivates us, someone who tells us we are going to pass science. The reason why we fail science is because in our minds we believe science is hard and we're gonna fail it. That's why we fail (Dialogue, 15th May).

The common strand in students remarks about what they needed to succeed was teacher empathy and investment on them. Students seemed to clamour for some external intervention to extricate them from academic mediocrity in science. During this fourth dialogue students exposed the entwining of their experiences of science with how they felt about their teachers as they diverged from the discipline and started describing their current teachers:

Magic

That science teacher there, when those who look like her (majority culture) talk she doesn't say anything. When I talk she takes me to the year head? How is that? As for me, science, too many problems there, so when I go there my mind goes to sleep....maybe that teacher made me not like science because she doesn't teach, she is always on my case, maybe that's why I don't like science. We need a proper teacher, then I can concentrate (Dialogue, 15th May).

Student remarks about their learning experiences indicated that they were failing to cope with the rigours of science education. Thus, with regards to the discipline they strongly believed that care mattered more than content with the former being the missing ingredient for their success in the discipline. The absence of feelings of care and empathy translated into the students perceiving the pedagogic setting as alienating, unfair and postured against them.

Cultural minority students' experiences of science education seemed to provide internalised justifications why they; sat at the back of the science class, did not do homework or participate actively in class activities; did not come early for class, engaged in other activities during the science lessons as well as code-switched to their home languages in an English-medium teaching and learning environment. Such enactments seemed to be rituals from the perception and feelings of being *othered* in a subject they were not faring well.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

At the conclusion of our dialoguing, Magic, one of the participants remarked "*I hope you tell them exactly how we feel*" (Dialogue 15th May). This part of this work endeavours to distil cultural minority students' voice vis-à-vis the status of integration and the state of equity. Study findings point to cultural minority students experiencing neo-colonial positionality sustained by a resilient Eurocentric structuring text. Paradoxically such students' experiences seem mired by feelings of marginalisation, alienation, desperation, discouragement, disenchantment and inequity. This paradox in the context of democratisation seemed responsible for the internal contradiction in their consciousness between the promise and the reality of integrated schooling. Despite contradicted consciousness cultural minority students transcended their vulnerability and reaffirmed their power through performative actions. Performative acting through disengagement, not asking or responding to questions served as a mechanism for identity affirmation. In this deliberate state of disengagement students by default had also chosen not to engage with the discipline (content) and hence greatly limited their learning opportunities.

With regards to power, the teaching and learning context observed was experienced as as mirroring power-wielders and the powerless. This experience deliberately positioned cultural minority students in ways that did not promote the realisation of their academic aspirations, activate their competence whilst retaining and celebrating their socio-cultural identity. Such a pedagogic setting disregarded the historicity of the students and failed to acknowledge the potency of their cultural currency. The strictures imposed by this context led students to voice differential treatment and the minimisation of their learning opportunities in a culturally tiered classroom. They voiced that by being premised on a nexus of differentiation and exclusion the pedagogic setting failed to respond to their realities within the science classroom and was experienced as alienating. Thus, students voiced institutionalised power at WHS as infringing on their autonomy and expunging their affinity for questioning and communal engagement.

Even though there was no mention of cultural hierarchies at WHS, such a hierarchy was nuanced in student remarks. In dialogues students stated the attribution of all classroom challenges to them. However, these experienced attributions implied a value judgement through which other identities were regarded as inherently good for all, as such all in the learning context were expected to unreservedly abandon theirs and embrace the presumed ideal. Such a context, through striving to supplant their cultural identities, led cultural minority students to experience threats of invisibility and marginalisation. Feelings of being treated differently seemed to catalyse disruptive enactments in the science classrooms as an act of operationalising their power in recognisable ways. Disrupting the science classes in response to their feelings seemed to serve as a way of re-capturing their cultural identity, re-asserting their superiority and power over perceived subjugation. Unfortunately, it seemed such displays of power compromised teaching and learning, limited learning opportunities for all learners and the teachers' professional passion seemed expunged.

With regards to pedagogy, minority students voiced a disconnect and an absence of instructional scaffolding. They professed the pedagogic setting to be stoic, fact-laden, individuated, shunned collaboration and communal interactions. In such a context they experienced a curtailing of their freedom to commune and connect, which was the mainstay of their identity. They felt the structure as segregating, exclusionary as it did not foster collegiality and multidirectional communication. Without this connectedness they echoed a persistence of historical barriers between the various ethnic groupings. These experiences propagated inequity, sustained differential engagement with the discipline and failed to harness varied potentialities in the science classroom. Such a structure as voiced was tantamount to denial of the equal opportunity, treatment and success, hence, equity. What was problematic with this context as voiced by the students was that it cast learners as incapable of taking charge of learning and created the illusion of mismatch between minority students and schooling. Voices captured implied this mismatch as they spoke of merely passing and not excelling. Packaged this way science education was framed as a stage for actors to read a prescribed script and a discipline in which only those with a specific socio-cultural capital could participate and faced a crisis of validation. This prevailing reality did not respond to minority students' aspirations and their dreams remained unrealised whilst CRP remained a pedagogical mirage.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

From the discussion in the paragraphs above an emerging picture is that in some integrated schools the reality of equity remains elusive. Echoes from the liberated voices of those on the

receiving end of this vestigial reality in this study suggest the need for the freeing of subjugated cultural knowledge about those who have and are being othered. Thus, the deconstruction and reconstruction project cannot be delivered at tertiary levels only but must be buttressed by grassroot epistemic liberation and responsive restructuring of the pedagogic settings attuned to dispensing equity. Teachers as the frontline force for the realisation of equity must continue to be capacitated on how to include learner voices and other forms of being in the structuring of pedagogic settings. Policy frameworks must continue to be strengthened to extend learner participation and the integration their voices. Research must continue to pursue and capture learners' voice for responsive learning outcomes and a relevant reform agenda for equity.

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