

Inequality in Imagination amongst Marginalised Learners: Teachers Pounding Away with a Hammer

Wade Cafun, Labby Ramrathan

Social Justice, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

Email: drwccafun@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Cafun, W., & Ramrathan, L. (2021). Inequality in Imagination amongst Marginalised Learners: Teachers Pounding Away with a Hammer. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 9, 351-367. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2021.912024>

Received: November 3, 2021

Accepted: December 18, 2021

Published: December 21, 2021

Copyright © 2021 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Imagination is supposed to act as a means by which one's mind is freed from the often contextual limitations to which one becomes accustomed. But what if imagination, in the instance of already marginalised learners serves to limit their thoughts, in particular their abilities to imagine the possibility of attaining success? The need for substantive equality is highlighted in this paper as such equality focuses on the degree to which individuals have been disadvantaged when determining the level of support required at present. Through the use of narrative inquiry, learners were given a platform from which to express their individual experiences of inequality and their imaginings of themselves in the future. From this, we were able to fathom the degree to which learners' imaginations of success were limited by experiences of inequality. Findings suggested that mere formal equality was insufficient to aid the emancipation of these learners and therefore a sort of substantive equality was required. A shift in policy is thus necessitated so as to provide teachers with a different tool to address such limited abilities to imagine.

Keywords

Social Justice, Imagination, Education, Formal Equality, Substantive Equality, Policy, Marginalisation, Photo Elicitation, Imaginative Narratives, Focus Groups

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction and Background

Set against the backdrop of Spaul's (2015) two school worlds, this paper delves into the inequality in imagination of marginalised learners whose school world is

likely one riddled with the application of formal equality. Spaul (2015) speaks of one school world which tends to accommodate a wealthier class of learner in which opportunities for future success are abundant. However, Spaul (2015) goes on to claim that the vast majority of South African learners are exposed to a school world somewhat different from the one that caters for wealthier learners. A school world in which learner performance is generally poor and very little future success is achieved is the school world which forms the so called second school world; this being the one to which most South African learners are exposed.

Borrowing from Spaul's (2015) notion of two school worlds and linking such notion to Gynther's (2009) distinction between two types of equality, with one being formal equality and the other being substantive equality, it becomes apparent that each world plays host to one of the two types of equality mentioned above. In the one world, the implementation of formal equality perpetuates and even exacerbates inequality; while in the other world, the implementation of substantive equality focuses on the degree to which individuals have been disadvantaged when determining the level of support required at present. This type of equality has proved to be more liberating than the former, particularly in instances of marginalised groups (Gynther, 2009; Dean, 2018).

Our paper is located within the discourse of teachers freeing the minds of oppressed learners so as to better enable them to use imagination as a vehicle for liberation; and ultimately achieve their full academic potential. Such a discourse is routed in the work of Deleuze (1994) as he wrote about the freeing of one's mind through the practice of imagination. In addition, in the early 21st century Mathews (2002) asserted that imagination enables one to access a world of fantasy free from limitations of one's reality. More recently, Cleaver and Katsiaficas (2001) highlighted the importance of imagination in channeling individuals' minds prior to engaging in resistance movements against oppressive forces. Just three years ago, Jansen (2018) asserted that imagination aids tremendously in freeing one's mind of contextual constraints. In this regard, it should be noted that Deleuze (1994), two decades earlier, contended that imagination forces one's mind to operate at the border between what is known, through experience, and what is unknown, through having never experienced it. Operating at this border for extended periods of time, Deleuze (1994) claims, causes the line between what is known and what is unknown to be blurred, and so eventually the unknown becomes the known. In this paper, merging of the unknown with the known takes place through the use of one's imagination so that ultimately the participants were able to break free from contextual constraints and so transcend their circumstances of social injustices. Accordingly, by merely beginning to imagine, their minds through the freedom of imagination became an essential tool in effecting social change in their lives.

Upon analyzing the data gathered for this paper, we discovered that imagination, in the instances of some marginalised learners tended to be limited by context and experience. Thus, liberation through imagination was uncommon in

respect of certain learners. This was particularly evident with learners who had constantly been exposed to instances of marginalisation through existing in structures which forced upon them a school world in which performance was generally poor and success was seldom achieved. Remaining cognisant of these already existing structures we set about gathering data in a manner which allowed participants to imagine freely whilst also having the opportunity to word and reword their imaginings. Gough (2004) has contended that the writing of fictional texts enables one to constantly word and reword one's thoughts until the words on the page best fits one's imagination. For this reason the use of imaginative narratives was central in our data collection process. In addition, encouraging the use of imagination as far as imagining new, non-oppressive structures was concerned, enabled us to write our paper against the backdrop of Freire's (1996) call for structural transformation.

1.2. Formal Equality and Substantive Equality, the Difference and Policy

An overdependency on educational policy is problematic when trying to achieve equality as Gynther (2009) argues that policy forms mere formal equality and with formal equality comes an equal application of rules. Ntho-Ntho and Nieuwenhuis (2016) support Gynther's (2009) argument against an overdependency on educational policy as they contend that an equal application of rules in an already unequal context yields unequal results. Gynther (2009) draws a distinction between formal equality and substantive equality with formal equality being a mere equal application of rules, as suggested above. While the latter, substantive equality, focuses more on disadvantage, holding that the greater the disadvantage to which one has been subjected, the greater the support one should receive.

Unlike with formal equality, in the instance of substantive equality an unequal application of rules is often necessitated. It thus becomes apparent, that when taking into consideration the different degrees of disadvantage to which learners have been subjected, to merely rely on policy, which forms a type of formal equality, is insufficient and therefore falls short of truly achieving equality. Relying more on substantive equality, in the absence of policy accordingly appears somewhat more desirable when attempting to liberate the minds of marginalised learners. However, as argued by Ntho-Ntho and Nieuwenhuis (2016) such is not the case in South Africa's contemporary education system.

1.3. Marginalisation and Substantive Equality

In our paper we have relied on Young's (2000) interpretation of marginalisation to clarify for the reader exactly what is meant when we make reference to marginalised learners. Young (2000) identified, what she referred to as "five faces of oppression." According to Young (2000), the five faces of oppression are exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. For the purposes of our paper, we shall focus only on her explanation of marginalisation as a face of oppression. Young (2000) proffers that marginalised beings

are beings whom the system of labour will not use and thus they are forced to the outskirts of society. The result is often impoverishment. Marginalisation, according to Young (2000) is the process by which marginalised individuals are forced to the outskirts of society and left to face material deprivation in a society where many others have plenty. Accordingly, the marginalised learners to whom we refer in our paper are children of adults who have been pushed to the outskirts of society, and left to face material deprivation through exclusion from the labour force. It must, at this juncture, be noted that the school from which data was gathered was situated in a community in which unemployment was rife and material deprivation proved to be rather common-place. Thus, referring to the learners who participated in the process of data collection as marginalised learners can, in our opinions, be justified.

The need for an application of substantive equality, especially within a schooling context riddled with marginalised learners is highlighted by Mamphele Ramphele (2017) in her book *Dreams, betrayal and hope*. In this book, Ramphele (2017), amongst other things, writes about how South Africans are still plagued by inequalities of the past. She argues that settlement patterns still reflect the inequalities of the past. Ramphele (2017) contends that many a white family home, which has now been in one's family for several generations was often purchased at a subsidised rate and has now multiplied tenfold in value. Whereas people of colour are having to only invest in such properties at a present day higher and unsubsidised rate. This is undoubtedly a reality for the community served by the school in which we gathered data. Surely in such an instance mere formal equality would be an insult to the dignity and emancipation of many an oppressed individual.

The beating of social justice issues, as Nieuwenhuis (2011) puts it "with a hammer" in the context of education receives very little support from both Ramphele (2017) and Gynther (2009). Gynther (2009) thus justifiably, in our opinions, claims that the beating of social justice issues with a hammer forces one to view every issue as though it were a nail and so the application of substantive equality rather than formal equality would appear to be much more desirable when attempting to free the minds of marginalised learners. Gathering data through the use of imaginative texts, combined with photo elicitations allowed the participants a back and forth freedom of movement in their minds between the constraints of their realities (photos) and the freedom of their imaginings (narratives), rather than merely replicating the structural constraints experienced by participants in their daily lives. These methods and their effectiveness in the freeing of marginalised beings' minds through acting as tools for social change are explained in greater detail under our next heading.

2. Dealing with Data

2.1. Methodology

We have written this paper with a desire to assert that through the use of imagination the voices of marginalized beings may be liberated. We wished to show

that the implementation of substantive equality in respect of learners who have fallen victim to systems of oppression does indeed aid in the emancipation of such learners. We have thus positioned this paper within the critical theory paradigm, and selected participants who may be considered as marginalized beings, following the definition stated by Young (2000) above. To ensure the accuracy of results a three-tier methodology was used which included photo elicitations, interviews and the writing of imaginative narratives.

2.2. Participants

The participants in this paper were twelve learners, ranging from the Grades 8 to 11. Our reason for choosing learners as opposed to teachers was because they have their entire adult future ahead of them and so may benefit more than adults through liberation. Furthermore they are directly affected by social injustices in their current learning environments, which tends to limit their imaginings of future success. Our reason for choosing this category of learners (i.e. Grades 8 to 11) was because we wished to obtain responses from more mature learners (as opposed to primary school learners) so as to minimize the possibility of immature responses which may have resulted in the generation of data which would have been less rich. To ensure greater representativeness participants from both genders and multiple race groups were selected in a proportion reflective of the general demographics of the research site.

Our research site was a single high school in which social injustice, in particular, marginalization of the community served by the school, was overt and learners at this site were performing poorly. In this case, we chose a poverty-stricken school with a fairly low pass rate. Our unit of analysis was thus learners who were performing poorly in a single school which existed in a context of overt social injustice and marginalization. This was to ensure that the spaces from which the data originated were in fact socially unjust in nature and quite accustomed to the occurrence of marginalization. In addition to this reasoning, our decision to use a single school rather than multiple schools was to ensure a common experience amongst participants which made the probing for, and obtaining of, deeper responses in the focus group discussion more easily achievable.

2.3. Methods Used to Obtain Data

2.3.1. Data Collection Design

The order in which our methods of data collection are expressed below, is the order in which our collection methods took place. Our justification for this order is expressed in the discussion under focus groups as it is here that we bring our entire justification for this approach, and the approach itself, together to form a single coherent and overarching justification.

2.3.2. Photo Elicitation

Upon the first meeting with the participants we made use of photo elicitation. We presented each of the participants with four photographs of four different spaces in and around their school. We then asked them to describe each of those

spaces and how, if at all, they may have influenced one's experiences at their school. We then asked the participants to simply imagine experiences different from the ones previously described. This session thus served to establish a common point of departure in respect of learners' experiences in the photographed spaces. Oftentimes the experiences described by the learners could be viewed as constraints of realities which ultimately hindered their attainment of academic success. Nevertheless, adding the dimension of imagination to this initial session enabled us to fathom the initial range of learners' imaginations while keeping somewhat negative and socially unjust experiences in mind. Thus, beginning to explore possible ways in which imagination could be used as a tool with which one could break free from constraints of realities was introduced.

2.3.3. Imaginative Narratives

A week after the photo elicitation, we returned to the school and asked the participants to engage in the writing of imaginative narratives. They did so, while keeping in mind the somewhat negative experiences which were reminisced on during our previous photo elicitation encounter. Our reason for asking for written responses was because [Clandinin and Connelly \(2000\)](#) contend that educational research often concerns itself with the construction and reconstruction of personal stories which are easier to construct and reconstruct when written. Thus, as [Gough \(2004\)](#) argues, writing enabled the participants to word and reword their stories until the words best captured their thoughts, in this case, their imaginations. This process in keeping with [Mathews' \(2002\)](#) assertion that imagination activates the use of fantasy to escape reality therefore enabled learners to escape the constraints imposed on them by their material realities as their imaginations began to run free. In essence, by employing the fantasy of imagination, as highlighted by [Mathews \(2002\)](#); imagination indeed became the vehicle by which learners minds could move away from limitations of socially unjust experiences towards instances free from constraints of reality. Thus, gathering data in this manner allowed learners the opportunity to begin to grapple with ideas of social change through imagining such changes. The changes included, amongst others, not being painted with one brush simply because of the structural social group to which they belonged, and not having their expectations of future achievements lowered simply because of the marginalised community in which they lived.

Given that the participants had never experienced performing in a completely socially just environment. We opted to follow [Gough's \(2004\)](#) suggestion to deploy fictional texts to obtain story lines of educational inquiry. These took the form of imaginative narratives. Such narratives were focused on the imagining of success as this then aided in freeing the participant's minds from the possible constraints of what was commonly experienced by them in their schooling context. Nevertheless, elements of constraint, in the form of simple and generally low goals, remained evident. It was the emergence of these elements of constraint that spurred us towards the writing of this paper.

2.3.4. Focus Groups

Finally, we engaged the twelve learners in a focus group discussion. Focus groups are a form of qualitative research which helps to explore topics with an emphasis on how views and attitudes change when respondents discuss answers with each other (Gibbs, 1997). In addition to this, Hyden and Bulow (2003) suggest that focus groups promote interaction among participants, and this often results in the merging of ideas. In the case of this paper, imaginings expressed by some participants that differed somewhat from lived experiences began to merge with imaginings of other participants. For instance, a participant named Daina imagined learning in an environment of greater praise, while Bianca imagined a space in which academic accolades are positioned more prestigiously in and around the school. Thus, despite initially being frustrated with the reality of achievements not being praised and appropriately displayed around the school, the learners' imaginings enabled them to transcend such frustrations. Accordingly, imagination began to operate as a means by which one could begin to move towards social change.

Our data collection process thus followed a trajectory which commenced with a common understanding in the photo elicitation concerning socially unjust spaces and marginalisation as well as how these spaces may have operated as constraints in respect of liberation. It then moved to more individualistic understandings as expressed in the imaginative narratives; so as to enable the learners' minds to run free. Doing this, allowed imagination to operate as a means by which constraints of reality could be broken, albeit in one's mind. However, the process finally brought one back to a common understanding of all aspects combined in the focus group discussion. This approach was in line with Gibbs's (1997) suggestion that the use of focus groups shifts the attention away from the individual and towards the phenomenon. Hence, concluding our data collection process with a firm focus on the phenomenon itself, being that of learners' imagination and its inequality when faced with socially unjust spaces, seemed most appropriate.

3. Implementing Substantive Equality for Emancipation

3.1. Central Argument of the Paper

In this paper we argue that the implementation of substantive equality in schools is needed to achieve emancipation of marginalised learners.

From this argument, the following three elements emerged: implementation of formal equality in schools, implementation of substantive equality in schools, and finally, emancipation of marginalised learners.

3.2. Dealing with Each Element of the Argument in Turn

3.2.1. Implementation of Formal Equality in Schools

The context in which education in South Africa is taking place at present, is one in which vast inequities remain evident (Spaull, 2015). These inequities include,

amongst others, inferior education for the less wealthy. Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) argue that increasingly value systems in society are at odds with the temptation of material gain. The implementation of formal equality was indeed in existence in the day to day experiences of the learners whom we interviewed. Such implementation ranged from concerns about individual needs and desires as well as punishments and expectations of learners to assessment of learners' academic abilities. The constant implementation of formal equality becomes starkly apparent in the extracts below.

It doesn't surprise me that the trophies are kept in such a small, confined space; and in the staffroom of all places. Nobody can see them there. What motivation is there in that? ... some learners need more motivation, especially those who battle, but the school just treats us all the same. —Bianca

I know nobody will help me because in the past people haven't been very helpful, they feel as though they are wasting their time with all of us in this school, we are painted with the same brush. It is as though we are only expected to follow one career path. A path that is in tech and not a path that is in more academic fields. —Toby

You have to keep yourself on track in order to be successful, because in this place nobody will do it for you. That picture just reminds me of how most people here don't care. I don't even drink and do stuff like that, even though most other learners do. But nobody really seems to praise me for being so good. —Daina

Above, Bianca, Toby and Daina each speak of how learners in their school are subjected to a sort of treatment that is largely the same despite being different learners, each with individual needs and desires. In the case of Bianca she expresses the need for certain learners, in particular one's who are struggling academically, to be given more praise for their achievements so as to motivate them to continue to perform well. However, evidently this is not the case, as all the learners who receive trophies and various other accolades have them displayed in the same less than visible space within the school (see [Figure 1](#)). Remaining on the issue of praise, Daina complains about how she receives very little if any praise for being one of few learners in her school who does not engage in the consumption of alcohol. She expresses a desire for greater praise. It thus becomes apparent that in an instance where extra praise should be given, when considering the unique circumstances mentioned, extra praise is simply withheld. This is likely because nobody else is given praise for abstaining from alcohol; and so all the learners in this school are, to a large degree, treated the same.

It appears as though the trend of treating learners exactly the same extends into the realm of teaching and learning within the classroom. This becomes evident in the words of Lawrence, below, where he speaks about the constant and rather unnecessary doing of revision work in class. Expecting every learner in the class to revise the exact same work most likely does not take into account the differing abilities and levels of understandings of the learners in the class.



Figure 1. Trophy cabinet in the staffroom.

I've played sick before and I'll likely play sick again. Especially on those kind of days where there is no point in being at school because teachers are just doing revision work. And it's usually the same work over and over again, not necessarily what I need to focus on. It becomes very boring and most people don't pay attention anyway. I can rather stay at home and do something more constructive, like eat or something. —Lawrence

Treating all learners the same occurs in respect of punishment (see **Figure 2** below) in this school as suggested by Raymond and Erin below.

When I look at that picture of the bench it reminds me that all the naughty children sit there when they fight. —Raymond

When looking at that picture I am reminded of one day when I arrived late for school. On that day I got locked out. You see, what happens is whenever you arrive late, you just get locked out with all the other late arrivals, and then you get detention, no matter what your reason for coming late is. My brother was sick that day, but there was no point in explaining because as I said, all the late arrivals get detention anyway. —Erin

Nevertheless, being caught up in, and suctioned into, an already existing system of formal equality happens all too easily in the day to day lives of the learners whom we interviewed. This is suggested in the instance described by Khetiwe who explains how she simply got suctioned into a scenario that was already playing itself out, in essence she was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Oneday, I was in Gr 9, these boys were running away from a teacher and they were just pulling me with them and I just ran, I don't know why I ran but I did. Then the teacher caught us and we were all going to be in trouble. —Khetiwe

But this suctioning of learners into a system of formal equality tends to go beyond mere punishments for misbehaviour and even extends itself to the assessing of learners' academic performance. The practices described and suggested by Raymond and Lawrence in the extracts below certainly leave much to be desired as assessment of one's academic performance goes to the very heart of schooling.



Figure 2. Bench in reception area associated with punishment.

I think the teachers just push people through the system because some of the people who do pass, they know nothing about any of their school work. You see their results and notice they made it by one percent. So I think teachers just pass some of them to get rid of them. —Raymond

I personally don't think that the previous grades really prepare you for what is to come in the final phase of your schooling. You keep on passing in the lower grades, but you don't really understand the work anyway. So most people, myself included really battle and perform quite poorly at the higher grades. But if you make it into Grade 12, and many don't make it in this school, you find that you end up passing. I don't know how that happens, but at least it gives me hope. —Lawrence

Despite the overwhelming evidence of the application of formal equality described above, the spoken words of Clint, below, go to the very heart of this paper. In Clint's extract the limited expectations of learners from this school are alluded to, and it is such a limited expectation that likely influences the limiting of one's own imaginings of future self and future success.

Many people don't really expect me to do well, even people in my family don't expect much. In my life it's only my mother who does expect it. Well, I don't know if she expects it or if she wants it. I barely passed last year and my mother was like the only one who kept saying no I must try harder, I can do better. In this school everyone does so badly that I doubt anyone really expects anything different of any of us. —Clint

It seems apparent from the extracts above that Hofmeyr and Nyoka's (2013) call for intergenerational equity is a logical one at present. Intergenerational equity, according to Hofmeyr and Nyoka (2013) is a principle of distributive justice which concerns the relationship between past, present and future generations. In essence the multiple generations are required to enter into a partnership so as to minimize the possibility of future generations carrying the burden of the excesses of their predecessors where power was abused in the instances of exploitative practices, which more often than not did in fact benefit some.

In the case of the learners whom we interviewed, it is likely that those who went before them set a pattern and trend which has influenced the manner in

which the learners who now attend the school are viewed; perhaps they are all viewed as nails and so the proverbial hammer is used to pound away at any matter that concerns them. A mere uniform application of policy, in which officials are seldom held to account for the educational experiences of learners in schools aids in locking such marginalised learners in a system of gross inequality (Bloch, 2009). In accordance with the work of Gynther (2009), we thus call for the application of substantive equality, which neither views all learners and problems as nails, nor suggests the use of a hammer, i.e. a general application of rules, in respect of any and all persons and problems. The application of substantive equality is explained, discussed and justified under the next heading in this paper.

3.2.2. Implementation of Substantive Equality in Schools

An equal application of the rules in an already unequal context, quite naturally, Ntho-Ntho and Nieuwenhuis (2016) argue, yields unequal results. Gynther (2009), in his understanding of substantive equality asserts that the greater the disadvantage to which one has been subjected, the greater the support one should receive. Such an understanding offers much relief to Ntho-Ntho and Nieuwenhuis's (2016) criticism of an equal application of rules. However, an equal application of rules, according to Jones and Walton (2018) appears to be a growing international trend in schools, and they do not foresee this trend dissipating anytime soon due to fears of receiving negative branding for non-compliance, as many consider rules to be sacrosanct. Nevertheless, when taking into consideration the unique contexts and experiences of learners within schools it becomes apparent that the application of substantive equality, which flies in the face of an equal application of rules, is greatly necessitated. The words of the learners below justify and add much clarity to this contention.

The sight of industry nearby and immediately in the background does distract me when at school. You see it clearly when at school, it's literally just across the street from the school so it becomes a part of your schooling life. There was once a fire at the refinery. I was excited to see something different but I was afraid at the same time that we may blow up. This fear of blowing up plays on my mind at times while I am at school, I just know I'm going to think about it constantly. Something should be done about this. I don't know if anything can be done, but certainly something should be done so we don't get distracted. Other schools don't have this problem, so they don't need this kind of help. —Clint

Just the location of this school alone, seems to justify the need for a treatment of this school that is somewhat different from most other schools in contemporary South Africa. It was the racist laws of the apartheid regime which permitted the construction of a school for the then so called coloured community in a ridiculously close proximity to an area that ought to have been zoned entirely for industry (see Figure 3, below) (Chari, 2006). It is not just Clint who feels adversely affected by the presence of industry while at school as the words of Brittany, below, describe how its presence affected her as well as many other learners on one school day in particular.



Figure 3. Industry overshadowing the school.

Oh yes! That Refinery is a distraction. I remember the fire at the refinery. That day People were taking pictures and sending them to each other. Nobody was concentrating on school work, in fact I don't think any work got done that day. Even a few days after that, people were talking about the fire and basically wasting whole periods just talking about it. If there was something that could be done about that huge distraction it would be very welcomed by me. —Brittany

The need for something to be done about the distraction caused by the presence of industry, presumably by some authority, is thus highlighted in the words of Brittany; and this highlights a need for treatment somewhat different from most contemporary South African schools. Clint's and Brittany's sentiments on point of different treatment for their school due to the presence of industry therefore seem very much alike. However, different treatment need not necessarily arise from some source outside the school. The words of Erin, below do indeed suggest that small attempts may be made by individuals within the school itself to provide additional support, and accordingly different treatment for those believed to need it most.

The podium is not my best friend because it's scary to go up in front of a lot of people, I used to have to go up when I was in the ecoclub. Some people who go up are talented but over the edge, it could be okay except the other learners don't appreciate what you go through when you go up there, they usually laugh and ridicule you. But Mrs. Simmons tries to get learners from troubled backgrounds involved in the ecoclub so at least they have something to take their minds off their problems. —Erin

A glimmer of hope for the application of substantive equality appears to be evident through the efforts put forward by Mrs. Simmons, as described by Erin, above. Nevertheless, these efforts are but a drop in the ocean when juxtaposed with the overwhelming blanket like application of rules evident in the actions of management within the school made visible through their decision to display pictures of politicians in the reception area of the school. Across South Africa many a government school chooses to display pictures of politicians in their reception area, as if it has been ordered by some general decree. They do this, ra-

ther than use the space to honour people within the school itself; people like Mrs. Simmons who are actively making a difference, or indeed learners themselves for their personal achievements. Using the space to honour people within the school would likely motivate others within the school to make a difference or, in the case of learners, strive harder for success. The annoyance with this gesture is evident in the words of Tatum and Nicole in the extracts below.

I don't even like seeing those pictures in the reception, it annoys me and makes me angry because personally I don't like Jacob Zuma because of all the corruption, and he does nothing for the people, that's why we still battle the way we do. We can talk about success, but in this place, South Africa, which is run so poorly, how will we ever achieve it? Yes, we can only achieve success if those of us who have been so disadvantaged are provided with more assistance than those who are already on top. When I say "on top" I mean those who already have a good life, a great life. —Tatum

That space should rather be used to honour the hard work of the students. That would motivate us to continue to work harder. Once, before those pictures were there I drew a good picture in Arts and Culture and the teacher put it up there for a few weeks. I think that wall space is better used for stuff like that instead of a president who robs us of our futures with the way he's running this country. —Nicole.

Apart from annoyance with the gesture itself, Tatum highlights a need for greater support for those who are already disadvantaged and simply trying to make a success of their lives. Nicole's words make clear the fact that she feels as though those in power are guilty of robbing her and presumably others like her, of their futures. At this juncture we feel it incumbent upon ourselves to remind the reader that the learners whom we interviewed come from a community which falls clearly within Young's (2000) understanding of marginalized beings. Thus, Nicole's reference to "us" likely refers to the marginalized whom she feels are robbed of their futures, we would suggest through this treating of all the same, rather than providing additional support for those who require it. Accordingly, although clearly needed, substantive equality is lacking in the daily school lives of the learners whom we interviewed.

Gynther (2009) draws a distinction between formal equality and substantive equality with formal equality being a mere equal application of rules. While the latter, substantive equality, focuses more on disadvantage, and clearly a greater focus on previous disadvantage is what the learners whom we interviewed are crying out for. Hence, unlike with formal equality which seems to be in operation in this school, in the instance of substantive equality an unequal application of rules is often necessitated. This unequal application of rules would likely place these marginalized learners on an equal playing field with their wealthier and more advantaged counterparts. It thus becomes apparent, that when taking into consideration the different degrees of disadvantage to which people have been subjected, to merely rely on policy, which forms a type of formal equality, is insufficient. Once again, through policy, this pounding of all issues of inequality

with a hammer is indeed also insufficient because, as is evident above, not all problems are nails.

3.2.3. Emancipation of Marginalised Learners

Freire (1970) refers to a sort of “knowing.” But what if this “knowing” to which Freire (1970) refers is what contributes significantly to learners’ experiences of poor performance? Freire (1970) argues that the act of knowing reduces the practice of education to a complex of techniques, naively considered to be neutral, by means of which the educational process is standardized in a sterile and bureaucratic operation with repetition being commonplace.

It was in the context of a standardized and sterile educational process that Freire (1970) wrote his article on the action of “knowing”. Freire (1970) contends that although the techniques are considered neutral, it is only through repetition that such consideration is taken as the norm, and this is sadly an operation of indoctrination. Deleuze (1994) proffers that repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it. The argument of Deleuze (1994) thus appears to support Freire’s (1970) claim that through repetition, indoctrination is in operation. We therefore see that many learners, falling into the category of the marginalised, as is the case with the learners whom we interviewed, likely come to “know” all too well an educational structure riddled with social injustices. Indeed in such a structure inequality abounds.

This “knowing” to which Freire (1970) refers, comes about, and is perpetuated by the repetition (repetition of two systems of education, repetition of lacking quality education, repetition of learner poor performance, repetition of inequality etc.) of what is considered neutral by the structure in which it occurs. The learners whom we interviewed are no exception when it comes to knowing experiences of limitation. Thus, the emancipation of the minds of marginalized learners is a particularly daunting task as is evident in the extracts below.

What’s happening around me really does influence the way I perform. For instance, if there is an atmosphere of people studying, like during exams I will study really well. However, when everyone around me is having fun, then I just want to join in and go all out. So, I need to find a balance in order to be academically successful, or at least I need to avoid being around people who are not interested in working. I find when I am in an environment that supports learning I can focus and even find it easier to imagine myself doing well. But when I am not in this space then all seems hopeless, and it seems like I may never be successful. —Brittany

Constant exposure to an environment in which academic success is not taken seriously evidently adversely affects Brittany’s ability to not only achieve success, but also imagine it. She even goes as far as claiming that through being in such an environment her attainment of success seems hopeless. However, it is not just an environment in which academic success is not taken seriously that adversely affects one’s ability to imagine success, but also an environment in which op-

portunities to be successful are few and far between. Such is the case with Tatum and evidenced in her words below.

*I have been told that I have a lot of potential. But honestly, I don't see it until I am given opportunities to succeed. Like in Maths for instance, if the teacher has just taught a section then gives us a test on it when it is fresh in my mind, I do well and this motivates me to work harder. I can then see myself doing well in my final exams before even writing them. But this doesn't often happen. Most times we are taught something and then only get tested on it in the exam, by then I have forgotten it, so in a case like that I just know I will do badly before even trying. — **Tatum***

It is apparent that in the instance described by Tatum, above, greater opportunities provided in which success is attainable would undoubtedly result in greater motivation for learners to be successful. Learners would thus not only achieve success easier but would also find it easier to imagine the attainment of such success. Having to tread a long journey to attain success is admittedly, in the words of Khetiwe, below, “off putting” but the mere ability to talk about success, according to her does provide her with some hope of achieving it.

*My aunt will talk about the future and what I could be, but she admits that there's still a lot that needs to be done to get from here, where I am now, to a really good job and good place in my life. But my Aunt's talking about it and encouraging me at least gives me hope even though the journey from where I am to where I would like to be is off putting. — **Khetiwe***

Although Khetiwe does not make specific mention of imagining success her claim that being able to talk about it, in our opinions feeds into Freire's (1970) assertion that knowing, in this case knowing a lack of success, is perpetuated by repetition itself. Thus, if the learners whom we interviewed repeatedly experience a lack of success, and therefore find it difficult to even talk about, or imagine success, because they have come to know the lack of success too well they would undoubtedly be stuck in a structure in which success remains out of their reach. In addition, the very structure in which they would be stuck would prevent them from imagining anything different. Accordingly the emancipation of the minds of the marginalized learners would become all the more difficult, especially where teachers are left with nothing but a hammer with which to pound away at what limits the imaginations of these learners. Freire's (1985) call for structural transformation to aid in the emancipation of the marginalized is thus supported in this paper.

4. Conclusion

The marginalized learners whose words were shared in this paper have suffered repeated exposure to experiences of limitation and so academic success was seldom acquired by them. They thus initially experienced difficulty in imagining success which accordingly resulted in their imaginations, the very thing which ought to set them free, limiting their imaginings of future self. It became evident

that the application of formal equality in failing to consider the unique degrees to which each of these learners had previously been disadvantaged was insufficient to achieve emancipation of the minds of these marginalized beings. We thus argue in support of the application of substantive equality which will consider previous and unique disadvantages of each marginalised learner.

In our gathering of data, we allowed the learners the freedom and flexibility to simply imagine ways of transcending the constraints of their environments. This process enabled us to begin to open an avenue through which the learners were able to use the fantasy of imagination as a vehicle for the attainment of social change in their lives. In allowing individual and free imaginings, we were forced to consider the unique degree of disadvantage of each learner. It is therefore hoped that if others follow our example and begin to consider the unique degrees of disadvantage amongst learners locally and globally, they too will be in a better position to aid learners in respect of the emancipation of their minds. Thus, ultimately learners' imaginings of success will no longer be limited by repeated experiences of failure and marginalisation to which too many learners have come to know all too well.

Acknowledgements

This work is based on the research supported by the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Bloch, G. (2009). *The Toxic Mix. What's Wrong with South Africa's Schools and How to Fix It*. NB Publishers.
- Chari, S. (2006). Life Histories of Race and Space in the Making of Wentworth and Merebank, South Durban. *Journal of African Studies*, 65, 105-130.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00020180600771808>
- Clandinin, D., & Connelly, F. (2000). *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. Wiley Publishers.
- Cleaver, K., & Katsiaficas, G. (2001). *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Black Panthers and Their Legacy*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203950920>
- Dean, H. (2018). Tensions between Formal and Substantive Equality. In S. Seubert, O. Eberl, & F. van Waarden (Eds.), *Reconsidering EU Citizenship: Contradictions and Constraints* (pp. 108-116). EE Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788113540.00014>
- Deleuze, G. (1994). *Difference and Repetition*. Columbia University Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1985). *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation*. Bergin and Garvey Publishers.

- Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin.
- Gibbs, A. (1997). Focus Group. *Social Research Update*, No. 19, 4.
- Gough, N. (2004). Performing Imaginative Inquiry: Narrative Experiments and Rhizosemiotic Play. In T. Nielsen, R. Fitzgerald, & M. Fettes (Eds.), *Imagination in Educational Theory and Practice: A Many-Sided Vision* (pp. 42-60). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Gynther, P. (2009). Basic Skills Provision for the Have-Not's: A Rights Hoax? Re-Examining International Standards on the Right to Education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15, 851-864. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110903452333>
- Hofmeyr, J., & Nyoka, A. (2013). *Transformation Audit 2013: Confronting Exclusion*. <http://www.ijr.org.za/portfolio-items/transformation-audit-2013-confronting-exclusion/>
- Hyden, L., & Bulow, P. (2003). Who's Talking: Drawing Conclusions from Focus Groups—Some Methodological Considerations. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6, 305-321. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570210124865>
- Jansen, J. (2018). Imagination beyond the Western Mind. In H. Moeller, & A. Whitehead (Eds.), *Imagination: Cross-Cultural Philosophical Analyses* (pp. 7-32). Oxford University Press.
- Jones, N., & Walton, R. (2018). Using Narratives to Foster Critical Thinking about Diversity and Social Justice. In A. Haas, & M. Eble (Eds.), *Key Theoretical Frameworks: Teaching Technical Communication in the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 241-260). Utah State University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7330/9781607327585.c010>
- Mathews, R. (2002). *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*. Routledge.
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2011). Social Justice in Education Today. *Acta Academica*, 43, 189-210.
- Ntho-Ntho, A., & Nieuwenhuis, J. (2016). Religion in Education Policy in South Africa: A Challenge of Change. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 38, 236-248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2014.984583>
- Ramphele, M. (2017). *Dreams, Betrayal and Hope*. Penguin Books.
- Spaull, N. (2015). Schooling in South Africa: How Low Quality Education Becomes a Poverty Trap. In A. de Lannoy, S. Swartz, L. Lake, & C. Smith (Eds.), *The South African Child Gauge* (pp. 34-41). Children's Institute.
- Young, I. (2000). The Five Faces of Oppression. In L. Heldke, & P. O' Connor (Eds.), *Oppression, Privilege and Resistance* (pp. 5-16). McGraw Hill Publishers.