NO RANKING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE? MEASURING QUALITY OUTCOMES IN MAURITIAN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

- Current conventions about quality in the Mauritian education system.
- Research project being undertaken in Mauritius in low SES schools-
- Conference purpose-“How leadership and learning for social justice takes place in a Catholic primary school?”.
- Is it possible to move from the existing understanding that a different type of schooling is provided for children in low SES areas to a broader understanding that the measurement of quality outcomes needs to include things such as life skills and empowerment for participation in school and community decision making?
CLARIFYING THE TERMS

Social Justice principles:

- Distributive justice (Rawls 1971), e.g. providing extra resources.

- Cultural Justice (Young 1990; Fraser 1997), e.g. recognition unique socio-cultural backgrounds.

- Participative Justice (Young 1990; Fraser 1997; Gewirtz & Cribb 2002), e.g. authentic participation in decision making concerning one’s life.
CLARIFYING THE TERMS

• QUALITY OUTCOMES:

• Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) definition of quality education:
  - Capacity of the education system to increase access & equity to education + promote the acquisition of essential key competencies (OECD, 2012).

• Education For All conference (EFA, 1990) & Dakar framework for Action (EFA, 2000) conferences:
  - Quality = accessibility, relevance, enrolment, retention and achievement
MAURITIUS: Quality outcomes = Exam results

Strengths:
- Free, compulsory pre-primary & primary education
- 99% enrolment rate at primary level
- Equity of access for boys & girls + rural & urban areas

Weaknesses:
- Relevance of curriculum content
- Exam-oriented evaluation system/teaching & learning
- Relatively high rate of school dropout in middle years of secondary schooling

OBSTACLES TO TRUE QUALITY OUTCOMES
Low SES schools: Education inequality is created.
Social justice principles & Catholic ethos in education

- One of the key mission of Catholic schools: Preferential Option for the Poor (Sacred Congregation for Catholic education, 2008)
  - Support the most vulnerable ones (financial/disability/spirituality)
  - Empowering the Poor (quality education/providing him/her a voice)
  - Enabling this voice to be heard and fully participate in matters that concerns him/her.

&

Social Justice principles: Equity, Recognition, Empowerment & Participative action.
Introduction: The Republic of Mauritius

- The Republic of Mauritius comprises the main island of Mauritius and the islands of Rodrigues, Agaléga and Saint Brandon.

- Population of 1.2 Million:
  - Hindus (sub-divided into Marathis, Telegus and Tamils),
  - Muslims of Indian descent, Sino-Mauritians,
  - ‘General Population’- Creoles (African ancestry or have both African and European roots (Eriksen, 1990), Franco-Mauritians (European ancestry) and other “indeterminate origin” (Boswell, 2005: 197)
Mauritian Education System

- **Structure: Strong Colonial Influence**

  - **Private schools**
    - Fully paid by individuals & partly accountable to the State
  
  - **Government schools**
    - Fully run & funded by the State
  
  - **Aided schools**
    - Grant-Aided but managed by Religious authorities, e.g. BEC

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & HUMAN RESOURCES (MOE)
Context of Catholic schools in Mauritius

The *Bureau de l’Education Catholique* (BEC) mainly ensures:

- Management of 46 grant-aided primary schools & 17 grant-aided secondary schools.

- Quality training for secular teachers, based on catholic ethos.

- Training of school leaders (primary & secondary level).

- Actively contribute to the country’s reflection on education for the development of innovative educational structures & child’s welfare/development.
Main challenges of the Mauritian Primary school system

- An extremely competitive evaluation system - the Certificate Primary Education (CPE):
  - Compulsory exams to access to secondary schools (National & regional schools);
  - Grading system marked in terms of A+;
  - Sitting for 5 subjects (Papers set in English);
  - Relatively high rate of failure of CPE students (30-35% yearly)
ZEP schools as an inclusive strategy

MOE’s initiative in 2002:
The ‘Zones d’Education Prioritaires’ (ZEP project) addresses “educational failure” (Mauritius National Report, 2008, p.20) seen especially in low SES areas.

- Special infrastructural & monitoring support which aim at enabling 30 ZEP schools to improve results at CPE exams.
- Main evaluating criteria of project: Percentage pass rate at CPE exams & rate of students’ absenteeism.
- Yet, many of these schools very slowly progress (especially at the level of pass rate at CPE exams).
Quality education for Social Justice

AIM: To investigate & understand teaching, learning and leadership in a low SES catholic school.

THE CASE: Blue Boat Primary School (Catholic)

GEOGRAPHIC SAMPLE: School situated on coastal area with families mainly from low SES areas.

Unique Catholic school of Mauritius which is part of the ZEP project & its lowest percentage pass rate at CPE exams was 20.7% in 2003.

All Teachers, school leaders and some parents& students were interviewed.
FINDINGS & DISCUSSION (I)

- DIFFERENTIATED PEDAGOGY

Traditional & new teaching tools & strategies: collaboration/peer-tutoring, hands-on activities/Role-Play/

Technological tools: interactive whiteboard vs

‘drilling exercises’ & repetition - examined through traditional paper & pen exams.

Need to review Teacher-Pupil ratio

Pedagogical help from community (Creative English classes)
FINDINGS & DISCUSSION (II)

- RELEVANCE OF CURRICULUM

Teachers stated that curriculum should “meet the pupils’ reality & needs” or “be in their mother-tongue” - the use of Kreol language facilitates the learner’s understanding of abstract concepts & foreign languages (English & French).

Existing textbooks & topics are beyond learners’ interest & comprehension.

The need for Essential Learning Component (ELC).
FINDINGS & DISCUSSION (III)

• HIGH STAKES EXAMS DETERMINING QUALITY

“Most of the learners improve throughout the years but will not be of the level for CPE exams and when they fail they only feel that they are failures”.

The need to focus upon ELC- basic literacy & numeracy skills.

New evaluation systems: Sports/Arts & Creativity/Oral assessments can become new means of evaluating progress in ZEP schools.

Authentic political will to review the current evaluation system for low SES schools.
FINDINGS & DISCUSSION (IV)

- LEADERSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

“Doing good by the students and the teachers” - financial help; not giving up to difficulties; guided by gospel values; transparency & accountability; acknowledging “…the daily reality of the child…the child’s right to know, learn how to write his name…”; reinforce the values of Preferential option for the poor so that staff enact these on a daily basis.
FINDINGS & DISCUSSION(V)

- Adequate training for teachers who work in low SES schools

Availability of special teaching resources for children with special needs & those who lack school materials.

More consideration & encouragement for teachers who work there.

The low SES schools should not become a “dumping place” for demotivated teachers.
CONCLUSION

- Acknowledgement of the uniqueness of ZEP schools but little change is actually happening in terms of quality outcomes.

- Broader vision of social justice principles (distributive/cultural & participative) are not part of the educational structure & culture of low SES schools.
RECOMMENDATIONS

• Providing the children found in low SES schools with a genuine “fair go”

• Acknowledging the uniqueness of each ZEP school: cultural/geographic/family & ethnic backgrounds

• Genuinely involve parents & community to participate in decision making & take ownership of school decisions & implementation

• Providing quality training for teachers to understand & work within unique context
JULIO’S STORY

• Julio, 11 years old, already knows the meaning of “being a failure”!
• At his 1st attempt, he didn’t succeed the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) exams.
• Yet, he is repeating his class and hopes to “learn about baking cakes…like my mum”
REFERENCES


