The Essentiality of Decolonisation to Excellent Functionality by Public Secondary Schools

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Abstract: The paper interrogates why experimentation with decolonisation is hard to come by in public secondary schools despite its usefulness. The paper is both conceptual and empirical in nature. Document study and interviewing techniques were used to collect data from three selected secondary schools in one of the Districts of Limpopo Province. Research findings reveal that firstly, sticking to old apartheid practices prevent schools from becoming sufficiently functional. Secondly, dearth of consciousness that decolonisation revolutionises schools, delay managing schools through it. Thirdly, the absence of decolonisation in schools amounts to emancipation, without freedom, to institutional incumbents. Lastly, decolonisation emphasises taking thinking differently seriously in educational institutions. As part of the conclusion, the researcher recommends that public secondary schools need to genuinely embrace the 21st century manner of managing and leading learning institutions where decolonisation of every practice at the school, permeates every corner of a school's governance. Such a change of focus is likely to assist schools to deinstitutionalise the entrenched colonialism which is irrelevant in the 21st century schooling.

Keywords: Consciousness, Deinstitutionalisation, Mental Barriers, Revolution

1. Introduction

The desire for a decolonised school has to be an aspiration of every educational institution at least this century. Gold (2016:8) has a point when emphasising that in learning institutions, decolonised practices, remain a stress-buster for all the organisational incumbents. This suggests that with decolonisation in place in a school, not a single member would be heard of complaining of stress-related challenges. Decolonisation under discussion in this paper, is being comprehended by Sebola (2015:610) as the creation of a structure and order which cannot be externally imposed, which result from interaction between a multiplicity of governing nodes which influence each other in the creation of a certain order or behaviour. Every school requires order and a certain way of behaving by all its members for a learning institution to succeed with its core- function of teaching and learning. This is exactly what genuine decolonisation, brings to an educational institution. In the context of a school, decolonisation has to be internally generated other than being externally imposed, so that it remains relevant to the ethos, culture and general unique ways of doing things in that school. One of the key advantages of decolonisation in a school, is its ability to nag all institutional incumbents to always wish to serve a school with aplomb and distinction.

Clarke (2009:14) understands decolonisation to be the act or manner of governing an educational institution which enables everyone to speak out his mind. This implies the emancipation of everyone for the triggering of excellent functionality of the entire educational institution. Broadly, this signifies that decolonisation encapsulates how power and authority are exercised in a particular educational organisation with the intention of carrying out the mandate of that institution. To confirm the essentiality of decolonisation especially in an school which has being recording scholastic learner performance which was putting a school in a category of under-performance and dys-functionality, Msila (2016:31) articulates that a sound governance and decolonisation have a potential of steering the half-sinking ship into the bay of educational transformation and social change. With decolonisation in place, a school that was known to be struggling in terms of producing brilliant and exquisite learner results could turn the tide and register quality learner performance. Decolonisation teaches emancipatory and civil ways of engagement for institutional members. Furthermore, decolonisation is known to be able to teach how to decimate organisational challenges other than magnifying or aggravating them (Fox, 2010; Theletsane, 2014; Moyo, 2015:16; Levin, 2017:33). Khoza, (2015:43) and Masina (2015:24) contend that where there is decolonisation, the

delivery of quality schooling to all learners is possible. Nkuna (2015:120) and Tisdall (2015:15) have a point when remarking that apartheid has instilled in African professionals and their learners a sense of self-hate and inferiority complex to the level of battling to embrace decolonisation through which they would use to govern, manage and lead their secondary schools with dignity and pride. Brilliant functionality by public secondary schools is essential especially where an educational institution is not paying any lip service to the concept of a decolonisation project. It has to be stated in no unequivocal terms that entrenching colonialism benefits no one in public secondary schools (Yukl, 2006; Motsepe, 2015:5 & Allen, 2017:9). One of the underlying reasons why many secondary schools still experience colonialism that is indescribably inefficacious, after more than two decades of independence, is because of placing little attention to decolonisation project largely by public secondary schools. Shejavali (2015:34) and Siswana (2007:182) have a point when asserting that conspicuous indicators of the inefficacy of colonialism are the dysfunctional institutional systems and structures prevalent in many public secondary schools which are also responsible for the under-achievement of those schools.

2. Theoretical Considerations

Welman, Kruger & Mitchell (2005:12) retort that a theory represents a mental view of phenomenon or a system and normally forms the basis for a chain of reasoning. This signifies that when one advances a particular argument on a phenomenon such as the utilisation of the decolonisation project by public secondary schools, with a theory in place, one's argument is likely to hold substance. Critical theory underpins this paper. Its choice rests on the relevance the researcher finds in it in terms of sufficiently illuminating issues of how lack of decolonisation project by some public secondary schools, deny learners there the basic right of quality and decent schooling they are entitled to and how that persists to paint a picture of African public secondary schools as places where the future of black learners are being doomed for good. Critical theory helped the researcher to make meaning from the whole notion of the essentiality of decolonisation, to the excellent functionality by public secondary schools and how persisting with colonialism by public secondary schools, compromises the dignity of learners. Briefly, one of the principles

of the critical theory is that very often truth serves the status quo. The other principle relates to the question of "why is it that certain groups of people are so privileged in life than others"? These fundamental principles of this theory were helpful in clarifying how lack of decolonisation project, perpetuates inequality between learners. For instance, on the one hand learners from Limpopo Province under Capricorn District found themselves attending some schools where there were no genuine decolonisation project, in their learning institutions, something which was not completely the case with learners of other Provinces. The predicament with such a sordid state of affairs could be that some learners are already being advantaged by where they are schooling much as others are already disadvantaged (Motsepe, 2015:5). Knott (2017:14) and Joubert (2017:18) remind that lack of decolonisation project may make it difficult for the school governors and managers to be accountable to their customers, namely, learners and parents. Critical theory encourages reflective and analytical thought with regard to a lack of decolonisation projects, in some of the public secondary schools. The fact that the three chosen secondary schools in this paper are still having shaky decolonisation projects, has to be a cause for concern. The question to pose is whether the absence of decolonisation project, is deliberate or unintentional in the three secondary schools under study. Critical theory is better placed to respond to such a question (Moyo, 2015:16; Skenjana, 2017:8). The theory reveals that inequality in schooling in the form of experiencing decolonisation in some schools and failure to witness it, in others, could be entrenched if the masses are docile and gullible and not standing up for their own trampled upon rights. Decolonisation facilitates quality teaching and learning with the theory serving as a basis for approaching, understanding and interpreting the significance of decolonisation to excellent school functionality as occurring in some educational institutions of the Provinces. Higgs and Smith (2010:67) advise that knowledge and how we understand truth, including scientific truth, moral truth and historical truth should not be separated from everyday life. This implies that comprehending the trend on how quality and decent schooling services are denied to their legitimate recipients, namely, learners and parents, the context of the manifestation of denial of quality and decent schooling service, is as essential as the state of affairs itself. Critical theory assists in arriving at the root cause of persisting with colonialism in the

epoch of decolonisation as experienced by many African public secondary schools (Van Niekerk & Van Niekerk, 2009:12). Furthermore, the theory emphasises schooling ethics which in this context would imply the study of good and bad behaviour by human beings especially in the manner in which they interact as part of rendering a schooling service in educational institutions, to nurture learners. Critical theory uncovers whether inability to create structures, systems and processes by some public secondary schools to enable the success of decolonisation there, was a deliberate or unintentional exercise. The credibility of the theory as regards the worrying effects of lack of decolonisation in defining and characterising many public secondary schools is not in doubt. Critical theory stands out in advising against separating "real life testing" from scientific theories. This suggests scientists are bound by social reality and norms as much as the rest of all the people, including learners who benefit from the availability of decolonisation in schools because of facilitating excellent institutional functionality and thus good learner performance through the decent schooling generated by decolonisation project.

The researcher contends that not every theory other than the critical theory could productively illuminate and delineate a problem of this paper like the chosen theory (Allen, 2015:11). The problem of this paper centres around explaining the opportunity missed by some public secondary schools by taking their own internal stakeholders for granted through managing and leading schools without a decolonisation project. Critical theory advocates for critical reflection on society, schooling included, in order to discover the hidden assumptions that maintain the existing power relationships that keep the societal members perpetually enslaved though in a different form and guise (Higgs and Smith, 2010:72). Embracing critical theory by the researcher, in this paper, centres around the theory advising against separating the context of decolonisation between schools and the learnt social oppression which schools as once oppressed organs of state, have been subjected to during the era of colonialism and apartheid. Critical theory teaches that public secondary schools require to be emancipated from inefficacious colonialist practices experienced daily, sooner rather than later (Arden, 2013:38). Schools do not have to wait for its unpleasant consequences to spread further. This suggests that how public secondary schools normally think and act, is the product of many years of being subjected to

conditions and circumstances that either facilitate the quality and decent educational service to the learners or an entrenched and perpetual neglect of those learners through the absence of strong decolonisation project in schools (Tisdall, 2015:15; Joubert, 2017:8).

3. Problem Statement

Hofstee (2010:107) advises that there is a distinction between the research topic and the research problem. The stated author maintains that the researcher risks wasting the reader's time where she fails to distinguish between a topic to read about and a research problem to solve. The above explication implies that with a research topic, the researcher gathers data about it while with the research problem, the researcher strives to have it ultimately solved. The prerequisite of the researcher solving a research problem is to understand it better. Hofstee (2010:110) avows that no skill is more useful than the ability to recognise and articulate a problem clearly and concisely. On the basis of the above, the problem of this paper centres around explaining the opportunity missed by some public secondary schools who persist to disregard the significance of decolonising practices in their own schools because of their schools having being naturalised to be managed and led along colonialist inclinations and tendencies which at times become a huge disservice for schools. Some secondary schools do take their own stakeholders for granted through managing and leading schools devoid of efficacious decolonisation tendencies. This becomes a disservice to mainly internal stakeholders of a school. It has to be emphasised that this practice by some public secondary schools, of despising their own internal stakeholders, is as old as mountains themselves. What is astonishing though about the discussed practice is that it appears to be more prevalent in public secondary schools than in the private ones. The question to pose is why such a sordid state of affairs in public schools? The response relates to the point that due to the suffered colonialism in Africa, indications are that it has eroded and corroded, in fellow stakeholders, any semblance of humanity and Ubuntu to the level where egoism in Africans is so strengthened that institutional incumbents turn to operate without conscience in much of what they are doing. That is why educational stakeholders could be cruel against each other. Such an alien behaviour by Africans as practised in some public secondary schools, is having devastating effects

to schools and their communities. With that kind of disposition, African public secondary schools could take long to successfully push back the habit of managing and leading schools that are bereft of a sound decolonisation systems and practices (Skenjana, 2017:8).

4. Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this paper are anchored on the critical theory as the theoretical perspective that underscores the paper (Higgs & Smith, 2010:88; Pheko, 2017:27). The research questions are as follow: What are the roles and significance of decolonisation structures and systems that are clearly crafted in line with the conditions and circumstances of incumbents populating an educational institution, in enhancing and reinforcing excellent functionality by public secondary schools? What are the ideas, concerns and aspirations of institutional incumbents regarding the shifting and the strengthening of the decolonisation practices?

Broad as they are, the above questions can be broken down into the following sub-questions:

- How are decolonisation structures and systems created?

- Who genuinely benefits most from the functional structures and systems in place?

- How best to replace un-impactful decolonisation practices with efficacious ones?

- How is an excellent functionality linked to decolonisation structures and systems of an educational institution?

5. Research Methodology

This paper is qualitative in nature. There are many reasons that necessitated that the paper follows a qualitative research approach as against the quantitative line of thinking. In the first place, the problem which the paper pursued centred around attempting to explain the opportunity missed by some public secondary school by ignoring the invaluable contribution of decolonisation practices to superior performance of those schools. Such a research problem was amenable to be studied through the qualitative way of thinking as against through the quantitative one. The nature of the problem was found to be researchable along the qualitative school of thought as against the quantitative line of thinking (Dawson, 2006; Levin, 2005). The choice of the qualitative research methodology was also triggered and orchestrated by the fact that the paper is being underscored by the critical theory. The researcher found a need to create a synergy between the Critical theory as the theoretical perspective that underpins the paper, as well as the qualitative approach as the overarching research methodology (Hofstee, 2010:115). It has to be emphasised that the combination of the two, helped immensely in terms of illuminating issues of how lack of efficacious decolonisation practices by some public secondary schools, deny their own learners the basic right of quality and decent schooling service which all learners are entitled to and how that persists to paint a dark picture of some public secondary schools, being the destroyer of the fate and future of countless black learners. A good case in point for such a state of affairs happens annually when some secondary schools keep on experiencing unabated scholastic underperformance of learners due to placing inadequate attention to those schools' decolonisation systems. This occurs amongst others as a result of lack of efficacious decolonisation practices. That was manifested through poor learner results by some schools which was fast becoming legendary for those schools (Masina, 2015:24). The example, just referred to, goes to exhibit and expose the rifeness of the predicament of inefficacious decolonisation in public secondary schools. With the critical theory underpinning the paper, the researcher utilised it, to interrogate how stakeholders in secondary schools normally understand lack of efficacious decolonisation and the kind of discourses they normally engage themselves in, as part of overcoming perennial under-functioning of their schools. Furthermore, the theory was also applied to establish and determine the common reaction by secondary schools as regards utilising decolonisation project, to engender superior institutional functionality. Since this paper is qualitative in nature, there was a need to amalgamate both the critical theory and the qualitative research approach. That aimed at maximising the ability and strength of the critical theory towards the exposure of how inefficacious decolonisation tendencies, rob learners of the quality schooling service they are entitled to. Partnering the qualitative research approach and the critical theory enabled the researcher to make an in-depth understanding of how despite many

years since colonialism and discriminatory school-ing formally ceased to exists, its effects remain firmly in place. Such effects are still so severe such that many public secondary schools, find it diffi-cult to experiment with a sound decolonisation system to begin to offer schooling opportunities to all learners with aplomb and distinction. To con-clude this item on research methodology, there is a need to divulge that document study as well as interviewing techniques were utilised to construct data relevant for this paper. To be precise, all the documents primary and secondary that contained information about the decolonisation project for public secondary schools were studied. To corrob-orate and triangulate the gleaned data, interviewing was conducted with three members in each of the identified or sampled three public secondary schools. Responses were audio-taped for transcrip-tion later-on. The said data collection tools emerged very helpful in terms of accessing data pertaining to how lack of decolonisation practices in public secondary schools, reduce learners into sub-hu-man beings denied of quality and decent schooling service which they are entitled to by virtue of being dignified human beings (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005; Levin, 2017:33).

6. Findings and Discussion

Findings arrived at in this paper, are in relation to the research topic whose focus is: the essentiality of decolonisation to excellent functionality by public secondary schools. The basis of the findings is the analysed data which were generated through the document study and the interviewing technique. The three public secondary schools which were interrogated as regards the invaluable contribu-tion of decolonisation to excellent functionality by public secondary schools, were being referred to as School A, School B and School C, respectively. That was done to protect the actual identities of those schools. The researcher sampled those public secondary schools for scrutiny in the area of a sound decolonisation practices, in relation to the production of a maverick learner results as a hallmark of excellent functionality by those public secondary schools. Furthermore, paying attention only on those sampled schools ought not to create an impression that they are worse off as regards to clinging tenaciously to inefficacious colonialist practices. That is not the case, not at all. Suffice to disclose that the choice of those three public sec-ondary schools, was on the basis of the researcher

having familiarised himself with issues of decolo-nisation in those institutions, down the years. The critical theory has been sufficiently instrumental in assisting in the analysis of data to ultimately emerge with these findings. Findings and discussion for this paper are the following: Firstly, the challenge of sticking to the old apartheid practices; secondly, the dearth of consciousness that decolonisation revolutionises schools; thirdly, the predicament of emancipation without freedom and lastly, how decolonisation advocates for thinking differently on educational issues. A detailed discussion of each finding follows.

6.1 The Challenge of Sticking to Old Apartheid Practices

Exquisite and magnificent functionality of learning institutions occurs with much ease after the estab-lishment of the necessary decolonisation structures, systems, policies, procedures and processes. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 explicitly proclaims that doing such is the competency of the school governors (Brunton, 2003: B-11). On this point that excellent functionality of secondary schools owes its origin on decolonisation which is excellently anchored, School Principal I of School A advises that "there is no gainsaying the fact and real-ity that decolonisation of schooling rejuvenates and refreshes how an enterprise of teaching and learning is being approached and conducted all along, a prac-tice which is but hard to introduce in schools due to clinging tenaciously to an old apartheid way of doing things by the majority of current school managers and leaders". Teacher B of school C shares that "I was more than privileged to serve in a primary school whose policies, structures and systems were simply matchless because of having being prepared along the decolonisation way of doing things as against the old colonialist pattern of handling the complex business of schooling especially in the 21st century". School governing body chairperson 2 of School A asserts that "without a sound decolonisation pro-ject in our public secondary schools which is based on functional policies, systems and structures, any school irrespective of the unequalled competency of a principal, would always pull hard to perpetually display excellent functionality". The utterances of the research respondents are straightforward in calling for the taking serious of strong decolonisation prac-tices by schools for the sake of salvaging the future of its learners. This is a point which even the review of literature is not mute about it. For instance, both

Tsheola, 2002, Mbeki, 2003, Madue, 2013; Zwane, 2015:10) emphasise that efficacious educational institutions are what 21ˢᵗ century organisations so much require and demand for the sake of their smooth operations.

6.2 How Decolonisation Revolutionises Schools

It comes as no surprise for some schools that perpetually demonstrate excellent functionality to continue to hope that, as long as they embrace decolonisation tendencies and inclinations, then mediocre institutional performance would be a thing of the past. that regards schools that are still rigidly tied to their old colonialist way of operations, which at times deny them the opportunity of experimenting with new innovations of doing things, that can only be declared and labelled unfortunate (Macha, 2016:23). On this challenge of some public secondary schools not showing signs of being ready to replace colonialist patterns of operations with decolonisation practices, School Principal 3 of school C cautions that "my experience of having being a principal for no less than two decades keeps on reminding me, that it is the readiness to try new innovations, which assists in sustaining the momentum of excellent functionality created in an educational institution". Teacher 3 of the same school agrees when stating that "show me a single school whose learner performance is annually excellent, which is not producing those mouth-watering pupil results being helped by a decolonisation practice which keeps on enlivening the operation spirit at the school". School governing body chairperson 2 of School B accentuates the fact that "having noticed what a decolonisation project does for schools, it will not be soon for me and my school governing body to begin to ignore and disregard it as a result of its vivid contribution to the excellent functionality of our schools". As a researcher, I fully align myself with the observation by the research respondents that in many instances, scholastic learner achievement in educational institutions could be ascribed to the available decolonisation practice in a school as against the previously employed colonialist pattern of managing and leading schools. The body of literature reviewed confirm in no uncertain terms the expressed views. For instance, Gobillot (2008), Cunha, Filho & Goncalvers (2010) advocate that the essentiality of a sound decolonisation system towards the excellent functionality of educational institutions remains irreplaceable.

6.3 The Predicament of Emancipation Without Freedom

Allen (2014: 9) remarks that as long as the creation of efficacious decolonisation practices are not taken as a priority by many public secondary schools, then managing schools within the emancipatory mood which is devoid of genuine freedom could remain an unabated challenge. This point suggests that apart from the discourse on decolonisation, relying on the creation of appropriate decolonisation systems, structures, policies, procedures and processes for its success in educational institutions, remains something inevitable. On this aspect of the need for educational emancipation that ushers in a real freedom, Teacher 1 of School A emphasises that "despite having less than 15 years teaching experience, I have personally witnessed good intentions in schools failing to be impactful especially to learners, because of ignorance of the value of the concept of decolonisation, which in my opinion humanises everyone in a school and thus promote a spirit of oneness". School principal 3 of school C reasons that "attempts to operationalise ideas associated with decolonisation, however noble they could be for a school, but when those ideas are detached and disconnected to the context and the nature of institutional incumbents populating a school, then their contribution to freedom could be minimal". School governing body Chairperson 1 of school A reminds that "the school context, just like any other institutional environment as well as the real nature of members of the educational institution, are as contributory to a freedom prevalent in a school terrain, as any other constituent ingredient of an educational institution". The responses of research participants are spot-on in disclosing in no uncertain terms that ignorance of the context or environment in a learning institution, which is where decolonisation practices are expected to thrive, is tantamount to embracing decolonisation on the one hand and sticking to colonialism on the other. This fact is even being vindicated by countless literature reviewed for the sake of this paper (Omano, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Thornhill & Van Dijk, 2010; Sebola, 2012; Qwabe, 2013; Tisdall, 2005:15; Skenjana, 2017:8).

6.4 How Decolonisation Advocates for Thinking Differently on Educational Issues

With decolonisation in the picture, it is business unusual. This is the case because as regards education or schooling-related issues, decolonisation project,

advocates for the adoption of thinking out of the box. This is the relevant and appropriate 21st century way of thinking and acting which in the main emphasises reflective praxis in all respects. One of the key reasons why decolonisation is gaining momentum with regard to the current handling of school-related issues, is because of the realisation of how much it resonates with the constitutional democracy in the country. On this matter, School principal 1 of School A notes that "myriad secondary schools are battling to replace dys-functionality defining and characterising their educational institutions because of being mired in conservative mood with regard to throwing away the old apartheid way of thinking and operating in favour of embracing a recent concept of decolonisation". Such a view is being endorsed by Teacher 2 of the same school when reminding that "the enemy of dysfunctionality of countless learning institutions is their stay with the old in the form of refusing to think out of the box as an inherent requirement of how 21st century educational institutions have to operate in comparison to those of the previous years". School Governing Body Chairperson 3 of School C reasons that "from time immemorial, there was always the concept of evolution, which in the context of schooling signifies never being satisfied with the status quo and as a result being always open to learning in order to imbibe new ideas and practices and then reform or transform as part of taking a school forward". Views shared by the research participants are together emphasising the need for change by all institutional incumbents so that they are able to transform their workplace practices to be different from how it has always known to be. The review of literature reminds that in educational institutions, change has to be inevitable and ongoing (Knott, 2017:14; Pheko, 2017:27).

7. Conclusion

African public secondary schools need to deal with their challenges of lack of excellent functionality sooner rather than later. This will enable them to improve their scholastic learner performance. Whether decolonisation hurdles experienced by public schools are internally generated or externally imposed, is not an issue. The question to ask has to be: how should every school makes decolonisation practices succeed? That would enable schools to operate differently and in an efficacious manner? That would enable institutions to put their school's interests in a trajectory of forward development and movement. This is possible with decolonisation systems that are well tailored to incumbents and institutional conditions. Appropriate decolonisation practices have to be free from euro-centric models and general institutional rigidity. The postponement of introducing decolonisation by African public secondary schools, could allow institutional dys-functionality and instability to soar. There are copious incidences and examples occurring in the selected public secondary schools, that confirm that as regards magnificent and brilliant decolonisation systems, structures and processes that enable a school to offer first class learner performance, the selected three schools are still lacking. Lack of decolonisation in schools benefits no one.

8. Recommendations

The bases of these recommendations are discussed findings which are as follow:

- There is a need for public secondary schools to fathom or establish for themselves why it is that decolonisation is being underrated in those schools, despite its known efficacy in terms of generating unabated institutional performance everybody would have a reason to identify himself or herself with a school.

- There is a need by public secondary schools to embrace an awareness that decolonisation in educational institutions, requires structures, systems and processes through which it would flourish and thrive remaining impactful and ever well-meaning to the sterling performance of a school. That could occur first through the creation of decolonisation ethos that by and large, promote a school's exquisite and maverick learner results.

- Lastly, there is a need to reconcile decolonisation in public secondary schools with the nature of institutional incumbents there as well as the nature of the school context or environment enabling the success of the introduced decolonisation project.

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