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POST-SCHOOL YOUTHS' SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES AND ASPIRATIONS

ABSTRACT

While three million youth in South Africa are not in education, employment or training (NEETS), not much is known about their schooling experiences nor their aspirations for the future. Eighty-seven post-school youth (PSY) were enrolled at a youth development and organisation (IYDO) centre in a Black township to the south-east of Johannesburg. This paper analyses the perspectives of these post-school youths of their formal schooling experiences and their aspirations for the future. The paper is framed by Willis's (2000) theory of the basic educational paradigm at the heart of the teaching relationship and intentional resistance from working class boys. Analysis of data showed the failure of the schools attended by the participants in providing a reasonable standard and quality of education as the main cause of dropping out of school. In spite of challenging structural constraints both historical and current, these post-school youth are not disaffected nor disengaged from quality education. Contrary to the literature, they aspire for a better life and for educational opportunities that would enable them to access professional and managerial jobs and upward social mobility. Appadurai's (2004) theory of culture of aspiration enabled making sense of participants' aspirations. The issue of post school youth requires not only alternative post school programmes but also attention to schooling practices within formal secondary school education.

Keywords: *Schooling experiences; post-school youth; basic educational paradigm; aspirations; NEETS (not in education, employment, training).*

1. INTRODUCTION

Three million youth between 18 and 24 in SA are not in education, employment or training (NEETS) (Cloete, 2009). Such youth have been described as “excluded youth” (Cloete, 2009:1) and a “youth time bomb” (Perold, 2012). There are two approaches to this problem. On the one hand there are concerns that arise from the economic sphere about “threats to the country’s future sustainability and prosperity” or from the social sphere of “the social instability that arises when there are too many young people without work” (Cooper, 2014). On the other hand there are concerns from a social justice and human rights perspective. The white paper notes that post-school education and training



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should also contribute to developing thinking citizens, who can function effectively, creatively and ethically as part of a democratic society. They should have an understanding of their society, and be able to participate fully in its political, social and cultural life (DHET, 2013: 2).

This paper analyses the perspectives of these post-school youths of their formal schooling experiences and their reasons for dropping out of school.

PSY are not a homogenous group – there are those who are “fine”, those who are “at risk” and those who are “lost” (Perold, 2012). Perold identified poverty, personal reasons such as pregnancy and lack of funds as the single largest obstacle for SA youth not in education, employment or training (NEET). In the SA context, youth NEET are isolated, out of touch with networks that can guide them into post-school education opportunities or employment options (Perold, 2012). Their work experience is piecemeal, insecure and survivalist. Further, poor health, interrupted education, involvement in criminal activity and discouragement and depression are endemic to youth NEET. Improved quality of schooling, financial assistance and strengthened post-school education and training provision is required to provide youth NEET access to opportunities for advancement (Perold, 2012).

The findings show that these PSY’s schooling experience showed gross neglect that worked mainly to exclude youth who aspire to professional and managerial careers. They are not disaffected from quality education that abides by the basic paradigm of teaching and socially just schooling. To the contrary, they desire education that would provide them with the opportunities to access higher education qualifications and professional and managerial jobs. To this end, they engage in informal educational programmes provided at the youth centre.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Internalist sociological explanations focus on the processes associated with the “organisation of the education system” (Moore, 2004:18) such as regulating control over movement, timetable specifications and interpersonal conflict that contribute to some youth dropping out of school. The failure of schools to acknowledge and include diverse cultural identities lead to youth disengagement and dropping out of school (Moore, 2004:18). The alienating nature of “doing” high school...large class sizes, rigid timetables, hierarchical structures, didactic pedagogies, punitive behaviour management regimes, poor facilities, measurement and testing, standardisation, lack of creativity, labelling, streaming, irrelevant curriculum, vocationalisation and poor relations with teachers has been noted (Robinson *et al.*, 2012: 11). Disengaged youth “need space and freedom to pursue their own interests and aspirations” and find traditional schooling constraining and limiting (Smyth & Robinson, 2014: 18). Various facets of school disaffection such as perceived injustice or actual victimisation at school can lead to substance abuse (Jonson *et al.*, 2012). Contrary to common sense, Smyth and Robinson note that leaving school “often has little to do with their academic capacity” (2015: 225). Robinson *et al.* found that the catalyst in the case of their informants was the enactment of the policy on behaviour management in schools, specifically the uniform policy. Taylor (2012: 37) argues that “a lack of sense of school belonging can be a destabilising aspect in disaffected students’ lives”.

Curriculum related factors include social biases in the formal curriculum (Moore, 2004: 18) and curricula not related to student’s lives (Kirby & Gardner, 2010). Teacher related factors include low expectations resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy of success of some groups and

failure of others (Moore, 2004:18) and ineffective pedagogical practices (Kirby & Gardner, 2010). According to (Smyth & Robinson, 2014: 221), the factors that lead to disengagement are achievement related such as poor prior learning experiences, absences from school and poor language and literacy skills and linked to aspiration such as an absence of career plans, poor knowledge of labour market opportunities and how to educationally access them and limited networks.

Willis's (2000) explanation for disengagement from education focuses on the teaching relationship. Willis argues that:

within the institution of the school operates the basic educational paradigm at the heart of the teaching relationship. Teaching is seen as fair exchange – most basically of knowledge for respect and of guidance for control (2000: 69–70).

It is knowledge that the teacher trades that gives the teacher moral superiority. The most important chain of exchanges is of knowledge for qualifications, qualified activity for high pay and pay for goods and services (2000: 64).

The teachers authority is based in moral, not coercive grounds, in being knowledgeable and in being able to teach socially valued knowledge to students. Socially, the “right attitude”, “respect and politeness” is expected of students. A loss of legitimacy of pre-given institutional expectations leads to differentiation:

Differentiation is experienced by those concerned as ...a process of learning whereby the self and its future are critically separated from the pre-given institutional definitions (Willis, 2000:3).

Willis argues that there is an element of self-damnation in how working class youth get working class jobs. This damnation is experienced as “true learning, affirmation, appropriation and as a form of resistance” (2000: 3).

While ineffective or dysfunctional schools might produce disengagement, Willis shows that it could also arise in good schools. The site of Willis's (2000) main case study – Hammerton Boys – “had the reputation of being a good school...it had reasonable standards of behavior and dress enforced by an interested and competent senior staff” (Willis, 2000: 4). The careers classes were taught by dedicated and experienced teachers (Willis, 2000: 5). During his research the school was experimenting with new techniques – “streaming was replaced by mixed-ability groupings, a resource centre was introduced, experiments were made in team teaching and curriculum development programmes...” (Willis, 2000: 4). It was within this context of a “good school” that a group of 12 non-academic White working class boys, studied by Willis, developed a counter-culture in the school characterised by opposition to authority, rejection of conformists, disrespecting teachers, sleeping in class, swearing, drinking and smoking openly in the school, rejection of the timetable and moving about at their own will, truancy, being out of class, being in the wrong class, roaming the corridors looking for excitement, laughing and being able to produce it, pulling pranks, making jokes, symbolic and physical violence, Paki-bashing and deliberately disturbing general assembly. In attempting to provide an explanation for anti-school attitudes amongst White working class boys, Willis argues that such attitudes have their roots in working class culture, that it is the working class boys' own culture that prepares them for “the manual giving of their labour power” (Willis, 2000: 3).

In the initial “youth dialogue” at the centre, the participants condemned their teachers for sabotaging their education and revealed their plans and aspirations for the future unabashedly. Appadurai’s (2004) concept of aspirations was useful in making sense of the PSY aspirations. He has developed a revitalised toolkit that gives due regard to developing and strengthening the capacity to aspire amongst the poor. Appadurai argues that the capacity to aspire, conceived as a cultural capacity must be strengthened especially among the poor. Aspirations are never individual (Appadurai, 2004), but formed in social interactions. The capacity to aspire is nurtured by real-world conjectures and refutations as they are formed in interaction in social life. They are not equally distributed in society as the middle class have more aspirations due to being exposed to situations that generate aspirations. Appadurai argues for the need to strengthen the capacity of the poor to exercise “voice,” to debate, contest and oppose vital directions for collective social life.

3. THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

The site of this study is a youth organisation and development centre (IYDO) in a Black township to the south of Johannesburg. I was invited to a youth dialogue facilitated by the centre for education rights and transformation (CERT) at the university. CERT had been working at the youth centre and in the community for a while.

Despite the institution of a democratic government and political system in 1994, the township is reminiscent of apartheid regulation of racial groups. The Group Areas Act made it illegal for Black races to live where they chose. Blacks were allocated residential areas much further away from urban centres. These were called townships or locations and are locally known as “*kasies*” today. The township, in which the youth centre is located, is exclusively populated by the Black population group. It is approximately 60km from central Johannesburg. Heavy industries such as chemical, iron and steel, fertiliser and power stations are within 10km of the residential area. The township has tarred and dirt roads. It has a mixture of standard small council homes, constructed during apartheid for Blacks as well as individually designed homes. Four schools in the area have closed down. This is due to students attending schools in other areas. This township appears to be socially, politically and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of the city of Johannesburg.

A journalist for the *Saturday Star*, Kabelo Khumalo, entitled his article “*Youths initiated into a life of crime*” outlined gangs being attached to each initiation school. The violence that gangs use was highlighted: the use of knives, pangas (machetes) and axes when breaking into houses and stealing.

The Isitemba Youth Development Organisation (IYDO) is sponsored by the Netherlands based philanthropic organisation, Eindhoven and by one of the industries in the area: Arcello Mittal. It is also supported by the Department of Health and Social Development. The services offered at the centre include:

- advice referral, service referral system, internet access, CV development and upload;
- social programme: teenage pregnancy support group, substance abuse workshops, career exhibition;
- skills development: computer training, life skills training, welding, sewing, entrepreneurship, and
- SMME workshops from Monday to Friday.

The mission of IYDO: to provide economic sustainability and eradicate poverty in the community through the implementation of sustainable livelihoods programmes. The vision is to empower youth and hold up high moral values amongst youth and to implement youth economic development programmes. Youth who use the services and enrol in the programmes come not only from the surrounding area but also from up to 30km away. At the time of data collection 87 students were registered at the centre. With the exception of sewing classes where students pay R700 once off for a 3-month course, all other classes are free. Around 12–15 students attend the sewing programme. The computer literacy facilitator runs 6 classes a day for 12 students at a time.

The youth interviewed range from 18 to 35 years old. Most originate from challenging social and economic backgrounds. Most of their parents are employed in semi-skilled working-class jobs such as: dressmaking, shop assistants and clerks. Most of the females interviewed already had children of their own and were being supported by the state grant for their children. Some of the youth were being supported by their parents' old age grant. In spite of economic impoverishment, the youth are generally very optimistic about learning capabilities for work and contemptuous of mass protests where property such as schools and libraries are destroyed.

4. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study sought to understand why the PSY at the IYDO centre disengaged from formal schooling. Informed by case study methodology, data were collected through non-participant observations of activities and lessons at the youth centre, in-depth interviews with students and analysis of documents and records filed at the centre. Although observations of computer literacy, sewing, life skills lessons and workshops activities and music centre activities were also done this article is based on data collected during interviews with the students.

I was invited to a "youth dialogue" at the youth centre, convened by a CERT facilitator. Around 50 male and female Black students participated in the "youth dialogue". The participants at the dialogue were robustly critical of their teachers and schooling experiences. Participants spoke in English or their mother tongue and were very forthright and informative about their own experiences to improve their capabilities/skills and gain employment. This dialogue was audio recorded and transcribed in English by the convenor of the dialogue and sent out to all researchers invited to the dialogue. I read and analysed this transcript in-depth and identified key issues to be followed up in the individual interviews with students at the centre pertaining to their schooling experiences. In-depth interviews were conducted and followed up by informal conversations with students. An interview guide with open-ended questions enabled participants to speak about issues upper most in their minds. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

An initial transcript was chosen randomly and analysed to identify the initial codes. All the responses were read and assigned codes that captured their essence. For example, the codes of not being able to conform to school demands; being stuck and poor quality schooling were identified. All other transcripts were analysed according to the initial codes as well as for different codes specific to them. The key findings that arose from the data were presented to facilitators and students for verification and feedback.

Ethical approval was given for the study by the university ethics committee and the research was guided by the committee's guidelines for ethical research practices such as full disclosure of the purpose of the study, upholding anonymity and confidentiality as well as liberty to withdraw from the study if necessary. All participants engaged fully in the study. All youth were conventionally dressed, were respectful and spoke without the use of profanities/vulgarity as used by the "lads" (Willis, 2000).

5. FINDINGS

A typical day at the centre involves starting at 8am with Life Skills (LS) lessons followed by workshops on substance abuse; computer literacy (CL) classes and sewing classes. Rose facilitated the LS class of 13 students. The topic was conflict, what it is, is it good, how to deal with it, etc. A guide was referred to, to open the topic and to let the questions structure the discussion and thereafter to read from with the facilitator reading out aloud. The CL class took the form of students practicing their presentation skills using PowerPoint on a topic decided on by individual students such as "being a human being", "a healthy body", "stress", "technology". Students had their topics and points on their computer screens. After each presentation, students asked questions and a discussion took place. The teacher informed me that students write tests and get a certificate when they complete the course.

Data analysis resulted in the following main themes: dissatisfaction with rigidity of school regulations; dissatisfaction with curriculum and pedagogy; financial constraints; feelings of alienation in a good school and strong aspirations.

5.1 Dissatisfaction with rigidity of school regulations

In the most damning comment on their schooling, students likened their schools to prisons, their teachers to policemen and themselves to prisoners. They noted the locked gates, the barbed wire at the gates and the guards at the gates. The siren sounding regularly every 45 minutes, the tone of voice used by the principal and teachers were seen as prison like regulations of prisoners. These participants experienced schooling as an incarceration rather than liberating. They described the rules and regulations of the school pertaining to uniform wearing, time usage, lining up at assembly and other places, homework, respect demanded by teachers, as stifling. Most spoke about needing an "outlet from the schooling system". Tsepo, who had access to better quality conventional schooling needed an "outlet" from its stifling rules and practices. In commenting on what the schooling system did to students, Tsepo explained:

it instils fear in learners, when it ought to teach confidence, it teaches them not to make mistakes! To not write in their maths books...

The requirement "to not write in their maths books" refers to the practice of teachers not allowing learners to write notes as they needed to. They could only write what the teachers told them to and in the way they required.

Participants found teachers' subordinating demeanour towards them inappropriate. These participants found that they were not encouraged by their teachers but were always told that they are going to fail and that they are doing badly. They dropped out of formal schooling to escape the oppressive disciplinary practices and procedures. One of the post-school youth recounted his embarrassment when "results were put up on the notice board" that caused embarrassment and led to him excluding himself.

Khaya: Our results were put on the notice board, I felt embarrassed. I didn't do well and it was on public display...

Many complained about the attitude of their teachers. Khaya for example noted that the "teacher hated me, always picked on me".

Mfondo, a very capable girl, found that one of her teachers who wanted her to "give personal information about her friend" led to very abusive confrontations when she refused to do so. This teacher then discussed the matter with other teachers and tainted Mfondo's relationship with other teachers. This led to Mfondo dropping out of school.

5.2 Dissatisfaction with curriculum and pedagogy

Many of the interviewees experienced the school curriculum as narrow, irrelevant, boring and meaningless for their lives in their communities and an imposition that disregarded their own life-worlds and talents. The view that the subjects that were taught to them did not connect with their individual lives was pervasive.

A criticism of their education in Khaya's words is that they "learn everything about everything and nothing about themselves".

Khaya: the problem with this current model is that we are taught everything about everything and nothing about ourselves. Going inside of ourselves and taking that out and using it to learn something is what we need...

What the curriculum should be is bringing out what is inside them and relating it to the knowledge in the curriculum is what they desire. Students also bemoaned that their own talents were not recognised. One of the participants (Khaya) recounted his primary school days when he was "more into sports" and received Gauteng colours (provincial award) for athletics. But the high school he moved into, did not offer athletics or other sports activities – it only provided soccer.

Khaya: in primary school I was more into sports...I was very good in athletics...I got Gauteng colours for athletics but then I moved to high school...there was no sports only soccer.

The majority were highly contemptuous of the pedagogy practiced by teachers that cast them as "empty vessels". Some subjects like Business Studies were condemned as:

a complete waste: only copy and paste, no thinking whatsoever.

The participants were aware that they were taught "what to think not how to think, not how to reason".

A further criticism of formal schooling was it aimed at conformity at the expense of uniqueness and creativity. One of the participants noted:

we are expected to respond to a task in a uniform way, whereas I like to do it differently

Contrary to the literature that disaffected youth find the curriculum challenging these youth found the dominant expectation of regurgitation or "copy and paste" in subjects such as Business Studies demeaning and boring. Students further spoke about being asked to regurgitate the teacher's notes in their tests and exams. These students found the routine

classroom activities such as listening to the teacher, copying notes, groupwork and feedback in lessons as performances that meant little except “killing time”.

All students interviewed did not have the benefit of career guidance and possible career paths. This resulted in students trying out many options. For example, Lerato first enrolled for boiler-making, then law at UNISA, leadership studies at the Mathew Goniwe School of Leadership and eventually Computer Literacy, Life Skills lessons and the leadership workshops at the IYDO centre.

The majority of the interviewees were openly critical of their teachers “who didn’t come to school” and those “who did not teach in the classroom”. One of the participants (Lerato) declared that “On payday the teachers didn’t come to school”. Another participant (Comfort) brought up the issue of “lazy teachers”:

Comfort: If a teacher is lazy you won’t be educated since you are there to learn from the teachers, we can’t teach ourselves.

Yet another student, Ayanda, declared that many of them have been sabotaged by their teachers for “choosing” not to expose them to grade level curriculum content and making full use of available resources. In her own words:

Ayanda: Many of us are sabotaged by our teachers not making full use of available resources in black schools. We are talking about one learner reading a particular book in grade 10 and another only reading it in grade 12 but what we must consider is the fact that that particular book is available in all schools. The difference is that our teachers choose not to expose us to these materials earlier. They are sabotaging us.

Lerato attended a public high school where the teachers “sometimes don’t come to school”, “come to the classroom, but don’t teach”, “don’t come to school on payday” and did not “make available past exam papers to students”.

Students revealed that they failed subjects such as maths and science because they were not taught subject knowledge by their subject teachers but were expected to learn from the textbook on their own. Helen recalled her science teacher who come to class with thick textbooks that five students had to share. The teacher would then “not explain” but tell them to do the activities in the textbook. The next day the teacher would want them to correct the work when they did not “know the work”. As students they had to “agree with all his corrections since they didn’t understand the work”.

Helen: I recall my science teacher from school. He would arrive to class with thick textbooks to be shared between at least five learners (due to shortage of textbooks) with the activities already ticked and accompanied by the class work. He would not explain the work but we would be expected to complete the activities. The next day he wants us to do corrections and we don’t know the work. Therefore, we agreed with all his corrections since we did not understand the work. “I failed science” as a result.

The participants recounted that their lessons were further impoverished by limited resources such as laboratories, libraries, textbooks and basic furniture. One of the students said that during practical lessons in science, the equipment was so short that only two learners actually conducted the experiment whilst the rest of them agreed with everything without engagement and understanding.

The post-school youth are aware of the inequalities between public and private schools. For example, Themba started his high school education in a "white" school but after Grade 10 had to move to a public school due to financial constraints and found that "there was a huge difference". Amongst the differences were studying Shakespeare much earlier than Grade 12, access to the handbook "student companion", varied and richer extramural activities such as photography. Such extramural activities provide non-academic students with alternatives. In Temba's own words:

Temba: A grade ten student (in the white high school) already knows about four books of Shakespeare but public school learners encounter them in matric, with Macbeth. We received "student companions" which are provided by the school for free. They contain a variety of broad factual information and learners use it to refer. *Kasi* learners are not familiar with it (student companion). It's not that I undermine *Kasi* but white schools enjoy various privileges which set their education apart from "*Kasi* schools". Even their extramural activities are richer than what is available in "*Kasi* schools". This gives them options in case a learner is not strong academically, then the learner can take photography as an alternative because it was introduced in school.

Yet another reason given for their perception of private schools being better than public schools is that "they guarantee the necessary attention to struggling learners". Thus, Phillip notes that:

Phillip: Private schools are much better in comparison to public schools because they guarantee the necessary attention to struggling learners. Why are our educators taking their kids to private schools instead of public schools? Why not equipped them with more cultural or extramural programmes? We have the facilities and the space to resource our schools with sport courts and music lessons. We only find these things in private schools. The current system exacerbates inequality by maintaining the status quo between those who have and those who don't have means.

5.3 Financial constraints

A common reason for dropping out of school is lack of finances to pay school fees or buy specialised equipment for the different subjects. Linda was able to pay R200 registration fees but unable to buy the equipment for her mechanical and graphical engineering subjects. She enjoyed school and subjects such as Mechanical and graphical engineering, physics, Maths. The "no fees" school provided an opportunity for Linda to access high school education, but the non-discretionary application of the rule of provision of equipment for orphans only, excluded her from getting the free equipment the school was providing only for orphans.

5.4 Alienation in a "good" school

Tsepo revealed the sense of alienation he experienced in a good Roman Catholic school that "took him away from his community". Tsepo went to a Roman Catholic primary school that he describes as "the best school". Furthermore, the students at the school were given many opportunities "to do things on their own and to control things as well". They were given leadership training at a young age. A very confident and well-spoken student, he described the formal curriculum at the school as alienating him from his community. In his words: formal education leads to "removing me from social issues affecting our community".

When he was in Grade 11 the education at the school became "shaky" as he began to question its value to him and he tried to "break away from the system". He tried to figure out "why am I doing this?" Amidst the serious problems that fellow students and youth in his

township community faced, he felt he was “doing nothing good” and “was self-centred”. In matric (his final year at school) he got a chance to interact with other schools. This changed his life...he saw that in poorer schools there were geniuses for whom “maths was second nature”. He participated in the youth camp initiative that changed him further. He felt the need to do something for those around him who were in so much need. He found himself depressed and felt that he needed to “do something to assist those in need”. He joined the IYDO centre and found his life becoming meaningful. He spends R250 a day to travel to the centre. He found a “way out” from meaninglessness at the centre where he sees it as his “duty” to “facilitate the genius of fellow students”. Unlike traditional pedagogy the first thing we ask is “what can you do?” Tsepo asked the question: What should schools do? His response:

allow them to see if their ideas are true, facilitate their true genius, recognise what they good in, teach them and then give them the opportunity to “showcase what they know”. We don't need to standardise them.

Tsepo spoke about needing an “outlet from the schooling system” it instils fear in learners, when it ought to teach confidence, it teaches them to be afraid to make mistakes! To the extent of not writing in their maths books. He started studying Chartered Accounting at NWU. He found auditing and checking financial records very boring – His own genius was not recognised. Further, he found the attitude of the teachers: “expect something to be wrong” very strange.

5.5 Aspirations of PSY

In the initial “youth dialogue” and individual interviews the participants condemned their teachers for sabotaging their education and revealed their own initiatives in alternate education and plans and aspirations for the future robustly. The participants aspire for a better life and for educational opportunities that would enable them to access professional and managerial jobs and upward social mobility. For example, Lerato is 26 years old and enrolled in the LS and CL classes at the centre. She hopes that the CL certificate she gets will assist her in her application for administrative and secretarial jobs. She applied for a part-time job at Mathew Goniwe school of leadership where she is employed to facilitate workshops on topics such as gangsterism, sexual abuse and safe sex. She also speaks to parents about the annual national assessments (ANA) and about how to help their children prepare for assessments. She attends the leadership programme at the centre on Tuesdays for one and half hours and says “it's the best”.

6. INTERPRETATION/DISCUSSION

The findings of this study concur with those of Smyth and Robinson (2012; 2014), Johnson (2012), Taylor (2012) and Moore (2004) as well as Kirby and Gardner (2010). The schools from which these PSY dropped out had rigid school rules that failed to acknowledge and include diverse identities (Moore, 2004:18). These PSY also found traditional schooling constraining and limiting without space and freedom to pursue their own interests and aspirations (Smyth & Robinson, 2014). Furthermore the alienating nature of “doing” high school, rigid timetables, authoritarian and hierarchical social relations, unproductive pedagogies, punitive behaviour management regimes, lack of creativity, an intellectually impoverished curriculum and poor relations with teachers have also been identified by Robinson *et al.* (2012). This study concurs with Smyth and Robinson (2015) that leaving school had little to do with their academic capacity. The lack of a sense of school belonging (Taylor 2012) was a destabilising aspect in

these students' lives. The ineffective pedagogical practices as found by Kirby and Gardner (2010) were also derided by these PSY. Smyth and Robinson (2014) highlighted the absence of career guidance, information on labour market opportunities and how to educationally access them as well as limited networks.

The absence of the fundamental components of the basic paradigm of teaching (Willis, 2000) creates an ambivalent attitude to education amongst the youth. The non-academic and narrow curriculum did not enable the cognitive objective that is the basic fundamental objective of education. Accompanying the non-academic curriculum was a pedagogy of neglect – even where academic subjects such as Science was being offered, teachers were not providing students with systematic instruction. Then the lack of textbooks and other resources visited further exclusion from subject-based knowledge. Without academic knowledge to exchange, the moral authority of the teacher was denuded to become coercive and that of the prison guard. With the lack of this essential core, it is not surprising that the participants experienced schooling like a prison. A comparison with the “lads” would highlight the stark differences between SA youth and the “lads”.

Whereas the lads teachers were “dedicated, honest and forthright” (Willis, 2000: 67) these post-school youth think that their teachers “sabotaged” their education by not teaching them, relating to them as if they were “prisoners” and “not using resources provided in the school” to teach them. While Willis holds that “it would be quite wrong to attribute to them [teachers] any kind of sinister motive such as miseducating or oppressing working class kids” these students' teachers inferiorised these students by saying “this school is not fit for my children” and then bragging that their own children were being educated in advantaged former white schools. Such comments indicates gross negligence and lack of empathy. Similar to Willis's case “where the teachers authority becomes increasingly the one of the prison guard” these students rejected the “hollowness” of their teachers authority. Within this atmosphere, the teachers authority was coercive and not pedagogic. According to Willis what the student strives for becomes, not knowledge and the promise of qualification, but somehow deference and politeness (Willis, 2000:69). These youth were aware of the lack of guidance from their teachers but afforded them politeness and respect. In spite of weak knowledge and lack of guidance these participants aspire for academic knowledge and professional qualifications.

The lads attended a good school that had reasonable standards of behavior and dress enforced by an interested and competent senior staff (Willis, 2000: 4). Unlike the lads who reject what could be described as a reasonable quality of education these PSY desire high quality learning and an academic curriculum that will give them access to universities and higher qualifications. Amongst all the participants the capacity to aspire and focus on opportunities, such as that provided by the youth centre, was common.

Unlike Willis's “lads” who attained “partial penetration” of the determinants and constraints of their own and social class circumstances, these participants are fully aware of the difference in quality of education in post-apartheid historically advantaged white and disadvantaged black schools and the labour stratification that ensues from it. In this regard, the act of rejecting their schooling is an act of self affirmation and resistance. The participants exemplify the lads “omnipresent feeling that they know better” (Willis, 2000: 56) that their eventual position will be in manual work. These participants knew the destination of their schooling and rejected it and the working class future it portends.

In stark contrast to the lads who defy being controlled these participants subject themselves to social control for the time they are in school. Their main response to taunts from teachers was not attending their classes and eventually being pushed out of school. Unlike Willis's lads, these PSY were respectful towards their teachers and could be described as showing the "right attitude", being polite and respectful. The findings confirm those of Smyth and Robinson (2015: 225) who note that leaving school "often has little to do with their academic capacity". These youth found the curriculum offered in their schools boring.

Contrary to the literature, the PSY had aspirations and plans to study towards professional and managerial jobs. The youth dialogue and the youth centre provided opportunity for the participants to exercise voice, to debate, to plan and aspire for a better future. The IYDO centre developed and strengthened the capacity to aspire amongst the PSY.

None of the participants could be described as "lost" (Perold, 2012). All found support and purpose at the youth development centre. Many could be described as more than "fine" as they had recognised demeaning education and rejected it and were well on the way of self-affirmation and "becoming somebody" (Wexler, 1992) and living their lives by their own design. Those that are "more than fine" (Perold, 1990) display resilience, resourcefulness and courage as well as an understanding and concern for their peers (Perold, 1990) who are struggling with depression and who engage in substance abuse. They speak with conviction about assisting them to "get unstuck" and "get ahead". A few could be described as "at risk" as their experiences are typical of post school youth lives of piecemeal, insecure employment of various kinds. The youth centre, however, provides stability and lasting connection and support for them.

The training opportunities at the IYDO centre align with Robinson *et al.*'s (2014) principles of socially just schooling: more personalised symmetrical relationships with facilitators; student-centred programmes such as the advisory centre, internet access, life skills coaching; the centre being in the community and in touch with community issues; learning capabilities for the world of work such as computer literacy and sewing and a pedagogy that begins with student issues.

7. CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that post-school youth not in education, employment or training have been deeply disadvantaged by their mainstream schooling experiences. The lack of socially valued knowledge being the core issue – knowledge that would create the opportunity for professional and managerial jobs and to break free from structural determination. These PSY rejected the impoverished curriculum and pedagogy that limits them to manual and menial labour. The post-school youth differentiate themselves from their schools' institutional practices and the future it imposes.

The lack of knowledge that would enable entry to higher education meant denial of professional and managerial qualifications that they aspire to would reproduce social and racial stratification. The work done by the centre for education rights and training (CERT) agents contributed to an aspirational culture developing amongst the participants at this youth centre. The strong presence of voice, opinions, discussion and future plans to advance was evident. While the argument that in the current neoliberal climate such provisions obstruct the development of a policy driven socially just system might be made, the role of the youth centre in the everyday life of post-school youth in a Black township should not be underestimated.

The youth development centre provides crucial support to post-school youth to experience being valued by their facilitators and peers. Instead of “loitering” and what Bernstein in the British context called “the wastage of working-class talent” the centre provides youth with advice for re-entry into the education system. On an existential level the support at the centre helps them to “recover integrity in their everyday life and reconstruct legitimacy ... from power and structure” (De Certeau, 1984). The youth development centre provided a community for the youth there to aspire.

In addition to the Department of Higher Education and Training policy for post-school education and training to build an expanded, effective and integrated post-school system, mainstream schooling in previously disadvantaged schools ought to be radically reformed to prevent legitimate resistance to it and as Smyth and Robinson (2015: 232) say “to prevent the haemorrhaging of young people into reengagement programmes”. Reva Klein (1999) advocates a total rethink about the nature of schools that would include breakfast clubs, extracurricular activities for parents and pupils and support for the health of students so that the school is at the heart of the community.

The case of the academic curriculum in a good school with committed teachers being alienating as experienced by Tsepo requires further investigation.

For youth for whom it is too late to repeat their secondary schooling youth development centres would provide crucial support. It also shows an alternative way that would be less punitive and flexible enough to accommodate PSY's individual demands. Such centres would also develop and nurture the capacity of PSY to aspire. As a conclusion one could only applaud the courageous efforts, in spite of severe deprivation, of the participants to acquire capabilities and skills that would facilitate employability.

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