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Democracy and Inclusive Education Policy in Post-1994 South African Schools: Goal, Tension, and Struggle[1]

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Abstract

Globally, the idea of inclusive democracy is synonymous with the participation, deliberation, and representation of citizens in the management of the affairs of nation-states. In the light of this global picture, South Africa's constitutional democracy and its inclusive education policy ensure the right to education for school-going children (from foundation, to the intermediate and senior phases). Unfortunately, the zones of exclusion (i.e. difficulties to exercise the right to education) have shown that in post-apartheid South African schools, inclusive education gains have not been enjoyed by the intended recipients—the learners. This means that despite the formalisation of inclusive education policies by the state, substantive inclusion (i.e. active participation, deliberative engagement, and participatory representation) remains a distant dream for many school-going children in South Africa. Against this backdrop, the authors show that formal inclusive policy in schools in South Africa is split between social changes on one hand, and political democracy on the other. Consequently, the authors support the call for a continual struggle by (or for) educable learners who fall within the zones of exclusion in post-1994 South Africa. Ultimately, the authors argue that the realisation of substantive inclusive education depends on the protests of the excluded, who struggle in the interstices of zones of exclusion that have created and deepened the gulf between the ideal and the achievement because democratic inclusive education is at a crossroad; it is extended and dragged in opposite directions in post-1994 South Africa schools.

Keywords: democracy, participation, deliberation, representation, education, inclusive education policy, South Africa, schools

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Introduction

As a starting point, we argue that in the Athenian prototype of democracy, participation and education are inseparable:

> *Participation . . . together with democracy and education . . . forms a three-piece suit advertising one's enlightenment and fellow-feeling, showing one's good taste and sympathy, and putting one among the pure and innocent. (Margetson, 1978, p. 35)*
>
> *Participation then is educative in that it is itself a learning process with the crucially valuable function of developing what is essentially human about persons. (Margetson, 1978, p. 40)*

It is not surprising that we find ourselves contemplating this three-piece suit, the Athenian prototype of democracy, in relation to its nature, its aims, and its character. Hence, focus on its intellectual ancestry and its future prospects in post-1994 South Africa are at the heart of this article. With that said, this article:

- provides a conceptual clarity—the interpretation and feasibility of theories of participation, deliberation, and representation as lens through which to analyse the policy of inclusion in schools
- shows that the goal of inclusive education policy vacillates between the transformative project on the one hand, and the democratic project, on the other
- asserts that the zones of exclusion point to a continuing tension between ideal (policy documents) and practice (achievement) in schools, and
- argues that the realisation of a substantive inclusive education lies in the struggle waged by those who are excluded from formal democratic schools in post-apartheid South Africa.

Methodology

According to Jaakkola (2020) and MacInnis (2011), a conceptual article that adopts a theory adaptation approach should do three key things, namely, problematise a theory, suggest an alternative frame, and formulate a new perspective. Adding to this view, Brodie et al. (2019) signified that incorporating the aforementioned aspects expands the scope of the research as well as justifies why a particular perspective is pivotal. To achieve this end from the theory adaptation point of view, this article suggests that all research is partly conceptual, empirical, and philosophical. In simple words, all research strives for conceptual clarity, contains (or should contain) a review of literature, and locates empirical research within the preferred theoretical framework. A conceptual article, proceeds only on a theoretical level characterised by the review of literature, critical analysis of policy documents, and rigorous argument. Thus, this conceptual article employs three methods of inquiry. On the descriptive side, the authors look at the origin, history, and development of democratic theory (i.e. participation,

deliberation, and representation). On the analytical side, we proffer a critical review of national legislation on inclusive education policy via the zones of exclusion in post-apartheid South African schools. Lastly, from a normative perspective, the authors find the potential "locatedness" and "usefulness" of the ideals and the achievement for inclusive education in post-apartheid South Africa. In other words, the authors' methodology is a process with three aspects. First, it adopts a preferred theoretical framework to look at inclusive education policy in South African schools (theory development). Second, it identifies challenges in inclusive education policy in South African schools (review of literature). Lastly, it presents possible alternatives to the problems of inclusive education in South African schools (rigorous argument).

Athenian Prototype Democracy: Participation, Deliberation, and Representation

This section provides conceptual clarity—the interpretation and feasibility of theories of participation, deliberation, and representation—as lens through which to analyse inclusive education policy South Africa. The origin of the concept *democracy* dates back to the Athenian prototype circa 500 BC derived from the two Greek words, *demos* [people] and *kratos* [power]. It was Pericles (450–429 BC), governor of the Greek city-state of Athens, who succinctly summed up this notion of the collective *will of the people*:

> *Our constitution is called democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. . . . We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect. . . . Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well: even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics . . . we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all. (Thucydides, 1972, pp. 145–147)*

Briefly, there are three points worth mentioning about Pericles' Athenian prototype of democracy. First, in Athenian democracy, the word citizenship reflects two different formulations: citizenship is a legal status (to be a citizen), and citizenship is a practice (to act as a citizen). Second, Pericles also distinguished democracy as the rule of the people—a notion of democracy rekindled and celebrated by Abraham Lincoln in 1863 as "government of the people, by the people, for the people" (as cited in Rogers, 1984, p. 20). Third, Pericles claimed that the democratic principles of the city-state of Athens encouraged the people to participate in collective self-rule—thus showing that active participatory citizenship has educational benefits. Kreibig (2000) asserted, "we might contest Pericles' claim that 'the whole people' governed, but here is a powerful statement in support of participatory democracy" (p. 94). In the end, Pericles saluted the active Athenian prototype as being the best possible constitution in classical Greece. As we shall soon see, Benhabib (1996) defended the model of deliberative democracy as an element of Athenian democracy.

Benhabib (1996) maintained that a deliberative type of democracy gives rise to reason and guarantees pragmatic reasoning in constitutional democracies. Accordingly, the theorists of deliberative democracy argue that:

> *The institutions of this polity are so arranged that what is considered in the common interest of all results from processes of collective deliberation conducted rationally and fairly among free and equal individuals. The more collective decision-making processes*

> *approximate this model the more [it] increases the presumption of their legitimacy and rationality. (Benhabib, 1996, p. 69)*

As far as can be judged, deliberative democracy allows citizens to use popular participatory institutions to deliberate about issues of common concern in the polity. In the light of this, deliberative structures result in democratic legitimacy with free and unconstrained public deliberation. As interlocutors, Benhabib's deliberative citizens are considered as equals—morally and politically. Benhabib's deliberative democracy challenges Schumpeter's (1950) typical, common citizens who surrender "to extra-rational or irrational prejudice and impulse" (1996, p. 262). Giving credence to Pericles' Athenian constitutional democracy, Benhabib's deliberative democrats are also informed about general politics. As a consequence of free and unconstrained debates, citizens are able to question, interrogate, and determine the national agenda. In short, in a deliberative democracy, reason-giving and justification of collective decisions are key requirements. Of note, in Benhabib's deliberative model of democracy, members of a society's opinions are tested, challenged, examined, criticised, and rearticulated, as in parliamentary procedures.

In *The Concept of Representation*, Pitkin (1967, p. 240) advanced the idea of substantive political representation in this way:

> *The concept of representation . . . present[s] a continuing but not hopeless challenge: to construct institutions and train individuals in such a way that they engage in the pursuit of the public interest, the genuine representation of the public; and, at the same time, to remain critical of those institutions and that training, so that they are always open to further interpretation and reform.*

In the eyes of Pitkin, the term representation was fraught with tension between purpose (ideal) and institutionalisation (achievement). By disrupting this duality, a democratic participatory representative body demonstrates that 1) its citizens are able to assume control over what it does and does not do, 2) its actions have substantive content, that is, the citizens are also able to act through their leaders—far from being spectators of its actions, 3) it is accessible, responsive, and accountable to the general public—the electorate, and 4) in the spirit of genuine participation and deliberation, the people are capable of initiating government activities. In turn, the government is or should be conceived of as responding to the people unless there are good reasons for not doing so. Pitkin's concept of representation is, we think, a good illustration of how to select emissaries to a democratic participatory representative body that serves two main functions: 1) asserts that participation by Pericles and deliberation by Benhabib are not incompatible with representation—in fact, these two elements are not independent but are mutually tied to each other, and 2) affirms a maximal control of people's power over their elected representatives.

So, we have provided a theoretical framework as lens to analyse the presumptions that are evident in the policy of inclusive education post 1994 in South Africa using three criteria, namely, participation, deliberation, and representation: 1) Pericles' constitutional democracy has been shown to be self-improving and has the educational value of fostering active participatory citizens—this is a participatory criterion, 2) Benhabib's deliberative democracy promotes open, informed public conversations—this is a deliberative criterion, and 3) Pitkin's substantive political representation shows how individual citizens working within formal, outer institutions (popular participatory institutions) are able to pursue the public good—this is a representative criterion.

To all intents and purposes, a classical democratic theory framework is not premised on old-fashioned and unrealistic theoretical-impractical foundations, but is applicable to both old democracies and to

newly established democracies, including South Africa. It follows, as the authors will show in the next section, that inclusive education policy that promotes democracy, participation, and representation in South Africa generally, and in formal schools specifically, is feasible, desirable, and encouraged.

Inclusive Education Policy in Post-1994 South Africa: What is the Goal?

The attraction of Athenian prototype of democracy is apparent in the first section of the Freedom Charter,[2] "The People Shall Govern!" that stated:

> *All people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country. . . . All bodies of minority rule . . . councils and authorities shall be replaced by democratic organs of self-government (Congress Alliance, 1955, p. 1).*

In the main, a few points are worth stating with regards to the Freedom Charter's concept of *the rule of people*. In essence, the allusion to the people's will is a powerful reflection of prototype Athenian democracy as pronounced by Pericles. Second, it outlines the theoretical–practical basis for a democratic type of government in a unitary, non-racial, and just South Africa. Third, it visualises the power of people, including jurisdiction over elected representatives—similar to Pitkin's idea of substantive political representation. Moreover, "The People Shall Govern!" is equally unique in that it suggested that the people can self-govern; it also reiterated that "democracy is no dim and distant chimera, confined to the [Athenian] Greek city" (Pitkin & Shumer, 2000, p. 392). In the words of Sayed and Carrim (1997), "central to the notion of educational democracy in South Africa is the idea that democracy entails, and should enhance, greater participation" (p. 91). Sadly, the Freedom Charter's concept of the power and control of people—and by association, the education of people (democratic goals)—was diluted during the interregnum (the shift from the art of apartheid to the art of democracy via the art of transformation).

The concept of the power of citizens envisaged in the Freedom Charter tradition was also summed up in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA)[3] and, illustrating this point, its preamble reads:

> *We the people of South Africa, recognise the injustices of our past. We, therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental rights; lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by the law; improve the quality of life of all the citizens and free the potential of each person; and build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations. (RSA, 1996b, p. 1)*

In our view, there are four points worth pointing out about the Constitution. First, South Africa is a constitutional democracy that rests authority in the hands of its citizens—this is in line with the participatory element of classical democracy. Second, it is the sensible nature of South Africans as free, non-racialist, self-directing citizens that enables them to devise a social pact or laws applicable to humanity—this is a deliberative model of classical democracy. Third, the Constitution ensures maximal degree of citizens' control over the representatives—this is a representative model of classical democracy. Fourth, there is a lurking ambiguity at play here—the Constitution is torn between

[2] The Charter's preamble has the hallmarks of prototypical Athenian democracy: people's power, self-rule, equality and freedom, and it envisaged "a government . . . based on the will of all the people . . . black and white" (Congress Alliance, 1955, p. 1).

[3] From this point on in this article, this is simply referred to as the Constitution for ease of reading.

transformative goals (to rectify historical injustices) and democratic goals (to establish a just, equal, and democratic society) with roots in the anti-apartheid struggle, and as reflected in the Freedom Charter tradition. As Liebenberg (2010, p. 25) has shown, our "Constitution is simultaneously backward- [recognition of injustices] and forward-looking [establish a just society]" (p. 25). In heightening this contrast, von Holdt (2013) maintained that, "the constitution is marked by these tensions. It is a complex document reflecting the stalemate between the contending forces and the need for redistribution of power and resources in order to right historical injustice" (p. 592). The result, it is argued, is that democratic elements of the Freedom Charter are indefinitely stated, and cancelled out by the broad transformative inclination of the Constitution—and in subsequent inclusive education policies, as the reader will see.

More profoundly, in the heart of hearts of the South African Schools Act (SASA; RSA, 1996a) rests the notion of democratic model of governance including partnership. The Act created the way for democratic representative bodies known as school governing bodies (SGBs). An SGB of an ordinary public school includes the elected members [parents of learners at the school, educators at the school, members of staff at the school who are not educators, and learners in the eighth grade or higher in the school], the principal . . . [and] co-opted members. (Department of Education [DoE], 1996, p. 18)

The aim of the SGB's school democratic governance is further expressed by the Act as shown in the following quotation:

> *The governance of every public school is vested in its governing body. . . . A governing body stands in a position of trust towards the school. . . . The governing body of a public school must function in terms of a constitution which complies with minimum requirements determined by the Member of the Executive Council [MEC]. (DoE, 1996, p. 14)*

Our disquiet with the above-mentioned Act is that the provision of school governance and co-operation is unclear and not helpful for these reasons: 1) MECs are entrusted with authority to regulate the powers and functions of these participatory representative structures, 2) in performing their roles, functions, and responsibilities, SGBs do not exclude the Department of Basic Education's calling upon experts, and 3) by centring and limiting the Athenian enthusiasm for participation, deliberation, and representation, the SASA seems to favour a top-down as well as a vertical logic that weaken the democratic objectives that had their origin in the principles of the Freedom Charter. From Colebatch's (2002, p. 23) point of view, the vertical dimension with regards to education policy,

> *sees policy as rule . . . it is concerned with the transmission downwards of authorised decisions . . . the ability or capacity of subordinate officials to give effect to these decisions . . . so as to achieve this compliance.*

Put differently, the Department of Basic Education gets to decide on practices that are democratic within the school context and convey them to MECs to execute. Additionally, due to the compromise of people's power for people's education, the genuine consultations concerning school governance have become identical with a top-down form of government. As a consequence, this type of consultation, has come to exhibit what Arnstein's (1969) referred to as a *degree of tokenism*, not genuine participation, in post-1994 South African schools.

Alongside the Freedom Charter's notion of democracy, encapsulated in the Constitution and envisioned in the SASA, is Education White Paper 6 (EWP6; DoE, 2001a) on inclusive education that makes provision for quality educational opportunities for all school-going children in South Africa by

> *Maximising the participation of all learners in the culture and the curriculum of educational institutions and uncovering and minimising barriers to learning. (p. 7)*
>
> *The mobilisation of out-of-school [all] children and youth of school-going age. (p. 8)*
>
> *Focus[ing] efforts on improving the capacity of education and training to accommodate learners who experience the various forms of learning difficulties. (p. 26)*
>
> *A flexible curriculum and assessment policy that is accessible to all learners irrespective of the nature of the learning needs. (p. 31)*

In a nutshell, three points are worth underlining about EWP6 and its view on inclusive education. First, it refers to the maximal degree of learners' participation in the culture and curriculum in South African schools. Second, through active participation in school affairs, it guarantees learners deliberation on matters relating to barriers to learners in schools. Third, by mobilising children (out-of-school) and young people (of school-going age), EWP6 contributes to their genuine representation in public formal institutions in South Africa. Commendable, no doubt, but we should question whether the EWP6 vocabulary inherited from Pericles, underpinned by the principles of the Freedom Charter and linked to the SASA, circumscribes the idea of democratic participation. Furthermore, does it translate into the reality of learners' lived experiences considering that the anti-apartheid democratic ideals are "celebrated but not translated into a radical rethinking of liberation theory" (Gibson, 2001, p. 72) because they were sacrificed on the altar of a negotiated transition to democracy in South Africa? The authors' response is simple: the post-1994 inclusive education policy's conceptualisation of democratic citizenship education undermines the very goal it seeks to advance, that is, to "contribute to the betterment of the life of the people, it has to be practical"—to use Maluleka and Mathebula's (2022, p. 65) work on philosophy of education in post-apartheid South Africa.

Thus, the authors assert that the policy stance on inclusion of the learners in post-1994 South Africa can be summarised as follows: 1) Pericles' Athenian democratic energy that was apparent in the Freedom Charter was weakened during the transition from the apartheid regime to a democratic type of government, and 2) the result is that the elements of democracy were indefinitely stated and cancelled out by the general transformative inclination of the Constitution 3) because of the compromise of the rule of the people; even school democracy, as the SASA shows, resembles an elitist form of government (a degree of tokenism, not genuine participation) and 4) even EWP6 and its view on inclusive education is not spared—it undermines democratic citizenship education, that is, the right to education for all learners in the school context in South Africa. This begs, more precisely, the question of why there are so many questions, uncertainties, and debates on whether inclusion of learners is ideal or has been achieved in South African schools. Walton and Engelbrecht (2022) posited that the uncertainty that underpins effective implementation of inclusive education has, instead, shifted focus to researchers who are interested in documenting the barriers behind the failure of successful inclusive education instead of proposing a solution to learner inclusion. Given the drifting focus on how learners can be effectively included in schools, Ferguson et al. (2019) reached the conclusion that implementation of inclusive education policy has proved to be rather elusive in schools in South Africa. In a similar vein, the zones of exclusion in schools also show the tension between ideal (inclusive policies) and practice (inclusion of the learners) in South Africa's constitutional democracy, as we shall see in the ensuing discussion.

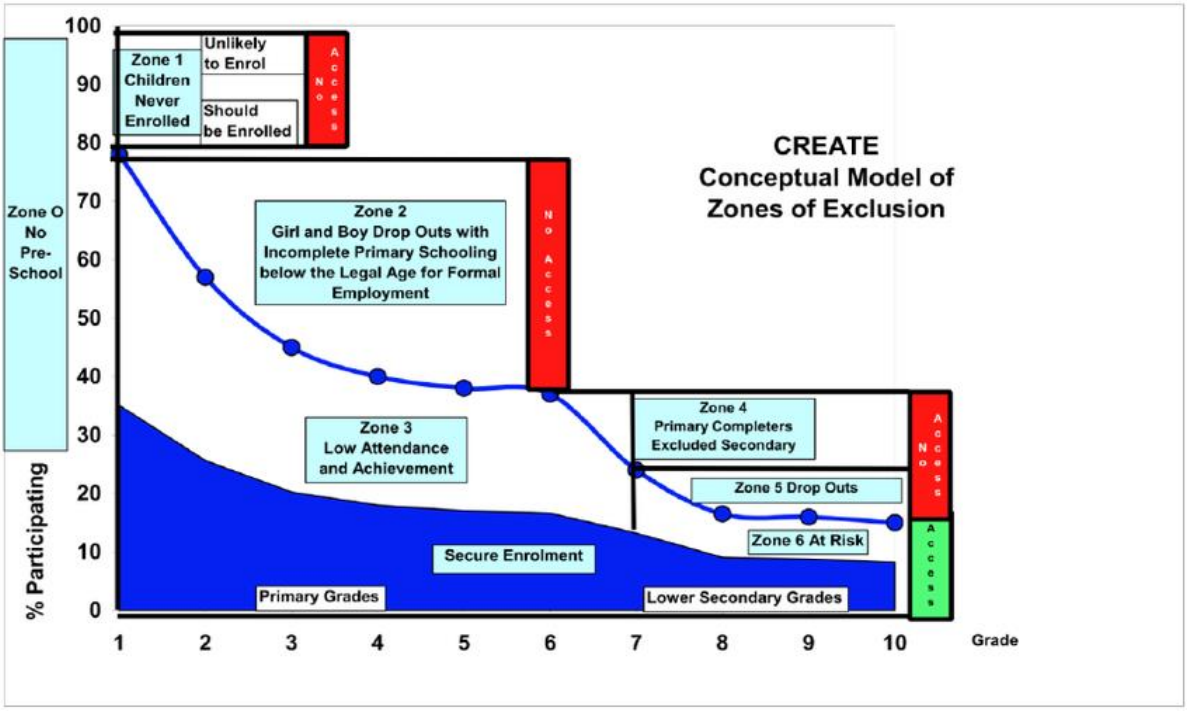
Inclusive Education and the Zones of Exclusion in Post-1994 South Africa: Where is the Tension?

As already pointed out, our disquiet with the policy on inclusive education post-1994 South Africa is its continuing tension between ideal (intention) and practice (achievement). In the words of Christie (2010),

> *the gap between the expression of rights and their delivery in practice has haunted [the] existence [of inclusive education framework]. One of the major shortcomings of formal statements of rights is that when they encounter the texture of lived experience, they easily prove to be abstract and empty. There are dangers in not recognising the limited nature of rights. (p. 5)*

There are some points worth considering about Christie's analysis of inclusive education policy encapsulated in the Constitution (with its transformative orientation envisioned in the SASA, which diluted the democratic ideals and were captured in EWP6) that undermined democratic goals. Christie (2010) warned of justiciable socioeconomic rights (for instance, the right to education, in particular) that, "are abstracted from their social context and the real-world consequences flowing from the enforcement of these abstract rules" (Liebenberg, 2010, p. 44). In line with this view, Hulme and Hulme (2012) cautioned against the "ahistorical and de-personalised accounts of [inclusive education framework] complete[ly] devoid of human experiences" (p. 44). Waghid (2005, p. 337) also alerted us to formal (inclusive education) declarations, charters, and bills of rights that are unlikely to "create space[s] in which . . . [political authorities] are able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished and awaken us to the multiple voices and multiple realities." As a consequence of this gulf between ideal and practice, we question the educational benefits of the espoused inclusive education policy in post-1994 political settlement in South Africa. Our focus now turns to the zones of exclusion in post-1994 South African schools (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Zones of Exclusion



Source: Lewin (2007)

Although he described educational access of school-age children in low enrolment countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Lewin's (2009) zones of exclusion (i.e. patterns of how learners face exclusion in schools) are also applicable in South Africa. The reasons why inclusion of learners in schools is arguably yet to be achieved since transition in 1994 lie in Lewin's (2009) zones of exclusion outlined in the diagram below. As for South Africa, Zone 0 (pre-school participation), at worst, paints a picture of those learners who are not part of the democratic education system—the absence of the practical ideal of the participatory model of democracy and its educational benefits in South African schools. At best, it goes against Pericles' maximal concept of constitutional democracy that is self-improving and fosters active participatory citizens. This shows a degree of tokenism, not authentic participation in education in South African schools. As far as can be judged, pre-school participation (Zone 0) speaks to all school-going children without access to basic learning in the South African setting. This state of affairs, in our view, curtails basic human rights, namely, access to primary education in South Africa.

As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) declared, "everyone has a right to education [that] shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (p. 4). Also, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Organisation of African Unity, 1999) indicated that the education of the children should be geared towards "fostering respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (p. 4). Moreover, in providing for the global and regional human rights framework, the Constitution further promised the right "to a basic education, including adult basic education and further education" (RSA, 1996b, p. 12) in South Africa. Furthermore, the SASA seeks to preserve the rights of all learners. In relation to the aforementioned policy documents, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2012) also promoted "human rights, inclusivity [and] social justice as defined in the Constitution" (p. 5). From an Athenian democracy perspective, school-going children in Zone 0 form part of the unrecognised, excluded, and unheard voices of millions of learners who remain outside the ideal–practice education policy framework in post-apartheid South Africa. Let us now turn our focus to Zone 1.

Equally, Zone 1 (children never enrolled) focuses on children who, ideally, are supposed to be in school (should be enrolled) but, practically, are not (unlikely to enrol)—a clear example of the practical impotence of the representative model in South Africa's democracy schools. Although the Constitution, the SASA, and EWP6 are intended to support democracy, they fail to provide guidance where it matters, that is, the practical representative aspect of inclusion—especially in the education space that is besieged with problems of "persistent inequality, inadequately trained teachers, poor infrastructure, lack of educational materials, poor support and management, unmotivated learners, and low educational outcomes" (Centre for Development and Enterprise, 2017, p. 1). Additionally, from a socioeconomic point of view, the rights and responsibilities of a democratic school community (parents, educators, members of staff, learners, the principal, and co-opted members) are regarded as those of consumers of the commodity called education as opposed to being participants in the education ecosystem. Also, teachers face challenges in dealing with "socio-economic problems in the community, e.g. poverty and substance abuse" (Department of Basic Education, 2015, p. 37). Thus Dube's (2020) argument that the Department of Basic Education should pay major focus on devising an inclusive approach that accomodates all learners, even those in rural settings in South Africa. Given this proposal, it is, we believe, fair to observe that if we find the forward-looking Freedom Charter's concept of people's government laudable as a vehicle for the struggle for democratic representation, we must also find the backward-looking Constitution, SASA, and EWP6 untenable at best and unjustified at worst. Our focus now shifts to Lewin's (2009) Zones 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

For the purpose of this article, Zone 2 (drop-outs due to incomplete primary schooling), Zone 3 (poor attendance and poor achievement), Zone 4 (do not transit to secondary level primary, and completers excluded in secondary schools), Zone 5 (drop-outs at secondary level) and Zone 6 (school-going learners who are at risk of dropping out from secondary level) refer to learners in the schooling system struggling with educational demands of different kinds—a glaring inability to transcend the ideal–practice divide of the deliberative type of democracy in schools in South Africa. In theory, the ideal of deliberation is unrestricted and just because learners are perceived to be educational equals in school governance, namely, policy matters relating to learners' retention, attendance, and performance. If this argument is accepted, a schooling system from a deliberative perspective promotes free and unconstrained deliberation between members of SGBs (i.e. learners, educators, managers, parents, and other interested interlocutors). To elucidate the above-mentioned point, in his chapter "The Student Government," Kane-Berman (2001) asserted that, during the Soweto uprising in 1976, the Soweto Students Representative Council "revealed an intelligence, a clear-sightedness, a reasonableness, an awareness of responsibility to the [school] community" (p. 132). Seen in this light, the ideal–practice move towards democratic inclusive education is likely to 1) emphasise individual autonomy (i.e. a learner's ability and desire to act for themself), 2) promote solid school communities that encourage active, critical, and informed learners, 3) allow deliberative engagement, that is, "open and reflexive human encounters" (Higgs & Waghid, 2017 p. 9), and 4) encourage collective empowerment (i.e. thinking new thoughts, facing new challenges, and charting a new path) in South African schools.

By way of brief summary, the zones of exclusion paint a picture of an inclusive education that diluted the democratic ideals, and undermined democratic goals in South African schools. School-going children are not part of the democratic education system (Zone 0); a large number of educable children who are supposed to be in schools are not (Zone 1); and among those learners who are enrolled drop-out (Zone 2), poor attendance, and achievement (Zone 3) are rife, it is difficult for many to transit to secondary schools and those who do are excluded in secondary schools (Zone 4), at secondary level the drop-out rate is very high (Zone 5), and learners struggle to deal with academic demands placed on them (Zone 6). For inclusive education to be effective, it thus becomes essential to establish a conducive environment for "learners to . . . demonstrate readiness and practise deliberation, which would enable the education system to produce responsible, responsive and democratic citizens" (Mncube, 2008, p. 89). On a positive, hopeful note we can draw inspiration from the Freedom Charter tradition that showed that a school that embraces participatory, deliberative and representative models of democracy is likely to "represent, in the pattern of its life, the values and qualities of human relations that promote growth . . . demonstrate habits of cooperation, free communication, and reflective thinking—the values of the democratic ideal" (Wirth, 1966, p. 125). It is no surprise, therefore that inclusive education (and by implication, the zones of exclusion) is the next stage of struggle by (or for) learners denied the right to democratic education—and thus giving substance to the ideal in post-apartheid South Africa schools.

Inclusive Education and Democratic Classrooms in South Africa: Why a Perennial Struggle?

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the authors argue that the realisation of a substantive inclusive education lies in the struggle waged by those who are exclded from formal democratic schools in post-apartheid South Africa. As indicated above, protest scholars viewed democratic inclusive education as part of a protracted struggle to be undertaken on behalf of learners who are denied the right to education as fellow citizens. In support of the protest scholars' argument, Dembour (2010) insisted that we should

> *look at the . . . right [to democratic inclusive education] as claims and aspirations . . . in favour of the oppressed . . . they advocate relentlessly fighting for [this] right [to democratic inclusive education], as one victory never signals the end of all injustice . . . most of them are more concerned with concrete source of [socioeconomic] right[s] . . . in social struggles, which are as necessary as they are perennial. (p. 3)*

> *[What this means is that democratic inclusive education goes beyond] the natural scholars (i.e. democratic inclusive education is not a given), deliberative scholars (democratic inclusive education is not just agreed upon), discourse scholars (democratic inclusive education is just talked a about). But, is linked to protest scholars (i.e. democratic inclusive education is fought for). (p. 9)*

We can note four points about democratic inclusive education as a national human rights matter in South Africa. First, the protest school of thought accepts that learners in Foundation to Intermediate and Senior Phases in post-1994 South Africa are national rights holders who are excluded zonally (as depicted by the zones in Figure 1), and are in need of a meaningful and pragmatic education as a human right. Second, the advocates of the protest school maintain that human rights injustices give rise to endless demands for redress in South African schools. Third, the state's inability to realise justiciable rights is the root of an ongoing struggle to give actual form to the ideal of the inclusive education agenda of advancing equal opportunities for everyone in South Africa. Fourth, democratic inclusive education encapsulated in the Constitution, envisioned in the SASA, and captured in EWP6 is merely given (natural school), agreed upon (deliberative school), and talked about (discourse school) in South Africa. Fifth, the protest scholars call for a need to go beyond the natural given, agreed upon, and talked about approaches to fighting for a democratic inclusive education in South Africa. In Christie's (2010) words, "South Africa's anti-apartheid struggles that gave rise to [democratic inclusive education] are now out of view. [Democratic and inclusive education] rights are fought for, won, lost, and won again" (p. 6).

And hence, Enslin (2003) captured the transformative-centric and democracy-centric discourse well, when she argued that

> *South Africa's emergent conception of citizenship has to be understood in the context of the negotiated transition to democracy that was marked by the election of 1994, and also the period of struggle against apartheid that preceded it. . . . This still recent transition and the radical break with the past that it is supposed to represent means that South Africans do not yet have a settled conception of citizenship [and, by implication, for democratic inclusive education] to draw on. . . . Thus citizenship education [and, by implication, democratic inclusive education] too, is still in a formative stage. (p. 73)*

Enslin's quote shows how half-baked constitutional democracy has a direct bearing on inclusion of learners in South Africa. For example, a review on education change and transformation for the period 1994 to 2001 (Department of Education, 2001b, p. 1) maintained that post-1994, educational changes are steered by the necessity "to overcome the devastation of apartheid, and provide a system of education that builds democracy, human dignity, equality and social justice." Artiles et al. (2021) stated that, as a consequence, inclusive education came to the fore to equip educators with the tools to address the past inequalities and injustices that some learners had previously faced within the schooling system. The attention turned to a novel system of education that aims to rectify the ills of the past education system and speed up transformation into a democratic society. This transformed society, it is believed, is likely to be translated into an inclusive citizenry in South Africa. As we saw earlier, the transformative agenda neatly encapsulated in the Constitution sets the tone for the SASA and EWP6. Normatively, a post-1994 concept of citizenship allows a "transformed" citizen to move

beyond the apartheid divide, that is, race and ethnicity-based notions of citizenship in South Africa. Commendable modesty, no doubt, but the same transformed citizens are also committed to providing the tools needed for such transformation in pursuit of a revised accommodative version of a democratic citizenship education envisaged in the Freedom Charter. As Chisholm and Fuller (1996) noted, the democratic movement that dominated the National executive committee of the African National Congress

> *advanced an agenda for central and local transformation built on the foundations of [democratic] education. . . . The NETF [National Education and Training Forum] came to be dominated by representatives whose history and allegiance did not lie in the democratic movement. (pp. 704–705)*

Given this state of affairs, democratic inclusive education that is much vaunted remains a promise unfulfilled. Going back to Pitkin's (1967) substantive political representation, the tension that exists between the ideal and practice of democratic inclusive education in South African schools should be clear, and

> *should lead us neither to abandon the ideal, retreating to an operational definition that accepts whatever those usually designated as representatives do, nor to abandon its institutionalisation and withdraw from political reality. Rather, it should present a continuing but not hopeless challenge: to construct institutions and train individuals in such a way that they engage in the pursuit of the public interest, the genuine representation of the public; and, at the same time, to remain critical of those institutions and that training, so that they are always open to further interpretation and reform. (p. 240)*

If we accept, as we believe we must, that the practice gives short shrift to the ideal only at great peril when we refer to democratic inclusive education substantively, it seems that there is a need to disrupt the dichotomy between ideal and practice by creating "third spaces or interstitial spaces" (le Grange, 2007, p. 586). So, in a sense, democratic inclusive education does not simply involve the intent disconnected from the practice experiences of learners—it should (and must) transcend the ideal–practice divide to help us make practical sense of deep idealistic issues in democratic education in South Africa. Our contention is that the zones of exclusion make it impossible for learners to actively participate, engage deliberatively, or be represented substantively in South African schools. In the eyes of Engelbrecht (2020), policy guidelines that foreground inclusive education in South Africa continue to be questionable. Thus, Siegel (2014, p. 24) asked how inclusive education practitioners in a democratic South Africa can stop the suffering—that is, "self-imposed restrictions on themselves and their work." The answer, Siegel suggested, is that we should "think of [inclusive education] of education as first and foremost a part of, and responsible to, [inclusive democracy]" (2014, p. 25). Put differently, when it comes to democratic inclusive education, the concepts of democracy and education are interconnected; thus, democracy "plays mainly the role of a midwife: it helps in bringing education to birth in the way that midwives help in delivering babies" (Akinpelu, 1987, p. 167). From a democratic perspective, the struggle is waged in order to give meaning to the purpose—a constant pursuit of democratic inclusive education in South Africa broadly, and in schools, specifically.

The argument may be summed up this way. First, our disquiet with the policy on inclusive education post-1994 South Africa is its continuing tension between ideal (intention) and practice (achievement). Second, by extension, the zones of exclusion in schools also show the tension within the ideal (inclusive policies). Lastly, the practice (inclusion of learners) reveals a regressive rather than a progressive realisation of inclusive education—a dream deferred for the majority in schools. It is not difficult to understand why this is so, given that the realisation of substantive inclusive education depends on the

protests of the excluded who struggle in the interstices of zones of exclusion that have created and deepened the gulf between the ideal and the achievement because democratic inclusive education is at a crossroad—it is extended and dragged in opposite directions in post-1994 South Africa schools. The inability of formal inclusive education to realise justiciable social rights (i.e. the right to basic education) is the source of perennial struggle "to liberate and free [school-going children] from the influence of public policies that repress and attack individual liberty in post-aparheid South Africa" (Mathebula, 2019a, p. 19). In this, and only in this sense, we reorient the discourse from the history (democratic theory), the evaluation (formal policy), and the analytical (policy versus achievement) inquiries (such as, what democratic inclusive education should do when it comes to schools) to philosophical inquiry, that is, "a single, careful and systematic thinking [method]" (Mathebula, 2019b, p. 25) about democratic inclusive education in a new and inclusive South Africa. You may not agree entirely, or perhaps at all, with our conclusion, but we hope you will agree as a matter of emphasis, that the task awaiting those who are silently excluded is to 1) align themselves with protest scholars' fight for a democratic inclusive education that transcends the ideal state policy and real school experiences of educable learners in post-1994 South African schools, 2) realise that the transformative goals and democratic goals are not fundamentally incompatible but are closely and mutually linked, and 3) acknowledge the noble and urgent need to disrupt the dichotomy between the purpose and achievement of inclusive education in schools in South Africa; to contribute to the betterment of the life of the learners it has to be practical.

Conclusion

We began this article by providing a conceptual clarity—interpretation, and feasibility of theories of participation, deliberation, and representation—as lens through which to analyse policy in the context of South African education. As a noble idea, it is not difficult to comprehend the educational benefits of the Athenian prototype of democracy that 1) fosters active participatory citizens—Pericles' (Thucydides, 1972) participatory criterion, 2) promotes open, informed public conversations—Benhabib's (1996) deliberative criterion, and 3) with substantive political representation—Pitkin's (1967) representative criterion. Sadly, the democratic spirit of Pericles' popular form of democracy envisioned in the Freedom Charter was compromised on South Africa's journey to democracy during the transition from apartheid to democracy. This started with key elements of democratic theory being indefinitely stated and cancelled out by the broad transformative inclination of the Constitution. Subsequently, inclusive education policies were followed by the SASA's school democracy, which is identical to an hierarchal form of government. To top it all, EWP6 undermined inclusive education that sought to provide quality educational opportunities for all school-going children in South Africa. Of concern, is the ideal–practice divide that characterises democratic inclusive education as depicted by the zones of exclusion in post-1994 schools in South Africa. As things stand, there are three tasks awaiting proponents of democratic inclusive education in South African schools. First, to align themselves with protest scholars' fight for a democratic inclusive education that transcends the ideal state policy and real school experiences of learners in post-1994 South African schools. Second, to realise that the transformative goals and democratic goals are not fundamentally distinct but are closely and mutually connected. Lastly, to acknowledge the compelling and urgent need to disrupt the dichotomy between the purpose and achievement of inclusive education in post-1994 schooling system in South Africa.

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