Social Justice in Educational Administration: Review of Centralisation-Decentralisation Conundrum in Education

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ABSTRACT Placing social justice at the centre of educational administration implies critical reflections on the status quo. A unitarised system of administration strives, amongst others, to maintain uniformity in respect of service delivery. The system does, in some cases unintentionally, marginalise social justice concerns. Marginalisation of social justice concerns does not only affect those with unequal social, educational, and professional capital because they are poor, live in rural areas, immigrant, female, gay or different in race, abilities, ethnicity, religion, language, or culture, but also limits the voices of allies within educational administration that would confront issues of inequality and injustice. This paper, informed and directed by the different rationales, provides a critique for decentralisation and re-centralisation trends in various countries. Organisations and governments have been found to be unsure as to when they may decentralise and/or re-centralise. The concept conundrum refers to a confusing or puzzling situation. In the context of this paper decentralisation and centralisation both have their own challenges. When you apply either one of them old problems are resolved and new ones crop up, this means that neither decentralisation nor centralisation is a panacea to all problems

INTRODUCTION

A general definition of social justice is hard to arrive at and even harder to implement (Bogotch 2002; Furnman and Gruenewald 2004) even though the concept has been continually constructed since the time of Plato (Furnman and Gruenewald 2004). In essence, social justice is concerned with equal justice, not just in the courts, but in all aspects of society. This concept demands that people have equal rights and opportunities; everyone, from the poorest person on the margins of society to the wealthiest deserves an even playing field. Marshall (2004) advocates the notion of educational leadership for social justice. She asserts that marginalisation of social justice concerns not only those with unequal social, educational, and professional capital because they are poor, live in rural areas, immigrant, female, gay, or different in race, abilities, ethnicity, religion, language, or culture but also limits the voices of allies within educational administration that would confront issues of inequality and injustice. Traditional training for educational leadership reflects a culture that has marginalised issues and concerns of social justice. This paper provides a critical reflection on, in the quest for social justice, the processes of centralisation, decentralisation and recentralisation in educational administration.

Social Justice Conceptualised

According to Gerwitz et al. (1995), theories of social justice advocate adequate mechanisms used to regulate social arrangements in the fairest way for the benefit of all. For the purpose of this article, conceptualisation of social justice hinges on Nancy Fraser's definition. She defines justice as 'parity of participation' (Tikly 2010). Fraser (2008) elucidates that 'overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalised obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others as full partners in social interaction". Gerwitz (1998) maintains that social justice is premised on the discourse of disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote marginalisation and exclusionary processes. Social justice supports a process built on respect, care, recognition and empathy. The presence of words, such as 'demands, mechanisms, disrupting, subverting' in definitions above, suggest concerted action and seem to elicit revolutionary overtones. Similarly, Calderwood (2003) also adopts a revolutionary approach to social justice. She posits that it works to undo socially created and maintained differences in material conditions of living, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the perpetuation of privilege of some at the expense of others. Frey et al. (1996) raise concern about

sensibility toward social justice. The authors (Frey et al.1996) claim that sensibility should forego ethical concerns, commit to structural analyses of ethical concerns, adopt an activist orientation and seek identification with others. On the promotion of social justice, Calderwood (2003) is of the view that people need to act to reduce and eradicate oppression, however distant we may feel from personal culpability of its enactment. The view is further accentuated by former British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, who, quoting an unknown Greek philosopher, said: *"When will there be justice in Athens? It will be when those that do not suffer are as angry as those that do"*. Undoubtedly, there seems to be an agreement that injustice is not only an issue that concerns those at its receiving end, but also those members of society that do not seem to be affected. The situation seems to further call for alertness or what we may call thinking beyond the visible and the ordinary. Calderwood (2003) cites an unfortunate reality about social justice. She states that mechanisms of injustice are largely invisible, even to those who strive to live their lives and carry out their work ethically.

WHAT ARE DECENTRALISATION, CENTRALISATION AND RE-CENTRALISATION?

Rondinelli et al. (1989:59) define decentralization from an administrative perspective as "the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and the raising and allocation of resources from the central government and its agencies to field agencies, subordinate units or levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations, area wide, regional or functional authorities, or non-governmental private or voluntary organizations." Centralisation, on the other hand, is the retaining of the responsibility for planning, management and financial control at the upper level of government. Re-centralisation is the withdrawal of the decision making authority from the lower level to the upper level. Gershberg and Jacobs (1998) argue that improvement in service delivery requires greater autonomy for the local service provider and also strengthened performance of some central functions. Karlsen (1999) argues that 'there is tension between decentralisation efforts and the need for central control'. He views decen-

tralisation as a way of managing conflict and providing what is known as compensatory legitimisation. This argument provides a basis for studying the shift from districts to regions and determining whether this was done in an attempt to strengthen the central function or to ease the tension between districts and the provincial education offices. De Clercq (2002) postulates that 'the relationship between the South African provincial government and districts is that of administrative delegation'. Lim and Fritzen (2006) argue that decentralisation has the potential of improving quality, increasing innovations, increasing effectiveness and efficiency, redistributing political power and solving the problem of financing education. The nature of the relationship between the provincial education offices and the sub-units is important as it attempts to conceptualise the performance of districts and regions in the South African context. It is accepted that decentralisation initiatives are sometimes aimed at enhancing efficiency, rather than merely devolving power and authority to lower levels of the hierarchy. Sometimes educational decentralisation is politically triggered, as in the case of Taiwan in 1987. For this reason, and in order to benefit from experiences elsewhere, one needs to understand reform measures in terms of the contemporary problems, political and cultural contexts in which they take place (Leung 2004). According to Common (1998), it is not possible for all countries to adopt global standards of public management. Furthermore, there is a danger that pressure to globalise may produce unintended consequences if applied uniformly across diverse political or administrative cultures.

INTERNATIONAL TRENDS IN DECENTRALISATION AND CENTRALISATION IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Norway

This section analyses decentralisation and re-centralisation trends in various countries in order to investigate their rationales. In Norway, the decentralisation movement for education commenced in the 1960s and became very strong in the late 1970s. It continued during the 1980s and 1990s, but the arguments and nature of the decentralisation movement itself changed over time. The Curriculum Guidelines of 1987 (Karlsen

1999) reflected the local needs and conditions in Norway at the time, but even though the bottom-up strategy is still the accepted rhetoric, there was a shift in the 1990s towards a more traditional top-down government strategy. The New Curriculum Guidelines of 1997 are mainly the result of a central initiative to return to the top-down strategy. During the 1970s and 1980s there was a move towards a less standardised and more locally oriented curriculum to include local knowledge and local culture. However, the New Curriculum of 1997 changed this endeavour by focusing on a National Standardised Curriculum and stressing more academic and skills-oriented education. The above-mentioned case is an example of a reaction to decentralisation, namely re-centralisation (Karlsen 1999). Karlsen's (1999) tension argument is vital for this particular paper as it traverses decentralisation and centralisation moves in some countries around the world which might have experienced both processes. In investigating these processes, it is important to find out whether such moves were the result of tension between decentralisation efforts and the need for control. The tension argument is vital for this study as it investigates what informed the abolition of districts and their amalgamation into regions.

Decentralisation and centralisation forces may occur at the same time as contradictory phenomena. This is what Karlsen (1999) refers to as decentralisation-centralism or re-centralisation. Khamsi and Stolpe (2004) argue that 'many comparative researchers have highlighted the international pressure for governments to decentralize the education sector'. It is not surprising that several comparative researchers have critically commented on this global trend. They raise serious concerns regarding the transferability of decentralisation policies and experience from one cultural context to another. Mangelsdorf (1988) contends that the interest on the part of developing countries may be spontaneous, but sometimes changes in local governments are the result of national and international politics and events, rather than local initiatives. Khamsi and Stolpe (2004) state that a great deal of speculation has revolved around whether a decentralised education system such as that in the United States of America, can achieve the required level of coherence to implement changes demanded by current reforms.

Scholars studying educational change in other countries argue that, in some contexts, clearly defined hierarchies and more centralised structures may be more effective in bringing about successful reforms (Khamsi and Stolpe 2004). According to Lauglo (1995), bureaucratic centralism is prevalent in many developing countries. Not only does the legacy of colonial rule reflect the need to control and develop in order to meet the needs of colonial rule itself, but there is also the need for nation building initiatives associated with independence. Lauglo's study found that central planning, which is practised by most developing countries, is an example of bureaucratic centralism. Lauglo (1995) further argues that bureaucratic centralism is a pattern that emerges when local and regional governments are weak, especially after independence. Mangelsdorf (1988) argues that the degree of decentralisation that accompanied decolonisation elsewhere in the world is determined by the degree of centralisation or decentralisation established by the former regime.

Mongolia

In Mongolia, according to Khamsi and Stolpe (2004), the withdrawal of 'internationalist assistance from fraternal socialist countries led to a major economic crisis that forced the Mongolian government to seek funding from the international community composed of free market economies. This reorientation had an impact on their educational policies, which have been borrowed for in 1992'. Khamsi and Stolpe (2004) argue that British and American experts have always favoured the introduction of a decentralised system of educational administration, whereas Soviet and German Democratic Republic experts usually recommended a centralised approach to the countries that they have advised. The decentralisation of governance and finance has been used as a panacea to combat the mistakes during the socialist era, namely the lack of quality, efficiency and cost effectiveness, and the dependence on external subsidies for funding the costly education sector. What began in 1993 as a presentation of possible solutions by the Mongolian government was used merely as a strategy to appease international donors and was later prescribed as a condition for international loans and grants. According to Khamsi and Stolpe (2004), some developing coun-

tries such as Mongolia opt for certain programmes pertaining to educational reforms simply in order to appease donor countries. The argument about Mongolia prompts this study to be aware of hidden motives. It is essential to investigate whether or not South Africa, like Mongolia, used decentralisation measures for the purpose of securing international loans and grants.

No real decentralisation occurred in Mongolia, irrespective of international pressure, because no devolution of decision-making authority from central to provincial, district or institution occurred in practice. In 2002, the Parliament of Mongolia introduced a new educational law that was known as the re-centralisation law. This law introduced re-centralisation measures by abolishing school boards that had decision-making powers (including hiring and firing of principals) and replacing them with school councils with purely administrative functions. As a result, district governors and provincial governors, who are state and party representatives, were put back in charge of regulating school matters (Khamsi and Stolpe 2004). Several issues are evident from the above account. First, the Mongolian government lacked the political will to implement the decentralisation of education and finance portfolios. Second, there was a hidden agenda in their educational decentrali-sation policies that were utilised to secure international grants and loans. These policies remained on paper only and were never implemented. Third, the stakeholders in education were not involved in educational reforms. Public and political support is crucial for changing the legal foundation of education administration. Fourth, capacity building is critical for the success of decentralisation policies in order to equip officials with the necessary skills pertaining to their new roles and responsibilities. Fifth, the historical background and context of a country must be taken into account to ensure the success of decentralisation. The reluctance of the Mongolian Government to decentralise governance and finance was based on their conception of democratic centralism, a core principle of socialist governance. This approach is based on the Marxist-Leninist ideology that the state as a representative of the proletariat (working class), needs to enforce democratic centralism, which first ensures that all groups participate in governance (democracy), and then carries out the de-

cisions effectively and efficiently (centralism) (Khamsi and Stolpe 2004). To summarise, decentralisation should not be touted with a hidden agenda. Elements crucial to its effectiveness include the political will of the bureaucrats, the involvement of stakeholders, capacity building for officials on the ground, and consideration of the historical and political context of a country. Generally speaking, education systems in the East, where the collective takes precedence over the individual, have taken a centralised approach.

Central governments develop, design and execute policies and standards for school finance, curricula, text books, assessment and teacher preparation. But as East Asian countries become more and more complex, their governments are finding that a centralised approach fails to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse population. The advance of communication technology and the condensation of the global village have provided decision makers with a repertoire of ideas that they can refer to in solving these emerging problems. Educational decentralisation is one such idea (Leung 2004). It is clear that various ideological approaches, as explained above, have an influence on choosing either centralisation or decentralisation. These approaches form another dimension in viewing decentralisation in South Africa, namely whether or not it had something to do with the argument of the collective versus the individual.

China

In China, a 1985 government document declared that the power for the administration of elementary education belonged to the local authorities. Due to financial constraints, the Chinese government relaxed their monopoly on running schools and from 1994 allowed non-state sectors to do so, hence the emergence of *Minban* schools (administered by the people) and *Guoyou* schools (owned by the state but run by private enterprises). One cannot decentralise the operation of schools without a certain amount of decentralisation of the curriculum, hence, another area of decentralisation in China is that of the curriculum and textbooks. Prior to 1986, the whole country used a uniform set of textbooks published by the People's Education Press, written according to the standardised curriculum for all. This changed in 1986 with the introduction

of different groups of educators and publishers, which were commissioned to publish different textbooks to cater for the various needs of students from different parts of the country. The curriculum, however, remained uniform, and so a handful of provinces, for example, the Shanghai province, were selected as pilot areas for the development of their own curricula and syllabi. This case shows that China chose to decentralise due to financial constraints.

It is important to note that among these moves towards decentralisation, there were at times moves in the opposite direction. For example, a Shanghai Municipal Commission of Education was formed in 1995 to take charge of all aspects of education in Shanghai (Leung 2004). The Municipal Commission was directly under the National Ministry of Education and the Municipal Government, and all educational matters, which were formerly under the control of other departments of the Municipal Government, were transferred to the Commission. This can be interpreted as re-centralisation (Leung 2004). The argument put forth in the case of Shanghai is that re-centralisation was an attempt to balance the loss of control from the centre to the periphery. The impetus for decentralisation in China was the need to share the country's financing of education and not the devolution of authority to lower levels of the hierarchy. In Hong Kong, decentralisation refers mainly to the transfer of authority and decision making from government to schools. Hong Kong's education system has been a combination of centralisation and decentralisation. It is centralised regarding the curriculum and the examination structure, but decentralised regarding operation of schools, because most schools are run by religious or other non-governmental organisations known as School Sponsoring Bodies (SSBs). In October 1997, however, major changes took place in the operation of schools, and School Based Management (SBM) is the norm now. This move is perceived as a way of regaining control from the SSBs and is an example of re-centralisation (Leung 2004). The arguments put forth above in the cases of Shanghai and Hong Kong, are vital for this study; they shed light on a number of issues that led to decentralisation, as well as motives for re-centralisation.

Cyprus

In Cyprus, according to Panayides (2003), educational decentralisation is limited to minor matters such as infrastructure of school buildings, determining the educational districts for each school and providing the furniture and fittings required for schools to function. The responsibility for providing these services has been transferred to the School Boards who are practically the owners of the schools. A school board is established in each municipality (including rural areas) to take care of schools under its jurisdiction. It has been difficult to implement educational decentralisation in Cyprus considering the size of the country. It is an island with an area of only 5 910 square kilometers and a population of 700 000. This case shows that the size of a country plays a role in successful decentralisation, as well as dictating the form it should take. For example, the demarcation of districts in a small province in South Africa, like Gauteng Province, may not be comparable with Mpumalanga's larger geographical area. According to Gershberg and Jacobs (1998), the transfer of authority to lower levels is viewed as an instrument for improving service provision by holding the service providers more directly accountable for their performance. However, by disaggregating the different aspects of accountability, the expected improvement requires both greater autonomies for the local service provider, as well as enhanced performance of some central function. They refer to this enhancement of central functions as re-centralisation. They argue further that many social reforms aim to give the sub-units greater discretion over budget utilisation. However, a strong central commitment to mobilise financing and distribute information about local performance is likely to enhance the extent and sustainability of local service improvement significantly. The same authors (Gershberg and Jacobs 1998) state that there are many arguments in favour of decentralisation, but when examined in more detail, it becomes apparent that achieving greater efficiency and equity often requires both decentralisation and a strengthening of central functions, or re-centralisation'. As mentioned above, capacity building is critical for sub-units to execute their duties and responsibilities effectively (Gershberg and Jacobs 1998). However, if the administrative capacity at local level is weak,

the central government must either take steps to improve it, or continue to use its expertise to provide services directly. Gershberg and Jacobs (1998) argue that national governments have the greatest capacity for inter-regional distributive policies, re-allocating resources from wealthier jurisdictions to poorer ones. In addition, national governments may be less vulnerable to be captured by local elites and interest groups. Fraser (1997) moves beyond socialist political imaginary in which the central problem of justice is redistribution, to a 'postsocialist' political imaginary in which the central problem of justice is recognition. This implies that capacitation in regions need not be seen as a 'babysitting' exercise but as real empowerment of individuals and structures who would be afforded reasonable authority and autonomy.

The proponents of re-centralisation argue that many important taxes, such as consumption and income taxes, can be managed more efficiently and equitably by the national government. Sub-national governments can run up deficits that in extreme cases can threaten macro-stability. National governments must account for externalities, spillovers or economies of scale associated with equity or redistribution concerns. Gershberg and Jacobs (1998) argue that, in practice, the reform environment contains elements of decentralization and re-centralization that are evolving constantly. Karlsen (1999) claims that 'the model of decentralisation and centralisation as waves following and replacing one another is far from reality. The cases referred to from Norway … indicate that the process usually goes in two directions at the same time'. In the United States and Great Britain, lessons are emerging from the pattern of educational reform of these two most decentralised educational systems. According to Cummings and McGinn (1997), these two countries are undergoing simultaneous thrusts towards further decentralisation at micro-level and centralisation at macro-level. On the one hand, they increased the local management of schools, partly as a response to the choice movement, which in itself is a product of the larger role being given to market forces in the public sector. At micro-level, however, there is tremendous concern on both sides of the ocean for national standards assessment and implementing greater national control over the quality of educational provision. Cummings and McGinn (1997) claim that the dif-

ferentiation in standards of educational provision in the United States and in Great Britain is substantial. This is largely due to the decentralised system of educational finance, but also to the great diversity of school types that rely on public and private finance. These cases attest to the fact that centralisation and decentralisation are forces that follow each other, and decentralisation alone is not a panacea for all education problems. The above literature review has uncovered the following facts about the concepts of decentralisation and re-centralisation. These facts are critical for the discussion because they provide a lens for viewing decentralisation from a broad perspective.

- Decentralisation moves are sometimes adopted due to financial constraints, or to resolve financing problems, for example, in the cases of China, Mongolia and Hong Kong.
- Regaining central control, or re-centralisation, sometimes becomes necessary, for example, in the cases of Norway, Mongolia, China.
- Curriculum standardisation or control over the quality and provision of education is another driving factor, for example, in the cases of Great Britain and the USA.
- The size of a country may be crucial in determining decentralisation policies, for example, in Cyprus it was difficult to implement decentralisation due to its small size.
- Capacity building of the new responsible officials is crucial for the success of decentralisation efforts.
- Greater efficiency and equity is often achieved through both decentralisation and centralisation. Some authors refer to this phenomenon as waves following each another.
- Decentralisation shifts always start from the top - local bodies usually implement the central goals or strengthen the central function.
- Most developing countries decentralise education due to international pressure, for example, Mongolia.
- A country's particular context, historical background and contemporary problems have an impact on the success of decentralisation.
- For decentralisation to succeed there should be political will.

◆ Decentralisation is sometimes used as a hidden agenda for other imperatives.
◆ Involvement of all stakeholders is critical for the success of decentralisation.

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH DECENTRALISATION

The United States Agency for International Development (2005) argues that the following issues usually pose challenges for decentralisation efforts. First, the design as specified in legislation and decrees may create uncertainty as to which level of governance or which decision maker is responsible for which aspects. The capacities of school boards to govern schools, or school directors to manage schools, or teachers and others who work collectively to reform schools, are often weak and need development. It is, therefore, not surprising that Ghana, for example, resorted to posting highly qualified personnel to local levels in order to address this concern. System support to the newly decentralised authorities may not exist. Sub-national governments, school boards and parents may have very little information about the school's academic and financial performance relative to other jurisdictions or schools. Decent-ralisation is often not accompanied by increased discretionary funding required for schools to exercise their new responsibility for self-improvement. The challenges raised above are vital to this discussion on decentralisation because they highlight certain factors which may or may not have contributed to the organisation of national, regional and local structures in educational administration. To summarise, these challenges include the design of the structure, capacity of the local officials, support from higher authorities and the capacity required to exercise new responsibilities.

DECENTRALISATION PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

According to the Policy Framework for Education and Training (ANC 1995), the national education and training system was supposed to have four levels of governance, namely national, provincial, local and institutional. The policy framework argued that the responsibility for providing education would be shared between central government and the provinces in order to ensure that policy formulation and the provision of education is fair, efficient and directed towards the promotion of human development in all its aspects. However, at that stage, the powers and roles of local governance and management structures in relation to districts still had to be clarified through further consultation. Karlsson al. (1996) claim that, in spite of what is stated in schedule 6 and Section 126 of the 1993 Interim Constitution (RSA 1993) in terms of national and provincial legislative competencies, the centralisation/decentralisation debate remains a contentious issue. Any weakness in the system, be it at central, provincial, regional/district/circuit and school levels, is likely to have a bearing on the whole system. This means that a call for either decentralisation or centralisation creates an unnecessary dichotomy, as if there were some 'great Chinese wall' between them. There is no global trend towards decentralisation or centralisation alone in education systems, which usually display features of both decentralisation and centralisation simultaneously. This argument is vital in order traverse the centralisation/decentralisation conundrum.

According to Malherbe (2005:1), the ANC strongly believed that political power should be centralised as far as possible to enable government to act quickly and decisively and to prevent the entrenchment of previous or the possibility of delaying tactics by those still clinging to the apartheid ideology. It should be stated, however, that this initial opinion was compromised during the negotiations prior to the new dispensation (ANC 1995). The process of clarifying the role and powers of districts did not occur as indicated by the establishment of the District Development Project (DDP) in 1998, whose mandate was to address this issue. In 1998/9, the DDP received a lump sum of R100m to showcase what post-apartheid education management should be like, with special focus on communication, accountability and command, from the level of schools through various actors at district and regional levels, all the way up to provincial level. Chisholm et al. (2003) posit that there is a need to develop capacity at district level in order to enhance productivity and performance. Policy Reserve Fund (PRF) grants were awarded on condition that districts improve their planning, service delivery, school support performance and accountability. Even though there was no clear policy on districts, the De-

partment of Education was serious about developing the capacity of districts, as demonstrated by the availability of the lump sum from the PRF earmarked for district development (Chisholm et al. 2003). The assertion by Chisholm et al above may be construed as recultivating individual and institutionalised practices rooted in low expectations, deficit thinking, marginalisation and imperialism (Kose 2009).

The decentralised system of South African education governance devolves powers and responsibilities to provinces and schools. Provinces delegated some of their authority to districts for the purpose of managerial efficiency, accountability and educational effectiveness. Prior to the new dispensation, district administrative units or post offices passed down regional or provincial mandates to schools, rather than providing professional support. The personnel of the 'apartheid district' were accountable not to the district or area manager, but to the regional/provincial offices. Currently, districts are supposed to play a policy implementation role, supporting instructional improvement and creating sites of learning (Chisholm et al. 2003). Chisholm et al. (2003) contend that functions were devolved from the national department without the necessary transfer of funds. Provinces experienced problems in prioritising their budgets to accommodate the additional functions. All provincial education departments inherited divergent systems, procedures and practices. They faced great challenges in trying to establish a common acceptable administrative system. In June 1998/9, the National Conference on District Development was held in Mpumalanga to review and debate what was needed to enhance district capacity and how to make districts more effective in their professional school support and service delivery. This conference resolved that each province should hold a District Development Conference aiming to improve district delivery to schools. The nine provincial district conferences were held between June 1999 and January 2000, during which the following problems were identified:

- Misalignment of government structures.
- Districts' limited decision-making powers.
- Lack of a legal framework and sufficient delegated authority to support schools.
- Shortage of human, financial and material resources.

- Lack of head office support in driving implementation reforms.
- Lack of policy realism and continuity.
- Lack of coordination of directives to districts.

A key observation of stakeholders was that district officials related used bureaucratic procedures that were similar to those of the former apartheid era. They argued that they experienced similar administrative inefficiencies, bureaucratic delays and lack of appropriate support. District officials such as deputy education specialists and subject advisers were not always professionally supportive or informed about policy implementation and school support work. It was alleged that they tended to pass down head office directives, rather than working professionally with schools to motivate educators and negotiate ways of adapting reforms to the schools' context. It is evident that the devolution of functions without the necessary transfer of funds and lack of support created challenges for districts (Chisholm et al. 2003). The conferences revealed deeper structural and politically sensitive reasons for the poor performance of districts. Therefore, several needs can be identified. Firstly, the locus of governance power and the way in which each level exercised its power should be rethought. Secondly, an interdependent governance system that would lead to an improvement in teaching and learning should be created. Lastly, policy implementation, school support and service delivery should be improved in order to enhance teaching and learning.

According to Fleisch (2002), the Gauteng Department of Education reorganised its system in 1998 due to internal and external pressures. The external pressures stemmed from the state budget squeeze and the national government's commitment to promote cost efficiency and accountability. Other pressures came from civil society wanting a more responsive bureaucracy to provide better quality support and service delivery. The internal pressures included a single focus on taking over old, fragmented state structures, and lessening the power of the old bureaucrats through cultural and structural changes. Organisational structures were put in place without the formulation of long-term departmental strategies and priorities. According to De Clercq (2002), the relationship between the South African provincial governments and districts is that of administrative del-

egation. She emphasises that decentralisation and centralisation are social constructs whose meaning and impact depend on their context, the forces behind them and their relationship, as well as implementation strategies. De Clercq (2002) claims that the main struggle was to transform the racist, undemocratic and inefficient apartheid state systems. The populist demands were for democratisation of the state, greater participation of civil society in decision making, and for an interventionist and accountable state, committed to democracy and equity. Divergent views were articulated by international groups. The white opposition wanted to limit the power in the hands of the state and pressed for a more lenient, less regulatory, cost-efficient state with devolved powers to provinces and local institutions. It has already been stated that there was a shift in the view held by the ANC prior to 1994. The ANC's demands were for both some decentralisation and centralisation to pursue the objectives of democracy and equity. During the negotiation process (CODESA 1993), a compromise was reached in terms of a three-tier system. De Clercq (2001) claims that provincial implementers faced serious challenges and that there were complex educational reforms to implement, a fragile government system, a lack of financial resources, and a lack of human resources and capacity, all of which constrained effective policy implementation, equality, service delivery and school improvement. All these perspectives provide a lens for understanding decentralisation measures in South Africa.

Jansen and Taylor (2003) mention the consensus among policy analysts about a widely observed policy-practice gap in South Africa's education system since 1995. They claim that abundant evidence is available to support this argument. However, they concede that the reasons for this underperformance of education policy are widely contested. The dominant view holds that the policy gap should be attributed to the weak capacity within the new state, the lack of material resources for learning, the restricting role of the national examination, the weak academic and professional knowledge base of practicing educators, and the underdeveloped infrastructure for modern schooling, especially in rural areas. A contrasting but minority view cites the politics of transition, or what Hans Weiler, quoted in Jansen and Taylor (2003), calls the 'political costs of reforms', that is, the con-

scious decision to retard progress on radical reforms, given the political resistance and contestations that are associated with reforms. Irrespective of numerous challenges confronting the South African education system, Jansen and Taylor (2003) cite, among others, the following as achievements of the new dispensation:

* The creation of a single national education system out of 19 racially, ethnically and regionally divided education systems, and the reorganisation into nine provincial departments.
* The generation of a formidable architecture of policies and laws to govern education.
* The small yet important increase in end of school or matriculation pass rates, especially from 1999.
* South Africa has been able to achieve among the highest enrolment rates in African education. More than 12 million learners attend school, with gross enrolment rates averaging 100 percent for primary schooling and 70 percent for secondary schooling. The participation rate of girls is recorded as one of the highest in Africa.

CONCLUSION

The arguments put forward by the authors above highlight issues that are all relevant to the exercise and somewhat confusing practise of pondering centralisation, decentralisation and recentralisation in educational administration from a social justice perspective. These issues include the development of districts, structural and political reasons for the poor performance of districts, the devolution of functions without the transfer of funds, the balance between decentralisation and centralisation, the policy gap, decentralisation perspectives, the four levels of government that were initially proposed by the ANC, as well as the achievements of decentralisation. In the South African context, very little research has been undertaken about the way in which decentralisation actually manifests itself at district and regional levels of the education system. We contend that centralisation implies tacit marginalisation of the majority and perpetuation of injustice. In Mongolia there was no political will to decentralise education. International pressure plays a role in that country's decentralisation and no real

decentralisation took place; it was only done to appease international donors. In China, decentralisation was seen as a way of resolving the financing of education. Decentralisation was opted as a way of improving service delivery. The international literature has also shown that, when national interests are high on the agenda, it is unlikely for devolution of power to occur. Decentralisation in South Africa has not been without challenges such as lack of capacity, size of districts, international pressure, the need to improve service delivery, financial challenges and the national interests. Unlike Mongolia, political will was prevailing and decentralisation efforts were not meant to appease donors. The authors of the paper suggest a pervasive, genuine and continued consideration, in addressing social justice in educational administration, what is called 'rules of reasonableness'. This would be in congruence with the assertion that social justice should entail varying attention to macro-level processes such as educational policy-making and social movement organisa-tion, and microlevel processes such as local behaviours and interactions. The historical and political context of a country and contemporary challenges are determining factors.

In a decentralised organisation, the process of decision making is redistributed to the point of service or action. As responsibilities are delegated downwards it allows people within the organisation to exercise local or even personal preferences in accomplishing tasks. This structure is beneficial because it allows the products and services to be more local needs-oriented whilst at the same time motivating employees.Guidelines for effective decentrali-sation include consistency, cost-effectives, consideration of mundane issues as well as fairness.

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