

Ideology and the good society in South Africa: the education policies of the Democratic Alliance

Article (Accepted Version)

Sayed, Yusuf and Van Niekerk, Robert (2017) Ideology and the good society in South Africa: the education policies of the Democratic Alliance. *Southern African Review of Education*, 23 (1). pp. 52-69. ISSN 1563-4418

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/78243/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

Copyright and reuse:

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

AS REVISED 27 OCTOBER 2017

Ideology and the good society in South Africa: The education policies of the Democratic Alliance

Yusuf Sayed and Robert van Niekerk

University of Sussex & CPUT and Rhodes University

Abstract

Since the end of apartheid in 1994, South Africa has been transforming in the economic, political and social spheres. This largely peaceful democratic transition sought to dismantle the apartheid system of institutionalised racial segregation and extend the status of a common citizenship and equal enjoyment of rights to all South Africans, regardless of race, gender or religion. Despite the establishment of democratic institutions and the inclusion of social and economic rights for all citizens in a complex map of policy frameworks, South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies in the world. The education system, characterised by a crisis in quality, persistent inequality of access and fragmentation in achievement levels, further reflects this trend (Badat, S & Sayed, Y 2014; Van Rooyen & le Grange 2003; Deegan 1999). In the post-apartheid period, public debate has arisen around the socio-economic rights of citizens in the allocation of resources and access to basic services such as education. Crucial to the democratic transition in South Africa have been the political parties – articulating and aggregating the interests of the populace as well as developing and promoting policies for change (Matlosa 2007). This article seeks to address this gap by providing a detailed analysis of the education policy of the opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA). To this end, it scrutinises the ideological underpinnings of their education policy framework and the policy ideas and strategies proposed. The article begins by contextualising the research in relation to the literature related to education policy and political parties. This is followed by a description of the educational context in South Africa and of the Democratic Alliance (DA). The emergent education priorities and approaches of the

DA, with reference to citizenship and in effecting redress and equity in relation to the role of the state, is then discussed. The article concludes by reflecting on the significance of its findings for education research and policy.

Keywords: institutionalised racial segregation, socio-economic rights of citizens, citizenship, redress and equity, education policy changes

Political parties and their education policies are underpinned by ideologies that have direct consequences for sustaining or eroding education as a public good in South Africa. The idea of diversified systems of education provision in which the non-state actors play a role in public education provision has been strongly advocated by various international and national organisations. Such views resonate in the local context, as in the case of South Africa with the views of political parties such as ruling Democratic Alliance (DA) policies in the Western Cape province, a province which is described in the influential McKinsey report as a 'promising start' among 20 school systems around the world (Mourshed et al. 2010). The local policy contextualisation of such a policy agenda trajectory, which re-frames the role of the state as an actor amongst others in the provision of public goods such as education, was re-affirmed in a policy speech by DA leader Mmusi Maimane in parliament in 2017:

Another idea which has been piloted with great success by the DA government in the Western Cape is our Collaboration Schools, where public schools operate in partnership with non-profit organisations and private-sector sponsors to improve management, governance and teaching and learning in schools. We'd look to roll this out this nationally once we are in government. (<http://www.polity.org.za/article/da-mmusi-maimane-address-by-da-leader-ahead-of-the-presidents-state-of-the-nation-address-sona-in-parliament-this-thursday-cape-town-08022017-2017-02-08>)

This agenda as a global agenda is cast as a pragmatic response to under-performing public schools (themselves a consequence of neo-liberal attrition) to legitimate market-based solutions to public service provision and consistent with what Ball evocatively and aptly describes as part of a 'neo-liberal imaginary' (Ball 2012). The Democratic Alliance ruling party in the Western Cape province of South Africa positions itself as an advocate of non-state, increasingly performing a central role in finding solutions to under-performing public goods (education), but managed and regulated by the provincial state. Within this 'neo-liberal imaginary' the DA has a clearly-articulated but unrealised policy agenda based on social liberalism – the limits of which are evident, however, in the failure of the DA to transcend an ameliorative strategy of educational re-dress and which leaves intact the racialised, structural inequalities of public education provision in the province it rules. This article engages the complexity of the form this takes, drawing on policy documentation and interviews with key DA informants. It focuses in particular on the DA's education policy vision and its strategies and critically examines its advocated policy approaches aimed at effecting redress and equity in relation to the role of the state.

The article begins by locating the DA in the politics of the transition from the apartheid social order. Since the end of apartheid in 1994, South Africa has been transforming in the economic, political and social spheres. This largely peaceful democratic transition sought to dismantle the apartheid system of institutionalised racial segregation and extend the status of a common citizenship and equal enjoyment of rights to all South Africans regardless of race, gender or religion. Despite the establishment of democratic institutions and the inclusion of social and economic rights for all citizens in a complex map of policy frameworks, South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies in the world. The education system, characterised by a crisis in quality, persistent inequality of access and fragmentation in achievement levels, further reflects this trend (Ahmed et al. 2007; Van Rooyen & le Grange 2003; Deegan 1999). In the post-apartheid period, public debate has arisen around the socio-economic rights of citizens in the allocation of resources and access to basic services such as education. Crucial to the democratic transition in South Africa have been the political parties – articulating and aggregating the interests of the populace with developing and promoting policies for change (Matlosa 2007).

The 13 political parties represented in South Africa's National Assembly have contributed a variety of education policy platforms. There has, however, been a limited account of rights, equity and participation among these policies, and their bearing on developing a better education system has been noted in the literature (Sayed & Soudien 2005). There has been little scholarly research in South Africa that analyses proposals of political parties, particularly the opposition parties, addressing their implications for equity and quality in education. While previous research on educational policy has discussed curriculum and teaching in South Africa (Chisholm 2005), equity and policy issues, including decentralisation (Sayed 2010), privatisation (Motala 2009) and leadership, none have looked explicitly at political parties. This article seeks to address this gap by providing a detailed analysis of the education policy of the opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA). To this end, it scrutinises the ideological underpinnings of their education policy framework and the policy ideas and strategies proposed. This examination is based on an 18 month SANPAD-funded research project, entitled *Effecting Social Citizenship through Social policy: Policies, Contestations and Practices*, undertaken in South Africa between 2011 and 2013. The study was conducted by a team of collaborators from Rhodes University, the Cape Peninsular University of Technology (CPUT) and the University of Sussex. Analysis involved the interrogation of parties' key policy documents, which was then complemented by interviews with the respective parties' policy elite to reveal the breadth and complexity of the policy process. A range of official policy documentation related to the party was collected for analysis, primarily official policy documents but where relevant and explicatory also official party policy position press statements, media articles, blogs and the party's official website. A total of 20 interviews were conducted with DA national-level members and members at provincial and local level in the Eastern Cape Province.

This article begins by contextualising the research in relation to the literature related to education policy and political parties. This is followed by a description of the educational context in South Africa and of the Democratic Alliance (DA). The emergent education priorities and approaches of the DA, with reference to citizenship and in effecting redress and equity in relation to the role of the state, is then discussed. The article concludes by reflecting on the significance of the findings for education research and policy.

Education policy and political parties

There are multiple and competing meanings attached to the terms 'policy' and 'policy making' and while little consensus exists it is generally agreed that policies are highly contested, value-laden, dynamic and a product of various compromises (Ball 2008; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Whilst there has been a government-centric focus on the past, evidenced by definitions such as Dye's (1992 in Rizvi & Lingard 2010: 4) 'whatever governments choose to do or not to do', there is growing recognition that the policy domain extends beyond that of the state and includes that of statements and manifestos of political parties (Ball 2012; Rizvi & Lingard 2010). In South Africa, however, there is very little research that examines the education policies of political parties as important policy actors. This is despite the fact that political parties, including opposition parties, have been repeatedly acknowledged as critical to democratic governance, in solving collective problems and guiding and shaping the direction of policy (Dahl 1989; Schmidt 2002). Indeed, much of the literature tends to frame the discussion of political parties within the overall theory and practice of democracy (Katz & Crotty 2006; Salih et al 2005). They are seen to fulfil a number of democracy-supporting functions, including aggregating, challenging and representing interests, mobilising the public, providing sources of governance, maintaining government accountability and making demands on elected officials (Katz & Crotty 2006). In social democracies 'they espouse the promotion of a better socio-economic dispensation for the electorate' (Matlosa 2007: 4). They thus play a critical role in promoting ideas about the kind of 'good society' that is desirable in a democracy. Operating as strategic alliances, rather than as homogenous and coherent entities, political parties comprise multiple viewpoints, competing interests, visions and agendas that are constantly negotiated and mediated. It is these multiple understandings that this article explores and provides a different perspective on the relatively unexplored area of political parties and education. Within this framework, the growing strength of the Democratic Alliance as the official opposition party in South Africa warrants closer treatment, particularly its policy positions on education. The article's interrogation of DA education policy is based on the view that policy concerns the authoritative allocation of values through the allocation of resources based on defined ideological choices.

Parliamentary governance and the official opposition

Thirteen political parties are represented in South Africa's multiparty system, with the African National Congress the ruling party in the national legislature. The Democratic Alliance is currently South Africa's official opposition party. The party's evolution can be traced to liberal, breakaway factions from the United Party (UP), which was in government between 1934 and 1948 and which was a major opposition party during the apartheid period (Piombo 2009). Its historical development since that time involved shifting coalitions with various parties, movements and political agendas, including the incorporation of the Independent Democrats, a social democratic-styled opposition party led by Patricia de Lille (De Lille 2010). The DA currently has 89 seats out of a total of 400 in the National Assembly, following the 2014 elections. Since the 2009 provincial elections it has governed the province of the Western Cape and since the 2011 local elections it has controlled 13 municipalities as well as four district councils (DA 2012b). The DA in the Eastern Cape has six Members of Parliament, six Members of the Provincial Legislature, one Member of the National Council of Provinces, 101 municipal councillors and 25 staff members serving under the Provincial Director (DAEC 2012). Statistics from the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa in recent years demonstrate that the DA shows an increase in their national vote share from 1,7% in 1994 (as the Democratic Party) to 22,3% in 2014 (IEC 2014).

In the lead-up to the 2009 national elections, the DA introduced the 'Open Opportunity Society for All' policy platform (DA 2008a: 1). This policy programme also formed the basis of the 2014 election. The DA principles espoused in its policy documents focus on individual civil and political rights such as freedom of speech, private property and universal suffrage. This vision espouses classical liberal ideals of *individual freedom* and the *limitation of state power*, which are seen to be mutually reinforcing: 'An open society is one where every individual's freedom is protected by the Constitution. The state has no right to tell people how to think and what they may or may not say. People are free to do as they please as long as they do not infringe the rights of others' (DA 2014).

Its main education policy document, 'Preparing for Success: The DA's Plan for Schools that Deliver Real Opportunity' (DA 2008b, updated December 2013), contains six policy proposals: structuring of schools for performance; categories of schooling;

funding school education; teachers; curriculum, learning and evaluation; and school environment.

On 28 July 2012, the DA launched its 8% Growth Plan. Education has been identified as requiring 'special attention as the DA believes the present system is not adequately preparing young South Africans for the jobs market' (James 2012).

Having provided a brief background and context of South African education and the DA, the next sections turn attention to some of the key themes emerging from the research regarding the DA's views on education.

The DA policy framework: At the nexus of opposition and government

The DA has to strike a fine balance in its education policy as both an official opposition party and one that governs the Western Cape, one of the larger and richer provinces in the country. Research revealed a party that sought to straddle these tensions by influencing and challenging national government policy made by the ruling ANC party on the one hand and introducing new and modified legislation in the province it governs on the other.

Rooted in its commitment to federalism, the DA's status as governing party in the province enabled it to 'experiment' with reforms and influence government policy by example. As one interviewee noted: 'It's a virtue for the country if we try something and it works ... then everyone in the country can benefit, even outside the Western Cape, but if the DA fails, it doesn't harm anyone ... ' (interview with DA policy researcher, 2011). Its status as provincial government provides muscle to its education policy as 'at some level, crafting policy without government experience is just talking, just thinking, its dreams, and its wishes. But once you test it on the ground you find out real quick if its utter failure ...' (ibid). The Western Cape Province is therefore used as a space where the DA can experiment and put ideas to the test. Speaking specifically in this context about education, members of the DA pointed to tightening accountability in education through numerous amendments to the Western Cape Schools Act in 2010 such as '... provision for the visitation and assessment of schools for certain purposes; expand the power of the Provincial Minister responsible

for education to determine provincial education policy and the power of the Head of the Western Cape Education Department to make certain rules' (Western Cape Schools Amendment Act 2010: 1). In the interviews the DA highlighted how they can promote their own interest in the national legislative process through the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) (see RSA 1996) and play a role in shaping national policy.

The process of what is referred to as experimentation challenges the existing semi-federal nature of South Africa, raising questions about the legislative rule (NDoE 1996) that education is a concurrent national and provincial responsibility. As one interviewee noted:

How independent are we here as a government in the Western Cape to run education in a way that could perhaps be quite markedly different from the way it is run in the rest of the country. Do we have that right? I don't just mean that we can run it more efficiently. But can we run it differently? Does that concurrent power, is it that strong? (...) It is my belief, and it is our belief, that that concurrent power is very significant for a province. (Interview with DA/WCED official, 2011)

This quote reflects a strategic orientation in the DA that the semi-federal nature of SA policy affords space to change and modify national policies to suit its policy agenda. This is why interviewees noted that they were concerned with what they see as the interventionist approach of the ruling ANC government in the Eastern Cape province. While acknowledging the constitutional imperative of intervention in the case of systemic collapse, they suggest that this could set a precedent or create a 'pretext' for national intervention 'anytime a province seems to be stepping out of line' (interview with DA policy researcher, 2011). Preserving provincial autonomy is seen as the best way to address the different socio-demographical needs of a diverse population. DA members suggested the government must 'do its job, intervene, ... pull out and leave them' (interview with DA senior parliamentary member, 2011). The DA see the current South African state as one that needs to act, but without compromising its commitment to provincial autonomy.

But governing at the provincial level has also brought with it many challenges, not least the realisation that implementing policy as an official opposition party is different from

critiquing policy. Interviewees spoke about ensuring that they avoided the ruling ANC party's dilemma of inconsistency between what it said at party conferences and what it did in government. As one member of the DA policy elite said (Chairperson of DA), they could well launch an attack on the outcomes of the school system in this country. What they have to bear in mind is that in this province their own party is responsible for those outcomes (interview with DA policy researcher, 2011). Similarly, others noted that it could be embarrassing if 'the figures in the Western Cape aren't great, then it silences [you]. You can't say anything because you don't want to be embarrassed!' (interview with DA senior parliamentary member, 2011). The notion of embarrassment recurs as a metaphor for explaining the tightrope that the DA has to walk as a party gaining an increasing share of the electoral vote as reflected in the 2014 elections and moving from opposition only to opposition plus governing. This is evident in the Western Cape Province, where the DA polled 59,38% of the vote, compared with 48,8% in the 2009 elections. Its nearest rival in the province, the ANC, polled 32,89% in the 2014 elections (compared with 31,5% in the 2009 elections) (<http://www.elections.org.za/resultsnpe2014/default.aspx>).

The nexus between opposition and governing in the iteration of DA education policy reveals the tensions in reconciling an agenda which holds the ruling party to account but simultaneously establishes principles and strategies for effective education delivery on which the party as opposition is held to account. Specifically for the DA as an official opposition and a government of a province of South Africa, the challenge is to identify and respond to policy gaps to ensure that its vision of education becomes that of the entire country.

Muscular liberalism and walking left in education policy

The DA's 'Open Opportunity Society' platform is reflective of the combination of classical liberalism – the primacy of individual liberty secured through the market – with a social liberal commitment to state-provided social services such as education and health in the context of the market. In its vision statement, the DA opposes attempts by the state to limit the space of individual freedom and indeed 'actively promote the extension of such space' in order to achieve a utilitarian goal of maximising aggregate wellbeing by 'making the market work for the many, not just the few' (DA 2012a). On their website the DA describes their 'open society' (DA 2008a).

The 'open society' as described on the website espouses 'individual freedom and the limitation of state power', whereby an individual's position at birth does not dictate the potential outcome of success, but rather 'your talents and ... your efforts'. The role of the state is to create 'opportunity for citizens, while individual citizens have a responsibility to make use of opportunities on offer'; 'for all' means regardless of race, where 'people are judged by their character, their effort and their contribution'. It recognises, however, that in the South African context there is a need to temper untrammelled individualism with a commitment to some form of social welfare provision. The provision of social welfare is cast as residualist, consistent with the view that the state should not limit individuals' ability to secure their social needs in the first instance through market provision. As the following respondent noted:

It's one of the defining elements of the DA, basically it wants the government to be as little as possible, but as much as is necessary. Also, the key is that it must fulfil a care function. And that is where the market cannot provide for everybody something that is absolutely necessary like water, electricity, transportation ... then the state needs to step in to provide it. So there's great argument to be made for public education, precisely on those grounds (interview with DA policy researcher, 2011).

The previous party leader, Helen Zille, in her 2009 State of the Province speech stated that 'we believe the state has a crucial role to play in socio-economic development. We are not free market fundamentalists. By the same token we do not believe that a state, with limited capacity, should over-reach itself' (Zille 2009).

These views are philosophically consistent with the 'new liberalism' of John A Hobson, LT Hobhouse and TH Green. Distinctive from laissez faire and classical liberalism, social liberalism argued that the state had a formal responsibility to address poverty and provide health, education and welfare services within the context of a market economy (Freedon 1998; Simhony & Weinstein 2001). Seekings (2000) has traced the roots of new liberalism in a South African discourse of social citizenship in the 'war years' of the 1940s, signified in the extension (albeit racialised) of old age pensions by the United Party government of Jan Smuts. The genesis of the DA's social liberalism is partially derived from this history, although unevenly so: United Party liberal reformers were also willing to consider radical social policy proposals such as

a state-controlled National Health Service, a historical policy agenda that is not shared by the DA.

The DA is an opposition party whose conception of education policy can be characterised as centrist, incorporating an uneven combination of social liberalism and classic liberalism. One of the interviewees noted that some MPs were 'far, far right', and that their most 'objectionable' rhetoric is usually edited out of outgoing statements. This 'right-wing base' speaks only to 'a very limited part of the DA' – the main base is centrist, which the DA policy researcher argued to be 'more palatable' to the electorate.

The DA thus seeks to ground liberalism in the South African context in such a way that state power is not merely the defence of negative freedoms, as articulated by free market fundamentalists such as Milton Friedman (1961) and that there is a need to 'walk left' such that the party '... stretches farther to the left than maybe originally intended, simply because of the massive need for social welfare' (interview with DA policy researcher, 2011). The current leader of the DA, Mmusi Maimane, asserted in a speech in 2016 that 'the DA is absolutely 100% committed to overcoming the structural inequality that makes South Africa such an unfair society' (Maimane 2016). The means to overcoming this identified inequality is, however, a neo-liberal strategy that privileges individual effort and a diminishing of the role of the state. This was articulated by the DA leader in a speech introducing the DA's new policy platform ahead of the 2017 State of the Nation Address. Described as a 'Rescue Plan for this lost generation', the policy platform is described as follows (Maimane 2017):

Freedom, fairness and opportunity will be at the heart of this plan. A policy package that puts each young person at the centre of their own development, a master of their own destiny ... And they are tired of depending on the government for their well-being ... They don't want to be patronised by hand-outs, and they don't want to rely on the welfare of the state or the charity of others. And this is what our Rescue Plan will set out to achieve – to restore the dignity and independence of the millions of South Africans who still find themselves locked out of our economy and reliant on the state to survive.

The party positions itself as centrist with a commitment to 'muscular liberalism', but in a manner that remains fully consistent with a 'neo-liberal imaginary'. The variant of

this liberal ideology traditionally takes the form of social liberalism, which believes a limited government is consistent with the provision of targeted social assistance. This positioning is not very dissimilar to some of the ideological pronouncements of the ruling ANC government, which privileges work-seeking behaviour over receipt of (referred to pejoratively as 'dependency on') state welfare (social grants) (Maniates 2012). The separation occurs when it comes to strategies to achieve educational equity and redress, as the next section discusses.

Equity and redress as opportunity: The state as an opportunity provider

The DA's education policy presents the argument that redress and equity in South Africa are about opportunity in education. The role of the state is to ensure that it maximises individual freedoms and opportunities in education. For the DA, equity is equality of individual opportunity. The ontological primacy afforded to individuals is consistent with its classical liberal roots: the individual is responsible for ensuring her/his mobility and advancement. The DA's visions thus assume a meritocratic society where individual effort and willingness to innovate and take risks are rewarded. The role of the state is to support rather than substitute for individual effort. This approach essentially assumes that individual success or failure is largely an individual responsibility, divorced from structural considerations and class constraints, and stands in contrast to egalitarian arguments for social justice. This vision is articulated by the well-worn metaphor of the 'fishing rod for self-reliance':

And we are an opportunity-driven party, for example we will give you a fishing rod, give you that opportunity to catch a fish, and not give you a fish and make you happy for one day. We want to make you happy for the rest of your life and if opportunities are not given, there is no chance for you to develop. ... And we've also said, no matter the circumstances of your birth you can achieve in life if those opportunities are given to you' (interview with senior DA Eastern Cape official, 2012).

Education opportunity is about 'nurturing self-reliant, capable citizens, able to compete with the best in the world' (DA 2008b: 4). Tellingly, the document, and indeed party members were all silent on education's role in developing a critical citizenry. Participation in the labour market is seen as the best solution to individual poverty and

national growth, as articulated by the DA policy researcher: ‘for the next three years all you’re going to hear from the DA is growth, growth, growth, jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs.’

The DA also sees education as vital for developing skills for participation:

The DA believes ... without a good education, you will not be developed ... you won’t be able to get access to good job opportunities. So that’s another opportunity. And we believe you cannot have a lot of illiterate people roaming the streets, and if we have a lot of them, we won’t be able to develop that economic environment (interview with DA senior parliamentary official, 2011).

Underpinning the individualism of its education policies is a view that it is not the responsibility of the state to redistribute resources. Instead, what is invoked is a residual state that acts as a final-instance safety net for those who fall through the cracks, but without creating dependency (DA 2008c). The policy statement by the DA leader in 2017 reflects continuity of neo-liberal policy thinking in the DA since its inception on overcoming state dependency and emphasising commitment to individual responsibility and freedom. For the DA the state is considered as operating at a distance, it’s the last-instance guarantor of equity for the marginalised. As the following respondent noted:

I’ve got an obligation to cooperate with what is going on in the country. I cannot expect the government to do everything for me. You need to take a step, you need to make sure that you are doing something so that you can say ‘Hey government, this is your role.’ You see? (interview with DA local councillor, 2012)

Choice and accountability in the education policies of the DA

The DA proposes a range of public and private choices for education consistent with a liberal approach that considers the market equal to the state in the provision of education. The value of choice is seen in its ‘Preparing for Success’ Education Policy Document (DA 2008b: 4) as comprising ‘raising educational quality, maximising affordability, promoting choice for parents, teachers and learners, encouraging healthy competitive performance between schools, encouraging innovative solutions to poor schooling, ensuring accountability to consumers of education and harnessing all available resources for the creation of a system we can all be proud of.’ In its 2013 education policy framework document ‘Learning for Success: DA Policy on Basic Education’ (DA 2013), while making a policy commitment to good-quality public

education the DA ‘acknowledge[s] that independent schools relieve the burden on the state to provide schooling for all’ and also ‘recognise[s] that independent schools expand choice available to all learners. Independent schools broaden the choice of parents in terms of the kind of schooling they want for their children. Appropriate levels of public funding for various categories of independent schools will make it a more affordable option for all learners and save taxpayers’ money in broadening access to quality educational opportunities (DA 2013: 19).

The party’s policy identifies four specific strategies to give effect to these commitments that necessitate comment.

- i. Improving overall quality through stringent control and accountability mechanisms.
- ii. Decentralising schooling and exercising differential treatment of good and bad schools, ‘so that excellence is recognised and valued, and poor performance is rooted out’ (DA 2008b: 1). No mention is made, however, of what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘bad’ schools and how performance is to be assessed according to these normative judgements.
- iii. Making bursaries to available to high-achieving, disadvantaged students in private schools. This strategic policy aim, however, contradicts a professed commitment of the DA to addressing ‘structural inequality’ in that it both pathologises and individualises the problem of educational access and achievement.
- iv. Introducing a voucher system whereby parents can exercise choice, ‘encouraging healthy competitive performance between schools’ in a quasi-market (DA 2008b: 4). The ‘voucher’ scheme can be seen as actively privileging certain public schools over others without addressing the problems of under-performing schools, which compounds the problem of differential human and financial resourcing of the latter and reinforces rather than addresses the inequity within the public schooling system.

While Robertson (2012) has noted that this agenda and the language used closely resonate with an educational agenda promoted by corporate actors within a neo-liberal framework, the DA under its current leader is attempting to redefine its social policy agenda around a ‘non-racial’ social liberalism. The limits of such ‘non-racialism’ are evident, however, in the DA’s policy which differentiates and supports ‘good’ schools in contrast with ‘bad’ schools in marginal communities. This policy continues to

reinforce racialised educational exclusion, as the schools needing resourced interventions are in predominantly black areas which remain scarred by the geo-spatial inequalities of the apartheid era and thus require more, not less targeted resourcing.

The social liberalism as an ideological framework increasingly informing the vision of the DA is furthermore inconsistent with the idea of education as a public good. The most telling reflection of this is its advocacy of vouchers for education provision as the mechanism to give opportunities to poor students by incentivising individual advancement and competitiveness in a quasi-market:

One of the redress initiatives is to say that we need to ...give learners an opportunity by allowing them to have ... education vouchers. You say to a child from Gugulethu, here's your voucher, right, you go and buy the best schooling with this voucher (interview with DA senior parliamentary officer, 2011).

The idea of vouchers is premised on the assumption that competition produces efficiencies in education and 'parents and pupils would exercise their preferences by voting with their feet, and their vouchers' (DA 2008b: 9). The DA's Education Policy Document (2008b: 5) elaborates on this scheme: 'To further increase the options available to poor parents, every school will be required to accept a minimum percentage of non-fee-paying pupils. In addition, the DA will institute a nation-wide bursary voucher program aimed at giving the most academically promising 350 000 children from low-income families the opportunity to receive a better school education.' This would give opportunities to only 1,8% of the 19 million school-age population (DoSD 2012). Vouchers are thus a mechanism of redress for the DA, as they improve access to good-quality education for disadvantaged groups, with priority given to the hard-working and 'academically promising' poor (DA 2008b: 5). The notion of vouchers in this approach brings together the DA's ontological ideal of individual effort and redressing disadvantage and has the effect of framing education as a 'positional social good' whose worth depends to some extent on its perceived value and on others having less of it (Olssen et al. 2004: 206). The extent of commitment to such an elite model of educational provision at the cost of further radically diminishing under-resourced, 'poor performing' schools is starkly reflected in the position of Maimane (2017) as follows:

This [voucher scheme] will give poor parents the financial power to take their kids out of a school that does not perform and into a school that does. This, in turn, will foster healthy competition amongst schools to attract learners. Under this system, only schools that provide our children with a decent education will survive.

The notion of choice coupled with a commitment to decentralisation is further evidence in the argument of the DA that the state should enable high-performing schools to self-manage. This rationale was articulated by one of the interviewees drawing on the liberal metaphor that 'it's a smart government that knows when to row and when to steer'. Extending this to schools, he noted that the DA is doing a 'good job, getting schools to row' (interview with DA/WCED official, 2011). Schools that are high-performing will under a DA government be 'required to develop and implement their own performance evaluation systems. The Department of Education should not impose any system on these schools, but should merely issue guidelines, provide deadlines and ensure that the outcomes are made available to the department. Inspections by official inspectors would be made only on the specific request of an interested party' (DA 2008b: 26). This largely laissez faire approach to school governance is inconsistent with a responsive governance striving at equity and which is sensitive to the range of problems in schools related to school cultures which do not validate the cultural experience and preference of black learners, as reflected for example in the struggles of black learners to wear their hair according to their cultural preference (News24 2016).

For poor-performing schools the DA proposes tough surveillance mechanisms (DA 2008b: 6-7). To quote the policy document, schools achieving less than 60% pass rates in matric

will be subjected to external review by the Department of Education. This will involve visits by school inspectors to class-rooms, interviews by inspectors with teachers, principals and learners, and the compilation of a detailed report on each of these schools analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the school as a whole, as well as the individuals within it' (DA 2008b: 26).

The focus is therefore on efficiency, performance and quality that will be realised through encouraging 'healthy competitive performance between schools' and

elaborate school performance management principles. Power will be decentralised, performance reviews and audits utilised, the deployment of 'dysfunctional schools task teams' and financial incentives for good performance by teachers at poor schools. Financial penalties will be imposed on poorly-performing schools and rewards of greater independence and accreditation accorded for individualised performance targets.

The DA unsurprisingly views private schooling as a democratic right. In its policy document it states 'as a matter of principle, a democratic country should recognise the right of parents to choose not to use state schools' (DA 2008b: 9). The party promotes legislation that allows the private system to expand as well as offering state subsidies on a sliding scale to allow private schools, described as 'providing the kind of education wanted by parents and pupils' to 'flourish' (DA 2008b: 9). In this sense, the DA is not far from current government policy on private schooling.

Stratifying schools as proposed by the DA cements a two-tier system of schooling (Badat & Sayed 2014), with the best pupils in poor schools creamed off through the voucher system. In setting up a differentiated performance management system for high and low-performing schools, the DA effectively uses the policy of education decentralisation to create a dual system of expectations, unproblematically proposed as a way of achieving overall quality, whereby high-performing schools are given greater autonomy and rewards, whereas those that do not perform well are put under stringent management control. The inequalities that are likely to result are not perceived as a problem, as the following lengthy extract makes clear:

Interviewee: We've got a two-tier education system. I'm not shy to say that. Look at all the ministers' children, and my children. Not one of our children go to a no-fee-paying school. Because whether we stay in the rural area or not, we see the difference in quality.

Interviewer: What is the DA's position on that?

Interviewee: We believe that is appropriate. We believe in high-quality education. Unfortunately, you cannot offer high-quality education in all the schools; you can strive to offer quality, but not to the extent that you want to offer. And those types of education are unfortunately only offered in selected

schools, because of the available resources. (interview with DA Eastern Cape senior official, 2012)

More choice perpetuates entrenched inequalities. There will be increased social competition for limited educational resources and privileged schools at the cost of social justice.

One of the key discourses and 'defining features of virtually every DA proposal or policy' (interview with DA Eastern Cape parliamentary member, 2012) is that of accountability. Greater accountability at all levels of the system is viewed by the DA as a key mechanism for ensuring effective policy implementation, the rationale being 'if people, we believe, are not held accountable, it gives rise to corruption, an acceptance of low performance' (interview with DA senior parliamentary member, 2011). For schools and teachers, accountability is offered as the panacea for the education crisis:

And one of the key issues that came out of the opposition process, holding government accountable, is then to see how that works on a local level. And so one of the things that we have found in education here is that we have very weak schools, weak performing teachers, unaccountable principals. There was not very much accountability built into the system as far as we could see. But when it was, it achieved very high results. ... We found that when certain administrative mechanisms were in place and there was a person that could be accountable for that, hold others accountable for that, it worked quite well (interview with DA Eastern Cape senior official, 2012).

In order to ensure accountability, a number of 'administrative mechanisms' and regulatory systems are proposed, including school reporting systems, standardised testing, performance agreements for principals and targets for provinces and schools justified within a discourse of new managerialism that appropriates technicist language from the business sector. Targets are seen as 'pull factors' (interview with DA policy researcher, 2011) to increase standards overall. In this target-oriented system, children undergo standardised testing in grades three, six, and nine before writing final matriculation. In a sense, good-quality education in the view of the DA could be seen as an achievement-oriented culture of tests and exams.

We believe that teachers should be retrained on an annual basis to see that you still have a grasp for the content of your subject. We send teachers to the classrooms, we don't know if they are performing or if they are meeting the anticipated outcomes (interview with DA policy researcher, 2011).

Creating a deregulated labour market in which schools control their own budgets, pay scales and employment conditions was described as vital for dissolving perceived 'capture' by national trade unions and consequently weakening their power to bargain.

The issue is about balancing the educational needs of children as the Constitution requires with the employment and labour rights of the professionals who must deliver the service. And it's just our belief that in fact the pendulum has got stuck a bit far on one side (interview with DAWCED official, 2011).

Conclusion

This article has examined the education policy positions of South Africa's opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, focusing on its education policy vision and its strategies and approaches to effecting redress and equity in relation to the role of the state. Specifically, the article has considered the ideological underpinning of DA policy as evidenced in their policy texts and in the views of key policy officials and leaders in the party that collectively present its education policy ensemble. It has argued that many of the education strategies and approaches advocated are a form of muscular social liberalism which steer a fine balance between classic liberal theory and a recognition of the need for state intervention in social policy given the specificities of the south African context and in particular the need to address the historical legacies of the apartheid system.

The DA's education policy resonates with the current global discourse of education reforms involving decentralisation, choice and rolling back state and consumer power (Ball 2006). This is tempered by its acknowledgment of the apartheid legacy on education in the South African context. In terms of the state's role, the DA's rhetoric breaks with the state vs. market approach typified in right/left political positioning, and rather advocates for a more active role for government in education. This is not only in the traditional liberal sense of ensuring market functioning, but in a redistributive

sense of creating access opportunities. This position is not, however, contoured on an inclusive concept of social justice, but based rather on technocratic goals of setting minimum standards and improving access for the disadvantaged.

The DA as such reframes redress in the language of individual opportunity and its 'equal opportunity' approach implies a selectivity rather than universality towards educational provision, consistent with a liberal vision of meritocracy. Considering the historical marginalisation, and deep contemporary divisions in South Africa, their education policies would most likely selectively improve access to better-quality education for those who can afford it and further entrench inequalities. As Bentley & Habib (2008: 12) suggest, 'to leave access or competition (at the social, economic and political levels) to the market would simply reproduce the historical disparities of our past'. In the DA's proposed system, notions of education as a social good are wedded to an ideological framework which is consistent with a more active liberalism traceable historically to a tradition of social liberalism. The article further reveals the need for a more nuanced and sophisticated theoretical account of the conceptual framing by the DA of their education policy if the variant of its neo-liberal policy framework and its impact is to be understood. It therefore cautions against a simplistic critique of the DA, arguing for a more historicised and contextualised account of the policy positions of SA political parties in academic and public policy discourse.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of postgraduate students Emma Browne and Ulandi du Plessis, whose contribution to the data gathering and research which underpins this article has been invaluable. The article draws on a research project entitled *Social Citizenship through Social Policy: Policies, Contestations and Practices* undertaken by the authors as part of SANPAD Grant 10/20 19354.

References

Badat, S & Sayed, Y. (2014) Post-1994 South African education: The challenge of social justice. In Rotberg, R (ed.). *Strengthening Governance in South Africa: Building*

on Mandela's Legacy. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science Series. Volume 652. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Ball, S. (2006) *Education Policy and Social Class: The Selected Works of Stephen J Ball*. Oxon.: Routledge.

Ball, S. (2008) *The Education Debate*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Ball, S. (2012) *Global Education Inc. New Policy Networks and the Neo-liberal Imaginary*. London: Routledge.

Bentley, K and Habib, A. (2008) *Racial Redress & Citizenship in South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Bothma, M, Gravett, S and Swart, E. (2000). The attitudes of primary school teachers towards inclusive education. *South African Journal of Education*, 20: 200-204.

Chisholm, L. (2005) The politics of curriculum review and revision in South Africa in regional context. *Compare*, 35(1): 79-100.

DA (Democratic Alliance). (2008a) Open Opportunity Society Platform [online]. Available at <http://www.da.org.za/docs/THE%20OPEN%20OPPORTUNITY%20SOCIETY%20IN%20ACTION.pdf> [accessed 12 June 2012].

DA (Democratic Alliance). (2008b). Preparing for Success: The DA's plan for schools that deliver real opportunity [online]. Available at <http://www.da.org.za/docs/647/MDU%20DA%20Preparing%20for%20Success.pdf> [accessed 12 June 2012].

DA (Democratic Alliance). (2008c) Breaking the cycle of poverty: The DA's plan to give better opportunities to all South Africans [online]. Available at <http://www.da.org.za/docs/657/Breaking%20the%20cycle%20of%20poverty.pdf> [accessed 12 June 2012].

DA (Democratic Alliance). (2012a) DA Plan for Growth and Jobs: Working for Change, Working for Jobs [online]. Available at <http://www.da.org.za/docs/13004/DA%20Plan%20for%20Growth%20and%20Jobs.pdf> [accessed 11 August 2012].

DA (Democratic Alliance). (2014) Election Manifesto 2014. Together for Change. Together for Jobs [online]. Available at <http://www.da.org.za/docs/15652/DA%20Manifesto.pdf> [accessed 12 June 2014].

DA (Democratic Alliance). (2012b) Our history [online]. Accessed 12 June, 2012. <http://www.da.org.za/about.htm?action=view-page&category=383>.

DA (Democratic Alliance). (2013) Learning for Success. DA Policy on Basic Education [online]. Available at <http://www.da.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Education1.pdf> [accessed in December 2013].

Dahl, Robert A. (1989). [Democracy and Its Critics](#). Yale University Press: New Haven

DAEC (Democratic Alliance, Eastern Cape). (2012) About Us [online]. Available at <http://www.daec.co.za/> [accessed 12 July 2012.]

De Lille, P. (2010) The opposition must unite – Patricia de Lille. Speech by Patricia De Lille, MP and Leader of the Independent Democrats, to the ID National Conference, 20 March 2010 [online]. Available at <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71627?oid=167367&sn=Detail&pid=71627> [accessed 12 July 2012.]

Deegan, H. (1999) *South Africa Reborn: Building a new democracy*. London: UCL Press.

DoSD (Department of Social Development). (2012) National Population Unit Fact Sheet: The State of Children in South Africa [online]. Available at http://www.population.gov.za/pop_dev/images/2012factsheets/state%20of%20children%20in%20south%20africa%20factsheet.pdf [accessed 1 September 2012].

Freedon, M. (1998) Reputations: JA Hobson and welfare liberalism. *The Political Quarterly*, 69(4): 441-450.

Friedman, M. (1961) *Capitalism and Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

IEC (Independent Electoral Commission). (2014) Election results [online]. Available at <http://www.elections.org.za/content/Elections/National-and-provincial-elections-results/> [accessed 27 October 2017].

James, W. (2012) Analysis: Building a base for growth [online]. http://www.thenewage.co.za/blogdetail.aspx?mid=186&blog_id=2504 [accessed 18 August 2012].

Katz, RS & Crotty, WJ. (2006) *Handbook of Party Politics*. London: SAGE Publications.

Maimane, M. (2016) #FairSA: Creating a fair and more equitable society [online]. Remarks made by the DA leader at the launch of the #FairSA campaign at Ramotse Village, Hammanskraal, 7 March 2016. Available at <https://www.da.org.za/2016/03/fairsa-creating-a-fair-and-more-equitable-society/> [accessed 27 October 2017].

Maimane, M. (2017) Address by DA Leader, ahead of the President's State of the Nation Address (SONA) in Parliament this Thursday, Cape Town (08/02/2017) [online]. Available at <http://www.polity.org.za/article/da-mmusi-maimane-address-by-da-leader-ahead-of-the-presidents-state-of-the-nation-address-sona-in-parliament-this-thursday-cape-town-08022017-2017-02-08> [accessed 20 March 2017].

Maniates, S. (2012) Discourses around social welfare grants as antipoverty policy: Effectiveness and the potential for reform [online]. Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection. Paper 1347. Available at http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/1347 [accessed 27 October 2017]

Matlosa, K. (2007) *Political Parties in Southern Africa: The State of Parties and their Role in Democratization*. Report prepared for the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). Stockholm: IDEA Publications.

Motala, S. (2009) Privatising public schooling in post-apartheid South Africa – equity considerations. *Compare*, 39(2): 185-202.

Mourshed, M, Chijoke, C & Barber, M. (2010) *How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better*. McKinsey and Company.

News24. (2017) Black girls in tears at Pretoria school hair protest [online]. Available at <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/black-girls-in-tears-at-pretoria-school-hair-protest-20160829> [accessed 27 October 2017].

NDoE (National Department of Education. (1996) *National Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996)*. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Olssen, M, Codd, J & O'Neill, A. (2004) Reading education policy in the global era. In Olssen, M, Codd, J & O'Neill, A (eds). *Education Policy: Globalisation, Citizenship and Democracy*. London: SAGE.

Piombo, J. (2009) *Institutions, Ethnicity, and Political Mobilization in South Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rizvi, F and Lingard, B (2010) *Globalising Education Policy*, Routledge: Oxford: Routledge

Robertson, S.L. (2012) '[Placing Teachers in Global Governance Agendas](#)', *Comparative Education Review*, 56 (3), November.

RSA (Republic of South Africa). (1996) *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Sayed, Y. (2010) 'Globalisation, educational governance and decentralisation: promoting equity, increasing participation, and enhancing quality?' *Compare*. Vol. 40(1), pp. 59-62.

Salih, M.A.ed. (2005) *African Parliaments Between Governance and Government*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York

Sayed, Y & Soudien. C. (2005) Decentralisation and the construction of inclusion education policy in South Africa. *Compare*, 35 (2): 115-125.

Sayed, Y, van Niekerk, R, Brown, E & du Plessis, U. (2014) Assessing the education policies of the opposition Democratic Alliance. Working Paper. Unpublished draft.

Schmidt, V. (2002) Does Discourse Matter in the Politics of Welfare State Adjustment? *Comparative Political Studies* 35(2): 168-193, March 1, 2002 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414002035002002>

Seekings, J. (2000) The origins of social citizenship in pre-apartheid South Africa. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 19(4): 386-404.

Simhony, A & Weinstein, D. (2001) *The New Liberalism: Reconciling Liberty and Community*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Treasury. (2013) Budget Highlights 2013 [online]. Available at www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national%20budget/2013/guides%20Budget%20Highlights.pdf [accessed 19 December 2013].

Van Rooyen, B & le Grange, L. (2003) Interpretive discourses in South Africa's Education **South African Journal of Education**, 23(2): 152 – 156

Western Cape Schools Amendment Bill 2010, Provincial Gazette Extraordinary 6705: Cape Town

https://wcedonline.westerncape.gov.za/documents/Draft-Bill/lqsp.html#WC-Ed-Amendment-Bill-Eng.pdf*inf.html accessed: 27 October 2017

White Paper No. 6: Special Needs Education. *South African Journal of Education* 23(2): 152 -156.

Zille, H. (2013) Well done, Angie Motshekga. *City Press*, 22 July 2013.

Zille, H. (2009). State of the Province Report, 2009. Speech made on 29 May 2009 in the Western Cape Provincial Parliament [online]. Available at http://www.westerncape.gov.za/other/2009/5/sopa_2009_zille.pdf [accessed 27 October 2017].

Notes on the authors

Yusuf Sayed is a Professor of International Education and Development Policy at the University of Sussex, United Kingdom and the South African Research Chair in Teacher Education and Director: Centre for International Teacher Education (CITE) at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), South Africa.. He has extensive expertise in education policy analysis and in teacher education.

Robert van Niekerk is professor and director of the Institute for Social and Economic Research and the Matthew Goniwe Chair in Social Policy at Rhodes University, Grahamstown. His research specialisation is the institutional history, ideologies and understandings of social policy and social change in South Africa.

Address for correspondence

r.vanniekerk@ru.ac.za & y.sayed@sussex.ac.uk