

Chapter 7. Mediating Active Citizenship and Social Mobility in Working Class Schools: The Case of Equal Education in Khayelitsha, Cape Town

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Introduction

Although the Equal Education (EE) social movement is focused on improving public education in South Africa, it is part of a much wider network of community-based organisations in Khayelitsha that are concerned with active citizenship issues relating to health (especially HIV/AIDS), sanitation and human rights awareness and litigation. The long-term objective of these partner organisations is to develop youth leaders that will drive the formation of a national rights-based, working class-focused, social movement in townships throughout South Africa. These organisations have emerged over the past decade, beginning with the formation of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), an organisation established in 1998 to fight for HIV treatment (see Robins, 2008). The mode of mobilisation of the partner organisations strongly reflects the influence of TAC's highly effective brand of AIDS activism. In fact, a number of the key activists in EE, and those in the Social Justice Coalition (SJC), honed their activist skills with the TAC.

What is important for our study of the EE is to examine the specific conditions that have shaped the environment within which this organisation and its partners operate. Unlike other provinces of South Africa, the Western Cape has a relatively well resourced and well managed education sector. The EE and its partner organisations in the Western Cape have taken advantage of this stronger institutional capacity in their efforts to lobby and pressure a relatively responsive local and provincial state. However, it is much more difficult to achieve such successes in provinces with weaker state capacity such as in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo Provinces. As other chapters in this book show, without a certain level of state capacity and responsiveness, the politics of mediation is unlikely to have much impact. This requirement of a capacitated democratic state could be seen as a precondition for mediation practices to stand a chance of success. But even then, there are no guarantees that the TAC and EE model can be replicated within other institutional settings.

The EE campaigns have drawn on the creative repertoire of tactics deployed by the TAC during its struggles for access to AIDS treatment in public health facilities (see Robins, 2008). These strategies and tactics in turn reveal a strong family resemblance to the mobilisation practices deployed by anti-apartheid organisations during the 1970s and 1980s. However, the major difference between anti-apartheid activism and current forms of EE and TAC activism is that the latter organisations explicitly acknowledge the popular legitimacy of the democratic state and draw on a rights-based approach that is predicated upon the political space that has opened up with the advent of the post-apartheid Constitution. These new democratic spaces have created the conditions for a politics of mediation and brokering of rights in ways that were not possible during apartheid. These changed circumstances have allowed the TAC and its more recently formed partners organisations – the EE, Social Justice Coalition, Section 27, and Ndifuna Ukwazi – to successfully pressure, shame, blame and mobilise the state to respond to its Constitutionally enshrined obligations to provide decent healthcare, sanitation and education to its citizens.

We are particularly interested in understanding what kinds of processes of mediation are taking place through these social movement interventions in the education system. In this paper we examine the social and economic backgrounds, aspirations and career trajectories of the predominantly African and working class education activists that are trained and employed by Equal Education. We regard these activists as the 'foot soldiers' and cultural mediators of a *pedagogy of active citizenship*. In the course of seeking out educational reforms at a systemic level, these EE activists also acquire leadership skills that allow them to disseminate these pedagogies of engaged citizenship. These organisational tactics and pedagogical practices are also deployed by EE and its partner organisations to lobby and pressure the state to respond to its Constitutionally-mandated obligations to poor and working class citizens.

These organisations are particularly concerned with training a new generation of working class leaders and activist citizens. This is part of a wider political programme that focuses on specific community-based struggles to build a national working class political culture of active citizenship. The leadership of this social movement believes that knowledge about the Constitution, efficient organisational skills, coupled with savvy tactics of social mobilisation in poor neighbourhoods, can contribute towards substantive social transformation. The predominantly African working class activist mediators of this rights-based pedagogy of active citizenship seek to help its township-based constituencies to acquire the social capital and political culture of mainstream, liberal civil society. While some of the mediators and ordinary rank-and-file members may remain within these movements, others may seek upward social mobility by entering the private, NGO and public sectors. This can of course produce tensions between personal aspirations for social mobility and more communal conceptions of collective activism.

Regardless of their social and economic trajectories, these activist mediators acquire a pedagogy of active citizenship that is tightly focused on activating and animating a post-apartheid Constitutional democracy that has generated an internationally recognised progressive socio-economic rights jurisprudence. Given the current ANC Government's relative receptivity to rights-based rhetoric and popular demands, this would seem to be a very pragmatic and progressive politics. This rights-based politics appears to offer a real possibility for some degree of success notwithstanding historically produced structural constraints. This rights-based paradigm has also spread to other community-based organisations, thereby contributing towards the horizontal dissemination of this political culture of mediation and its pedagogies of active citizenship.

Although we see progressive possibilities for these rights-based social movements, we are acutely aware of the dangers of overstating their potential, especially given the enduring legacies of race and class inequalities. In the case of the existing educational system, it would seem that for many years to come, middle class (historically white) schools will continue to reproduce middle class learners. Similarly, working class schools in the black African townships are likely to persist in reproducing working class school leavers, with a few exceptional cases of upward social mobility. In the case of working class learners, it would seem that they will continue to be disadvantaged on a job market that privileges the needs of the information and service sectors of the economy

We therefore recognise the need for a sober assessment of the limits of social movement attempts to improve and reform poor and working class schools at a systemic level. This requires acknowledging the structural obstacles and historical legacies of apartheid education (Fleisch, 2008). At the same time, an analysis of the continuities of educational structures of inequality needs to acknowledge the possibilities of improvement through the kinds of mediation practices that we discuss in this paper.

Chatterjee and the chattering classes: conceptualising mediation and rights talkⁱ

In many respects, the politics of mediation that is addressed in this chapter differs markedly from Partha Chatterjee's (2004) account of the 'politics of the governed' in contemporary India. Chatterjee argues that 'civil society' in India, and elsewhere in the Global South, is essentially an enclave of the educated elite that is insulated from the popular classes, or what he calls 'political society'. While Chatterjee's critique of conventional ideas about 'civil society' may be useful for understanding 'democratic deficits' in India, his neat analytic distinctions between 'the state', 'civil society' and the 'political society' ignore the complexities of political grey zones and contradictions. These distinctions also downplay the democratizing possibilities of the mediating roles played by community-based organisations that broker the access of poor and working class citizens to middle class, professional spaces, careers and trajectories. Chatterjee's conception of civil society implies that this elite enclave is inaccessible to the subaltern and working classes. It also implies a normatively based dismissal of the political authenticity and relevance of working class citizens who desire to enter these elite spaces of 'civil society.'

For Chatterjee, civil society refers only to a hermetically sealed space that represents the narrow class interests of the relatively small educated, bourgeois elite who are totally disconnected from the interests and struggles of the 'popular classes' which constitute the massive majority of the population in the Third World. This notion of 'civil society' refers to 'a closed association of modern elite groups, sequestered from the wider popular life of the communities, walled up within enclaves of civic freedom and rational law' (Chatterjee, 2004:4). Members of the popular classes, he argues, do not act as citizens but are instead subjects of the state. They survive by on the margins, often by illegal means, and enter into political deals with politicians, NGO workers, paternalistic local powerbrokers, and shacklords in order to access state resources and services. These political brokers are adept at navigating between the apparently quite distinct spheres of 'the state', 'civil society' and the 'popular classes'.

There seems to be very little space within Chatterjee's schema for subaltern and working class subjects to enter this fortified elite space of civil society. Yet, this case study is specifically concerned with working class community organisations that are able to provide ways of navigating and transgressing the boundaries between working class and middle class professional worlds. The EE case study also questions the analytic value of Chatterjee's neat separations between 'civil society' (middle class space) and 'political society' (subaltern space). Instead, the EE example will show how working class public education activists can become grassroots brokers of 'rights talk' and forms of social and cultural capital that

challenge Chatterjee's conception of 'civil society' as the exclusive domain of the chattering classes

For the purposes of this case study, a more useful aspect of Chatterjee's analysis concerns how the popular classes become the 'target populations' of state-driven development and welfare programmes and policies. Chatterjee (2004:41) writes that they are the subjects of governmentality, which appears to limit their role as agents of mass action and political mobilisation.

... Civil society, then, restricted to a small section of culturally equipped citizens, represents in countries like India the high ground of modernity. So does the constitutional model of the state. But in actual practice, *governmental agencies must descend from that high ground to the terrain of political society* in order to renew their legitimacy as providers of well-being and thereby confront whatever is the current configuration of politically mobilised demands (emphasis added).

This depiction of paternalistic state intervention on behalf of needy 'subjects' does capture an important aspect of the political dynamics in post-apartheid South Africa. The EE case discussed in this chapter suggests, however, that the underclasses are not only 'target populations' and docile subjects who are subordinated to state governance and 'development' programmes; instead working class EE activists are specifically concerned with promoting daily practices of *active citizenship* in ways that question this patrimonial conception of state-citizen relations and blur the boundaries between Chatterjee's rigid distinction between political society and civil society.

This is of course not a new development. During the anti-apartheid struggle, working class activists, through their involvement in anti-apartheid activism, acquired forms of social capital and political literacies that allowed them to enter into the elite spaces of 'civil society' (see Robins, 2008). Many of these activists later became significant players in big business and the post-apartheid state. Similarly, large numbers of rank-and-file trade unionists and township activists made their way into the top echelons of the state and private sector by drawing on 'struggle' networks and organisational literacies that could be converted into currency deemed valuable by business and the modern state. EE is simply the latest story of the ways in which popular struggles can end up mediating working class access to middle class institutional spaces and career trajectories.

While for the majority of South Africans, the post-apartheid transition has not provided these kinds of 'bridging capital' and social mobility opportunities, this does not mean that the excluded masses are living in some pre-modern cultural backwater called 'political society'. Members of civil society organisations, as well as ordinary citizens, seem particularly adept at straddling elite and popular/subaltern discourses. They are also often able to simultaneously deploy liberal democratic discourses of rights, citizenship and 'development' *and* clientalistic patronage politics. Although access to liberal democratic 'rights talk' and political literacies are no guarantee of access to membership of the inner circle of middle class 'civil society,' for the working class EE activists we discuss in this chapter, such forms of 'bridging social capital' are indeed seen to hold out real possibilities for social mobility. Rather than subscribing to Chatterjee's binary logics and neat analytic

categories, this case study shows that EE activists, and the working class communities within which they work, engage with 'rights talk' and the political discourses of liberal democracy in ways that offer prospects for both social mobility *and* community empowerment.

The EE case will also suggest that the politics of mediation is not necessarily characterised by collective clientalism, patronage, coercive local leadership, or governance based on conceptions of the bureaucratic management of populations, of the poor, the disabled, the homeless, the illiterate, and the ill. Instead, the EE mode of activism can be described as a critical pedagogy of rights that seeks to leverage access to state resources and services as mandated in the South African Constitution; it also provides possibilities for working class youth to gain access to middle class jobs and lifestyles.

Equal Education's role of political mediation

In order to better understand how mediating institutions work, we have chosen to explore the case of Equal Education. While certainly not unique in South Africa, and internationally, as a civil society organisation whose mission it is to mobilise local, regional and national communities around constitutional rights (Robins, 2008), Equal Education has a number of important features that make it worth studying. First, unusual amongst rights-based civic society movements (although similar movements are emerging in Chile), it has consciously chosen to mobilize younger people - secondary school learners and university students - from poor and working class households. While the focus of mobilization has been on this demographic category of working class youth, as an organisation it has attracted a cross-class leadership.

The second distinguishing feature of EE relates to its emergence as a 'second generation' civil society movement that was built on the remarkable successes of an earlier partner movement, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). The TAC, which was established in Cape Town in 1998, in turn drew upon the activist repertoires of the African National Congress (ANC) and the United Democratic Front (UDF), an umbrella body for anti-apartheid organisations in the 1980s (see Robins, 2008). As such, extensive 'learnings' have been carried over to the new organisation, and this has extended EE's strategic, tactical, financial and logistics sophistication. While only a few years in existence, it has already developed into a powerful grassroots movement based in the largest working-class township in Cape Town, Khayelitsha. Although the EE continues to be centred in Khayelitsha and the Western Cape, it is beginning to establish similar grassroots bases in other parts of the country. It has also developed powerful networks with other allied civil society and labour organisations which has contributed towards raising its national profile.

EE can also be distinguished by its specific organisational culture that includes its principled stand on non-violent protest, its emphasis on long-term capacity building amongst the emerging cadre of working class youth leaders, and its openness to external researchers, the universities, journalists and a wide range of other civil society organisations. Unlike some militant civic organisations that rely on the instant media spectacle of the burning barricades, the TAC and its partner organisations have developed patient forms of organising and capacity building, what Robins (forthcoming) refers to as 'slow activism.'

Finally, while Equal Education has come into being only in the past four years, it has developed a rich multi-media footprint. Extensive archival film and video resources is available for public scrutiny on YouTube and it has an active website that provides regular documentation presenting the case for the organisation's campaigns. While few researchers have published on the organisation, the organisation gets regular media coverage (e.g., op. ed. articles) in relation to its various campaigns (see Mail & Guardian November 23, 2012, p.11).

A Brief History of Equal Education

As the Treatment Action Campaign began to mature as an organisation, its leadership recognised that the rights-based model of activism it had pioneered could be effectively utilised in other social sectors. The founder of the TAC, Zackie Achmat, was responsible for establishing the basic framework for Equal Education under the direction of a new board comprising of high profile educationists, policymakers and education activists such as former Gauteng MEC for Education Mary Metcalfe and Paula Ensor. The initial steps in the Equal Education history involved the recruitment of a younger generation of organisational leaders, the most prominent of whom were Yoliswa Dwane and Doron Isaacs, both former University of Cape Town (UCT) law students. The initial organisational focus of the newly appointed staff was on recruiting secondary school learners in Khayelitsha.

Before the organisation even began to plan its first campaign, it initiated a thorough process of doing observational research in Khayelitsha schools and discussing the issues they encountered there. As Doron Isaacs, an EE leader and founder member, noted in an interview in 2012:

...The first of the two activities that we did was producing a weekly news wrap, which was like an email group of the stories involving education that we came across. It was a mailing list where we would just read everything that had been published on education and we summarised the articles. It was hardly a revolutionary activity. And then the second thing was observations to build up our own familiarity with the issues....We would go every morning and just sit in classrooms in four schools in Khayelitsha [and] the Western Cape Government allowed us to just sit there. We used to just go and join a class and we just did that for a couple of months. We obviously got to know students, got to see what was happening, and we used to then like take notes and then meet and discuss what we had observed.ⁱⁱ

Although Khayelitsha had a history of militant student organisations that went back to the 1970s, Equal Education distinguished itself from these organisations through its commitment to building mutually beneficial and constructive relationships with learners, parents, teachers and the wider community, as well as with the various organs of the state, particularly the local district office and the provincial department. Small groups of learners were pursued to affiliate, and these groups began a diverse range of activities including a photographic project in which learner members were given cameras and encouraged to take photographs of the conditions in their schools.

The outcome of this project was the first campaign, the 'Broken Window Campaign', centred at Luhlaza Secondary School in Khayelitsha. Learner members, under the guidance of organisers, planned a campaign to pursue the provincial education department to repair over 500 broken windows at the school. The campaign included meeting with school management, with the elected representative council of learners (RCLs), and writing letters to the provincial government. This was followed by a petition, which attracted considerable media attention, in which Equal Education was able to collect over 2000 signatures, including those of a number of prominent national figures. Despite a hostile reception from some local education officials and local teacher unions, the campaign eventually persuaded the provincial government to fix the windows and undertake a major upgrade of the school infrastructure. During the course of the campaign, the learner membership from schools throughout Khayelitsha grew, as did the regional profile of the organisation. Subsequent to the first campaign, the organisation began to expand beyond Khayelitsha, and opened branches in Bontehewel and Kraaifontein, and began to initiate activities in Grahamstown, Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth, Potchefstroom, Polokwane and Thembisa (see Angara, 2011).

The initial success of the 'late coming campaign' in Khayelitsha provided a spring board for the same campaign in other communities. Running parallel to these campaigns was the organisational demand for school libraries, which involved conventional activist protest tactics and activities more closely associated with volunteer/social welfare activities. As the organisation matured, the focus shifted from school and community issues to national policy demands, particularly addressing the inadequate infrastructure in the poorest provinces. In December 2012, Equal Education won a historic victory in pressuring the Minister of Basic Education to enact national Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure. In mobilising for these norms and standards, EE highlighted the fact that 93% of South Africa's 24 793 public schools had no libraries, almost 2500 had no water supply, 46% still used pit latrines and 913 had no toilets at all.ⁱⁱⁱ

These developments demonstrated the capacity of the organisation to identify, translate and mediate demands for improved conditions in public schools. But these processes of mediation between learners, teachers, parents and bureaucrats did not end with infrastructure improvements. Instead, these processes also resulted in the *mediation of ideas and practices relating to active citizenship*, a challenge that is central to the objectives of EE and its partner organisations. The activists who become involved in these campaigns also learn certain activist literacies and skills that can be translated into a variety of institutional settings and which can in turn facilitate social mobility.

Equalisers and Organisers: Brokering a pedagogy of active citizenship in working class communities

Based on our interviews, we found that most of the Equalisers and Organisers came from 'working class' families newly arrived from the Eastern Cape and were either first or second generation residents of Cape Town. We also found that while some came from households with members in formal employment, most were the sons and daughters of domestic workers, casual labourers or informal artisans. All of those we interviewed had direct links to rural communities and had some experience in moving back and forward between the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape Provinces. They had in common a strong parental

figure, a mother, grandmother or father that acted as a role model/moral authority in the lives of the young people. They all had experienced a range of very poor education services, including attending mud schools in rural communities, and urban schools that had decaying infrastructure, violence around the school perimeter, and the absence of qualified teachers during the key secondary school years. From the accounts of the respondents, it would seem that the scenario of 500 broken windows at the Luhlaza High School in Khayelitsha was all too familiar.

Most of the Equalisers and Organisers that we interviewed were recruited into EE as learners during the first wave of mobilization around the 500 Broken Windows Campaign. We found that the longer they had been part of the organisation, the more likely it was that they would have acquired a more sophisticated understanding of the deeper political objectives and agendas of EE. For instance, Akhona, who was only recruited to EE as a university student, sees the organisation's mission in terms of the rather limited objective of 'keeping learners off the street'. By contrast, Nkosi, who participated in the earlier EE activities while he was a learner, developed a very sophisticated political/class analysis of the education system. This broader political education presumably emerged from his Reading Group discussions and exposure to the inner workings of the organisation's leadership structures. The following section discusses EE activists' actual experiences within the organisation and how this contributed towards developing their political understanding.

Lonwabo's introduction to rights based politics was through a photography project. A group of volunteers agreed to take photographs of his school. The exercise required them to have a discussion about what pictures to take. This innovative photography project, which was sponsored by Equal Education, led Lonwabo to join the organisation with fourteen school friends. The key to his political development was meeting learners from other schools in Khayelitsha. During these meetings, he began to realise that the problems in his school were not unique, but that they were common problems experienced by all the secondary schools in the township. The specific issue that learners at his school, Chris Hani Secondary School, were concerned with was the absence of a science teacher. The learners formed a crisis committee to organise around this issue. In 2008 Lonwabo joined the Leadership Committee and the following year was elected the chair of the Committee. He successfully completed his matric (Grade 12) that year, and began studying the following year at University of the Western Cape. During his first year at university, he worked in Equal Education as a volunteer and was promoted the following year to the position of Organiser. Over time, the campaigns Lonwabo was involved in changed from school based issues to wider national campaigns. In 2011 he played an important role in organising the Equal Education rally in the Cape Town city centre.

Reflecting on his work in the organisation, Lonwabo described the Equal Education as 'a bridge' connecting government to communities. He also used the metaphor of 'a platform', 'It gave us a platform to raise issues.' He illustrated how the 'bridge' and 'platform' metaphors worked in the Broken Window Campaign of 2008. The initial school activities took place separately in each institution, where the Equalisers would raise the issue that most concerned learners in a particular school. The Equalisers would then come up with ideas on how to improve their schools. At Luhlaza Secondary, the issue emerged out of a very provocative photograph taken by Zami, one of the learners, of an entire bank of broken

windows at the school. By engaging with the problem of broken windows, Equal Education aimed to provide a 'platform' on which learners would raise their grievances. The other metaphor was creating a 'space' for learners from many schools to share their problems.

Lonwabo contrasted the EE experience to the 'disastrous' march led by COSAS in 2007 (Angara, 2011). During that action, COSAS members entered a school and tore up student exam papers protesting the closure of an Adult Education centre. The COSAS action became a fundamental pedagogic 'object lesson' for EE. The COSAS action did not get any teacher or community support. The EE approach would be different in many respects. It would focus on making the community aware; 'Most people don't understand, the working class, our parents, and other community members need to become aware of these problems.' 'EE is a platform but it needs the people, people can stand up and say something, to say something to make people aware, to fight inequality.' In response to the questions about what skills he had acquired during his participation in EE, Lonwabo spoke about the development of his political consciousness.

Linda was introduced to EE through one of his teachers, who was a former member of TAC. He recalled the first meeting at his school on the 8 May 2008. Unlike the majority of learners at the small initial meeting, who were in Grade 9 and Grade 11, Linda was in his final year of school. He recalled that the meeting was held at the EE office in H Section and that the youth group had organised transport. At the time, he was a little unsure about the organisation, but he described it as a 'good thing' learning the history of South Africa. During that year the movement began to grow, and after he passed his matric he was asked to head the youth group as a facilitator. Linda worked in the first year as a facilitator/intern and was involved in organising transport for learners to meetings, marches and pickets. During the following year, while he was still working with EE, he decided to rewrite his matric to improve his marks so that he could go to university. As an Organiser his job was to speak to principals, organise learners and engage in organisational activities. In his work with learners he organised a range of activities from very humble jobs like cleaning the school toilets to mobilising for EE campaigns in the City CBD. Linda identified the two major achievements of EE as firstly, that it showed learners that they could make plans and that those plans can be achieved, and secondly, it showed them how to communicate to a wide range of people including learners, teachers, principals and officials. He also noted that it was important that the organisation was based in Khayelitsha and that it is now taking the campaigns to the national level.

Akhona had a very different level of understanding of the organisation. Not having come through the ranks of EE as an Equaliser, she had jointed the organisation with a group of university friends. Akhona went through the training to become an Organiser. She recalled that the training equipped her to cope with peer pressure, handle high school learners sensitively so as not to embarrass them, and to 'bring out shy people in the group.' She facilitated meetings weekly and helped coordinate various EE activities, including calling taxi drivers for the learners' transport, sending bulk SMSs to remind learners of the meetings, how to make claims for the team, making certain that the programme is planned at least two weeks before the meetings, and ensuring that they have read and understood the materials for the meetings. She also assisted in planning activities for the EE congresses and workshops.

Ayanda became involved in EE through participation in the making of an EE documentary. Like the earlier experiences that Zami had with the photography workshop, and which led to the photographing of the 500 broken windows, EE as an organisation worked with a group of volunteer documentary film makers. As one of the four interns, Ayanda was taken through all phases of the film making process, using the camera, editing, directing, and writing the treatment. They downloaded the film they made on YouTube. The film is titled, 'Equal Education: What it means to be an Equaliser.' This film project inducted him into the movement, and through it he became involved in the late coming campaign and the sleeping outside parliament campaign. After these campaigns he became active in the youth groups, helping them define topics for discussion, planning campaigns and assisting in EE campaigns on university campuses. He told us that involvement in these EE campaigns taught him 'the importance of maintaining good relations with our mothers, learners and the principals.' It had also taught him 'to fight for my rights, even if this is difficult.' As he put it, 'We have a right to picket because we are tired of the Minister not responding. They are no longer scared to sleep outside of Parliament or even to get arrested.' In addition to acquiring a sense of the right to have rights, Ayanda also described the benefits of having learnt to speak in public and to assert his rights vigorously, without breaking law.

These accounts of the experiences of Equalisers and Organisers draw attention to the ways in which EE sought to develop the organisational and political skills of its members. Terms like 'bridge' and 'platform' highlight the brokering and mediating roles of EE activism. These mediation practices not only broker relationships and networks between 'the community', 'civil society' and 'the state', but they have also allowed activists access to social and cultural skills and competencies that tend to be associated with middle class institutional worlds. In other words, these experiences and capacities acquired through EE activism create the possibility for these working class youth to gain entry into middle class institutions (e.g., universities) and public and private sector jobs. Some of the more seasoned activists have also ended up being headhunted by NGOs

Aspirations and visions of a better future

The role of EE is not that different to bridging education institutions. In other words, the skills and dispositions acquired through EE activism can be translated into cultural literacies and competences that allow high school leavers to gain access to universities and tertiary technical training colleges that further their career prospects. EE functions as a bridge or platform for social mobility and middle class aspirations and career trajectories while simultaneously furthering a working class political project of improving public schooling in places like Khayelitsha. The organisation also exposes its members to social and professional worlds and networks that go well beyond their immediate working class environment. For example, this may involve structured interactions with middle class professionals and learners from middle class schools in Cape Town. These interactions can also lead EE activists to develop aspirations for careers that transcend their working class backgrounds.

However, there is a danger in overemphasising this apparent conformity to middle class values by these working class learners. For instance, at an EE meeting in Khayelitsha attended by the National Minister of Basic Education in 2012, we noted the confrontational

style of EE Equalisers and rank-and-file EE members who expressed their profound frustration with the failure of the National Department to address problems relating to textbooks, library and general school infrastructure. Rather than viewing EE Equalisers as either compliant or resistant, it is necessary to recognise that their responses to authority tend to be highly situational and contextual.

In the third part of the interview, we explored with the Equalisers and the Organisers their ideas about the future, plans and aspirations. Lonwabo, who is currently doing a B Ed degree at a local university, was on his way to be becoming a mathematics and science secondary school teacher. He hoped to become a teacher in a school 'with all the things school really need, I believe in good management.' While not saying it directly, he seemed to suggest that he would like to follow his school role-model and become a school principal. Linda articulated his aspirations within the context of the lives of his siblings. His oldest sister was a hospital porter, the second sister was studying engineering at an elite university and a third sister was studying community work. Lonwabo talked about finding a career for himself as a social worker. This career, he hoped, would enable him to address issues of domestic violence and abuse that are so rife in his community.

The school learners, Ayanda and Akhona, as would be expected, had less well developed high education and career aspirations. Although Ayanda was in a technical high school doing a high school course in electrical engineering, his experience of making a documentary film with the interns at Equal Education had profoundly influenced his career aspirations. He wished to go to university to study English, but his long term aspiration was to become a documentary film maker. Akhona, the university student with no prior experience as a learner with EE, was doing a BA in gender studies at a local university. Akhona hoped to get an internship in a gender focused NGO after graduating. Although Akhona had only passing exposure to the interns on the documentary film project, this had catalysed her career aspirations to become international journalist. She hoped that such a career would allow her to travel to the US and Europe. To realise this career she planned to study history and geography at university.

Finally, Zami came across as an outspoken and highly articulate leader of the school at which EE launched its first campaign. She had a difficult post school route. She passed her senior secondary but did not get the marks she had hoped for and failed a key subject. Of the three tertiary education programmes she originally applied for, only one made her an offer. It was for business studies in a private college. Given that she had not gained admission to her two first choices, she took it up but quickly realised that the values associated with the course, and the entire career that it was positioning her towards, ran counter to her political beliefs and personal values. Despite serious reservations and a strong desire to drop out, she finished the year, hoping to move to the local university to study law the following year only to be disappointed as she did not have the requisite points and subjects. Her ongoing network at EE has helped her think again about her first degree, and she is currently planning to apply to an elite university for a BA degree for entry in 2013. At the same time, she is receiving an extraordinary political education at Ndifuna Ukwazi, a public education NGO that is part of a network of organisations that includes EE, the Treatment Action Campaign and the Social Justice Coalition.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the above accounts, tertiary education and professional careers feature centrally in the desires and aspirations of these Equalisers and Organisers. The EE leadership seems to be acutely aware of these aspirations and has sought to accommodate them as part of its wider aim of improving public education and developing civic leadership in working class neighbourhoods. But EE is concerned with much more than simply providing its individual members with access to social capital, upward social mobility, and organisational skills. It is also concerned with practices of political mediation that can facilitate activists' access to institutional spaces that they would not ordinarily be able to enter. This includes access to the traditionally middle class institutional spaces of lawyers, government officials, domestic and international NGOs, and the media. It is by moving in and between these typically elite state and civil society spaces that these practices of political mediation offer the potential to empower poor and working class activists in places such as Khayelitsha.

In terms of 'skills acquisition', the Equalisers and Organisers, across the board, described acquiring a range of basic organisational skills. These ranged from logistics skills such as arranging transportation for campaign events, confirming taxi arrangements, payments and sending out bulk SMSs, to managing group dynamics and developing communication skills. The latter included 'social skills' ranging from addressing adolescent behaviour, and drawing shy learners into discussion, to higher level mobilization skills such as public speaking, writing letters to officials, planning school campaigns, and talking to principals, parents and teachers. A few acquired exposure to specialised skills, particularly associated with the photography project and the film documentary making. Two of the organisers were given access to higher order political education, through the Reading Group and discussions with members from the other partner organisations. This political education included both the class analysis and theories of grassroots struggle, locating struggle within the wider political and state domains.

Equal Education also gave the Equalisers and Organisers access to wider social and political networks. At the most basic level, many learners' first major political awakening came during their interaction with learners from other secondary schools in Khayelitsha. This shifted their political consciousness, which had previously been confined to competition between high schools over soccer teams and uniforms, to realising that the problems faced at one school were in fact problems faced by all schools. This could be viewed in terms of the classic distinction drawn by C Wright Mills between private troubles versus public issues. The second level of networks is between Equalisers and Organisers. Although they came from the same social and economic context, the Equalisers had an opportunity to link in with students that were both activists and had figured out how to access university or post-secondary education. The third level was linkages with the middle class University of Cape Town (UCT) and University of the Western Cape (UWC) students, again linkages that would provide invaluable information for social mobility through higher education. Finally, these networks include the wider set of volunteers and supporters, i.e. international exchange student volunteers, middle class activists, film makers and board members.

Alongside the acquisition of these skills and networks, Equal Education also provides Equalisers and Organisers with what can be termed 'empowerment'. Empowerment in this context is the experience of identifying a problem, developing a set of strategies and tactics, mobilizing, campaigning, and finally being successful and then repeating that process. This enables Equalisers and Organisers to come to believe that they can take control of their collective destiny. Empowerment comes out of concrete victories at local, provincial and national level engagement. They can see the links between their own actions and positive outcomes for themselves and the organisation. This allows them to make difficult personal decisions, e.g. to move from a commerce course at a post-secondary institution to studying Politics and History at a university.

It would seem that the Equalisers and Organisers do not see any contradiction between their roles as activists serving their community *and* the prospects for individual social mobility that membership of EE offers. While it is clear that their acquisition of skills and networks within EE can contribute to their social mobility, they see this as consistent with, and in fact necessary for, the success of this working class public education movement. In this sense, the tasks of mediation undertaken by EE occur at two levels: firstly, the mediation between working class communities, civil society organisations, and the state through activists practices that involve pedagogies of active citizenship and rights talk; and secondly, through processes of mediation whereby working class youth acquire the forms of social and cultural capital that enable them to enter the largely middle class spaces of elite universities, NGOs and public and private sector jobs. In this respect, EE raises questions about Chatterjee's designation of 'civil society' as the space of the educated elite that is sequestered from the popular classes, i.e., the working class and the poor. The EE case study demonstrates the real possibilities that exist for a community-based organisation such as EE to mediate working class youths' access to the state, civil society and to middle class professional spaces and trajectories.

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ⁱ This discussion of Chatterjee's work draws on the argument presented in Robins's 2008.

ⁱⁱ Doron Isaacs, 26 August 2012, Cape Town.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Mail and Guardian*, November 23, 2012, p.14. While an important victory of EE, the Norms and Standards were widely seen as vague.