SCHOOLING IN THE SHADOW OF BENEVOLENCE: THE EXPERIENCE OF SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS IN AFFLUENT SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

In a quest for improved educational outcomes that will lead to access to and success in higher education and the workplace, many affluent independent South African high schools offer scholarship places to talented and deserving learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Learners selected for ‘inclusion’ in these schools can be presumed to be given unquestioned benefits and yet the voices of these scholarship recipients are seldom heard. By listening to these learners in a study framed by the idea of ‘voice research’, the authors found that while the learners are grateful for this opportunity, they are also aware of the limits of benevolence and
find that their full participation in the academic, sporting and social life of the school is constrained by their own disadvantaged economic positions. With reference to literature and the voices of the participants, the authors conclude that while offering many advantages, scholarship programmes have limitations which need to be acknowledged at both an individual and a systemic level.

**Keywords:** scholarship programmes, inclusive education, independent education, voice research, marginalisation

### INTRODUCTION

Solutions to the problems of university access and success are increasingly being sought at the level of secondary education. Various initiatives targeting learners during their high school years are explicitly designed to prepare learners for the epistemological and other demands of university (see Brenner, this volume). While not necessarily motivated by enhancing access to higher education, many affluent independent schools in South Africa offer financial assistance to enable learners from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend these schools. These learners are usually identified as having sporting, cultural and/or academic potential and are given access to an independent education that their families would otherwise not be able to afford. While this practice suggests opportunity and implies possibilities of upward mobility for its beneficiaries, it is also a practice that needs to be problematised in the quest for equitable access to quality education in South Africa. Benevolence, that is the moral obligation to help those less fortunate, is expected to be met with gratitude, not critique, and yet the consequences of benevolent acts may result in the opposite of what was intended (Stove 2011). The research reported in this article focused on the experiences of learners from low income families who are the beneficiaries of bursaries or scholarships to attend affluent independent schools. With the exception of Simpson (2012), the voices of these learners have seldom been heard in South Africa. They do, however, offer an important perspective on this particular type of educational intervention. The main claim of the article is that while these learners perceive themselves as being fortunate, and are conscious of the great advantage they have been given, and/or earned, they are also very aware of the limits of benevolence. We begin by providing some background on the independent sector in South African education in order to orientate the reader to the context of the study. We then discuss the two broad conceptual bases for the research, namely: educational inclusion and exclusion; and the possibilities and limitations of ‘voice research’. After outlining the research methodology, we present and discuss our findings. We conclude by suggesting that while identifying talented learners and providing them with access to enriched educational opportunities may be lauded, attention must be paid to the (unintended) individual and systemic consequences of this ‘benevolent’ practice.
INDEPENDENT EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Independent (sometimes called ‘private’) education is a worldwide phenomenon. There are usually two reasons for establishing independent schools: the first is to provide an alternative to state funded and regulated education; and the second is to provide educational opportunities for learners who cannot access state education (Kitaev 1999). In South Africa, independent schools have been founded in response to both reasons but our concern is with schools, some established more than a century ago, which provide parents with alternatives to the language/racial/religious/curricular offerings of state education at a particular time. In his history of independent schools in South Africa, Randall (1982) explains that in the past good private secondary schools drew their pupils from a narrow sector. The schools were ‘selective, making use of entrance examinations, and they are expensive, with fees, including boarding so that only the well-to-do can afford them’ (Randall 1982, 7). More recently, South Africa’s constitution has affirmed the right of independent schools to exist, provided they are registered with the provincial department of education; do not discriminate on admission on the grounds of race; and do not offer an education inferior to public education (RSA 1996, section 29(3)). Recent statistics indicate that 3.8 per cent of South African learners attend independent schools (DBE 2013) although many of these independent schools would not be regarded as affluent (Hofmeyr and Lee 2004).

Many well-resourced independent schools offer state-of-the-art facilities and are often assumed to attract some of the best teachers. Given the high fees charged to meet all operating costs, independent schools that are not subsidised by the state remain the preserve of the financial elite. It has, however, become increasingly common for management boards or governing bodies of independent schools to provide scholarships to historically disadvantaged or underprivileged learners who show academic promise. In many cases it is not the school which provides the financial assistance for these learners, but rather the Student Sponsorship Programme (SSP). According to its website (http://www.ssp.org.za), the SSP identifies ‘high potential’ young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and circumstances and affords them the opportunity to realise that potential in educational centres of excellence during their high school years. The scholarship award, whether made by the school or the SSP, usually covers tuition, school uniforms, sports gear, books and educational excursions. In some cases extra-curricular leadership and personal development activities are provided for learners who are scholarship recipients.² Learners enrolled in affluent schools through these scholarship schemes could be expected to enjoy significant benefits and educational advantages that their families’ socio-economic status would not normally afford them. As a result of attending an affluent independent school, these learners could expect social mobility (Randall 1982); access to the cultural capital of the middle and upper classes; and preparation for higher education (ISASA n.d.). Writing the National Senior Certificate (NSC)
examinations set by the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) can result in greater access to high demand university courses; reduced likelihood of university exclusion; and increased chances of ‘on time’ throughput (Visser and Yeld 2008).

INCLUSIVE/EXCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The efforts made by affluent independent schools to enrol selected learners who would otherwise be financially excluded can be regarded as an initiative aimed at inclusion. Often assumed to be an issue of special education, inclusive education is, in fact, more broadly concerned with reducing exclusion from and increasing participation in schools and other educational institutions (Ainscow et al. 2006). However, access to a school does not necessarily translate into inclusion. Access itself is a complex concept, with Morrow (2007) suggesting a distinction between formal access (i.e. admission to an educational institution) and epistemological access (i.e. access to the knowledge offered by the institution). Access to the social or informal environment of the school (LaHELMA 2004; WALTON 2013) is also important for learners. Inclusion must entail full participation and a sense of belonging in the life of a school, and not just accommodation or tolerance of those previously excluded. However, embedded in efforts to acknowledge and redress previous exclusion is the potential to exclude or marginalise learners further. In this regard, Slee (2011, 155) warns that ‘while inclusive education sometimes describes genuine attempts to challenge the injustices in education, it can also be deployed to sustain these injustices’. There are many ways in which the inclusion of previously disadvantaged learners in affluent schools through scholarships has the potential to sustain injustice. In the next section, we mention three of these, namely: individualising solutions to systemic problems; clauses of conditionality; and the presumption of assimilation.

Our first concern is to raise questions about how scholarship initiatives offer individual solutions to systemic problems. The South African education system is beset with problems, with many primary schools ‘poor, dysfunctional, and unable to equip learners with the necessary numeracy and literacy skills’ (TAYLOR, VAN DER BERG and MABOGANE 2013). Scholarship programmes offer a select few the opportunity to escape the poor educational outcomes associated with underperforming schools. However well meaning these initiatives are, and however beneficial for the few fortunate enough to benefit from them, they do not offer a solution for the schooling problems for those who remain. Dorling (2011, 34) maintains that ‘[e]litism in education can be considered a new injustice’ as he critiques educational divisions that perpetuate social inequality and sustain the myth that ‘elitism is efficient’. Relevant here is a concern raised by Botsis, Dominguez-Whitehead and Liccardo (2013, 129) regarding university scholarship programmes. They argue that scholarships (in their research, offered to black women in science, engineering and technology) enable institutions to achieve certain transformation goals by diversifying student populations, but maintain their ‘elite’ status by being available only to high academic
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achievers. These authors maintain that scholarship programmes reaffirm ‘the dominant notion of excellence within the university space, which could be read as a reproduction of inequitable practices’ (Botsis et al. 2013, 129). This idea may well be applicable to the scholarship programmes in affluent independent schools, many of which have reputations built on their record of academic achievement. By awarding scholarships to academically promising learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, the elite and affluent independent school is able to diversify its learner population, without jeopardising the school’s academic reputation. We thus suggest that there are important and uncomfortable questions that need to be asked of scholarship programmes at school levels. These include: To what extent do we further ghettoise schools by removing their top performers and concentrating them in already high performing schools and how are school communities disrupted by the removal of those deemed talented (Sapon-Shevin 1994)? Is equity best served by providing access to elite spaces for a few? Should we laud all efforts, however limited, towards greater inclusivity, because some inclusion is better than none? By raising these questions we are not suggesting that these scholarship recipients do not deserve a high quality education, rather we are arguing that all learners deserve a high quality education.

Second, we raise the ‘clauses of conditionality’ (Slee 1996, 107) that pervade inclusion efforts. The term was coined by Slee to describe exonerating language where inclusion is deemed unfeasible (or inconvenient). Thus, the requirement only to make ‘reasonable accommodations’ for learners with disabilities excuses schools from doing whatever is necessary to become fully inclusive learning spaces. Clauses of conditionality make ‘included’ learners perpetual guests in a school or education system. These learners do not belong to the school by right. Instead, their continued enrolment remains subject to certain conditions. In the case of learners who experience barriers to learning in South Africa, the condition of inclusion is a school’s capacity to cater for their needs (Walton and Lloyd 2011). This is also a concern with regard to scholarship programmes. Although previously disadvantaged learners are given scholarships to attend affluent independent schools, there are often explicit or hidden conditions of the awards. These academic, behavioural, sporting or other expectations make for a tenuous stay at the school, as scholarship recipients must meet conditions for continued enrolment that their fee-paying peers can avoid. These expectations may include meeting certain academic standards, and continued involvement and performance in sport.

The third concern, not unrelated to the second, is the extent to which scholarship programmes are essentially assimilationist endeavours. In this regard, Slee (2011, 107) voices a powerful indictment of some inclusion efforts:

Inclusive education … is not achieved through charitable dispensations to excluded minorities. It is not about the movement of people from their tenancy in the social margins into unchanging institutions. Integration requires the objects of policy to forget their
former status as outsiders and fit comfortably into what remain deeply hostile institutional arrangements. There is an expectation that they will assume an invisible presence as they accept the dominant cultural order.

According to this claim, scholarship recipients may be considered ‘invited guests’ at affluent independent schools steeped in particular colonial, religious and linguistic histories and traditions. While most schools have embraced the racial transformation of their learner population, many still bear vestiges of ‘Little England on the Veld’ (Randall 1982) in their school cultures, religious traditions, uniforms and language of instruction. The scholarship recipient must assume the position of the grateful beneficiary of the school’s hospitable gesture, accept and internalise the hegemonic norms of the host school and make necessary adjustments to ‘fit in’ (Horvat and Antonio 1999; Kuriloff and Reichert 2003).

While it is easy to theorise from afar, and varyingly laud, interrogate or dismiss scholarship programmes that enable learners from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend affluent independent schools, little is known about the lived experiences of these learners. Slee (2011, 107) urges that in the quest for inclusion, ‘we seek understandings of exclusion from the perspectives of those who are devalued and rendered marginal or surplus by the dominant culture of the regular school’. In the section that follows, we discuss ‘voice research’ as a framing idea for our report on the experiences of scholarship recipients in affluent independent schools.

LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF LEARNERS

Listening to children’s voices on matters that are of concern to them has been somewhat neglected (Messiou 2008) in educational research. In recent years, however, learners’ voices have been given a greater emphasis, especially after the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC was promulgated in 1989 and is ‘the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights for children – civil, cultural, economic, political and social’ (Network of Community Activities n.d.). Some of the core principles of the convention are non-discrimination; devotion to the best interests of the child; and respect for the views of the child. The convention enshrines children’s right to attend school and receive a basic education, but also to express their views in a safe environment, free of discrimination and judgmental attitudes. As a consequence, researchers and teachers have found value in listening to the voices of learners and gaining insider perspectives of learner experiences. Research in recent years has been conducted with (rather than on) learners, with a particular focus on learners who face marginalisation or exclusion. An example is Sookrajh, Gopal and Maharaj (2005) who listened to the voices of ‘refugee’ learners in a school which had ‘included’ them. The learners revealed their experiences of name-calling, alienation from the curriculum and rigid assumptions about their experiences. Through listening
to the learners’ experiences, teachers became aware of the challenges faced by these learners and were able to be more pedagogically responsive in the classroom and make the school culture more inclusive.

Although voice research may reveal some promising insights into educational inclusion, exclusion and marginalisation, it is not without critique and contestation. The epistemological value of voice research been questioned by those who are concerned that the knowledge it generates is context-dependent and segmentally organised (Arnot and Reay 2007; Bernstein 2000; Moore and Muller 1999). Voice research is said to ‘privilege the mundane’ as ‘experience replaces theory as the author of knowledge’ (Moore and Muller 1999, 202). In addition to this, are the complex issues of whose voice gets heard, and what it means to write the Other. There is always a dilemma in voice research when selecting whose voices to hear, particularly when trying to understand experiences of inclusion and exclusion (Walton 2011). On the one hand, the act of identifying a particular group to listen to signals that their experience is expected to be different, or strange, and so the research works to perpetuate their ‘otherness’ (Allan 2007). On the other hand, we cannot know how programmes and practices are experienced by different groups of learners if we do not select according to particular identity markers. Then, we cannot escape the unequal power relations that operate in any research that involves young people, and the weight of responsibility in presuming to relay the voice of another. It is with due acknowledgement (though not resolution) of these challenges that the study reported below was executed.

RESEARCH METHOD, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research site and participants

Independent schools were selected based on the fact that either the school or an SSP provided underprivileged learners with the financial means to attend the school. With ethical clearance from the university ethics committee, the first author was able to approach four independent high schools within the Johannesburg region to take part in the study. Upon gaining access into the school, the school principal referred the researcher to the school psychologist or SSP and scholarship coordinator to assist in purposefully selecting learners from disadvantaged backgrounds who had received a scholarship to attend the school. McMillan and Schumacher (2009) note that through the use of purposeful sampling, pertinent and information rich data can be provided by the participants in relation to the purpose of the study. Once learners had been selected, informed consent to participate was obtained firstly from their parents/guardians/caregiver and thereafter from the participants themselves. Table 1 gives a brief summary of the selected schools and participants who took part in the study.
Table 1: Brief summary of selected schools and participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Characteristics of school</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Designation</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| School A | Co-ed high school | 1 x Grade 8 Girl  
1 x Grade 9 Boy  
2 x Grade 10 Girls | A1  
A2  
A3 and A4 |
| School B | Co-ed high school | 1 x Grade 12 Girl  
1 x Grade 12 Boy | B1  
B2 |
| School C | All boys school | 1 x Grade 8 Boy  
4 x Grade 9 Boys  
1 x Grade 10 Boy | C1  
C2, C3, C4, C5  
C6 |
| School D | All boys school | 2 x Grade 8 Boys  
2 x Grade 10 Boys | D1 and D2  
D3 and D4 |

Data collection and analysis

A multi-modal approach was used to collect a range of data. This approach combines visual and verbal/written data to ‘create a richer picture of the topic under study’ (Reavey and Prosser 2012, 194). More dynamic participant responses were expected from this move away from a ‘mono-modal’ approach (Reavey and Johnson 2008).

The data were collected over a period of two months with each participant being individually interviewed twice. The first interview was semi-structured with open-ended questions. This format allowed the participants to express their views, thoughts and experiences, and to raise issues relating to the research topic or questions. Additionally, indirect and hypothetical questions were used. Although individual interviews yield useful information, we were concerned that the participants would respond with answers they felt the researcher would want to hear. Learners were thus also asked to complete a photo diary in preparation for a second interview. Participants were each given a disposable camera and asked to take pictures of places that either made them feel happy, safe and included or from which they felt excluded. The aim of using photo diaries was for the photographs to ‘serve as a representation of children’s experiences which might not be easily articulated in other ways’ (Clark 2005, 495). A pleasurable element was incorporated into the research by encouraging the learners to take photographs (Mitchell 2004 in Moletsane et al. 2007) and it was expected that the participants would become more aware of their perceptions and experiences and better able to express them.

In the second interview, the learners’ photographs were used as a ‘tool’ to elicit interview responses pertaining to them. This allowed the participants to explain their thoughts, feelings, perceptions and experiences around each one. After affording each participant a variety of methods for expressing their experiences, the aim was that learners would have begun to think about their experiences more critically. It is
for this reason that a ‘message in a bottle’ question was asked as a final interview question. The ‘message in a bottle technique’ as used by Davies (2000) is where participants are asked to send a message to another planet, country or famous person saying what they would like to see changed in their school to make their schooling experience more positive. Through this, the learners would be able to express any dissatisfactions relating to their experiences. Finally, the learners were asked to keep a journal in which they could write about any positive or negative experiences at school. This could provide a valuable source of information if the learners gave ‘thoughtful attention to each journal entry’ (Creswell 2008, 231). The use of a range of data collection methods allowed the learners not only to express their experiences verbally but also through other creative forms. It should be noted, however, that triangulation was not the aim of the multi-modal data collection but rather the addition of richness and depth to the learners’ responses.

The data were analysed thematically (Cresswell 2008) by coding each data segment, and then looking for patterns among the codes to cluster them around categories which were further subsumed under the broad themes of access, participation and belonging.

Findings and discussion

Access

Learners’ concerns about aspects of ‘formal access’ relating to and depending on factors such as admission rules and finances, and about ‘epistemological access’ referring to access to knowledge (Morrow 2007, 2) both emerged from the data. Formal access in the context of the current study relates to the selection and admission of scholarship recipients into affluent independent schools. The learners’ perceptions of why they were granted formal access to the schools fell into three main categories. The first category was that of academic performance in their previous school. In terms of this, four learners clearly articulated that they believed they were selected because of their ability to ‘excel academically and because we’re good at academics’ (C3). One learner explained confidently that she received a scholarship because: ‘I’m outstanding ... I do well in school and I excel’ (A1). These learners, therefore, felt that their academic talent identified in their previous schools had led to the scholarships and in turn granted them access into the independent schooling system. The second category was diligence as students. Four learners felt they received a scholarship due to their hard work, which was either noticed by the SSP (‘SSP realised that I’m a hard worker’ (A2)) or by the school (‘the school basically noticing all the hard work I have put into everything that I have done’). The third category related to aspects of potential and future promise. In this regard one learner felt that ‘the principal thought I had a lot of potential’ (D2) and that this resulted in the opportunity to attend
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an affluent independent school. The learner ‘was grateful to him for that’ (D2). A second learner stated that, along with recognising him as a hard worker, the SSP believed that he ‘would be able to adjust and adapt and be able to perform well’ (A2), therefore showing future promise.

Although not related to academic potential, other learners felt they had received scholarships due to their potential to excel in sports. Learner C4, by contrast, did not attribute his scholarship to his current or future achievements, simply believing that he received a scholarship ‘to get a better education and to get like a better future in life’. We find it significant that these learners focused on themselves and their achievements in accounting for their selection as scholarship recipients. We found no evidence of any recognition of other factors that might have advantaged them in the selection process, nor any sense that selection might be based on subjective or contested criteria. It seems that the learners derived confidence by positioning themselves individually as the deserving winners of a legitimate contest. This belief serves as an asset (Fergus and Zimmerman 2005) or as a protective factor that promotes resilience (Hall-Lande et al. 2007) and enables them to navigate the challenges of the academic demands of the new school.

Once formal access is achieved through the awarding of a scholarship, then the focus shifts to epistemological access. Despite the scholarship recipients having academic potential, being hard workers or having future promise, they seemed to find a significant difference in the quality and difficulty of the work after entering the independent school. Almost all of the scholarship recipients found the work to be rather challenging at first as the standard was much higher than that of their previous schools. However, in terms of learners adjusting and being able to excel, two major influencing factors emerged from the data, namely: ‘individual efforts’ and ‘teacher support’. In terms of individual efforts, many learners expressed the need to ‘adjust’ to the higher academic expectations of the school. Learner A2 felt that he had ‘adjusted pretty well ... it was difficult and I had to find my feet at first but I had to put in twice the amount of work in order for me to achieve the results that I can be content with’. This was a general feeling amongst many learners, some taking up to two years to adjust. However, in general all learners expressed that they experienced some form of success in adjusting and being able to excel.

Learners’ epistemological access and academic achievement was further aided by ‘teacher support’ and by tutor or peer support either during or after school hours. There was a general agreement amongst the participants that they, along with their peers, were given ample support and extra assistance to cope with their academic work. In this regard, it was found that the teacher support in all four schools was extensive, catering for all learners in the school with the scholarship recipients particularly benefiting from this. Extra lessons/tutor lessons were offered to the learners for all subjects with learner A4 stating that teachers ‘were always there as long as you make a time and make time for them’. Learner D3 also noted that teachers
‘understand my situation ... they are very supportive of the fact that I still have to take some time to adjust to the new surrounding’. This finding supports Te Riele’s (2006) assertion of the importance of positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and learners in effective support provision. Furthermore, it is worth emphasising that these scholarship recipients, who were top achievers in their previous schools, may not have identified themselves as learners in need of academic support. However, at the independent schools, they were suddenly positioned as needing help in order to maintain their academic achievement. Learner D4, for instance, explained how he was an ‘A-student’ in his previous school, but upon acceptance was required to repeat Grade 9. As a result, we suggest that formal access and epistemological access in the independent school are not necessarily achieved simultaneously.

The act of benevolence, in the form of a scholarship, allows certain learners access to schools that are otherwise inaccessible. But if we look at more than access, and consider participation and belonging, we find that the act of benevolence casts shadows on other areas of the educational experience for the scholarship recipients. Shadows are an apt metaphor, as they ‘can be thought of as occupying a liminal space, one between absence and presence and are partly understood in relation to absence’ (Johnston 2013, 7). We see shadows, primarily cast by acts of benevolence, as a metaphor for the various aspects of schooling that are present and available (‘out in the open’) for the majority of learners, but absent or unavailable for many scholarship recipients.

Figure 1: Shadows cast by acts of benevolence

Figure 1 depicts the three broad categories over which shadows of benevolence are cast. Participation, often affected by financial means, is a concern for scholarship recipients both academically and with regard to sport. Other learners may enjoy
full participation in these areas, but scholarship recipients experience limits to their participation. Thus, both academics and sports are shadowed. Social relationships and belonging are shown moving out of the shadow of benevolence because scholarship recipients feel as if they only belong partially.

**Participation**

In looking more closely at academics in the shadow of benevolence, it was evident that scholarship recipients were faced with academic challenges related to technology and finances. In terms of technology, it has become increasingly common in many schools for learners to work off tablets and smart phones within the classroom to aid both teaching and learning. Due to scholarship recipients coming from underprivileged backgrounds, most of them are unable to afford these devices. In situations like this, the scholarship recipients are unable to participate fully in the lesson and as learner A2 stated, ‘I couldn’t have access to the information that the other children had access to’. Consequently, scholarship recipients need to find alternative ways of accessing information by either working collaboratively with their peers, or obtaining the information after school hours in the school library or at home. As a result, their full participation is limited as learning alongside others and collaborating with them in *shared* learning experiences (Booth and Ainscow 2002) has not fully been achieved.

In addition to these limitations, the financial implications of access to resources for completing projects also present challenges. For learners without computers at home, it is often impossible to access a computer to complete tasks. Although each of the schools attended by the participants in the study has a library with computers, scholarship recipients felt they did not always have enough time to complete projects due to limited library hours. Other learners, who did have a computer at home, did not always have the programmes needed for completing a task. This meant that learners had to complete the task at school, resulting in further challenges and time pressures. When required to complete a group activity, some scholarship recipients felt that ‘it was a struggle to get the resources’ (C6) resulting in the group having minimal time to complete the project.

Sports and/or other extramural activities also fall under the shadow of benevolence. Scholarship recipients spoke of two main challenges, the first being that of attendance and the second relating to equipment. With regard to attendance, scholarship recipients reported receiving assistance in relation to their living arrangements and transportation. However, there were again limits to this benevolence. When the learners were required to be at school outside of regular school hours, the schools would sometimes assist by providing accommodation or money for transport. However, despite these benefits, transport still proved to be a challenge for many of the learners. The main challenges experienced by
most participants related to their having to show their support at sports events on a Saturday, which was expected of all learners at the school. With most scholarship recipients having to travel quite far to school by public transport, it was difficult for them to attend these events as they could not afford the transport costs. Learner D3 explained how he hated it when people judged him for not attending the school fixtures to support the school. He added that: ‘I don’t have money for a taxi to get to school ... that’s one thing that I’d really want to change to make my experience a lot better’ (D3). Even when the learners could arrange transport, they would be dropped off early in the morning and they would have to wait for hours before the sporting event even started.

The second challenge related to sports equipment and tours. While the schools provided most scholarship recipients with the necessary and basic school and sports clothes, sporting equipment tended to be the learners’ responsibility, and in most cases was too expensive to purchase. One learner mentioned that the expense of sporting equipment affected the type of sports he could do. Therefore, he would ‘choose the one that will demand the least financially’ (A2) or where he would be able to use the same equipment for different sports, for example:

I use my boots for soccer and for rugby ... if I were to do cricket I would need special shoes ... for hockey I would need the stick and stuff like that so I will try to choose whichever’s more convenient for me because of the equipment.

Sports tours often proved to be unaffordable for scholarship recipients. One learner, who was an avid and talented soccer player, explained how opportunities would come up now and then and explained how he would find himself ‘not being able to partake in them because my parents can’t afford to pay for them’ (B2).

Analysis of the data indicated that scholarship recipients felt partly included in and partly excluded from the academic and extramural activities of their schools. We now examine whether or not these learners felt a sense of belonging to the school community.

**Belonging**

Figure 1 illustrates that peer relationships fall partially under the shadow of benevolence. Some scholarship recipients felt that their peers viewed them negatively and that this created barriers between them and the peers. One learner reported that those peers who knew about scholarship recipients thought that they were there ‘just because of the government of South Africa ... they are not smart, they are just here because the government sponsored them to be here’ (A3). She referred to this as the ‘single story’ that many learners have with regard to scholarship recipients. This ‘single story’ was reflected in other ways by other participants and resulted in their initially either being shy, introverted or very secretive about their personal background and financial position. An example of this ‘secretive background’ was
described by a learner who was reluctant to spend weekends at his friends’ houses in case they would expect a reciprocal invitation to spend a weekend at his home. He stated that:

… right now I don’t want to go to other people’s houses because sometimes the same person you went to would want to come have a sleepover at my house and I wouldn’t let him sleep over at my house, so right now I don’t want to go sleep over at other people’s houses (C6).

However, over time, these peer experiences seemed to emerge from the shadow as learners started developing trusting friendships. This resulted in learners feeling more comfortable about their peers knowing they were scholarship recipients and about their backgrounds. Scholarship recipients soon realised and felt that they were actually no different to their peers and were not treated any differently. This was supported by learner C5 who stated that ‘we are all getting the same education’ and learner C2 who said that ‘the way everyone is treated is the same, just because they are rich or whatever, everyone is just treated the same’. Another learner responded saying: ‘I wouldn’t say I’m the same as others, we are all different, we all come from different backgrounds, we are all independent in our own way, so we are all different …’ (A4). For one learner (D3), this confidence translated into his being able to educate his affluent peers about the ‘ghetto’ (Soweto) and was able to ‘correct them (his peers) about how they think of the ghetto’. As a result, he reported that his peers had more respect for him.

In concluding the data collection process with the message in a bottle question, the learners were asked if there was anything they would like to see or have changed to make their experience more positive. Although many learners responded by saying there was nothing they would like to see changed as they were happy with their placement and felt included, there were slight variations. These included aspects relating to ‘scholarship recipients being more equipped with resources in order to excel’ (A2) and civvies day (wearing clothes other than the school uniform to school) being taken away to ‘eliminate the divide between learners’ (D3). The major concern was peer perceptions. In relation to this concern learners commented on how they would like to ‘be around friendlier people’, ‘end racism’ or simply change the perceptions of learners and how humans treat one another. Beyond these possible changes, the learners did not deem any significant aspects of their schooling as needing to be changed.

The scholarship recipients were, by their own account, mostly uncritical of the scholarship programme, and their negative comments referred mainly to their experience of the limits of benevolence and the challenges of developing friendships and a sense of belonging. Their ‘single story’ was that they were the deserving recipients of a great boon, and that the difficulties they experienced were insufficient to induce critique of the scholarship opportunity. However, many participants’ responses reflected Slee’s (2011, 107) concerns about ‘charitable dispensations to
excluded minorities’. The scholarship recipients positioned themselves as being responsible for ‘fitting in’ to the institution by learning to ‘adjust’ and by making plans to circumvent the consequences of their lack of resources. At least initially, they assumed an ‘invisible presence’ (Slee 2011, 107) by being quiet and reserved, and their lack of critique suggests an acceptance of the ‘dominant cultural order’ (Slee 2011, 107) of the school. While these findings were derived specifically from the data collected from scholarship recipients in affluent independent schools, they do point to issues of wider significance for the various programmes which strive to offset educational disadvantage and to promote access to higher education. These issues include the need to consider that access to a programme must be accompanied by the material and other support necessary to secure success, and an acknowledgement that there are hidden material and social costs of participation that may not be readily apparent to those who devise or manage such programmes.

CONCLUSION

Learners who receive scholarships to attend affluent independent schools are grateful for the opportunity; are confident that they have earned their place; and are mostly positive about their experiences. Benefactors, school staff and scholarship programme managers would do well, however, to consider how the financial limits of the scholarship impact learners’ abilities to participate fully in the life of the school and to share all learning experiences with their peers. Also, attention needs to be given to the extent to which these scholarship recipients potentially occupy positions as ‘tenants on the margins’ (Slee 2011, 107) of the schools. Scholarship recipients remain aware of the precariousness of their tenure in having to fulfil the conditions of their scholarships and many are conscious that they cannot fully participate nor do they fully belong in the elite space of the independent school. We acknowledge the limitations of our findings, and do not claim that they would necessarily reflect the experiences of all scholarship recipients in all affluent schools. The study does, however, point to the need for ongoing critical engagement with the various initiatives that seek to address educational disadvantage, from as many perspectives as possible, not least of which is consideration of those who remain after those with potential are selected and withdrawn. The long term impact of scholarship programmes also needs investigation, not only in terms of the extent to which they may enhance access to and success in higher education for beneficiaries, but how they work either to enable or constrain the realisation of a socially just education system.
NOTES

1. Most independent schools in South Africa are not high-fees schools. For the purpose of this study, ‘affluent’ independent schools are deemed to charge in excess of R46 700, the highest fee bracket designated by ISASA (Hofmeyr et al. 2013).

2. As authors, we have given much consideration to ways of referring to the learners who participated in the study. In interviews, most were adamant that they had received scholarships, not bursaries, and they wanted this to be emphasised. They were keen to highlight that their talents and achievements, not their disadvantage, had led to their being given a place in the school. We did not want to refer to them as ‘scholarship learners’ either, as we think that this signifies that their identity as learners is determined by their status as scholarship recipients, and thus ‘others’ them. So we talk of ‘learners who are scholarship recipients’, or, for the sake of brevity, ‘scholarship recipients’. We acknowledge that even ‘recipient’ is not a perfect designation, as it positions the learners passively, when in fact we find them exercising a significant amount of individual agency to navigate the challenges that they encounter.

3. Issues related to the challenges of identifying ‘talented’ learners for the purposes of providing opportunities to participate in enrichment programmes are considered in some depth by Richards (this volume) and Liccardo, Botsis and Dominguez-Whitehead (this volume).

REFERENCES


DBE see Department of Basic Education.


ISASA see Independent Schools’ Association of Southern Africa.


