Critical occupational therapy in the margins: 
Parent participation in under-resourced schools

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In this chapter we describe the impact of coloniality on the occupation of learning in South African schools, and outline the associated complexities of parent involvement in schools that are under-resourced. We present experiences of working with parents through Occupation-based Community Development (ObCD) campaigns in an Schools Improvement Initiative (SII) partner school, describing the possibilities of border thinking as a theoretical frame for shifting and shaping occupational therapy practice towards a partnership-focused collaboration with parents. We use these examples to examine the lessons that have emerged through such approaches, and offer ideas for how collaboration with parents might flourish in schools with similar situations and experiences.

Occupational therapists recognise that learning is an occupation (see Chapter 5, Silbert & Galvaan for an explanation of this term) comprised of multiple and varied activities, and shaped by contextual influences (Galvaan et al. 2015). A transactional perspective of occupation takes account of the many varied people and activities that interact with one another in multiple, complex ways, forming the situations in which daily participation is produced (Aldrich 2008; Cutchin et al. 2008). Based on this view, learning can be interpreted from different vantage points, but it is our experience that the characteristic view of learning is often solely about the learners’ academic performance. This represents a single, yet powerful notion that dominates the way that occupational therapists have structured their services at schools.

Notwithstanding this focus on performance, we choose to position our work in relation to the more complex, transactional view of learning that draws attention to the numerous social actors – parents, guardians, teachers, school managers, peers and significant others – who co-construct how learning might be enacted within particular settings. As such, we believe that those social actors who contribute to learners’ lives from the position of the family are not only parents, and that different versions of families exist. This is consistent with the perspective in the South African Schools Act, whereby any individual who fulfils the responsibilities to ensure that a learners’ educational needs are met is regarded as equivalent to parents (Lemmer & Van Wyk 2004). Our understanding of a ‘parent’ includes all those individuals who contribute to caring for and nurturing learners. ‘Parents’ may therefore include mothers, fathers, grandparents, older siblings, aunts, uncles, or any other significant person who is responsible for the learners’ upbringing. While it may seem exceptional
to view parents in this way, and involve them within the life of the school, this is aligned with legislation indicating their necessary inclusion (RSA 1996).

Parent involvement has been positioned as a multidimensional concept (Feuerstein 2000) and is not new, having originated in the USA and Europe in the 1960s and 1970s with the implementation of programmes to promote school success for ethnic minority and immigrant groups, as described by Bakker and Denessen (2007). Schools attempted to create opportunities for parents (from backgrounds that were different to the dominant group attending the school) to develop attitudes and practices that would support their children's success. However positive these intentions were, they failed to engage parents as equals, expecting them to assimilate to the dominant, largely white, middle-class values and practices related to supporting children in their educational endeavours. The historical roots of practices relating to parent involvement have shaped expectations for how parents are to be involved in learning processes and institutions responsible for education. For example, Epstein's framework (1995 cited in Lemmer & Van Wyk 2004) locates parent involvement in six different practices that characterise the relationship between the home, school and community contexts. These are:

1) assisting parents to develop home environments and parenting skills that support learning;
2) communication with parents about learners’ progress in school and school programmes;
3) involving parents as volunteers by designing opportunities that take into account the complexities of modern living;
4) involving families in learning activities at home;
5) including parents in school governance and decision-making; and
6) coordinating and working with community resources to support school programmes and strengthen the role of the family in learning (Lemmer 2007: 221).

Although helpful in terms of outlining the various ways in which involvement takes place, such a framework does not account for parent engagement on parents’ terms, thus privileging the perspective of the school in denoting how and when parents will be involved. Theodorou (2007) argues that, although parent participation and parent involvement are often used interchangeably, they do not denote the same thing. She indicates that focusing on an approach that privileges parent participation would prioritise collectivist orientations to the relationship between the home and school and could enable the development of the whole school and all its learners. Such an approach would enact participatory ways of doing that are grounded within power-sharing and full participation within decision-making processes, with clearly defined rights and responsibilities for all those involved.

This chapter aims to forefront parents’ critical position in relation to the occupation of learning, and considers how parent participation, as opposed to mere involvement, in under-resourced schools might be enacted to enhance the quality of learning and contribute to the improvement of our society.
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Parent involvement in South African schools

School reform in democratic South Africa has involved re-orienting the role of parents in schools, with particular attention given to their place in democratic school governance (Lewis & Naidoo 2004). This has not been without its challenges. For instance, many black, working-class parents who live in rural areas face barriers to their engagement in school governance structures, as they often live far from the school (Lemmer & Van Wyk 2004). Further to this, parents who reside in working-class communities often have their concerns ‘defined for them by the middle-class - the Black educator middle-class in Black schools and the White, Colored or Indian professional middle-class in mixed schools’ (Lewis & Naidoo 2004: 107–108).

Parent involvement that occurs predominantly through involvement in governance structures does not create sufficient opportunities for marginalised parents and learners. This raises questions about whether parent involvement, as it is currently enacted within South African schools, would support what is needed to grow education in South Africa.

Many schools and their learners are still struggling to escape the identities imposed on them during apartheid (Soudien 2012). This reflects the apartheid education system, and its different preparation of learners from different race groups for the expected roles that they would play in life. Schools that were classified as black during apartheid typically had limited resources, and were often situated in working-class communities (Chapter 2, Clark). These schools have remained under-resourced in the post-apartheid era. It follows that the parent involvement practices of many South African schools are born out of these historical educational dispensations, raising doubt that Eurocentric approaches to involve parents – such as those proposed by Epstein – would be appropriate in the South African context. It is our view that an approach to parent involvement that is premised on participation and shared terms for engagement (Theodorou 2007) could be useful in South African schools. However, we believe that enacting such an approach would require recognition of the ongoing coloniality that shapes the occupation of learning and the participation of parents in under-resourced schools.

Coloniality and the occupation of learning

Coloniality prevails despite the end of colonial administrations (Ndlovu & Makoni 2014), and is reflected in the global hegemonic structure of power (Glaveau & Sierra 2015). Coloniality has been described as referring to ‘long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations’ (Ndlovu & Makoni 2014: 5). Coloniality’s pervasive and invisible influence continues in ways of thinking that construct our modern experience through various aspects such as culture, texts and the criteria for academic performance (Ndlovu & Makoni 2014). This also regulates race, labour, land and people on the
basis of material gain, which results in inequality across social groups. The education system in South Africa, with its attendant hierarchical matrix of power, is an insidious example of the ongoing influence of the modern colonial project. The interconnecting spheres of this matrix include a struggle for control at the level of the economy and the public sphere, as well as authority, knowledge and subjectivity (Tlostanova & Mignolo 2009). However, control of knowledge and the discourses that position some identities with more power than others enable domination of certain subjectivities by others (Tlostanova & Mignolo 2009). Since domination is only possible because of epistemological domination, the education system becomes a key platform where coloniality is maintained, and particular subjectivities are reproduced. The ways in which coloniality influences participation in learning at schools in South Africa therefore warrants attention.

Global socio-political hegemonies are reflected in local conditions in South Africa (Ndlovu & Makoni 2014). Further complicating matters, the impact of the legacy of apartheid has led to a prevailing context of untenable inequality that has substantially impacted on access to quality education. As Clark suggests in Chapter 2 of this publication, although all children are guaranteed the right to education (RSA 1996) and free schooling is available to all children, the quality of education available to those whose parents can afford to pay for it differs substantially from those who cannot afford it. This maintains a class-based system of segregation that is strongly linked to geographical location and race in South Africa – a situation that was brought into being through the Group Areas Act in 1950. Apartheid spatial planning has resulted in a continued geopolitical structure influencing the schooling landscape and determining who has access to particular institutions. What this means is that schools are generally made up of learners who occupy a similar class position. However, race and class have come to be intertwined in more complex ways since the end of apartheid (Nattrass & Seekings 2001), resulting in multicultural spaces emerging within different institutions.

Understanding and valuing cultural diversity leads us to question the ‘assimilative’ and ‘inclusive’ education policies of many so called ‘multi-cultural’ societies in which the prevailing hegemony of the dominant culture and language works against the expression and development of the cultural heritages and epistemologies of marginalised groups. This has been our experience of many schools in South Africa where middle-class, English, Christian (also read ‘white’) values are often emphasised. The modern colonial project tends to uphold these dominant ideologies, dictating who is valued in such a system. Learners and parents from largely black, low socioeconomic backgrounds are not valued, nor expected to make valuable contributions to the schools in which they participate. This is because they are positioned at the margins of the colonial matrix of power resulting in current parent involvement practices that ‘reproduce the existing patterns of power and privilege in schools and the broader society’ (Lewis & Naidoo 2004: 108).
Limited power to contribute: School practices that sideline voices and experiences from the margins

The South African Schools Act (RSA 1996) positions parents, and their contribution to the occupation of learning in schools, in limited ways. Parents, according to the Act, are required to contribute to school governance through the school governing body (SGB). A select number of parents are elected onto this committee, and are required to represent the views of all parents at the school when key decisions must be taken. These key decisions usually relate to the operational management of the school, in line with the often obsessive focus on operational and technical efficiency in schools (Lewis & Naidoo 2004). There is also a discourse promoted in documents and in official interactions with schools that emphasises parental responsibility in ensuring a high level of performance in academic work. For example, a recent pamphlet released by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) highlights the kinds of activities that parents should be doing with their children, and also strongly advises parents of their responsibilities regarding this (WCED 2016).

This reading material emphasises the normative middle-class experience of reality, giving weight to the view that these ideologies are operational within parent involvement practices, and discounts what parents from different backgrounds may be confronted with in their daily life. Such discourses, and the current positioning of parents’ contribution in schools, perpetuates the hegemonies associated with the colonial matrix of power and disregards these parents’ role in improving learning through drawing on their own knowledge.

Over the past fifteen years, we have had experience working with final-year occupational therapy students in developing ObCD campaigns in schools situated in both Lavender Hill and Khayelitsha in Cape Town. ObCD is a reasoning tool for occupational therapy practice (Galvaan & Peters 2017) that has assisted OT students and practitioners to practice in novel ways. This has revolutionised the traditional role outlined for occupational therapists in settings in which a community development practice orientation is more contextually appropriate (UCT 2015). ObCD has led to the development of programmes that address systemic issues within the context of long-term partnerships. These partnerships are nurtured over time, allowing for shared planning and practice to evolve. In Chapter 11, Abrahams et al. describe how ObCD practice has been used to shape speech- and language therapy student practice. This suggests that the ObCD framework and interventions may have utility beyond the particular setting within which the interventions were initially developed.

The schools that we have worked with in Khayelitsha are partner schools in the SII (see Chapter 1, Silbert, Clark & Parker). At all of these schools, there were requests from teachers and school managers for us to work more actively with parents in order to enhance the contribution they were making towards the school’s development. We saw this as an opportunity to work more fully with the multiple role players involved in learning.
Our understanding of the work required with parents has been shaped, in part, by a key experience – attending a parents conference hosted by another under-resourced school in Lavender Hill. This experience illuminated that parents were not positioned as key collaborators in learning. At this conference we noticed how parents were spoken to, rather than with, and that a large focus of the conference was on providing them with information that they could use to strengthen their children's academic performance in literacy and numeracy. Sadly, this information did not appear to reflect the lived reality in Lavender Hill, where there are limited resources available to support learning. Nor – because of the social position of parents from black working-class communities – did it take into account that parents have their own knowledge that they could bring to these learning activities. Our experiences at Intshayelelo Primary in Khayelitsha were similar in that teachers overwhelmingly spoke about the value of involving parents predominantly in relation to the enhancement of learners’ academic performance. These dominant views reinforce parents’ positions as adjuncts, who are expected to assimilate into the school system and interact with it on the terms laid out by the school.

The rest of this chapter presents an example of our work with a group of parents at an under-resourced school, and describes an attempt to engage more authentically with them. This was done by exploring and collaboratively enacting the different possibilities that may exist for parent participation, resisting the roles that are so often prescribed to parents who are positioned on the margins in under-resourced schools.

Re-imagining occupational therapy with parents in schools

Cushman’s (2016) work on developing a decolonial approach in composition studies highlights the necessity of a theoretical grounding that allows a discipline to engage with the dominant ways of thinking that structure its approaches. As such, our view is that the discipline of occupational therapy needs to ‘work towards dwelling in the borders to revise the paradigmatic tenets of thought structuring everyday practices’ (Cushman 2016: 236). In order to develop a decolonial option the occupational therapy profession needs to follow a similar route, since scientific and biomedical perspectives govern practice (Joubert 2010) that is grounded in Eurocentric origins. Given these orientations, coloniality is reflected in the theories and approaches most often used in occupational therapy practice, contributing to the dominant hegemonies that frame how we understand how people participate in everyday life. To develop a different orientation to practice we would need to encompass border thinking in our approaches.

Border thinking is a decolonial approach, where critical thinking occurs with, and from, the perspective of subalternised identities (Grosfoguel 2007). It is characterised
by a system of thought that ‘delinks’ from the dominant ways of thinking that characterise how subalternised identities are represented and positioned (Mignolo 2011). Border thinking produces a different logic, which can contribute to shifting the colonial matrix of power because it encompasses a refusal to accept the usual options available to particular social groups. Rather, a form of epistemic disobedience occurs where alternative forms of knowledge are valued and used.

Approaches, such as ObCD, have been put forward as a potential way of embracing border thinking in our practice as occupational therapists. ObCD focuses on marginalised groups and their experiences of oppression, as shaped by the structural and contextual determinants influencing daily participation. In this approach the ways in which coloniality shows up in daily life is understood through the development of a mutual understanding. We work hard at growing relationships that allow us to situate ourselves as partners in a community and nurture the development of a shared understanding that allows for us to work simultaneously in the margins and with those who are marginalised. By this we mean that we form consolidated, humanising partnerships with those who are usually devalued as contributors and knowledge generators. This way of working allows the different options available to particular communities to be exposed. In this sense a form of delinking occurs. We follow with an example of our practice with parents at Inshayelelo Primary, an SII partner school. The example illustrates the power such an approach might have for the realisation of parent participation as opposed to involvement.

Experiences of working differently in and with the margins: Working with parents at an SII partner school

Final-year occupational therapy students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) complete three seven-week service learning placements during their academic year. Towards the end of 2013, a decision was taken to place students at Intshayelelo Primary School as part of the developing collaboration between the Faculty of Health Sciences and the SII. Situated within the community development domain of practice, the students were required to initiate an occupational therapy service at the school to contribute to whole-school improvement.

As part of the final-year OT curriculum, students are exposed to the ObCD framework as a reasoning tool to guide their approach in practice. In the context of the SII they are required to embark on a strategic process to develop a shared understanding of the particular issues that the school community might be facing. The initiation phase of practice, as proposed in the ObCD framework, focuses on developing relationships by drawing on participatory methods which are continuously built on and shaped throughout the process of ObCD. Dwelling in the borders is promoted through our approach by undertaking – together with those groups involved – a critical analysis of the way subalternised identities are positioned and interacted with across multiple domains. This framework demands that students
critically reflect on their identities as developing professionals in relation to those with whom they will be working. This allows for the development of relationships that ensure that previously silenced voices are brought to the fore, and are positioned to make a critical contribution to the emergence of a new understanding of the situational issues.

Two students, Clarissa and Noluthando, began working at Intshayelelo in their final service learning placement in 2013. These two students, whose identities were very different to one another, were also remarkably different to the members of the school community. Both carried different degrees of privilege with them, partially stemming from their role as developing professionals from a prestigious university. The ObCD framework enabled these students to engage with the identity dynamics at play during the process of building understanding of the needs of the school. This contributed to their ability to think in and with the margins, as described above.

This process of exploration led the students to engage with teachers who spoke specifically about the lack of parent involvement that they had experienced in the school. At this particular point in time the Grade R learners at the school had gone through a screening process (see Chapter 12, Gretschel et al.) to identify whether any learners would benefit from occupational therapy interventions focused on identified barriers to learning. After the screening assessments students felt it would be beneficial to bring teachers and parents together to discuss these issues. The following excerpt from the OT students' report on this meeting describes some of the insights that were gained:

Through discussions with the parents and teachers, parents expressed that they felt ill-equipped in being able to assist their children in their learning processes. Parents present at the meetings identified that their limited, and lack of, resources, low socioeconomic statuses and educational levels hindered their ability to assist in their children's learning. Some parents were of the view that their social identities were limited by the aforementioned factors in that it limited their abilities to assist their children.

In order for parents to consider differently how they might contribute to learning, it became important for the OT students to reconsider how parents might participate in the life of the school. Their approach became one where they were committed to creating a space for parents and teachers to collaboratively consider the possibilities for promoting children's learning in the school, and to identify ways in which their shared ideas could become a reality in the long term. A series of productive conversations (Senge 2006) provided the opportunity to do this in an integrated way.

The process of building understanding within the ObCD framework draws on an integrated set of competencies that allows not only for insight to be gained on the
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part of those facilitating the process, but also for the views and ideas of those directly involved in particular situations to be shifted. These core competencies include:

- asking the right questions at the right times to expose core ways of thinking about situations and experiences;
- listening and observing conversations and situations deeply in order to allow voices and experiences to emerge and become heard; and
- representing the meaning of what has been seen and heard so that alternative, different or new understanding emerges (Taylor 2000).

Using these core competencies promotes the border thinking required to expose different options for action. This orientation to practice resulted in the students’ choosing to facilitate a process in which parents and teachers were provided with an opportunity to (re)consider how parents might participate in, and contribute to, their children's learning.

The ObCD campaign³ was developed further by offering two developmentally focused workshops for parents of Grade R and Grade 1 learners. These workshops were targeted at providing parents with the relevant knowledge and skills to support their child’s learning in simple ways during everyday activities. Both parents and teachers expressed that these workshops were highly beneficial in providing a bridge into their children’s education. After the workshops took place a parent-teacher think tank was initiated and facilitated by the OT students as a response to parents’ and teachers’ wishes for greater connection with one another. This think tank exposed many unfounded assumptions that both groups held about one another and their contributions. Parents felt that they were positioned in a particular light and that teachers assumed that they were lazy and uninterested in their children’s education. Teachers confirmed that they had made this assumption, but this was challenged by the parents at the workshop. Teachers, on the other hand, felt that parents were not receptive to their suggestions or cognisant of the input being made into their children's lives. This assumption was felt by parents to be untrue, but the lack of engaged interaction between parents and teachers had fuelled these views. The evolution of such a situation was made possible by the colonial matrix of power, which maintained that parents in a working-class community would have nothing to add to the process of learning.

Sharing these views in a facilitated space allowed an opportunity for a new understanding to emerge based on a reciprocal sharing and respectful challenging of existing assumptions. These discussions showed that both parents and teachers actually had positive intentions in contributing to their children’s learning. The root of the problem was found to be that parents and teachers held opposing assumptions about their intentions, and their views about how they were supporting, and how they might have differently supported, the learning of their children. The outcome of this meeting was the formation of a parent-teacher committee in the Foundation Phase (FP) in order to focus on critically considering how to collaborate with parents more actively.
Occupational therapy students who are placed at the SII schools are required to follow on from previous students’ contributions during their service learning placements. This is to be done by determining the potential next steps, and then acting on them. During the 2014 academic year two more OT students were placed at Intshayelelo. They needed to consider how they could continue to support the development and growth of the parent-teacher committee that, in the absence of direct support from the OT students, had not taken off and continued as hoped. Although one of the parents and FP teachers had agreed to take on the management of this committee, they had struggled to coordinate times to meet within their different schedules. Further to this, the committee and its contribution had not been prioritised within programmes at the school. From contact with various parents on an informal basis, the next two students recognised that the parents’ own engagement in daily life was still not fully considered during school discussions. The strain between the daily challenges that parents confronted in relation to their children’s academic demands and expectations was a source of tension. These students identified that perhaps parents and the school needed to develop a deeper understanding of how parents’ lives influenced their capacity to support learning, and therefore their feelings of how they could adequately contribute to learning. Given the need to bring particular meaning, and potential new understanding, with regards to parents’ experiences, the OT students elected to use photovoice as an effective participatory tool that would allow the marginalised voices of parents to emerge (Galvaan 2007).

Photovoice is a critical approach founded within action research, and that is intended to provide opportunities for people to tell their stories about their lived reality (Photovoice Worldwide 2016). It usually involves marginalised individuals and groups who would not usually be provided with this opportunity. This approach was particularly well suited for the work that needed to occur with parents at Intshayelelo given the opportunity it provided to illuminate daily experiences in a visual form that could be reflected upon and learnt from. The students thus continued to dwell in the borders and to create new meanings through such an approach.

The process was embarked upon by collaborating with a representative from the past parent-teacher committee who was willing to become involved in the project. This representative, a grandmother of one of the learners, was keen on the proposed idea and agreed to participate. She assisted with the process of recruiting three other parents (two fathers and one mother) who agreed to participate. Each parent was provided with a disposable camera that they used to take pictures of their participation in the activities that they do daily, emphasising those aspects of their lives that were important to them. They were eager to participate in the photovoice project, and there was much excitement when the photographs were developed and used to generate group discussions about their daily realities. The parents involved selected two photographs that they would use for an exhibition and meeting with other parents and interested teachers at the school. These were to be used to
further develop their initial ideas regarding the issues parents faced, and how this interfaced with learning.

Emerging strongly from the discussion was the parents’ need to respond to their children, and provide for them in the ways that they required. One of the fathers, referring to a photograph of his home with his family standing outside, spoke of his house as his castle, and his daughters as princesses. This generated a discussion around the importance of fathers as role models. Another photograph, by the same father, showed him cycling. He spoke with great love about his participation in a sport that he saw as being usually reserved for white people. This generated a conversation about the kind of occupations parents valued, but that were outside the ambit of what was usually considered possible for them in terms of the positions they occupied. The conversation offered the opportunity to consider their potential skill in being able to promote learning at the school through the opportunities that they accessed. Other parents spoke of the significant challenges they faced in getting their children to school each day, a reality often taken for granted by school management. The campaign provided a platform to voice and discuss their common challenges, a space these parents had not been provided previously. When the parents hosted their exhibition and meeting they presented the themes that they had discussed. This generated a discussion between parents, in their home language, in which they demonstrated deep insights into how they saw themselves contributing to their children’s education. For example, one father spoke about meeting regularly with the principal to share his ideas on an informal basis. He also saw opportunities during informal gatherings at the school for parents to share their ideas. He commented on how this was currently not the case. This is a reflection of the constrained position of parents as contributors, a result of the prevailing coloniality in the school where parents are not considered as knowledge contributors. The parents and teachers at the workshop expressed their appreciation for one another, and for the process of meeting and sharing together.

The parents resolved to do the following:

- They wanted to meet with the SGB and principal about their involvement in the school in various areas, including fundraising. They also indicated that they would suggest to the school that they have workshops at the beginning of the year to help parents familiarise themselves with the content of the curriculum. They believed that this would enable them to better assist their children with homework.
- They decided to establish a support group for themselves.
- They determined that they would like to be involved in collaborating with the school to establish better and safer means of ensuring their children are able to get to and return home safely from school, by both organising better transport systems and collaborating with other parents who could assist with such a project.
These resolutions demonstrated parents’ capacity, as agents, to begin a process by which they could ‘delink’ from the usual options that were presented for them. We saw this as the potential realisation of parent participation.

**Lessons taken away: Limitations to inscribing parents as experts in the life of the school**

Although the outcome of the campaigns described above were positive in rethinking how parents and occupational therapists may collaborate and participate within schools, these outcomes failed to flourish. This was because parents struggled to come together on an ongoing basis to organise these actions in the absence of an on-site coordinator who could facilitate the continuation of this process. Further, the OT students did not do sufficient work to ensure that organisational infrastructure was in place to support the ongoing development of parent participation. This has led us to question and consider how our approaches may be repositioned to contribute to sustainable change. We leave with two important insights:

1) One of the issues with border thinking is that although it subverts conventional thinking practices, something more is required to shift the standard structures that reproduce the hegemonies associated with the occupation of learning. Although shifting dominant thinking is one avenue for change, we believe that appropriate channels for parents to enact their agency within the school context must also be developed in order to shift from parent involvement to parent participation. This calls for a (re)consideration of the enactment and interpretation of school-based policy in order to include parents more fully in the life of the school as knowledge generators and contributors. Parents’ ideas should matter, and approaches for their inclusion should be driven with them collaboratively. The campaign presented in this chapter provides an example of how schools may begin to work in partnership with parents, through collaborating with professionals such as occupational therapists who embrace critical approaches to occupational therapy practices in schools.

2) From the perspective of a critical occupational therapy practice, the conditions that continue to exclude parents’ voices must be worked with. Once these voices are amplified, they need to be maintained at a coloniality-challenging frequency. One way of achieving this is for occupational therapists to employ an occupation-based community development approach to facilitate processes with the other role players involved in learning. Positioning parents differently, allowing them to be understood, to understand themselves, and be heard, is significant in finding new ways of engaging in schools. As occupational therapists using this kind of approach, we have offered a perspective that highlights the possibilities for delinking and engaging differently in schools.

It would be naïve not to acknowledge the challenges that need to be faced, and the substantial work that needs to be done to imagine new ways in which parents may
be fully inscribed in the life of the school. We recognise that it is a tall order to create spaces that extend the work of the school and engage all of us in working toward an inclusive society. The difficulties that we encountered within the example described is a reflection of the complexity associated with this type of work. Notwithstanding this, exploring new ways to co-create spaces in schools that allow effective participation of all those involved in learning is an issue with which our education system should engage seriously in order to realise the forms of participation that would contribute to creating a truly democratic South Africa.

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Notes

1 The apartheid government introduced a set of Acts that legally enforced a system of racial segregation. The Group Areas Act is one such act that classified different geographical areas for different race groups. The result was that white people attained and occupied prime land while black and coloured people were moved to areas with limited resources and lack of infrastructure, often far away from quality educational opportunities.

2 Pseudonyms.

3 A campaign involves the design of strategies to counter the hegemonies associated with the participation of marginalised social groups that result in exclusion and injustice. It is implemented in collaboration with this group, as well as with different combinations of key role players and stakeholders, depending on the issue at hand and the direction the community decides to take.

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