

# Nomalanga Grootboom

## **The most important school policies are housing policies. What does this mean for the boundaries of school leadership in South Africa?**

This paper shows that the treatment of black and white learners and the attitude of school leaders deeply rooted in South Africa's history plays a central role in learning in the era of uncertainty. The most important school policies are housing policies, and South Africa pursues too few of them, with too little strength. The paper describes and analyses current poverty and income distribution in South Africa, with a central concern about the relationship between poverty, inequality and growth as it relates to educational opportunities.

The paper investigates schooling in former white schools, a literature with a long and distinguished history, employing a backward mapping of a study done by Grootboom (2012), about "cross racial interaction in a former white school".

Low-income working families are eligible for social grants to supplement their rental payments up to market rates but the so-called vouchers perpetuate rather than reduce segregation. Suburbs maintain zoning ordinances that prevent construction of low- and moderate-income housing, rendering Government subsidies for such housing less useful to combat segregation. Government programs encourage the destruction of public housing ghettos but make inadequate provision for rehousing the displaced residents, many of whom are then forced to leave their gentrifying neighborhoods to seek homes in newly segregated inner-ring suburbs. Unless we desegregate neighborhoods, we cannot desegregate schools, and unless we desegregate schools, the doors to opportunity for too many black students will continue to be closed.

The paper therefore concludes that reducing inequality substantially is currently unlikely without a massive increase in the human capital of those presently poor, but prospects in this regard are inauspicious. School leadership needs to be move beyond the administrative and instructional duties, and begin to pay more attention to the role and mission of education in valuing unity through social diversity. As a result, traditional boundaries of school leadership responsibilities are in flux and require deeper discussion and debate.