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Social justice in education revisited[1]

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Abstract

Social justice is a primary concern of politicians and human rights practitioners, but has lost much of its currency as it has been elevated through philosophical debates to the level of an idealised or "*imagined social order*" of modern state formations. This article is based on a conceptual analysis of social justice and the trajectory of philosophical discourse. It is argued that much of the social justice discourse ignores the specificity of the geo-historical and social contexts of developing countries and it is premised that social justice in education should be based on a more holistic approach that takes these situational factors into account. Based on the conceptual analysis forwarded, it is postulated that social justice is not an external condition or system. If it were an external condition or system, we could simply have learned social justice as we would have learned any other content-based subject. But social justice is an ideal – a vision that must become *a way of life* that permeates all aspects of being human. For this reason, it cannot be legislated or achieved through international conventions or declarations – albeit important instruments to promote social justice – social justice must come home in the hearts and minds of people and it must be lived. It requires that every citizen take responsibility to protect, advance and promote the values, principles and ideals of social justice, although for the marginalised and oppressed this is not enough. They need access to resources and opportunities for developing and exercising their capacities or capabilities for living a decent human life.

Keywords: social justice, education, education policy, equality, conceptual analysis

Introduction

Maslow (1958: 15) observed that "*I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail.*" Looking at post-apartheid South Africa it seems that the hammer political decision-makers have found is policy. Democratic South Africa has developed a policy obsession whereby decision-makers want to cure all social ills with policies. The result is that we hammer and beat social problems into a myriad of fragmented pieces and then develop a policy for each small segment. This is even more apparent within the field of education. There are four consequences of this. First, it kindles the flame of managerialism in government structures and spurs the forces of centralisation and control. Secondly, it results in organisations bullet-proofing themselves, thus creating a smoke-and-mirror environment where organisations reflect the things they want government and the world to see, while hiding deeper lying concerns. Thirdly, by doing this, organisations achieve

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procedural or administrative compliance with the policy regime without achieving a much deeper level of substantive compliance (Nieuwenhuis, 2008). Finally, as a consequence of the fragmentation of social challenges and social justice concerns policymakers develop a kind of tunnel vision on social justice whereby they tend to focus on one specific social issue while losing sight of the bigger picture. Let me illustrate the consequences with two examples.

In 2008, the world was shocked by an incident at the University of the Free State when a group of white students made a video in which a group of black cleaners from one of the hostels were humiliated and subjected to gross human injustice and degradation (Mail & Guardian, 2008). The students tried to justify their actions as a hoax, but it did reveal a much deeper attitude of racism and disrespect for the human dignity and rights of fellow human beings. The university condemned the video outright and immediately claimed that the students' actions were against university policy and that it was directly opposed to what the management of the former white university had tried to achieve with its transformational policies.

A similar trend may be observed when looking at constitutional developments in Eastern European countries after the implosion of communism (1989-1991). Many of these Eastern European countries have reformed their constitutions in such a way as to bring human rights principles from the sphere of morals to the sphere of positive law (Gynther, 2009). For politicians and laymen of diverse ideological backgrounds, it is tempting to make use of rights-talk that, in a seemingly apolitical form, promises emancipation, equality and a better world to all intents and purposes. At grassroots level these promises are often experienced as empty and devoid of substance. In the end, much of what emerges from the fragmented discourse is what Mary Pichen has termed "*grandiloquent incantation*": It obscures debate and provides no route for governments being held accountable for their actual practices (Pichen, 2001: 97).

Two important observations must be made at this point: Gynther, (2009) reminds us of the distinction between formal equality and substantive equality. Writers on the topic agree that mere formal equality is not enough as equal application of a rule or law to all can have unequal results (Nieuwenhuis, 2005). The alternative, the substantive equality approach, can be divided into two distinct models: the difference model and the disadvantage model. The difference model has lost most of its support because of its normative indeterminacy. The disadvantage model defines equality in terms of disadvantage. The principle on which this model is based holds that "*…if a person is a member of a constantly disadvantaged group and can show that a distinction based on the personal characteristics of the individual or the group and not imposed on others perpetuates or worsens that disadvantage, the distinction is discriminatory whether intentional or not*" (Gynther, 2009: 2).

Secondly, although human rights are claimed to be universal, what is actually at issue is a product of the Western liberal tradition, and even there merely one among many

emancipatory vocabularies. As Kennedy (2004: 19) puts it: "*Human rights encourage people to seek emancipation in the vocabularies of reason rather than faith, in public rather than private life, in law rather than politics, in politics rather than economics.*"

Against this background I embark on a conceptual analysis to revisit social justice in education. In doing this I undertake to look at some of the formulations and conceptualisations of social justice and indicate why these formulations are deficient in a developing country context. Secondly, in using the conceptual analysis I argue that some of the commonly held assumptions about social justice are lacking in comprehensiveness and that, as long as these are taken as a point of departure, we may never be able to achieve social justice in education in a developing country context.

Research approach

The research design utilised in this study is non-empirical in the classical sense of the word (cf. Mouton, 2001; McMillan and Schumacher, 1997), but rather qualitative and analytical (McMillan and Schumacher, 1997: 32). It is non-empirical as it relies on existing or secondary data of a textual nature and it is qualitative since its methodology is that of conceptual analyses. It is analytical because it relies on a reflexive analysis of various kinds of textual and other data.

The research is also informed by the view of Neuman (1994: 384), namely that:

> By looking at historical events or diverse cultural contexts, a researcher can generate new concepts and broaden his or her perspectives. Concepts are less likely to be restricted to a historical time or to a single culture; they can be grounded in the experience of people living in specific cultural and historical contexts.

It should also be noted that the nature and structure of concepts have been the focus of various strands of thought, most notably of analytic philosophy. Analysing concepts and statements represents the hub of activity in analytic philosophy and diverse views on analysis are generated within this philosophical tradition (see Beany, 1998). Similarly, diverse views exist about the nature of concepts which is sometimes described as "*mental formulations of experience*" (Chinn and Kramer, 1999: 78) or as "*words describing mental images of phenomena*" (Fawcett, 1999: 2). Rodgers (2000: 7-31) provides a useful overview of the philosophical debates about the nature of concepts and concludes that there is only a tentative answer to questions about the nature of concepts, although there is a consensus:

> … tha concepts are cognitive in nature and that they are comprised of attributes abstracted from reality, expressed in some form and utilized for some common purpose. Consequently, concepts are more than words or mental images alone. In addition, an emphasis on use alone is not sufficient to capture the complex nature of concepts (ibid: 30).

Morse et al. (1997: 76) capture the purpose of concept analysis that forms the basis of this study, as follows:

(a) to identify gaps in ...knowledge; (b) to determine the need to refine or clarify a concept ... (c) to evaluate the adequacy of competing concepts in their relations to phenomena; (d) to examine the congruence between the definition of the concept and the way is has been operationalized; or (e) to ascertain the fit between the definition of the concept and its ...application.

The above attempt at defining the nature of concepts is unavoidably tentative since considerable diversity exists around the matter. This diversity has research methodological implications that hinge on the nature of the problem to be researched; the philosophical orientation towards the nature of concepts; and the history of the concept (ibid: 28-29). In this article the concept of *social justice* is considered within the context of social, economic, political and cultural arrangements that have shaped and continue to shape its meanings within a developing country context.

Formulations of social justice

Formulations of the concept of *social justice* have a long history that includes the social contract theories of Locke, Rosseau, Kant, Hobbes and others. It is not my intention to offer an overview of these theories here, but to take the Rawlsian notion of "*distributive justice*" as my point of departure. Rawls (as quoted by Keet, 2006) argues that the "conception of social justice" is to be regarded as providing "...*in the first instance a standard whereby the distributive aspects of the basic structure of society are to be assessed.*" This standard should form the basis for "*assigning rights and duties and defining the appropriate division of social advantages*" (ibid: 234). For Rawls (1971) social justice provides a moral frame for modern democracy to come to full expression. It governs the conduct of people in relation to each other. Rawls (1958) further argues that not only does it bring out the idea that justice is a primitive moral notion in that it arises once the concept of morality is imposed on mutually self-interested agents similarly circumstanced, but it emphasises that, fundamental to justice, is the concept of fairness which relates to right dealing between persons who are co-operating with or competing against one another. The question of fairness arises when free persons, who have no authority over one another, are engaging in a joint activity and amongst themselves settling or acknowledging the rules which define it and which determine the respective shares in its benefits and burdens. Central to Rawls' argument is the idea that justice is concerned with establishing the priority of that which is right over that which is good. While goodness can be determined in different kinds of ways, the principles of what is right and just place limitations on the individual's ability to privilege his or her own best interests. He argues that a well-ordered society requires individuals with highly developed moral sensibilities. One may think of a public conception of social justice as constituting the fundamental charter of a well-ordered human association (Rawls, 1971:5).

Rawls (1958) offers two principles of social justice: the principle of *Equal Liberty* claiming that each person is to be granted the greatest degree of liberty consistent with similar liberty for everyone, and, secondly, the *Difference Principle*, stating that

practices that produce inequalities among individuals are allowable only if they work out to everyone's advantage and the positions that come with greater reward are open to all. In essence then, Rawls puts forward the case for distributive justice.

The notion of "*distributive justice*" is also supported by Robert Nozick (1996: 187), but Nozick offers an alternative in his entitlement conception of justice. For Nozick (1996), any distributive state arrived at from a just initial state by means of just transfers will itself be just. This has the result that one person might be justified in living in luxury while others around him are in dire poverty or even starving. He argues for a minimalist state intervention and for the "free operation of the market system" which must provide for the optimisation of opportunities for everyone.

In searching for a theory of social justice in education, Brighouse (2002) argues that a theory on social justice in education is needed that has to inform us what rights people have, which efforts merit strong state protection, how rights should be distributed and principles to manage trade-offs. He asserts that egalitarian liberalism is a normative theory of what ought to be – it is concerned with what principles should guide the design and reform of society. According to Brighouse (2002), egalitarian liberalism is rooted in the conviction that all individuals need a certain minimum of liberties (see Rawls) and that the state must make them accessible to all (see Nozick). Brighouse (2002) proposes two principles that should guide social justice in education: fair equality of opportunity and equality of condition. *Equal opportunity* concentrates on treating all people equally and providing people with equal rights. Treating everyone the same does not necessarily mean fairness of treatment. Equality of opportunity is restricted by the family background and circumstances that put children at a disadvantage. The provision of equality of opportunity must be combined with social justice principles to provide substantive equality to marginalised groups (see Nieuwenhuis, 2005). *Social justice* provides equitable outcomes to marginalised groups by recognising past disadvantage and existence of structural barriers embedded in the social, economic and political system that perpetuate systemic discrimination. Social justice recognises that there are situations where the application of the same rules to unequal groups can generate unequal results. Social justice provides a framework to assess the impact of policies and practices.

Following the line of reasoning put forward by Rawls, Brighouse (2002) asserts that to achieve social justice in education, two principles are needed: personal autonomy and educational equality. *Principle of autonomy* states that each child should have the opportunity to become an autonomous person. He should be able to step back and reflect on the self and educators have the duty to facilitate the process where people can become autonomous. Educational equality is based on the idea that the state must guarantee a set of liberties implying that each child shall have right to equally good education. Equality then means more resources to those with less (e.g. the blind) to ensure the same quality. The quality principle therefore proposes that those with similar levels of ability and willing to exert the similar level of effort should faced

similar prospects regardless of background and, secondly, those with lower levels of ability should receive additional resources than those with more abilities.

The liberal stance taken by authors like Rawls, Nozick and Brighouse on social justice has been critiqued from various sides. Pitt (1998), for example, argues that social justice in education in "new times" is aligned to an ideology of liberal democracy resulting in the emergence of a hyper individualism. This has resulted in the language of economics dominating the social justice and educational debate (see Michael Apple, 1995). In such a situation the social whole, social identity and social cohesion are marginalised. This produces a curriculum which focuses on the education of the individual for economic imperatives. For Pitt (1998) social justice policies act as a political lever to legitimate economic restructuring – they are policies designed to carry disparate groups forward and together, on a common wave of economic reform. Social justice policies are therefore paraded as being "good" for all of society and, in this sense, they are used to "sell" economic reform. Against the backdrop of economic rationalism and liberal democratic ideals, there emerges a language geared to the production of an economically viable self-image, identity, esteem and confidence. As a result, the sense of identity as "social" disappears from view. It erodes the individual's responsibility towards the group.

MacIntyre (1992) also rebukes the liberal notions of justice of Rawls and Nozick, claiming that it is premised on an impossible consensus on a range of principles of moral origin and that the Aristotelian and Lockean notion of "justice as a virtue", which supports the notions of Rawls and Nozick, must be abandoned (MacIntyre, 1992: 199). MacIntyre (ibid: 200-202) further admonishes the centrality of the values of the market place which have displaced the tradition of virtues and insists on the impossibility of genuine moral consensus. This, in turn, makes the social justice notions of Rawls and Nozick logically indefensible. Taylor (1990) also takes issue with Rawls' ideas by showing how much a traditional Rawlsian position frees the citizen from the responsibility to act. The position taken by Taylor is that citizenship requires that the individual commits him or herself to a moral position. Practical reasoning or a deontological approach (i.e. the moral imperative to act in terms of what is morally right) is central to the active citizen.

Gewirtz and Cribb (2002) also reject the liberal view of social justice. They argue for the plurality of the notion of social justice which extends beyond "distributive justice". Such a plural notion includes "distributive justice", "cultural justice" and "associational justice" and these notions exhibit varied meanings on a conceptual plane. Griffiths (2003: 7) similarly talks of the plural "theories of social justice" in education and views "social justice" as "dynamic, as a verb" with the emphasis on "uncertainty, fallibility and risky judgements" in order for us to be all humanly different (ibid: 142). A different position taken is that of Giddens. Giddens (1994) approaches social justice from a radical politics perspective and suggests a framework which draws on philosophic conservatism. It is a framework which connects autonomy with personal and

collective responsibility. Giddens (1994: 10) labels such a philosophical framework as "*a philosophy of protection, conservation and solidarity*". It is a framework which also preserves some of the core values which have been associated with socialism (Giddens 1994). There are six key points in the framework proposed by Giddens (1994):

- repairing damaged solidarities by reconciling autonomy and interdependence;
- recognising the importance of the discussion of ethics, i.e. "life politics";
- allowing individuals and groups to make things happen, a "generative politics";
- creating a democracy where issues are debated openly by the public;
- developing a welfare state which is empowering rather than merely dispensing; and
- confronting the role violence plays at all levels of human affairs.

The intention of Giddens (1991) is to build on the gains resulting from the emergence of human dignity, such as human rights, while at the same time curbing the excesses of individual agency suggested by Rawls. A related line of thinking is found in the work of Nussbaum and Sen which offer a conceptually rich notion of "capabilities" as a normative framework for promoting human well-being and social justice in development debates (also see Unterhalter, 2003, Robeyns, 2006).

Martha Nussbaum (2000) and Amartya Sen (1999) approach social justice from a different angle by proposing a universal set of capabilities that, together, mark what we as human should be *able to be* and *do* in order to meet at least the threshold for living in a fully human way. The capability approach developed by Sen and Nussbaum through dialogue and disagreement for over nearly 20 years (Sen, 1981, 1992, 1999; Nussbaum and Sen, 1993; Nussbaum and Glover, 1995; Nussbaum, 2000) proposes that each of the capabilities is crucial and each is qualitatively different from the rest, yet they are also related to each other, in a variety of complex ways. Sen (1999) argues that capabilities – i.e. well being achievement, well being freedom, agency achievement and agency freedom – should be taken as the way to assess any policy or practice. According to Sen, in evaluating social welfare, including education, capabilities should be equalised, although other aspects of social identities will necessarily be different. Nussbaum (2000) has linked the notion of capabilities not only to an evaluative process with regard to thinking of justice in a range of different settings, but also to a normative exploration of humanness.

Nussbaum (2000) proposes a list of ten central human capabilities, which she regards as the core entitlements for human flourishing and living life with dignity. Nussbaum (2000) makes the important point that governments cannot be expected to deliver all the capabilities, nonetheless "in the political arena" certain human capabilities exert "a moral claim that they should be developed" (ibid: 83). Where resources are sufficient, failure by government to develop central capabilities becomes a social justice problem. The capabilities proposed by Nussbaum (2000: 78-80) are:

- Life – living a fully human life of a normal span;
- Bodily health – being adequately nourished, and with shelter;
- Bodily integrity – including freedom of movement, security from various kinds of assault, and opportunities for sexual expression and reproductive choice;
- Using one's senses – imagination and thought, with freedom of expression and conscience;
- Emotions – in freedom of attachment and association;
- Practical reason – including forming a conception of the good and a life plan, with liberty of conscience;
- Affiliation with others in forms of social interaction like friendship and work, protected against discrimination;
- Relating to other species;
- Play; and
- Control over one's environment, both political and material.

Sen and Nussbaum's work on the capability approach has largely focused on clarifying concepts, rather than on applying them in specific institutional contexts. Their formulation of the capability approach has emerged out of debates in liberal political theory and rooted in ethical individualism.

Conceptualising social justice in a developing country context

The overview presented above reveals a situation where the social justice discourse has been colonised by the dominant Western philosophical and political approach and has largely became a symbol used to legitimate Eurocentric material practices and to consolidate their dominance in world forums. The policies and practices of the dominant social group led to social justice being defined according to economic gain, while marginal themes focus more on the development of social cohesion and a sense of community. In this regard, Cox (as quoted by Pitt, 1998) takes issue with the idea of the citizen as a competitive individual. She urges for a conception of the citizen which goes beyond economic frameworks and recognises the location of human beings within what she refers to as social networks and the social, as opposed to the economic, capital that animates their relationships with one another.

Much of what I have presented thus far is based on the conceptualisation of an idealised or "*imagined social order*" of modern state formations. Because they are idealised and abstracted from context, they bear distinctive signs of their Western modernist legacy (Christie, 2009). Christie (2009) notes that the realities of educational provision in many of the countries of the world – even relatively rich Western countries – do not always match these ideals. Though these ideals provide a hegemonic norm for what education across the world should look like, they are certainly out of the reach

of most of the world's children, as numerous EFA reports show (Unterhalter, 2005). Although the principles and frameworks developed may offer guidelines in terms of the development of legislation and policies, they remain barren abstractions that cannot prevail over socio-economic and political contexts which fundamentally shape what form rights and therefore social justice take in practice. In this regard, Balibar (2006: 25) asserts that: "*different geo-histories engender profoundly heterogeneous points of view on the same questions of principle*". In contrast to wealthier countries, poor countries may simply be unable to afford what international conventions and treaties require them to do, more especially in terms of ideals such as "Education for All". Developing countries may not have the economic resources or political will to provide the type of quality education for all envisaged by the international agenda written in the conference rooms of Paris or Washington. But even if developing countries had the resources and political will, cultural beliefs and practices may work against the right to equality or protection against discrimination (Christie, 2009). In addition, when discussing the markets in education Ball (1993) claims that in the ideal environment every parent is free to make a choice on a school he/she wants to educate his/her children, but the choice is actually never "open" to everybody. In fact, parents who live in a rural area with only one poorly resourced school and poorly trained teachers available to their children are constrained in their school choice and this may result in no choice at all. Their children will never receive the type of equal quality education advocated. In practical terms, this implies that the right to education for all is limited by the socio-economic realities operating at grassroots level.

I would thus like to argue that we need to look at social justice in education not from an idealised theoretical angle, but that we need to depart from the social realities of the situation within which social justice must be achieved. Approaching the concept of social justice as a geo-historical situational bound construction opens it up to continual reconstruction, without foreclosing future forms (Christie, 2009). From a geo-historically perspective, I accept that social-justice is embedded in a struggle for social change, particularly struggles against domination and oppression of varying kinds. In this regard, Henkin (1989) usefully points out that human rights as we currently know them are not about philosophical notions of justice, democracy or "the good society". Rather, they are about claims which individuals may legitimately make upon their societies for certain defined freedoms and benefits. In similar vein, Mandela (1994) stated: "*Our single most important challenge is therefore to help establish a social order in which the freedom of the individual will truly mean the freedom of the individual…. Our definition of the freedom of the individual must be instructed by the fundamental objective to restore the human dignity of each and every South African.*"

Looking then at social justice and education in South Africa Fiske and Ladd (2004: 233) suggest that while South Africa has made good progress in some respects, *"(a) long other dimensions, however, equity has remained elusive for reasons largely related to the country's historical legacy and the pressures it faced as a result of the*

new global economic environment." Many of the freedoms gained after 1994 have only remained available to black families in urban areas with the ability to pay high school fees, transportation and other costs. The majority of black families continue to live in townships and rural areas that were part of the apartheid system and most attend schools that continue to be poorly provided for and have poorly trained teachers (Fiske and Ladd: 2004).

Du Toit (2004) identifies four failures of post-apartheid SA. Firstly, there is little indication that the impact of HIV/AIDS can be moderated, let alone turned around, in the immediate future. An estimated 5.6 million South Africans were HIV positive in 2008, the largest number of any country in the world (Nicolay, 2008). Secondly, violent crime remains at a very high level. In the first ten years of democracy, close to a quarter of a million South Africans (about 230,000) have been murdered. More than 300,000 have survived such attacks and are recorded as victims of attempted murder. Another million or so have become victims of robbery with aggravating circumstances (Du Toit, 2004). Thirdly, poverty remains pervasive. Despite the very successful extension of service delivery, especially those that relate to hard services, by 2005 there were still more than 22 million South Africans (about 48% of the total population) living in poverty (Appel, 2008). Finally, in the midst of this problem of development lies the issue of unemployment inextricably linked to poverty and inequality, and also to crime and HIV/AIDS. Up to this point in time, the problem of unemployment has not abated. In 2009, 12.89 million people were unemployed (Mail & Guardian, 2009). Every one of the above failures of governance impacts adversely on human dignity and the eluding ideal of social justice. Section 9 (1) of the South African Constitution states that: "*Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law*". This is immediately followed by the proviso (Section 9(2)) that "*Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms*" (Republic of South Africa, 1996). This promise is vacuous in achieving social justice if the failures are not addressed.

In the light of these failures we need to look at the capacity of the state to address these failures. Omano (2007) describes the state capacity as the ability of the state to act authoritatively to transform the structural basis of the economy to achieve economic growth, reduce poverty and income and wealth inequalities. Inclusiveness and social justice are central to this conception. Although a number of gains could be claimed in terms of a reduction in both absolute income poverty, which is the income of poor people, and in relative income poverty, social development through social grants, housing, water and sanitation, Netshitenzhe (in Appel, 2008) noted that many studies, including the Income Expenditure Survey by Statistics South Africa, have found a widening inequality gap in the country. Omano (2007) identifies a number of aspects on which the state lacks capacity to come to terms with these failures. In part, the lack of capacity may be because the democratic state lacks the resources, human and material, to meet the myriad of needs.

Looking at social justice in education then would require that we do not simply treat it as a theoretical abstract exercise, but that we take the social context and capacity of the state into consideration. Young (1990; 2000) asserts that we need to be concerned, not only with just procedures, but also with just outcomes. For her, a theory of social justice that recognises human agency, and so gives primacy *to doing* rather than *to having*, must start with an account of social injustice (Young, 1990). By prioritising doing over having she casts doubt on distributive accounts and shifts attention to the role of just procedures as a way of achieving more just outcomes under initial conditions of structural inequality in which the social positions of some people constrain their freedom and well-being and, may I add, also their capabilities. Where race and class produce unequal effects, as in South Africa, we can hardly claim that children have equal rights to education. But even where race and class differentials do not exist at community level other socio-economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment or violence and child abuse or child neglect, will work against achieving the type of social justice that we may propagate at a theoretical level. I would like to argue that you cannot develop a theory of social justice from a predominantly first-world context where the realities of poverty, unemployment and oppression are ignored. The context within which social justice must be acted on cannot be negated in the development of an idealistic notion of what social justice should achieve.

Here again, I think it is important to link up with the work of Young (2000) when she states that ideally, social justice requires the establishment of institutional and other structural conditions for promoting self-determination and self-development of all members of society. These two ideals of social justice are pitted against the two general conditions of injustice, namely, domination and oppression, which are the main impediments to the achievement of genuine agency. Young (2000) describe oppression in terms of five "faces"[2] that inhibit people's capacity for self development. Marginalisation and powerlessness, the faces most pertinent in developing country contexts, are structural forms of oppression that act against meaningful social justice. Marginalisation occurs when a whole category of people is excluded from meaningful participation in social life and is thus potentially vulnerable to deprivation and even extermination. The ongoing poor service delivery uprisings in many parts of South Africa are indicative of the extent to which marginalisation and oppression continue to plaque poorer communities in our society.

Further, genuine inclusion has to overcome external and internal exclusion. Externally excluded groups remain outside of both the distributive domains for public goods and the arenas of public deliberation. External exclusion can be variously imposed; for example, through policies like affirmative action or social practices such as the domestic confinement of women to the home and menial work. Internal exclusion can be much more insidious. Under the pretence of inclusion, previously excluded groups may be brought into a public deliberative domain but remain on the margins of deliberation (Young, 2000). Learners previously excluded from white educational

institutions in South Africa may thus be brought into institutions of learning, but their needs, aspirations and participation remain on the periphery.

The implication of the aforementioned is that strategies are required to ensure substantive inclusion and the elimination of marginalisation and oppression. Miller (1999) proposes three substantive principles of social justice – need, desert and equality – each linked to a mode of human relationship, regarded as an ideal type. In a relationship of "solidaristic community" the principle of justice is distributed according to need. Each member of such a community (a family or a religious group, for example) is obliged to assist in meeting others' needs, in proportion to their ability to do so. As a principle of justice, needs must be able to function in circumstances of relative scarcity where not every need can be met and where needs will compete with other demands. In a relationship of instrumental association, dessert is the principle for just distribution. Typically, Miller (1999) argues, the purposes of an organisation set the criteria for dessert, and justice is done when each member of the organisation receives a reward equivalent to the contribution s/he makes. Equality is the primary principle of just distribution in a relationship of citizenship. Equality is a principle of social justice only in limited circumstances (Miller, 1999). Although justice and distributive equality share a logical grammar, justice does not always require equal distribution. What is more, equality is not a singular concept. Unlike distributive equality, social equality (or equality of status) is not directly connected to justice for, while it identifies an ideal, it does not specify any distribution of rights or resources (Miller, 1999).

Given this critique and analysis of social justice and bringing to bear the realities of social justice within a developing country context, we can now try and determine the space of social justice from a more holistic perspective.
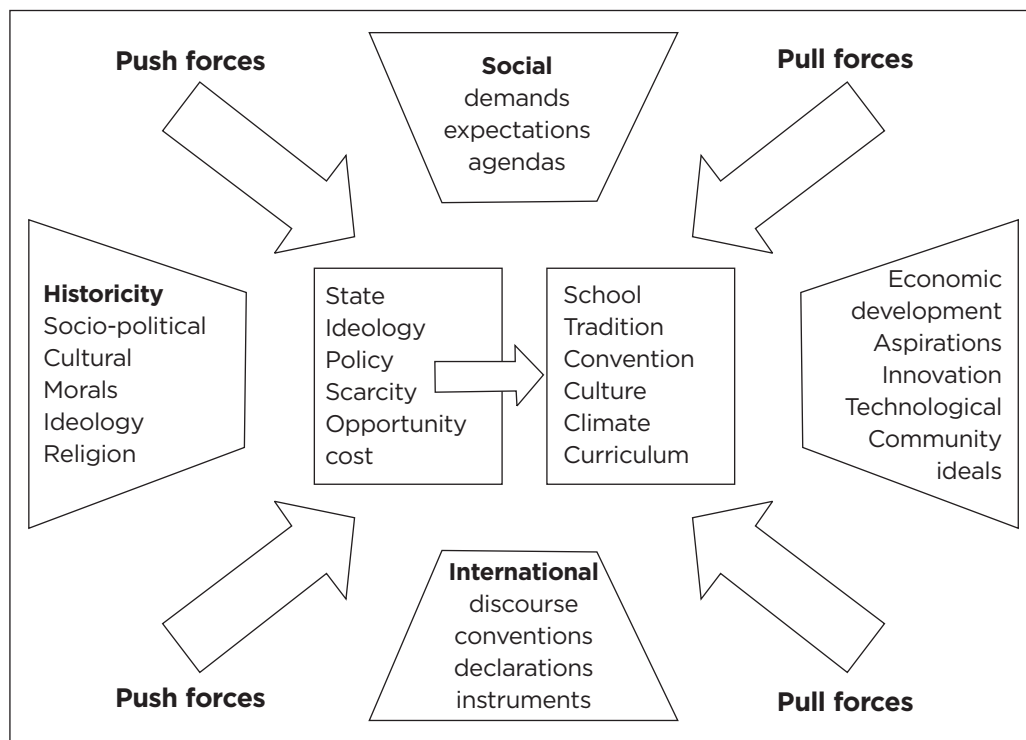
Social justice seen from a holistic perspective

I now venture to conceptualise social justice from a more holistic perspective by taking the geo-historical and socio-political context as a point of departure. The space of social justice within such a complex configuration is graphically illustrated in Figure 1. The basic notion is that social justice must be impressed within a force field of interacting push and pull forces as well as inhibitors. The push/pull forces consist of the historicity of the space wherein social justice is sought (the family, school, community, state etc.); the social demands, expectations and agendas that actively promote a more just dispensation within the context; international trends and discourses (e.g. globalisation, education for all, marketisation of education etc.); and the dynamics of technological advances and economic imperatives for development and job creation. The very same push/pull forces can, however, also act as inhibitors of change (see the lightning bolts in the arrows in Figure 1).

If we were to superimpose this conceptualisation on education we see a similar dynamic process in operation. In a developing country context, like South Africa, the

social justice agenda at the level of the state is co-determined by the ideological assumptions of the ruling party, the policies that flows from it. As the state endeavours to create policy frameworks to address all the concerns and to satisfy its constituency, it may create elaborate frameworks that operate more as political symbolism (Jansen, 2001) rather than genuine attempts to come to terms with the real concerns. This is so as policies are moderated by the co-determinants of scarcity of resources and opportunity cost. There are two consequences of this. First, in prioritising a particular concern over others, the state will allocate funds to that concern (e.g. creating elaborative administrative structures or focusing on a particular sector of the education system, like basic education), thus diverting funds away from other social justice concerns that could have been served. Second, to satisfy its constituency base it may adopt a specific political stance and develop particular policies on a social issue without allocating funds or political will to the concern (e.g. the inclusion of Grade R as part of compulsory education without allocating funds to it to make it part of the formal system of education) which then results in the policies taking on a symbolic nature. The gap between policy and praxis is thus widened. The inability of the state to provide effective service delivery in townships and informal settlements in South Africa over the past number of years and the resultant ongoing violence and demonstrations is a case in point. Only those social justice issues that are actively pursued feature on the state agenda and are thus controlled and subjected to increased managerialism.

Figure 1. The space of social justice in education: a holistic perspective

At the school level where policies must be implemented, the same push and pull forces are in operation but, admittedly, international forces may have less of an impact on the local level. The other factors that have helped shaped the school's tradition, conventions, culture, climate and curriculum in operation (including the hidden curriculum) may operate as strong inhibitors to change. The result of this is that policies handed down from the state are dealt with in a way that will ensure statutory or administrative compliance, without addressing the deeper underlying assumptions, values and beliefs of the school.

Any system committed to creating greater social justice in education will not succeed unless it addresses social justice in a more comprehensive or holistic manner. This, in turn, implies that any state that is committed to social justice in education must come to terms with the following challenges in conceptualising its strategies aimed at promoting and advancing social justice in education:

1. Accept that social justice is not an external condition or system. If it were an external condition or system, we could simply have learned social justice as we would have learned any other content-based subject in schools. Social justice is an ideal – a vision – that should be reinvented and reinvigorated by each generation (Knight, 2001) so that it becomes a way of life that permeates all aspects of our lives. It requires that every citizen take responsibility to protect, advance and promote the values, principles and ideals of social justice. South African history bears witness to the long struggle to realise the ideal of social justice. Whether we succeed in protecting and advancing social justice will depend on the will and ability of all the citizens of the country to work towards shaping social justice in all spheres of life.

2. Realise the importance of creating personal agency that is supportive of social justice. The statement of Rawls (1971) that a well-ordered society requires individuals with highly developed moral sensibilities is important in this regard. The question is: Is justice without morality possible? I am convinced that social justice cannot be served in any shape or form in a self-interested and immoral society. It is not about pointing fingers or playing the blame game where we accuse others of how immoral and corrupt they are. It starts with taking responsibility for the self and to live the values that will promote social justice. Social justice remains an empty ideal unless we can infuse it with meaning by basing justice on certain moral principles and empower people to take personal responsibility for doing and extending justice to others. This is aligned with the principle that each member of such a community (a family or a religious group, for example) is obliged to assist in meeting others' needs, in proportion to their ability to do so (Miller, 1999). The state should thus take human agency seriously and enable the self-development and self-determination of all citizens (Pendlebury & Enslin, 2004).

3. Justice must be achieved amidst scarcity. As a principle of justice, need must be able to function in circumstances of relative scarcity, where not every need can be met and where needs will compete with other demands (Miller, 1999). In a developing country context the state will be required to move more and more in the direction of a welfare state or what Nussbaum (2000) calls ensuring bodily health, that is adequately nourished, and with shelter. In these conditions the welfare state must be empowering rather than merely dispensing (Giddens, 1991). In terms of education, it implies that the state provides opportunities and support for all children to exercise the range of functions necessary for developing their mature adult capabilities (Pendlebury & Enslin, 2004).

4. Accept the geo-historical history of the struggle as something that must be reconciled with attempts to create social justice. This implies that the state must work with communities to repair damaged solidarities by reconciling autonomy and interdependence (Giddens, 1991). It also implies the elimination of structural forms of oppression that restrict people's access to resources and opportunities for developing and exercising their capacities or capabilities for living a decent human life (Young, 2002). In doing this, care must be taken not to create new forms of exclusion that will create new forms of social injustice. Similarly, it must ensure fairness in terms of rewards. You cannot reward state officials for failing to deliver the social services intended to create a just society. Justice is done when each member of an organisation receives a reward equivalent to the contribution s/he makes (Rawls, 1971; Miller, 1999). This also applies to education. You cannot reward a child if no contribution has been forthcoming, and you cannot reward educators for not performing at the level required from them. For example, you cannot promote a child to the next grade automatically if s/he has not participated in the educational process on an equal basis with others.

Conclusion

Brighouse (2002) asserts that, until recently, no theory of justice in education existed and that we cannot simply read a theory off from Rawls, Young, Giddens or any other author. In this article I have critically reviewed a number of theories that could inform such a theory of social justice in education. I have argued that social justice is an ideal – a vision that must become *a way of life* that permeates all aspects of being human. For this, reason it cannot be legislated or achieved through international conventions or declarations – albeit important instruments to promote social justice – social justice must be lived. It requires that every citizen take responsibility to protect, advance and promote the values, principles and ideals of social justice, although for the marginalised and oppressed this is not enough. They need access to

resources and opportunities for developing and exercising their capacities or capabilities for living a decent human life. The road to achieving this is, however, obstructed by the geo-historical and scarcity challenges faced by developing countries. These challenges and their negative impact on achieving social justice in education must be addressed. As long as these conditions exist there cannot be social justice. It is a journey that all developing countries and their people must embark on. In the *Long Walk to Freedom* Nelson Mandela (1994:751) said:

Some say that (the liberation of the oppressed and the oppressor) has now been achieved. But I know that that is not the case. The truth is that we are not yet free: we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.

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Endnotes

[1] This article is based on a paper presented at the Örebro-Unisa International Conference 2010, South Africa (1-3 February 2010).

[2] The five faces of oppression are exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.