(Higher) Education for social justice through sustainable development, economic development and equity

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Abstract
In this article, the author argues that (higher) education for social justice is an encounter, as it invokes both the capacities and cultural stock of individuals and groups. Considering that social justice is inextricably connected to need, desert and equality, it seems plausible to claim that (higher) education for social justice ought to be responsive to the aforementioned demands. The author shows how (higher) education for social justice seems to manifest in instances, such as sustainable development (SD), economic development and equity (not at the expense of equality, but rather as a shift in focus from striving towards equity in an equal manner). And, drawing on the seminal works of Bell, Hooks and Hackman, cultivating equal participation (through deliberation, self-reflexivity and openness), contesting dominance and privilege, and developing a critical understanding and awareness to enact social change respectively seem to be the ingredients for engendering an education for social justice in and beyond the university classroom.

Keywords: education, social justice, teaching, learning, need, desert, equality, sustainable development, equity and economic development

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
Higher education, or ways of engaging with one another, has always been connected with the achievement of something morally worthwhile (Roland Martin 2013). By implication it would not be inappropriate to connect higher education with the attainment of social justice, that is, a condition considered as morally worthwhile for society. This is so because justice cannot be considered as something harmful for society. Now a particular theory of education for social justice can be associated with the ideas of Roland Martin (2013), who proposes (higher) education for social justice as an encounter. A theory of (higher) education as an encounter is concerned with both cultural transmission and individual learning (Roland Martin 2013, 7). Whereas past philosophies of education tended to view an encounter as one dimensional, in which an individual was seen as coming into contact with an external entity that changed the individual, Roland Martin (2013, 9) holds the view that an encounter
involves both an individual changing the entities with which he/she comes into contact, while simultaneously being changed by the entities through the cultural exchanges that unfold. Thus, it is found that twentieth-century British philosopher Michael Oakeshott’s view on (higher) education is concerned with the world into which individuals are initiated, one that is composed of skills, languages, practices and manners of activity, out of which ‘things’ are generated (Roland Martin 2013, 9). That is, the entities in which individuals are initiated change the individuals, and simultaneously the individuals themselves are changed by the entities – a matter of cultural exchanges that occur between individuals and other entities (Roland Martin 2013, 9). Consequently, (higher) education as an encounter unfolds when individuals interact with other entities (other individuals) on the basis of their cultural understandings. When the cultural perspective is missing, a significant portion of the educational process is lost as well (Roland Martin 2013, 9).

Roland Martin’s theory of education holds that (higher) education only occurs if there is an encounter between an individual and a culture in which one or more of the individual’s capacities and one or more items of a culture’s stock become yoked together (or attached) (Roland Martin 2013, 17). In essence, whenever capacities and stock meet and become attached to one another, then (higher) education occurs. In agreement with such a view of education, I contend that (higher) education for social justice should always be considered as an encounter amongst individuals, groups and/or other entities. This means that individuals and others bring to the encounter their capacities (for learning) and cultural understandings and, in turn, together shape the particular encounter. And when the aim of (higher) education is to achieve social justice, the capacities and cultural stock of individuals should invariably be geared towards attaining social justice. Hence, (higher) education for social justice has a better chance of being realised if treated as an encounter, because an encounter would be attached to the capacities that individuals bring to change both entities as well as their cultural stock. And the change process that individuals undergo when their capacities and cultural stock become yoked together is what is called learning (Roland Martin 2013, 19). Now that I have explained (higher) education for social justice as an encounter, I will expound more specifically on this notion of (higher) education for social justice.

Any attempt at expounding on (higher) education for social justice requires some further explanations of (higher) education and social justice respectively. I specifically examine the concepts (higher) education and social justice separately, because education for something (in this instance, social justice) implies that people understand what education is meant for. Therefore, looking at social justice would give people some idea of the intended aims of (higher) education. Previously I argued that (higher) education ought to be considered as an encounter. This encounter, I now posit, has to be aimed at achieving social justice. So, what does social justice involve? Crudely put, when people discuss the concept of social justice in particular, and argues that when some policy or some state of affairs is socially unjust, then they are claiming that a person, or category of persons, enjoys fewer advantages than
that person or category of persons ought to enjoy in society (Miller 2003, 1). Social justice is regarded as an aspect of distributive justice, where the latter, according to the philosopher Aristotle, is concerned with the fair distribution of benefits among the members of various associations (Miller 2003, 2).

The allocation of valued goods (money and commodities, property, jobs and offices, education, medical care, child benefits and child care, honours and prizes, personal security, housing, transportation, and leisure opportunities) and of devalued goods (military service, degrading or hard work and care for the elderly) depends on the workings of the major social institutions (Miller 2003, 7). Thus, individuals should be careful not to understand the term ‘distributed’ literally, but rather to look at Rawls’s ‘basic structure of society’, which is concerned more with the ways in which a range of social institutions and practices together influence the shares of resources available to different people (Miller 2003, 11). There is no doubt that the state is the primary institution whose policies and practices contribute to social justice or injustice, as the state has a major influence on the shares going to each person by enacting property laws, determining taxes, organising the provision of health care, and so forth (Miller 2003, 11). However, the state itself would be largely impotent if it were not for the collaboration of other major institutions and agencies (Miller 2003, 12).

Central to any theory of justice will be an account of the basic rights of citizens, such as freedom of speech and movement, in terms of which people are empowered to deliberate and express their feelings with others in debates and discussions pertaining to particular topics at hand. Also, one of the most contested and inextricable issues arising in debates about freedom is whether and when a lack of resources constitutes a constraint on freedom (Miller 2003, 13). The issue of school fees poses a great challenge for many learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, and thus begs the question how freedom could in fact be attained. Iris Marion Young’s rendition of social justice centrally requires ‘the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression’, and distributive issues should be tackled from this perspective (Miller 2003, 15). Here, concerns for personal autonomy and personal development are instrumental if people are to be empowered to make their own decisions. Power needs to be decentralised to allow people to make their own decisions in the pursuit of social justice. According to Miller (2003, 247), in order for society to be just it must comply with the principles of need, desert (reward) and equality, whereby institutional structures must ensure that an adequate share of social resources is set aside for individuals on the basis of need. Social justice thus requires that the allocating agencies be set up in such a way that vital needs, such as food, medical resources and housing, become the criteria for distributing the various resources for each of the specific needs (Miller 2003, 247). Also, a main issue for social justice is economic desert, which is how people are rewarded for the work that they perform to encompass productive activities, such as innovation, management and labour (Miller 2003, 248). The reward for performance should serve as an incentive for the working class to improve their productivity and efficiency.
In addition to need and desert, a third element of social justice is equality, in terms of which democratic citizens must be treated equally so that they can enjoy their legal, political and social rights (Miller 2003, 250). In essence, in order for social justice to be achieved, citizens must be treated equally. This means that public policy is geared towards meeting the intrinsic needs of every member of society, and the economy is constrained and framed in such a way that the income and other work-related benefits people receive correspond to their respective deserts (Miller 2003, 250). Thus, educators need to constantly instil the underlying principles of social justice so as to ensure that the future youth are able to enjoy a world in which economic, social and political boundaries no longer coincide, and in which people are given the freedom to be responsible and democratic citizens. Hence, if social justice were to be considered the desired outcome of education, then education has to be responsive to need, desert and equality – all aspects that make up social justice. Now that I have examined the notion of (higher) education for social justice, I shall explore some instances in which (higher) education for social justice can be realised. These instances involve the following: sustainable development (SD), economic development and equity.

**INSTANCES OF (HIGHER) EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND EQUITY**

(Higher) education for social justice is an encounter as it involves both the capacities and cultural stock of people (individuals and groups) in enhancing their responsiveness to need, desert and equality. Attending to people’s need(s) and desert (rewards) and engaging with them equally are considered to be ways in which social justice can be realised. In the literature I have identified three major instances in which the realisation of (higher) education for social justice along the lines of need, desert and equality seems to play a prominent role. These instances are the following: SD, economic development, and equity. I shall now discuss the realisation of social justice in each of the aforementioned instances.

Firstly, the issue of sustainability in (higher) education as an instance of social justice has been widely argued for: Fien (2002, 143) holds the view that SD can contribute to harnessing more informed understandings of ‘principles of the Earth Charter’ – environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development and peace in relation to the achievement of justice through education; Stables (2002, 53) claims that SD is a notion of (environmental) education that brings human reflexivity into a just dialogue with the environment; and Suavé (2005, 30) posits that SD makes explicit concerns for human development, the maintenance of life and the cultivation of social equity. In line with these views, I want to look more closely at the notion of SD as an instance of social justice in (higher) education.

SD is defined as measures put in place to meet the developmental needs of present generations without jeopardising or compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own developmental needs (GHK 2008, 7). However, SD does not
focus solely on environmental issues, but broadly captures the different dimensions of development (Bonnett 1999, 313; Gough 2006, 50; GHK 2008, 7). Moreover, education for sustainable development (ESD) is regarded as a lifelong process, from early childhood to higher education, in which values, lifestyles and attitudes are established from an early age. It is considered a ‘life-wide’ process during which learning takes place and subsequently where individuals, take on different roles in society (Hargreaves 2007, 223; UN in GHK 2008, 6). Furthermore, education is a prerequisite for promoting behavioural changes and providing all citizens with the competencies required to achieve sustainable development, and success in revising unsustainable trends depends largely on high-quality education (GHK 2008, 6). Education and training should contribute to all three spheres of sustainable development, namely, the social, economic and environmental spheres (GHK 2008, 6; Lawson 2005, 135).

Social sustainability is concerned with building sustainable and harmonious communities and includes a compilation of actions and efforts to promote development that does not compromise or deplete the stock of human and social resources, but rather contributes to the enhancement of their potential (GHK 2008, 10). A selection of thematic issues relating to the social pillar of sustainable development includes health, community cohesion, social equity, demography, management of migration and cultural diversity, equal opportunities, flexicurity, and development of human and capital skill (GHK 2008, 11). The term ‘economic sustainability’ is defined as the way to achieve economic growth whilst respecting environmental limits, discovering new measures and developing new methods of minimising environmental degradation, and conserving and preserving natural resources effectively and efficiently (GHK 2008, 9; Scott and Gough 2003, 12).

Since its international launch in New York on 1 March 2005, the United Nations (UN) Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) has made considerable progress in terms of concrete activities and actions on the ground, where progress has been made in both institutional and programmatic areas at the international, regional and national levels (Wals 2009, 4). While the roots of the ESD can be traced back to the early 1970s, its first flowering occurred at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (Elliot 2013, 17; Wals 2009, 7). UNCED resulted in a landmark publication agenda called *Agenda 21*, which provides a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by UN agencies, governments and major organisations (NGOs, CSOs and networks) to reduce the human impact on the environment (Wals 2009, 7). Chapter 36 of *Agenda 21*, on education, training and public awareness, for which UNESCO was designated as Task Manager, identifies four overarching goals that include: promoting and improving the quality of education; reorienting the curricula; raising public awareness of the concept of SD; and training the workforce (Elliot 2013, 16; Gough 2006, 51; Wals 2009, 7). The rationale of ESD is to build a global society in which everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education and to learn the value, lifestyles and
behaviour required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation (UN 2011, 1). And, considering that societal transformation is a desired goal of SD, it can safely be claimed that SD is a way in which social justice manifests itself in society, considering the latter’s insistence that societal transformation should ensue. In line with such a view of societal transformation, Bell (1997, 3) avers that such transformation cannot be delinked from an education for social justice. Such an education insists that learners play an active role in their own learning and that they collaborate with educators to establish empowering, democratic and critical educational environments. In addition, Bell (1997, 3) highlights the importance of SD as an instance of (higher) education for social justice by arguing that the goal of such an education ‘is [the] full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs’. And, considering that the issue of need is constitutive of social justice, ESD, in the words of Bell (1997, 3), ‘should be democratic, participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change’.

In essence, in the current, article I am concerned primarily with an ESD as an instance of (higher) education for social justice that connects with cultivating pedagogical activities in universities aimed at making students aware of some of the socio-cultural dimensions of SD, in particular emphasising the importance of human coexistence through peace, citizenship, ethics, equality, poverty reduction and cultural diversity. As aptly put by Bell (1997, 4), (higher) education for social justice cannot be blind to the equitable distribution of resources [a matter of addressing need], and learner empowerment in the service of sustainable social change – a view supported by Schreuder, Reddy and Le Grange (2002, 133) and Gough (2006, 49). This brings me to a discussion of economic development as an instance of (higher) education for social justice.

Economic development, the second instance in the discussion, can be regarded as ‘a process of improving people’s lives’ (Kabuya 2011, 2). In sub-Saharan Africa, development should involve ‘the ability to meet basic needs and to sustain economic growth, [alleviate] poverty, [create] wealth, and economic freedom … a change in living standards, quality of life, women’s status and a change of people’s attitude to work’ (Kabuya 2011, 2). Considering the aforementioned, economic development (in South Africa) has to be a measure for gauging the economic wellbeing of the population and ought to reflect the economic output (eg, agricultural and industrial), infrastructure (eg, power and transportation facilities), physical health and level of education, and cultural, political, legal and economic differences in governance (Kabuya 2011, 2). Bearing in mind that economic development has to do with the economic wellbeing, output, infrastructure, health, education, political and cultural aspects of people’s lives, development also depends on how well the aforementioned are managed. In other words, economic development depends on ‘good governance’ (Kabuya 2011, 2). Moreover, literature on development abounds and the following view on development stands out: Development is economic development, and the latter is equated with economic growth. Development is considered as ‘good
change’ in the realm of ecology, economics and all spheres of societal, political and cultural life (Chambers in Ngowi 2009, 260). Other views include the following: (1) Seers (in Ngowi 2009, 260) posits that economic development means creating conditions to realise human potential, reduce poverty and social inequalities, and create employment opportunities; (2) Todaro (in Ngowi 2009, 260) views economic development as bringing about major changes in social structures and national institutions, accelerating growth, reducing inequality and eradicating poverty; (3) Zdeck (in Ngowi 2009, 261) views economic development as creating jobs and assets, establishing an investment climate in distressed communities and providing access to quality education, social services and decent housing; and (4), Ngowi (2009, 260) views economic development as a dynamic and fluid process that involves growth and change in relation to improved performance in the factors of production and production techniques. For the current article, my interest is in economic development as a process of improving the living conditions of people (such as through better housing, health care, education and job opportunities); protecting the environment and people; and enhancing the political and social wellbeing of people. Thus, economic development can be considered as an instance of an education for social justice.

Education and the quality of universities can broadly be linked to development, and the impact of universities on the economy can also be based particularly on the quality of educators. Aspects, such as student performance – creativity, the ability to work in teams or personality traits, should be the focus of attention, in particular where an emphasis on using basic cognitive skills that can ensure economic returns as the monetary reward needs to be affirmed by educators (Hanushek 2004, 59; Hanushek and Woesmann 2008, 607). That is, educators need to emphasise to students that their performance in learning, in addition to having a meritocratic end, should also be geared towards enhancing their economic status. The underlying notion of economists on the economic outcomes of human capital is that individuals make investment decisions in themselves through schooling, where the accumulated skills that are relevant for the labour market from these investments over time represent an important facet of human capital development (Hanushek 2004, 60; Hanushek and Woesmann 2008, 609). In the same way that a firm’s investment in physical capital reaps returns in the form of income, so does the investment in human capital hopefully return future economic benefits (Hanushek 2004, 60; Hanushek and Woesmann 2008, 611).

In the main, student performance in universities can engender considerable benefits for society. Improvements in universities, therefore, will yield direct benefits for local economies, as local economies benefit greatly from a more educated labour force, leading to higher local growth (Hanushek 2004, 69). With enhanced economic gains, many universities can become more self-sufficient in providing better (higher) education for students, as sufficient economic resources will be available to cover the expenditure of these higher education institutions (HEIs). Also, there is evidence to suggest that the improvement in the quality of the educator force is central to
any overall improvements, including learning. Improving the quality of the educator force, for instance in South Africa, however, would require a new set of incentives, related to hiring, retention and remuneration (Hanushek 2004, 70).

(Higher) education is widely accepted as a leading instrument for promoting economic growth, and for a continent such as Africa, where economic growth is essential if the continent is to overcome the vicious cycle of poverty, education is particularly important (Bloom, Canning and Chan 2006, 1). For decades, development agencies have neglected tertiary education as a means to improve economic growth and mitigate poverty in favour of primary and secondary education (Bloom et al 2006, 1). Enrolment rates for higher education in sub-Saharan Africa are by far the lowest in the world, with the gross enrolment ratio in the region standing at only 5 per cent (Bloom et al 2006, 1). In the period from 1985 to 1989, 17 per cent of the World Bank’s worldwide education sector spending was on higher education, but the proportion allotted to higher education declined to 7 per cent from 1995 to 1999 (Bloom et al 2006, 1). However, recent evidence suggests that higher education is a determinant as well as a result of income, can produce public and private benefits, such as greater tax revenue, increased savings and investment, and may lead to a more entrepreneurial and civil society (Bloom et al 2006, 1). Higher education also can improve a nation’s health, reduce population growth, improve technology and strengthen governance (Bloom et al 2006, 1).

Moreover, tertiary education can help economies to keep up with or catch up to more technologically advanced societies, where higher education graduates are more likely to be aware of and better able to use new technologies (Bloom et al 2006, 15). These higher education graduates are more likely to develop new tools and skills themselves, by which their knowledge can improve the skills and understanding of non-graduate co-workers and lead to entrepreneurship, which may result in job creation (Bloom et al 2006, 15). Tertiary education also could benefit economies through producing qualified teachers who can enhance the quality of primary and secondary education systems; training physicians and other health workers to improve society’s health, raising productivity and work; nurturing governance and leadership skills to provide countries with the talented individuals needed to establish a policy environment favourable for growth; setting up robust and fair legal and political institutions and developing a culture of job and business creation; and addressing environmental problems and improving security against internal and external threats (Bloom et al 2006, 16). Research has shown that, in sub-Saharan Africa, the current production level is about 23 per cent below its production possibility frontier, and a one-year increase in the tertiary education stock in the region would raise the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita by only 12.2 per cent (Bloom et al 2006, 1). The growth rate of GDP per capita would rise by 0.24 percentage points in the first year as a result of convergence on a higher education state (Bloom et al 2006, 1).

In recent years, the World Bank and major donor governments have begun to reconsider their exclusive focus on primary education and are now placing greater emphasis on secondary and tertiary education, in an endeavour to achieve greater
economic growth and to eradicate poverty. There are signs of progress that suggest that sub-Saharan African states have put measures in place to strengthen their tertiary education systems, but this progress is limited in comparison with that in other world regions (Bloom et al. 2006, 1).

Higher education may benefit individuals as well as societies through the development of democratic and informed citizens and through the promotion of social inclusion and cohesion. It is through non-monetary societal gains that it becomes apparent that there are lower rates of crime, greater and more informed civic participation and improved performance across a host of socio-economic measures in societies where there are high proportions of university graduates (Malaza 2013, 1). Also, there is increasing evidence that suggests that universities in Africa are seen as training grounds for democratic citizenship (Malaza 2013, 1). High participation rates in higher education seem to be linked to greater productivity of workers, which translates into improved outputs and outcomes for the knowledge economy (Malaza 2013, 1). High levels of education also are associated with a country’s innovative capacity and the development of many key technologies (Malaza 2013, 1). Therefore, to ensure that learners gain access to HEIs, secondary education should provide a stronger learner clientele that can enter HEIs. The possibility for economic development will then be far greater than in the case of learners who never gain access to a higher education level in society.

The 23 public universities and higher education institutes in South Africa play an important role in the country’s economic growth, with the institutions directly and indirectly contributing 2.1 per cent of the GDP. The contribution of these HEIs is just below the contribution of the gold industry and substantially higher than the contribution of forestry, clothing and leather products, textiles, restaurants, hotels and others (Malaza 2013, 1). Universities in Africa, and particularly in South Africa, are responsible for implementing poverty-reduction schemes; creating economic opportunities; conducting research on environmental sustainability; improving health care; and developing outreach programmes in terms of social inclusion and social capital (Malaza 2013, 2). Furthermore, global partnerships have been forged through higher education that have aided South Africa in gaining access to the vast resources available to developed countries through co-operation agreements with universities situated in these countries (Malaza 2013, 2). It has become increasingly evident that universities have played a great role in the South African economy in particular, with emphasis placed on social and community development. The rest of the African states clearly need to adopt such an approach to higher education so as to uplift their communities and to educate the youth to be better prepared for their roles in society. Only then can a move be made towards greater equity in trying to ensure that social justice is enacted.

Research has shown that rich, resourced nations pay inadequate attention to the expenditure of public education, which inadvertently has resulted in poor enrolment in schools (Gylfason 2001, 850). Consequently, it is found that the OPEC countries send 57 per cent of their youth to secondary schooling, compared to 64 per cent for
the world as a whole, and spend on average a mere 4 per cent of their gross national product (GNP) on education, compared to nearly 5 per cent for the rest of the world (Gylfason 2001, 851). Education stimulates economic growth and improves the lives of people through increased labour force efficiency, democracy, good governance and improved health, and through enhancing equality (Gylfason 2001, 851).

Public expenditure on education varies a great deal from country to country, and in the 1990s, countries such as Haiti, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nigeria and Sudan, spent as little as 1 per cent of their GNP on education; whereas others (Namibia, Botswana and Jordan) spent between 8 per cent and 10 per cent of their GNP on education (Gylfason 2001, 852). Also, what needs to be taken seriously is that public expenditure may be supply led and education of mediocre quality, failing to ensure efficiency, equality and growth compared to private expenditure on education, which is demand led and thus perhaps likely to be of a higher quality (Gylfason 2001, 851).

Likewise, research has confirmed that workers leaving primary industries, such as agriculture, fisheries, forestry or mining, generally have limited labour market education to offer new employers in other industries, except in modern agriculture and high tech oil-drilling operations (Gylfason 2001, 856). There is thus a shortage of high-skilled labour and capital in these primary industries, reinforcing the need for investment in education and training as an engine for growth, where improved education would shift comparative advantage away from primary production towards manufacturing and services to accelerate learning and growth (Gylfason 2001, 856). It is evident from the literature that countries rich in natural resources are also at risk. Firstly, too many people become locked in low-skill, intensive natural resource-based industries, failing to enhance their education as well as their children’s education and earning power (Gylfason 2001, 858). Secondly, the authorities and other inhabitants of resource-rich countries become overconfident and, therefore, tend to underrate and overlook the need for quality education, as well as good economic policies (Gylfason 2001, 856). What I have shown is that economic development at a sustained level is intertwined with education for social justice on the grounds that the former (economic development) is linked to improving both the capacities and skills of people (including taking into account their cultural stock). On the one hand, education for social justice in relation to economic development has in mind what hooks (2003) refers to as enhancing the cognitive abilities of learners to attend to social inequities by becoming more critical and self-reflective. On the other hand, hooks (2003) intimates that learners, through their criticality and self-reflexivity, can become effective change agents in the classroom and in their communities, specifically in relation to the issues of privilege and dominance. These, as I have shown, often work against the desert people should enjoy collectively (equitable distribution of wealth and resources in line with what people need to be rewarded for). She argues that, unless privilege and dominance are reflected on critically to prevent all people in society from receiving their desert, oppression and marginalisation will persist (hooks 2003). Hence, an education for social justice in the form of economic development aims to cultivate a critical awareness in students and educators that an
abuse of privilege and dominance will perpetuate social injustices.

Thirdly, democracy and education are intricately linked with social thought and practice, and democracy, in all of its contemporary and historic forms, has played an important role in shaping public education (Green and Kurth-Schai 2008, 1). Historically, (higher) education and democracy have evolved in response to rapid urbanisation, globalisation, cultural diversity and economic growth (Green and Kurth-Schai 2008, 1). Through the dynamic prowess of education, educators have been able to adopt new methodologies of teaching, in which the Internet has been an important medium for both teachers and learners in allowing for ease of communication between the parties or for interactive and creative lessons in class. If one looks at American democracy, and specifically at deep democracy as an embodiment of American society, it (deep democracy) advocates, in its fullest capacity, for both social and civic life (Green and Kurth-Schai 2008, 3). Public education with deep democratic principles and values provides direct experience with practices of collective engagement, where young democratic citizens are to enact complex processes of teaching and learning that would lead to deliberative competence, inclusive participation and social imagination in social transformation (Green and Kurth-Schai 2008, 3). A university that encourages democratic principles and values would allow students to deliberate with their peers, educators, parents and other members of society, which deliberation is important for inclusion and, hence, for social justice in higher education (Glass 2009, 10).

A deep democracy is radically social, compellingly aesthetic and persistently exploratory, criteria which are inherent to a good society and are long-standing aspirations for a social order that supports the establishment of justice (Green and Kurth-Schai 2008, 5). Politics and education, at all levels, involve dominant elites and special interest groups and, with an over reliance on these established patterns, supports isolation and exclusion, structures a narrowed discourse and establishes forms of opposition in schools and society (Green and Kurth-Schai 2008, 5). The state needs to distance itself from these dominant elites and special interest groups to ensure a more democratic education system, free from isolation and exclusion. Developing a deeper set of democratic processes through the broad engagement of school-age, youth and adult citizens and disadvantaged groups to support border crossings between disparate positions and expectations would expand the number of active participants across their life span and at all stages of social enquiry, decision-making and implementation (Green and Kurth-Schai 2008, 6).

Deep democracy requires persistent collaboration in teaching and learning to support principled risk-taking, maintain openness and yield adaptive responses, as deep social inquiry requires creativity, vision and deliberation rather than caution, constraint and convenience of closure (Green and Kurth-Schai 2008, 6). The fulfilment of the transformative purpose of deep democracy requires continuing innovation in civic education, and the latter must emphasise pedagogies that support movement beyond the illusions of convenience, convergence, certainty and control (Green and Kurth-Schai 2008, 7) – a matter of enhancing education for social justice,
as democratic education is a matter of pursuing an encounter. Educators need to adopt pedagogies that encourage students to be active participants in the classroom, thus empowering these democratic citizens and preparing them for their roles in society (Dewey in Glass 2009, 11).

Also, civic education for a deeper democracy must engage a diverse set of pedagogies that should extend collective wisdom concerning significant social issues; expand possibilities for thought and action beyond those initially brought by individuals; enrich relationships by increasing the number and variety of meaningful connections among diverse participants; and enhance capacities for continued engagement in civic learning and public life that narrow the gap between democratic aspirations and real-world accomplishments (Green and Kurth-Schai 2008, 7). A more inclusive, aesthetically and exploratory informed public education broadens opportunities for richer experiences of a democratic life (Green and Kurth-Schai 2008, 7). Thus, a more inclusive education encourages greater equity in society, hence social justice, according to which every participant in the education system has an equal right to quality education.

Learning is seen as vital for countries’ economic development and, more importantly, for their social cohesion and quality of life (Levin 2003, 5). Also, the average amount of education and, more importantly, the distribution of education across the population, are of the utmost importance for any nation (Levin 2003, 5). Equity in education is important for several reasons. Firstly, it is a human right for all citizens to have a reasonable opportunity to develop their capacities and to participate fully in society (Levin 2003, 5). If students are given the opportunity to better themselves through quality education, it paves the way for them to create opportunities for themselves in the workplace as responsible and democratic citizens. Secondly, insofar as opportunity is not distributed fairly there will be an underutilisation of talent (Levin 2003, 5). Societies bear the brunt because these individuals are not able to develop their skills and abilities and, as a result, societies lose many teachers, doctors, scientists and others in the respective professions. Thirdly, high levels of education are associated with positive outcomes, such as improved employment and earnings, but also health, longevity, civic participation and more (Dearden, Reed and Van Reenen in Levin 2003, 5). Fourthly, social cohesion or trust is itself an important factor supporting successful countries (Levin 2003, 5). In essence, increasing equity in education, an important facet of social justice, thus can have a range of benefits for countries.

Based on the literature, there are two underlying dimensions of equity. The first dimension deals with whether the overall levels of provision are sufficient and of the right kind, and the specific nature of these concerns varies with the level of education and with the life stage of the students (Levin 2003, 7). Looking at schooling in particular, although universal access is provided, there are inherent concerns about equality in education, and in particular the provision of special education or the distinction between general and vocational education (Levin 2003, 7). Further, the transition from education to work, and the overall availability of work for young
people and their relative wages, are of greatest concern (Levin 2003, 7). Many graduates are unable to find work, particularly in South Africa, because of a shortage of jobs. The minimal wages offered to young recruits at grassroots level also raises the question whether there is equity in the distribution of income among individuals in the workplace.

The second dimension is concerned with the participation and success of learners from particular ethnic groups (indigenous people and immigrants), who have tended to experience lower levels of participation and success in all areas of education (Levin 2003, 7). Family socio-economic status remains the strongest predictor of educational attainment, for which attention needs to be paid particularly to the most disadvantaged segments of society (Levin 2003, 7). During the apartheid regime, many black individuals were marginalised, and were not allowed to gain access to affluent high schools. This level of marginalisation is still found in terms of education today, with learners from poor and disadvantaged areas being unable to gain access to richer schools because they are unable to meet the demands of these schools in terms of the exorbitant school fees charged. The state needs to address this concern to ensure that society is more equitable and just.

Gender also represents an equity dimension that is significantly different from the other two dimensions because, in many areas of education and in many countries, female achievement has equalled or surpassed that of males (Levin 2003, 7). However, gender equity is still of great concern, as women are still disadvantaged in the labour market and are still unequally represented in many areas of study and occupations (Levin 2003, 7).

The state needs to address the issue of gender equality in order to ensure that there is equity in the labour market. Historically, there have been two main approaches to addressing equity in education. The first approach focuses on what is called ‘equality of opportunity’, in which access to education is critical and where it is the responsibility of the state to provide opportunities to participate (Levin 2003, 8). The second approach is concerned with equity in the results of education, such as graduation and access to employment (Levin 2003, 8). However, providing the same opportunity is not enough because different people will need different kinds of opportunities and some people will need more support in order to be successful (Levin 2003, 8). The state, therefore, needs to deal with the issue of when the outcomes of education are in fact inequitable.

There is great concern about the marginal impact of money, in terms of how much money or whether more money in fact would further make a noticeable difference to education (Levin 2003, 10). There are both empirical and theoretical reasons underpinning the possibility that additional input of resources is more likely to produce diminishing marginal returns (Levin 2003, 10). That is, once a certain level of education has been provided, simply spending more money is unlikely to lead to equivalent or greater returns in outcomes (Levin 2003, 10). The classic economic question of efficiency thus begs us to question what kinds of inputs are more likely to produce the most value in terms of outcomes (Levin 2003, 10). The question
that needs to be asked is whether resources are best allocated to particular levels of education, or to education itself as opposed to other social purposes (Levin 2003, 10). Also, it is important that a consideration of equity in education should not jump to the conclusion that the necessary strategies all involve extensions of educational practices, or that they all lie within the education system itself (Levin 2003, 10).

Countries need to address equity in education through a range of policy measures aimed at three goals: encouraging individual participation, changing the way institutions provide education, and changing the broader social and economic conditions that affect participation and success (Levin 2003, 10). Educator Horace Mann, who greatly influenced public education and schooling in the United States, foresaw public education as ‘the great equaliser’ (Nieto in Mwonga 2005, 3). Public education in democratic principles fosters equal access as an important principle, in terms of individuals of different races, cultures, religions, social class and ethnicity have equal access to schools, universities and other education institutions (Mwonga 2005, 3). However, as is evident in society, public schools have failed to provide an equitable education for many students through the prevailing discrimination that exists in the structure of schools, the curriculum, and interactions among teachers and learners (Nieto in Mwonga 2005, 3). This is based on the notion that learners of different races, cultures, religions, social class and ethnicity are regarded as inferior to a culture of mainly white European, Anglo-Saxon middle to upper middle class males (Mwonga 2005, 3).

Now, if an education for social justice through equity aims at producing a more just society, then such an education for equity should, in the words of Hackman (2005, 103), ‘become part of lived practice in the classroom’. This implies that learners should be taught ‘that their rights as citizens in this society carry responsibilities – of participation, voice, and protest – so that this can actually become a society of, by, and for all of its citizens’ (Hackman 2005, 106; italics in original). In other words, classroom activities should not only create a space for learners to deliberate about contemporary issues such as diversity and democratisation, but also a space where they learn to make a consistent commitment to self-reflection and personal interrogation in order to ‘enact [equitable] social change and growth’ (Hackman 2005, 107).

**CONCLUSION**

I have argued that (higher) education for social justice is an encounter, as it invokes both the capacities and cultural stock of individuals and groups. Considering that social justice is inextricably connected to need, desert and equality, it seems plausible to claim that (higher) education for social justice ought to be responsive to the aforementioned demands. I have also shown how (higher) education for social justice seems to manifest in instances such as SD, economic development and equity (not at the expense of equality, but rather as a shift in focus from striving towards equity in an equal manner). And, drawing on the seminal works of Bell, hooks and
Hackman, I have shown that cultivating equal participation (through deliberation, self-reflexivity and openness), contesting dominance and privilege, and developing a critical understanding and awareness to enact social change respectively, seem to be the ingredients to engender an education for social justice in and beyond the university classroom.

REFERENCES


