*Jan Nieuwenhuis*

# Social justice in education today

Authors on social justice provide a specific lens through which social justice in education can be viewed. They construct an ideal that cannot be legislated or achieved by means of international conventions or declarations – social justice is seated in the hearts and minds of people and it must be lived. It requires that every citizen should take the responsibility to protect, advance and promote the values, principles and ideals of social justice. In achieving these noble ideals developing countries need to come to terms with certain challenges that must be addressed lest social justice remain but a dream. This article argues that as long as these conditions exist there cannot be social justice.

## Sosiale geregtigheid in onderwys vandag

Skrywers op die gebied van sosiale geregtigheid verskaf 'n bepaalde lens van waaruit sosiale geregtigheid in die onderwys beskou kan word. Hierdie skrywers konstrueer 'n ideaal wat nie deur wetgewing of internasionale konvensies of deklarasies bereik kan word nie – sosiale geregtigheid moet tuiskom in die harte en gedagtes van mense en dit moet geleef word. Dit vereis dat elke burger verantwoordelikheid opneem om die waardes, beginsels en ideale van sosiale geregtigheid te beskerm en te bevorder. Binne die konteks van 'n ontwikkelende land is daar bepaalde uitdagings wat aangespreek moet word om te voorkom dat sosiale geregtigheid bloot 'n droom bly. Daar word geargumenteer dat vir solank as wat hierdie uitdagings bestaan, daar nie sprake kan wees van sosiale geregtigheid nie.

*Prof Jan Nieuwenhuis, Dept of Education Management and Policy Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria; E-mail: jan.nieuwenhuis@ up.ac.za*

SUN MEDIA
BLOEMFONTEIN

I n an earlier publication it was argued that absolute equality be-
tween people is a theoretical abstraction that cannot be defended
(Nieuwenhuis 2005). The notion of "complete" or "absolute"
equality is self-contradictory. Two unique individuals and even
identical twins are never completely equal; they are different (pecu-
liar) in a variety of interesting and intriguing ways:

> Nature spreads its gifts unequally, so that inequalities among men
> on virtually any trait or characteristic one might mention are obvi-
> ous and probably ineradicable. […] Inequality, while it may be the
> root of much that is cruel and hateful in human life, is also the root
> of just about everything that is admirable and interesting (Schaar
> 1997: 167).

Although philosophers such as Tugendhat & Wolf (1983: 170)
consider absolute qualitative equality admissible as a borderline
concept, it will not be defensible to assume that equality can
be understood to mean absolutely the same. I have suggested
a descriptor of equality by locating equality in the notion that
objects that share similar characteristics could be regarded as
being equal in terms of their common characteristics. I have
argued that "equality" denotes the relation between the objects
that are compared and that every comparison presumes a *tertium
comparationis*, a concrete attribute defining the respect in which
the equality applies. In terms of what it means to be human this
*tertium comparationis* is our shared humanity. In this regard I argued
in support of Adler (1981: 165) that

> […] by being human, we are all equal – equal as persons, equal
> in our humanity. One individual cannot be more or less human
> than another, more or less of a person. The dignity we attribute to
> being a person rather than a thing is not subject to differences in
> degree. The equality of all human beings is the equality of their
> dignity as persons.

Acknowledging the dignity of persons by extension implies
acknowledging their right to develop their unique capabilities to
the fullest, but doing so again highlights the inequalities between
people. Whereas, within the South African context, laws and
white papers on education uphold the principle of equality and
the promotion and protection thereof, it stresses the importance

of the development of individual talents and capacities. In this regard the South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996, states:

> Whereas this country requires a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in educational provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance, contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society, protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages, uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators, and promote their acceptance of responsibility for the organisation, governance and funding of schools in partnership with the State [...]

The tension between promoting the equality by eradicating past injustices and developing the unique talents of people is obvious, thus raising the question as to how social justice could be best served in education. It is against this background that one needs to revisit social justice in education. The article will first examine some of the formulations and conceptualisations of social justice and indicate why these formulations are deficient. Secondly, it will be argued that some of the commonly held assumptions are lacking in comprehensiveness, and that as long as these are taken as a starting-point, social justice in education will never be achieved.

## 1.   Formulations of social justice

Formulations of the concept of social justice have a long history that includes the social contract theories of Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hobbes and others. This article does not intend to give an overview of these theories, but takes the Rawlsian notion of "distributive justice" as starting-point. Rawls (1958: 163) 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" (Rawls 1958: 173). 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) offers two principles of social justice: the principle of "equal liberty", claiming that every person is to be granted the greatest degree of liberty consistent with similar liberty for everyone and the "difference principle", stating that practices that produce inequalities among individuals are permissible 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.

Robert Nozick (1996: 187) also supports the notion of "distributive justice", and 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. Thus 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 all.

Brighouse (2002), in searching for a theory of social justice in education, argues that a theory on social justice in education is needed to inform one of 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: 181), egalitarian liberalism is rooted in the conviction that all individuals need a certain minimum of liberties (in this regard he supports Rawls) and that the state must make them accessible to all (*cf* Nozick). Brighouse (2002: 183) proposes two principles that should guide social justice in education: fair equality of opportunity and equality of condition. Fair equality of opportunity concentrates on treating all people equally and providing all people with equal rights. But treating everyone the same does not necessarily mean fairness of treatment (Nieuwenhuis 2005). Equality of opportunity is restricted by 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. Equality of condition 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. Equality of condition recognises that there are situations where application of same rules to unequal groups can generate unequal results. The two principles of social justice should provide a framework to assess the impact of policies and practices on education.

Following the line of reasoning forwarded by Rawls, Brighouse (2002: 185) asserts that personal autonomy and educational equality is required in order to achieve social justice in education. Personal autonomy states that each child should have the opportunity to become an autonomous person. S/he should be able to reflect on the self and educators have the duty to facilitate the process whereby people can become autonomous. Educational equality is based on the notion that the state must guarantee a set of liberties implying that each child shall have the right to equally good education. Equality then means more resources to those with less (for instance, the disadvantaged) 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 face 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 such as Rawls, Nozick and Brighouse on social justice has been widely critiqued. 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 resulted in the language of economics dominating the social justice and educational debate (*cf* Apple 1995). In such a situation the social whole, social identity and social cohesion are marginalised. This produces a curriculum that focuses on the education of the individual for economic imperatives. For Pitt (1998: 2), 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 background 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. In this regard, Cox (Pitt 1998: 4) takes issue with the idea of the citizen as a competitive individual. She calls on a conception of the citizen that 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.

Alasdair MacIntyre also rebukes Rawls' and Nozick's liberal notions of justice, 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" must be abandoned (MacIntyre 1992: 199). MacIntyre (1992: 200-2) also admonishes the centrality of the values of the marketplace which have displaced the tradition of virtues, and insists on the impossibility of genuine moral consensus. Charles Taylor also takes issue with Rawls' ideas by showing how much a traditional Rawlsian position frees the citizen from the responsibility to act. According to Taylor (1990: 34), citizenship requires that the individual commits him-/herself to a moral position. Practical reasoning or a deontological approach (in other words, the moral imperative to act in terms of what is morally right) is central to the active citizen. The position taken by Gewirtz & Cribb (2002) is based on the idea of 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 mentions 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 (Griffiths 2003: 142).

Anthony Giddens takes a different position, approaching social justice from a perspective of radical politics and suggesting a framework which draws on philosophic conservatism. Such a framework connects autonomy with personal and collective responsibility.

Giddens (1994: 10) labels such a philosophical framework as "a philosophy of protection, conservation and solidarity". This framework also preserves some of the core values which have been associated with socialism. 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, for instance "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.

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

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. She 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" (Nussbaum 2000: 83). Where resources are sufficient, failure by government to develop central capabilities becomes a social justice problem. Nussbaum (2000: 78-80) proposes the following capabilities: life – living a fully human life of a normal span; bodily health – being adequately nourished, and have 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 such as friendship and work, protected against discrimination; relating to other species; play, and control over one's environment, both political and material.

The above overview reveals a situation where the social justice discourse has been colonised by the dominant western philosophical and political approach and has to a large extent become 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 resulted in social justice being defined according to economic gain, while marginal themes focus more on the development of social cohesion and a sense of community.

## 2.    From theory to praxis

Much of what is presented thus far is based on the conceptualisation of an idealised or "imagined social order" of modern state formations. As idealised and abstracted concepts from a particular context, they bear distinctive signs of their western modernist legacy (Christie 2009). Christie (2009: 3) 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 be, they are certainly out of the reach of the majority of the world's children, according to numerous EFA reports (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". Unlike wealthier countries, poor countries may simply be unable to afford what international conventions and treaties require them to do, more specifically 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 oppose the right to equality or protection against discrimination (Christie 2009). In addition, Ball (1993: 8), in discussing the markets in education, claims that in the ideal environment every parent is free to make a choice on a school s/he wants to educate his/her children, but the choice is never "open" to everybody. In fact, parents who live in a rural area with access to only one poorly resourced school with poorly trained teachers for their children are restricted 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.

Social justice in education needs to be examined not from an idealised theoretical angle, but 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, results in continual reconstruction, without foreclosing future forms (Christie 2009). From a geo-historical perspective social-justice is embedded in a struggle for social change, in particular struggles against domination and oppression of varying kinds. In this regard Henkin (1989: 10) usefully points out that human rights, as currently known, 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 (1994b) 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.

Considering social justice and education in South Africa, Fiske & 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 remained available only 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 & Ladd 2004).

Du Toit (2004) identifies four failures of post-apartheid South Africa. First, there is little indication that the impact of 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 nearly a quarter of a million South Africans (approximately 230 000) have been murdered. Over 300 000 have survived such attacks and are recorded as victims of attempted murder. Another million or so became victims of robbery with aggravating circumstances (Du Toit 2004). Thirdly, poverty remains pervasive. Despite the successful extension of service delivery, in particular that relating to hard services, there were still over 22 million South Africans (approximately 48% of the total population) living in poverty by 2005 (Appel 2008). Finally, in the midst of this problem of development, the issue of unemployment is inextricably linked to poverty and inequality, as well as to crime and AIDS. The problem of unemployment has not yet abated. In 2009, 12,89 million people were unemployed (Anon 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 (Act 108 of 1996) states: "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)): "Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms" (RSA 1996).

This promise is vacuous in achieving social justice if the failures identified are not addressed.

In the light of these failures one needs to consider the capability of the state to address these failures. Omano (2007: 1) describes the state capacity as the ability of the state to act authoritatively to transform the structural basis of the economy in order to achieve economic growth, reduce poverty, income and wealth inequalities. Inclusiveness and social justice are central to this conception. 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 relative income poverty, social development through social grants, housing, water and sanitation in South Africa. However, Netshitenzhe (Appel 2008) notes that many studies, including the Income Expenditure Survey by Statistics South Africa, found a widening inequality gap in the country. Omano (2007: 5) identifies a number of aspects on which the state lacks the capacity to come to terms with these failures. In part, this lack of capacity may be the result of the democratic state's lack of resources, human and material, to meet the myriad of needs, but it is also linked to the incapacity of the state to effectively address service delivery.

Social justice in education should not simply be treated as a theoretical abstract exercise, but the social context and capacity of the state should be considered. Young (1990 & 2000) asserts that one needs 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 means 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, their capabilities. Where race and class produce unequal effects, as in South Africa, one can hardly claim that children have equal rights to education. But even where race and gender 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 hamper the achievement of the type of social justice one may propagate at a theoretical level. One 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.

In this instance it is important to mention the work of Young (2000) who 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 (Young 2000: 25). 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: 48-65) describes oppression in terms of five "faces"[1] 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 an entire category of people is excluded from meaningful participation in social life and is thus potentially vulnerable to deprivation and even extermination.

Genuine inclusion must overcome external and internal exclusion. Externally excluded groups remain so from both the distributive domains for public goods and the arenas of public deliberation. External exclusion can be variously imposed; for example, through policies such as 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 periphery of deliberation (Young 2000). Learners previously excluded from white educational institutions may thus be brought into institutions, but their needs, aspirations and participation remain on the periphery.

---

1    The five faces of oppression are exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

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 distribution 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, proportionally to their ability to do so. As a principle of justice, needs must be able to function under 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, desert is the principle for just distribution. Typically, Miller (1999: 134) argues, the purposes of an organisation set the criteria for desert, 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 under limited circumstances (Miller 1999: 141). Although justice and distributive equality share a logical grammar, justice does not always require equal distribution. In addition, 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: 25).

Given this critique and analysis of social justice from a praxis perspective, the space of social justice from a more holistic perspective will now be determined.

## 3.   Social justice in education from a holistic perspective

The starting-point for a conceptualisation of social justice from a more holistic perspective will be taken as the geo-historical and socio-political context. Figure 1 illustrates the space of social justice within such a complex configuration. 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, and so on); the social needs and demands, expectations and agendas that actively promote a more just dispensation within the context; international trends and discourses (globalisation, education for all, marketisation of education, and so on), and the dynamics of technological advances and economic imperatives for development and job creation. These push/pull forces can, however, also act as inhibitors of change (*cf* the lighting bolts in the arrows in Figure 1).

Superimposing this conceptualisation on education reveals a similar dynamic process in operation. In the context of a developing country such as 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 flow from it and the co-determinants of scarcity of resources and opportunity cost.
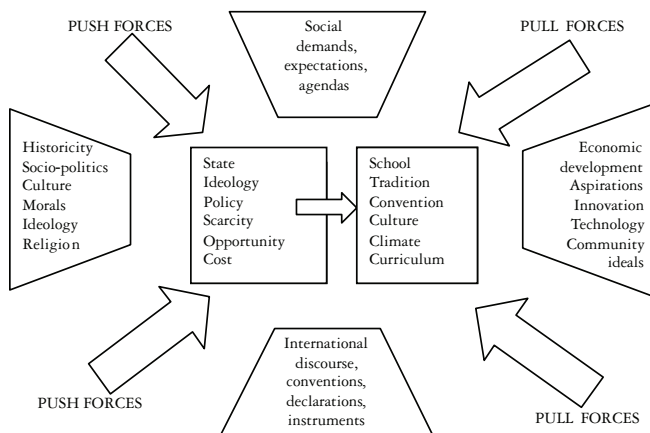


Figure 1: The space of social justice in education: a holistic perspective

Two consequences result. First, in prioritising a particular concern over others, the state will allocate funds to that concern (creating elaborative administrative structures or focusing on a

specific sector of the education system, such as basic education), thus diverting funds away from other social justice concerns that could have been served. The Tirisano document (DoE 2002) is a good example of how the state determined educational priorities that guided its transformation of education. Secondly, to satisfy its constituency base it may adopt a specific political stance and develop certain policies on a social issue without allocating funds or political will to the concern (the inclusion of Grade R as part of compulsory education without allocating funds towards it to make it part of the formal system of education), resulting in the policies taking on a symbolic nature (*cf* Jansen 2001) rather than a genuine attempt to address issues of social justice. The policy symbolism is captured in many of the earlier policy documents prepared by the Department on quality education, *cf* White Paper 1 (1996) and White Paper 4 (1998). 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 are 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, such as affirmative action.

At the school level where policies must be implemented, the same push-and-pull forces operate, but admittedly, international forces may have less impact on a local level. The other factors that 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 lying assumptions, values and beliefs of the school (*cf* Nieuwenhuis 2008).

Given such a more holistic analysis of social justice in education, it could be argued that any system committed to creating greater social justice in education will not succeed unless it addresses social justice more comprehensively or holistically. This, in turn, implies

that any state and, in particular, developing countries, committed to social justice in education must come to terms with the following challenges in conceptualising 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, one could simply have learned social justice as one would have learned any other content-based subject in school. 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 should take the 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 will 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. This, in turn, implies that social justice must become a way of life. The values informing social justice must be lived.

2.  Realise the importance of creating personal agency that is supportive of social justice. Rawls' (1971: 195) statement that a well-ordered society requires individuals with highly developed moral sensibilities should be taken as a starting-point. 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 one accuses 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 one 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, proportionately to his/her 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 amid scarcity. As a principle of justice, need must be able to function under circumstances of relative scarcity, where not every need can be met and where needs will compete with other demands (Miller 1999). In the context of a developing country the state will be required to move increasingly in the direction of a welfare state or what Nussbaum (2000) calls ensuring bodily health, that is adequately nourished, and with shelter. Under these conditions the welfare state must be empowering rather than merely dispensing (Giddens 1991). In terms of education this 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 context 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). This also implies the abolishment of structural forms of oppression that restrict peoples' access to resources and opportunities for developing and exercising their capacities or capabilities for living a decent human life (Young 2002). In doing so care must be taken not to create new forms of exclusion that will, in turn, create new forms of social injustice. Similarly, it must ensure fairness in terms of rewards. One cannot reward state officials with considerable bonuses when they are 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. One cannot reward a child if no contribution was forthcoming. For example, One cannot promote a child to the next grade automatically if s/he did not participate in the educational process on an equal basis with others.

## 4.    Conclusion

A theory of social justice in education is essential. Brighouse (2002: 181) states that until recently there was no theory of justice in education and that one cannot simply read a theory off from Rawls, Young, Giddens, or any other author. This article critically reviewed a number of theories that could inform such a theory of social justice in education. It 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 by means of international conventions or declarations – albeit important instruments to promote social justice; social justice must be lived. It requires that every citizen must take the responsibility to protect, advance and promote the values, principles and ideals of social justice. The road to achieving this is, however, obstructed by geo-historical and scarcity challenges confronting developing countries. These challenges and their negative impact on achieving social justice in education must be addressed in an ordered and well-structured manner without creating new forms of social injustice. As long as poverty, unemployment and high levels of violence exist, there cannot be social justice. This is the real challenge and it is a journey on which all developing countries and their people must embark. In *Long walk to freedom* Nelson Mandela (1994a: 751) asserts:

> 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.

# Bibliography

ADLER M J
> 1981. *Six great ideas.* New York: Touchstone.

ANONYMOUS
> 2009. SA unemployment rate increases. *Mail & Guardian* 29 October 2009: 9.

APPEL M
> 2008. Poverty in South Africa 'is declining.' *South Africa.info* <http://www.southafrica.info/about/social/poverty-021008.htm>

APPLE M W
> 1995. *Education and power.* 2nd ed. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

BALIBAR E
> 2006. Constructions and deconstructions of the universal. *Critical Horizons* 7(1): 21-43.

BALL S J
> 1993. Education markets, choice and social class: the market as a class strategy in the UK and the USA. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 14(1): 3-19.

BRIGHOUSE H
> 2002. Egalitarian liberalism and justice in education. *Political Quarterly* 73(2): 181-90.

CAHN S, KITCHER P, SHER G & P MARKIE (eds)
> 1996. *Reason at work: introductory readings in philosophy.* 3rd ed. Forth Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace.

CHRISTIE P
> 2010. The complexity of human rights in global times: the case of the right to education in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development* 30(1): 3-11.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (DoE)
> 1996. *Education White Paper 1.* Pretoria: Government Printer.

> 1998. *Education White Paper 4.* Pretoria: Government Printer.

> 2002. *Tirisano working together.* Pretoria: Department of Education.

DU TOIT P
> 2004. Affirmative action and the politics of transformation: a survey of public opinion. *F W de Klerk Foundation.* <www.fwdeklerk.com/cgi-bin/giga.cgi?cmd=cause_dir...id...>

FISKE E B & H F LADD
> 2004. *Elusive equity: education reform in post-apartheid South Africa.* Washington, DC/Cape Town: Brookings Institute/HSRC Press.

GEWIRTZ S & A CRIBB
> 2009. Towards a contextualized analysis of *social justice* in education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 1(1): 69-81.

GIDDENS A
1991. *Modernity and self-identity.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

1994. *Beyond left and right: the future of radical politics.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

GRIFFITHS M
2003. *Action for social justice in education.* London: Open University Press.

HENKIN L
1989. Universality of the concept of human rights. *Annals of the American Academy* 506: 10-6.

SAYED Y & J D JANSEN
2001. *Implementing education policies - the South African experience.* Cape Town: Juta.

KNIGHT T
2001. Longitudinal development of educational theory: democracy and the classroom. *Journal Education Policy* 16(3): 249-63.

MACINTYRE A C
1985. *After virtue: a study in moral theory.* 2nd. ed. London: Duckworth.

MANDELA N
1994a. *The long walk to freedom.* London: Little, Brown & Co.

1994b. State of the Nation Address, Parliament, 24 May 1994. <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/special%20projects/mandela/speeches/1990s/1994/1994_state_nation_address.htm>

MILLER D
1999. *Principles of social justice.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

NICOLAY N
2008. AIDS and demographic model. *Metropolitan.* <www.actuarialsociety.org.za>

NIEUWENHUIS F J
2005. From equality of opportunity to equality of treatment as a value-based concern in education. Russo *et al* (eds) 2005: 182-97.

2008. Organisational change: from adjusting the clock to morphogenesis. Weber (ed) 2008: 173-96.

NOZICK R
1996. Distributive justice. Cahn *et al* (eds) 1996: 73-96.

NUSSBAUM M C
2000. *Women and development.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

NUSSBAUM M C & A SEN (eds)
1993. *The quality of life.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Omano E
    2007. *Affirmative action and state capacity in a democratic South Africa.* Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies.

Pendlebury S & P Enslin
    2004. Social justice and inclusion in education and politics: the South African case. *Journal of Education* 34(2): 31-43.

Pitt J
    1998. Social justice in education in 'new times'. Unpubl presentation, Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, Brisbane, 29th Nov-3rd Dec 1998. <http://www.aare.edu.au/98pap/pit98177.htm>

Pojman L & R Westmoreland (eds)
    1997. *Equality: selected readings.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rawls J
    1958. Justice as fairness. *Philosophical Review* 67(2): 163-93.

    1971. *A theory of justice.* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

Republic of South Africa (RSA)
    1996. *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996* (Act 108 of 1996). Pretoria: Government Printer.

    1996. *South African Schools Act* (Act 84 of 1996). Pretoria: Government Printer.

Robeyns I
    2003. Sen's capability approach and gender inequality: selecting relevant capabilities. *Feminist Economics* 9(2-3): 61-92.

Russo C, J L Beckman & J D Jansen (eds)
    2005. *Equal educational opportunities: comparative perspectives in education.* Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Schaar J J
    1997. Equality of opportunity and beyond. Pojman & Westmoreland (eds) 1997: 137-47.

Sen A
    1992. *Inequality re-examined.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Taylor C
    1990. *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tugendhat E & U Wolf
    1983. *Logisch-Semantische Propädeutik.* Stuttgart: Reclam.

Unterhalter E
    2005. Global inequality, capabilities, social justice: the millennium development goal for gender equality in education. *International Journal of Educational Development* 25(2): 111-22.

Weber E (ed)
    2008. *Educational change in South Africa.* Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

YOUNG I M

1990. *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

2000. *Inclusion and democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.