Education for Economic Growth: A Neoliberal Fallacy in South Africa!

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Abstract

In the last three decades, the enduring debate on purpose of education has been coloured by a distinct market-driven discourse (Aronowitz 2009; Giroux 2009). South African education is at a crossroads: differing constituencies jostle for ideological dominance, with capitalist market discourses competing with social democratic citizenship discourses. In this paper I examine how neoliberal discourse in particular is influencing and shaping education. I examine the rationale for neoliberalism's dominance and the implications of a neoliberal agenda for education in South African. Whether or not South African society understands and appreciates the gravity of the ideological options is debatable, but the elusive and insidious nature of neoliberalism also raises the question as to whether South Africans are even aware that ideological positions are in fact being chosen for them. The paper takes issue with the uncontested doctrine and rhetoric of 'education for economic growth' and its fallacious assumption that 'a rising tide lifts all boats'. I argue for an exploration of an alternative approach to education, namely, the human development approach (Nussbaum 2003; 2006; 2010; 2011), which has as its fundamental premise, the need to assess and respond to human capabilities. Nussbaum builds on Sen's (1999) notion of human capabilities in which the focus is on the individual in terms of human development, namely, that certain conditions have to prevail for people to achieve functioning.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, capabilities, education, economic growth, ideology

Introduction

In an interesting observation on the relationship between education, the eco-

nomy and the state in the United Kingdom, Stronach comments that

> Education and the economy are in a kind of failing marriage, with government as a rather fixated counsellor, forever on the lookout for magic remedies (2011: 39).

In this paper I want to argue that South Africa faces a similar dilemma in the relationship between education and the economy. My approach to the theme of 'Education at the Crossroads' is accordingly to explore the discourse that informs the purpose of education in South Africa, namely, education for a more productive economy. I examine the commonsense notion that a more productive economy will result in economic growth which will in turn yield benefits for all the country's inhabitants. I caution that this instrumental rationale and its potential for alleviating socioeconomic ills in present-day South Africa should be approached with a degree of scepticism.

While hoping to avoid an unhelpful tone of outright advocacy in this paper I nonetheless believe that it is important to engage an alternative to the agenda that I critique, and with this in mind I propose to explore an approach to education that focuses on the development of human capabilities.

A Brief Account of Local and Global Socioeconomic Realities

Exacerbating already serious concerns about national socioeconomic well-being, few would deny that South African education is also in a state of grave crisis (Fleisch & Christie 2004; Shindler & Fleisch 2007), manifest not least in embarrassingly low secondary-school pass rates and poor quality performance for secondary learners who do pass, especially in poor and working-class communities.

At the same time, South Africa's socioeconomic ills are all too apparent in wanton xenophobic violence, banal acts of cruelty to animals (even for profit), rampant violent crime and the squalor of mushrooming informal settlements, while unemployment rates that have persistently remained above 30% for the last two decades and deepening income inequality are accompanied by shameful educational and health provisioning for the indigent classes (Forslund 2013; Pillay 2013).

South Africa is not alone in the socioeconomic challenges it faces. Commenting on the moral significance of global poverty, Thomas Pogge (2010) notes the irony that it occurs 'in the context of unprecedented global affluence …. The global poor are not participating proportionately in global economic growth' (2010: 12). A key factor at the global level is that international institutional arrangements make it difficult for less-developed nations to cross the development threshold, building capacity to meet and sustain the basic needs of their citizens in relation to food security, health, sanitation and education. Pogge reminds us that the

> [f]undamental components of international law systematically obstruct the aspirations of poor populations – the World Trade Organisation, The International Monetary Fund and World Bank are designed so that they systematically contribute to the persistence of severe poverty (2010: 26).

Such international institutional capitalist arrangements and the crisis that they create have never been more overt than in the last decade (Bauman & Rovirosa-Madrazo 2010). While economic growth is important for any nation, the development economics literature indicates unequivocally that economic growth does not automatically lead to a better life for all, inclusive of better education. Tikly and Barrett contend that for economic growth to translate into wider and higher wage earning, a strong macroeconomic and labour market needs to exist, which is not the case in less-developed countries of the global south (Tikly & Barrett 2013).

A state of crisis requires a nation to make sense of the processes that generated the crisis, reflect on or even change their contexts, ask new questions, interrogate existing theoretical frameworks, and trouble, disturb and disrupt established historical and mental discourses. It calls for profound introspective review of the forces that have come to shape current conditions. Zizek (2011), in his analysis of the crisis in global capitalism – the forthcoming 'apocalypse' as he puts it – invokes Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's five stages of grief that follow when one learns, for example, that one has some terminal illness. He contends that the first stage is *denial* : an ideological denial that there is any fundamental disorder, a disbelief and refusal to accept or entertain the thought that a tragedy is about to occur. In the second stage there is *anger* which we explode into and vent when we can

no longer deny the fact and we begin to question how this could be happening to us. The third stage of grief is *bargaining*: we continue as normal, making minor adjustments and hanging on to the hope that we can somehow postpone or delay the inevitable or that it may somehow go away. The fourth stage, *depression*, is a realisation that there is no escape, which gives rise to despair and a sense of hopelessness and withdrawal. In the fifth stage there is *acceptance*: recognition that we cannot fight this, so we may as well prepare for it. Zizek notes that individuals pass through a 'zero-point': a turning point where the situation is seen no longer as a threat, but as the chance of a new beginning. In capturing this reawakening, he quotes Mao Zedong: 'There is great disorder under heaven, the situation is excellent'. He argues that the cognitive shift to an 'emancipatory enthusiasm' is only realisable when the traumatic truth is not just accepted in a disengaged way, but is fully lived (2011: xii). This is a powerful analysis as it offers an explanation of why individuals, groups and even nations react or respond to the crisis that global capitalism has created. It also speaks to the Foucauldian notion that the present is contingent and to an understanding of how the power that has come to create the present enables us to better position ourselves to disrupt what looks fixed and unsurpassable (Foucault 1979). Similarly, Bourdieu implores us to seek out and explore alternatives to economic efficiency discourses and economic growth discourses, especially in relation to their marginalisation effects on the social (Bourdieu 1998).

Education as Economic Instrumentalism and Neoliberal Common Sense

Although it is commonly recognised that economics and education are intricately connected, opinions differ as to the optimal extent, nature and form for this connection. It remains an issue as to why nations continue to see the primary purpose of education as serving the needs of the economy and how this has come to be regarded as common sense. Torres argues that

> common sense becomes naturalised in the lives of people as something normal that we do or ought to do … [it is] a generalised truth about something; it is the normal way to do things, the normal way of becoming human beings (2011: 181).

The assumption is cumulative and reified and has a degree of variability according to context. It also has inherent hegemonic force that shapes policy direction. Torres suggests that there is a need to examine how the new neoliberal common sense has come to be and how it has 'percolated' into education. He argues that this neoliberal common sense has replaced the old traditional liberal progressive model of education. As far back as the 1960s Dewey (1966) cautioned against a narrow instrumentalist agenda, arguing that there should not be narrow technical education for the masses at the expense of traditional cultural education that would include ethical and moral dimensions. Dewey's notion of liberal, progressive education entailed experiential learning that focused on the welfare of society, sensitivity to capitalism's potential for creating inequality and inequity in society, and orchestrating policy in the service of democracy and citizenship (Aronowitz 2009; Torres 2011). While Torres cautions though that liberal–progressive common sense is not without defect especially as it relates to hegemony that it also creates, he contends that 'Liberalism has been displaced by neoliberalism, deeply affecting education and social policies' (Torres 2011: 184). In recent decades economic instrumentalism appears to have become the new common sense (Stronach 2011). The vocationalising tendency in education–economic discourses that find their way into educational policy stem from pseudo-economic educational discourses ('educationomics') which posit the instrumental connection between education and the economy (Stronach 2011: 176). Neoliberal economic imperatives such as individualism, competition, commodification of knowledge and the marketisation of education have been driving the strategic direction of education systems across the world (Harvey 2007; 2010b; Nussbaum 2010; 2011).

The roots of neoliberalism can be traced back to the West: more specifically, Britain and the United States (Harvey 2007; 2010b). The rise of neoliberalism in the US and UK in particular was a response to Marxist community-oriented approaches and state interventionist approaches as espoused by Keynesian economic theory (Harvey 2007). Two of the most aggressive protagonists were Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US. Both set out to curb the powers of labour, deregulate industry, agriculture and resource extraction, and liberate the powers of the financial sector. Harvey describes neoliberalism as

> a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong property rights, free markets and free trade (Harvey 2007: 2).

Whereas classic liberalism sought to liberate the market from regulations in the hope that a free market without restrictions would bring wealth to everyone, with the state responsible only for providing a social safety net effect, neoliberalism sees the state as taking an active role in the construction of markets, especially in previously social domains such as education and health. Neoliberals vociferously argue that it is not possible for the state to 'compete with the accuracy and rectitude of free market signals' (Parker 2011:438) and that it should therefore allow market freedoms to play themselves out 'naturally'. Neoliberalism unambiguously pushes the state to adopt the role of creator of the ideal conditions for capital accumulation, but thereafter to withdraw to minimally involvement in determining the form of economic activity or the terrain in which this activity should happen. The state should create and preserve an appropriate institutional framework that can guarantee the integrity of money, and the proper functioning of the markets. In the absence of markets or if markets do not exist, then these must be created – as can be witnessed in burgeoning markets for electricity, water, education, health care, social security, personal security, communication and transport (Harvey 2006; 2007; 2010a; 2010b). The individual (firm or entrepreneur) should be at the centre. Apart from personal wealth ambitions, individuals are to be accountable and responsible for all aspects of their lives, from education, to housing, health and even personal security and social welfare. Neoliberalism starts from the premise that *individual* freedom is paramount in society. Individual advancement comes through entrepreneurship and individual endeavour. Neoliberalism supports a value system grounded in 'self-discipline (with punishment for lapses), self-reliance and the accompanying pursuit of self-interest' (Parker 2011: 438). Success or failure is attributed to the *individual's* ability or inability to utilise the opportunities available. The burden of *individual* personal responsibility culture has been deliberately imposed on all members of society, according to which competition is promoted as an acceptable moral value and incentives

drive individual success. One may argue that aspiration and individual personal responsibility are in fact worthy values. They do however become tainted when competition is excessive and the playing field is unfairly tilted in favour of some and not others. It follows, then, that citizens who are less capable, for whatever historically determined reason, are relegated to barren hinterlands coldly and deliberately demarcated by institutional structures to maintain their subjugation.

Neoliberalism's influence on the educational sector is complex. In an overt, unchallenged ('common sense') way, it legitimates an instrumental agenda for education: namely, to serve the economic growth needs of the nation. Wealth creation and the accumulation of economic profits are valued, although their distribution is an issue that neoliberals are reluctant to engage with. At a more complex level, neoliberalism signals a move to subject various aspects of education to the principles of the market. In response, a growing body of critique challenges issues such as corporate-style educational governance at school level and in higher education in which performance and accountability regimes are given priority by means of national and international standardised testing that fuels the rankings culture (Hursh 2000; Lingard 2010; Thomas 2005; Wong 2008).

Neoliberal Moves in the South African Landscape

While elements of neoliberalism may well have been present before the advent of democracy in South Africa, post-apartheid South Africa has seen firm and decisive shifts towards performativity and neoliberal market-driven discourses. Harvey (2007) notes that developing nations and relatively new democracies such as South Africa appear to have wilfully, unquestioningly and almost blindly 'bought' the neoliberal doctrine and are serving this ideology in strong doses to their unsuspecting citizens. This marks a departure from the human emancipatory agenda that pre-apartheid South African liberation movements like the African National Congress (ANC) aspired towards. The current ANC government, with its history of struggle politics, follows a contradictory economic agenda, and it does this, as Bond provocatively puts it, by 'talking left and walking right' (Bond 2011: 11) – maintaining a development rhetoric but creating a climate for unprecedented capital accumulation by traditional and emerging capitalist classes. Thus we

find the Minister for Higher Education, (who is also Secretary General of the South African Communist Party) urging comrades to be vigilant against corruption and 'tenderpreneurship'[1] while the state remains helplessly obtuse in its reluctance to act against these societal ills.

A typical strategy of a neoliberal state is to make aggressive moves to neutralise trade union activity. This neutralisation occurs in a somewhat unique way in the South African context. While the capitalist-controlled media tries to portray an image of overly powerful trade unions in South Africa and although the country ranks first in the world in terms of labour and civil unrest per capita (Bond 2011), the figures show that since 1994 a larger portion of the nation's surplus or 'profit' has accrued to the owners of capital than it has to labour (Tikly 2011). This calls in doubt the real extent of labour-movement power in South Africa. The recent Marikana disaster in which 34 protesting mineworkers were killed by police is an issue of how 'global capitalism … shows up in South Africa in a racialised form, embedded in a minerals-energy-financial complex based on cheap labour' (Pillay 2013: 1).

The embedded status of COSATU in the tripartite alliance is further testimony to the paradox which Bond (2011) has alluded to. Pillay (2013) warns that COSATU is in danger of being co-opted by the political elite and argues that the 'cosy' relationship between NUM union leaders and mine management was a key trigger in the 2012 mineworker strike. Although attempts to neutralise trade union power and to dampen and frustrate trade union activity are rife in South African politics, the alliance between the ruling party and COSATU has remained solid through what has now been almost two decades of post-apartheid governance. But what this also reflects is the increasingly familiar pattern of trade union leaders aligned to liberation

[1] 'Tenderpreneurship' is a new and original South African socioeconomic construct which derives from the process of fast-tracking new entrepreneurship development by awarding lucrative state contracts to persons from previously disenfranchised communities through corrupt tender processes in which those who tender and those awarding the tenders (both of whom are usually connected to the ruling political party) are equally complicit. It often happens that a single individual (or 'tenderpreneur') rapidly amasses wealth through being awarded a multiplicity of lucrative tender contracts.

movements and agendas 'naturally progressing' to high-profile leadership roles in government. Trade union rhetoric abounds on the ineptness of the state in delivering on its mandate, but it remains mere rhetoric, a kind of 'forked-tongue' discourse that veils the deception that takes place. This embedded relationship between the state and labour unions is fertile soil for neoliberalism. While the major trade union movement in SA signalling its discontent with the privatisation of state-owned and run institutions, the new neoliberal South African state has engaged in rampant privatisation of historically state-managed strategic functions like water, power, health services, etc. In essence, the neoliberal state moves towards systematic deregulation and simultaneously time creates a climate for capital accumulation. As can be expected, the 'economically' fittest in society are best placed to thrive under such conditions, and thrive they do – so much so that it has become very difficult to dislodge the hegemonic position of what has become a very powerful and coercively influential middle class (Harvey 2010b). The benefit of economic growth seldom accrues to the indigent classes in any substantive way. Citing the Argentinian crisis of 2001 and the world financial crisis of 2008, Torres aptly reminds us of lessons to be learnt:
Neoliberalism has utterly failed as a model of economic development [and has] brought the world capitalist system to its knees. Paradoxically, the capitalist state, so vilified by prominent globalisers, was called upon to intervene, rescuing a de-regulated capitalist system from its own demise. Yet the irony is that the politics of culture associated with neoliberalism is still in force and quite strong because it has been able to formulate this new common sense that has percolated deeply into social consciousness of many sectors of the population, particularly professional middle classes (Torres 2011: 193).
Hursh concurs that

> Neoliberal policy discourse has become so dominant in the public sphere that it has silenced the voices of those calling for alternative social conceptions (Hursh 2000: 3).

He argues that such neoliberal discourse has ramifications for education, giving rise to performativity, standardised testing and accountability and audit regimes that have intruded on the lives of teachers and students.

South African Education and Neoliberal Tinkering

A new curriculum policy took effect in South African schools in January of 2012. The accompanying Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) states unequivocally that

> The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 serves the purposes of: providing access to higher education; facilitating the transition of learners from education institutions to the workplace; and providing employers with a sufficient profile of a learner's competences (Education 2011 : 6).

While the document also makes reference to social justice issues, these are captured in a single point under the purpose of education. The strong market agenda for education in SA is alarmingly explicit but appears as an unassuming, innocent and noble will of the people. Its disturbing undertones are eloquently masked by the social justice rhetoric that permeates the policy document – another perplexing instance of the 'talk left, walk right' tendency already alluded to. Motala notes that in seeking to improve quality of education South Africa has taken its cue from global trends,

> paying increasing attention to curriculum delivery … detailed prescription of what teachers should do … [and] a much greater emphasis on accountability and performance management (Motala 2013: 232).

There is still little understanding as to how these moves play themselves out.

Neoliberal performance-driven regimes have started to take root and are now usurping the agenda for education in South Africa at both school and higher education levels (Maistry 2012). A recent instance of this trend was the 2011 two-day joint Umalusi, Higher Education South Africa (HESA) and Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA) seminar where the predictive value of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) for success in higher education and its vocational potential were discussed. Key thought leaders in education appeared to share a common understanding that school education should serve an instrumental role either preparing students for the world of work or providing them with a 'licence' to enter higher education.

Arguably the most significant market-influenced strategic policy move in South Africa has been the state's decision to regularise the market for public school education by encouraging public schools to levy compulsory school fees. Motala notes that this runs counter to international models that advocate free access to compulsory schooling, and that the outcome has been a 'two-tiered education system in South Africa, one catering for the wealthy (the partly deracialised middle class) and one catering for the poor (which remains mainly black)' (Motala 2013: 228).

South Africa's achievement in mathematics ranks among the worst in the world, according to a recent TIMMS report (Howie 2004), and even though mathematics has been designated as high-priority subject area for development, trauma to the human spirit will continue when 'failure' in mathematics is perennial. Should neoliberal lobbyists continue on the mathematics and science crusade at the expense of the 'softer' sciences? How do we ensure that strategic education and curriculum decisions strengthen our democracy in South Africa and move us to a deeper and nuanced understanding of what it means to participate in a democracy – understanding of a kind that moves beyond the rights that derive from legislative enshrinement towards what Waghid refers to as deliberative democracy and citizenship (Waghid 2010), understanding that foregrounds sustainability for all rather than a selected few.

High-stakes testing and strong accountability regimes have their roots in neoliberalism (Lingard 2010), with standardised testing and teacher accountability regimes gaining particular currency and legitimacy during the Reagan and Thatcher regimes in the US and UK respectively. It was during this period that neoliberal performativity discourses began to feature in educational discourses, as in the emergence of new naming/labelling protocols and new categorisations for public consumption and comparison (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne 2002). Arguably the most profound and defining characteristic of neoliberalism is its tendency to bring all human action into the domain of the market (Harvey 2007; 2010). Ball cautions about new neoliberal policy technologies that translate into school and policy choice shaped by market rationality (Ball 2008). According to Mathison (2008), implicit values in neoliberal market-oriented models for education include the notion that accountability is a valued expectation, that

> simple parsimonious means for holding schools accountable are also

> good, that choice or competition will increase quality and that it is morally superior to seek employability over other purposes of education (Mathison 2008: 532).

What's Wrong with 'Education for Economic Growth'?

In an intriguing book entitled, 'Not for profit – why democracy needs the humanities', Martha Nussbaum (2010) alerts us to the essentialist, instrumentalist rationale for education that society has internalised. She describes world education as being in a state of crisis with insidious neoliberal insurgence spreading 'like a cancer' with debilitating effect (Nussbaum 2010 :1). Drawing inspiration from Dewey, she argues that the purpose of education should be to lead citizens towards living a life rich in social significance. She urges us to challenge the notion that economic growth invariably leads to a better quality of life, suggesting that the relentless search for economic profit through economic growth may well be at the expense of skills needed to strengthen democracy. She further contends that when society begins to place emphasis on the vocational potential of school subjects, we are likely to churn out incomplete citizens, unable to empathise with others' sufferings and achievements. Human aspects of the sciences and social sciences are being eroded to make way for curricula that contain 'useful and highly applied skills suited for profit making' (Nussbaum 2010: 2). These changes are profound and often unsolicited by the ordinary citizen. Critical thinking and imagination, philosophy and the arts are being replaced with scientific and technical education and testable skills that will enable *workplace* success. If workplace success becomes the key objective of schooling, it is bound to have effects on curriculum and pedagogy.

I want to argue I that heightened sensitivity to the way a neoliberal value system is starting to manifest will enable us to effectively respond to what appears 'natural' and 'normal' (Bourdieu 1998). How do we respond to what Nussbaum calls the 'silent crisis' (2010)? When neoliberal market imperatives drive the education agenda it clouds the ability to see others as human beings rather than as instruments for profit. Education's narrow obsession with market-driven science and technology looks at face value like worthy aspirations but there is abundant literature in development economics which shows that such an agenda for education is unsustainable (Sen 2009).

What is likely to happen is that worthy values like the ability to think critically and to 'imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person' (Nussbaum 2010: 7) are likely to be eclipsed. How then do we educate young people for democratic participation – to address crucial issues in our diverse society? Nussbaum unambiguously declares that 'cultivated capacities for critical thinking and reflection are crucial in keeping democracies alive and wide awake' (Nussbaum 2010: 10).

Education that has a narrow focus on increasing the per capita Gross National Product persists as a flawed measure for quality of life, in that political liberty, health and education are negatively correlated with economic growth (Nussbaum 2010; 2011; Sen 1999; 2005). For a country like SA, relatively impressive development indices (when compared to the rest of Africa) mask the educational and health challenges experienced by the poor and working classes. South Africa is ranked 45 out of 134 nations in terms of 2009-2010 global competiveness rankings (Schwab 2010). Internationally, empirical studies have shown that economic growth does not automatically translate into progress and development in health and education for all (Bauman & Rovirosa-Madrazo 2010; Pogge 2010). If anything, neoliberal-driven growth increases the gap between the rich and poor and accentuates the Gini coefficient[2] in the developing world, as has been the case in post-1994 South Africa (Tikly 2011). The traditional model of education for economic growth relies on basic skills, literacy and numeracy and computer science and technology. This may succeed in increasing GNP per capita but may not succeed in the distribution of education in qualitative ways to the poor, especially the rural poor. It can however rapidly create competent technology and a new business elite class. Ideas of equal opportunity and equal access get lost in the euphoria of aggregate economic growth mantras.

So the question is will it serve a neoliberal agenda to develop a critical citizenry? Will critical thinking be important in an education for economic growth? The arguments presented above suggest that the answers to this question are not clear. It does not however serve the interests of the business elites to create spaces for freedom of mind – obedient, skilled, technically trained labour is what is needed for production and profit maximisation. For neoliberals, creative thinking is useful in as far as it is directed at creating new products and services in the most efficient way possible. Maximising

[2] Gini coefficient refers to the measure of income inequality in an economy.

efficiency in and of itself is a valuable exercise – maximising profit (economic growth) without demonstrable attempts at equitable distribution thereof is worthy of interrogation. We cannot simply trust that those in power will apply their energies to education that favours egalitarian values. Education for economic growth may not take seriously social justice issues of class, gender, race and poverty (Tikly 2011).

A new nationalism focused on sport and aggregate economic wealth clouds issues of poverty and unequal access to education. At every turn, South Africans are fed the doctrine of education for economic growth, while distributional equality, especially in education, remaining at the level of empty rhetoric (Tikly 2011). The neoliberal mantra is pervasive, repetitive and constantly reified: if the nation is doing well (on average), then its citizens must be doing well even if they are extremely poor. Putting a human face on poverty may expose a different perspective on the education for economic growth rationale. Proponents of education for economic growth fear critical thinkers because a

> cultivated and developed sympathy is a particularly dangerous enemy of obtuseness, and moral obtuseness is necessary to carry out programmes of economic development that ignore inequality (Nussbaum 2010: 24).

How we re-centre the human-subject (Rothenberg 2010) is indeed a challenging prospect that requires radical rethinking and the raising of complex questions.

There is thus a need to engage alternative discourses on the purpose that education should serve. The human development paradigm, for example, offers a different perspective on what this could be. It supports a focus on ***opportunities*** or ***capabilities***, which

> each person has in key areas ranging from life, health, and bodily integrity to political liberty, political participation, and education (Nussbaum 2010: 23).

This approach values the notion of human dignity that all individuals possess and emphasises that such dignity must be respected. While such aspirations are plainly enshrined in South Africa's national constitution, the alarming

reality is that they have been overtaken by greed, nepotism, and desire for personal enrichment by certain members of the national leadership, the recent revelation of flagrant fraud and deception by South Africa's Communications Minister being one example.

I close with a brief sketch of the insights for education offered by the human development approach.

Human Capabilities Theory

In their research on conceptualisations of education quality, Tikly and Barrett note that in the global south, human capital theorists pursue a market-led approach where economic growth is the key rationale for investment in education. This approach posits that creating greater choice and competition between schools will pressurise schools to improve outcomes (results), thereby generating greater accountability through the public display of school performance achievement scores. They note, however, that in parts of India, a market-led approach that saw the introduction of low fee schools to encourage competiveness between schools, proved counterproductive and served to exacerbate inequality between schools, regions and individuals. Human rights approaches to education on the other hand suggest that individuals in society are differently able and that institutional structures serve as barriers to fair participation (Tikly & Barrett 2013). One such approach to education is the *capabilities approach*. Nussbaum (2010) starts from the premise that capabilities are fundamental constitutional entitlements which every person should have and which are non-negotiable. She makes the following suggestions for what school education should do to produce citizens in and for a healthy democracy (Nussbaum 2010:45):

- Develop students' capacity to see the world from the viewpoint of other people, particularly those whom their society tends to portray as lesser, as 'mere objects'.

- Teach attitudes towards human weakness and helplessness that suggest that weakness is not shameful and the need for other not unmanly; teach children not to be ashamed of need and incompleteness but to see these as occasions for cooperation and reciprocity.

- Develop the capacity for genuine concern for others, both near and distant.
- Undermine the tendency to shrink from minorities of various kinds in disgust, thinking of them as 'lower' and 'contaminating'.
- Teach real and true things about other groups (racial, religious, and sexual minorities; people with disabilities), so as to counter stereotypes and the disgust that often goes with them.
- Promote accountability by treating each child as a responsible agent.
- Vigorously promote critical thinking, the skill and courage it requires to raise a dissenting voice.

What is particularly compelling about the above suggestions is that they are not loaded with the popular jargon and political rhetoric that characterises education policy documents in South Africa. They outline a basis for developing critical citizens and should not have to be explicitly detailed in policy to be regarded as feasible. They embody inherent, enduring human values, emanating from a deep common sense that goes beyond legislative specifications in a curriculum (Torres 2011).

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