

# RE-IMAGINING SOCIALLY JUST PEDAGOGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CONTRIBUTION OF CONTEMPORARY THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Despite post-apartheid policy intentions to redress the effects of apartheid, inequalities in higher education have remained an endemic problem in South Africa, and continue to have a major influence on students and educators in South Africa. This has recently been foregrounded in student-led protests regarding equitable access to higher education (#FeesMustFall) and requests to decolonise the curriculum (#RhodesMustFall)—reigniting attention towards the enormous disparities that still exist in the South African education system generally, and which includes the higher education sector. Those institutions which were historically disadvantaged continue to struggle with paucity in terms of funding, geopolitical positioning, human and material resources. Student protest movements have resonated and reverberated across multiple higher education contexts internationally as well (for example at Oxford University, in the United Kingdom and the #StudentBlackOut demonstrations planned from Yale to University of Missouri in the United States). Conducting research into issues of social justice in relation to higher education pedagogical practices is thus of crucial importance in the present time and space, which remains plagued by issues of inequity.

Although socially just pedagogies in and by themselves will not eradicate structural inequalities, they can make a contribution to recognising and critically interrogating the issues that perpetuate these injustices, exploring different ways of enacting pedagogies in higher education. Therefore, more research and scholarship is needed to enable



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this to happen in higher education institutions, not only in South Africa, but also internationally. This special issue of *Education as Change* is dedicated to investigating the contribution that socially just pedagogies might be able to make to the issues of inequality and injustice in higher education. More particularly, the special issue focuses on contemporary innovative theoretical and philosophical perspectives and the contribution that these perspectives can make to re-imagining socially just pedagogies.

Collectively, then, the papers in this special issue:

- provide alternative theoretical perspectives of socially just pedagogies through considering the entangled connections of the social, political and material conditions of inequalities and their implications;
- offer commentary on how different theoretical developments may develop complex, enriched and nuanced understandings of socially just pedagogies in higher education;
- consider how historical, social, political, material and cultural backgrounds and contexts that are constitutive of contemporary challenges and tensions materialise and function in efforts to design and enact socially just pedagogies in higher education;
- show the South African as well as the international dimensions of the tensions and challenges documented in relation to socially just pedagogies in higher education, in an effort to contribute to an emerging discourse that takes into account the localities as well as the realities of global forces.

At the heart of the contributions in this special issue are two fundamental questions:

- How do we make sense of “socially just pedagogies” in higher education in light of the contemporary theoretical developments and how would a socially just pedagogy work from these perspectives?
- How might different theoretical perspectives enable transformative approaches to socially just pedagogies in higher education? Transformation for whom? At what cost? What are the challenges/dangers they bring with them?

The contributions towards the pursuit and exploration of socially just pedagogies in higher education in this special issue point to new theoretical and methodological perspectives raised in re-conceptualising the meaning(s) and most importantly the enactment(s) of “socially just pedagogies.” *Socially just pedagogies* are usually understood as the educators’ efforts to enact pedagogical practices that improve the learning and life opportunities of typically underserved students (Ladson-Billings 1994), while equipping and empowering all students to work for a more socially just society themselves (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1998; King 2005). Together, the papers in

this special issue demonstrate that ever more theoretical and methodological tools are necessary in an effort to envision and enact socially just pedagogies in higher education.

Collectively, the contributions highlight the dynamics of different conceptualisations of justice and socially just pedagogies in higher education. Research shows, as Hill and her colleagues (Hill et al. 2012) argue in their review of research on the access to education in South Africa, that there are increasingly complex conceptualisations of access to education and its implications for the educational opportunities and trajectories of disadvantaged groups. These authors suggest that notions of *distributive justice*—that is, emphasis on equality of opportunity and equality of outcome—are not enough to understand whether educational inequalities are successfully addressed in South Africa. In their papers in this special issue, several authors make a similar observation emphasising that practices and procedures of teaching and learning at the micro level are equally important to the organisation of higher education institutions. The notion of socially just pedagogies, then, has to consider specifically how it is entangled with notions of justice at the societal level and whether it really creates spaces in higher education that nurture relational values such as care, compassion, respect, and solidarity. Collectively, different manifestations of justice strengthen the conceptualisation of socially just pedagogies as a critical practice for analysing issues of power in social relations at both the micro and macro levels (Hill et al. 2012). At the same time, different manifestations of justice at the macro level highlight that there are limitations to any approach to distributive or relational or other social justice pedagogies or frameworks to explain access in complex social, cultural and political contexts without accounting for issues of agency.

With these contexts and complexities in mind, this special issue offers three different sets of articles on re-imagining socially just pedagogies in higher education. The first set includes three articles inspired by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Chantelle Gray van Heerden argues that a consideration of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of milieu and cartography, as related to subjectivity, can make a contribution to pedagogical praxis. In particular, Gray van Heerden suggests that some of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts (e.g. *ritornello*) enable a re-grounding of subjectivity—a necessary task for reconceptualising socially just perspectives in higher education. Similarly, Delphi Carstens uses Deleuzoguattarian schizoanalysis to interrogate concepts of social justice in relation to the crisis of neoliberal capitalism and then discusses the implications pertaining to the practice and scholarship of contemporary pedagogy in South Africa and elsewhere. Finally, Frans Kruger and Adré le Roux draw on Deleuze's interpretation of the concept of *fabulation*, and Deleuze and Guattari's argument that desire is a positive social force that enables experimentation to occur, to re-imagine the idea of a pedagogy as a politics of affirmation.

The second set of articles combines a variety of theoretical tools to shed light on students' and higher educators' experiences in university classrooms that raise a number of issues related to social (in)justices. Bozalek and Zembylas theorise what

they call “response-able pedagogies” to analyse the design of a transdisciplinary and interinstitutional university course from a feminist new materialist theoretical framing. These authors highlight how response-able pedagogies constitute ethico-political practices that incorporate a relational ontology into teaching and learning activities. Clowes, Shefer and Ngabaza draw on Nancy Fraser’s concepts of maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation to highlight constraints to equal participation identified by students in a university module. Employing a participatory photovoice methodology, the students’ research focused on ways in which social and group identities had shaped their experiences of feeling empowered and disempowered on campus. James Garraway also uses Fraser’s notion of “participatory parity” and examines it together with Wally Morrow’s (2009) notion of “epistemological access” whereby students gain access to disciplinary knowledges. He uses activity theory as a methodology to examine this nexus between participatory parity and epistemological access. Hurst and Mona’s paper is critical of monolingual and anglonormative colonial practices of continued reliance on English as the medium of education in South African higher education, which disadvantages many students whose home language is not English. Their paper proposes translanguaging pedagogies as a response that can empower students who are disempowered by English monolingualism. Leibowitz and Naidoo use a posthuman perspective through which to revisit data collected from a scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) research project, in which 23 audio-recorded interviews were conducted with academics from a variety of faculties and units for academic development. They use posthuman literature to respond to hegemonic discourses about students regarding their identities and learning which became apparent in the interviews.

Veronica Mitchell draws on new materialism and the Baradian notion of diffraction to move beyond students’ reflective practices in a health sciences university course. Mitchell shows how students’ reflective texts shared online on the Google Drive platform can be productive and transformative material forces that enact new knowledge, creating new possibilities to enable a socially just pedagogy in medical education.

The third and final set of articles in this special issue includes two articles that use autoethnographic and creative forms of writing to show the power of more evocative forms of writing about socially just pedagogies. Asanda Ngoasheng and Daniela Gachago use an autoethnographic method of reflecting on their teaching practice to explore the ethical dilemmas that arise when introducing a pedagogic intervention to help students understand privilege as systemic, intersectional and historically rooted. Marguerite Muller uses a narrative arts-based approach to write a performative text to illustrate her continual journey and process of moving towards socially just pedagogies. As Muller suggests, her “fictional” narrative is intended as a creative exploration of innovative methodologies in trying to find a way forward into messy and uncertain spaces that characterise the complexity of the higher education landscape.

Ongoing work on socially just pedagogies suggests that higher education can make an important contribution towards social transformation, but for this to happen there has

to be some transformation at the higher education level too. Such transformation demands rethinking and reframing of concepts such as social justice, democratic deliberation, colonial and decolonial processes, and citizenship and how they are relevant to higher education curricula, pedagogies, administration structures, and assessments. Papers in this special issue do precisely this; that is, they engage in the re-theorising of such concepts in order to confront taken for granted meanings and to shed light on numerous challenges in higher education institutions. These challenges point to the salience of higher education's histories in South Africa, especially higher education's complicities with the legacies of colonial violence. Rethinking and reframing from different theoretical perspectives such as posthumanist or decolonial theories is a vital academic *and* political task in the long processes of inventing new socially just pedagogies that are responsive to the challenges identified.

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