University access, inclusion and social justice

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Abstract
University access programmes inherently and inevitably provide students with a ‘label’. Firstly, students are generally segregated and stigmatised as they are treated as a separate group that accessed university somewhat ‘illegitimately’. Access programmes generally place more emphasis on academic development and in so doing seem to undermine the importance of inclusivity. Even though evidence suggests that these concerted efforts at ‘pulling out’ students in order to ensure that they learn in homogeneous environments, the practice somewhat falls short of observing heterogeneity, and does, to some extent, not seem to employ inclusive practices. We therefore argue that inclusion poses a social justice challenge to university access programmes. Through the social critique lens, we challenge stereotypes associated with university access programmes in accordance with critical intellectual enterprises. Critical intellectual enterprises require that we constantly re-evaluate, not only our social institutions, but also the terms that we use to describe our very existence.

INTRODUCTION
This article provides an analysis and critique of contemporary practices and debates concerning inclusion and university access programmes from a social justice perspective. Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Oyler and Sonu (2010, 238) indicate that social justice has ‘proliferated in education in recent years and is an umbrella term encompassing a large range of practices and perspectives’. It has become evident that students in some quarters of the education system frequently experience ‘negative and inequitable treatment’ (Brown 2006; Ladson-Billings 1994). Inclusion calls for students never to be seen in isolation from the broader societal changes and constitutional imperatives (Coates 2007; Alexander 2009). According to Bornman and Rose (2009), what is central to the understanding of inclusion is the notion of participation. The article addresses and examines university access programmes
as social structures and institutional contexts or spaces with specified rules and regulations. Some of these rules are clearly known and well articulated; others are not so clear, whilst some are largely invisible. These institutional rules govern students’ behaviour, their thoughts and the shape of their lives.

**UNIVERSITY ACCESS PROGRAMMES AND INCLUSION**

Despite the fact the higher education participation rates are still comparatively low and remain racially skewed (Pandor 2006), South Africa’s democratic government has seen growing student numbers and improved access to higher education, especially for disadvantaged black students, as a key to overcoming past inequities, thus creating a stable democracy and society, as well as producing the high level skills essential to drive forward economic growth and development (Pityana 2006). National participation rates at higher education institutions remain at 16.3 per cent which is well below the national benchmark of 20 per cent.

Furthermore, an increase (40% in 1993 to 63% in 2007) is depicted in the enrolment figures amongst African students, yet the participation rates for white and African students between the age cohort of 20–24 years, is 60 per cent and 12 per cent respectively (Council on Higher Education 2009, 19). Clearly as attempt to increase not only participation figures, universities have come up with structured access programmes as a means of also improving through-put rates. This response from universities we do not contest; what we do however question, is the authenticity of these types of programmes in creating spaces, thereby allowing opportunities for student ownership, participation and consultation in determining their own success.

As noted earlier, access programmes strive to develop skills for lifelong learning. We contend that they should empower, emancipate and contribute to creating independent learners. One element of social justice that seems to have been overlooked is the voices of the students concerned. In addition to the students’ right to learn (Brown 2002), Cook-Sather (2002) stresses that students should have a say in how they are taught. As will be pointed out later, fairness is one of the indispensable elements of social justice. Key concerns that need continuous reflection in respect of fairness include: what the students get out of the experience, particularly their achievements; the opportunity to learn effectively without interference or disruption; the respect and individual help they receive from their lecturers/tutors; and their access to all aspects of the curriculum. Some deliberations of social justice link it with academic achievement, critical consciousness and inclusive practices (Grant and Sleeter 2006; McKenzie, Christman, Hernandez, Fierro, Capper, Dantley, González, Cambron-McCabe and Scheurisch 2008).

**SOCIAL JUSTICE CONCEPTUALISED**

A general definition of social justice is hard to arrive at and even harder to implement. In essence, social justice is concerned with equal justice, not just in the courts, but
in all aspects of society. This concept demands that people have equal rights and opportunities; everyone, from the poorest person on the margins of society to the wealthiest, deserves an even playing field. According to Gerwitz, Ball and Bowe (1995), theories of social justice advocate adequate mechanisms used to regulate social arrangements in the fairest way for the benefit of all. For the purpose of this article, conceptualisation of social justice hinges on Nancy Fraser’s definition. She defines justice as ‘parity of participation’ (Tikly 2010, 6). Fraser (2008, 16) elucidates that ‘overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalised obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others as full partners in social interaction’. Gerwitz (1998) maintains that social justice is premised on the discourse of disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote marginalisation and exclusionary processes. Social justice supports a process built on respect, care, recognition and empathy. The presence of words, such as ‘demands, mechanisms, disrupting, subverting’ in the definitions above, suggest concerted action and seem to elicit revolutionary overtones.

Similarly, Calderwood (2003) also adopts a revolutionary approach to social justice. She posits that it works to undo socially created and maintained differences in material conditions of living, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the perpetuation of the privilege of some, at the expense of others. Frey, Pearce, Pollock, Artz and Murphy (1996) raise concern about sensibility toward social justice. The authors (Frey et al.) claim that sensibility should forego ethical concerns, commit to structural analyses of ethical concerns, adopt an activist orientation and seek identification with others.

On the promotion of social justice, Calderwood (2003) is of the view that people need to act to reduce and eradicate oppression, however distant we may feel from the personal culpability of its enactment. This view is further highlighted by former British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, who, quoting an unknown Greek philosopher, said: ‘When will there be justice in Athens? It will be when those that do not suffer are as angry as those that do’. Undoubtedly, there seems to be an agreement that injustice is not only an issue that concerns those at its receiving end, but also those members of society that do not seem to be affected. The situation further calls for alertness or what we may call ‘thinking beyond the visible and the ordinary’. Calderwood (2003) cites an unfortunate reality about social justice. She states that the mechanisms of injustice are largely invisible, even to those who strive to live their lives and carry out their work ethically. A question that may arise from the ensuing debates above is whether or not and to what extent providers (managers and tutors) of the university access programmes are aware of practices, processes, rules and regulations that perpetrate and perpetuate acts of social injustice and consider themselves as not culpable. Summarily, social justice can be construed as ‘the exercise of altering institutional and organisational arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions’ (Goldfarb and Grinberg 2002, 162).
The challenge with regard to university access programmes is the balance that needs to be provided in relation to widening access and creating opportunities for ensuring success (Grussendorf, Liebenberg and Houston 2004). On the other hand, Goduka (1996) is of the opinion that students originating from a range of social and cultural backgrounds portray different life experiences, educational opportunities, various expectations, needs and academic potential. In line with the latter views, we argue that the need for expansive access needs to be balanced with the most appropriate opportunities and choices available to support and guarantee the success of selected students. We acknowledge that admission authorities at higher education institutions are faced with daunting challenges such as increasing throughput rates and securing subsidies; yet, arguing from a social justice perspective, and taking into account socio-political considerations (democratic principles as embedded in the South African constitution) it is necessary that students from historically and educationally disadvantaged contexts be incrementally admitted to institutions of higher learning. Furthermore, cognisance needs to be taken of the fact that these students’ educational backgrounds might not have adequately prepared them for the demands of university life.

The key question is then: How do higher learning authorities respond to these demands and what should the role of these institutions be, in not only providing, but also securing access to learners, especially from contextually disadvantaged milieus? We therefore argue that increased access without increasing the chances of students succeeding academically might, in itself, be regarded as an exclusionary practice.

In line with above, we now reflect on the structures and practices employed at a traditional White Afrikaans university embarking upon seemingly providing access to prospective students who may have not have qualified when measured against the set admission requirements. The specific access programme is available to all students who were unsuccessful in gaining admission to this university. An admission point of between 20 and 24 is required of prospective students to be admitted to the programme. Study options for learners are geared at the following options, namely: Economic and Management Sciences; Human and Social Studies; and Natural and Agricultural Sciences (UPP brochure 2011). The latter options are, however, not part of the mainstream at the main campus and are located at an off-campus site. Clearly in our view, this access programme has academic merit; furthermore, the intent of this university to engage with the challenges associated with access and the creation of opportunities for success, are indeed encouraging.

Our point of departure is however, that any type of access programme should not be delivered as an off-campus activity. The type of support that is offered to access students in relation to full-time students at the main campus should also be scrutinised. In an article in the official newsletter from this university, dated October 2011, the aim of a new tutorial programme is highlighted as a mechanism of supporting main campus students to achieve academic success in module-specific assessment offerings. Senior students fulfil the role of tutors as a means of transferring their academic knowledge to mostly first-year students (Official newsletter 2011). Again,
the good intentions of this programme are not at stake; what is questionable is why this programme is offered only to mainstream students and not students in the access programme. Upon perusal of the UPP 2011 brochure, it is noted that only black students appear on the cover page; this in itself, may imply that black students are the only individuals whom seemingly do not qualify for full admission and have a much greater need to be included in the access programme. Apparently, white students are also part of the full-time access programme enrolment. Furthermore, the Unit for Students with Disabilities (USD) is located on the main campus and renders support to learners with barriers to development in the areas of visual impairments, hearing impairments, mobility impairments, specific learning disabilities, psychological impairments and disabling chronic illnesses. In relation to the latter, the support of each student is tailored to the specific needs of the individual e.g. study material in alternative format, sign language interpreting and assistance in the lecture hall. Physical accessibility, alternative test and examination arrangements, applications for financial aid, placement in campus residences, etc. (South African National Council for the Blind newsletter 2011); the questions that arise again are: How and what type of support is rendered by the USD to students (Access programme at the off-campus site) experiencing challenges to learning and development and would not an access programme located at the main campus, allow for a more streamlined, centrally coordinated and efficient resource utilised operation?

The above-mentioned implied exclusionary practices of access programmes may be perceived as limiting student participation that, in itself, could promote the silent exclusion of so-called included students. As our argument for access is framed within a social justice, inclusion discourse, we claim that any form of university access, where constitutionally and practically feasible should be part of the mainstream. Thus, this means that all the activities of any university access programme should be practised within the confines of the main campus.

THE ADVENT AND NATURE OF UNIVERSITY ACCESS PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Academic under-preparedness is progressively being experienced at South African institutions of higher education (Cilliers and Kilpin 1998; Van den Bergh and Burke 1998). Hartshorne states that ‘it is well documented that students coming from the Department of Education and Training are dependent on rote learning and experience teacher and textbook dominant learning environments’ (Agar and Knopfmacher 1995, 124). Many South African universities have developed access programmes as an alternative route to university admission. According to Kapp (1994) access programmes were conceived to increase access for black students who were disadvantaged by apartheid and to empower these students for the rigours of higher level study. Pavlich, Orkin and Richardson (1995) assessed the effectiveness of access programmes and suggested that they depend substantially, on:

• The use of appropriate learning technologies (e.g. tutorials; computer-assisted learning; etc).
• Intra- and inter- programme management structures.
• The development of sensitive alternative selection procedures, i.e. identifying the more capable students regardless of their grade twelve results.
• Ensuring that disadvantaged students are catered for in non-academic ways (in terms of financial aid; counselling services, etc).
• The extent to which faculties administration and student body perceive the programme as ‘legitimate’.

Even though access programmes are intended to ameliorate deficiencies, they are not without criticism. Mabokela (1997, 431 in Akoojee and Nkomo 2007) asserts that these programmes are underpinned by the assumption that black students are inherently deficient. Mabokela (2000, 147) further argues that the ‘deficiency model of labelling black students has the potential not only to stigmatise black students as inferior but also to impede the ability of these universities to critically interrogate the relevance of their academic programmes’. Troskie-de Bruin (1999) found that access programme students are critical of this ‘backward looking’ approach. Notwithstanding such drawbacks, the access programme has the potential and is designed as an intervention strategy that can promote access to higher education through academic preparation (Edward, Droogsma, Ada, Chung, Jack and Joanne 2004).

A study by Edwin and Alexander (2004) found that students who successfully completed the programme had better opportunities for further study and tended to do so at higher academic levels than those who did not complete it. This vindicates Akoojee and Nkomo’s (2007, 385), Malaza’s (2007) and Higher Education South Africa (HESA)’s (2005) assertion that access should not be limited to participation in higher education, but embrace success (access with success). Attempts by university authorities to increase access without creating opportunities for students to be successful might be interpreted as a new form of social exclusion (Wilson-Strydom, 2011: 407). Access can be denied due to financial constraints and other factors. Retracting from Amartya Sen’s capability approach (conversion of opportunities), as a framework in understanding the complexity and challenges associated with student access, Wilson-Strydom argues further, that individual conversion factors such as, physical condition (e.g. blind or sighted), academic ability, language ability, motivation to learn, life skills needed, etc. tend to be overemphasised by university bureaucracies in their attempt to support students, especially those from disadvantaged contexts, in gaining admission. On the other hand, social and environment conversion factors such as economic inequalities, rural versus urban, the national education system and policy framework, school contexts (financial resources, access to learning support material, quality educators, food and nutritional needs), the university context (availability of bursaries for certain study fields, marketing, etc.) tend to be misunderstood and needs to be actively interrogated by universities when applying admission requirements.
The above discussion indicates that universities generally become involved when the students reach their doorstep. To fill the gap, the Upward Bound Programme (UBP), a model to redress access of previously disadvantaged students to higher education, was conceived. UBP was conceptualised on the assumption that by exposing school learners to university life and giving them additional academic tuition, their chances of success at university would be enhanced (Ramrathan, Manik and Pillay 2007, 73).

Appraisals of access programmes have revealed some successes. In fact, an appraisal by Hay and Marais (2004, 59), after ten years of the existence of the programme, concluded that if it is implemented in an innovative way, it has a justifiable place in higher education. An access programme implemented at the Vaal University of Technology (VUT) not only resulted in widened access but it had a positive impact on the learners’ cognitive and academic language skills (Du Plessis, Van Rensburg and Van Staden 2005, 863). Wood and Lithauer (2005, 1002) reveal that the access programme has far-reaching effects on all aspects of students’ lives and not only on their academic performance. Results from their longitudinal study showed that students who completed the programme tend to perform better in later degree studies than those who were directly admitted to degree studies.

Despite recorded successes attributable to the access programme, Downs (2005, 666) cautions that due to the consequences of a myriad of academic and non-academic factors, it cannot necessarily be guaranteed that students who perform well in the programme will continue to perform better in subsequent degree courses. Alfonso (2006, 874) concurs that this increased educational opportunity (through access programmes), does not necessarily result in educational attainment. This fact calls for the need for on-going student development and support. Chickering’s theory (as cited in Hadley 2006, 11) addresses the concept of student access to higher education settings. He focuses on students’ ability to acquire the necessary academic skills for higher education, develop the capacity to respond appropriately to challenging situations and accrue a new level of independence. He further argues that first-year students are typically challenged by the vectors of competence, emotions and autonomy. Chickering (1969) defines developing competence as the student’s ability to acquire the intellectual skills necessary for the higher education environment. Managing emotions has to do with students’ self-control and appropriate behaviour in relation to challenging situations. Developing autonomy is the students’ experimentation with achieving independence and being able to cope in a new environment.

INCLUSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Inclusion, at all levels of education, implies no discrimination in terms of disability, culture, gender or other aspects of learners or staff that are assigned significance by society (Department of Education 2001). It involves all learners in a community, with no exception and irrespective of their intellectual, physical, sensory or other differences, provides equal access to the mainstream curriculum and classroom for all
learners. Inclusion emphasises diversity over assimilation and is based on the notion of human rights, equity, social justice, respect and care (Ballard 1997; Dunbar-Krige and Van der Merwe 2010; Landsberg, Kruger and Nel 2005). Teaching all students equitably (that is, a tendency to act in ways that support learning for all students) means that diversity is acknowledged and celebrated. This assertion is in congruence with inclusive education’s raison d’etre.

The creation and development of learning communities have long been acknowledged as a vital recourse in social justice debates. Sands, Kozleski and French (2000) see the basic premise of inclusive learning communities as those that all learners, irrespective of the challenges individual learners face, belong to where the concepts of inclusion, democracy, community, collaboration and diversity are embodied in their philosophy. Creating and developing these inclusive learning communities further broaden propositions that advocate inclusive learning communities as the process for, and the desirable outcome of equity, democracy and social justice. In relation to the latter view, international perspectives dictate, and in most developing contexts, laws demand that all learners receive an appropriate education in the ‘least restrictive environment’ that is consistent with their needs (Snowman and Biehler, in Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana 2010.) Therefore, learners with specific learning needs (access students) should, wherever possible, and with the appropriate support, be educated alongside others through the mainstream setting. Only where it is absolutely necessary, in terms of the student’s particular needs, should he/she be educated in a separate specialised setting. The South African constitutional mandate articulates this view by stating that the right of all learners, irrespective of disability or difficulty, is to be treated as normally as possible (not labelled and/or separated).

According to Bahous and Nabhani (2008), social justice is seen differently in various parts of the world. Even though legislation in the United States, for example purports social justice, none requires that students be consulted on what they want or need. In Britain, several national frameworks assert the right of students to actively participate in decisions concerning their education (Cruddas and Haddock 2003). Troubling education systems for social justice implies that providers, as well as teachers, need to be aware and possess the will to contribute to socially just educational practices. Even though attempts have been made to infuse social justice in teacher education programmes, these attempts have been mapped onto the fragmented structure of teacher education programmes and have had limited success (Goodlad 1990; McDonald 2005). According to Villegas (2007), research confirms that teacher beliefs about students significantly shape the expectations they create and continue to hold about student learning. Once formed, these expectations lead teachers to treat students differently, resulting in positive or negative performance, aspirations and self-concepts, which are more likely to correlate with the students’ academic performance. These expectations, if communicated in any manner to the students, are also likely to be affected. Lacking faith in students, even when a determination arrived at concerning their performance is flawed, leads teachers
to form low academic expectations of students and subsequently, to treat them in ways that stifle their learning (Madom, Jussim and Eccles 1997). The tendency is more likely to positively contribute to the consolidation of exclusionary practices in university access programmes, as students’ learning in these programmes may be hindered due to construed expectations. It therefore seems difficult for teachers to consider different approaches to teaching and learning in such programmes. This implies that there is a need for conscientising lecturers, managers and students to embrace inclusion in university access programmes. Therefore mechanisms by universities should be indicative of the measures to accommodate diversity and provide supportive teaching and learning environments for all students. Every level of a university’s education system needs to be developed whilst the active participation of all students, whether access or not, should be encouraged and supported at all levels. This view, upheld by Donald, Lazurus and Lolwana (2010), further highlights two approaches detrimental to the issue of inclusion as it relates to access, namely:

1. Prevention – here the focus should be on transforming education institutions and curricula to facilitate access to appropriate education for all students. It also focuses on elements of social transformation that can assist in preventing the occurrence of barriers to learning and development.

2. Support – here the focus should be on providing education support to lecturing staff and students.

The challenges (lack of access to quality training opportunities; mismatch between teacher supply and demand; fragmentation and uncoordination; tenuous involvement of teachers, organisations and role-players, etc.) facing Teacher Education and Development (TED) in South African universities are considerable. These issues, in themselves, prohibit access to qualification-based TED offerings, facilities and infrastructural developments on the part of the prospective teacher, especially those individuals prone to contextually disadvantaged schooling opportunities (Integrated Strategic Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa 2011). Therefore, for universities to become more accessible it becomes cardinal that their capacity to render effective TED is optimised, extended and expanded. Creative means from these institutions need to be sought to meet the demand of producing the estimated 12 000–16 000 teachers needed annually, otherwise the call for the reopening of colleges of education needs to revisited. The issue at stake for higher education is not only the support of students in access programmes, but also to become increasingly involved in creating avenues for maintaining and sustaining academic success for prospective students.

Considering the fact that students are not adequately prepared for Higher Education learning where a greater acumen in terms of critical and creative abilities is demanded (Waghid 2004), the question to be asked should be: What is the role of Higher Education Institutions in availing their expertise in their human resources and physical infrastructure as a means of demonstrating a commitment to the development of contextually disadvantaged communities in South Africa?
Tikly (2010) argues that social justice demands of the past create a more inclusive, relevant and democratic educational dispensation. According to McGregor (2004), the way we organise spaces in educational settings produce particular social relations. Spaces constructed through social interactions, are enacted and continually created and recreated. According to Gerwitz, Ball and Bowe (cited in Mncube 2008, 79), social justice has two major dimensions, namely distributional and relational. Mncube (2008) further maintains that the relational aspect of social justice has to do with procedural rights and is concerned with ordering social relations according to formal and informal rules that govern the way in which members of the society treat one another at both micro and macro levels.

We contend that the need for individual recognition, albeit within social interactions and the resultant relations of diversity as a social justice imperative, should permeate learning environments, programmes and practices. The recognition of diversity necessitates responsive education. Critical elements of such education amongst other things, include self-reflective analysis of one’s attitudes and beliefs (Novick 1996); caring, trusting and inclusive learning environments; and respect for diversity. Fraser (1997) suggests the existence of diversity panels in the creation of democratic social institutions. According to Brown (2006) Fraser’s diversity panels can challenge the presumption of entitlement and highlight the reality of institutionalised oppression. By engaging in informed constructive discourse with people who are different from them, students are forced to examine how power, privilege and dominance are manifested and reinforced. Such discourse communities can provide the context in which students learn about the origins of stereotypes and prejudices, thereby recognising and experiencing the need for change.

Social justice has also been characterised as fighting against and altering institutionalised inequities, discrimination and injustices that benefit few students and harm many more (Goldfarb and Grinberg 2002). Recent practices in South African higher education have seen university access programmes housed at sites other than at the universities. These sites include further education and training (FET) colleges and/or satellite campuses. According to Theoharis (2007) such tendencies do not keep university access programme students at the centre of universities’ practice, but further remove the link between social justice and ecojustice (Furman and Gruenewald 2004). The authors of this article also drew lessons from segregated (public versus private) schools in Lebanon where the effects of labelling seem immense. The Ottoman rule resulted in poor performance being attributed to public schools, with the gap between various social strata becoming wider and deeper (Inati 1999). The discussion above, once again, portrays education as a vehicle that is amenable to perpetuating both exclusionary and inclusionary practices.

Offering programmes at exclusive sites also poses a challenge in respect of resources. Questions relating to the proper distribution of benefits and burdens among sites have always posed a challenge for education institutions. Fraser’s perspectival
dualist framework is problematic for the disparate distribution of goods and services and/or social structures that enable material inequality (North 2006). Fraser (1997) asserts that the increasing stress on sectoral politics undermines redistributive efforts that seek to improve the well-being of marginalised citizens. Her perspectival dualist framework views recognition and redistribution as co-fundamentally and mutually irreducible dimensions of justice.

Race also plays a role in internalised and institutionalised inequities. Prejudices and stereotypes in teaching students of colour are well documented. Irvine (1990) for example, reviewed a vast body of literature on the issue and concluded that teachers generally believe that black students have less potential for academic achievement than white students. Owing to low expectations, black students tend to receive less attention, encouragement, praise, time to respond, positive response after a correct reply, eye-contact and more verbal and non-verbal criticism. These actions constitute favourable ingredients for learned helplessness as they are excessively devoid of affirming attitudes and tacitly condone deficit overtones. According to Villegas (2007, 375), ‘challenging deficit perspectives and promoting affirming views of diversity is a precursor to building teachers’ disposition to teach all students equitably’.

**DISCUSSION**

Social justice aims at circumventing marginalisation and exclusionary processes. Sapon-Shevin (2003, 26 and 28) state that ‘Inclusion is not about disability ... Inclusion is about social justice .... By embracing inclusion as a model of social justice, we can create a world fit for all of us’. Debates on the existence of a link between social justice, academic achievement, critical consciousness and inclusive practices also need further interrogation. Inclusion has been described by UNESCO (2003) as an approach that examines how to transform educational endeavours in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It should further be seen as a reform strategy which supports and welcomes all students. Moreover, it places more emphasis on the educational programmes’ meeting the needs and supporting students as normally and as inclusively as possible, rather than the students being separated, excluded or in any manner discriminated against by the needs of the programme (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana 2002). Ts’oeu (2009) asserts that instead of the student adapting to the programme, the programme should be ready to serve every student, regardless of what makes him/her unique. She further suggests that diversity needs to be seen as both a challenge and a source of enrichment in a learning environment.

The realisation of academic achievement and preparing students to live as critical citizens requires learning environments that embrace heterogeneity and inclusion. Heterogeneity provides all students with access to a rich and engaging curriculum (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan and Lipton 2000). University access programmes are, to varying degrees, characterised by ‘pull-out’ exercises. Students who are segregated by such pull-out programmes are possibly denied access to the rich and engaging curriculum.
Pull-out exercises are usually associated with descriptions and labels for particular groups. Students in the university access programmes are not immune to such practices as utterances relating to their poor academic achievement are common. This serves to cultivate individual and institutionalised practices rooted in low expectations, deficit thinking, marginalisation and cultural imperialism against a diverse spectrum of students (Kose 2009). Kose further calls for those in authority to embrace social justice by facilitating a moral dialogue that strives for high academic achievement and affirming relationships with students from all backgrounds and ability levels (Shields 2004), as well as deepening one’s epistemological awareness, value orientation and practice toward social justice (Brown 2004).

CONCLUSION

In this article we did not intend to undermine or devalue the contribution university access programmes make in widening access and participation in higher education. We aimed to show how the somewhat unintended consequences, such as labelling and stigmatisation may contribute to exclusionary practices. In order to achieve inclusion for fair co-existence, duplication in terms of resources, the attitude of teachers in such programmes, curricula issues, as well as matters relating to the interaction of students as members of learning communities, continue to pose a challenge to create, develop and maintain learning organisations and programmes that embrace social justice. It can be concluded that learning organisations need to ensure that particular groups are not disadvantaged and to promote their participation and success. We need strategies for promoting good relationships and managing behaviour; where conscious and unconscious discrimination are not tolerated; where raising achievement for all is the motivating and driving force, as well as where students are treated fairly with dignity and respect (inclusive and socially just practices). As Agarwal et al. (2010, 238) state, the vision of social justice reflects an understanding that we work to address the ameliorative systemic inequities that affect students. Drawing from the realisation that ‘individual experiences may be shaped by issues of oppression’ (McDonald 2007, 2076) and the placement of students in an educational landscape characterised by tendencies of inequity, we need to meet the challenge that social justice poses to university access programmes. We conclude with the observation that social justice appeals to intra-, trans- and interdisciplinary spaces of human existence.

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HESA. 2005, see Malaza, 2007.


UNESCO, see United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation.


UPP, see University Preparation Programme Brochure.


