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Cultivating Flourishing Lives: A Robust Social Justice Vision of Education

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Presented at AERA 2010 as the Social Justice Award Lecture, this article calls attention to the purposes of education in the 21st century and the need for a robust, social justice vision of education. Here, it is argued that education is about the cultivation of a flourishing life and not only the narrow preparation for employment. To realize education that cultivates students' flourishing minds and lives, this article proposes five core principles for this robust social justice vision: self-assessment, critical questioning, practicing democracy, social action, and criteria for adjudication.

KEYWORDS: social justice, cultivating, flourishing

The title may suggest dissatisfaction and impatience with the political (e.g., federal, state, and local governance), social (e.g., teacher-student/parent), moral (e.g., caring), and research and development aspects of education. My dissatisfaction and impatience is caused by the (lack of) vision for our current purpose of education: to prepare U.S. students to compete in the global economy and to give them "21st-century skills for 21st-century jobs." In addition, the title may be taken to mean that current conceptions of social justice are not and have not been robust enough to bring about *flourishing* lives for students. My dissatisfaction does not come from arrogance, for that is not my nature, but the impatience does come out of what I believe is at best a laissez-faire attitude and at worst a disregard and/or narrow conception of social justice in education (see e.g., Grant & Agosto, 2008). This article addresses the purpose of education in the 21st century, calling attention to widely discussed but narrowly envisioned education proposals—national standards, charter schools, linking teacher evaluation to student test scores, and the silences around issues such as social justice and ethics and the underrepresentation of people of color in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. In particular, I call attention

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to the traditional Jeffersonian, Mannian, and Deweyan aims and goals of education, such as personal autonomy, critical and analytical thinking, ethical judgment, learning how to function as a diverse society, learning to forge relationships across difference, and to respect one another's perspectives, experiences, and world views. I ask, partly inspired by Rose (2010), "Are these aims still being pursued? Are students being taught in ways that are consistent with cultivating flourishing lives, or are they being trampled over by workforce preparation and consumerism, which are based on a narrow, top-down, technocratic model of teaching and learning where experts determine what children learn and teachers follow a script and transmit its information and standardized tests determine the success or failure of that transmission?"

This article joins others in raising questions about the purpose(s) of education in our democratic society. Indeed, one of the more prevailing discussions about education over the centuries has been about its purpose and character. From the time of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, questions have been raised about the purpose and aims of education to develop autonomous "human beings living with beauty, living with wisdom, and loving the common good" (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 123), including developing citizens "for whom philosophy and art have become a way of life" (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 123) and "citizens whose creative imaginations contributed to what democracy could become" (Gibson & Grant, 2010, p. 11). Today, discussions of the purpose of education, while present in society's mainstream discourse, are too often isolated and/or reduced to employment and employability, consumerism, and voting. In addition, discussions of the purpose of education today often leave me searching for connections to students of color and low-income students. While I agree that there are policies and practices designed to service students of color and low-income students, my attention here is for these students to have an education that prepares them and encourages them to have a flourishing life, not just a life. My educational wishes for my grandkids, Gavin and Amaya—two African American children and their cohort—are for them to have an education that is responsive to their identity and cultural historical background. An education where they do not have to search for racial and gender role models, but instead where role models who achieved excellence both on the national and global stage are readily visible and in a good number. This I don't see in (public) schools; what I do see are politicians and others of financial means running to put their children in private schools. Dorothy Height (who I will return to later), in speaking about taking action in order to achieve social justice and to put an end to inequalities, argues that people must take action, and "if the time is not ripe, you have to ripen the time." "Ripen the time" is significant to me as I argue for a robust social justice education of all students that will lead to a flourishing life. In presenting my argument herein, I am focusing on African American students; I am, after all, a firsthand witness to the education my grandkids do and do not receive.

Wordsmithing and Clarifying the Language

For the title, I deliberately chose words that convey a particular meaning. I did this because some words have multiple meanings, and sometimes words or phrases such as social justice in oral and/or written discourse come with no meaning attached, with weak or mushy application for equity and/or equality, and/or with vague, sometimes rambling intent within political, social, and ethical/moral discourses. Also, meaning(s)—when given—often cause confusion because they are not explained or are not addressed by the actors (i.e., researchers, teachers, scholars, government officials). (For a discussion of this, see Cochran-Smith, 2008; Grant & Agosto, 2008; North, 2006.) In addition, my title challenges many of the current notions on social justice in the education literature and the mainstream discourse about the purpose of education for our students. Let me first clarify what I mean by the words on the left side of the colon in the title.

Cultivating

> . . . while we live, while we are among human beings, let us cultivate our humanity.

Cultivating, both as a word and concept, has history and currency in education. It is used here as the action that brings about flourishing. The dictionary definition of cultivate is to nurture, give time and attention for self-improvement or for the benefit of others. To cultivate is the work that teachers and professors do for and with their students. For example, during the summer of 2010, the Garrison Institute in California hosted a program for teachers, Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE). The purpose of CARE is to prepare classroom teachers for challenging situations, helping them to recognize how their responses affect children and to teach them to become sensitive to the needs of students and how to manage classroom relationships (Garrison Institute, 2010). Cultivating is also the work of the branch of positive psychology at Harvard University to develop a psychology of positive human functioning that will lead to scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving individuals, families, and communities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and to make normal life more fulfilling (Ben-Shahar, 2007, 2009; Compton, 2005).

Cultivating is also used in the title of Martha C. Nussbaum's[1] (1997) widely acclaimed book, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. In the book, Nussbaum's notion of cultivating is to use liberal education as a "tool" to prepare students for global citizenship, to get them ready for the interlocking and interdependent world in which they live. Nussbaum's tools for cultivating humanity include the development of three capacities: "critical examination of oneself and one's tradition" (p. 269); "an ability to see oneself as not simply citizens of some

local region or group but also, and above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern" (p. 270); and narrative imagination—"the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions, wishes and desires that someone so placed might have" (p. 270).

The cultivation in my title uses multicultural democratic education much like Nussbaum uses the humanities—its ideology and practice as a tool to prepare students for a flourishing life (see Gibson & Grant, 2009; Gollnick & Chinn, 2006; Grant & Sleeter, 2009; Sleeter & Grant, 2009):

> Multicultural democratic education builds on existing theories and practices of democratic education—such as a focus on deliberation in the classroom, community involvement and empowerment in school decision-making, instruction on citizenship responsibilities and roles, and a human rights orientation. It also builds from the notion of *paideia*, the critical cultivation of thinking, curious, complex citizens who (re)create democracy. . . . [In doing so,] a multicultural democratic education puts the cultivation of and attention to students' flourishing and whole lives front and center. Thus requiring educators to work from a place of authentic, critical caring; that high-quality learning experiences are prioritized; that authentic, cooperative communities are built in classrooms; that lives and communities are connected to a broader global context; and that students connect school learning to social action and citizenship. Together, these orientations and emphases encourage students to grapple with "what it means to be human" (West, 2004, p. 217), to understand democracy not only in terms of government action but in terms of an orientation to the world and a commitment to equity and justice (Parker, 2003; Perlstein, 2000). This multicultural democratic education embodies a commitment to critical questioning, to hope, and to justice: "No democracy can flourish against the corruptions of plutocratic, imperial forces—or withstand the temptations of militarism in the face of terrorist hate—without a citizenry girded by these three moral pillars of Socratic questioning, prophetic witness, and tragicomic hope" (West, 2004, p. 21). By prioritizing students' flourishing lives and minds, by cultivating critical consciousness, and by connecting individuals to the broader world, a multicultural democratic education develops citizens committed to the (re)creation of a robust, pluralistic democracy—a citizenry committed to fighting injustice and working for a better world. (Parker, 2003, p. 27; Perlstein, 2000)

Flourishing

The way I am using *flourishing* as a word has roots dating back to the ancient Greek notion of "citizens living with and practicing wisdom, beauty, and the common good" (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 123). Flourishing sometimes is used as a synonym for or to help clarify the meaning of *eudaimonia*, the classical Greek word for happiness, or "well being, living well and doing

well"—the good life. Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* (in Broadie, 1991) argued that *eudaimonia* means "doing and living well." Although flourishing is taken to mean happiness, this is not a precise synonym for *eudaimonia*. Brighouse (2005) offers a useful distinction between happiness and flourishing:

> Happiness and flourishing are not, however, identical. We often think of someone as flourishing when they accomplish something of value, even if we do not think that they are personally, happy. An artist might be thought of as flourishing if she succeeds in producing great art, despite unhappiness in her personal life, and we might think that even if we think that the unhappiness produces the greatness. (p. 61)

It is because of this subjective distinction between the meaning of happiness and flourishing that I find *flourishing* a much better term to use to describe the quality of life for which a robust social justice education is needed. Certainly, those who are flourishing may experience happiness—but happiness is better understood as the *by-product* of flourishing rather than a synonym for flourishing itself. Happiness is too narrow of a concept to encompass all of the complexities of personal flourishing (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1991).

Another aspect of flourishing that I find meaningful is that, according to Brighouse (2005), it involves people making meaning and sense of important aspects of their life. In addition, Brighouse argues that, considering the moral and political aspects of Western education, personal flourishing is one of the five primary aims of education. The other aims are: personal autonomy; the ability to contribute to society and the economy, broadly understood; democratic competence; and the capacity for cooperation. About flourishing and education specifically, Brighouse states, "At the foundation of the arguments for preparing children to be autonomous and preparing them for the labor market is the idea that these are extremely valuable for them to be able to live flourishing lives" (p. 39). Brighouse also argues that having a flourishing life is influenced by seven factors: financial situation, family relationships, work, community and friends, health, person freedom, and personal value.

This idea of personal flourishing as a fundamental aim of education corresponds to what Gibson and Grant (2010) argue is at the heart of a multicultural democratic education:

> An ethical commitment to the cultivation of students' complex, flourishing lives. Such a commitment recognizes that, as democratic citizens and as *humans*, students are more than their test scores, their skill mastery, or their future employment. Instead, the commitment is to the "full development of the human personality" (UN, 1948, Article 26.2), that encourages *all* students—regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, religion, or gender—to imagine

> and experience flourishing lives and to discover and cultivate individual talents, interests, aptitudes, and commitments (Dewey, 1916/2009). To accomplish this, teachers must actively work against the limiting of life chances that traditionally occurs in schools serving marginalized students by becoming, as Toni Morrison (1987) contends —a "friend of their minds"; for a commitment to students' flourishing lives is a commitment to their flourishing *minds*. This is in direct opposition to what students of color, low-income students, and English language learners usually experience. (p. 25)

By becoming a "friend of their minds," teachers hold high expectations for students, recognize the intellectual capacity of often marginalized students, provide curriculum content that is challenging and culturally responsive, and maintain ongoing reflective assessment of what they teach, how they teach, and why. It is not a paternalistic friendship of their minds, but rather a commitment to cultivating the intellect of *every* student—and particularly those who have too often been denied the right to become flourishing, intellectual students.

A commitment to students' flourishing lives also recognizes that there are a variety of good lives, and not all of these lives are focused on the accumulation of wealth and status. And since there are a variety of good lives—which means there are many different people, who come not only from different ethnic groups but also from different regions and cultures and have a variety of different identity markers (e.g., gender, sexuality, language, (dis)ability, class)—a question to consider is: Are people from nondominant backgrounds equally influenced by the aforementioned seven factors that Brighouse (2005) identifies? If so, are they also influenced (perhaps even more so) by factors born out of life experiences particular to their ethnic/racial group—for example, in the case of African Americans, enslavement, segregation, and cultural racism. I cannot provide empirical evidence to answer these questions one way or the other, but I can argue based on my review of African American literature, for example, that I believe that African Americans are influenced by the seven factors Brighouse notes, but they are also influenced by additional factors. The significance of this observation, I argue, helps us to be a better "friend of our students' minds." Here, I am arguing that teachers who have knowledge of African American writers (e.g., Phyllis Wheatley, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and Walter Mosley), knowledge of themes and characteristics (e.g., enslavement, religion, racism, equality) within African American literature, and knowledge of the genres within the literature (e.g., slave narratives, Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights) have a greater opportunity to be a "friend of their (African American) students' minds" and to help them achieve a flourishing life. This literary knowledge is an important means of providing teachers with an awareness of the multitude of good lives and the multiple ways in which lives can be helped to flourish.

In both *The Norton Anthology: African American Literature* (Gates & McKay, 1997) and *Ebony Rising: Short Fiction of the Greater Harlem Renaissance Era* (Gable, 2004), two publications that represent some of the more celebrated African American literary works, other factors are visible that promote a flourishing life for African Americans: personal freedom, positive identity, cultural appreciation and recognition, family and friend support, meaningful employment, moral/ethical values, financial stability, good mental and physical health, and education. These constituents I find in the issues and themes that frame African American literature. The themes include the role of African Americans within the larger American society, what it means to be African American, African American culture, racism, slavery, and equality. Gates (1987) explains:

> In 1925, Du Bois outlined what he called the "social compulsion" of black literature, built as it was, he contended, on the difficulties that sprang from emancipation, on the feelings of revenge, despair, aspiration, and hatred which arose as the Negro struggled and fought his way upward. (p. 30)

Similarly, Raboteau (1998) contends, "all African-American studies, including African American literature, speaks to the deeper meaning of the African-American presence in this nation. This presence has always been a test case of the nation's claims to freedom, democracy, equality, the inclusiveness of all" (p. 31). As such, it can be said that African American literature explores the very issues of freedom and equality that were long denied to Blacks in the United States (p. 31).

Education for Robust Social Justice

How well do U.S. schools prepare students for a flourishing life in an increasingly pluralistic society, but one still hampered by cultural racism and social class stratification (Halstead, 1988; Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Lipman, 2002)? Education in the United States focuses on the history and culture of European Americans, with recent increased attention on global awareness and competition (see Brown & Brown, 2010; Grant, 2011; Wynter, 1990).

In this article, I examine trends in multicultural social justice education that challenge old and new configurations of influence and deliberation in today's society. My assessment is mixed: In some areas related to interracial engagement, multicultural social justice education is making progress; in others areas (e.g., school achievement, urban poverty, and violence), progress is minimal or nonexistent (see e.g., Bates, 1996; Demiral & Demiral, 2006; Glennerster, 2002).

Because over the past 30 years I have argued for a theory of education that is inclusive of all students—that accounts for race, class, gender, physical

and mental ability, sexual orientation, and religion—and that is based on my study of pre-K to college-level education in the United States, I begin with an account of the multicultural social justice principles I defended in that work and the rationale for those principles. I then ask what the status is of multicultural social justice education and what its future possibilities are. After providing some examples of what might be done to implement multicultural social justice education in schools, I assess some developments in education policy and practice with those principles in view.

The theory of education that supports multicultural social justice education has two very different sources. One is the study of the history and culture of people of color, especially African Americans, and the struggles of other marginalized people, both as individuals and in groups, within and outside the movements for civil rights (e.g., gender rights, gay rights, (dis)ability rights, and religious rights). The second source includes the experiences (research/scholarship, teaching, and writing) of numerous multiculturalists working with/in schools, colleges, homes, and communities. For multiculturalists, all human beings are deserving of equality and worthy of respect, dignity, and the "full development of their personality," and they should be treated so wherever they live. Furthermore, multiculturalists share a common struggle for liberty and freedom with thinkers like W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Paulo Freire, Mary Wollstonecraft, Sojourner Truth, James Baldwin, Martin L. King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, and other social justice advocates. They therefore have moral obligations that transcend the current framing of the aims of education as preparing U.S. students to compete in the global economy and to give them "21st-century skills for 21st-century jobs."

These early thinkers' ideas formed the basis for the 1960s Civil Rights movements. They believed in equality and equity and had progressive ideas about education and the influence of education and society on people of color. For example, Du Bois (1905/2005) argued that through freedom, equality, and education one can find self-discovery. Education can lead to enlightenment and the discovery of new ideas. Such self-discovery, Du Bois contended, would allow the African American community to rise against racism, and he believed that education was needed in order for a society to reach its highest potential.

Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950), an African American historian who grew up during the time of bitter racial segregation, was well placed to contemplate the issues associated with the inferior education that African Americans were receiving. Woodson, author of *The Mis-education of the Negro* and founder of the *Journal of Negro History*, is often called the Father of Black History, which begat Black Studies and (arguably) begat Multicultural Social Justice Education. Woodson's letter in 1927 to Thomas H. Barnes is a founding document for our idea of multicultural social justice education. Woodson begins his letter by arguing that the history of African Americans—their significant contribution to the making of the United

States—was being distorted, omitted, and/or reported inaccurately in order to sell the immigrant story of American history; it thereby miseducated both Black and White people. Woodson argued for the need to establish a Home Study Department. He wrote:

> Recently a Negro instructor in a college was asked to give a course in Negro history. He treated the request as a joke. He has been well instructed in the story of the Hebrew, the Greeks, and the Romans. He has made a special study of the achievement of Europeans and Americans. He has been taught that these nations accomplished all. The perpetuation of the immigrant story of American history similarly is an exercise of power in which the African American male history and culture is "set aside by the master . . . and the will and wishes of the master . . . are what prevails, therefore, there is no other history worth considering. The fact is that the so-called history teaching in our schools and colleges is downright propaganda, an effort to praise one race and to decry the other to justify social repression and exploitation. The world is still in darkness as to the actual progress of mankind. Each corner of the universe has tended to concern itself merely with the exploits of its own particular heroes. Students and teachers of our time, therefore, are the victims of this selfish propaganda." (Woodson, 1927, p. 1)

At the height of the 1960s Civil Right Movement, James Baldwin—who was a major literary interpreter of the struggles of Black Americans and well placed to reflect on issues associated with the inferior education African Americans received—was invited to give a talk to teachers in New York City. The title of his address, "The Negro Child—His Self-Image" (which was later changed for publication to *A Talk to Teachers*), included the following observation:

> Any Negro who is born in this country and undergoes the American educational system runs the risk of becoming schizophrenic. On the one hand he is born in the shadow of the stars and stripes and he is assured it represents a nation which has never lost a war. He pledges allegiance to that flag that guarantees "liberty and justice for all." He is part of a country in which anyone can become president, and so forth. But on the other hand he is also assured by his country and his countrymen that he has never contributed anything to civilization—that his past is nothing more than a record of humiliations gladly endured. He is assumed by the republic that he, his father, his mother and his ancestors were happy, shiftless, watermelon-eating darkies who loved Mr. Charlie and Miss Ann, that the value he has as a black man is proven by one thing only—his devotion to white people. (Baldwin, 1985, p. 326)

More recently (2000s), although education reform has given attention to students of color—the dismantling of legal school segregation, education policy (e.g., No Child Left Behind Act) designed to help poor, low-achieving students and students of color—a good deal remains to be done as schooling

is far from helping students of color cultivate a flourishing life. According to McNeil (2000), Noguera (2003), Rothstein, (2004), Oakes (2005), Paige and Witty (2010), and Valenzuela (1999), among others, schooling for students of color and low-income students is filled with basic skills and standardized test performance, rote memorization, and a lack of critical thinking, creativity, and engagement. Valenzuela argues that schooling is "subtractive," and Page and Witty claim that "the average African American public school twelfth grader's performance on academic measures approximates that of the average white eighth grader" (p. 2).

By using the observations by Woodson, Baldwin, McNeil, Oakes, Valenzuela, and Paige and Witty, we can assess how far we have come over the past 70 years, the challenges that still confront us, and what we can do if we have the will and desire to do it. My assessment is this: Whereas there has been improvement (i.e., equality and equity) in the education policy and practice for people of color over the past seven decades, successful education of students of color and students who are poor is a distant second to the education of White students. In addition, we have lost the will and desire to continue the progress we previously made in closing the achievement gap. Attention today is about competition between schools for federal funds; promoting and advocating for charter schools and undermining the *public* in public schools; teaching to the test, instead of teaching students; and renewing the ideology of *the* disadvantaged student. At a recent forum on the achievement gap, Waldfogel (quoted in Anderson, 2009) argued:

> I want to underscore one thing, which I think is very clear as you look at data across the past 30 years—those who asserted the black-white assessment gap could not be closed were clearly wrong. . . . We can clearly see tremendous convergence at some periods over the past 30 years and see other periods where policies shift, factors shift, and there is not so much convergence. This suggests that the black-white test score gap is extremely sensitive to environmental factors, to social factors, and to policy factors. . . . The gains and gaps . . . fluctuated with declines or increases in segregation, teacher quality, and improvements in parental education.

The second source for my theory of education that supports multicultural social justice education develops out of my experiences working at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Chicago Public Schools. From the 1960s to the present day, I have worked as a school teacher, administrator, and professor. During this time I have constantly—often working along with others—thought about "new/different ways" to educate PreK-12 students who are marginalized and to prepare teacher candidates for a pluralistic student body. Working along with others, I challenged traditional education policy and practice in favor of a multicultural social justice approach (see e.g., Gibson & Grant, 2010; Grant, 1982, 2010; Grant &

Agosto, 2008; Grant & Brown, 2007; Grant & Gillette, 2005; Grant & Melnick, 1978; Grant & Secada, 1990; Grant & Sleeter, 1996, 2009; Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1994; Sleeter & Grant, 2009; Zeichner & Grant, 1981) that would lead to the development of flourishing lives. This approach to education has deep roots in ideas and work of African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and first-, second-, and third-wave White feminists and feminists of color.

While working with colleagues—both from the United States and abroad—I have learned a lot about myself, my education, my country's educational system, and its strengths and weaknesses. I see that while in some respects my education prepared me to intellectually challenge systems of oppression and to be fluent and/or literate in human relations skills, in other respects my preparation was not so good (e.g., understanding of the U.S. economic system and its relationship to the poverty of people of color). Thinking about issues of all kinds—including how people of color, especially African American and Latino males, drop out of schools, how gang violence permeates school communities, how students of different backgrounds are being brought together, how academic achievement is excellent for some and poor for others—I had another vantage point for thinking about what a robust social justice vision of education should do to cultivate students' flourishing lives.

Cultivating Flourishing Lives: Core Practices

Focusing on a robust social justice vision to cultivate flourishing lives, I argue that five core practices are essential to prepare students for a U.S. society that has yet to achieve freedom, justice, and equality for everyone: (1) self-assessment, (2) critical questioning, (3) practicing democracy, (4) social action, and (5) criteria for adjudication.

Self-Assessment

The first core practice for a robust social justice vision of education is the self-assessment of one's beliefs and values and the traditions on which they sit. In education, Arthur Jersild's (1955) research on the relation between self-understanding and education continues to guide many of us today. Jersild asked, How does helping students in a distinctly intimate and personal way influence the teacher's own life? He concluded, "The teacher's understanding and acceptance of himself [*sic*] is the most important requirement in any effort he makes to help students to know themselves and to gain healthy attitudes of self-acceptance" (p. 12). Many schools of education continue to support Jersild's thesis by suggesting that teachers' ability to critically analyze themselves and their life experiences—in other words, to be reflective (Zeichner & Liston, 1996)—and their life experiences are crucial to understanding their students. Parker Palmer (2007) argues, "Knowing myself

is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. In fact, knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge" (p. 2).

There is another level of self-assessment that I believe is critical for cultivating flourishing lives, one that pushes us to look deeper into who we are *and* the ideas and traditions that we uphold. Nussbaum (1997) describes this as "Socratic Self-Examination." She contends that no beliefs are accepted as authoritative simply because they are handed down by tradition or become familiar through habit; instead, only those ideas and beliefs are accepted that survive reason's demand for consistency and justification. Cornel West (2004) promotes this thesis as he explains that the "Socratic love of wisdom holds not only that the unexamined life is not worth living but also that to be human and to be a democratic citizen requires that one muster the courage to think critically for oneself" (p. 208). West goes on to add,

> This love of wisdom is a perennial pursuit into the dark corners of one's soul, the night alleys of one's society, and the back roads of the world in order to grasp the deep truth about one's soul, society, and world . . . Socratic questions yield intellectual integrity, philosophic humility, and personal sincerity—all essential elements of democratic armor for the fight against corruption and power. (p. 209)

Socratic self-examination is significant for critiquing ways of doing that are both personal and institutional. A robust social justice education must encourage teachers and students to move beyond self-reflections that mainly challenge surface-level beliefs and ideas, such as personal beliefs or values and ideas that are only a small part of a much bigger whole. I am reminded of Martin Luther King's speech on April 4, 1967, "Beyond Vietnam— A Time to Break Silence." Here, King is meeting the challenges of West's statement that "This love of wisdom is a perennial pursuit into the dark corners of one's soul, the night alleys of one's society, and the back roads of the world in order to grasp the deep truth about one's soul, society, and world" (p. 209). In voicing his concern and opposition to the war in Vietnam, King (1967) speaks of his self-assessment:

> I come to this magnificent house of worship tonight because my conscience leaves me no other choice. I join you in this meeting because I am in deepest agreement with the aims and work of the organization which has brought us together: Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam. The recent statements of your executive committee are the sentiments of my own heart, and I found myself in full accord when I read its opening lines: "A time comes when silence is betrayal." And that time has come for us in relation to Vietnam. The truth of these words is beyond doubt, but the mission to which they call us is a most difficult one. Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government's policy, especially in time of war. Nor does the

> human spirit move without great difficulty against all the apathy of conformist thought within one's own bosom and in the surrounding world. Moreover, when the issues at hand seem as perplexed as they often do in the case of this dreadful conflict, we are always on the verge of being mesmerized by uncertainty; but we must move on.

In reading (or hearing) King's words, we can sense that self-assessment requires inner strength, especially when it challenges the popular prevailing discourse of thinking and acting of those that have the support of many in society, including the federal government. King was the "Socratic gadfly" on the back of a troubled nation. He described his remarks as issuing a "passionate plea to my beloved nation . . . [and was speaking] to my fellow Americans" so that the United States would better deal with the poor people of the nation.

To develop a robust vision of social justice, students must receive practice in analyzing their vision of society and the actions that are taking place around them. These actions should be located and rooted in the local—the culture, history, literature, and art of students' communities, including their neighborhoods and schoolyards (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). Here I am reminded of social realism Chicago-style, a movement born during the Depression of the 1930s and led by Richard Wright that argued that African Americans should analyze and express in literature, art, plays, lectures, and others forms of realistic art the racial and social injustice and economic hardship they face each day of their life in urban Chicago (Wright, 1937). Whether looking at Wright's recommendations in the 1930s or the place-based education of the 21st century, we see the importance of rooting students' learning in their local contexts.

Students must determine how their vision and these actions are influencing (or not influencing others). They must learn, like King, how to think about the values of society, learning how to defend values that are sound and to criticize those that are not socially just.

Critical Questioning

The second core value for robust social justice is critical questioning: questioning that is critical, deliberative, and encourages debate. As such, questions encourage analytical thinking and the consideration of competing points of view. When articulated, they are stated clearly and precisely and, if necessary, expressed in different ways to clarify meaning and scope (Paul & Elder, 2007). Critical questioning should occur in all spaces in society: private and public. They are seen and/or heard in the work of the thinkers I referenced previously (e.g., Du Bois and Baldwin); in literature, philosophy, art, and music; and increasingly, critical questioning is clearly visible in the lyrics of rap and hip-hop artists. *Critical questioning tracks the truth.*

Paulo Freire (1970, 1973) wrote extensively about the development of critical questioning and critical consciousness among people who have

learned either to accept the status quo or have accepted that they are powerless to do anything about it. Freire argued that the dominant class in any society will give answers to questions, but that their answers will not disrupt fundamental existing relationships of power and resources. The dominant class has the power to promote its perspective as if it were the only legitimate perspective. Empowerment begins by asking questions that arise out of the everyday living conditions of people and by refusing to accept answers and explanations as true without investigation (Barnhardt, 2005; Gruenewald, 2003, 2008). Such was the case with the fifth-grade students in Brian Schultz's (2008) book, *Spectacular Things Happen Along the Way.* The students questioned the relevance of the school curriculum and the honesty and accuracy of the information they received about the status of their school, and they argued for a different curriculum—a curriculum that would connect their subject matter learning to the discovery of *accurate* information about the status and future of their school.

Critical questioning involves asking not only, "Is this true?" but also, "Who says so?" "Who benefits most when people believe it is true?" Critical questioning also encourages alternative ways of looking at problems and inquiring into not only "What knowledge is of most worth?" but also, "Whose knowledge is of most worth?" Here, there is a real challenge for teachers because generally curricula do not arise out of the everyday living conditions of ordinary people; curricula are increasingly defined by state standards, federal policy, and textbook companies. Thus, teaching critical questioning may begin by questioning "truths" and silences in textbooks.

Critical questioning promotes analyzing systems of oppression. In a study that Grant and Sleeter (1996) conducted, we found that many of the junior high girls who were from the lower middle class were not strongly interested in patterning their gender identity after their mothers and were more thoughtful about their futures than the boys. The girls argued that although they admired and loved their mothers, they wanted a different kind of life. They were not mainly interested in raising kids, taking care of their husbands or significant others, and providing part of the family income. Instead, they wanted professional careers and more control of their lives. Many of the boys, on the other hand, held unrealistic dreams of playing professional sports and gave little consideration to other professional alternatives. Complicating the girls' pursuit of their goals, however, was their lack of consistent and careful analysis about their choice of boyfriends and their occasional downplaying of their intellectual side to appeal to the boys. For many girls, the selection of boyfriends was based more on the boy's popularity, coolness, or romantic pursuit than the boy's dedication to a realistic career-oriented future.

The school involved in this study missed a chance to engage students on these issues, which were of real concern to the students. Although it is very important to encourage young people to aspire to become anything they

wish, it is also important to help them learn to think systemically about oppression and justice as it plays out in their own lives. Why is it that young men in communities of color and White low-income communities see relatively few options for a better life and tend to latch onto dreams such as becoming an athletic star? Why is it that young women from working-class backgrounds very often aspire to a career, but at the same time often subordinate themselves to the men in their lives? These questions beg for a systemic analysis of sexism, social class, and racism. A systemic analysis of sexism, for example, would examine why full-time working women still earn less than men. It would help students to connect devaluation of women in the job market with devaluation of women's work in the home. A robust social justice analysis of social class would examine why working-class jobs are increasingly being replaced by very low-paying service work (Mishel, Bernstein, & Allegretto, 2007; Tabb, 2007b) and how workers' efforts to organize are constantly being thwarted (Tabb, 2007a). It would also extend this line of analysis to the restructuring of the global economy, examining what kinds of jobs are going where, how large corporations are directing these changes, and what people can do to challenge the trends.

Practicing Democracy

The third core value for a robust social justice education is the practice of democracy. At a time in U.S. history when the practice of democracy is taking on a variety of meanings, Gibson and Grant (2010) asked:

> What, then, is the "real gist" of American democracy? Is it deliberation, self-government, and freedom, as expressed in the founding documents? Is it voting and civic participation, as articulated in citizenship education? Is it patriotism and defense, as argued by contemporary constituencies? Or is it the free market, consumerism and the accumulation of wealth, as implied by former President George W. Bush when he urged Americans to "work together to achieve important goals for the American people. . . . This work begins with keeping our economy growing . . . I encourage you all *to go shopping more*." [emphasis added]

Gibson and Grant (2010) acknowledge, along with others (Barber, 1998; Giroux, 2006; Putnam, 2000; Sandel, 1996; Wolf, 2007), that we are at a democratic crossroads of authoritarianism, imperialism, and greed. Shall we continue down such a road or follow West's (2004) suggestion to proceed down a path of a renewed commitment to "the possibility of a democratic community—a vision of everyday people renouncing narrow self-interest and creating a web of caring under harsh American circumstance" (p. 95)?

Schools are not democratic places. The flow of decision making is generally top-down rather than rising up from below. Much of schools' teaching about democracy (e.g., student council, voting for class officers, reading

a few pages from a civics text) does not prepare students to engage in the serious practice of democracy nor to understand the complexities of democracies that currently challenge us (e.g., Dahl, 2006; Giroux, 2006; West, 2004). Students need to understand that the practice of democracy includes much more than voting, having freedom of speech, or walking a picket line—although these practices are significant. To practice democracy also means that you learn about how the practice of democracy can be made to work for you or against you and that it is important that you understand the differences as well as know what you can do to influence an outcome that befits those who are marginalized. In addition, to practice democracy means that you encourage a pluralistic democracy, that you challenge the notion of democracy being defined through employment and consumerism, and that you develop a critical awareness about what you are reading, seeing, and hearing in the media. Such an understanding of the practice of democracy comes from knowledge of democratic actions in various places and under different circumstances and the struggles that lie therein. During the Civil Rights Movement, for example, the ideals of democracy were ever present in the actions and activities of participants. Speaking about how democracy and citizenship working together can lead to the greatest form of government, King (1955) told a rally:

> We are here this evening for serious business. We are here in a general sense because first and foremost we are American citizens, and we are determined to apply our citizenship to the fullness of its means. We are here because of our love for democracy, because of our deep-seated belief that democracy transformed from thin paper to thick action is the greatest, form of government on earth.

To practice democracy means democracy must be pursued—"to the fullness of its means"—when it is being denied; liberty and justice are called into question when, for example, schools become more racially segregated (Boger & Orfield, 2005) and when we see mainly White students in the honors and college-bound classes. To practice democracy requires, as Moyers (2007) contends, "a public roused by the knowledge of what is being done to them in their name" (p. 5). To practice democracy we must confront its enemies. Moyers tells us:

> In his Jefferson Lecture the late Cleanth Brooks of Yale identified them as the "bastard muses": propaganda, which pleads, sometimes unscrupulously, for special causes or issues at the expenses of the total truth; sentimentality, which works up emotional responses unwarranted by, and in excess of, the occasion; and pornography, which focuses upon one powerful human drive at the expense of the total human personality. To counter the "bastard muses," Brooks proposed cultivating the "true muses" of the moral imagination. Not only do these arm us to resist the little lies and fantasies of advertising, the official lies of power, and the ghoulish products of

> nightmarish minds, they open us to the lived experience of others—to the affirmation of a heightened consciousness—to empathy. So it is when Lear cries out to Gloucester on the heath: "You see how this world goes . . . " Gloucester, who was blind, answered: "I see it feeling." (p. 2)

Encouraging Social Action

The fourth core value for a robust education for social justice is action for social change and/or nonviolent direct action. Social action is individual or group behavior that involves interaction with other individuals or groups, especially organized action toward social reform.

President James Miller of Western Michigan University stated when introducing Martin Luther King to speak to faculty and students about the War in Vietnam, "To prepare individuals to the point that they will possess not only superior qualities of analysis to go to the heart of complex problems, . . . and have the courage and the ability to state their convictions clearly, concisely, and openly . . . is not enough" (Miller, 1963, p. 1). Miller (1963) argued, "There is yet another purpose. The logical consequence of study and thought is *action* [emphasis added]. Otherwise this whole business of education is a sham" (p. 1).

Social action is a central component of the push back against defining American democracy through the lens of markets, consumerism, and wealth. Social action pushes back against racism and other forms of oppression and it pushes forward toward the cultivation of a flourishing life, the practice of democracy that engages in Socratic self-examination, and critical questioning. Oppressed and marginalized people have to engage in social action—nonviolent action—in order to break free of constraints that confine them. Social action is needed to disrupt rules, beliefs, and actions that control individual/personal freedoms and keep in place institutional controls. A case of social action begins with Woodson's letter in 1927 to Thomas H. Barnes that I quoted earlier that initiated what we now call Black History Month.

Social action allows for "a method of struggle that says you can use moral means to gain moral ends" (King, 1963). Social action is needed to foster open dialogue from and among groups in society (e.g., faith, civil right, feminist communities, teachers), and it is needed to give voice to those who are opposed to poverty and sexism. The idea of social action is clear in Baldwin's *A Talk to Teachers*, when he visits a New York public school to talk about the Negro child's self-image. During the lecture, Baldwin was using moral means to gain moral ends. He tells the teachers:

> It is not really a "Negro revolution" that is upsetting the country. What is upsetting the country is a sense of its own identity. If, for example, one managed to change the curriculum in all the schools so that Negroes learned more about themselves and their real contributions

> to this culture, you would be liberating not only Negroes, you'd be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history. (Baldwin, 1985, p. 329)

Social action—that is, as I have noted earlier, "interaction with other individuals or groups . . . toward social reform"—is more than sometimes viewed as tension raising or threatening. This, I believe, is because we as a country do not like to discuss race and social class and/or to critique our behavior toward the oppressed. But when this is the case, we need to be reminded of King's (1963) words in his *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*:

> Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster a tension such that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks to dramatize the issue so that it can no longer be ignored. (p. 3)

Criteria for Adjudication

"We need a theory or principles of justice which enables us to adjudicate between our actions so that we can say with some confidence this action is more just than that" (Walker, 2003, p. 169).

The fifth core value for a robust social justice education is to have tools that assess how well we are cultivating a flourishing life: tools that helps us to determine how well we are engaging in "Socratic Self-Examination"; the extent to which our questioning is critical, deliberative, and encourages debate; and the extent to which we are creating a caring, democratic community. A good number of education policies and practices do acknowledge and attempt to tackle injustices. However, many of these policies and practices are weak in the "assessment" area or do not offer or argue for tools to adjudicate between rhetoric and actions. Criteria of adjudication allow us to determine the extent to which education policy and practice are implicated as causes or consequences in social injustice, assess whether education is compounding poverty and/or other disadvantages, and assess the extent to which the education system enhances life chances for students who are disadvantaged through no fault of their own. Simply put, it allows us to assess if education policy and practice are doing the job and how well. Here, of course, I am speaking about more than high-stakes or standardized tests. Whereas both teacher and student accountability is critical to social justice, I nevertheless believe in order to provide an education that cultivates students' flourishing lives, accountability must reflect the commitment to education that—in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26.2—"shall be directed to the full development of the human personality" (United Nations, 1948). In my way of thinking, this includes more than performance on standardized tests.

The value or principle most commonly espoused in social justice debates is equality, and here I am referencing D. Miller's (1999) three types of equality: equality of rules and procedures, equality of status, and equality of outcomes. The first type of equality, Miller explains, "equality or rule and procedures," often noted as equality of opportunity, does not offer *enough* equality to single-handedly overcome the other two types of inequality: status and outcome. This is apparent from research data that show the test scores of Brown and Black students in multiracial schools lagging behind White and Asian students (Rothert, 2005). It is also apparent when, in spite of nondiscriminatory de jure policies, Black and Brown students are educated in the worst public schools.

The second type of equality, equality of status, is about being accepted as equal in society. Recent symbols of efforts—for example, African Americans' attempts to gain equal status in American society—are seen in such statements as "Black is beautiful" and "Black Power." Whereas these statements were popular during 1960s and 1970s, they have been replaced (presently) by such statement as "Acting White" (Fordham & Obgu, 1986) and the use of code phrases, such as "at-risk" to marginalize poor Black and Brown students (Brown, 2006). Thus, this form of equality (equality of status) alone is not sufficient to overcome the injustices caused by a lack of opportunity and equality of outcome.

Equality of outcomes, the third type of equality, deals with distributive injustice and cultural inequalities. The injustice that comes about here is that the life chances and enhancements of those with a lot of resources and those who are of a particular ethnic/racial group or adhere to mainstream lifestyle can access as a consequence of affluences or their cultural power and privilege because of their group norms is far, far greater than those who are poor and culturally different.

What is also important is quality of academic achievement, opportunities, and status that different schooling/education conditions contribute toward having a flourishing life and the way that poor schooling/education conditions results from other forms of disadvantage. From this, D. Miller (1999) states, "We come away with the belief that all three types of equality may need to be considered, but any one alone is insufficient to cover all circumstance in which justice is sought" (p. 9). In addition to these three criteria, Miller suggests that two others are necessary: Policy must set down which agents or institutions have the responsibility for securing that people receive what the policy entitles them to, and policy must provide the resources for implementation. If this is not done, Miller argues "the policy amounts to little more than rhetoric, on which consensus was easily achieved because no one considered the challenges and tensions of implementation" (p. 9). To this point, O'Neil (1996) reminds us, "Just institutions and practices provide the specifications for judging the justice of particular acts or decisions" (p. 182).

Conclusion

This article argues that we should engage in the cultivation of flourishing lives and that a robust social justice vision of education is necessary for this cultivating work. I have argued that what constitutes a flourishing life is different for different people and that the constituents for a flourishing life are probably influenced by the history and culture of the group to which an individual belongs. In addition, I have argued that the theory of education that supports multicultural social justice education has two very different sources: (1) the study of the history and culture of people of color, especially African Americans, and the struggles of both women and men as individuals and in groups both within and outside of the movements for civil rights (e.g., gender rights, gay rights, (dis)ability rights and religious rights) and (2) the experiences (research/scholarship, teaching, and writing) of numerous multiculturalists working with/in schools, colleges, homes, and communities. In addition, I have argued that to cultivate flourishing lives, a robust social justice education must include five core practices: (1) self-assessment, (2) critical questioning, (3) the practice of democracy, (4) social action, and (5) tools of adjudication. In sum, for each and every one of us, cultivating flourishing lives for our students in keeping with a robust social justice vision of education demands that we are clear (and have agency) about the meaning of *cultivating* and *flourishing*, that we acknowledge that our students are shaped by their histories, and that within this context, the core values of self-assessment, critical questioning, practice (of) democracy, social action, and (having) a criteria for adjudication must act in concert to ensure a robust social justice.

Finally, usually when I write an article, I have a "muse" or a vision (e.g., What will a flourishing life for my grandkids, Gavin and Amaya, be?) that steers my course. In writing this article, especially as I moved toward the conclusion, I thought about Dorothy Height, the Civil Rights leader, president of the National Council of Negro Women, and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, who passed away on April 20, 2010. President Barack Obama called her "the godmother of the civil rights movement" and a hero to Americans. Dorothy Height was a woman who for decades modeled robust social justice as she worked along with Dr. Martin Luther King and other Civil Rights leaders. In 1964, she cofounded "Wednesdays in Mississippi," a program that brought Black and White women from the North to meet their counterparts in the South. Chatting over tea, they forged bold alliances on issues like health care and education. Dorothy Height encouraged President Dwight D. Eisenhower to desegregate schools and President Lyndon B. Johnson to appoint African American women to positions in government (see e.g., *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 2010).

Some may contend in reviewing her life that Dorothy Height lived a flourishing life because she was a drum major for robust social justice. Implicit here, I am arguing that if you wish to cultivate a flourishing life

for yourself and others, you must *engage* in robust social justice, as expressed in Dorothy Height's statement about taking action as I noted earlier: "If the time is not ripe, we have to ripen the time."

Note

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[1]Martha Nussbaum's (2003) article, "Cultivating Humanity in Legal Education," was helpful in framing this article.

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