

Is educational expansion likely to reduce economic inequality? This is a question of great interest for egalitarians. But is this a reasonable expectation? And if not, are there any other outlooks to explore? The paper sets out to understand the justice context in which this expectation has been couched – standard Rawlsian theory of justice – and then moves on to point out some critical issues raised by recent economic evidence and theory. It also brings in, in an exploratory way, some heterodox justice alternatives that seem better suited to deal with the critical issues. In fact, the main objective of this paper was to outline a number of problems that mainstream theories of justice have had with regard to the *relevance* of principles of justice. An area that needs more attention in social justice studies is precisely that of the relationship between factual statements about the world and normative prescriptions, or, in other words, the bridges between the realities of our contemporary social injustices and the normative horizon the theories of social justice point to. So, the problem dealt with here is not so much that of the justification of the principles, but that of the *robustness* of the solutions the principles themselves propose – the extent to which these are congruent with ordinary facts about the world. In particular, some factual truths about the relationship between inequality and education seem especially important in view of the centrality of educational policies in social justice proposals. In this way, this paper has tried to understand this centrality; to contrast it with recent theoretical and empirical research relating educational expansion to *increases* in economic inequality; to assess the capacity of mainstream social justice to deal with these stories; and finally to move on to identify some potential distributive justice alternatives that rely less heavily on education than does Rawlsian social justice. And although the paper has not attempted to argue thoroughly for any specific alternative, it has however argued for the centrality of this problem in any account of justice.