What is Justice? Bringing the Voices of Teacher-Educators and Contemporary Political Philosophers into Dialogue

Presented by

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Introduction
The following paper is concerned primarily with demonstrating the complexity of an educational goal of social justice. I attempt to do this by bringing into dialogue the voices of political-philosophers and teacher-educators regarding the nature of social justice, and considering some of the tensions, contradictions and continuities that emerge within and across these voices.

In regards to political philosophical thinkers, I have selected some of the ideas of John Rawls, Martha Nussbaum and Iris Marion Young – three contemporary political philosophers who have been concerned with the nature of social justice and the just society. These internationally renowned thinkers have attempted to develop theories that bring consistency and comprehensiveness to fragmented visions of social justice. Within and across their extensive works are ongoing tensions, contradictions and continuities. I do not attempt to review the ideas of these thinkers here but, rather, take three general perspectives from which to consider the nature of social justice, that emerge from my reading of their work. For the purpose of this paper, then, I have selected three perspectives from which to consider the nature of justice a) Impartiality and the Principles of Justice; b)Capabilities and Human Flourishing; and c) Democratic Political Processes; where Rawls, Nussbaum and Young are considered for their contribution to each perspective respectively. In discussing these three perspectives I also draw attention to some of the possible difficulties and tensions that they give rise to.

In regards to the voices of teacher-educators, I draw on some of the preliminary findings emerging from a PhD study entitled ‘Justice and Teacher-Education’. This study has involved, in part, conversations with fifteen teacher-education practitioners regarding their understandings of the nature of social justice and some related ideas. Unlike the political philosophers cited here, these practitioners bring our focus more exclusively on the relation between education/teacher-education and justice. In

1 There are, of course, many other perspectives from which to consider the nature of social justice. I have selected these three for the purpose of this paper. Furthermore due to the limitations of space, this discussion necessarily simplifies and generalises the work of these thinkers.

2 As part of this study, the current researcher engaged in 2-3, 30-60 minute, fairly informal conversations with each of the fifteen participants. Not all of these conversations are drawn on here. In some cases, ongoing negotiations are still in process between the researcher and the participants regarding the ways in which the data are to be used for the study. Roughly speaking, the themes explored in these conversations included: the participants’ understandings of social justice in relation to education and how they have come to these understandings; the possibilities and constraints presented by the current institutional environment for attempts to foster justice through teacher-education; the scope for dialogue regarding justice and justice issues within teacher-education institutions. The content of these conversations varied significantly from one participant to another. For further analysis and more detail regarding the methods employed for the study, see Justice and Teacher-Education (Lucas, forthcoming).
doing so they demonstrate that social justice has multi-faceted implications for educational institutions and for the realities and responsibilities of pedagogues. For example, Margaret\(^3\) suggested that there were day-to-day social justice issues that arose in her work, including the difficulties of balancing the opportunities of pre-service teachers against ‘duty of care’ and ‘the integrity of the program’:

> When I sit down and talk to them [pre-service teachers] it almost always becomes an issue of social justice. [For example] ... They present as students with a disability, and I have real problems, I mean I have moral dilemmas with that ... I’m in a dual role here. I need to make sure that any student who comes before me in this program, has the opportunity of achieving... Then I have the duty of care to students in classrooms in schools ... I have a duty of confidentiality to the students [pre-service teachers]... So there are these daily interactions with what’s fair ... you have this crisis that you can see the great thing that this could be, this person, but you also see that um they could severely be disadvantaging your child in their class... Now as a member of the profession am I a good person in letting that person through...the university has a very strong social justice policy and so we have to give every possible support to people... we have to give them reasonable accommodation so that they can succeed ... at what point does it become unreasonable accommodation...? (Margaret)

So on the one hand, I consider some of the ideas of political philosophers who have generally dealt more exclusively with the political philosophical question: ‘What is the nature of social justice?’ On the other hand, I consider some of the ideas articulated by teacher-education practitioners who, as Margaret suggests, are working daily at the junction of social justice and education. I conduct a selective dialogue, then, across the three general themes emerging from the voices of contemporary political philosophers, and the teacher-education practitioners who participated in the aforementioned PhD study (this notion of dialogue is further explored below). As a discussion of the preliminary findings of this study, I tentatively begin to explore possible points of tension, contradiction and continuity within and across this dialogue. It is hoped that bringing the voices of teacher-educators and political-philosophers into dialogue in this way, can provide further depth to this current attempt to begin exploring the complexity of social justice and its relation to education.

**Overview**

The first part of this paper attempts to make the case that social justice is indeed a complicated concept. The second part suggests that in order to take the complexity of social justice seriously, we need to engage in ongoing dialogue regarding the nature of this educational goal. Here I discuss briefly the notion of dialogue that underpins this work. In the third part of the paper, I attempt to bring into dialogue the voices of political philosophers and teacher-educators in regards to three general

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3 Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of participants.
perspectives from which to consider the nature of justice: a) Impartiality and the Principles of Justice; b) Capabilities and Human Flourishing; and c) Democratic Political Processes. In conclusion, I suggest that given the complexity of the nature of this educational goal, open and ongoing dialogue regarding the nature of justice should be nurtured and maintained in education circles. I oscillate throughout this paper, between the voices of political philosophers and teacher-educators.

PART ONE
The Complexity of Social Justice
Social justice is widely recognized as a goal of educational policy, research and pedagogy. However, the term 'social justice', and hence an educational goal of social justice, does not have one meaning known and shared by all educational practitioners. In the following statement, Sam, a participant in the aforementioned study, highlights the difficulties with the persistent and persuasive use of the term in education, despite its ambiguities:

I think the whole concept of justice is a really difficult one because it’s one of those things … that sounds good, and I think if you said to most people in the world do they believe in justice, they’d agree, absolutely, yeh it’s good. But what is justice? When does justice for one person become an imposition for another person? And that’s why it’s such a difficult thing, it sounds right, it sounds good, but what do we actually mean by justice, let alone social justice … it might be that we’re actually heading off in different directions … it’s a very, very difficult concept, I find, to engage with’ (Sam).

Similarly, Jason, when asked whether or not he thought his colleagues shared his understandings of social justice, points out that: ‘… first of all I think that the idea of social justice itself is a contested idea, you know, what is social justice, it might mean one thing to me and something to somebody else’. Robert, as well, reminds us that: ‘President Bush post September 11 certainly gave the term a spin that sort of means revenge…’, an interpretation not necessarily shared by all.

The ambiguities inherent in this educational goal are similarly highlighted by extensive and ongoing political philosophical debate and contestation regarding the nature of social justice and the just society. For example, Alasdair MacIntyre points out that:

Some conceptions of justice make the concept of desert central, while others deny it any relevance at all. Some conceptions appeal to inalienable human rights, others to some notion of social contract, and others again to a standard of utility. Moreover the rival theories of justice which embody these rival conceptions also give expression to disagreements about the relationship of justice to other human goods, about the kind of equality which justice requires, about the range of transactions and persons to which considerations of justice are relevant, and about whether or not a knowledge
of justice is possible without a knowledge of God’s law (MacIntyre 1988: 2).

Adding further depth to this problematic, Christine, begins to unravel the complexity of justice as follows:

Christine: So I’m not actually sure whether what I’m doing is about social justice or just common-sense. The two overlap I think
Researcher: Do you think so? Do you think they overlap?
Christine: Yeh I think they do. Although when I hear how some people live their lives maybe they don’t overlap that much for other people [laughs].

Christine’s comment adds further depth to the complexity of justice because it necessarily leads us to further questions regarding the nature of ‘common-sense’. If we consider ‘common-sense’ to be a form of rationality, then we can see an overlap here with a similar query raised and explored by Alasdair MacIntyre in Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (1988). MacIntyre suggests that there are not only rival conceptions of justice, but also disputes around the nature of rationality. Any attempt, argues MacIntyre, to advocate a particular conception of justice based on a standard of rationality, or in Christine’s case ‘common-sense’, must also grapple with the further complexities arising out of the contested nature of rationality.

The political philosophical question ‘what is social justice?’ is not only inherently complicated in itself, then, it also gives rise to a series of related questions and difficulties. Embedded within the political and philosophical nature of social justice are questions of knowledge, power, morality, values, oppression, disadvantage, fairness, distribution, equality, and so on. It is my contention, however, that despite the deep complexity of social justice (and in fact because of it), an exploration of what we mean when we affirm this concept as an educational goal is a worthwhile endeavour. More specifically, I contend that this exploration is one that should be undertaken through dialogue. I turn briefly to the understanding of dialogue that underpins this paper next.

4 Clarification regarding the use of terms for the purpose of this paper needs to be made. First, ethics/morality is taken to be a branch of philosophy that is concerned with questions about what it is right or wrong to do in other-regarding actions, and questions about what it is good to be or to value, meaning and fulfilment (see Abbey 2000: 11) – it is also the branch of philosophy that is concerned with questions of social justice and the just society. Second, I do not make a distinction between the use of the terms ‘morals’ and ‘ethics’ here. Third, politics is considered inseparable from questions of power, morality and social justice. And finally, in a minimalist sense, the question of social justice is broadly concerned with the nature of the just or good society, including how people ought to be treated, the proper or fair distribution of society’s benefits and burdens, and regulation of society’s institutions. (It should be noted that the way in which I use these terms is not without challenge. For example, Rawls, who I draw on in the following discussion, makes a distinction between a comprehensive moral doctrine and a political conception of justice. He states quite clearly that his theory of justice as fairness is a political conception, not a moral doctrine ‘... we must always distinguish between the political conception and various comprehensive doctrines, religious, philosophical, and moral’ (Rawls 2001: xviii). I find this a curious distinction and look forward to exploring it in more detail as part of my PhD thesis.)
PART TWO
On Dialogue
Here, I use the term dialogue to indicate my belief that ideas, including ideas about justice, are continuously formed and re-formed through conversation, actual and in absentia (see Taylor cited in Abbey 2000). Through my use of the term dialogue, I am suggesting as well, that an exploration of social justice should make every effort to maximize openness and reflexivity – openness in an attempt to listen to the voices of others, constituting a willingness to recast one’s thoughts and a fundamental acceptance of the tentativeness and fallibility of one’s ideas; and reflexivity in a constant attempt to unmask one’s presuppositions. In addition, I suggest that this dialogue be ongoing, in order to account for the shifting nuances and connotations of language and meaning, and the continually changing contexts and difficulties to which we need to respond in order to foster justice in contemporary societies. It is through dialogue concerning the nature of social justice, then, that its complexity can be taken seriously and be subject to revision, contestation and critique.

Consistent with this notion of dialogue, it is my view that the thinkers I discuss here – the political philosophers and the participants in the aforementioned study – do not speak ‘the truth’, or have the final word, any more than I do, about the nature of justice. Rather, for the purpose of this paper, it is hoped that the selective dialogue that I construct here will provide scope for developing a better understanding of the complexities that we are dealing with when we advocate social justice as a goal of education. I hope not to have the final word, but to contribute to, and provoke further dialogue regarding the relation between justice and education.5

I turn now to three themes that have emerged from this preliminary attempt to bring into dialogue the voices of political philosophers and teacher-educators. As stated earlier, I oscillate between the voices of political philosophers and teacher-educators.

PART THREE
a) Impartiality and the Principles of Justice
For some theorists, specifying the nature of social justice involves devising and applying impartial rules or principles of justice. Here, some of the ideas emerging from the work of John Rawls are considered exemplary of such an approach. For Rawls, the task of political philosophy is to advocate a set of principles of social justice. These principles should stipulate the appropriate means by which to distribute the benefits and burdens of social cooperation within society’s main social, political and economic institutions (for Rawls these institutions make up the ‘basic structure’ of society).

Rawls explains that social cooperation makes possible a better life for all however, ‘[t]here is a conflict of interest since persons are not indifferent as to how the greater benefits produced by their collaboration are [to be] distributed, for in order to pursue

5 I intend to explore this concept of dialogue in more detail as part of my PhD thesis (see Lucas forthcoming).
their ends they each prefer a larger to a lesser share’ (Rawls 1971). A similar assumption about the nature of human relations is expressed in Sam’s statement: ‘... we are living in an era where the two prime motivators of human behaviour are greed and fear... so the appeal is always to be competitive, to get on, to get the best you can for yourself, to get as much wealth and stuff, regardless of what it does to other people...’ Based on such an assumption about the nature of human relations, Rawls contends that a set of impartial principles of justice is desirable in order to fairly regulate the distribution of benefits in society: ‘A set of principles is required for choosing among the various social arrangements which determine this division of advantages... These principles are the principles of social justice... (Rawls 1971).

These principles of justice, Rawls argues, are to be arrived at impartially by abstracting from the contingencies of any actual society (Barry 1995). The point of view of those deciding on these principles should be removed from and not distorted by the particular features and circumstances of the basic structure. The parties deciding on the principles of justice

... are not allowed to know the social positions or the particular comprehensive doctrines of the persons they represent, they also do not know persons’ race and ethnic group, sex, or various native endowments such as strength and intelligence... We express these limits on information figuratively by saying the parties are behind a veil of ignorance (Rawls 2001: 15).

Christine, a participant in the study, points out that in the day-to-day realities of teaching, social justice requires pedagogues to ‘... treat people differently in ways that take into account their race, their gender, their health, their rurality, their poverty and so on’. For the purpose of devising principles of justice, however, Rawls, asks us to overlook these differences by engaging in a thought experiment, that is, by imagining ourselves to be in ‘the original position’. From this position, behind a ‘veil of ignorance’, people are prevented from promoting principles of justice that are biased toward personal combinations of fortuitous talents and characteristics (Beauchamp 2001). Familiar with Rawls’ use of the ‘original position’, Stuart points to the potential usefulness of this thought experiment as an ethical tool for making judgments regarding the justice/injustice of particular circumstances: ‘...what I want to give them [undergraduate students] is tools that they can actually use to make decisions... And I think that that one about well how would you have agreed to this in the original position is a mighty powerful concept and that’s why I use it’. Here, Stuart points out the potential of this ethical tool to help us reach agreement regarding the fair distribution of society’s benefits and burdens because, behind a veil of ignorance, we are unaware of our own and others’ position in society. Potentially, the decisions made from this impartial stance would redress, as Stuart puts it, the extreme inequalities that emerge from ‘luck in the genetic pool ...’

6 Stuart clarifies: ‘sometimes it’s luck, sometime it’s cheating, often it’s just being given it by your parents’. 
Rawls goes on to argue that behind a ‘veil of ignorance’ citizens would agree, or come to an ‘overlapping consensus’, regarding the principles of justice that should govern society’s institutions (Barry 1995). For Rawls, two principles of justice would thus emerge:

a) Each person has the same indefeasible claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme of liberties for all; and

b) Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society…(Rawls 2001: 42-43).

Rawls’ elaborates extensively on these principles (see Rawls 1993; 1999; 2001). Briefly, however, these principles point to the respects in which some form of basic equality (the first principle) is compatible with a belief that justice allows people to be unequal in other respects (the second principle). According to the first principle, a scheme of equal basic liberties includes a list of primary goods: freedom of thought and liberty of conscience; political liberties (for example, the right to vote and to participate in politics) and freedom of association, freedom of movement and free choice of occupation; income and wealth; the social bases of self-respect; and finally, the rights and liberties covered by the law (2001). I will return to this notion of the equal distribution of a certain list of goods, when I consider the tension between liberty and equality below.

For Rawls, once these basic liberties are assured, social and economic inequalities are permissible only where they are attached to positions open to all. Here, Rawls points to the importance of equality of opportunity - that all should have a fair chance to attain public offices and social positions regardless of social class of origin (2001: 43). For Rawls, this in turn requires equality of opportunity in regards to education: ‘Society must also establish, among other things, equal opportunities of education regardless of family income’. (Rawls 2001: 44). Given that equality of opportunity is satisfied, social and economic inequalities are permissible, where they are to the benefit of the least advantaged members of society (see Rawls 2001: 57). Sam, begins to further unpack the complexities of a notion of equal opportunities, proffering a notion of ‘realistic opportunities’. He explains: ‘Well if I were to run the

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7 Rawls suggests that these principles offer a conception of justice that may command widespread agreement despite the pluralism and disagreement that characterize our society. A political conception, according to Rawls, has the hope of achieving an ‘overlapping consensus’ (or ‘enveloping’ consensus as Baier (1989) suggests) because it can appeal to public ideals already held in modern democratic societies and can bypass the disagreement arising from the inescapable diversity and mutual incompatibility of general and comprehensive religious, philosophical and moral doctrines (Baier 1989: 772). Interestingly, both Nussbaum (1999) and Young (2000) use Rawls’ concept of an overlapping consensus. Taken to be in the spirit of Rawls’ overlapping consensus, Young elaborates suggesting that ‘[a]greement on ways of addressing specific problems, moreover, can leave intact differences of affiliation and perspective, and even give them prominence in discussion’ (2000: 43-44). (See Scheffler (1994) for an interesting critique of this ideal.) I intend to explore this idea further in my PhD thesis (see Lucas forthcoming).
400 metre race with Cathy Freeman, at face value that’s equal opportunity because we’ve both got the same distance to travel’. In relation to education, Sam points out that equal opportunities could be taken to already exist in some form: ‘… you can say, well it [equal opportunities] already exists, all kids go to school, we’ve got laws that say they should all do the same sorts of things at school …’. However, as Sam goes on to suggest, ‘realistic opportunities’ need to take into account ‘how their [students] needs are catered for, how their abilities are developed. It also depends on what sort of things they already know, what sort of things they can do, the way in which they behave, their attitudes and aspirations …’

The Difficulties of Abstract Principles and Impartiality

As Stuart pointed out above, in some situations a veil of ignorance can be employed as a useful ethical tool. As well as this, principles of justice can provide us with a set of standards or guidelines with which to assess the justice/injustice of society’s institutions or structures. However, Rawls’ abstract principles give rise to a number of difficulties in their application to social realities. In general, abstractions risk erring by simplifying and reducing the complexities of social justice. The problems of reducing this complexity are evident in Margaret’s warning in relation to ‘disadvantage’: ‘… there are targeted populations and targeted schools... there is socioeconomic difference, [but] ... you can’t make the quantum leap, low socioeconomic to non-achieving students ... there are all sorts of disadvantage that aren’t just this sort of northern, southern suburbs, unemployed, single parent type disadvantage. So you can’t have a single strategy to fix it …’. Furthermore, Sam warns of the risks of blanket assessments and solutions to injustice at a systemic or structural level: ‘… by keeping strategies in place that allow numbers of oppressed people to get through the system successfully ... people can keep turning around and saying the system’s working well; it proves that so and so’s done alright and they came from this background.’

As well as the difficulties associated with abstract principles, a Rawlsian approach does not appear to take into account the profundity of listening and attending to people’s lived experiences. As Jackie suggests, in relation to her association with real people at the centre of real humanitarian crises, ‘... their presence in my life is a real gift. It’s just made me turn around and imagine life from another perspective ... put a face on it and that’s what’s changed for me’. And in relation to similar conditions of oppression captured in film and story, Jackie continues: ‘I’ve always found that provocative. It makes me think more broadly ... get into someone else’s shoes ... try to understand ... what it feels like to be on the receiving end of oppression to such a degree ...’. It seems that these face to face confrontations with oppression may, in some cases, have the potential to provide the impetus to be concerned to devise and/or apply principles of justice in the first place, something seemingly overlooked by Rawls’ emphasis on impartiality.

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See also Nussbaum’s chapter: The Literary Imagination in Public Life (Nussbaum 1998). Nussbaum argues here that literary forms have a distinctively valuable contribution to make in contemplating possibilities for political change.
To recap on the ideas of Rawls' discussed so far, an emphasis is placed on the need for impartiality in devising principles of justice. Rawls employs a thought experiment, namely, the ‘veil of ignorance’, to ensure that impartiality is maximized. Rawls considers social institutions just if, and only if, they conform to the two principles of justice that emerge from behind this veil. These principles of justice are to be employed to ‘... help to clarify the goal of reform and to identify which wrongs are more grievous and hence more urgent to correct’ (2001: 13). Notwithstanding, as the comments made by teacher-educators suggest, there are possible limitations to an emphasis on impartiality and abstract principles.  

b) Needs/Capabilities and Human Flourishing

The tension between liberty/freedom and equality

Varying notions of ‘equality’ and ‘freedom’ play a pivotal role in many theories of justice. Stuart suggests that there is an inevitable tension between these two ideals:

... the more you have of one, the less you have of another ... that's just too bad, that's just the way life is [laughs] and you just have to juggle them. I mean everybody thinks freedom is a good idea and everyone thinks equality is a good idea, but plainly you can't have full amounts of both. The more you have of one in a society the less you have of another (Stuart).

In a different way, Stephen attends to the complexity of a concept of freedom: ‘Well... it depends how you define freedom. I think that freedom is sometimes taken as anything goes but ... [individuals and groups of individuals] don’t just have rights to live in freedom ... they also have responsibilities... So being free isn’t about doing what you want to do, it’s about living harmoniously within the community in which you live’.  

There are various perspectives on the nature of justice that have attempted to address this tension between freedom/liberty and equality. At one extreme, a radical egalitarian notion of equality may suggest that any individual differences are incompatible with a theory of justice, justifying circumstances in which individuals are denied any choices regarding the life that they want to live. At another extreme, individual freedom must be respected even if its unrestricted exercise leads to vast inequalities or deprivation. Other perspectives on this tension include notions of equality that recommend only an equal distribution of goods necessary to satisfy fundamental human needs (Beauchamp 2001).

Rawls insistence on the equal distribution of basic liberties, contained in the first principle of justice stated above, can be considered a version of this latter notion of equality. Similarly, Martha Nussbaum provides a list of basic needs, or ‘capabilities’,

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9 There are, of course further limitations that I do not have the space to consider here.

10 Here, and later in our conversations, Stephen points to the importance of community within the just society. Unfortunately I do not have the space here to consider the possible overlaps with communitarian debates around notions of justice.
that must be satisfied in order to meet the requirements of justice. As with Rawls' scheme of primary goods/basic liberties, Nussbaum's list points to a minimalist sense in which individuals are to be considered equal. Once this threshold has been met, justice then permits varying social inequalities that arise as diverse individuals freely pursue their own view of what is deepest and most important to them (Nussbaum 1999; Rawls 2001). For Nussbaum, the point of this list is the same as Rawls': ‘... to put forward something that people from many different traditions, with many different fuller conceptions of the good, can agree on, as the necessary basis of pursuing their good life'. In comparison to Rawls, however, Nussbaum's list of 'central human functional capabilities' offers a richer account of human needs for functioning that is somewhat different in structure and substance and length and definiteness (Nussbaum 2000).

Nussbaum's account of human needs is based on an Aristotelian concern for human flourishing. According to Aristotle, the ultimate good for human beings must reflect the distinctive aspects of human nature, the flourishing of the entire human personality in all its dimensions, 'in its appetitive and affective dimensions as well as its intellectual ones' (Arrington 1998: 70). For Nussbaum, then, a conception of justice requires maintaining and fostering the conditions that make possible human flourishing (1999; 2000; 2001). Nussbaum's concern is not for the conditions necessary for mere humanness or survival, but for the conditions necessary for fully human functioning or a basic human flourishing (1999: 40).
Nussbaum suggests that these conditions can be identified by asking ‘... what are the functions without which (meaning without the availability of which) we would regard a life as not, or not fully, human... In short, what do we believe must be there if we are going to acknowledge that a given life is human?’ (Nussbaum 1999: 39; 2000). Nussbaum points to a good deal of commonness about what people must have if they are to be able to live well, suggesting that individuals‘… special dilemmas can best be seen as growing out of special circumstances, rather than out of a nature or identity that is altogether unlike that of other humans’ (1999: 7; 2000). Grounded in this conception of a minimalist human commonality or sameness, Nussbaum argues that central human capacities and functions can be given, at a high level of generality, in a fully universal manner (1999: 8; 2000). Nussbaum converges on an approach known as the ‘capabilities approach’ from which to articulate this list of basic human capacities. A brief summary of this list of ‘Central Human Functional Capabilities’ includes: Life; Bodily health; Bodily integrity; Senses, imagination, thought; Emotions; Practical reason; Affiliation; Other species; Play; Control over one’s environment (see Nussbaum 1999: 41-42; 2000; 2001). Nussbaum points out that this list of capabilities ‘...is certainly general – and this is deliberate, to leave room for plural specification and also for further negotiation’ (Nussbaum 1999: 42). Nussbaum further clarifies that this list ‘... is both open-ended and humble; it can always be contested and remade’ (Nussbaum 1999: 40).

A number of participants, in their own way, proffered certain conditions that they considered necessary in order that people could fulfil their potential. For Sam, and others, access to education in general was important: ‘Because it can change your horizons from day to day living to a longer term, and gives you the luxury of actually controlling your life, having some sort of plan over it rather than having to go hand to mouth’. Jackie talks more specifically about ‘human flourishing’ as requiring: ‘... a

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11 Nussbaum responds extensively to possible concerns with universalist views, however there is not the scope to consider this response here (See Nussbaum 1999; 2000)

12 A brief summary of these capabilities follows:

1. Life
2. Bodily health and integrity - being able to have good health, reproductive health, adequate shelter, adequate nourishment.
3. Bodily integrity - being able to move freely from place to place, secure against violence/assault.
4. Senses, imagination, thought - being able to think, imagine and reason, in a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education; freedom of expression, political and artistic; freedom of religious exercise.
5. Emotions - being able to have attachments to things and persons outside ourselves, being able to love, grieve, to experience longing, anger, etc.
6. Practical reason - being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s own life.
7. Affiliation - being able to engage in various forms of social interaction, show concern for others, friendship, compassion; having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation.
8. Other species - being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants and the world of nature.
9. Play - being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities
10. Control over one’s environment - political (political participation) and material (being able to hold property and the right to seek employment).

(See Nussbaum 1999: 41-42; also 2000: 78-80; 2001: 416-418 for more detail.)
society where people feel free enough and able enough to contribute ... first of all they need a safe structure from within which to do that ... once people are safe ... [and] they don't have to worry about the day to day necessities [then] you've got a bit of mental space to think about how you can contribute'. The opportunity for creative expression, among other things, was important to Tamara and Jason. Tamara talked about rights: 'being able to be creative, being able to think your own thoughts ... to be allowed to be different ... and also enjoyment of life.' Finally, for Kendell"... humans have a need for a sense of belonging ...' and for Stuart a need and desire to be 'self-determining.'

The difficulties of stipulating what is good for people
A notion of ‘capabilities’ attempts to ‘... put people into a position of agency and choice, not to push them into functioning in ways deemed desirable’ (1999: 11). However, despite this caveat, stipulating in a general or universal way what is good for people or what it is that they need, gives rise to further difficulties and complications. Such a judgment infers a responsibility to act in such a way that ensures people have access to certain goods, emphasizing the ways in which people ought to be treated equally. The ensuing action can in turn be criticized for its potential to disregard the voices of those on whose behalf we are acting, marginalizing a responsibility to otherness or difference. Stephen White points to this problematic as a tension between a ‘responsibility to act’ and a ‘responsibility to otherness’. He explains that a responsibility to act presupposes making an assessment of a situation (here, an assessment regarding what people need) while a responsibility to otherness implies a willingness to learn from others and postpone such judgment (White 1991).

A number of participants further emphasized the need for caution in stipulating what is good for people or what they need. As Robert points out, ‘... good is not absolute good, I mean my good from the life I've lived would be different from your good in the life you've lived ...’ Stuart’s approach could be considered an attempt to balance a responsibility to otherness and a responsibility to act. On the one hand he suggests that ‘... the way you treat people has to be I think, a recognition of who they are as individuals and where their interests and diversity ... lie. I think treating people as if they were identical as everybody else is such a denial of human nature that it couldn’t possibly be labelled justice ...’. On the other hand, Stuart suggests that ‘... there are a number of ways of satisfying human interests, so there is some room for different individuals and different cultures to choose different roots ... so if they disagree with each other, they’re not both wrong. There is some room. But there’s not a heck of a lot because of the sort of biological thing that they are’. Similarly, Robert suggests that ‘... universalist assumptions about the nature of anything are very dangerous [because] they’re usually ... assumptions that encode certain norms of certain groups and not others ... We still have to assume something about the human species as an actor in history ... in order to have sensible analytic projects and

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13 Nussbaum provides an example: ‘The person with plenty of food may always choose to fast, but there is a great difference between fasting and starving, and it is this difference we wish to capture’ (1999: 44).
proactive political projects, [however there are] very good reasons and grounds for being very wary of doing that. So we have to do it cautiously and carefully. Jackie highlights this need to be cautious as follows: ‘… what we think might be the best thing for [people] isn’t necessarily and they need to say what they need and we need to respond to what they articulate rather than us thinking this would be a good idea … [we need to have] the power to stand back …’

To recap, for Nussbaum, social justice entails fostering and maintaining the conditions necessary for full human flourishing. These conditions are stipulated as a list of human capabilities for functioning. Some of the participants in the study similarly articulated varying human needs or rights. As Nussbaum, and some of the teacher-educators point out, there are some difficulties associated with stipulating in a general or universal way what is good for people.  

c) Democratic Political Processes

Iris Marion Young’s work serves as an exemplary approach to social justice that emphasizes the importance of democratic political processes. Young points to the intimate connection between social justice and democratic practice as follows:

Inclusive democratic practice is likely to promote the most just results because people aim to persuade one another of the justice and wisdom of their claims, and are open to having their own opinions and understandings of their interests change in the process (Young 2000: 6).

By elaborating on the nature of political processes, Yong draws our attention to the actual decision making processes that politics usually exhibits, under conditions of structural inequality. Young argues that democratic processes should be recognized as a struggle in which ‘citizens engage with others in the attempt to win their hearts and minds, that is, their assent’ (Young 2000:51). Participants should ‘… present arguments through which they aim to persuade others to accept their proposals’, involving primarily a ‘discussion of problems, conflicts and claims of need or interest’ (Young 2000: 23).

The role of discussion and persuasion in democratic political processes is similarly captured by Sam, who hopes that an ideal of social justice contains its own persuasive arguments:

‘I would hope that through real discussion about what is the purpose of education, what is schooling for, why do kids go to school, why are teachers there, and constant reflection on these different perspectives, that most people would be in a position where they can make an informed decision about whether social justice is desirable and or feasible … I would hope that if it’s such an important and good and valuable thing, then the arguments

14 Again, it should be noted that Nussbaum responds to this critique extensively (1999; 2000).
that sustain it would be so persuasive that most people would subscribe to them’ (Sam).

Young goes on to formulate an account of democratic processes that emphasises an ideal of inclusion (Young 2000). Inclusive processes, for Young, stipulate that those affected by a democratic decision should be included in the process of discussion and decision-making. ‘Not only does the explicit inclusion of different social groups in democratic discussion and decision-making increase the likelihood of promoting justice because the interests of all are taken into account. It also increases that likelihood by increasing the store of social knowledge available to participants’ (Young 2000: 83). For Young, the legitimacy of a democratic decision depends on the degree to which those affected by it have been included equally in the decision-making process, and have had the opportunity to influence the outcomes. Similarly, in reference to Young’s work, Robert suggests that ‘…those, whose lives will be affected by actions or decisions, should have a say, should know about them and have a say in them’.

Robert continues, recommending that participatory democracy include ‘…participation amongst informed people who have real agency in the decision’. Christine similarly points to the importance of informed participation as well as the intrinsic value of people being involved in the decisions that most affect their lives:

I’d like to see people have the kind of education that allows them to participate in the democracy in informed ways … it’s more than people just being happy and healthy and having access to a wage, it is about their participation in a democracy, so that their needs and their aspirations and their ideas are put forward and considered by others, in the best interests of us all living together. So it’s not a kind of a big brother look after us all approach, it is actually people making a contribution to a whole range of things that help our society to function so that everybody gets looked after… (Christine).

As well as an emphasis on inclusion, Young points to the importance of promoting free and equal opportunity for people to express their interests, needs and concerns, free from domination and coercion. In turn, this requires openness and a willingness to enter into discussion with others including ‘…a disposition to listen to others, treat them with respect, make an effort to understand them by asking questions, and not judge them too quickly’ (Young 2000: 25). For Young, however, this does not infer orderliness or the absence of dissent. As she suggests, where one’s interests are ignored, ‘Disorderliness is an important tool of critical communication aimed at calling attention to the unreasonableness of others…’ (2000: 49).
If we consider educational institutions as sites where political struggles are played out\textsuperscript{15}, a number of participants in the study recommended that this struggle take a form that has some semblance of Young’s democratic political processes. For example, in regards to the importance of debate in university classrooms, Stephen points out that ‘… if you don’t let people have their own view then it would develop injustice anyway because it’s either indoctrination or you just drive their thinking underground … you can’t change people, people change themselves. And so you have to create an environment in which you have reasonably free debate…’ In a related way, Jackie points to the importance of making her own stance clear in relation to humanitarian issues, in order to help foster an open environment:

Because I say quite clearly what I think, I invite them [pre-service teachers] to say what they think. And I think I can take … times when they want to disagree … even if I’m really cross about it … I find it hard I must say … if it’s information that they’re lacking I tend to give it to them so they can be informed. They might still disagree. But that’s alright … they needn’t feel they’re running some risk by saying I disagree … I think it makes for really good communication… what you get in return is a reasonable openness from them … (Jackie).

Also in relation to the tertiary classroom, Sally-Anne, expresses similar aspirations for inclusive democratic processes: ‘I need people to listen to each other for ideas and to accept those ideas and try and understand them and that’s got nothing to do with agreeing with them … that they don’t feel threatened about giving their ideas, that they can talk to other people, or share ideas…people not putting each other down and listening … [everyone feeling] welcomed by other students, verbally, physically, where they sit, how they sit … So in terms of the actual physical environment of the classroom, I think that gives me a sense of students feeling included …’

Young’s approach also urges us to listen and attend to social differences and the specificity of social group position, cultural affiliation and structured power. Young’s politics of difference provides the means for recognizing and affirming social and cultural differences by ‘giving political representation to group interests and celebrating the distinctive cultures and characteristics of different groups’ (1999: 319). Politics, Young suggests, ‘must develop discourses and institutions for bringing differentially identified groups together without suppressing or subsuming the differences’ (1990: 320; 2000). Antithetical to the importance placed on impartiality by Rawls, Young argues that attending to these differences can serve as a resource, rather than an obstruction, in promoting justice, encouraging social relations that embody an ‘openness to unassimilated otherness’ (1990). In a similar vein, Robert

\textsuperscript{15} Here, I concur with Christine who states: ‘I think all teaching is a political act … because the very texts you decide to put in your curriculum that’s a political decision … whatever you put in your curriculum says things about what’s to be valued, about what’s worthy of study and then the way you go about it, the pedagogic stuff … says things about where power is located, about who’s got the knowledge, who’s knowledge is worth having, and those kinds of things.’
suggests that ‘… if you and I have differences, it would be good to be in dialogue, working towards a consensus that can comprise the differences but not paralyze us with opposition’.

Difficulties with Democratic Processes
Young argues that democratic processes serve as the best means of discovering and validating the most just policies and outcomes (2000). However, as Young suggests, democratic processes can take a long time and require considerable resources as well as determination and commitment from participants. The process can also be heavily bureaucratic and ‘rather boring at times’ (Young 2000: 3). As Robert points out, ‘participatory democracy is criticised as too time consuming; we can't have a plebiscite about everything...’ As well, such processes often require compromise. ‘Defeat, co-optation, or ambiguous results are more common experiences than political victory ... Because in a democracy nearly everything is revisable, and because unpredictable public opinion often counts for something, uncertainty shadows democracy’ (Young 2000: 16).

Teacher-educators present further problems for pedagogues in relation to inclusive democratic practices. For example, Kendell expresses the difficulties of addressing exclusion in the classroom, a difficulty similarly recognized by pre-service teachers: ‘And for many of them [pre-service teachers] it’s the isolated child or the quiet child or the child who’s excluded in some way, either from their peers or the rest of the class. And you know it’s a huge challenge and concern ...’ Tamara, on the other hand, points to the difficulty of assessing some occasions of openness as offensive. Having to act on the complaints of some pre-service teachers about the offensive talk of another Tamara states: ‘So she had the right to talk but where it started to affect other people badly, that’s where she didn’t have the right I don’t think. And they had the right to not have to put up with it’. Finally, to return to the contested nature of rationality illuminated by Alasdair MacIntyre in the first part of this paper, a related concern emerges regarding what we mean by the nature of an educated or ‘informed’ contribution to democratic processes as affirmed by Robert and Christine above.

To recap, Young brings our attention more exclusively to the internal workings of society's institutions than does Rawls and Nussbaum. Young suggests that just outcomes are most likely to be maximised by democratic political processes. Unlike Rawls, Young is not concerned with impartiality, but rather, attends explicitly to the situatedness and particularities of social contexts. There are however, some difficulties associated with an ideal of democratic processes including the resources, time and commitment that such processes demand, and the need to accept ongoing uncertainty.

Conclusion
This paper has attempted to demonstrate the complexity of an educational goal of social justice. To this end, I have brought into dialogue the voices of teacher-
educators and political philosophers and considered the tensions, continuities and contradictions that emerge in regards to three general perspectives from which to consider the nature of social justice: a) Impartiality and the Principles of Justice; b) Capabilities and Human Flourishing; and c) Democratic Political Processes. Each of these perspectives gives rise to a number of further questions demonstrating the deep complexity inherent in a concept of justice. For example: Do abstract and impartial social justice solutions overlook the particularity and situatedness of political and educational realities? Does stipulating what is good for people or what they need, in order that they may pursue their own flourishing, overlook difference and force people to act in particular ways? Could the time, energy and resources that must be committed to democratic political processes be better spent meeting the fundamental human needs of all people?

I have not attempted to answer these questions here. Indeed, I would suggest that any attempt to do so should be considered cautiously. Assessments regarding the justice/injustice of social relations and institutions are difficult and, as Charles Taylor suggests in regards to moral decisions generally, ‘[if] this conflict is not felt, it is because our sympathies or horizons are too narrow, or we have been too easily satisfied with pseudo-solutions’ (Taylor cited in Abbey 2000: 13). Or as Stuart, a participant in the study puts it, ‘there isn’t a magic wand and in fact any magic wand has to be viewed with great suspicion anyway’.

My impulse, then, has been to complicate rather than simplify the political philosophical question ‘what is social justice?’ and some related ideas. By conducting this selective dialogue I have attempted to illuminate and explore a small part of the deep complexity that we are dealing with when we advocate an educational goal of social justice. No doubt this paper falls short of a complete engagement with the complexities of social justice, but I hope that it provides enough stimuli for conversations to continue.

In conclusion, I concur with Solomon who suggests that: ‘What we need is not more hard-headedness but more humaneness, more openness. We need to be better listeners, not better arguers...’ (Solomon 1996: 305). I am advocating, then, not further arguments for or against particular perspectives regarding the nature of justice, but rather a need to take seriously the complexity and ongoing tensions inherent in this educational goal. It is my contention that this complexity can be taken seriously, and our understandings of justice revised, contested and critiqued, by engaging in open and ongoing dialogue regarding the nature of social justice. I think Sam demonstrates this ideal of dialogue aptly when he reflects on the shifting meanings and difficulties that are associated with this concept:

‘... I think that that’s why social justice, when we decide upon what it is, it must be put to the blow torch, it must stand the test of scrutiny, of critical analyses, you know, to see if it’s something that’s worth fighting
for, that’s worth having. It certainly shouldn’t be just something that’s swallowed and accepted…’ (Sam)

References


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