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Education, social justice and school diversity: insights from the capability approach

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## **Education, social justice and school diversity: insights from the capability approach**

### **Abstract**

This paper offers a theoretical exploration of the impact of diversity in schools on attitudes to inequality in students' later life. Reflecting on recent changes on the school system in England, and building on work on how values are formed and how inequalities between groups may be either perpetuated or changed, it seeks to investigate the development of values and agency goals relating to the reduction of poverty and inequalities, particularly between groups. School education has the potential to foster civic participation and moral values, and formal schooling can be seen as a unique site for the development of such values at a formative period of individual development, through processes such as collective reasoning and encounters with difference and inequality. While these issues have been explored with regards to educational content, most notably through citizenship education, it is equally important to consider the social context within which formal learning takes place, particularly the diversity of the school body itself, and how this is managed. This paper draws on existing literature on education, values and school diversity to examine how the capability approach can provide insight on the development of social justice values through education.

### **Keywords:**

Education, capabilities, values, agency goals, social justice, school diversity, school segregation.

**Word count:** 9,997 words

## Introduction

This paper is concerned with the impact of different schooling arrangements on values, and in particular, civic and social justice values, and awareness of and attitudes to difference and levels of inequality in society. Formal education is a unique site for the development of reasoning and critical reflection, and the formation of civic values, an issue which has also been addressed by capabilities scholars (Nussbaum, 1997, 2010; Walker, 2006b; Walker and McLean, 2013; McCowan and Unterhalter, 2013). The school can play a role in the development of social justice values through curricular content and pedagogy; but also through organisational arrangements.

As levels of inequality rise in England and elsewhere, the role of schools in value formation in relation to poverty and inequality becomes an increasingly pressing issue (IFS, 2013; OECD, 2011; EHRC, 2010). Moreover, English schools are now among the most socially segregated in the developed world (OECD, 2012). To what extent are these schools re-enforcing and ‘naturalising’ existing inequalities and contributing to ‘social apartheid’ (NCB, 2013; Bennett, 2014; Seldon, 2008), or acting as engines of change by instilling a critical awareness and outlook on inequalities and their causes?

The capability approach has much to offer to the analysis of education and schooling, both because it provides a rationale for education (because it can expand an individual’s capability set), and because it offers a framework for evaluating equality in education (we must aim for equality of capabilities). As I explore in this paper, the concept of capabilities also specifically offers a new perspective on schooling and values, as individual values and agency occupy a pivotal position in the capability approach. Further, from the perspective of human development, certain values can be identified as important for social progress.

Existing work has explored educational experiences in relation to capabilities in a number of ways (for example, Boni and Walker, 2013; Walker and McLean, 2013; Hart, 2012; Hart et al, 2014; Walker and Unterhalter, 2007; McCowan and Unterhalter, 2013; Terzi, 2008; Robeyns, 2006)<sup>1</sup>. This paper turns to investigate in more depth the development of values and agency goals through education, and in particular, values relating to social justice as defined in a broad sense (a concern for the alleviation of poverty and the reduction of inequality). As such, this issue of values development *through* education is at the heart of human development. Civic values, and within this, concern for social justice, are centrally important for overall human development (Nussbaum, 1997; Sen, 2005, 2009).

Peppin Vaughan and Walker (2012) addressed the tension between the centrality of values in a capability set, and the value-laden nature of education, offering a solution through particular curricular and pedagogical arrangements. While many, if not all, aspects of education relate to the development of individual values, this paper specifically examines non-curricular aspects of schooling, and in particular levels of socio-economic diversity or segregation within the school body.

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<sup>1</sup> See also recent special issues of *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 13 (3) special issue on education; and *Cambridge Journal of Education* 42 (3).

While there is a considerable literature analysing curricula and pedagogy in relation to ethical and moral education, it is also important to consider other, structural aspects of the school. As I argue here, the capability approach offers a new framework for exploring the relationship between schooling and social justice values in students, especially in terms of such non-curricular factors. In particular, there is a strong case for considering the socio-economic diversity of the school as a significant factor, in addition to curricular content, pedagogy and the organisational culture in the school. A central question is how education can either reinforce or transform structural inequalities in society. As Unterhalter and Walker (2007: 246-249) identify, drawing on the work of Young (2000), an electoral system of democracy is not enough to address unequal structures in society; it is also imperative to question the extent to which vulnerable and marginalised groups are actually involved in collective problem solving and public debate. The school has a critical role in paving the way for social interactions further down the line, and how and whether disadvantaged groups can come to be part of the public sphere. In this paper I use the capability approach to conceptualise an approach to education, civic values and capabilities that acknowledges and seeks to address power inequalities within a socio-economically diverse population.

This paper begins by outlining recent education policy changes in England. This is an interesting case for thinking about the relationship between education, and civic and social justice values for a number of reasons, particularly as it has a highly segregated school system (possibly reinforced by recent policies on Academies and Free Schools). Moreover, ‘Citizenship Education’ was added to the National Curriculum in 2002, making it a requirement for schools to teach this either as a distinct subject, or within other subjects, to all children aged between 11 and 16<sup>2</sup>.

The second section outlines how the terms ‘values’ and ‘social justice’ are defined in this paper, and identifies a number of key concerns for education systems today in relation to schooling and values. In the following section, the capability approach is used as an analytical frame to identify a space for comparison in which there should be equality: the level of freedom that schools give individuals in terms of their ability to form values and agency goals relating to social justice, and in fostering civic capabilities for engaging with social justice issues later in life. For both of these I focus on the significance of socioeconomic diversity within schools (as opposed to curricular content and pedagogy) on the formation of these agency goals and capabilities. Finally, I consider practical implications for schools.

### **Socio-economic segregation and schooling in England**

School systems can be segregated along a number of different lines: race / ethnicity; religion; gender; and socio-economic groups. Such segregation may be explicitly promoted through government policy, or may be due to the conscious or unconscious selection behaviour of

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<sup>2</sup> Despite earlier indications that it would be removed by the coalition government, citizenship remained in the revised 2014 National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2013), although Free Schools and Academies, which cover an increasingly substantial proportion of the population, are not required to teach this. The issue continues to be controversial, demonstrated in particular in the recent ‘Trojan Horse’ allegations in Birmingham schools.

parents, and residential patterns. Schools in England have long been characterised by some degree of socio-economic segregation: both through the division between private, fee-paying schools (which approximately 8% of children attend) and state-funded schools. Schools in the state sector have been dominated by the ‘comprehensive’ model since the late 1960s, which are typically non-selective<sup>3</sup>.

However, recent reforms have encouraged different school models within the state-funded education system. The 1988 Educational Reform Act sought to stimulate the creation of a quasi-market in education, with measures to increase parental choice and competition between schools drive up standards. The Specialist Schools Initiative was introduced in 1994 to bring a greater level of variety in the types of schools in the state system and increase parental choice in secondary schools, enabling schools to have particular subject specialisms and receive additional funding. In 1999 the government launched the ‘Excellence in Cities’ initiative, followed by the Education Act 2002, which was specifically targeted to provide more resources for schools with a high proportion of children from deprived background, by enabling them to apply to become ‘academies’. Both initiatives mean that state schools can apply to become privately run, with continued public funding, and with funding from the private sector also allowed. Most recently, in 2010 the government passed the Academies Act, which allowed any school to become an academy and the creation of ‘Free Schools’, free to attend but outside of local government control. The impact of these initiatives has been substantial. While in 1997/1998 only 7% of schools were specialist, by 2006/2007 this had risen sharply to around 80% (Exley, 2009: 452). It is likely that there will also be a substantial increase in faith schools<sup>4</sup>.

The implications of the policies for diversity are still becoming apparent. Although such schools are required to remain non-selective, there are indications that these reforms may well be leading to greater levels of socio-economic segregation between schools (Gorard, 2006; Green, 2009; Exley, 2009; Shepherd, 2011). According to Green (2009: 8), the recent reforms in the UK, and middle-class responses to the new levels of choice, has meant that for the moment at least, ‘comprehensive education...has effectively been abolished’.

It is now widely acknowledged that there was a period of substantial decrease in socio-economic segregation (measured by proportion of the student body eligible for free school meals) following the 1988 Education Reform Act (Gorard, 2009b). After 1997 however, segregation rose significantly, although becoming more settled in the period 2002-2006 (Gorard, 2009b; Exley, 2009; Burgess et al, 2005)<sup>5</sup>. More recently, Gorard (2014) found that while academies are associated with higher SES segregation; they are not its cause but are more likely to appear in areas where there is already inequitable school mixes. Academies are therefore not helping to reduce segregation (as they were originally intended to) or increase social justice in education. Other recent research suggests that while more Free Schools are opening in deprived neighbourhoods, they are taking in fewer poor children than other local schools (Green et al, 2014).

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<sup>3</sup> Although studies have shown that in many areas the comprehensive system has failed to create the diverse intake of students originally intended.

<sup>4</sup> This has caused concern amongst both religious leaders and education policy actors  
<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/jun/14/taxpayers-should-not-fund-faith-schools>

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the different measurement methodologies for segregation in schools, see Gorard (2009b).

It is imperative to both consider and monitor the implications of such changes. A number of arguments have been made in support of some level of socio-economic segregation in schools. There may be some practical advantage for initiatives to address deprived pupils; and it may also lessen any resentment due to differences in income (Gorard, 2009b: 639-640). Already, there is a vibrant debate on the relationship between school diversity and achievement<sup>6</sup>. There is some evidence that examination results for the poorest pupils have benefitted from decentralisation of school governance (Bradley and Taylor, 2010). However, according to Gorard's calculations (2009a), the potential to increase inequity and segregation comes at no particular gain for attainment; this is despite being created to explicitly address disadvantage (Gorard, 2009a: 108-109). A number of comparative studies (for example, Van de Werhorst and Mijs, 2010), suggest similar results.

Overall, the majority of research has been conducted into the implications of school diversity for the academic achievement of different social groups, and there is a significant gap in the literature looking at the relationship between segregation, and the civic attitudes, values and behaviours of students, and perceptions of inequality (Janmaat, 2010a: 9-10; Han, Janmaat et al, 2012). There are some arguments that separate schooling for certain groups can play a protective or even empowering role (for example, some of the perceived benefits of schools by faith, or for girls). The few studies that have been conducted on socio-economic segregation suggest that this may be further solidifying individualistic attitudes and eroding wider societal commitment to reducing inequalities (Exley and Suissa, 2013; Taylor-Gooby, 2013)<sup>7</sup>. However empirical work so far does not demonstrate a clear relationship and suggests further research is needed, particularly into the effects of educational processes (Janmaat, 2013: 216-219).

If we are concerned with issues of equality and whether different groups of students may be leaving school with different levels and types of civic competencies, then the capability approach has much to offer in terms of theorising about why such imbalances are problematic, and what might be done to resolve them. First however I will look in more depth at how we can conceptualise values and social justice in relation to education.

### **Schooling, values and social justice**

An ongoing policy concern in education is which types of schooling and teaching methods increase achievement, skills development, and transition to the labour market, and the perceived outcomes in terms of economic growth, as embodied in the human capital

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<sup>6</sup> This has been a subject of concern particularly in the USA in relation to racial diversity; see, for example, US Commission on Civil Rights (2006). For further discussion in relation to reforms in England, see Gorard (2009b: 639-640).

<sup>7</sup> Taylor-Gooby (2013) reports that public attitudes towards the more disadvantaged in the UK have become less sympathetic in recent years, and less concerned with inequality overall; he questions why there has not been a response to the growing levels of inequality; and attributes this to social identity linked to group membership at a time of growing social divisions, the breakdown of traditional class boundaries, and greater emphasis on choice and individual responsibility.

approach<sup>8</sup>. However, a body of policy and academic studies have also been concerned with the impact of formal schooling on the values of students as they pass through school and into wider society<sup>9</sup>.

It is widely acknowledged that schools can have a pivotal role in inculcating values and norms; for instance values relating to nationalism, religion, civic behaviour, culture, healthy living, and the environment. Indeed, it is widely believed impossible to have a schooling system which is free from values (McLaughlin, 1995; 2003).

Many of the debates centre on the difficulty in reconciling public and private values; over what should happen in situations where the values held by individuals or families are at odds with those that the government may seek to promote through school education, or particular norms that dominate in society overall. In England and elsewhere in Europe, for example, the 'faith school debate' epitomises the struggle over the role of the state in the values that schools promote, and whether they should primarily be determined by the individual or society. The arguments may be linked to particular political agendas; for example, the role of education in protecting particular cultural values.

It is also possible to distinguish further between the general issue of values in education, as discussed above, and two further linked areas of concern: moral education; and citizenship education (e.g. Tubb, 2003; Beck 2003). What constitutes moral education is highly context-dependent, ranging from the inculcation of particular moral values to the development of critical thinking to facilitate individual ethical reflection and decision-making<sup>10</sup>.

The second area of concern, *civic* values and citizenship education, has been the subject of both recent national and global concern. However, citizenship and citizenship education are also contested terms, with high levels of debate over what its objectives should be, the nature of delivery, and the potential ideological loading of such a subject (see, for example, McCowan, 2006).

Individuals encounter and learn about citizenship at many different points in life, but compulsory, formal schooling is a particularly significant stage. Many authors have argued that of all social policy sectors, education is the sector with the greatest potential for impact on citizenship values and behaviour, as a unique site of diversity and collective learning at an important stage of social development.

'Liberal democratic governments can try to persuade closed-minded citizens to respect reasonable opposition, but the realm of public schooling is a democratic government's single most powerful and legitimate means of teaching respect for reasonable political disagreement' (Gutmann 1995: 579).

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<sup>8</sup> This is evidenced, for example, in the significant level of public debate in many countries about national position on the annual PISA score tables.

<sup>9</sup> In this paper, I use the term 'values' to refer to the ideals that individuals hold which guide priorities and actions, the 'principles and fundamental convictions which act as general guides to behaviour, the standards by which particular actions are judged to be good or desirable' (Halstead and Taylor, 2000: 169).

<sup>10</sup> For instance, the launch of 'moral education' and 'moral education teachers' by Local Education Authorities in Iran after the 1979 revolution, was one of the most important political devices for diffusing the political ideology of the revolution in schools (Godazgar, 2002).

This paper is particularly concerned with values relating to social justice, which may be regarded as a subset of civic education. A broad and conventional understanding of social justice can be seen as a concern for the alleviation of poverty and the reduction of inequality (or at least some dimensions of it) and the redress of this through society and institutions as a matter of justice rather than charity (Jackson, 2005: 358-360). Acknowledging that there are different and more specific ways in which social justice and equality can be defined (for example, the capability approach has a particular definition), it is nonetheless possible to identify ways in which education can engage with the overarching issue of equality in society, despite the variety in definitions. As with moral and civic values, formal schooling has the potential to influence the development of social justice values in students; to open student's eyes to the realities of poverty and social disadvantage, and also give them the skills and critical abilities through which to engage with such inequalities in their professional lives (Walker et al, 2009)<sup>11</sup>.

In this paper, I am concerned not with a particular set or definition of social justice values, but the ability of students to be aware of, engage with and reason about social justice issues in a broad sense. Given that levels of income inequality and other forms of inequality are rising, both in England and globally, it is now particularly pertinent to examine in greater depth the relationship between schooling and social justice value formation. Without such exploration, it is a possibility that in contexts where levels of inequality are becoming more severe, younger generations coming through school may nonetheless be largely unaware of or unengaged with such growing levels of inequality.

There are, however, a number of dilemmas concerning whether and how schools should provide social justice education. First, how do we balance public and private values? This is an issue which has often arisen in relation to state schools in England. As discussed above, education is acknowledged to be inherently value-laden. But under what conditions can we justify purposively using the formal school systems to inculcate particular values; and if so, which values? In terms of social justice values specifically, we might ask whether individual parents might legitimately object to a national curriculum which explicitly addresses social justice issues on the grounds of indoctrination or cultural imposition<sup>12</sup>.

Second, how can schools respect equality between students on the issue of value formation, when individual students have different backgrounds, personalities, interests and perspectives? While it could be argued that certain collectively-agreed values should be encouraged by schools, there is nonetheless a debate about how these are transferred and whether schools should aim for uniformity of certain values as the students leave to become members of wider society. For example, should the aim be that all students leave school with an identical set of core social justice values? I discuss these issues in the second section of this paper, and propose a conceptual solution with reference to the capability approach, employing the notion of agency goal freedom and 'capability as autonomy' as proposed by Burchardt (2009).

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<sup>11</sup> There is considerable crossover between the notion of social justice values in education, and human rights education programmes. For example, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted in 1993 at the World Conference on Human Rights, mentions social justice as one of the components of human rights education (Part II paragraph 78).

<sup>12</sup> For example, this question is frequently raised in relation to religious studies, or forms of sex education.



Third, what aspects of educational provision in practice are important for students' engagement with social justice issues? There have been a range of curricular and pedagogical developments in the last decade in particular, both in England and globally. Yet these initiatives may not always produce the intended effect<sup>13</sup>.

In the following section, I examine how the conceptual framework of the capability approach offers a new perspective on the first two concerns outlined above. I turn to the issue of provision in the third section of the paper, and consider how different aspects of formal education can influence the development of social justice values. While in England and globally the last decade has seen a flourishing of human rights and citizenship education curricula and materials, I argue that it is very difficult to foster certain social justice values and capabilities without particular non-curricular arrangements in schools, with specific focus on the level of socio-economic diversity of the school body.

### **Capabilities, education and value formation**

There are a number of ways in which the capability approach can bring an insightful and productive perspective to the issues in values and education outlined in the previous section.

As an evaluative framework, the capability approach gives central place to individual values, through focusing on the capability to be and do what is valuable to that person. In this way, recognition is given to the fact that human behaviour can be guided by values, including 'other-regarding' values, as well as concern for one's own well-being. Sen's well-known example is of how the concept of capabilities enables us to distinguish between two cases of malnutrition: one in which a man cannot feed himself due to lack of available food; the other in which a man chooses to fast for political reasons. In this way the capability approach distinguishes between 'well-being' and 'agency', with agency goals depending in particular on individual values. However, relatively little attention so far has been given to the relationship between capabilities, values and education.

So far within the capability approach, most emphasis has been placed on the positive role of education in fostering overall human development. Education contributes to a range of aspects of human development, such as literacy in enabling employment, political literacy and general empowerment (e.g. Alkire, 2002: 255-271; Sen, 1999; Dreze and Sen, 2002), and the contribution of education to civic behaviour is an important part of this (Nussbaum, 1997; Sen, 2005; 2009).

But, as has also been explored within the capabilities literature, there is a danger in treating education as a benign 'black box' which straightforwardly delivers beneficial effects. Capabilities can be expanded through education, but in some circumstances also reduced;

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<sup>13</sup> For example, McLaughlin proposed an 'initiation thesis': the possibility that religious education can be both compatible with and enhances autonomous choice in the sphere of religion. Another example comes from Print and Coleman (2003), who suggested that under certain circumstances, citizenship education can produce negative effects on social capital and foster divisions in society.

for example, where there is gender violence in schools, girls' lives can actually be shortened by attending school (Unterhalter, 2003; Walker, 2006a).

This is particularly the case in terms of civic engagement. Formal schooling can in some instances be an agent for indoctrination of particular values which inhibit democracy; either explicitly through indoctrination, or inadvertently by not developing an individual's capability for the critical reflection and engagement that is necessary for a functioning democracy and overall human development. Nussbaum in particular (1997; 2010) has written extensively on the relationship of liberal education to citizenship through fostering logical reasoning and critical self-examination, recognising common needs and aims, and the ability to have a 'narrative imagination': of 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 and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have' (2010: 95-96). This is especially important if we consider how different groups have different levels of power and inclusion in democratic processes (Young, 2000).

With this in mind, it can be argued that it is possible to distinguish between certain skills imparted through education, and the reasoned, autonomous choice and value formation processes imparted through education (Vaughan, 2007: 118-119). For example, citizens need particular skills to participate in democracy (e.g. literacy, political literacy and the ability for critical reflection), but they also need to be able to value democracy as a system. The capabilities gained (or reduced) through schooling should not only be understood in terms of specific skills and academic achievements, but also to these messages and values which might be imparted as part of the educational process. In addition to skills, therefore, the school's influence on values may have a positive or negative effect on capabilities later in life<sup>14</sup>.

Recently, authors have drawn attention to the problem of agency goal formation and value formation as an unresolved area in the capability approach (Deneulin 2011; Burchardt, 2009)<sup>15</sup>. The problem is that in order for us to evaluate equality in terms of capability to reach agency goals, we first need to know that individuals have had equal freedoms in forming these agency goals, rather than being subject to indoctrination or adaptive preference (for example, having limited agency goals which were formed in a situation of deprivation, as explored by Hart, 2012, in relation to the choice to go to university<sup>16</sup>). If capability evaluation fails to take into account the conditions under which agency goals are formed, then it is not possible to accurately assess substantive freedoms, as those who have experienced past disadvantage and / or have limited experiences may develop lower aspirations and therefore are more likely to achieve their goals<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> For example, values relating to women's equality and empowerment may have an influence on the future path of female students (in addition to the skills they have learnt at school).

<sup>15</sup> Note that some capabilities theorists argue that education must promote particular values; for further discussion see McCowan and Unterhalter (2013: 147-148). Others such as Burchardt (2009) and Deneulin (2011) see it as more problematic.

<sup>16</sup> A similar issue was explored in the French context by André (2013); several authors including Burchardt and André propose the use of longitudinal data to assess agency goal freedom more effectively.

<sup>17</sup> There are broader implications to this: we also need more information about conditions affecting the development of agency because this will affect not just which goals are chosen, but also how individuals choose and sequence which capabilities are important to them, e.g. whether they see the capability to work for social

The tension between the centrality of values in the capability approach and the value-laden nature of education has recently been explored in Peppin Vaughan and Walker (2012). As argued in that paper, in the realm of social policy, education policy poses a particular problem for the capability approach because education is inherently value-laden, and therefore has a greater potential to directly influence agency goal formation. A resolution was suggested in that schooling should in principle provide the conditions for each individual to develop and realise their own agency goals as objectively as possible, rather than transmitting certain values, through particular curricular and pedagogic arrangements.

Some examples of freedom of agency goal formation might be: being able to identify and pursue the valuable goal of being an artist; being able to identify and pursue the valuable goal of earning a lot of money very quickly, etc. While it is not possible for a school to simultaneously expand freedom of agency goal formation in all directions at the same time, offering experiences and support in encountering a broad range of ideas would be most desirable. Ideally, a school should aim to broaden a student's possibilities for agency goal formation, so that they leave school with a broader range of potential values and goals than had they not attended.

Bringing these reflections to the question of social justice education, employing the capability approach enables us to address the concerns around public/private values, and uniformity of values. Rather than straightforwardly imparting social justice values in formal education, we should be concerned with agency goal formation in the area of social justice. So instead of simply asking whether schools should imbue particular values, entailing a tension between public and private values, we can ask, *do schools expand students' capabilities to form goals and values in social justice* (as they often claim to do in terms of widening horizons through other goals, such as career choice, decisions to go to university etc)? Moreover, rather than aiming for uniformity of values in students leaving school this suggests that the focus should be on equality of freedom in agency goal formation<sup>18</sup>.

Further, employing the capability approach leads us to ask what sort of capabilities schools can foster among students who may be entering a society in which there is considerable diversity and inequality. Capabilities scholars working on education have drawn on Fraser's identification of three dimensions of equality – representation, recognition and redistribution – to theorise about how schooling processes relate to unequal power structures in wider society (for example, DeJaeghere, 2012). In particular, the concept of 'recognition' is important for drawing attention to who does and who does not engage in political processes. We can think of this both in terms of questioning whether marginalised groups have the ability to participate, but also of what sort of social interactions students from powerful, elite groups are prepared for through their schooling process. Beyond the development of values

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justice as an important and valuable capability – and whether they think this should be an important thing for society, to be addressed in schools, and so on.

<sup>18</sup> Note that in theory this might mean that some students for example reject democracy, or the goal of greater equality in society, but they have clarified, reasoned and reflected about their position, and it is an informed decision.

relating to social justice, what sort of ‘civic’ capabilities does a member of a democratic society need in order to engage with poverty and inequality?

In the following section I take these two concerns – freedom of social justice goal formation, and types of civic capabilities – and consider their relationship to different aspects of education and in particular, the significance of the level of socio-economic diversity of the school.

### **Social justice values, non-curricular influences and socio-economic segregation in education**

#### *Freedom of social justice goal formation*

For freedom of agency goal formation, we can consider both curricular and non-curricular aspects of schooling. Much of the citizenship education literature relating to social justice values focuses on the curricular content of education in influencing how young people form their ideas about what is just and what is not. In England, for example, over the last fifteen years there has been a growth in citizenship teaching materials since the subject was added to the national curriculum in 2002, and a significant proportion of engagement with social justice issues has fallen under ‘development education’ programmes which aim to promote values of global social justice. (It is also worth noting that some of these programmes also have an explicit aim of imparting particular values, rather than increasing young people’s ability to reason and form agency goals in this area).

However, non-curricular issues also play an important role: the structure and organisation of the school, and the make-up of the school body, which may be representative of the general population, or selective to a greater or lesser degree<sup>19</sup>. As raised at the start of this paper, a particularly interesting aspect is the level of socio-economic diversity in the school, and the degree to which the population of the school is representative of the population as a whole. Building on the work of Dewey (1916; 2007), many authors have argued that non-selective, socially representative school populations are vitally important for young people to gain awareness and respect for diversity<sup>20</sup>.

From a justice perspective, Brighthouse (2008) has argued that diversity can be problematic, stating that socio-economic diversity matters less than other values such as parental choice, or maintaining valuable family relationships, even if such segregation results in educational inequality. However, I would argue that for educational equality from a capability perspective, a priority in formal education should be freedom and equality of agency goal formation. Children should have equal opportunities to develop a range of goals, including social justice goals (they may or may not go on to develop these later in life); Kosko, for example, has argued that there should be limits on parental choices that might constrain a

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<sup>19</sup> For discussion of the effects of school type and environment on civic values in general, see Paterson (2009: 82).

<sup>20</sup> There is a body of research in the USA exploring this issue; see, for example, US Commission on Civil Rights (2006); Hurtado (2006); for a cross-cultural study, see Janmaat (2010b).

child's 'future' agency rights (Kosko, 2010: 429-439)<sup>21</sup>. Burchardt (2009: 16-17) argues that the definition of agency freedom 'needs to be expanded to include the conditions in which...goals, aspirations and preferences are formed'; that the 'menu' of options available to an individual influences not only final choice but also the very formation of goals. She suggests a typology of 'capability as autonomy' which identifies people who have had restricted or wider capability sets during the earlier, formative stages of life.

How might exposure to socio-economic diversity at school relate to freedom of agency goal formation for the individual, and is it likely to increase the 'menu' of options in relation to social justice goals at this formative stage?

Existing theoretical work in sociology and psychology offer some insights. One perspective, often referred to as the 'conflict hypothesis', argues that contact between different groups can increase hostility and have a negative effect on trust, cooperation, solidarity and participation (Janmaat, 2010a: 9-10; Putnam). From this perspective, the increased hostility between groups resulting from diversity at school could mean that individuals are less likely to develop concerns with helping other people and groups in society, and therefore has a restraining effect on the formation of goals relating to social justice. An alternative 'contact hypothesis' argues that prejudice between different groups can be reduced through increased contact between them, which fosters greater knowledge and mutual understanding (Keating and Benton, 2013; Janmaat, 2010b).

Most studies in this field are concerned with ethnic diversity rather than socio-economic segregation, and evidence supporting each hypothesis is varied, particularly showing different effects by country and region, according to the size of ethnic groups and the particular histories of inequality and integration (Janmaat, 2010a)<sup>22</sup>. However, what emerges overall is that contact needs to happen under certain conditions in order to not result in hostility; therefore the institutional structures and processes within the school are important in how diversity has an effect on students passing through, to support mutual understanding and learning across difference. Gurin's (2004: 18) study of educational diversity and democratic citizenship in the US, for example, cites three particular conditions as important for diversity to be educationally beneficial: equality in status, the existence of common goals, and intimacy of interaction.

While diversity under such conditions might have the potential to reduce group prejudice, what might be the effect specifically on freedom of agency goal formation? In thinking about the implications of diversity for individual development, Gurin (2004: 19-20) draws on Coser's (1975) concept of complex social structures, which encompass many different individuals with different expectations of us. In such structures, people encounter unfamiliarity, multiplicity, discrepancy, and potential conflict, which ultimately challenges

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<sup>21</sup> Kosko (2010) asks us to consider how much critical agency parents have in making such decisions; cultural preferences, for example, should not harm a child's preconditions for autonomy.

<sup>22</sup> Note that what is at issue in this paper is not so much managing diversity and questions about assimilation or 'politics of difference' etc (c.f. Macedo, 1995 discussing Young) but how greater awareness of poverty can be fostered, along with the desire for working towards equality of rights and human development for those who choose to do so.

them to think and act in new ways. Those who learn to function in such structures develop an ‘outward orientation’ and a deeper understanding of society<sup>23</sup>.

If we relate this to the experience of a child in school, a more diverse school body certainly offers everyday encounters with new, unfamiliar and challenging experiences. Besides their experiences at school, school age children and young adults are likely to be surrounded by people, culture and media determined by their parents’ social circle and socio-economic grouping; along with immediate neighbours and extended family<sup>24</sup>. Young people may be exposed to socio-economic diversity in these different areas of their lives, but the determining influence of their existing social group is likely to be strong. With less diverse school bodies, the chances of students growing up exclusively surrounded by a narrower social group are much higher. In contrast, a diverse school body offers exposure to a wider range of individual and family experiences: in a more socio-economically diverse school, students meet people with different family backgrounds and trajectories within society and the economy. This might entail parents’ experiences of work, histories of migration; opening up the possibility of reflection on the reasons behind family experiences, raising awareness of barriers to opportunities, the different contributions of people to society, and the possibility of change through individual and group agency.

Actual interactions and contact with people from different backgrounds are centrally important for many of the processes which Nussbaum (1997; 2010: 114-115) has identified as part of the cosmopolitan ideal of education, such as ‘narrative imagination’, and learning common humanity underneath socio-economic difference<sup>25</sup>. This involves not only contact but also friendships, discussion, and sharing experiences with people from different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. This is not to deny the hugely important role of the taught curriculum; as this paper goes on to explore, taught classes can offer numerous opportunities for developing awareness and understanding of others. As Nussbaum in particular has argued (2010: 95-120), there is a strong role for the arts and humanities in developing the ‘narrative imagination’ and in addressing ‘cultural blindspots’. However, there is a limit to what can be achieved through curricular means, even through engagement with a wide range of literature, and teaching of critical reasoning and personal reflection. There is no substitute for actual interactions with people from different backgrounds and cultures in helping to understand different points of view, in forming a realistic picture of society, the current power relations and how individuals can fit into this, as well as ideas about what changes might be desirable and how such changes might come about.

Overall, I would argue that actual contact with people from different backgrounds is therefore a powerful and irreplaceable experience in agency goal formation. Under the right conditions, challenging experiences and encounters with students from new, different backgrounds has the potential to open up thinking about different conceptions of fairness and social justice (or even the possibility of social justice goals where an individual had none before), thereby increasing autonomy of agency goal formation. Moreover, exposure to

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<sup>23</sup> Gurin (2004) also relates this to Piaget’s concept of disequilibrium, and optimum cognitive growth.

<sup>24</sup> For an interesting investigation of the significance of neighbourhood segregation on attitudes to redistribution and inequality, see Bailey et al (2013).

<sup>25</sup> See Fielding (2008: 47) for further discussion of this point; and also Enslin et al (2001).

diversity regardless of background is important for *equality* of agency goal formation in relation to social justice<sup>26</sup>.

In contrast, it is hard to see how segregation in schooling might in itself support freedom of agency goal formation. Socio-economic segregation may lead to less deeper understandings of socio-economic disadvantage, or even ‘shying away’ or avoidance of disadvantage. Non-segregation may therefore also be key to efforts to counter the perpetuation of unequal social structures and ‘horizontal inequalities’; in Fraser’s concept, furthering ‘recognition’ by making social differences and inequalities more visible (Stewart, 2003; Fraser, 1995).

For freedom of agency goal formation in terms of social justice goals, it is vitally important to have exposure to the lives of others in society, for understanding diversity and inequality. Formal school remains one of the key sites in which there is the potential for encountering difference, not least simply because of the number of hours spent at school between the ages of 5 and 16, and is therefore is a unique structure in that it has the potential to offer a different experience than those likely to be determined by parental background.

### *Affiliation and civic capabilities*

The second point is normative in a different sense, and instead of goals, focuses on civic engagement capabilities. Social justice activities later in life will depend on particular kinds of civic engagement capabilities; what role does diversity in schools play in fostering these?

Authors have long argued that a socio-economically diverse school enables students to learn democratic skills in a functioning model of democracy, and generally foster ‘social cohesion’. In England, a particular body of literature in the 1960s-1980s has focused on justifying the ‘comprehensive ideal’, with more recent theorising by authors (including Gorard, 2006: 68; Fielding, 2008)<sup>27</sup>. There have also been a number of empirical studies arguing that citizenship education may have negative effects in a segregated school, and that the ethos and relationships between pupils are highly important for citizenship teaching (Print and Coleman, 2003; Davies and Evans, 2002). In the US there has been considerable interest in the significance of social diversity in terms of race relations (e.g. Hurtado, 2005; Hoskins et al, 2012).

From a capabilities perspective, if our aim is human development and expansion of capabilities overall in society, then the degree of segregation in a school system is highly significant. Democratic participation and civic engagement of all groups is central to social justice and human development, and education has a key role to play in facilitating this ‘recognition’, by potentially strengthening the ability of different groups to treat each other with respect during democratic processes (Fraser, 1995; . If the schooling system is

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<sup>26</sup> Broido and Reason (2005: 24) explored this in the context of higher education, and concluded from a survey of research that a diverse student body at college level was essential for the high quality interactions important for the development of social justice values.

<sup>27</sup> See also references on education and social cohesion in Henry et al (2001) and Martens et al (2007), quoted in Mundy (2007). See also further references in Gorard (2006: 68).

segregated by socio-economic groups, it is likely that commitment to and ability to engage with different groups within democratic structures later in life may be weaker.

In a non-segregated school system, students, whatever their differences, are supposed to be treated and valued equally within a structure. In theory, the model suggests that they are offered equal resources and opportunities, according to their interests and abilities, to take them on to the world beyond school. This is important in two ways: (i) in terms of teaching mutual respect (Gutmann, 1995: 577), through actual practice (related to the point above); and (ii) school is a model of state-citizen relations. ‘Policy feedback’ theorists argue that there is a demonstrative impact of policy on beliefs and behaviours, exploring how the nature of institutions can affect people’s ideas about their rights and responsibilities as citizens (Crompton, 2010: 64-66; Svallfors, 2010). If young people of diverse backgrounds understand that they are all nonetheless valued and treated as equals by the state in the school system, then this is likely to have a positive impact on their democratic values and behaviour later on in life<sup>28</sup>. Alternatively, if children grow up aware that the state is allowing significantly different resources to be given to different sets of children, what message does segregated schooling give about their relationship to the state?<sup>29</sup>

An important point is the *type* of civic engagement capabilities which schools might foster. There is no straightforward link between socio-economic diversity at school, and increased levels of tolerance and civic behaviour (Keating and Benton, 2013; Janmaat, 2010b)<sup>30</sup>. Moreover, some authors have argued that selective or private schools can be highly effective at engendering civic participation and individual political agency amongst its students. Galston (2001: 231) reports evidence that private schools perform equally well as state-funded schools in imbuing civic values<sup>31</sup>. In addition, as discussed in the previous section, there are some instances where diversity may lead to increased conflict, stereotyping and misunderstanding between groups<sup>32</sup>.

However, it is important that young people have access to a model of civic values and engagement which is not just individualistic (i.e. promoting values of individual political

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<sup>28</sup> Another example could be the existence of National Health Service in the UK, which may foster trust in the state as guarantor for certain basic rights.

<sup>29</sup> The findings of Gorard’s (2012: 136) international study suggest that the very nature of a national school system may influence what students regard as ‘fair’. ‘Schools are mini-societies with a potentially powerful life-long influence on young peoples’ view of what a fair society is’. Further, a recent study by Hoskins and Janmaat (2014) suggests that students from lower SES backgrounds who have been ‘tracked’ have lower levels of self-efficacy and may be less likely to vote.

<sup>30</sup> In a recent study of factors influencing pupil’s sense of justice, fairness and equity, Gorard (2011) found that level of school segregation was not significant, and that teacher behaviour was far more influential. However, the definition of ‘fairness’ used with pupils in the study centred on teacher treatment, trustworthiness of adults and whether in-migrants should adopt local customs, rather than the overall distribution of resources, goods and freedoms in society.

<sup>31</sup> Galston reports the results of a study by Wolf et al (2000), in which levels of political tolerance are higher in students from private schools than government-funded schools. Walden (2014) in his chairman’s speech for the Independent Schools Association, argued that state schools fail to give students a moral compass as they do not have the time to teach ‘good values’.

<sup>32</sup> Brighouse (2008: 77) also reports studies where different ethnic groups have been shown to achieve higher academic results when schooled separately.



engagement) but also involves the opportunity to genuinely engage with pro-poor values and be concerned with the wellbeing of all members of society.

So, for example, it is important that schools are not only giving people the skills for individual civic participation (e.g. knowledge of the justice system, electoral system, ability to critically reason and reflect, ability to debate, critical reasoning skills in relation to the media etc). Students also need to have the opportunity to develop other skills and capabilities: to explore tolerance, understanding, empathy, awareness of disadvantage and their own position in society, seeing common humanity underneath difference, and understanding the lives of different socio-economic groups, along with a sense of how different elements of society can work together in reality, and the problems and advantages of a democracy functioning in microcosm. As Nussbaum outlines (2010: 25), education to support a humane, people-sensitive democracy should include ‘the ability to have concern for the lives of others, to grasp what policies of many types mean for the opportunities and experiences of one’s fellow citizens, of many types, and for people outside one’s own nation’; and, ‘the ability to recognize fellow citizens as people with equal rights, even though they may be different in race, religion, gender, and sexuality; to look at them with respect, as ends, not just tools to be manipulated for one’s own profit’<sup>33</sup>.

Moreover, as Wood and Deprez (2012: 481) note, Young specifies that vigilance is necessary to ensure that democracy does not systematically exclude the powerless. Education needs to prepare people to constantly strive for ‘radical inclusion’ of ‘the voices, perspectives, concerns, and interests of those predictably and consistently rendered inaudible and invisible’, along with learning to struggle and debate across differences. Deliberative democracy requires a commitment from everyone to the exercise of agency freedom for all in society, regardless of position or background, for a genuinely collective process of modifying and deciding on the policies under which they live (Crocker, 2014: 248-250). In addition to individual civic engagement, therefore, formal schooling needs to enhance people’s capabilities for empathy, social justice, and tolerance.

I argue here that it is likely that these skills are better learned in a mixed school environment than a selective one – even though in the former there may be opportunities for ‘service learning’ and voluntary work. In this way, there may be a pedagogical environment difference. Selective and independent schools may be highly effective at teaching individualistic political engagement skills; particularly because there is more time in the curriculum, and perhaps better discipline, giving faith as a working model of democracy. But a non-segregated school, if managed in a certain way, may well be better at the other aspects, particularly learning about different lines of difference, such as race, ability, and class; and learning about the realities of civic engagement in a context of greater diversity and inequality. It is important to note that this is not just the case for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, but also for children from middle-class / elite backgrounds. How might schools manage diversity in order to maximise freedom of agency goal formation, and the fostering of affiliation and civic capabilities?

### *Practical implications*

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<sup>33</sup> For further discussion of this point see also Chapter 6 in Nussbaum (2010).

An important qualification is that the benefits of socio-economic diversity depends on management of the school structure and curriculum, as a number of studies have made it clear that there is no straightforward link between diversity in the school body and changes in attitudes and values (Keating and Benton, 2013; Janmaat, 2010b, 2013)<sup>34</sup>. Diversity in schools may not simply provide exposure to different groups, but if managed in a certain way, can encourage deeper understanding, and expand both freedom of agency goal formation, and expansion of civic capabilities. How might a capabilities approach to school contexts inform the provision of this?

i) Freedom of agency goal formation will also depend on the curriculum, which should explicitly explore and explain the existence of inequality in society. This might include looking at inequalities in and between different countries, and across different historical time periods; and exploring ideas about why inequality exists. It is important to explore how things have been different in other times and geographical contexts, and about political movements and campaigns, for students to gain a sense of agency and the possibilities of individual and collective empowerment. This is important for forming agency goals, in facilitating a sense of individual agency in bringing about changes relating to social justice.

If young people are aware of the existence of socio-economic difference, but are unaware of the reasons for its existence, or means through which it can be addressed, they may be less likely to develop agency goals relating to poverty reduction. Yates and McLeod (2000) found that schools can make a difference as to how the advantaged perceive the disadvantaged with appropriate teaching support. Their research showed that when middle class students come to perceive themselves as capable and responsible agents, it also affects how they regarded others who may be less capable. This appeared to result in a lack of sympathy for those who are disadvantaged. On the other hand, the authors also found schools where students had been more effectively sensitized to social justice, and were more tolerant as a result.

ii) Fostering affiliation and civic capabilities requires that diversity is managed with respect; and the provision of an open, democratic and tolerant school environment. Students who experience an open climate at school, in which students feel able to openly investigate issues and to discuss controversial issues with their teachers and peers, are more likely to report trust, tolerance, and to demonstrate critical thinking (Flanagan et al, 2007). Teachers are role models, and the ways in which they moderate student discussions in classrooms, and/ or allow students to participate in school decision-making 'convey messages about social inclusion, about who belongs and whose opinions count, and how members of society should treat one another' (Flanagan, 2013: 83). Conversely, if schools ignore or exclude student views, or fail to enforce school rules equally, they provide hidden but strong messages about inequality and institutional trust.

Many scholars have already focused on capabilities, education and political behaviour later in life, and the implications for school structures. McCowan and Unterhalter (2013) argue that the development of political capabilities within schools depends on the upholding of

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<sup>34</sup> Janmaat, for example, has shown that non-segregated schooling tends to lead to greater equality in civic knowledge and skills, but there was not such a clear relationship with civic values, attitudes or behaviours (2010a).

capabilities *within* schools. It is important to consider what the ‘hidden curriculum’ of a school might be: the institutional experience can have as much of an impact on students as much as the formal content of classes (McCowan and Unterhalter 2013: 149). Walker (2010), reminds us that educational spaces are typically permeated by social structures such as gender, race and class, so that all identities and voices are not afforded the same respect. This forms a troubling foundation for Young’s (2000) assertion that marginalised and vulnerable groups need special attention so that they are fully included in democratic debates about decisions which might significantly affect them. Fertig (2012) cites Fraser’s call for ‘dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others as full partners in social interaction’; and it could be argued that one such institutionalised obstacle is the school-level segregation of children socio-economically, as this is likely to reduce the chances of full social interaction later on in life. Nussbaum (2010: 65) highlights how Dewey sought to make the classroom a real-world space continuous with the world outside; therefore an open and democratic school would give students the opportunity to learn and practice affiliation and ‘civic capabilities’ amongst a diverse, representative body of peers before engaging with a similarly diverse group in wider society.

## Conclusion

This paper argues that it is acutely important to monitor the outcomes of socio-economic diversity in schools in terms of outcomes in terms of values – specifically, freedom of agency goal formation, with a particular eye on social justice values, civic engagement, tolerance and social responsibility. In the current political context in England, these are pertinent considerations. Successive governments have been concerned with the idea of ‘fairness’, and the current government has both scrutinised the idea of values in education and has called for commitment to the idea of the ‘Big Society’, which entails a vision of empowered citizens and communities and greater social responsibility (Department for Education, 2012; Cabinet Office, 2010). This paper argues that school type and diversity are key elements in enabling the development of social justice goals, suggesting that the recent educational reforms quite possibly working in an opposite direction to the raised expectations of civic responsibility facing the population<sup>35</sup>.

While achievement dominates the education debate, the question of social justice values in education is of vital importance, particularly as the gap grows between rich and poor groups. Curriculum and pedagogy are important, but other school arrangements are too. Changes in the diversity of school bodies are likely to have implications for the values of the students.

A wealth of literature has investigated whether socio-economic diversity in school has beneficial and disadvantageous effects on achievement; there are as yet no conclusive arguments either way. However, this paper has argued that from the perspective of human development, maintaining socio-economic diversity in school is crucially important for the formation of social justice values and civic capabilities. Two main reasons have been offered:

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<sup>35</sup> A related point is that presumably the ‘Big Society’ requires equal capabilities to for civic participation, both of the disadvantaged and of the elite, which the current wave of school reforms may be working against.

first, such diversity is a vital component of the freedom to form agency goals relating to social justice. Second, human development requires democratic engagement of a kind that is not only rests on individualistic political skills, but concern for others and the more disadvantaged in society, and a school which is socio-economically diverse is more likely to engender this kind of civic engagement skills. In the light of this, recent trends in English schools are worrying, as greater school segregation may further polarise and entrench values in regard to reducing poverty and inequality.

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