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# Teachers and Learning for Sustainability: Rights, democracy and social justice

**Sharon Hunter and Claire Cassidy***
University of Strathclyde
*Corresponding author: claire.cassidy@strath.ac.uk

**ABSTRACT**
Educational institutions have an important role in the achievement of the United Nations' sixteenth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. In Scotland, all teachers must meet Professional Standards, at the heart of which is a set of goods that include sustainability, democracy, equality, human rights, and social justice. The contemporary parlous state of certain social goods and basic liberties is a spur to a long-overdue interrogation of key values and commitments in the context of Learning for Sustainability. This article aims to explore and problematize the notion of Learning for Sustainability in relation to the work of the teacher.

**Keywords:** *Learning for Sustainability; Social Justice; Rights Education; Democracy; Teacher Education*

## INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions have an important role in the achievement of the United Nations' sixteenth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. This aspiration is inextricably linked with the other SDGs, most notably the fourth, the guarantee of quality, inclusive education for all (United Nations 2015). In Scotland all teachers must meet the Professional Standards set by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), at the heart of which is a set of goods that include sustainability, democracy, equality, human rights, and social justice (GTCS 2012).

Decades of development in the liberalisation of social attitudes and the establishment of rights-based public policy in the UK have been disrupted by recent political events, and, in particular, by the emergence of ultra-conservative and socially regressive stances in the public sphere. Confidence in the inevitable advance of democratic values is being shaken. Even under such adverse conditions, it seems that it is still easy to talk of social goods glibly or to take them for granted. However, if the SDG of creating peaceful, just and inclusive societies is to be attained and, in moving towards this, abetted by teachers, it is imperative that we have greater clarity about both the thing to which we are aspiring, and also the educational considerations that are raised.

The apparently parlous state of these social goods and basic liberties is a spur to a long-overdue interrogation of their meanings and mutual relations in this educational context. Without a clear sense of what they are aspiring towards, the problem of how to enact their role in relation to Learning for Sustainability (LfS), a specifically Scottish term, as discussed below, becomes more confusing and the focus of what needs to be sustained is blurred. This article aims to explore and problematize the notion of LfS in relation to the work of the teacher and, specifically the Standards that student teachers and practising teachers work with and towards. We use the Scottish context to illustrate some of the issues involved, though it should be borne in mind that the issues and problems are pertinent on a more global scale.

## LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

In 1992, following its conference on Environment and Development, the United Nations (UN) published its Declaration on Environment and Development. The goal of the UN was to work 'towards international

agreements which respect the interests of all and protect the integrity of the global environmental and developmental system, recognizing the integral and interdependent nature of the Earth, our home' (UN 1992: 1). The focus throughout the Declaration is on sustainable development. The Declaration's principles making it clear that sustainable development pertains to the environment, ecosystems, standards of living, quality of life, demographics, technological advances, economics, and that the development of the social, economic and environment are inextricably linked. Subsequently, the UN declared the years 2005-2014 the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (United Nations 2005). The interconnectedness of economics, the social and the environment is reiterated, with the direct aim of 'improv[ing] everyone's quality of life' (p.3), now and in the future, being emphasised. With this goal in view, the UN turns its attention to education as the answer. 'Change towards a better quality of life', asserts the UN (2005: 6), 'starts with education'. In 2015, the UN published seventeen sustainable development goals towards which the international community will work for the next fifteen years.

While examples of sustainability or the challenges to sustainability are provided throughout these three documents, in terms of education and sustainability, clarity is lacking (Griffiths & Murray 2017). Variously, phrases such as: Education for Sustainable Development; Sustainability Education; Environmental Education; Outdoor Education; Citizenship Education; Global Citizenship Education; Social Justice Education are used, and often interchangeably. To add to the general fug around the concept, academic writers tend to situate themselves in one silo, principally because they appear to be working within their individual disciplines rather than in an interdisciplinary fashion. Something of a concentrated focus on environmental education (see, for example, Green & Somerville 2015; Tomas, Girgenti & Jackson 2017) has existed, with the likes of Evans, Stevenson, Lasen, Ferreira and Davis (2017) recognising that much of Sustainability Education, originating in Environmental or Outdoor Education, tends to remain associated with the environment and science. Buchanan (2012), for instance, highlights that there is a lack of understanding that sustainability may refer to issues beyond the physical environment. While he recognises that sustainability reaches beyond the bounds of the scientific, he supports the premise that Geography is perhaps a more appropriate 'habitat' in which it might be situated because geography teachers 'were also more likely to identify active and participatory teaching/learning methods, and were more confident than their Science counterparts in teaching sustainable development' (p.111). That said, he also acknowledges that geography teachers sometimes have a 'lack of understanding of the processes involved' (p.111), thereby lending further weight to the need for an interdisciplinary approach to LfS that moves beyond traditional understandings of environmental education to encompass the broader notion of environment as the places in which, and the people with whom, we live and interact.

There is, though, a shift away from environmental sustainability as the sole focus in education for sustainability (Clarke & Mcphie 2016). Recognition for socio-political issues within the frame of education for sustainability have more recently emerged, and 'sustainability knowingness, attitudes, and behaviours regarding environment, society and economy' (Kalsoom & Khanam 2017: 1302) are more in evidence. The complex relationships between people in societies in terms of sustainability education are evidenced through, for example, citizenship education (Reichert 2016; Brown 2018; Toukan 2018) or human rights education (Struthers 2015) or social justice education (Thurston & Yelich Biniecki 2017; Torres-Harding, Baber, Hilvers, Hobbs & Maly 2018). To an extent, though, this highlights the same problem as that found in situating sustainability education only in environmental education. In exploring education for sustainability, the three elements must somehow come together to form a coherent whole. Griffiths and Murray (2017) posit that the Scottish Government's education body, Education Scotland, may have a solution in referring to Learning for Sustainability (LfS) rather than Education for Sustainable Development. Education Scotland (n.d.) clearly states that LfS 'weaves together global citizenship, sustainable development education, outdoor learning and children's rights to create coherent, rewarding and transformative learning experiences', and, further, that all children have a right to this. Education Scotland (2015) explains that teachers will already be familiar with the constituent parts of LfS, such as outdoor learning, children's rights, sustainable development education, education for citizenship and international education. Fundamentally, the purpose, according to Education Scotland (2015), is that these elements come together to encourage thinking about 'who we are and the type of communities and world we want to live in. It is about improving the quality of life and wellbeing of all. It is very much about the here and now, the present day, but also about the future' (p.2).

The multifarious meanings gathering around the notion of LfS, as represented, for example, in the 'word cloud' presented in the Education Scotland documents, make the need for clarity and coherence particularly pressing: arguably, the more a term is intended to encompass, the less likely it is to be useful. A good place to begin may be a consideration of the purpose of LfS. It is in this that most literature and the various UN initiatives tend to concur.

*Learning for Sustainability: purpose*

As is seen above, the UN asserts that sustainability unites around the social, economic and environmental elements and that this is directed at ensuring a good quality of life for all. Buchanan (2012) supports the view that education will help us 'live as if the world mattered' (p.108) but this does not reach far enough; it needs to extend towards those inhabiting the world and the systems and structures in place to support them in their lives together. Griffiths and Murray (2017) ask us to consider 'How should we humans live well in our world?', where the term "world" is understood ecologically, as inclusive of human and more-than-human elements, in relationship' (p.41). The question is helpful because it encourages thinking about ourselves in relation to others and the physical world; it brings together the social, environmental and economic. Jónsdóttir (2015), like Griffiths and Murray (2017), sees sustainability in terms of 'the good life' and the reciprocal relationship humans have with their environment. She emphasises the need to ensure that, while pursuing the good life, the quality of others' lives must be taken into account; we must nurture earth's natural resources and have an eye towards the good lives of future generations.

Taking such a view leads to the 'active exploration of issues, about identifying potential solutions and acting upon them' (Tomas *et al*, 2017: 330). Actions are at least desirable and at best inevitable as a consequence of asking questions and seeking answers, with LfS posing questions that are challenging and unresolvable around issues such as social inequality and climate change (Sandri 2013). Sustainability implies action and this should be promoted through 'a sense of regard for local places and community' (Green & Somerville 2015) but should also go beyond the local and immediate. In cultivating values associated with 'justice, solidarity, peace and respect for life' (Jónsdóttir 2015: 393), a basis from which to build with the goal of action is founded. This articulates comfortably with much of what has previously been called Citizenship Education; the notion that the purpose of education and schooling is to develop citizens equipped to live in democratic societies. Bootinand and Petcharameree (2018) acknowledge that there are inherent tensions in supporting young people to be citizens who conform to certain expectations or who are patriotic or even 'obedient' (p.37) against the notion that citizens in a democracy, at the same time, should be 'non-dogmatic, critical, and value diversity' (p.37).

To a very great extent, school education is formed by the limitations and aspirations determined by the wider societal context. Before continuing to consider the nature of learning for sustainability it will be helpful to identify what seem to us to be some of the most salient aspects of this context.

*Learning for Sustainability: wider context*

In 2016 the election of Donald Trump as President of the USA and the UK referendum vote to leave the European Union signalled remarkable political and social changes. The two events made a substantive reality of what had been longstanding trends, and yet the pace with which the political scene altered was startling. The most conspicuous aspects of these changes are the rise of anti-intellectualism and the decline of social and political trust. Alongside this we can see changes in voter/civic behaviour. All of these aspects present significant challenges to the democratic, rights-orientated educator.

Anti-intellectualism is the disparagement, deprecation, and mistrust of experts, professional intellectuals, and the educational elite. There were two moments that captured the anti-intellectualism that became overt and mainstream in 2016: Donald Trump's declaration: 'I love the poorly educated' at a rally in Nevada in February, and UK Justice Secretary, Michael Gove's assertion that the British people 'have had enough of experts' during a Sky News interview in June . Trump is widely regarded as representing 'a radicalization of the anti-intellectualism trend' (Kayam 2018: 85). He conducted an election campaign which has been described as 'one of the most remarkable and deeply disturbing campaigns in American history' (White 2017: xix), using spoken language that had by far the lowest level of complexity of any US president, or presidential candidate in US history (Kayam 2018). Certainly, this widened political participation: he was able to address more Americans than any previous president or candidate. But his

administration's subsequent dismissal of evidence and scientific opinion, and its appointment of unqualified people into executive positions, has flattened any meaningful political debate and altered key policies, most catastrophically in relation to climate change. His administration's latest Environmental Impact Statement (July 2018) makes grim reading: in an abrupt volt face, they now accept that global temperatures will rise. However, the scientific consensus, that a change in our behaviour might avert the crisis, is somehow rejected.

The endorsement of what Wodak (2015) calls the 'arrogance of ignorance' (p.2) typifies the right wing populism that has been steadily gaining ground since the 1990s in many countries across the world (Wodak 2015: 2), although anti-intellectualism is not completely exclusive to right-wing ideologies (Motta 2017: 7). It would be difficult to overstate the significance of this break from the core Enlightenment principles of the authority of reason and empirical evidence under the guise of a pseudo-egalitarian assertion of the 'common wisdom of the people rather than the pretensions of the expert' (Oliver & Rahn 2016: 190). In place of deliberative democracy and communicative reason we now appear to have 'uninformed voters making irrational choices' on the basis of pre-modern foundationalist principles (Chomsky & Barsamian 2017: 16). Populism cynically harnesses the energy of, often legitimate, discontent among some of the poorest, to further covertly the interests of the most powerful.

The anti-intellectualist trend makes for a very difficult context for any educator, but the affective markers of right-wing populism present particular challenges to the development of learning for sustainability. These markers can be grouped under the general categories of fear and mistrust.

Right-wing populist parties typically rely on a 'politics of fear', which scapegoats minorities as responsible for whatever is perceived to be wrong in society (Wodak 2015: 2). This has variously manifested itself in the form of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia and transphobia, anti-Mexican sentiment, or any group, in fact, which can be seen as outside the normative boundaries of ethno-nationalism. Islamist terrorism has further fuelled this fear and legitimised foreign policy decisions that have, in turn, arguably increased the threat. Hand-in-hand with this tendency goes some form of nostalgic revisionism that identifies a former time before these 'others' changed everything for the worse.

Distrust of experts and social mistrust exist alongside a lack of trust in government and political institutions. This declined steeply during the 1960s and 70s, before levelling out with no consistent trend (van der Meer 2017). Voter participation is low, particularly among young people (Keating, Green & Janmaat 2015), and civic involvement is decreasing (Putnam 2000). Taking into account all of these aspects of our current political and social situation, it seems that the context for democratic rights-orientated education is more than a little discouraging: we are fearful, nervous, and have low levels of trust in each other and in our political leaders and institutions. The sustainability of democracy itself is in question.

And yet, significantly, alongside low levels of trust in government, a high level of support for democracy itself has been maintained (Keating, *et al*. 2015; van der Meer 2017). Among young people there is 'overwhelming evidence' that they are not in fact apathetic but, rather, that their political engagement has 'evolved rather than declined' (Sloam 2014: 664, 678) taking the form of other kinds of participation: direct action; demonstrations; boycotts; petitions; and so on, though these are activities that are engaged in by a minority of young people (Keating *et al*. 2015). Recent events support this idea; at the time of writing, thousands of school-age children in the USA are taking part in demonstrations about gun control, following the school shooting in Florida on the 14th February 2018. In Scotland the franchise was extended to 16 and 17-year-olds followed by considerable engagement and involvement in the Scottish independence campaign, rebutting the view that young people would not and could not engage with constitutional issues (Hopkins 2015).

Thus, the themes that emerge from this account cluster into three inter-related domains: the cognitive (recognition of expertise and evidence); the normative (commitment to democracy); and the affective (fear and its correlate, trust). These in turn can be mapped onto the notion of Learning for Sustainability, which, as is already obvious, has a distinctively broad and deep reach into the pedagogical relation to the human condition. The next part of this paper explores the educational import of these domains, with particular reference to the requirements made of teachers. Firstly, we will explore the Professional Standards teachers are expected to meet before returning to the three aspects discussed above: the cognitive, normative and affective and unpacking these to focus on the elements that are particularly relevant to LfS, notably in relation to teacher knowledge, education and democracy and education as transformation.

## EDUCATION: PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Many countries have sets of Standards that teachers and student teachers are expected to meet, for example: Australia (Evans *et al*. 2017); Scotland; Sweden (Andersson, Jagers, Lindskog & Martinsson 2013); and the USA (Bürgener & Barth 2018). Australia, for instance, has a sustainability curriculum framework and associated curriculum that aims to ensure that 'all citizens possess the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in decision-making that is cognisant of environmental, social and economic implications' (Tomas *et al*. 2017: 325). However, Evans *et al*. (2017) note that despite the mandatory nature of LfS in the Australian curriculum, it is does not feature in the standards for ITE or teacher professional standards. They note that the only country which has LfS embedded within its professional standards for teachers and student teachers is Scotland. The Standards for Registration (General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) 2012) do, as Evans *et al*. (2017) state, assert that Scottish student teachers and practising teachers are required to engage fully with LfS, and that it is 'embedded throughout the professional Standards to support teachers in actively embracing and promoting principles and practices of sustainability in all aspects of their work' (GTCS 2012: 2). The Standards are organised around three main headings: professional values and personal commitment; professional knowledge and understanding; and professional skills and abilities. Judging an individual's values and commitments is inherently problematic: the other elements of the Standards provide a pragmatic way of determining whether a teacher meets the criteria for registration. The intention is that there is synergy across and between the three areas. For example, it is expected that teachers will 'have secure knowledge of current educational priorities such as learning for sustainability' (GTCS 2012: 9) and that they will 'create opportunities for learning to be transformative in terms of challenging assumptions and expanding world views' (p. 14) and 'establish a culture where learners meaningfully participate in decisions related to their learning and their school' (p. 15). This is easy to understand when one looks further at the Standards and notes the philosophically loaded words used, without interrogation, within the values and commitments section. This latter comprises four further sub-headings: social justice; integrity; trust and respect; and professional commitment. The document works to draw links between teachers' values as what drives their practice, suggesting that teachers must continually re-appraise their values and associated practices throughout their careers.

Commitment features strongly for teachers adhering to the Standards in Scotland. They must demonstrate commitment, amongst other things, 'to the principles of democracy and social justice through fair, transparent, inclusive and sustainable policies and practices…to engaging learners in real world issues to enhance learning experiences and outcomes, and to encourage learning our way to a better future' (GTCS 2012: 5). In parallel they should 'embrac[e] the educational and social values of sustainability, equality and justice and recognising the rights and responsibilities of future as well as current generations', all the while 'Valuing as well as respecting social, cultural and ecological diversity and promoting the principles and practices of local and global citizenship for all learners' and 'respecting the rights of all learners'(p.5). Knowledge of interdisciplinary contexts and 'educational priorities such as learning for sustainability' (p.9) are more obvious.

### *The cognitive aspect: teacher knowledge*

Of course, it is important to have interdisciplinary knowledge if LfS is to be advanced (Starks 2013). Teachers need to think about what they need to know in relation to how humans impact upon their environment in its widest sense (Griffiths & Murray 2017) and they need to be confident in this knowledge (Tomas *et al*. 2017). However, this in itself is more problematic than might at first be anticipated. Tomas *et al*. (2017) refer to several studies that report on student teachers' lack of knowledge with respect to sustainability issues, reconfirming the work of Cassidy, Brunner and Webster (2014) who express concern not only at student teachers lacking confidence in their knowledge of issues associated with rights, but also their lack of engagement to find out. Struthers' (2015) study on human rights education similarly draws the conclusion that teachers' knowledge and understanding of human rights education was inadequate. She goes on to argue that if teachers 'are not versed in the language and terminology of human rights, they cannot in turn educate about, through and for human rights…that accords with the requirements of the international legal framework' (p.69).

Where does responsibility lie for the acquisition of this knowledge? Lack of confidence affects teachers' abilities to approach controversial issues that are an inherent part of LfS (Cassidy *et al*. 2014; Evans *et al*. 2017). Tomas *et al*. (2017) point the finger at ITE courses, blaming these for students' lack of knowledge. It is certainly arguable that some programmes of study could do more, though it would be difficult to quantify something as wide-ranging and amorphous. However, it does seem to run counter to the requirements of the Standards for Registration in Scotland (GTCS 2012) that put considerable onus on students and practising teachers to demonstrate a commitment to the issues, and that, within this, it might be inferred that they have some responsibility to research and inquire for themselves. While it is possible that ITE courses can provide activities that help students to know and understand some of the issues related to rights, democracy and social justice, such as those described by Andersson *et al*. (2013), knowledge and understanding is insufficient and, a one-size fits all approach is not likely to work well. There is a strong general impression of a dire lack of political literacy in the student body, and a more or less single-minded focus on a constrained and technical understanding of the work of the teacher, which easily bends to the dominant cultural narrative of anti-intellectualism and 'the juggernauts of standards and accountability' (Clarke 2017: 42). Receptiveness to the knowledge and understanding required for LfS is inevitably negatively affected by this.

Whilst anti-intellectualism and education levels are only weakly linked, there is some strong evidence that an educational focus on 'verbal intelligence' and the development of communicative skills, that is, 'abilities to think abstractly about political concepts, eschew heuristics that are grounded in negative affect and prejudice toward marginalized groups, and discuss politics with others' mitigates anti-intellectual attitudes (Motta, 2017: 11). This in turn is associated with socially liberal attitudes, and openness to considering the views and experiences of others. In other words, the acquisition of a certain set of skills may have an indirect transformative impact on one's values and commitments. The likes of Community of Philosophical Inquiry, for example, has been proposed as one approach to engendering deliberative participation (Cassidy 2017).

### *The normative aspect: education for democracy*

An informed citizenry is essential to a functioning democracy and there is consistent evidence that interest in politics correlates strongly to education levels (Keating *et al*. 2015) though we should be cautious about attributing a simple causal link between the two (Persson 2013). Knowledge and skills can be taught, but the commitment to certain normative ideas such as those asserted in the first element of the Standards is not something that can be transmitted in any straightforward way. Indeed, we should exercise caution in considering any form of 'education' that has the end of changing people's values and attitudes, however benign the intention. In contrast to the epistemic certainty that characterises populist right-wing political thinking, which is typically derived from certain religious and ontological stances (namely evangelical Protestantism and strong individualism), the habits of thinking that support democracy are those that can accommodate complexity and indeterminacy, requiring on-going critical self-reflection, and openness to new evidence and ideas in the quest for better understanding. The kind of reflection entailed in teacher educators' 'elusive search for social justice' eschews polarised notions of 'good/bad, have/have not, superior/inferior' (Oikonomidoy, Brock, Obenchain & Pennington, 2013: 62) since 'critical interpretations are contextual and 'dialogic' (Lynskey 2015: 83).

This entails both a set of skills and also, crucially, a bearing or comportment that embodies and sustains the commitment to democratic deliberation, reflection and communication. The Scottish commitment to teacher education rather than teacher training is significant here. The import of this distinction lies in the understanding of the work of the teacher as ethically and politically significant, rather than as simply an aggregate of technical skills or 'craft'. Education affords opportunities to become reflective practitioners through active engagement with complex and contested educational concerns.

### *The affective dimension: Education as transformation*

The 'transformational potential of education' (Davids & Waghid 2016: 34) is at the heart of LfS. There are two elements of this notion that are of particular interest here: the idea of praxis, and the affective aspect of education. 'Praxis' is a term that is rarely used in schools and in teacher education. This is a great pity because it is a word that neatly expresses what teachers and teacher educators often understand

themselves to be engaged in, and which connects the thinking-and-doing, or theory-and-practice, in a single living whole. Praxis is an Aristotelian and Marxist idea that enters educational discourse via Paulo Freire, who defines it as: 'reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed' (Freire 1996: 107). LfS is orientated toward action both as self-formation and as transformation of our social, economic and environmental relations (Brown 2018).

The critical citizen who is 'socially responsible, healthy, and civically engaged' (Torres-Harding *et al*. 2018: 4) is a common feature in the literature. Being a citizen involves learning that goes beyond what might be called Civics lessons. Certainly, education that involves learning about systems and structures in society is important, but in considering LfS, the aim is to move beyond this, to promote active engagement in the world and the issues affecting it. Some, like Torres-Harding *et al*. (2018), advocate empowerment through social activism; the notion that young people learn that they are able to be politically motivated and that they be encouraged to translate their motivation into action. Schools, notes Toukan (2018), are not politically neutral places; young people should be aware of this and their place in it. The activism flows out of, and back to, the deliberative citizenship in which young people 'are educated to be open-minded, to express themselves freely, to consider plurality of opinions and to respect the limits of reasonable differences when questions of political coercion are at stake…when they are initiated into a discourse of public reason' (Torres-Harding *et al*. 2018: 35).

The affective dimension of education tends to be ignored, neglected, or crushed under the weight of other, seemingly more pressing, outcomes-orientated agendas (Knight-Diop & Oesterreich 2009; Zhu 2017). But the transformative orientation of LfS re-establishes the place of emotion against the contemporary tendency toward a 'one-dimensional, economistic and bleakly utilitarian conception of the educational task' (Hyland 2011: 2). This revival of affect which can be seen in LfS literature is distinct from the 'therapeutic turn' noted by Ecclestone and Hayes (2009). Rather, the focus is on those emotions that relate to what Dewey calls the project of 'associated living, a conjoint communicated experience' (Dewey 1916: 87). Specifically, whereas fear and mistrust are the markers of anti-democratic politics, sustainable communities seek pro-social affective markers.

Empathy is the most frequently discussed of these affective markers in the literature on LfS. Davids and Waghid (2016), for example, consider notions of empathy or shared human endeavour, and assert the 'transformational potential of education' (p. 34) recognising that transformative learning takes one further than simple understanding to see how one's attitudes and actions have a bearing on society and change within that society. In this context, Kalsoom and Khanam (2017) offer a helpful concept; they speak about 'sustainability consciousness'. This brings together the notions of empathy, of situating oneself in the world with others, of recognising the transformative potential of education, of reflection and action. Sustainability consciousness is a usefully descriptive term and one that promotes the notion of 'minding' or 'attending' as Griffiths and Murray (2017) would say. They discuss minding as being an ethical act, one that encourages individuals to think of themselves in relation to others and this, they say, is the basis for seeking social justice, what Jónsdóttir (2015) describes as 'action competence' (p. 398).

However, the connection between empathy and acting is problematic. Boler (1997) argues that '[p]assive empathy produces no action towards justice but situates the powerful Western eye/I as the judging subject, never called upon to cast her gaze at her own reflection (p. 259). Lest our empathy become merely the 'numb consumption of another's suffering' (p. 268) it is essential that the fostering of certain emotions of empathy or compassion are not uncoupled from consciousness of power, for without the possibility of a shift in power relations there can be no justice. This returns us to the notion of critical self-reflection – the challenging of personal assumptions and beliefs – noted earlier in contrast to the closed certainty that characterises certain social and political stances. Boler's work on what she calls the 'pedagogy of discomfort' has become seminal in social justice education literature (Boler 1999). Critical self-reflection is uncomfortable, painful even. It raises serious questions about the idea of 'safe space', which has recently come to the fore on university campuses. This is not to dismiss concerns about student well-being, but the reformation of social and ecological relations that LfS demands inevitably carries risk in pursuit of the bedrocks of the democratic imaginary: empathy, equality and social justice. These risks create a tangle of ethical and pedagogical challenges for the educator: the process of critical self-reflection entails that students 'unpack their cherished beliefs and 'comfort zones' in order to deconstruct the ways in which they have learned to see, feel and act' (Zembylas & McGlynn 2012: 44), which is surely neither

simple nor ‘safe’. Though it should also be borne in mind that for many students there are already no safe classroom spaces (Boler & Zembylas 2003).

## CONCLUSION

Teacher educators face a number of challenges: increasing anti-intellectualism in public and private life and an atmosphere of distrust and fear, lack of basic political literacy and lack of confidence in handling controversial issues, divergent views on the nature of teachers’ work and the conflicting paradigms of the activist teaching profession and the docile teacher. There is a limit to what can be achieved in one or even in four years of a professional qualification, so this raises questions regarding recruitment and selection. The diversity of the teaching profession is under current scrutiny by the Scottish Government; more can be done by ITE providers to encourage black, Asian and minority ethnic people to apply, and more could be done to support them on ITE courses. The same can be said for other minorities such as people who identify as LGBTI and those with disabilities. Without greater diversity, the job of fostering fundamental democratic and rights-based attitudes is made much harder since the profession is visibly not embodying the values it purports to hold. There is also a strong argument to be made for favouring the selection of applicants who demonstrate attitudes of openness and who have relatively high levels of verbal intelligence. And, of course, the logic of critical self-reflection has implications for teacher educators, whose own values, commitments, prejudices and knowledge levels need to be open to self-scrutiny.

LfS cannot be depoliticised without doing violence to its central assertion of the interconnectedness of economics, the social and the environment. Similarly, the conceptualisation of the role of the teacher as politically and ethically significant is core to LfS philosophy. Bürgener and Barth (2018) urge us towards creating ‘change agents’ (p. 821) who are both competent and committed to effecting change. They acknowledge the perennial challenge in working with ITE students, the marriage between theoretical and practical knowledge, that the ‘spectator view of knowledge’ (Jónsdóttir 2015: 403) should be avoided in favour of an approach that encourages students to make connections between their actions and consequences. Oikonomidoy *et al*. (2013) may be right when they describe the character of social justice as elusive and, therefore, difficult to teach; and this must certainly be the case if we accept that LfS goes beyond a knowledge base and is to be transformative. Equipped with the right knowledge and skills, but also in espousing values associated with LfS, teachers can be activists (Stark 2013). By examining topics through a human rights framework or lens, teachers must be knowledgeable, but they must also be able to move beyond this if they are expected to defend rights or to be empathetic and actively engaged with the world and those who inhabit it (Struthers 2015). In order to do this, they themselves must be of an inquiring and reasoning disposition; this is what supports teachers to be transformative in their own lives and in supporting children in their learning for sustainability. This may, of course, be more challenging for student teachers given the power dynamics between them and tutors or supervising teachers while on placement, but if student teachers are truly to be inducted into the profession then they must also have opportunities to see and experience activism first-hand.

Helpfully, Griffiths and Murray (2017) place importance on developing wisdom and understanding alongside knowledge, but they also, importantly, urge that seeing ‘social justice’ as a noun is problematic. They contend that ‘it is more active than that’ (p. 40) and should be considered a verb. In so considering it, this may support teachers, student teachers and teacher educators to move towards inextricably linking knowledge with action in the realm of LfS, and avoiding ‘learned hopelessness’ (Tomas *et al*. 2017: 341) or ‘habituated numbness’ (Boler 1997: 255). Indeed, while student teachers may learn and understand particular ideas or concepts, it does not inevitably follow that they also have the ability to apply the concept (Sandri 2013). They need to be supported in this and they need to have opportunities to see how the notion of social justice can be enacted. This may be achieved through on-campus learning where discussions can be focused and hypotheses and experiences may be interrogated; but the enactment of social justice, aligned with any set of professional standards, ought to be enacted on placement if learning is to be meaningful and if rights, democracy and social justice are to be central to education practice. This may go some way to addressing the dilemma as to how students and teachers might apply their professional values and personal commitment in relation to LfS.

While Toukan (2018) urges an approach that fosters a sense of moral responsibility when faced with inequality and injustice, she goes further to propose a transformational approach that allows individuals to see themselves as immediately connected to others and issues on a more global scale and that they

are encouraged to act accordingly. This should be the goal of ITE and those graduating as teachers. It requires the 'compassionate imagining' described earlier and moves towards the teacher as political actor. Teachers, under such a view, cannot exist in isolation if they are to be far-reaching in their impact (Brown 2018); they must embrace the political and enact their sustainability consciousness.

Perhaps most fundamentally, teacher educators, teachers and student teachers could profit from an exploration of what it might mean to be an intellectual. Though intellectuals tend to be knowledgeable in their field, their intellectualism does not reside in this knowledge. Anti-intellectualism throws into relief the characteristic bearing of the intellectual: openness to complexity and indeterminacy, curiosity, and flexibility of thought. Intellectualism is not in this sense by any means a withdrawal from the world. In another time, Theodor Adorno, considering the role of teachers and the demands of critical self-reflection in post-war Germany, said '[w]hether someone is an intellectual or not is manifested above all in his relationship to his own work and to the societal totality of which it is part (Adorno 2005/1962: 21-22). It is this connectivity that distinguishes the intellectual (Jessop 2017). During a time when intellectualism is for some a pejorative, a proper understanding of the role of the teacher as someone in a particular relation to the world, prepared to recognize, confront, resist or embrace, change and be changed, is one that supports the foundations of Learning for Sustainability.

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