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**Maria Paz Cockerill**

**Enabling children and young people to flourish:  
The Capabilities Approach and its Aristotelian roots**

**Abstract**

This thesis argues for the Capabilities Approach in education, based on Aristotelian philosophy, in preference to the performative approach of the present Standards Agenda in education. This agenda confines learning to reaching standardised numerical targets and considers persons predominantly as economic units. Instead, Aristotelian philosophy provides a renewed understanding of realising potential and well-being, thus strengthening education theory and practice.

A particular contribution of the thesis is to make explicit the ethical dimension in education. Importantly, it explains the nature of this dimension and the theory that supports it. The thesis maintains that the basic shared human capacity for care, affiliation, and deliberation forms an essential part of the moral imperative that society must work to realise. It argues that the Capabilities Approach which has already influenced development in economics, health, and social policy, should also influence education.

The Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach focuses on the essential role of the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation. It includes a flexible method of reflection which seeks a synthesis between emotion and reason, informed by an ethical framework about what human beings share. The development of these capabilities enables human activity to occur in complex interdependence, promoting deliberated trust and co-operation in society, which in turn supports meaningful discourse, understanding, and positive action between individuals and groups. This thesis argues that education should have a significant role in nurturing these capabilities, to enable children and young people to flourish during their school years and beyond. The ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate learning and life decisions with reference to their well-being requires these capabilities.

Crucially, the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach is inclusive of and sensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups and individuals in society. It redefines our understanding of realising potential which includes an ethical dimension, and offers practical ideas about how education can help young people live a fulfilled life.

**Enabling children and young people to flourish:  
The Capabilities Approach and its Aristotelian roots**

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**Department of Education**

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**2012**

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## Introduction

### Education: the need for a broader perspective

Social scientists highlight the paradox that ‘at the pinnacle of human material and technical achievement, we find ourselves anxiety-ridden, prone to depression, worried about how others see us, unsure of our friendships, driven to consume and with little or no community life’ (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 3). There is wide agreement about the remarkable sensitivity of health to the social environment (Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003; Marmot *et al.*, 2010) of which education is an integral part. Evidence also shows that the lives of children and young people are affected (UNICEF, 2007; Layard and Dunn, 2009) by a worrying rise in mental health issues (WHO, 2010). This is further exacerbated by the utility based culture of *performativity*<sup>1</sup>, which has influenced education in England and given rise to a narrow standards-driven system where success is judged through standardised forms of assessment (Pring and Pollard, 2011).

Education needs a broader perspective of what it means to be a humane and educated person than is implied by this narrow focus (Pring and Pollard, 2011). A case has been made that suggests that the existing focus on standardised academic success and economic performance in education requires scrutiny and refinement (Smeyers *et al.*, 2007; Bridges *et al.*, 2008; Bridges, 2009; Pring *et al.*, 2009; Alexander, 2010; Smith 2011). Moreover, the need for re-assessment becomes critical in the face of persistent poor education and health outcomes, particularly in areas of greatest deprivation affecting the most disadvantaged (nef, 2004; UNICEF, 2007; Pring *et al.*, 2009; Marmot *et al.*, 2010; WHO, 2010).

In this thesis I put forward the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach, which offers a broader perspective than the performative culture in education at present allows, in preference to two major influences which lead to a narrow definition of what being educated entails and which prevent educational success for many. The two foci of utilitarianism in education which this thesis challenges are: (1) the theoretical bias which considers education as principally about generating productivity in respect of employment outcomes, and (2) an overemphasis in teaching and learning fuelled by this philosophy, which concentrates foremost on instruction in passing standardised tests. This philosophy supports a positivist understanding of progress and success in education which reduces evaluation to grades and numbers, also influenced by reductionist tendencies in science. Instead, this thesis challenges the theoretical understanding that defines education in terms of productivity and utility, and strengthens a theoretical understanding of education focused on intrinsic values about realising potential in

terms of flourishing. Significantly, this Aristotle-inspired approach focuses on what persons can be and promotes societal structures to ensure that opportunities are provided in which persons can realise their potential.

For centuries, many educationists have supported the importance of progressive education (Darling and Nordenbo, 2003), and some have focused particularly on the expansion of personal thought and collaborative engagement (Dewey, 1915, 1933; Bruner, 1960). This holistic approach concentrates on the development of grounded human beings and encompasses a wider vision of an educated person than is afforded by a performative view of education. The recent Nuffield review mentions continued efforts in education today which seek to break free from the performative culture by adopting a more progressive approach (Pring *et al.*, 2009). Yet there remains the persistent tendency towards education for productivity. The force of this thesis rests in its attempt to extend a progressive understanding of holistic education with its broad vision of an educated person by adopting the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach. I argue that this approach offers a helpful theoretical framework that includes an ethical dimension and which also provides practical ideas for education.

I propose therefore, that Nussbaum's version of the Capabilities Approach and the Aristotelian philosophy on which it depends serves to underpin a much needed ethical dimension in education. I suggest that the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach offers: (1) a framework of shared capabilities within which realising potential can be understood, (2) an alternative language in education free from the dominance of the performative culture of business and productivity (Pring, 2004; Smeyers *et al.*, 2007), (3) a definition of happiness and well-being shaped by an ethical understanding of what living well and doing well entails, which can guide educational thinking and practice, (4) practical reason and affiliation as two capabilities crucial to the process of reflective practice and developed by it, which enable understanding, well-being and educational success, (5) an approach to education which recognises diversity, resists reducing everything of value to a single standard or measurement, and which is free from the mechanistic tendencies of an approach defined by utility alone.

## **The Capabilities Approach**

The Capabilities Approach was first developed by Amartya Sen (1992, 1993) and Martha Nussbaum (1993, 2000) as a radical challenge to the conventional approach to welfare

economics. It can be defined as an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and to theorizing about basic social justice, where the key question is considered to be: What is each person able to do and to be? The approach so defined takes each person as an end worthy of dignity and considers whether individuals have the required opportunities to develop their capabilities 'to do and to be' in order to flourish.

In this thesis I concentrate particularly on Nussbaum's neo-Aristotelian development of the Capabilities Approach including the list of ten capabilities which she advocates (Nussbaum, 1993: 242-69, 1995: 86-131, 2000: 72-101). Nussbaum suggests the list of central human capabilities is one which 'can always be contested and re-made' (2000: 77) but which 'can be endorsed for political purposes, as the moral basis for central constitutional guarantees, by people who otherwise have a very different view of what a complete good life for a human being would be' (*ibid.*: 74). While researchers in the field suggest that the relative weight given to these capabilities may vary with age, among people and across cultures (Anand, 2005), there is a strong consensus from researchers across disciplines as varied as psychology, economics, and philosophy in respect of 'valued beings and doings' (Alkire, 2002: 2).

Concerning the Capabilities Approach and its conceptual understanding of what constitutes a good life and of the social structures which enable individuals and societies to flourish, Nussbaum points to practical reason and affiliation as two capabilities which 'both organize and suffuse all others, making their pursuit truly human' (2000: 131). Practical reason is understood as 'Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life' (2001: 417). Affiliation is understood as 'Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction, to be able to imagine the situation of another ... [and] being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others' (2001: 417). Developing these capabilities helps people to plan, monitor, and evaluate their personal development in respect of realising potential as individuals and in the context of others. Significantly, practical reason and affiliation enable persons and societies to engage with the ethical dimension of life through the flexible process of honing thoughts and emotions by sensitive and thoughtful reflection, and testing their ideas and assessing their actions in dialogue with others.

Consequently, with regards to education, Nussbaum defends the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation as significant for living well and flourishing, and urges educationists to nurture these capabilities in educational settings (1997, 2010, 2011). Congruent with

Nussbaum's position and drawing on the Aristotelian concept of *eudaimonia*, I support an understanding of educational success which includes realising potential for living well, and which does not define success primarily in terms of levels of productivity or above average achievement on a single standard scale. Instead I set out the Capabilities Approach and its Aristotelian roots as a theoretical underpinning well-placed to guide flexible reflection towards sensitive understanding and just action in education.

### **Emerging literature in relation to the Capabilities Approach**

An emerging literature considers and defends the significance of various versions of the Capabilities Approach in fields including economics, law, health, and education (Sen 1993, 2009; Nussbaum, 1993, 2006, 2010, 2011; Anand, 2005; Walker, 2006; Brighouse and Robeyns, 2007; Law and Widdows, 2007; Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007; Terzi, 2010). The Capabilities Approach offers an alternative to prevalent utilitarian measures for social justice and focuses on what entails human development and sustainable living, and is particularly helpful when we consider the vulnerable and those living in disadvantage. In practice, the Human Development Reports published by the United Nations have embraced the concept of capabilities as one of their theoretical cornerstones (UNDP, 1990-2007/8). Other examples of the Capabilities Approach can be found in various disciplines including economics (Sen, 2009) and health (Anand, 2005), in an attempt to improve the situation and ability to flourish of vulnerable groups such as the young, elderly, disabled, and dispossessed. Others specifically focus on changing existing injustices in society in relation to gender discrimination (Nussbaum, 2000), poverty through gender disadvantage (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007), including protecting the legal status of minority groups such as pregnant women (Deakin and Wilkinson, 2005).

Although the Capabilities Approach has not received the same attention in education which it has in health and economics, educationists have engaged with this theory to various degrees in the philosophy of education, especially with regards to developing human freedoms (Saito, 2003). Regarding practice, educationists have employed the Capabilities Approach in a variety of areas including educational policy analysis and pedagogy in tertiary education (Flores-Crespo, 2004, 2007; Walker, 2006), disability and special educational needs (Terzi, 2010). Others have applied the Capabilities Approach to issues of social justice in education, in particular as an attempt to achieve gender equality (Unterhalter and Aikman, 2007). The Capabilities Approach has also been defended as an alternative to Human Capital theories in respect of measures of equality in education, and is suggested as more sensitive to context

and individual need than that provided by economic measures such as GDP (Walker and Unterhalter, 2010). In general, these writers engage with the Capabilities Approach as developed by Sen (1992, 1993) and Nussbaum (2000) in respect of human freedom for capability development and its relation with education. They do not focus on Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach with regards to the implications of its distinctive Aristotelian roots. Hence, although these writers acknowledge Nussbaum's contribution to the Capabilities Approach, they do not specifically engage with the significance of the Aristotelian philosophy which underpins it and the ethical dimension which it supports.

What I seek to do in this thesis is engage directly with Nussbaum's neo-Aristotelian understanding of the Capabilities Approach, and suggest ways in which her position and the Aristotelian philosophy which informs it are significant for our understanding of an educated person. I argue that the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach strengthens education theory and practice, supporting an ethical dimension which can help educationists nurture individuals to realise their potential.

### **The ethical dimension in education and reflective practice inspired by Aristotle**

Alexander (2010), in the Cambridge Primary Review, argues that pedagogy should be about the way teachers apply 'values, principles and judgement, rather than the trading of tired dichotomies or capitulating to this or that national strategy which has been imposed from above in pursuit of a definition of educational "standards" that nobody is permitted to question' (2010: 3). Others propose that education should focus beyond the extrinsic value of exam success in pursuit of increased economic outcomes. For example, Terzi defends the intrinsic value of education and the importance of specific practices which relate to personal fulfilment and focus beyond the instrumental securing of employment or position in life. She recommends practices in education such as appreciating literature, the natural environment and music. In respect of judgements about policy in education, Brighouse insists on the importance of a clear definition of principles in education to guide the design and role of social institutions, and the judgement about the worthiness of a policy (in Terzi, 2006: 148, 182). Furthermore, Hogan suggests there is an overemphasis in education on indexing which promotes a mentality of 'technicity' (2000: 374).

These considerations point to the need for articulating an ethical dimension beyond performativity in education, a view that has also been voiced in recent educational reviews

(Pring *et al.*, 2009; Pring and Pollard, 2011). However, although educationists such as Pring and Pollard (2011) accept the importance of an ethical dimension in education, they refrain from articulating its nature. A strong theoretical basis which includes the ethical dimension in education is needed in order to strengthen the ability of education to move beyond the mentality of technicity. Therefore, in this thesis I set out a theoretical basis with reference to Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach and its Aristotelian roots, in an attempt to defend an ethical dimension in education beyond utility.

I hope to show that Aristotle's thinking provides a helpful understanding of what an educated person entails, which is pertinent beyond the ancient Greek philosophical setting of its genesis, and is applicable and necessary in education today. Indeed, recent education reviews indicate that our values in education arise from what it means to become an educated person, and that this defines what is important to learn and what counts as learning successfully (Pring and Pollard, 2011: 15, 30). I propose that the ethical dimension arising from Aristotle's philosophy, in particular his *Nicomachean Ethics*, provides important pointers when defining what we mean by an educated person. This dimension informs our understanding of what education should include, the essential emphases for teaching and learning, and how we define and evaluate educational progress.

Therefore, I propose in this thesis that the Capabilities Approach with its Aristotelian roots enables rigorous yet sensitive discussion and provides workable solutions to questions pertinent in education today, such as: Are there any capabilities which we share as human beings that transcend cultures, provide a basis for living well, and which society has a moral responsibility to nurture? What is a worthwhile life and how should we organise ourselves in society and in education to make such a life possible? How should we best understand well-being or happiness and what is its relation to teaching, learning and evaluation? What does realising potential mean and consist in? How does our view or definition of realising potential affect our understanding and practice of teaching and learning? How should we evaluate progress and attainment in education which is sensitive to each individual and their context?

## **Overview of thesis**

I will engage with these questions in the eight chapters of this thesis. As outlined below, in this thesis I begin by exploring the Aristotelian philosophical roots which underpin Nussbaum's development of the Capabilities Approach. Second, I consider this approach and its significance

for issues about human flourishing, social development, and well-being, together with the ethical dimension included in these considerations. With this background in place, I focus on the present challenges in education and the importance of the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach for practice and evaluation. Furthermore, I set out an approach for education based on a rich heritage of reflective practice sympathetic with the Aristotelian contemporary Capabilities Approach, which I suggest nurtures human beings so that they can flourish and succeed as reflective thinkers and responsible social beings.

### *1. A philosophical grounding for education: An Aristotelian approach*

In Chapter 1, I explore Aristotle's philosophical view and its potential to strengthen education. I propose a broad working definition of ethics to guide education, which challenges the prevalent performative approach. I show that Aristotle's philosophy recognises the complexity of moral dilemmas and the difficulties inherent in making judgements. Here, insight (*nous*) and practical wisdom/reason (*phronēsis*) are important to secure judgements about realising potential.

This philosophy stands in contrast to a standardised approach in evaluation where everyone fits onto the same linear scale not sensitive to diversity. This in turn narrows practice to instruct for success in relation to this narrow scale. Aristotle's position is important for education as it does not reduce evaluation to calculation using one scale and allows for diverse values. Given the complexity of the human condition this process for Aristotle requires an understanding of what is really valuable for human beings, and a balanced ability to apply general principles to the particular instance under deliberation. For this reason, Aristotle reminds us that 'our account would be adequate, if we achieved a degree of precision appropriate to the underlying material; for precision must not be sought to the same degree in all accounts of things' (NE I, 3, 1094b 10-15). I argue therefore, that a philosophical grounding for education such as this puts a strong case against certain utilitarian aspects of education.

### *2. Realising potential: Human flourishing in the context of a shared nature*

In Chapter 2, I consider Aristotle's 'function argument' in the *Nicomachean Ethics* which develops a view about human beings and their shared characteristics, from which surfaces a particular understanding of human flourishing understood as *eudaimonia*, which stands against the standardised approach in education. Although Aristotle offers a general outline for what we share as human beings, there is respect for human complexity within this philosophy. For this reason, there is no single measure of the good in Aristotle's ethics. Nevertheless, it is

possible to make judgements about what is good or bad for human beings in the context of our shared nature, a point supported by psychology research which suggests there exists some basic common understanding about this across cultures described as universal characteristics (Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

Of significance for education today, the *Nicomachean Ethics* calls individuals and groups to the public arena to reflect and evaluate sensitively and critically in order to make good choices about how to live well. The process involves learning to think well within an ethical framework based on what human beings share, in order to reach the best possible decision in any given situation, both individually and as a society.

### *3. The Capabilities Approach for personal and social development*

Researchers propose that human development and considerations about success and equality in this area should include data from a variety of areas (Sen, 1992), and critique evaluation confined to economic or happiness measures alone as insufficient for understanding development (Sen, 1993; 2009). In Chapter 3, I engage with the development of the contemporary Capabilities Approach and its potential for considering issues about human development, which are particularly significant for education.

Aristotle's position regarding the function argument and the concept of *eudaimonia*, understood as personal fulfilment and realising potential in respect of developing the natural capacities to be well, do well and thus flourish (Hughes, 2001), challenges a standardised version of human happiness and allows for different conceptions of the human good. Realising potential here is understood from an ethical perspective which includes a space for virtues, for the pursuit of the mean in the search for balanced judgements, and an overall grasp of what flourishing entails. This process requires the essential capabilities of practical reason and affiliation to be developed. I argue that the Capabilities Approach as developed by Nussbaum also allows for different descriptions of the good life and in this it builds on Aristotle's philosophy.

### *4. Happiness reviewed within the context of the Capabilities Approach*

Exploring the current happiness debate and positive psychology research in this area, I suggest that Aristotle's understanding of happiness in respect of *eudaimonia* is still pertinent today. It is an important contribution that helps us understand progress in well-being or happiness with greater sensitivity, and stands in contrast to standardised measurements of the kind to which



positive psychology and social science research is prone. Reviewing our understanding of happiness and well-being and its importance for and relation to learning is urgent, given the evidence of rising mental health issues (WHO, 2010) also affecting children and young people (UNICEF, 2007).

Education and well-being in society are intertwined and are both dependent on and responsible for nurturing relationships based on trust. This view is supported by psychology and social science research, identifying education as 'one of the strongest determinants of generalised trust' (Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005: 47, 64), and one of the seven determinants of health (Marmot *et al.*, 2010). The Capabilities Approach with its Aristotelian roots strengthens education's ethical responsibility to support the development of the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation, which enable persons to realise their potential as happy, trustworthy, thoughtful and engaged members of society.

#### *5. The significance of the Capabilities Approach in education*

Chapter 5 focuses more specifically on the barriers to realising potential fuelled by education within the performative culture, and argues in favour of the Capabilities Approach as an alternative for positive change in education.

In this chapter I first explore the difficulties which children and young people face today, where evidence indicates that children continue to make decisions which hinder their ability to flourish (OECD, Unicef, 2007). Research recommends developing resilience and well-being in young people across the social gradient if children's outcomes are to be improved (Marmot, 2010). There are also concerns about the curriculum and Standards Agenda in education adding to children's levels of stress. Furthermore, educationists challenge the system within which success in education is measured, promoted by the business language used and the persistence of the factory metaphor in education (Pring, 2005).

The importance of helping children to think well, relate well, and make good decisions in favour of their own and societal flourishing continues to be urgent today, and I advocate the contribution of the Capabilities Approach in education to enable positive change in this area. I argue in favour of this approach and its ethical dimension which gives clear practical guidance in education, that takes account of each person's struggle for flourishing, and that upholds practical reason and affiliation as crucial to realising potential nurtured within a framework of reflective practice.

## *6. The importance of reflection in education within the Capabilities Approach*

In Chapter 6, I argue that what is distinctive about reflection within the Capabilities Approach is its focus on practical reason and affiliation using a flexible method of reflection which includes an ethical dimension within it. This approach enables persons to plan, monitor progress, and review success in respect of realising potential on an ongoing basis, and looks beyond extrinsic values such as utility. With this in mind, I consider the similarities of progressive models promoted by Dewey and Bruner with reflective practice within the Capabilities Approach. I propose that the Capabilities Approach builds on their position with the ethical grounding it includes, which ensures that the focus on the individual child is not at the expense of learning.

I hope to show that the flexible model for ethical reflection offered in this thesis encourages a rich understanding of cognition, which includes the synthesis of emotions and reason tested within a common framework about human nature. Reflection of this kind requires individual attention and assessment undertaken in dialogue with others. It dislodges simplistic notions of reflective practice sometimes evident in pedagogy and learning, evidenced by a mechanistic attitude resulting from a rigid and formulaic approach.

## *7. Reflection as a way of life for growth: Learning from traditional tools of reflective practice*

Some suggest that part of the problem we face in education is the failure to learn from the past (Pring *et al.*, 2009: 85). In this chapter therefore, I expand on the notion of reflection by looking to the past, in particular, reflective practice from the Greco-Roman heritage of philosophy as a practical tool for life (Hadot, 1995), and the later tradition of 16<sup>th</sup> century Ignatian reflection which evolved from these philosophical roots. This heritage of reflective practice enriches the understanding of reflection for teaching and learning as a way of life sought in this thesis. As a result, flexible reflective enquiry within the Capabilities Approach is proposed which promotes essential ethical questioning, analysis and evaluation.

In Chapter 7, I also explore difficulties faced by the growth metaphor including the tendency to subjectivism and individualism. I propose that the Capabilities Approach and its heritage of reflective practice could salvage an understanding of growth in education which avoids this tendency, owing to the general principles which underpin it. Significantly, this approach considers growth from the perspective of a lifetime, assessed in the context of an ethical framework based on shared human characteristics and capabilities.

### *8. Evaluating quality and success in education within the Capabilities Approach*

The instrumentalisation of research assessment has been strongly criticised (Oancea and Furlong, 2007; Elliott and Lukes, 2008; Smeyers, 2008; Bridges, 2009; Pring *et al.*, 2009), owing to the connection between the narrowing of the official concept of quality to measurable performance, the narrowing of practice to production and delivery, and the narrowing of assessment to what can be quantified (Oancea, 2007: 260). Furthermore, Nussbaum suggests that given the universal desire to grasp the world and make it comprehensible to reason, oversimplification and reduction remain ever-present dangers (1986: 260). This is sometimes evident in education research particularly in the 'what works' culture of evaluation (Oancea and Pring, 2008) and the tendency towards an over-reliance on statistics resulting from 'scientism' (Smith, 2011) exemplified by the Standards Agenda in standardised tests.

By contrast in this chapter I propose the Capabilities Approach and its ethical dimension as a way forward for evaluation which seeks greater balance in understanding quality and success in education. Important in this approach is developing and implementing the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation, shaped through reflective practice, which help evaluators to think well, relate well and make sensitive judgements based on a variety of evidence. This thesis extends educationists' views who support evaluation as 'intelligent and informed appreciation' dependent on discernment rather than solely on metrics (Bridges, 2009: 511), or who propose that evaluation must include aesthetics (or 'connoisseurship') rather than be confined to science (Eisner, 2002). Importantly, Hogan reminds us that teaching as a way of life, which includes evaluation on an ongoing basis, is distinctive by its 'inherent relationship to learning as a human undertaking' and the 'inclusive undertaking for how life is to be lived' (2004: 27). It is in this process of evaluating learning and teaching towards realising potential for flourishing that I believe the Capabilities Approach provides a great contribution.

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<sup>1</sup> This term is used by Lyotard to describe a situation in education where the value of function has superseded concerns of justification or rights in education, owing to the triumph of technocratic reason (1979, in Hogan, 2000: 378-9).

## **Chapter 1**

### **A philosophical grounding for education: An Aristotelian approach**

#### **Introduction**

Few would argue that a principal aim of education is enabling individuals to realise their potential to live worthwhile lives and for society at large to flourish. Nor is it contentious to consider such an aim as an ethical pursuit. The debate begins when we try to unpick what various groups mean by realising potential, or what a worthwhile life entails, or what counts as a flourishing society. Further debate arises regarding how best to assess progress in respect of these and which measures are most appropriate for the task. The purpose of this chapter is to put forward a philosophical approach that helps us steer through this debate, inspired by the work of Aristotle, which is better able to shape education than the utilitarian alternatives prominent in education.

This Aristotelian approach is pertinent today as it embraces the importance of insight and practical reason, giving a credible place to both emotions and reason towards realising potential, and making judgements about progress in this area. This Aristotelian approach challenges evaluations in education which are measured according to a single standardised scale, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8. I suggest that such an approach provides a much needed ethical framework, enabling educationists to decide what the learning experience should consist in and how to understand success when working towards human flourishing.

#### **Identifying the problem and what is required**

What is required in education today is a conceptual framework based on ethics beyond utility which provides sound criteria from which to develop practice and consider assessment. I argue that this approach is a much-needed alternative in education, which stands in contrast to the performative approach present in the Standards Agenda. An Aristotelian approach is important in that it offers not just necessary and defensible criteria which enable us to make

sense of education with reference to what being educated entails, but also sufficient criteria that reflect the complexities of the real world in this respect. Hence in this chapter, I argue that what is required is a philosophical approach that is sensitive to the manner in which we experience the world through our emotions, while at the same time accepting that we require thought to make sense of our perceptions and insight for living well. Such a philosophical position provides a strong theoretical base that enables us to make judgements about underlying understandings and beliefs about education.

It is worth recognising the commitment of so many teachers and practitioners to initiate children and young people into what they believe to be worthwhile knowledge, understanding and activities – in short initiating them into a way of life that enriches them as human beings. Such practice requires deep reflection about the aims of education and its progress. Thinking in this way about education is not easy as it tackles disagreements in societies about what values are worth pursuing and what constitutes a worthwhile form of life. Here we can see that education is at its heart about ethics and that such ethical issues are already pervasive in our systems and practice. For example, an ethical framework shapes our choices in the resources that the practitioner chooses or is instructed to use, in the interests of the pupils and students who try to make sense of the world from their individual, group or cultural perspective (Pring, 2005; Pring *et al.*, 2009)<sup>1</sup>, or indeed in the tools chosen to assess progress (Pring, 2004; Oancea and Furlong, 2007; Bridges, 2009).

However there is often tension between the evident commitment of so many practitioners and the educational system within which their performance and the standards of their pupils are judged. There is a pull to comply to a framework of measurement based on a single scale that is rather simplistic, where in fact a much more nuanced account is required. One reason for this is that much of the language used in the field of education today is understood using a model of productivity. It utilises business language that reflects this position, and has as its conceptual base a utilitarian perspective that considers measurement as driven by numerical formulaic assessment and commensurability.

The present language of productivity can be an obstacle rather than a facilitator for education towards human flourishing. This is because it presumes an over-rationalistic and scientific bias such as that promoted by 'scientism' (Smith, 2011: 1) that eschews our view of persons and what counts as progress, as it does not fully acknowledge them as thinking-feeling, relational beings. This yearning for objectivity and proof in education, misconstrued as only satisfied by a

(quasi) scientific approach (Bridges, 2009: 497) has been fuelled in recent decades by the culture of 'performativity', described as 'efficiency measured according to an input/output ratio' (Lyotard, 1984: 88). This (quasi) scientific tendency towards evaluation in education has been critiqued by many educationists across the field (Dunne and Hogan, 2004; Law, 2004; Bridges and Smith, 2006; Oancea and Furlong, 2007; Bridges, Smeyers and Smith, 2008; Bridges, 2009; Pring *et al.*, 2009, 2010; Alexander, 2010; Pring and Pollard, 2011). Smith (2011) helpfully articulates the narrow and misconceived nature of this tendency in education, which he describes as 'scientism' (*ibid.*: 1).

Let it be clear from the start that I am not against statistics, only over-reliance on them and unreflective faith in them. The position is much the same as it is with the more familiar case of science. The fact that science has made our lives safer and more comfortable in numberless ways, and that many areas of science are intrinsically fascinating, does not justify *scientism*, the colonising by science of every other form of thought and the assumption that whatever problem we have, the solution will inevitably be a scientific one. (Smith, 2011: 1).

So what is the alternative? I suggest a fruitful alternative would be to embrace a different conceptual beacon which we can trust in education, one that enables us to make sense of education within the context of ethics beyond utility and which resists *scientism*. The challenge is to avoid reducing measurement to numerical formula, and instead to promote practice and assessment which is sensitive and interpretative, and which embraces broader horizons of understanding and greater awareness of the variety of expressions of human flourishing. I argue in this chapter that this is possible with an ethical base and approach inspired by Aristotelian thought.

### **An Aristotelian approach**

In this section, first I define what is meant by the term ethics, and second I develop a philosophical frame that is preferable to utilitarianism, inspired by the writings of Aristotle, with particular attention to his *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE). Aristotle's ideas are flexible enough to be adapted to the present day and steer a middle course between over-emphasis on emotions or reason. Aristotle's approach empowers us with a theoretical base that reflects the complexities of human lives and allows them to pursue a variety of paths to success within

their particular culture. It therefore provides a better approach than that provided by the utilitarian model, which is constraining, confines individuals within a deficit model of human development, and overall does not convince.

### 1.1 A working definition of ethics

Ethics is about how people should live, and live together, as they shape their lives in co-operation and reciprocity with others, and as they are themselves shaped by practical reason and affiliation (that is: the capability to make sound judgements through critical sensitive interpretation, and the capability to relate to others with compassion, care, and with respect for the dignity of every individual). In short it is about personal fulfilment and inter-personal respect and harmony. One reason for this as Aristotle points out, is that ‘... a human being is a political [animal], tending by nature to live together with others’ (NE, IX, 9, 1169b, 19). The claim that certain human abilities or capacities exert a moral claim that they should be developed is a claim about how human beings are in essence at their best. Here, ethics is seen in the holistic sense as a way of being, which requires developing a set of psychological and cognitive capacities in order to make judgements about how to live a fulfilled life.

In this wider sense the term ethics is used interchangeably with morality. Both are defined with reference to that which we share by virtue of being human, rather than with reference to conformity to any behaviourist format, or a particular cultural or religious authority, as the term morality is sometimes associated with and spoken about. Ethics in this sense is not restricted by the sometimes narrow Kantian interpretation of responsibility or duty in specific aspects of morality. Nor is it confined to rule compliance in the utilitarian sense. Instead, ethics is considered as a broad approach to how we should live a life and so is concerned with all of life. As understood from an Aristotelian perspective therefore, I take ethics to be primarily concerned with providing the general outlines of a normative theory about living well, itself shaped by empirical enquiry, but not as provided by *scientism*.

Frankena (1973) offers helpful categories in respect of ethics, that we can use here as a rule of thumb to facilitate philosophical thinking about morality, as described below.

- Descriptive empirical enquiry, historical or scientific, such as that done by anthropologists, historians, psychologists, sociologists, social scientists and educationists. The goal of such

enquiry is to explain the phenomena of morality or to work out a theory of human nature which bears on ethical questions.

- Normative thinking that anyone does when they ask what is right, good, or obligatory.
- Critical or meta-ethical thinking. This is the kind of thinking that we do when we are challenged to our limit in our normative judgements. It asks and tries to answer questions such as what does it make sense to say, what can we know and what do terms such as right or good or free or equal or responsible mean.

## 1.2 Towards a philosophical approach that education can trust

The following are ethical questions which are at the heart of educational practice and assessment, and the very *raison d'être* of learning: How should we be and what should we do in order to flourish, and how might we know that we are succeeding? How can we enable children and young people to realise their potential and what is meant by realising potential? What should learning and evaluation look like in the light of these questions? We need a philosophical approach that helps us answer these questions in a manner that is coherent and that we can in principle communicate to others beyond our immediate cultural or linguistic circle. As far as possible this requires seeking objectivity in terms of making sense dialogically through our shared language, and avoiding the extremes of either complete subjectivity or the objectivity provided by *scientism*.

I suggest that the kind of theoretical base we seek and for which I will argue in the rest of this chapter, needs to respect complexity, be non-sceptical, pluralist, depend on a recognisably social reflective method, and not over-estimate clarity in evidence. It must be eager to recognise the complexity of moral dilemmas, be willing to recognise that human nature is very flexible, and consequently that human flourishing can occur within a variety of social structures that makes it very difficult to communicate trans-culturally. A philosophical approach such as this would be well suited as the conceptual frame we seek to inform and shape practice and evaluation as it claims objectivity only as far as the nature of the subject allows. Aristotle in his writings on ethics advocates just such an approach and calls us to the public arena to reflect, deliberate and evaluate sensitively and critically in order to make the best possible choices about how to live well. Thus in the four sections below I first put forward a case for a shared language that is non-sceptical and in principle enables comparability.



Second, I engage with the issues pertaining to present educational language, its utilitarian influence and associated pitfalls. Third, I examine the utilitarian attempt at commensurability. And fourth, with the help of Aristotle's writings I suggest a position in ethics important in education - one that is credible and allows for pluralism without either being subjectivist, or reducing ethics to science.

### 1.2.1 Seeking 'plausible objectivity': Making sense through our shared language

What makes genuine communication even possible? I suggest that any viable way of talking-form of life requires us to be able to relate to the real world. I will not enter here into the complex philosophical debate about truth claims in epistemology and will not attempt a full defence of non-scepticism<sup>2</sup>. What I will do for the purpose of this chapter is gather some evidence for an understanding of 'objectivity' defined by the possibility of genuine non-sceptical communication based on a shared natural human heritage which enables human beings to discourse about their experiences in meaningful ways. This is the understanding of objectivity which I will use in this thesis, rather than its extreme version, logical positivism, which reduces truth claims to logic and mathematics.

Given our evolutionary journey as *homo sapiens* we can at the very least say that our different cultures and languages have shared roots (Midgley, 1978). These shared roots as human beings mean that to the present day we have our most basic needs in common, such as the need for shelter and food on the one hand and the need for reciprocity, affiliation and practical reason<sup>3</sup> on the other. This in turn means that we interact with our world in ways which are at the deepest level shared. Because human beings are also some of the most flexible of earth's inhabitants our journeys have taken quite different paths and our languages and customs have developed in disparate ways, and it is difficult to translate or compare between these various practices.

However, if we accept that we have shared roots, the possibility for a shared language is a reality, even if we also share the constraint that translation between persons or across cultures is often difficult. When Wittgenstein writes of the limits of our language being the limits of our world<sup>4</sup>, he is drawing attention to the fact that our language and our entire way of thinking about and assessing matters in our world cannot be separated from our way of living. Like the post-modernist, we can accept that there are constraints on our understanding and that there is no neutral standpoint for establishing how the world is, and therefore that we have no way

of assessing the truth of things other than in terms of how we have learned to think and talk. But this is a long way from saying that in fact our language does not relate to the real world at all. We do not have to go as far as the subjectivist who denies any common ground between language or cultures, and confines us to our cultural or even individual worlds, thus making our attempt to make references to others and the real world impossible. In fact Wittgenstein affirms in his *Philosophical Investigations* that language is essentially a public matter. To this extent, the intelligibility of language depends upon a set of conventions to which speakers have all subscribed, and the strong presumption is that in speaking or writing, they intend to observe these shared conventions.

Gadamer, in his work *Truth and Method*, also develops this idea of ineffability and stresses the importance of seeking what we as language users actually share for meaningful communication. For Gadamer there is too much stress upon difference in the modern age and not enough attention to what binds us as a species, what we share in common. He subscribes to the realist dimension that there is a world beyond our culturally conditioned perception of it, but that we cannot get a full picture of that world as interpretations constantly change. So he encourages what he calls a 'fusion of horizons' where we use dialogue as a central feature for understanding. And we build a bigger picture of past and present through a shared solidarity based on what we share. In this sense he speaks of 'Being that can be understood is language' (Lawn, 2006: 66).

These helpful insights point us towards a non-sceptical position about relating to the real world in what we say, and to an understanding that is not subjective about our ability to communicate with one another in a comparable way. Translation between people or cultures is a complex matter, especially when dealing with ethical concerns. In fact, we could say that translation is more of an art than a scientific process and cannot be reduced to any simple formula that would automatically guarantee success. This point will be further discussed in Chapter 8 in respect of evaluation with support from Bridges (2009). If we do accept that we have shared roots and that we can in principle relate to the real world beyond our individual language frameworks, there simply must be a basis for shared understanding between us, even though such translation will require patience and hard work.

An example of this is evident in popular sayings from various cultures, such as: 'a bird in the hand is worth more than ten in the bush' or 'never look a gift horse in the mouth'. Some of these sayings are easily transliterated between languages, but most are steeped in

metaphorical language the meaning of which is shaped by their cultural heritage and which are consequently difficult to translate in a manner that is faithful to the original. This requires a dialogue between peoples to find a fit that best communicates its intention. Therefore, evidence of difficulties in translation does not mean that translation is impossible. Rather evidence that we do often understand one another successfully itself supports the fact that effective communication is possible and that an effective social reflective method of interpretation is ongoing and thriving between peoples and groups.

### 1.2.2 What of the language of education?

Making sense of education as an ethical pursuit, in respect of our experiences, relationships, and choosing what is worthwhile in that context, is coloured by the language we use as well as our interpretation of it. The metaphors that have been developed in education recently in the UK, to a large extent reflect conceptual business models that are constrained within a language framework of productivity. An exception is the growth metaphor in education which will be discussed further in Chapter 7. The language of targets or outcomes resulting from the business model which lends itself to reference against a common standard agreed, suggests that educationists do in fact believe we can get things wrong, and that judgements are not just purely a matter of personal opinion, hunch, or feeling. This practice presupposes that we have some mechanism of understanding one another that is to some extent objective. The aim here is objectivity in what can be said, in order to guide practice and monitor progress. It rightly takes a non-sceptical approach to truth and non-relativist approach to our ability to communicate these truths, but to do this it often adopts a framework of '*scientism*' (Smith, 2011: 1) within which practice and measurement are defined.

For example, the present educational language of targets, impact and outcomes all points to an agreed framework based on a scientific method of standardised empirical enquiry that can be objectively assessed and about which we can communicate effectively. Smith warns against this when he challenges '*scientism*' (2010: 1). Within this agreed framework of scientism, educational professionals and policy makers understand judgements about teaching, learning and research as objective and defined by a single standard. They are making truth claims that are not subjective, and in practice independent of the individual, the practitioner, the school, the community or a particular society. They are non-sceptical about the meaning of the language they use or the evaluations made by individuals or groups.

However, the objectivity they seek by using this model of *scientism* is wrong headed, especially when education is considered as an ethical pursuit. There are two reasons for this. First in seeking objectivity, an overly narrow lens is used to explain<sup>5</sup> human beings as having commensurate values that can be scientifically measured using a single standard. Second, when it considers education from an ethical perspective, it does so from a utilitarian perspective where the language of more or less is a quantitative language that depends on commensurability, which economist Amartya Sen challenges (2009). As Pring (2005) rightly suggests, the business language and rhetoric used in educational policy today sees teaching as a purely technical matter of reaching targets, and learning as a technical matter of achieving targets. This does not allow education as an ethical pursuit to be understood using a wide lens, sensitive to the complexity of the human condition and seeking to understand and gain clarity so far as the subject allows. The point that ethics cannot seek precision-style clarity is made by Aristotle as he insists that although ethics should start from what most of us would pre-philosophically have taken to be true about the way we function as human beings, truth in ethics defies any attempt at exact formulation (NE, 1094b10-15). Clearly ethical assessment cannot be done using purely scientific tools, as it also requires that we listen to our wider heritage as drawn for example from the arts and humanities more broadly, as well as paying close attention to our human desires and feelings. And this wider approach has far reaching implications on teaching, learning and evaluation.

Furthermore, educationists do not always consider themselves to be working within the conceptual and practical realm of ethics, unless pressed, as illustrated by the culture of 'what works' (Oancea and Pring, 2008). But they would agree that education is concerned with how to realise potential for individuals and societal flourishing. It is in this sense that education is undoubtedly an ethical pursuit. Truth claims made about educational practice and research are in fact value laden and thus what we choose to include or exclude in such practice or research and its evaluation needs to be understood within the ethical frame. As illustrated in recent education reviews, educationists stress the significance of considering educational practice and evaluation within a frame which is not restricted by the language of targets and outcomes, and to take seriously the ethical dimension in education, (Pring *et al.*, 2009, 2010; Alexander, 2010; Pring and Pollard, 2011). They emphasise the importance of shaping practice and the curriculum in a manner not restricted by the language of targets and outcomes, in order to engage individuals and groups to reflect, imagine, reason, deliberate, and make a positive contribution to the lives of others and the community around them.

Others, such as Palmer (1983) highlight the importance of the practitioner as *authentic* role model and supporter of learners, and the need for the recovery of community in education. Williamson (1997: 93-104) reminds us that morality is part of the weft of society and of social experience and that learning must therefore include opportunities for reflection, enquiry, dialogue and engagement if we are to understand and make choices that are morally sensitive of the other. Midgley (1997: 36), echoes this when she discusses the need in education for opportunities to deliberate through serious thought. Furthermore, White (1997: 25) rightly points out that education should widen young people's conceptions of what their own fulfilment might consist in. Nussbaum (1997: 300) also stresses the importance of including this kind of deliberation in tertiary education everywhere, as in her opinion it would be catastrophic to become a nation of technically competent people who have lost the ability to think critically, to examine themselves, and to respect the humanity and diversity of others. Furthermore, she rightly states that the task of world citizenship requires the would-be world citizen to become a 'sensitive and empathetic interpreter' (*ibid.* : 63). Noddings (2006), helpfully offers a practical approach to reflective thinking for schools to adopt, and Stenhouse's Humanities Curriculum Project ensures that young people can explore matters of deep personal concern as teachers mediate to students the different 'voices in the conversation of mankind' (Pring, 2005: 15).

Notwithstanding critics such as these, the educational language of productivity prevails and does not acknowledge sufficiently the complexities of education from an ethical perspective, except as viewed from a utilitarian perspective. It is utilitarianism and its historical roots that underpin much of educational language, policy, practice and evaluation today, as illustrated by standardised tests such as GCSE and GCE, which include clear targets and measurable indicators. Business language which supports this position has been adopted enabling funding to be justified by clearly relating quantity of funding to quantifiable outcomes. It has done this by pursuing a single scale standardised measure to explain progress in raising achievement. Lacking in this approach has been a sincere attempt to recognise the importance of individuals and the vulnerable, and to acknowledge the importance of a sensitive interpretative approach which includes emotions when considering ethical issues at the heart of education.

The next step is to explore the utilitarian perspective exemplified in the culture of 'performativity' (Lyotard, 1984: 88) in education, and consider why it is unsuitable as the conceptual base for education. I will consider why the roots of utilitarianism in its denial of the importance of emotions for ethics have tended it to be over-reliant on reason. As a result, a

scientific-style model for commensurability has been its hallmark. But given the complexity of the human condition it seems implausible that there be commensurability in ethics. The counter-intuitive results that a utilitarian approach yields, means that we need to look for a path that is more sympathetic to the interplay between emotion and reason in the quest for making sense and making judgements about living well, while resisting the charge of subjectivism. Here is where we can draw on the Aristotelian approach in ethics for guidance. Yes, we still seek a kind of plausible objectivity in the way we make sense of life as relational beings. But the assumptions Aristotle makes about the nature, scope and method of ethics have a down-to-earth common sense quality and a nuanced view of the interplay between emotional sensitivity and rational coherence that can provide a more defensible conceptual base for educational practice and assessment than does the present utilitarian model today.

### 1.2.3 From emotions to calculus: The Achilles' heel of utilitarianism

It is worth looking at the roots of the present utilitarian position before delving into the problems that ensue in pursuit of calculus or commensurability through algorithm-style measurements. I will briefly draw on the work of Hume, Bentham and Mill to do this. Jeremy Bentham's (1748-1832) approach to utilitarianism is a critique against emotions as the guiding criterion in ethics, and presents an extreme position. Much of the background against which Bentham, and later John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873) reacted in formulating their versions of utilitarianism, is to be found in the subjectivist work of David Hume (1711- 1776), where moral is not considered as a quality of things in themselves but the response which those things evoke in us. Hume thought that the empathetic quality in our shared human nature enables us to respond to situations in the same kinds of way. Our shared human nature guarantees comparability, building as it does upon our universally shared moral sense.

It is worth noting that a subjectivist such as Hume, the utilitarians that followed such as Bentham or Mill, and an Aristotelian, could all be said to make assertions about basic comparability, as they all subscribe to some version of a natural law theory based on a shared human nature. They may differ widely in their views of ethics, but they are at one in holding that both the content and the form of moral thinking must in the end be derived from an examination of the kind of being that a man or woman is, and that this kind of examination must be conducted by the methods of rational enquiry which we employ also in other non-moral fields. So the essence of a natural law theory of morality lies in what it has to say about

the starting point and the method of moral thinking. And the variety in these three theories stems from the different pictures of people that they use for their starting point. Hume assumes that we share the disposition to sympathy with others, while Bentham's and Mill's attempts to be scientific presuppose a shared view both of values (or preferences) and of the canons of moral reasoning. But there is arguably no such shared view. Aristotle on the other hand offers an approach that takes both sense and reasoning seriously, while denying the possibility of commensurability of any kind in ethics (Hughes, 2006).

The advantage of Hume's account over the later utilitarian position is that it correctly highlights the importance of emotional response for understanding morally important features of persons and situations. Ethical understanding is too often seen as purely a matter of reasoning. But unfortunately Hume makes no provision for any rational assessment of the emotional responses we have, and overestimates the extent to which our natural emotional responses can serve as a criterion for what is of moral value.

Hume claims that sympathy, or fellow feeling with others is a principle in human nature (Selby-Bigge and Nidditch, 1975: 222-23). In this sense, Hume views these emotional responses as purely natural and in so doing does not sufficiently acknowledge that they are in fact rarely so and that our emotional responses to situations are far from being universally shared or morally reliable. As the field of psychoanalysis shows us our emotional responses can often be a product of a variety of influences, of some of which we may not be conscious. Unfortunately, in this psychological account, Hume makes no provision for any rational assessment of the emotional responses we have, whether natural or learnt. Hence he leaves himself open to the claim of incomparability in ethics.

In our search for a conceptual base that is better than that which exists at present with the utilitarian position, we seek comparability. In fact this is precisely what utilitarianism attempts to do also. But in so doing, it relies on calculus, which is misguided. The starting points in Bentham's account of utilitarianism are that we know what pleasure and pain are and how they motivate everything we do, and that the maximisation principle for goods is the most reasonable to hold. Bentham believes moral principles to be true and not simply the expression of sentiment or feeling, and such truths can be found in the principle of utility. That is, that pleasure or the avoidance of pain are the only fundamental goods, and that to have more of anything good is better than to have less.

Bentham in trying to tackle the injustice of the workplace at the time was influenced by the work of Adam Smith. In particular, he was interested in the attempt to explain the phenomena of economic life, industrialisation and the distribution of wealth, in terms of a few basic assumptions believed to be laws of nature as established by God. Seeking moral reform in favour of the workers, Bentham also uses the key notion of comparability in its strongest form, commensurability, thereby trying to demonstrate that the exploitation of workers by factory owners was morally indefensible. This utilitarian position relies on the commensurability of values as a measure to deal with injustice. There are echoes today where greater justice is sought for those who though not exploited as the factory workers were then, nevertheless lack opportunities to flourish in today's unequal society. An example, is the agenda to narrow the gap in education between the privileged and those living in areas of economic deprivation, which is understood with reference to succeeding in standardised tests measured on a single scale.

This utilitarian view of education as of ethics remains an implausible account owing to difficulties in the commensurability of values. For example it seems ill-conceived to try to ask the equivalence in value between different peoples' activities, such as: a walk on the beach, the attendance of a punk rock concert, eating out, sailing the Greek islands, reading the biography of David Beckham, or writing sweet nothings about their life on Twitter, to name but a few. Perhaps for this reason, welfare economics has tried to replace value-commensurability with a calculus of preferences. But there has been no way of computing the best overall outcome for several people with different preference rankings even here. For the utilitarian, we can now say that defending a whole set of moral conclusions on very few assumptions and a method of calculation based on commensurability is not convincing and is counter-intuitive. And further, our conceptions of what is or is not valuable is often subject to a diverse variety of psychological and cultural influences which can radically alter our most basic view of the world.

Neither a purely emotional response nor calculus of values gives us a convincing basis for ethics and we need to look for starting points elsewhere. As Sen writes, regarding economics and justice, we are inescapably and successfully involved in evaluating alternatives with non-commensurable aspects.

Non-commensurability can hardly be a remarkable discovery in the world in which we live. And it need not, by itself, make it very hard to choose sensibly ... The presence of



non-commensurable results only indicates that the choice-decisions will not be trivial (reducible to counting what is 'more' and what is 'less'), but it does not at all indicate that it is impossible – or even that it must always be particularly difficult. (Sen, 2009: 241)

#### 1.2.4 An Aristotelian approach that depends on insight and practical wisdom<sup>6</sup>

As I have explored above, neither emotions on their own nor calculus seem an adequate base for ethics and do not provide the conceptual framework sought in this thesis. Emotions, understood by Hume as the neutral standard for ethics do not leave room for any cognitive element in emotions as an essential factor to the way we make judgements. Calculus on the other hand, demands commensurability that is questionable in ethics. Instead, what is required is a more integrated approach such as that espoused by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*<sup>7</sup>. Here, an appropriate place is given to balanced emotions and reason, and comparability is possible within a shared understanding of human fulfilment. Aristotle rightly resists attempts to force ethics into the confines of a systematic theory while still giving us methods by which we can make moral judgements and work towards fulfilment.

Aristotle recognises the importance of virtues and focuses primarily on how people can make choices about how to behave. Aristotle considers virtue as a kind of excellence of understanding about the things that are most honourable (NE 1141b15) and considers practical wisdom as a kind of intellectual virtue: to possess it is to be good at thinking in a certain way. Making judgements is about responding appropriately to a given situation, which for him involves both an understanding of the universal principle (eg. kindness) and the particular situation (eg. what action would constitute kindness in this instance) (NE 1141b5). He would consider that universals come from particulars (NE 1143a32-b5), so the notion of kindness develops over the years and even though the word kindness might still be used, the individual's growth in experience of instances of kindness deepens their perceptive grasp of the virtue.

Making judgements is made possible through the development of emotional balance which requires a honed emotional grasp or understanding of a situation (sometimes called insight) to which thought is then applied in order to reach a decision. An appropriate response to situations is understood in terms of what a person of practical wisdom would know. And this

depends on having suitable role models, for example in parents, the community and the law. Practical wisdom is thinking about what to do when one has already grasped the emotional context of the situation. And practical wisdom so defined is about how we become experienced in living well towards the fulfilled life (NE VI,13 and NE VI,7)<sup>8</sup>. Aristotle views virtues as the responses which facilitate such an understanding, and motivate actions in which that understanding is expressed (NE II, 4). And the standard by which we can make comparisons is our recognition of a fulfilled life as a whole that we share by virtue of being human. So for example, answering the question, 'How ought I to feel towards a drug addict seeking money for their next fix in the street?' would first of all require our grasp of what it is to live a fulfilled life. We then require life experience or observation of fulfilled people to develop well-tuned emotional antennae, so to speak. Only then is one capable of deciding what one says to the drug addict, or how to be kind to him – and it is this element that is a matter of judgement. What is being sought here through this flexible process or method is an emotionally appropriate response to a particular situation.

Therefore one could say that for Aristotle, ethics is an epistemologically cognitive-emotive grasp of an individual situation where the intellectual and appetitive are synthesised in harmony. And this is made possible by a balanced set of emotional responses that include experience in moral virtue and a fine-tuned emotional disposition to which then deliberation is applied. This honed emotional grasp is what Aristotle calls insight (sometimes also translated as understanding which itself is sometimes translated as *nous*), which he describes as *perception of the particular* (NE 1143a25-b6, specifically 1143b6). It could be argued that the non-scientific, non-logical nature of an emotion related intellectual insight such as Aristotle has in mind, is open to the charge of subjectivism as there seems to be no possibility of a standard-neutral criticism between individuals. However, Aristotle's concept of insight, must be understood within the parameters laid down by our shared human nature which enable a shared language and from which a shared discourse is possible and deliberated judgements are made. This is best explained in the Function Argument (NE I,7) which I will look at in greater detail in the following chapter. Furthermore, it is Aristotle's belief that we share basic human functional capabilities that provide an objective standard for basic comparability in terms of an epistemological justification in ethics.

Unlike Hume, who considered reason as slave to the passions, Aristotle considers emotions to be an immediately affective-cognitive response to a situation in which the belief is not an explicit, separate element which then causes the feeling. For example, I feel fear because I

experience something as likely to cause pain, or harm, or to be in some other way threatening (NE II, 5). Fear involves the belief that a situation is somehow dangerous. Nussbaum (1990) explains this well in ascertaining that Aristotle does not make a sharp split between the emotive and the cognitive. For Aristotle emotions can play a cognitive role, and cognition, if it is to be properly informed, must draw on the work of the emotive elements (Nussbaum, 1990: 78-9). Here we do not rely purely on sense for making judgements. Choice here is seen to lie at the borderline between our intellect and our passions - as Aristotle describes it, as 'deliberative desire' (NE 1113a100-12) as well as 'desiderative understanding' (NE 1139b3-5). This cognitive role of emotions means that emotions provide a non-verbal grasp of a situation and respond in some way to its morally relevant features. And such a grasp is the starting point which reason can then build upon to decide what should be done. For example, a person might grasp that someone else needs kindness in their lives, but will still need to decide which action would succeed as being kind to that person in that instance. Similarly in the classroom situation a teacher may grasp that a child needs reassurance, but still needs to think through what she has to do to achieve that end. Aristotle would hold that without this 'starting point', this emotional grasp, practical wisdom or our ability to see what needs to be done cannot exist (NE 1144b31-35).

As I have already described, possessing practical wisdom for Aristotle means being good at thinking about what one should do which includes an emotional dimension within it, thereby making sense of how to live a fulfilled and worthwhile life as a whole. Or put another way, being able to see what one is doing from the point of view of a fulfilled life. This of course depends on an integrated understanding of the function of a human being and also involves an affective reading of the situation in an appropriate way. A more contemporary illustration of what moral choice might be like, also along these lines, is put forward by Murdoch (1971) in *The Sovereignty of Good*, where she stresses the importance of being 'attentive' and really 'looking' in order to make judgements. She develops a helpful metaphor for this which she calls 'moral vision'. Using this metaphor she considers the task of attention as ongoing all the time and highlights the importance of looking hard even at apparently empty, everyday moments thus making 'little peering efforts of imagination' which have important cumulative results. As she puts it, one can only choose within the world that one can see and this implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort (*ibid.*: 34, 42-43).

This kind of vision requires ongoing effort in terms of individuals having to think about what to do in each particular instance. And this thinking results in the kind of action-descriptions which

might be used to formulate moral principles. Nevertheless for this moral vision to be possible at all it requires both the grasp of a fulfilled life, and practice through moral virtue and practical wisdom. For Aristotle, our ability to think clearly about practical decisions depends upon our emotional balance. The kind of vision we have been talking about is made possible by our emotional balance, as only the emotionally balanced person will be sensitive to the morally significant features of the complex situations with which we are commonly faced. Thus one cannot be morally good in the full sense without practical wisdom, nor have practical wisdom without possessing moral virtues. (NE 1144b31-32). And practical wisdom as already explained involves a grasp both of universal principles and of individual situations. It is this kind of understanding of education as intrinsically concerned with enabling individuals to grow in their capacity to make good judgements in their lives, which salvages the metaphor of growth in respect of education. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7, and involves the development of the capacities of practical reason and affiliation which Nussbaum promotes (2001: 416-418).

Aristotle's position is not subjectivist as he would claim that any version of a fulfilled life has to fulfil basic requirements. These include developing moral virtues that help us grasp the particular in emotionally balanced ways, and experience through practical wisdom which enables the intellectual element required for making choices. Thus, to sum up, the neutral standard in ethics in epistemological terms is a fulfilled human being. We think about the capabilities humans have, and that is how we recognise what a fulfilled life is like. However, we need to distinguish between this epistemological justification, that is, recognising a fulfilled life, and what a fulfilled life consists in, which requires both guidance in moral virtue (role models – eg. parents, community and law) and gaining experience through practical wisdom. Hence, though there is a standard neutral justification which allows us to compare between individuals and societies, there is no blueprint for living well as such and no clear definition of what living well consists in.

Our factual knowledge of what it is to be human may not be complete, but we have enough information about features of our shared human nature to be able to recognise a fulfilled human life in circumstances very different from our own or from our experiences. We can in this way look intelligently at lives different from our own and give a convincing background explanation of human fulfilment in different people's life circumstances and progress. This is evidence we can trust, and there is a sufficient degree of objectivity and comparability here which allows for many different ways of life and many different accounts of justice, and rights

and duties<sup>9</sup>. This is precisely because human beings are such complex and such flexible beings. As Aristotle points out, as long as we do not seek more precision than the subject matter allows, we should be content with this (*ibid.*: NE I, 3, 1094b 10-15).

## Summary

In this chapter I have sought to provide a conceptual base that is plausible and that we can rely on when making sense of education. Thus, I have explored issues concerning language and communication; educational language and its pitfalls, also highlighting critics who propose a different approach; and the problems of over-emphasising either sense or calculus, as does the utilitarian position. Through this discussion a conceptual base has been put forward that includes the following characteristics:

- i) An approach that is non-sceptical about ethics and thus claims that there are truths to be known.
- ii) An approach that is not subjectivist and thus upholds that these truths are not there simply to be made up by each individual or society since there is a degree of comparability between peoples based on a shared human nature.
- iii) An approach that recognises the complexity of moral dilemmas even within a single society and yet refuses to over-simplify the many possible conflicting facets as does the commensurability of values. Nevertheless a refusal to oversimplify in this sense does not in any way lessen inculcating the importance of evidence for ethics, as for anything else.
- iv) An approach that identifies human nature as flexible, maintaining that within limits any given individual could flourish in quite different lives, and that there may be more than one equally viable human social structure in which individuals could flourish.

Consequently, I have attempted to show that if we use an Aristotelian approach rather than a utilitarian one, we can establish a theory that is plausible and that we can trust as a base for ethics (and thus education), with the following significant features:

- i) That is realist about ethics and thus not sceptical and not post-modern in its cruder definition, but at the other extreme is also not about imposing values.
- ii) That is pluralist, because humans are very complex and human flourishing is realised in different ways shaped by context and circumstance. However, this does not mean that anything goes and it is not in that sense subjectivist. There is some degree of

comparability based on the principle of shared human functional capabilities, though these are realised in multiple ways.

- iii) That recognises the importance of evidence for ethics, based on an account of emotional balance and empirical knowledge in the Aristotelian sense.

The conditions for a good description of a theory are firstly, that it arises out of an ordinary way of seeing the world and that it can be recognised as such. And secondly, that it is a good basis for assessing how we think and act, in this case in relation to education. I suggest that the Aristotelian approach proposed here as a theoretical base meets both these conditions.

Applying this Aristotelian approach in ethics as the conceptual framework for education would ensure that we keep a tighter focus on what is important for realising potential. For example, there is the importance of focusing on nurturing emotionally balanced responses in childhood which include developing the capabilities for human interrelatedness and choice-making towards a fulfilled life, and which demand reflective practice made possible through practical reason and caring engagement. Working towards excellence in these areas enables individuals to realise their individual potential to flourish in a society which is supportive of others in striving for the common good. A significant benefit of Aristotle's approach is that it emphasises the importance of the practitioner as role model both in terms of imparting learning and making judgements, and in their own level of practical wisdom (reason) and affiliation (caring engagement) which affect their daily interactions with others. Furthermore, evaluation within this conceptual framework resists being reduced to the rigid method of 'scientism' (Smith, 2011: 1). Instead evaluation focuses on building a corpus of evidence that we can trust, based on many kinds of data, always mindful of careful looking and of collecting human stories that together create a true picture of progress in different contexts. It is a body of evidence such as this and not numerical tables alone or standardised measurements using a single scale that are required to understand progress, and from which we should establish best practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Pring, R. (2005: 11). Here he makes a good case for education as a moral practice.

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive account of debates in epistemology see Dancy, J. (1985)

<sup>3</sup> The term affiliation (our interdependence and sense of relatedness by virtue of being human) and practical reason (The ability to make good judgements based on emotion, thought, and

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insight) are developed by Nussbaum (1993; 2000) from Aristotle's philosophy, who in the *Politics* describes human beings as essentially social beings, and in the *Nicomachean Ethics* stresses the importance of practical reason or wisdom (*phronesis*) for deliberations about living well.

<sup>4</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.6

<sup>5</sup> In the next chapter I discuss Aristotle's different types of explanations, and his view that when speaking about ethics we need to look at explaining the fulfilled life, which is about looking at the purpose or function of human beings.

<sup>6</sup> Here I use practical wisdom interchangeably with practical reason.

<sup>7</sup> Irwin, T. (1999); Broadie, S. & Rowe, C. (2002); and, Hughes, G.J. (2001).  
I draw on Irwin and Broadie's translations for Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Irwin, Broadie, and Hughes' commentaries on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. I use the abbreviation NE to refer to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* throughout.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*: NE VI,13,1144b31-32. See also NE VI, 7, 1141b 10-15 where Aristotle describes the greatest excellence in practical wisdom is where an individual can deliberate with the greatest grasp of the function of a human being in mind, that is the fulfilled life.

<sup>9</sup> This thinking forms the basis of Nussbaum's capabilities list which will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 5.

## Chapter 2

### Realising potential: Human flourishing in the context of a shared nature

Human excellence grows like a vine tree, fed by the green dew, raised up, among wise men and just, to the liquid sky. (Pindar, *Nemean* VIII. 39-44, in Nussbaum, 1986: 1)

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to use an Aristotelian lens to take a fresh look at the question of human flourishing and the implications that ensue from the way we make choices, live together, and support one another and those most vulnerable in society. This stands in contrast to the utilitarian approach in respect of well-being (Layard, 2005; Seligman 2011) and the tendency towards individualism in society today, which at last is beginning to be acknowledged as detrimental to well-being and flourishing societies. Consequently, in Chapter 2, I consider some of Aristotle's key philosophical concepts relevant to human flourishing and realising potential, and argue in favour of their contemporary application and adaptation in our search for understanding and progress in this important area of human development. Specifically, in today's western society where people refer to fulfilling or realising potential in a very individualistic way, it is important to note that realising potential is here understood in the Aristotelian sense of fulfilling potential of human beings *qua* human beings, within the context of a shared human nature.

Aristotle's philosophical approach provides an essential framework that enables us to engage with the contemporary debate about realising potential with greater sophistication than is often possible at present. In particular, I draw on his views about discourse and what constitutes an explanation. In addition I focus on his understanding of the structure of human beings and what constitutes flourishing, with reference to the Function Argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE Bk. I,7). Aristotle's far-reaching and inclusive approach enables us to recognise a shared language and calls us to map a shared journey that is focused beyond the individual, that resists viewing individuals as units of production, and that is anchored in mutual relation and shared human capabilities. His arguments equip us with starting points for living well based on general natural characteristics we share as human beings. These shared



characteristics enable us to give explanations towards human flourishing based on *endoxa* (the popular view), and do justice to the complexity of the human condition. In Chapter 2, I suggest that an Aristotelian approach when adapted to our present globalised society, enables individuals, communities, governments and policy makers to make considerable inroads into creating environments and nurturing social commitments such that our systems work towards every person's ability to realise their human capabilities and thereby realise their potential.

## **2.1 Aristotle's contribution to the contemporary debate about realising potential**

As discussed in Chapter 1, there are considerable benefits in taking a broad view of ethics such as that espoused by Aristotle, and in resisting the notion of scepticism in this area. This broader view of ethics allows us to investigate the areas of the moral alongside and in relation to other areas of human lives such as intellectual commitment, personal love, friendship, trust, and affiliation in general, and to ask subtle questions about their inter-relationship. Taking all these into consideration gives us a fuller picture and broader horizons as we question what is entailed in order to construct a good life, the kind of society we need to build, and the kind of education we must provide to make this possible. As we become aware that ethics permeates all aspects of our lives we begin to form a general account of how a person might live in order to live a good human life, and a sensitivity and awareness of the complexities involved. In this sense personal morality, good citizenship and the best way to organise a state all fit together into one narrative.

At present, these interrelated areas have been compartmentalised and their bearing on a nuanced view of what quality of life entails has been diminished<sup>1</sup>, and further exacerbated by the obsession with measurement. For example, the utilitarian approach is characterised by both confining interpersonal comparisons for social assessment to achievement in pleasure only, and by identifying achievements with the utilities achieved (Sen, 1992: 32). Aside from the question of aggregation of values and the associated problems, this approach is limited to considerations about pleasure or pain in the area of human flourishing. In contrast, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, provide a more far reaching account, based on the popular view (*endoxa*) of how the good person might live and how society could be structured in order to make well-being or flourishing possible. In keeping personal morality, good citizenship and state organisation interwoven, Aristotle's philosophy has the ingredients of a theory of justice that is powerful and that can help today's governments discern what

arrangements they need to provide in order to support each person's human capability to lead a flourishing life. This Aristotelian perspective depends on evidence about the nature, structure and purpose of what it is to be a human being and the kind of explanations we are able to provide and communicate about this subject. This is where Aristotle makes a significant contribution to the contemporary Capabilities Approach, which will be discussed in this chapter. With the exception of pioneers such as the economist, Amartya Sen, and the philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, whose contribution will be discussed in the next chapter, the Capabilities Approach still often falls short of engaging with the ethical dimension so critical to human development. Although the Capabilities Approach has been a great step forward in the way we understand human development in economic and social welfare terms, the ethical dimension that Aristotle's approach offers, makes an important contribution to our understanding of what realising human potential entails.

The Capabilities Approach as developed by Nussbaum (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993:242-70; Nussbaum, 2000:70-111), which we will examine in Chapter 3 and 5, is based on this Aristotelian thinking about the nature and purpose or aim of human beings in life. The Capabilities Approach in the political arena, exerts a moral claim that certain human abilities should be developed (Nussbaum, 2000: 83). Therefore, as a society we must find ways for these abilities to be realised. This view recognises that each human being is born with an inherent dignity and requires life circumstances that are worthy of that dignity. There is an ethical dimension here, which to have social plausibility must extend equal consideration to all at some level of equality (Sen, 1992: 4). The key question then becomes: equality of what?

By contrast, public life today continues to be influenced by the general social contract approach, originally inspired by theorists such as Locke, Rousseau and Kant, and based on the contentious assumption that all people are equal in social and mental powers. However, when thinking about justice between people who are in fact very different and unequal in abilities or power, such as children, minority groups, or those with disabilities, we need an approach that is sensitive to this diversity, rather than the social contract approach, which for this purpose is a blunt tool. Furthermore, even when we have identified one group, equality in terms of one variable may not coincide with equality in the scale of another. As Sen (1992) reminds us:

... equal opportunities can lead to very unequal incomes. Equal incomes can go with significant differences in wealth. Equal wealth can coexist with very unequal happiness. Equal happiness can go with widely divergent fulfilment of needs. Equal fulfilment of

needs can be associated with very different freedoms of choice. And so on.  
(Sen, 1992: 2).

Aristotle's view of the fundamental characteristics shared by human beings provides a starting point for the discourse about equality that is more sensitive to the complexity and variety of human beings than the social contract approach. The Aristotelian starting point enables us to address the question about 'equality of what' with greater accuracy and sophistication as we contribute an answer focused upon our fundamental shared capacities as human beings. Aristotle's ethical dimension based on our natural make-up as human beings informs the Capabilities Approach that Nussbaum espouses, which has far reaching implications for education, as I will argue in Chapter 5 and 6 in particular.

The focus of Chapter 3 will be the Capabilities Approach as developed from an Aristotelian perspective. As Chapter 8 makes clear, the Capabilities Approach engages with questions about diversity in education, beyond diversity in terms of multicultural issues alone. That is, the Capabilities Approach enables diversity in education to encompass evaluation generally, and to be a guide for making judgements in this area. Nussbaum's development of the Capabilities Approach (2000: 78-80) contributes greater finesse to debates about respecting diversity, and enables us to critique the present tendency towards one common standard present in education, which surfaces through standardised tests, and age constrained curricula.

## **2.2 Aristotle and the question of human flourishing**

As we shall see, Aristotle sets down the markers for the present-day Capabilities Approach that is making inroads into the socio-economic debates about quality of life (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993) and equality (Sen, 1992). His theories about what constitutes understanding and what counts as an explanation give shape to his view about the structure and aim of human beings in general and consequently their human functional capabilities. From this view of the structure and potential of human beings, still applicable today, arise the responsibilities of a society to ensure that every person is able to realise a certain quality of life. In the next part of this chapter I will consider some of Aristotle's key concepts, in particular his Function Argument (NE I,7), that are important for us as contemporary tools for discerning what it

means to become fully human and the kind of society that supports this journey, including its responsibilities in education.

In order to understand the development of Aristotle's philosophy, it is helpful to note that before his return to Athens in 335BC, Aristotle spent a lengthy period in Thrace where he studied zoology and wrote books on biology, logic and completed Book I of the *Metaphysics* (which literally means 'after-physics'). And this, together with his family background in the natural sciences, informed his thinking and practical approach, giving rise to helpful methods of understanding the world and consequently helping us decide how we should live. It was back in Athens and once his 'school', the Lyceum was formed, that he wrote his major works, probably including the remaining books of the *Metaphysics*, the *De Anima*, and finally the *Ethics*. The thinking from this body of work sustains Aristotle's approach in the later work of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, specifically his thinking in his previous works about the nature of things in relation to discourse, universals and particulars, identity and change, and what we can explain. It is this growing conviction about what there is, what we can say, know and explain, that shapes Aristotle's understanding about what is essential to the human species and its individuals. Aristotle explains this in terms of structure and purpose in his Function Argument (NE I,7).

It is worth pointing out, that Aristotle's approach is primarily anthropocentric, in contrast with his predecessor, Plato. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as Aristotle tackles the question of why we should be good in the context of human flourishing, his starting point is the observation of the world of nature, from which claims are made about the way things are, and why animals and human beings in particular behave as they behave. Aristotle believes that the answer to these questions is to be found not in some super-sensible world of Platonic Forms, as was the case with his predecessor, but in the internal organisation of the organisms themselves. Hughes (2001: 6) makes this point well as he explains that like Plato, Aristotle seeks to know the ultimate explanation of things, but unlike Plato, he believes that questions about such explanations must arise out of rather than ignore mundane questions about how we are to explain the shapes of inanimate parts of nature, and the shapes, movements and growth of animals. Specifically, when assessing how different species of organisms are by nature impelled to pursue what is good for them, we can begin to see how values are central to the behaviour of living things. As we learn to look at ourselves as animals and to understand how animals function, we can see how biology, with its inbuilt values, as is the case in thinking animals like humans, leads on to ethics.

I will discuss some characteristically human functional capabilities later in this chapter, and some of these, though more complex in the human species, nevertheless have their roots in their animal counterparts, as will be argued with reference to the philosopher Mary Midgley (1978: 4-82) and her elegant and entertaining work. Her position, which she claims to be mistakenly challenged by dualists and reductionists alike (Midgley, 1994: 15-18), defends human functioning as dependent on its natural characteristics. This provides an important insight that much of human life involves adaptation and learning to make a wide range of choices available towards realising potential as individuals and societies.

### 2.2.1 Discourse, explanations, and the heart of the matter

Before we delve into the Function Argument itself it is worth sketching out the conceptual tools which Aristotle uses to defend his claims about human beings. It is through the philosophical lens that Aristotle identifies the constituents of being human and sensitively hones what he considers to be the key elements for weaving the story of human flourishing. For the purposes of this argument this will be brief and in outline only.

Aristotle begins his *Metaphysics* with the claim that human beings by nature reach out for understanding, and that human beings seek to comprehend and grasp the world under some general principles that will reveal an order to its multiplicity (Nussbaum, 1986: 259). In Aristotle's words:

It is because of wonder that human beings undertake philosophy, both now and at its origins ... The person who is at a loss and in a state of wonder thinks he fails to grasp something; this is why the lover of stories is in a sense a philosopher, for stories are composed out of wonders. (*Metaph.* 982b12-19)

As Nussbaum (1986: 260) explains, we wonder and we look for an explanation for the apparently wondrous motion. There is a natural continuation between wonder, story-telling and theorising. And it is this cyclical process, rich in complexity, which enables us to make clear judgements in any given situation. Thus our experience is an object of wonder that serves as our starting point for research about the way things are. In the context of learning and

evaluation in education, this process of reflective practice and critical deliberation will be examined further in Chapters 7 and 8.

Aristotle also uses the principle of non-contradiction to show that we can only justify something from within our experience, as we cannot step outside it. In other words, in discourse, by asserting something definite we are also ruling something out, that is, at least its opposite (Metaphysics, IV4). According to Aristotle no principle can be provided with an explanation that stands outside our discourse or our conceptual scheme. The starting point of all discourse is perception and to step outside it would be to cease to think or to speak (Nussbaum, 1986: 252-253). In Aristotle's account of discourse we are able to designate a thing in speech only when it impinges on our experience. Aristotle uses thunder as an example - when we hear it we can use the name thunder to refer to that noise and only then question what *this* instance of thunder actually is and through this process begin to understand the meaning of thunder more fully (Ackrill, 1997:110-131). Furthermore, for Aristotle, it is from the things we experience and from this discourse that we can then ask the 'why' questions in order to understand the mechanisms that make things work as they do. In so doing we begin to establish the kind of explanation we are seeking. In the case of human beings we can provide explanations based on their structure, and these universal types of explanations, which provide reference points, are shaped and refined by further observation of particular instances (since perception is our starting point for knowledge, as described earlier).

Aristotle offers four types of explanations which are often misleadingly referred to as *causes*, a word best understood today with reference to the fourth type of explanation only, which deals with the origin of change. In his writings, Aristotle puts forward four possible types of explanations (*aitia*) to which all scientific explanation of things can be reduced. (1) Matter (*hylê*): this explanation helps us understand what things are made of. For example, a tree grows because it is made of certain materials. (2) Form (*morphê* or *eidos*): this explanation helps us understand 'what something is' or its essence, that is, how matter is organised or that which determines the nature (*phusis*) of the thing in question. In this sense how something is organised is not a part of a thing but the thing itself, considered from a particular perspective. For example, a tree grows because of the way it is structured. (3) Purpose (*telos*): this explanation helps us understand the aim or function (*ergon*) of something, especially in the case of organisms. For example, a tree grows for the sake of becoming a certain sort of tree, and not to look decorative or provide a canopy of shade, though it may do these incidentally. Sorabji (1980) points out, that if we turn to human beings, we are to take it as basic that all

living things have the capability to grow to the pattern of their species and to maintain themselves there, and that this capability can be transmitted to the next generation by those that precede them. (4) Origin of Change (More or less what we would nowadays call 'cause'. What makes something happen, brings it into being). Furthermore, in the case of organisms, the purpose (3) and form (2) are taken as one.

In line with Sorabji (1980: 49), I will use the word *explanation* here instead of *cause* as a more rounded translation of the word *aitia* for today's audience. Aristotle in his theory of explanations understands a 'thing' in terms of its form, that is, not just in terms of its material stuff or its constituent parts but rather its structure in terms of the way it is organised to function. And so in this sense we need to identify the structure that constitutes matter or the individual, before we can say something intelligent about the thing itself. This, he holds, can only be done from our perception of every particular instance. In respect of human beings, we observe the particular form of every individual and we place this information within the wider context of the link between them and their natural heritage in evolutionary and psychological terms. Of course, human beings can be studied in terms of their material constituents such as chemical make-up. And though this is helpful for certain exercises, it will not tell us what we need to know about the structure of human beings in terms of what certain aspects of their composition are for. For example, when we ask why we have a thyroid, we do not seek just a chemical explanation, but rather an explanation that informs us of its purpose, of how human beings function better with a thyroid than without, and the reasons why this is so. What a thing is for cannot just be explained by its material constituents, but also by its function. The key point here is that we seek a level of explanation without which we cannot understand the point of something. Hence we must not stop at the material explanation but always look for the function, what it is for.

In the case of human beings, Aristotle believes that we are organised in such a way that we are enabled to flourish, just like plants are organised in such a way they are able to flourish as they photosynthesise etc. So human beings have a set of functional capabilities, some of which we share to some extent and in some contexts with other animals (NE 1098a1-4). This formal explanation of a human being is what Aristotle would call its soul: a way of explaining this living body with all its capacities. It is in this sense that human beings can be defined in terms of their capabilities, since for Aristotle, the well-being of any individual consists in the integrated exercise of those capabilities. We can see here the inextricable link between structure (form) and aim (purpose) in respect of human beings (or indeed other organisms), a

structure which through observation, takes into account and is informed by the natural heritage of human beings from other animals. Though controversial, philosopher Mary Midgley (1978) supports this naturalist view:

*Homo Sapiens* is an animal. (At least he is not a machine, or an angel, or a fairy, or even something from Vulcan) So it would really be odd, would need a lot of accounting for, if comparative methods that make good sense over the wide range of other terrestrial species suddenly simply had no application to him at all. (Midgley, 1978: 15).

### 2.2.2 Being human, in a nutshell

Ethics, for Aristotle, has something to say about the fulfilled life and about the kind of community or society in which persons might hope to function best in order to lead such a life. Realising potential requires both understanding of what a fulfilled life consists in and living within a supportive structure that enables us to be motivated to work towards such fulfilment (NE 1103b26-31). Since Aristotle relates the aim of human life (or *telos*) to ethics, and the aim is interlinked with its natural structure, he considers ethics to be based on the capacities, or capabilities of the human being as they become actively alive (NE 1097b33-1098a3). And human fulfilment involves all our human capabilities working at their best in harmony with one another (NE I.7). In this sense, Aristotle understands fulfilment or realising potential within the parameters of how human beings are organised, or structured, in respect of their capabilities.

Aristotle believes that most people would answer the question, 'What do you aim for in life?' with the answer, 'fulfilment'. Differences in opinion only appear when asked what fulfilment consists in. For Aristotle, fulfilment is the ultimate aim (*telos*) (NE 1094a18-21) and sufficient of itself (NE 1097b14-20). Hence it is not sought for anything further, and disagreements about what a fulfilled life amounts to take place within a general agreement that it is a fulfilled life that everyone is aiming for.

The arguments in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* are complex, sometimes lacking in transparency, and there is ongoing debate amongst philosophers as to the most accurate interpretation of the text. Bearing this in mind, I will outline some of the arguments, in particular in respect of what we share in terms of functioning as human beings. Here, Aristotle provides the general method for discovering what fulfilment consists in, as he believes that



this is possible only if we can understand the function of a human being. His arguments are based on his metaphysical view of the soul, as mentioned above, and focus on the formal explanation of being human in terms of explaining this living body with all its capacities. It is through this Function Argument<sup>2</sup> that Aristotle attempts to establish an objective or independent foundation upon which ethics and politics can be based, with criteria for assessing our generally held beliefs about ethics (Hughes, 2001: 36-41). As Nussbaum (1993: 242) suggests, Aristotle's objectivity is justifiable by reference to reasons beyond local traditions and practices, as they derive from features of humanness that lie beneath all local traditions, and that these are there to be discovered, whether or not they are recognised by local traditions. Furthermore, there is evidence in favour of an argument in support of shared natural characteristics that explain why some of these features of humanness not only lie beneath all local traditions but also stem from and are shared by other animals (Midgley, 1978). Midgley argues in favour of such an argument from nature bringing evidence from various disciplines including neurology and socio-biology, anthropology, and psychology (*ibid.*: 4- 82). Nussbaum (1993) recognises that the fact that Aristotle held this position, does not necessarily make it true. Nevertheless, as she points out: 'it does, on the whole, make that something a plausible *candidate* for the truth, one deserving our most serious scrutiny' (*ibid.*: 243).

Aristotle considers that humans, as organisms, have an inbuilt function or aim, which is achieved when they function properly. And what is meant by living fulfilled lives is simply functioning properly by exercising our human capabilities (NE 1098a16-18), which are natural characteristics that we all share. He would consider the function of a human being to be, as he puts it, 'activity of the soul' (NE 1098a7), by which he means that the being or essential nature of an individual is expressed through a typifying activity (which would be congruent with the central doctrine of his *Metaphysics*) (Broadie and Rowe, 2002: 276).

The typifying activity which Aristotle sometimes refers to, as we saw earlier, is exemplified in different people exercising their characteristic function well in varying ways. Aristotle gives various examples, such as the flute player, the sculptor, or the carpenter (NE 1097b25). Nussbaum supports this comparison with crafts as a 'useful analogy' (1986: 293), as it illustrates how understanding of good lyre playing, for example, must begin from an understanding of what those functions are. And good functioning for any craft practitioner must remain within the boundaries of what that activity in its nature is. Similarly, the search for the good life in any human being must begin with the essential ingredients of a human life

and human activity. According to Aristotle, what is characteristic in all human beings and all these craft practitioners is 'being actively alive' (NE 1097b33-1098a3). This activity relies on exercising our capabilities, thus making the best available choices in our conduct, and can be understood as living well as a 'thinking/perceiving body' (NE 1178a20). Making judgements here means living life with reference to a principle about what being human entails, recognising our fundamental human capabilities and activating them, and applying reflective practice to every instance in order to make sense of life as a whole.

This argument allows for considerable individual variations, and possibly owing to the complexity of human beings Aristotle's views of what is characteristically human in respect of human capabilities is quite inexact. It could be said that Aristotle would not include destructive capabilities, for example, such as lying or stealing. One reason for this is that since essential capabilities for Aristotle are practical reason and affiliation, fulfilment also requires exercising these capabilities well. That is, we need to exercise our capabilities with excellence or commitment and dedication, from both a personal perspective and within the context of others' needs. In this sense human fulfilment must consist of intelligent action to which our other capabilities contribute (such as food, a healthy body, adequate shelter etc), or must be involved in intelligent action (for example emotions, NE I,8). In Chapter 7, I will explore the growth metaphor in education and attempt to salvage the concept of growth in respect of learning and realising potential, from the Aristotelian perspective which excludes destructive capabilities and requires practical reason and affiliation as pivotal to excellence and fulfilment.

For Aristotle, having an excellence (*aretē*), is to say that the thing is good of its kind, and to say it is good of its kind is to say it is able to perform its characteristic function well (NE 1106a15-24). The good of a thing of a given kind is in its function (NE 1097b25-8), and the function term primarily names an activity (NE 1098a5-7) (Broadie & Rowe, 2002: 277). And as we mentioned earlier, in Aristotle's account (NE 1098a17-18) the human good turns out to be a very general kind of thing, which in today's terms might be lived out differently by persons in different contexts. Furthermore, being actively alive (NE 1097b33-1098a3) or functioning well, or having a complete life (NE 1098a18-20), must include an abundance of opportunities for excellent activity and mutual support to exercise the functional capabilities. It is in this way that we develop rational maturity (and rational here includes the notion of balanced emotional awareness as an integral element), are able to make sense of our lives, and thus can realise our human potential or fulfilment.

In summary, through the Function Argument Aristotle tries to answer important questions. First, he argues that all human beings aim at fulfilment or a worthwhile life. Second, he holds that a worthwhile life must involve developing our specifically human characteristics to the full. Third, he concludes that, upon reflection, what is most characteristically human about ourselves is the way in which thought permeates and shapes our lives, not just our intellectual lives, but also our feelings and emotions, what we choose, and how we relate to others. Understanding our common human features with reference where applicable to our link with other animals, for example, 'in the area of motivation such as territorial instinct, or parental craft, or communal living' (Midgley, 1978: 4-82), is invaluable as we map how living a good life impacts on our individual and societal fulfilment.

In Chapter 4, I will examine further what well-being, or fulfilment (*eudaimonia*) consists in. But at this stage, from Aristotle's Function Argument, we can see his conviction that ethics depends on an account of human nature, which in turn depends on an account of biology and physics etc. As we deepen our understanding of our biological make up including associated areas such as the mind and consciousness we will have a fuller grasp of how a human being is organised, the implications for functioning, and the support necessary to enable every person to realise their fundamental human capabilities. What we do know from this account is that human fulfilment 'is clearly something complete and self-sufficient, being the end of practical undertakings' (NE 1097b20-22). And although we know that we lack the full picture when we speak about what it is to be human, we can nevertheless identify general definitions in respect of the essence of being human.

In our contemporary debate about realising potential, we can draw important lessons from adopting an approach that seeks to understand the structure of being human as a basis for making judgements about living well, and that helps us map our lives towards fulfilment. It is this search for what we all share as human beings that enables us to name with increasing certainty, the basic human capabilities that demand universal support structures. Without this shared framework and definition, our human quest for realising potential becomes a private matter about which we cannot make assessment or communicate in any meaningful way as it lacks any shared understanding. Furthermore, these human capabilities are complex and we should not be tempted to oversimplify them (as in the case of reductionism), or aggregate them (as in the case of utilitarianism) in our obsession for classification which reduces understanding to *scientism*. The endeavour to improve the quality of life for all people to flourish is a noble one, but we must remain sensitive to the complexities of this

quest. Aristotle's contribution to the study of human flourishing is particularly significant because his stance in respect of human functional capabilities and hence the Capabilities Approach (though he does not use this language himself) is an ethical matter. This insistence on the ethical focus provides a crucial dimension, often ignored in economics or social science, or even education.

### 2.2.3 Our shared human capabilities: The precursor to the Capabilities Approach

As mentioned previously, Aristotle considers the essential nature of an individual to be expressed through a typifying activity, and such activities are the realisation of the key human capabilities. The word Aristotle uses for capabilities is *dunamis*, which is the same word that in the singular, is often translated potentiality as contrasted to act. As Irwin explains, with reference to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (IX), 'if x has the capacity to function, x is capable of functioning and x will function in the right conditions' (1991: 318). In this sense a capability is what is realised in an activity.

According to Aristotle, capabilities are either innate as in the case of sensing, or learnt as in the case of a builder, building (Eg. NE 1103a20-35). But even the learnt ones presuppose an innate potentiality to learn, since there are innate capabilities that we simply display in actuality without choosing so to do or learn. Sensing, for example, is prior to our acts of seeing or hearing (NE 1103a26-30). But there are also capabilities that in order to realise we need to learn or practice, and choose to activate. Aristotle uses the illustration of the builder or the cithara player and tell us that they become builders by building, or cithara players by playing the cithara (NE 1103a35). Some of these capabilities are incidental and others essential to being human. We have the incidental capacities to become many things in terms of craft (NE 1094a10-26) only some of which we will realise, such as the example Aristotle gives of the builder or cithara player, or in today's professions, a lawyer, a surgeon, an astronaut, a magician etc. It is possible that we have many *dunamis*, which we never actualise at all, for example, being a lawyer or a gifted musician. These would be innate powers, which are accidental to human nature.

The capabilities just mentioned can be contrasted with, for example, the capability to learn to speak, think, walk, decide, reproduce, all of which are essential properties of humans. In other

words, they are part of our definition, our *ousia* (*ousia* is also used as equivalent to essence NE 1107a6 in respect of excellences). The function of a human being, as we have seen, is to develop our essential capabilities in a harmonious manner in order to live a fulfilled life. For Aristotle, there is a variety of ways in which this can be done and not all humans living fulfilled lives are said to be living the same kind of life in detail even if they must be doing so in fundamentals. Aristotle also writes of natural (essential or fundamental) capabilities from which the virtues or excellences develop (NE 1103a25) which enable us to realise our aim as human beings, as we learn and practice them to help us choose well. These capabilities which we can develop or not, as we choose, are known as *hexeis*, often translated as habits, dispositions, or states (Eg. NE 1103a26-b25; NE 1104a11-b3). These are learned dispositions, which can be chosen or not, and learned well or badly, which can then be activated in appropriate circumstances in respect of human fulfilment. It is in this context that human fulfilment consists of exercising our fundamental capabilities well, of which practical reason, which fine tunes our ability to choose well, and affiliation are crucial.

As outlined above, Aristotle's view of our shared discourse is also applied in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In respect of human fulfilment our shared discourse and the choices we make in pursuit of well-being or flourishing, are framed within the parameters of our 'grounding experiences' as human beings (Nussbaum, 1993:250). Aristotle outlines these and describes and defines them in general terms in NE II.7. These grounding experiences fix the reference for our deliberations about how to live well. It is these grounding experiences from which Nussbaum (1993) develops the contemporary Capabilities Approach which informs the ongoing debate on equality, and that will give us important pointers for education towards realising potential. For example, Nussbaum defends including the humanities as integral to the curriculum, and fostering reflection, critical deliberation, and dialogue, in order to educate responsible citizens capable of collaboration across differences and borders to solve pressing global problems (1997; 2010). This need for sensitive critical deliberation through reflective practice in education will be further discussed in Chapters 7 and 8, in respect of learning and evaluation respectively.

Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach will be examined in more detail in Chapter 3. It is worth mentioning at this point that Richard Rorty's (1989) pragmatist view, which resembles the Capabilities Approach in spirit, has no substantive vision of a shared human nature. It is this lack of a shared human nature, in my opinion, which misguides Rorty's otherwise persuasive arguments, as they do not allow for any universal reference point based on what we share as

human beings beyond the confines of specific cultures, or at times the private experience. Instead, Midgley (1978; 1994) builds a strong case in favour of a shared human nature and towards sensitive objectivity, which in contrast to Rorty lays the ground for effective communication between the private and the public sphere. It is such an approach, in my opinion, from which a moral framework such as that envisaged by Aristotle, should guide us today as a society to strive for a minimum threshold of human functional capabilities to be available to all, such as proposed in Nussbaum's capabilities list (2000: 74-75). Otherwise we are always limited by the confines of our specific context and arbitrary environment, unable to break out beyond this subjective lens when making ethical judgements on our journey of human development.

## **2.3 A shared human nature: Enabling sensitive critical understanding and diversity**

Midgley, reminds us wisely that:

The world does not relapse into helpless confusion just because things have more than one aspect and can be correctly described in more than one way. On the contrary, overlapping pictures taken from different angles provide the right way to get a reasonably unified notion of an object. Grasping this benign plurality is the first step in a rational approach to language. (1994: 56).

### **2.3.1 In favour of a common understanding of human flourishing**

It is clear from the previous section that Aristotle's assumption is that the good for humankind can be understood with reference to human nature, where human nature is understood from the sum of the individual standpoints and requires continuous dialogue and scrutiny that seeks out the most important judgements and beliefs about the way human beings have defined themselves to themselves. This requires that we make use of our faculty of reason which itself is honed by our emotions and desires. But we must remember Aristotle's comment that this is not an exact science and should not demand more exactness than the subject demands (NE 1098a26-29). This common understanding supports an objective standpoint, but not of the scientific kind later developed in the enlightenment period, which many, including Rorty, rightly refute. Hence, Rorty argues that we need to give up the notion that 'all contributions to

a given discourse ... can be brought under *a* set of rules which will tell us how rational agreement can be reached' (1979: 299).

However, Rorty goes further and offers a kind of hermeneutics operating only within the assumptions of a particular culture, and thus disclaiming any kind of objectivity in respect of truth, arrived at using a framework of reason. This illustrates a complete loss of confidence in the power of reason to understand our nature, or to support the notion of a shared human nature. Because Rorty (1989) maintains that there is no permanence in life, the best we can hope for is to find grounds in solidarity (*ibid.*: 189-99). His notion of contingency (*ibid.*: 3-72) points not to anything permanent, but to the fact that we are who we are just because we are thrown by our circumstances into a particular family, at a particular time and culture. Thus in the face of such radical inability to know anything permanent or universal in humanity all we can do is find grounds for solidarity when trying to understand, for example, what hurts, humiliates and shames people.

Although Rorty does not mention the Capabilities Approach, in respect of the human functional capabilities we have been discussing, this perspective is not too far away from the idea that we have various capacities, such as capacities for feeling shame, hurt and pain. However there is a relativism here that does not allow these capabilities to be agreed or translated between cultures or indeed peoples, or between the private and the public spheres, which challenges this idea of solidarity. Others, such as Gadamer, in *Truth and Method* (1960), refute the enlightenment's obsession with scientific-style objectivity with its reduction to *scientism* in respect of hermeneutics. Gadamer for example, claims that solidarity is achieved in the 'fusion of horizons' between people (Lawn, 2006: 66). Lawn describes Gadamer as a 'perspectival realist' (2006: 122) since his view of solidarity, unlike Rorty's, is developed from within a realist position albeit limited by perspective. The very fact that we do communicate and concede a common language suggests that there is something beyond each individual, even if we can only interpret this from our sense perception and from somewhat myopic perspectives. Aristotle's views on discourse demonstrate that he would not seek objectivity beyond that which is possible for human beings, limited as we are by our contextualised sense perception.

For Rorty (1989), trying to synthesise the public and private spheres of human existence is futile. As he writes:

The closest we will come to joining these two quests is to see the aim of a just and free society as letting its citizens be as privatistic ... as they please so long as they do it ... causing no harm to others and using no resources needed by those less advantaged. There are practical measures to be taken to accompany this practical goal ... [In respect of speaking about the private and the public] there is no way to make both speak a single language. (1989: xiv-xv).

Seeing things from different perspectives, or through different lenses, or using different language frameworks or genres, does not of itself mean that we are not referring to the same thing. This would be the case whether the approach is poetic, artistic, literary, or scientific. We may nevertheless find it very difficult to arrive at a common understanding when translating between these differing interpretations. These may include: the poet, describing the sense of wonder at the enormity of the universe; the artist, depicting the interplay of light and dark; the writer, describing the onset of day from 'the morning star' or of night from 'the evening star'; and the scientist, labelling their discovered planet as 'Venus' and assigning a formula to describe it. All these interpretations, from their particular perspective, could be said to be depicting the same reality, and together gather deeper understanding than apart. Crucially, arriving at a shared understanding requires sensitive critical deliberation which must include real dialogue and reflection.

Similarly in the case of the human condition and human nature we must continue seeking greater understanding of our shared reality, and we should resist this progressive loss of confidence in the powers of reason itself, both to understand our nature, and to direct the course of our lives. We need not see a complete discontinuity between the thoughts of the private and the public, or the past and the present, and rather enter into a constructive dialogue between each viewpoint, using the points of contact that we already have, from whatever discipline they originate. Nagel (1986: 3-4) supports this endeavour to relate the subjective and the objective viewpoints. This proposal urges us to take both angles seriously and in relation to one another. As Nagel points out, objectivity is only one technique used in understanding, and combined with our subjective viewpoint it can be reshaped and vice versa. There is a balance of the private and public, a relation of the two aspects of life, which simply 'defies distortions' (Midgley, 1978: 75). However, given the ultimate separation of the public and the private to which Rorty is committed, his perspective does not allow for a universal moral dimension to be considered in matters of functional capabilities. And in accordance with Aristotle's thought, it is precisely this moral dimension that we seek in respect of realising human capabilities towards flourishing. Therefore, instead, we should continue to seek a



common understanding with confidence, as Midgley, Nussbaum and Aristotle before them have sought to do. The philosopher John Cottingham (1998), also encourages us to persevere in this search.

That the task facing us is such a formidable one, and so uncertain of success, may give us pause, but is no decisive ground for giving up in despair, nor for concluding that there is anything inherently suspect in the philosophical goal of striving for a life guided by a rationally informed vision of the good. (Cottingham, 1998:27).

### 2.3.2 In support of a shared human nature

As outlined above, Aristotle's approach is informed by biology. Today, the sciences including psychology also provide evidence in support of both a shared human nature and the shaping force of nurture (Nettle, 2007). We are very similar in many ways to other mammals, both in terms of physiological make-up and behavioural traits. Midgley, makes an admirable case in favour of a naturalistic stance for human beings, bringing evidence from various disciplines including neurology, socio-biology, anthropology, and psychology (1978: 4-82). Even though contemporary scientific developments have further nuanced and fed our understanding of the human condition and its roots, her argument, supported by evidence from many scientific and social science disciplines, still holds true today. Midgley (1994: 44-51) acknowledges that we should not seek scientific-style objectivity of the kind exemplified by *scientism*, given that human affairs are complex and our powers of understanding limited. Regarding differing perspectives or viewpoints, Midgley argues that these are connected and that we can investigate the various viewpoints and attempt to relate them. In her view, enquiry is not about choosing one view as the true one, but about deciphering a composite picture from them all. And as the quotation below illustrates, we should not overestimate our faculties as capable of certainty or complete understanding.

Whatever else evolution may have accomplished, it plainly has never put any pressures on our species that would be likely to give us faculties capable of grasping this or any other subject-matter completely. (Midgley, 1994: 44).

Midgley (1994: 108) suggests it is reasonable that we understand the way of life that suits human beings, if we understand their nature more fully by knowing about their natural

heritage. And although human morality cannot be reduced to or equated with anything found among other social creatures, some key areas can be understood if considered from a shared natural social background. In Midgley's words, 'we are not just rather like animals; we *are* animals' (Midgley, 1978: xiii). Though differences with other animals are many, comparisons have always been made and these help us understand ourselves. However, rationality, and to some extent culture and speech are some of our distinguishing features from other animals. Furthermore, she maintains that animals are not machines, and to try to reduce them to machines is wrongheaded. The metaphor of function in respect of humans remains a helpful one in that it gives us insights as to what something is for, or in the case of humans, what is good for them. Implicit in this is a value judgement: what counts as a plus or a minus. And our structure of instincts and motivations indicates what is good and bad for us. So, if it is true we are naturally enquiring animals, and that this tendency has a fairly central place in our natural structure of preference, then it follows that enquiry is an important pursuit for us, and the same would apply to other tendencies (Midgley, 1978: 75). We cannot drop our tendencies or motivations but we do have the choice of better or worse ways of expressing them (*ibid.*:76-7). For example this is the case in respect of how we care for our young, our need for private space, our social groupings for safety, how we deal with fear, etc. It is also important that the claim of a shared human nature is not reduced to a scientific material account of our species, and Midgley points to the genetic explanation for humans as important but not exclusively so. As we are social beings, taking the long evolutionary perspective here is essential since society 'is not an alternative to genetic programming' although it 'requires it' (Midgley, 1978: 95-6). We need therefore, both the material and evolutionary perspectives as they require each other, and we should not deny either or reduce one to another.

The motivation of living creatures does not boil down to any single basic force. It is a complex pattern of separate elements always being readjusted. Creatures really have 'divergent and conflicting desires and motivation is fundamentally plural' (Midgley, 1978: 168). When we wonder whether something is good, our common sense will direct our attention to wants. And it is because our wants conflict that we have problems. We therefore need a priority system by which we can evaluate these, and in doing so 'take our species' wants and needs as facts' (*ibid.*: 182). As she reminds us, 'The question is never which wants to have. It is always what to do about conflicts between existing ones' (*ibid.*: 183). Moral philosophy attempts to do this, as it 'understands, clarifies, relates, and harmonises the claims arising from the various aspects of our nature' (*ibid.*: 169). And it is the likeness of our emotional constitutions, which makes us

able to 'sympathise to some extent with one another's dilemmas' (*ibid.*: 173-4). Midgely's example below explains this point further.

We can all feel respect, guilt, horror, admiration, regret, and the like. And though we do not feel them in unison, we are sufficiently within shouting distance in the matter to be able to understand one another's reactions if we try, and to exchange reasons for thinking on of these responses suitable ... general willingness to think and talk in this way shows a jointly inherited physical basis ... *Understanding ethics*, means, in the first place, as with mathematics, being able to follow an ethical argument. Next, ... it means being able to state and generalise the standards involved. Third, it means being able to relate those standards to other forms of thought, to say something about the place of ethics in life. (1978: 173-74).

It is therefore key that we see ourselves as part of the biosphere in which we reside and that we acknowledge our shared roots with other animals as well as our shared natural characteristics as a human species.

## Summary

Aristotle's philosophy shapes the Capabilities Approach with its rich notion of what it means to be human and fulfil or realise human potential. This view is counter to the individualistic conception of realising potential evaluated in utilitarian terms. Instead, realising potential in the Aristotelian sense consists in realising the common potential of human nature that underpins or gives shape to developing individual talent. This view rests on Aristotle's complex account of ethics, which rests on the development of our human capacities with reference to our shared grounding experiences that we understand across the human populace. What is critical here is an ethical dimension that is borne from the starting point that we all share a human nature full of potentialities which exercises the ethical demand. This is the practical implication of Aristotle's philosophy for the contemporary Capabilities Approach that is the subject of Chapter 3.

Adopting a stance in favour of a shared human nature, and making use of an ethical framework such as Aristotle's in respect of some essential functional characteristics of human beings, enables us to forge a path between our individual and societal conflicts, towards

human flourishing. Aristotle helps us understand that the Capabilities Approach is complex, because human beings are complex, and that as will be discussed in Chapter 4, human flourishing or fulfilment is about more than happiness simply understood. What we seek in the Capabilities Approach is ‘a truth that is anthropocentric but not relativistic’ (Nussbaum, 1986:11) and that of necessity takes the moral dimension into account. In this way, seeing our human capabilities from the perspective of our shared human characteristics, and being observant of our natural evolutionary roots, helps us develop a shared language and ethical framework for evaluating human flourishing. It thus provides an important platform, from which we can work towards nurturing society in respect of equality, trust and co-operation between human beings, locally and globally.

Aristotle’s arguments equip us with starting points for living well based on general natural characteristics we share as human beings. This in turn enables us to give explanations towards human flourishing that respect the diverse human condition and that include an important ethical dimension. Aristotle’s far-reaching and inclusive approach enables us to recognise a shared language and calls us to map a shared journey that is focused beyond the individual, that resists viewing individuals as units of production, and that is anchored in mutual relation and shared human capabilities. This Aristotelian view, though thousands of years old, continues to challenge societies’ commonly held beliefs about progress in respect of quality of life and, as will be discussed in later chapters, provides an important conceptual framework for education to challenge the utility based culture of ‘performativity’ (Lyotard, 1984: 88).

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<sup>1</sup> Social science research now recognises the importance of individual and collective social action as an indicator of quality of life for well-being leading to flourishing communities. Reference: Nick Marc’s research, *nef*: <http://www.neweconomics.org/programmes/well-being>

## Chapter 3

### The Capabilities Approach for personal and social development

#### Introduction

Chapter 3, focuses on the contemporary Capabilities Approach and the importance of developing this approach using Aristotle's philosophy, as outlined in the previous chapters. This thesis suggests that this approach includes the ethical dimension necessary for considering questions about human development, quality of life and equality, also so important for deliberations about education theory and practice.

As we engage with issues about personal and social human development, quality of life and equality, the Aristotelian view discussed in the Chapters 1 and 2, is relevant here. In particular, it challenges societies' beliefs about the assessment of quality of life. This is the case, whether quality of life is considered from the economic perspective of an increase in Gross Domestic Product and Gross National Product (GNP), or from the psychological perspective of individual self-report of feeling happy. However, numerical comparisons in respect of GNP or happiness are often taken as objective indicators for measuring quality of life. While this approach is seductive, it runs the risk of over-simplifying the complexities of the human condition by reducing a plethora of non-commensurable factors to a single numerical scale. The insistence on a scientific approach based primarily on numbers to measure human development reduces what is important for development or quality of life to an overly narrow view, limited to one area or 'space' (Sen, 1992: 1)<sup>1</sup>. At its worst, it is susceptible to *scientism* as critiqued by Smith (2011).

An important reason to critique a narrow approach limited to one 'space' is its tendency towards a reduced understanding of equality in society (for example, in terms of units of production or happiness respectively as is the case in either GDP or psychological measurements as the key measures for quality of life). This narrow understanding of equality provides only a partial understanding of quality of life, as it does not recognise that equality in one 'space' often means inequality in other 'spaces'. As Sen (1992: 1, 30)<sup>2</sup> suggests, the subject is more complex and sensitive than this narrow approach allows. Instead, what is

necessary is an approach that takes into consideration both objective and subjective accounts of human progress, and which is capable of discussing nuances between 'spaces'.

Furthermore, discussions about equality in respect of working towards enabling persons to realise their potential take on greater seriousness when considered within the ethical dimension which the Aristotelian view embraces.

Aristotle's philosophical approach helps us challenge the utilitarian stance towards assessing quality of life by numbers, and the purely income-based economic view. Based on an understanding of shared human characteristics, Aristotle's philosophy enables us to engage with complexities about quality of life in a nuanced way as we map the journey in respect of flourishing. Aristotle's position gives depth and support to the basic claim of every individual to dignity and concern. This position incorporates an essential ethical dimension. Specifically, it calls us to pay credence to the ethical dimension of our personal and social responsibility to ensure equality as we engage in supporting the development of human capabilities, such that no one is prevented from developing those capabilities which we consider essential for flourishing across humanity. Therefore this view maintains that it is by developing such human capabilities that persons are best able to flourish and realise their potential, as they plan and make decisions in their lives and with reference to others.

The benefits of making sustained efforts to embrace the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach in education, will be the subject of Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. Suffice to point out at this juncture that the Capabilities Approach offers the opportunity to make considerable inroads into enabling individuals and communities to realise their potential, by discerning the elements necessary for inclusion in education, and by ensuring provision of opportunities accordingly which adopt a sensitive interpretative approach to evaluation. Importantly, Aristotle's contribution, including his philosophical tools and concepts about shared human characteristics and capabilities, together with the contemporary Capabilities Approach, strengthen education theory and practice in respect of realising potential.

### **3.1 The Capabilities Approach: A contemporary perspective inspired by Aristotle**

The contemporary Capabilities Approach was developed in the 1980s by economist Amartya Sen. It was initiated by his search for a better perspective on individual advantage than that found in the moral and political philosopher John Rawls' focus on primary goods (Sen, 1992: 7-

8), as critiqued by McMurrin (1980 in Sen 2009: 234). Sen suggests that 'primary goods are at best, means to the valued ends of human life'. They are ends to other things, in particular freedom. The capability approach is particularly concerned with correcting this focus on means and instead focusing on the opportunity to fulfil ends and the 'substantive freedom to achieve those reasoned ends' (2009: 234). Consequently, the Capabilities Approach was aimed at bringing new ideas previously excluded from welfare economics.

The wider relevance of the Capabilities Approach soon became clear to Sen (1992), and the philosopher Martha Nussbaum. She has strongly influenced the way the approach has developed, has since worked together with Sen on the project of human capabilities (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993), and was the one to point out its connection with Aristotelian ideas. In collaboration with Nussbaum, development economist Sudhir Anand, and economic theorist James Foster, both referenced by Sen (1992: 154, 168-9), the Capabilities Approach has been accepted as a paradigm for policy debate in human development, inspiring the creation of the HDI (United Nations Human Development Index) as a measurement of progress first implemented in the Human Development Report in 1990<sup>3</sup>.

It is worth noting that the Capabilities Approach has been used to evaluate human development issues by many and in various areas ever since. It is a complex topic which has attracted attention across disciplinary boundaries contributing to debates in economics, political philosophy, health, social policy and world development work in some or all these areas. For example, as mentioned above the Capabilities Approach to human development continues to be used by the United Nations in their work on Human Development<sup>4</sup>. Also, the Brundtland Report (1987) produced by the World Commission on Environment and Development, when defining sustainable development, makes the essential link between the value of the environment and the lives of living creatures. This view has since been refined by economist Robert Solow (Sen 2009: 250)<sup>5</sup>, applying a wider view of humanity than was first used in the original report. In addition, theoretical and applied discussions in support of the Capabilities Approach are provided by economists and others including Sen (1992), Nussbaum and Sen (1993), and Basu and Kanbur (2009).

What this section offers is a focus on the contemporary Capabilities Approach put forward by Nussbaum, and reasons in favour of its importance today. It seems to me that Nussbaum's (2000: 11-15) Capabilities Approach, which does not fundamentally contradict with Sen's understanding, lays the groundwork for engaging with the equality debate in a meaningful way

that includes an essential ethical dimension. As supported by Walker and Unterhalter (2010) the Capabilities Approach in education is better equipped to enable equality in this area than either the utilitarian or resource based approaches. However, they do not engage with the theoretical underpinning which results in the ethical dimension so critical to the Capabilities Approach as proposed by Nussbaum's neo-Aristotelian version. In Chapters 5 to 8, I will explore the particular contribution of this approach to education theory and practice.

The Capabilities Approach is a general approach, focused on information about individual potential and thus advantages, and judged in terms of opportunities rather than a specific design for how a society should be organised. This perspective points to the central relevance of the inequality of capabilities as we evaluate social disparities, but it does not propose any specific formula for policy decisions (Sen, 2009: 232). In addition, the Capabilities Approach is sensitive to plurality and difference and focuses on human life rather than on 'detached objects of convenience, such as incomes or commodities that a person may possess, which are often taken, especially in economic analysis, to be the main criteria of human success' (*ibid.*: 233)<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, the Capabilities Approach in contrast with the utility or resource-based approaches, demands that we attend to various things: (1) the importance of considering capability rather than focusing on achievement exclusively, which includes the responsibility and obligations of societies and individuals to help the vulnerable; (2) the plural composition of capabilities and the essential role of practical reasoning for deliberation (since we cannot reduce all the things we have reason to value into one homogeneous magnitude, reflected evaluation demands reasoning, and not just counting); and (3) the place of individuals and communities and their interrelations (Sen, 2009: 235-252).

The Capabilities Approach makes an essential contribution to the way we should view justice and injustice, in terms of assessing advantage and disadvantage. Put another way, it offers an important focus based on shared human capabilities against which to evaluate what is better or worse for human beings in respect of flourishing. In contrast, the utilitarian approach concentrates on individual utility (for example, happiness or pleasure) as the essential criteria for evaluating advantage or disadvantage generally. This of course is dependent on aggregation and commensurability of values, which goes contrary to the ethical dimension proposed in this study. Another approach popular in economics is to focus on income, wealth or resources. Unlike the Capabilities Approach, neither the utility-based approach or the resources-based approach allows for assessments to take into consideration what a person is capable of doing or being, and what that person has reason to value. An essential concept of



capability therefore, is its link with the opportunity aspect of freedom, rather than just focusing on what happens at 'culmination' (Sen, 2009: 232), and of considering each person as an end rather than as aggregated data or an average (Nussbaum, 2000: 41-47). Furthermore, as Sen and Nussbaum both agree, an approach that is respectful of each person's struggle for flourishing, requires both understanding of the generality and the particular. Thus it requires both, some overarching benchmarks (such as those given by the Capabilities Approach), and detailed knowledge (collected as stories from the particular context). The Capabilities Approach aims at a fairly radical change in the standard evaluative foci widely used in economics and social studies, which in turn influences education. Nussbaum's contribution to this approach offers a theoretical framework of universal human capabilities as a guide for each individual in their development of normative ethics. Nussbaum's work on universal values provides a basis for global human development, and in particular it emphasises that we ensure the value and dignity of every person (*ibid.*: 69).

The Greek poet Pindar wrote a poem about what the good life for human beings requires. He believes that 'human excellence grows like a vine tree, fed by the green dew, raised up, among wise men and just, to the liquid sky' (Pindar, *Nemean* VIII.40-2. The citations are from lines 39 and 42-4. Cited in Nussbaum, 1986: 1). This poem illustrates our shared human need for a particular kind of climate in order to function well as human beings (Nussbaum, 1986: 1). Using Nussbaum's contemporary human Capabilities Approach (2000: 34-110; 2001: 414-425), I would suggest that essential for human fulfilment, is that certain shared human functional capabilities, in reality have the potential to be realised (from the individual context and in plural ways). In Chapter 2, we examined Aristotle's view of the 'good person', which is similar to the person which Pindar suggests has developed excellence. Aristotle's view is that such a person is able to identify starting points to basic things that help us flourish, based on our knowledge of human nature, such as our need for health, shelter, meaning and purpose, right relation, love, and friendship etc. Furthermore, from these general benchmarks, we can point to particulars when this is missing in a person's life, either our own, someone else's, or a whole community. For example, by observation we can see if someone is consistently eating the wrong food; is living rough; has no access to housing; is discriminated against for their gender, or skin colour, or religion; is abusing their body or others through substance abuse, or inappropriate behaviour; alienates themselves from the community through anti-social behaviour; does not trust others, or co-operate with others; and so on. We aim at human flourishing by making judgements based on motivation, observation and deliberation. And we strive for justice by using the general starting points about what we share as humans as our

reference base and link these starting points with the observations we make in each particular instance. This is the process by which change happens.

As discussed, Aristotle argues that we share general characteristics by virtue of being human, an important one of these being the capacity for deliberating through conflicts. Like all human beings, this essential capacity, together with other human capacities, requires care (support, trust and co-operation) and excellence to be realised. And also as discussed in Chapter 2, Midgley shows that this claim of shared human characteristics is part of our evolutionary heritage, and is one in which we can be confident, given the large body of evidence that exists from the sciences and social sciences. This basic shared human capacity for care, affiliation, and deliberation forms an essential part of the moral imperative that we, as a society, must work towards realising (Nussbaum, 2000: 72). This claim is supported by Aristotle in his view that we are inherently social beings, or as he puts it, man is 'by nature a civic being' (NE 1097b11). It is this ethical dimension, inspired by Aristotle, which is integral to the contemporary Capabilities Approach offered by Nussbaum.

Nussbaum (2000: 34-110) has developed this line of thought through her significant contribution to the Capabilities Approach, which includes a much-needed moral imperative for individuals, governments, and global development and sustainability (*ibid.*: 83). Any theory of ethics, and more specifically any theory of justice, must decide on the most appropriate features on which to focus, so as to evaluate a society and assess justice or injustice therein. It seems to me, that the Capabilities Approach generally, and Nussbaum's contribution in particular, offer suitable starting points for evaluating development and working towards justice between peoples and nations. Based on shared human characteristics that cross cultures, the Capabilities Approach offers a unifying structure which is sensitive to the diverse and plural nature of societies, and from which we can work together globally. Nussbaum refers to this when she says that her project, 'commits itself from the start to making cross-cultural comparisons and to developing a defensible set of cross-cultural categories' (*ibid.*: 35). The core idea is that of a human being as a 'dignified free being who shapes his or her own life in co-operation and reciprocity with others' (*ibid.*: 72). And this idea of human dignity according to Nussbaum has broad cross-cultural resonance and intuitive power. As is particularly evident in today's fast changing global environment which we all share, cultures are dynamic and change is a very basic element in all of them (*ibid.*: 35, 48).

Nussbaum shares Aristotle's view that once people take the opportunity to reflect and deliberate about their situation: 'In general, people seek not the way of their ancestors, but the good' (*Politics*, 1269a3-4). And as the quotation below illustrates, it is because of our shared characteristics as human beings in our journey toward human flourishing, that Nussbaum defends universal values inspired by Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

I believe ... that the human personality has a structure that is at least to some extent independent of culture, powerfully though culture shapes it at every stage. Desires for food, mobility, security, for health, and for the use of reason - these seem to be relatively permanent features of our makeup as humans, which culture can blunt, but cannot altogether remove. (Nussbaum, 2000: 156-157).

Nussbaum's exposition of the central human capabilities, ten in total (*ibid.*: 78-80), is developed in defence of universal values, to provide a robust framework for politics, and in particular issues of global human development including minority and vulnerable groups. In brief the list of capabilities comprises of the following: (1) life; (2) having bodily health; (3) having bodily integrity; (4) being able to use the senses, imagine and think; (5) emotional development and attachment; (6) developing practical reason; (7) affiliation - being able to live with and toward others, and to be treated with dignity; (8) being able to live with concern for other species; (9) being able to play; and, (10) being able to participate and be a full member of one's environment. Nussbaum identifies these universal functional capabilities of human beings focused on what they can actually do and be, as overarching benchmarks for aspiration and comparison. This position considers that certain functions are particularly central to human life and its fulfilment. Taylor (1993: 227-9) agrees with the importance of having insights such as these about human capabilities in order to be able to judge our progress in terms of human flourishing with greatest finesse. These essential insights are respectful of every person's struggle for flourishing and consider each person as an end and as a source of agency and worth in their own right. Thus these central capabilities are not just instrumental to further pursuits but are held to have value in themselves, in making the life that includes them truly human.

In Nussbaum's writing, and as influenced by Aristotle, practical reason and affiliation stand out as of special importance to human development. For Nussbaum, practical reason and affiliation 'suffuse all the others, making their pursuit truly human' (Nussbaum, 2000: 82). As Nussbaum explains:

To use one's senses in a way not infused by the characteristically human use of thought and planning is to use them in an incompletely human manner. To plan for one's own life without being able to do so in complex forms of discourse, concern, and reciprocity with other human beings is, again to behave in an incompletely human way. (*ibid.*: 82)

It is practical reason as an approach to ethical reflection that enables us to deliberate on our emotions, needs and motivation within the particular situation in which we find ourselves. This approach spurs us on to seek detailed knowledge of the variety of circumstances and contexts and cultures in which we strive to do well.

Importantly, through the Capabilities Approach, Nussbaum highlights the importance of the synthesis of emotional balance and thoughtful experience for making judgements in support of human flourishing and realising potential. Realising the functional capabilities of affiliation and practical reason in particular, though all of them are necessary in different contexts to greater or lesser extents, is essential for us to develop a sense of self-worth and trust of others in our interrelatedness. The Capabilities Approach joins people together by recognising universal shared capabilities with an ethical dimension, that encourage deliberation, the imagination, empathy and care (Nussbaum, 2001: 401-454) and Nussbaum explores the links between the universal human capabilities and the importance of developing the imagination and understanding emotions for empathy. To use Taylor's words (1993: 227), these capabilities 'commandeer moral allegiance' as they are based on an insight about the structure of human beings and what they require in order to flourish. And it is this 'moral allegiance' which contributes to cohesion in society through the development of genuine concern for others and a commitment to co-operation. Moreover, it shapes the politics of a global people as it promotes a corporate response that ensures fundamental human rights in respect of our shared capabilities, and works towards the meaningful sustainability of the environment for further generations. In short, the Capabilities Approach with its ethical imperative, as developed by Nussbaum, and inspired by the Aristotelian ideas we have already explored, is a significant contribution which can help us map our journey through the equality debate, so popular today, and which has a great contribution to make in education for the future.

### **3.2 Equality and the Capabilities Approach with its ethical dimension**

The question of equality is at the forefront of social policy globally, as people and governments seek to reach consensus about what a social minimum threshold of provision or opportunities must include. This then provides a benchmark for quality of life, and for structuring communities in such a way that care for vulnerable groups who require added support is available. There is wide agreement that every person should be able to realise their potential<sup>7</sup>. But the debate about equality begins as confusions arise when people speak of equality rather loosely without articulating clearly what they mean by the term. In addition, confusions and conflicts arise even when people or groups do define their use of the term, but disagree about the indicators that are most appropriate to evaluate progress about equality in respect of people's lives, and what constitutes progress in different areas.

There are three issues pertaining to the equality debate which provide much needed clarity in respect of the general discussion, and which when applied to education, strengthen theory and practice. First, the issue of lack of consistent nomenclature in the equality debate about which aspect of equality the chosen measurement is designed to assess. This is particularly important as identifying which aspect of equality is being discussed and given focus, has implications on other related areas and the impact of equality therein. Second, there is the issue about which conceptual bases give rise to the many indicators in this field. These grounding concepts often require challenging, as being open to the charge of relativism or absolutism, they limit the evidence base to the introspective subjective on the one hand, or to scientific-style objectivity on the other. Third, there is the issue of whether and to what extent we should include an ethical dimension which is non-utilitarian in our debates about equality and in our search for progress in this area of human development.

There are crude definitions of equality which we should reject on their own as benchmarks of progress, such as income alone. Instead the view of equality that is here being promoted is one that rests on the premise that as human beings we have shared human capabilities, that every person, irrespective of their circumstance should be able to realise should they decide to do so. This view of equality exerts a moral pull on every individual and society to work towards it. It is this ethical dimension that the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach provides, that is so crucial to the equality debate.

### 3.2.1 The importance of defining terms: Equality of what?

Equality is a concept that Europe and America has been developing since the enlightenment period. For example the advancement of machines in Europe was fuelled by the wish for equality, or at least the impetus to improve the material situation of many. This advancement provided many with basic goods, better working conditions, and even combated boredom, which Diderot identified as the greatest ailment for the human condition (Sennett, 2008: 92). There is also consensus about the importance of equality in the post-Enlightenment period (Sen, 2009: 291-93). In earlier works Sen (1992: 11-2) points out that every normative theory of social arrangement that has stood the test of time seems to demand equality of something that is important in that theory. For example, Sen mentions: John Rawls's view of equal liberty and equality in the distribution of primary goods; Ronald Dworkin's view of equality of resources as key (1992, 2009).

However, as Sen (1992: 12) points out, there is an issue of lack of consistent clarity in the equality debate in respect of identifying the 'space' of equality being measured, and the possible ramifications that isolating this space from others has on the resulting findings. Here what is essential when entering the debate about equality is to be clear about the proposed enquiry field. Hence it is paramount to provide an answer to the question: 'Equality of what?' from the outset, an issue which Sen examines at length and where he argues in favour of the Capabilities Approach (1992). We are warned that while it is fine to make a claim in favour of egalitarianism this needs to be understood as a claim about equality in a specific space. And we should always recognise that claiming equality in one space, can always lead to anti-egalitarianism in some other space (*ibid.*: 16).

It is important to acknowledge that the subject is complex and that there are potential difficulties in concentrating only on one area without searching for the wider perspective in this discourse. In particular, it is key to know that measurement in one space can lead to the neglect of understanding progress in other areas or even to the regression of equality in another space. In addition, being clear about the aspect of equality identified for evaluation encourages us to begin to look for the interplay and interdependence between the various spaces. It also reminds us of the importance of maintaining wide horizons in our search to understand progress in equality, and to ensure that we do not limit our search to one space, using one method for evaluating equality.

Instead we should embrace all the methods we can find which further a clear vision about what equality entails for human flourishing. The issue here concerns the many dimensions in which equality matters, none of which are reducible to equality in one space only. For this reason, Sen is rightly sceptical about a unifocal view of equality (2009: 297-98). Even in respect of the Capabilities Approach, which Sen supports, he correctly argues that 'it cannot speak in one voice', as it relies on different lenses (*ibid.*: 298). Nevertheless, the Capabilities Approach as developed by Nussbaum (2000: 72) goes some way towards providing practical help in our search for equality of human capability. In particular, as we discussed in the earlier section of this chapter, the list of human functional capabilities which Nussbaum offers (*ibid.*: 78-80), inspired by the philosophy of Aristotle, is one that we can endorse as a moral basis of central constitutional guarantees.

### 3.2.2 A conceptual base for equality which includes the objective and subjective view

There exist a wide variety of indicators for evaluating progress in equality, such as income, utility, resources, or capabilities. Each is chosen depending on their conceptual base. In general, the utilitarian conceptual perspective, whose pitfalls regarding commensurability were highlighted in the Chapter 2, provides the grounding for many of the indicators mentioned here. Its focus on calculus and scientific-style objectivity, which over-simplifies measurement in respect of equality, makes this approach very enticing. However, this need for simplicity of measurement eschews the complexity of the issues involved in the area of equality, as its view is restricted to one narrow lens.

Some have recognised this narrow approach and have developed theories that seek consensus. The approach taken by John Rawls in his work on justice is one such example, with its aim towards fair social allocation through distribution of resources or 'primary goods' (Nussbaum, 2000, Sen, 2009)<sup>8</sup>. Nussbaum points out that Rawls rightly pays credence to the importance of developing a reflective equilibrium through consensus and debate in order to agree about the basic resources we all need, and about some criteria for their fair distribution. However, both Sen and Nussbaum agree that Rawls falls into the social contract difficulty of aggregation, as he compares his mode of reasoning to the utilitarian tradition that focuses on the most good, summed over all its members (Nussbaum, 2000: 69; Sen, 2009: 69-70). Even the Rawlsian approach, in Nussbaum's words, 'does not sufficiently respect the struggle of each and every individual for flourishing' (Nussbaum, 2000: 69).

The issue here is that individuals and groups vary greatly in their need for resources and in their ability to convert resources into valuable functionings. A marked example of this would be the wish to bring everyone to an equal basic level of educational attainment. With this comes the need to consider the individual's situation from their perspective in order to devote greater resources to those who encounter specific obstacles given their particular social, cultural, or economic context. Rawls's view that treats two people as equally well-off on the basis that they command the same amount of resources, does not give due attention to the great variety of specific contexts that may require different attention for equality of opportunity for flourishing. Equality of resources as the only indicator of human flourishing is not enough. Although Rawls has made a great contribution to move us beyond equality seen in terms of economic utility alone, his view still falls short in respect of listening to the voice of different individuals. For this reason it cannot achieve the necessary depth of understanding required to diagnose obstacles when resources seem to be adequately shared, but in fact are not. This view does not allow room for the subjective narrative of the individual or group to be taken into serious consideration.

Aiming towards reflective equilibrium in assessing equality of opportunities for flourishing does require the subjective narrative to be taken into consideration. Although this subjective lens immediately dilutes a claim to scientific-style objectivity, it does not mean that our understanding lacks all objectivity. In fact what we seek is a kind of objectivity that stems from the observation of the particular and from which it builds a corpus of evidence that we can trust. The Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach, seeks such objective or common understanding by taking seriously the account of the particular. It does so as it recognises our shared language based on the claim that human beings share basic characteristics and needs from which human functional capabilities arise. It acknowledges that our understanding of these shared needs arises out of the particular observation and experience, from which the general view is reached. The Aristotle-inspired contemporary Capabilities Approach seeks to arrive at reflective equilibrium through a balance between the subjective and objective view. It challenges the veracity of the utilitarian over-emphasis on objectivity. It does so as it respects plurality on the one hand and supports universal shared characteristics in human beings on the other.

It is worth considering the subjective perspective included in the Capabilities Approach, with its rich variety. In agreement with Sen, Allart (1993) is in favour of taking account of both objective and subjective indicators in research using the Capabilities Approach. He puts



forward an interesting comparative model which focuses on the level of need satisfaction rather than resources, for measuring progress in welfare issues. Allart explains that 'Having, Loving and Being' (1993: 88-89), are catchwords for central necessary conditions of human development and existence. He believes that there are basic human needs, some material and some non-material, and that both types must be considered to gauge the actual level of welfare in a society. Wisely, Allart warns us against the temptation to rely solely on a subjective account based on people's opinions and attitudes, owing to the great variation in people's ability to articulate both satisfaction and discomfort (*ibid.*: 92). For example, some people at times may find it difficult to recognise their situation in these terms, whether they are able to articulate them as such or not. The Capabilities Approach does seek reflective equilibrium by balancing the subjective and objective. Because of its claim of universal human characteristics that give rise to the Capabilities Approach, the subjective view is always considered from the viewpoint of these shared abilities. Yet, such objective understanding of what we share as human beings is arrived at through observation of the particular and re-shaped by it. There is a symbiosis between the two that is essential. Neither the subjective nor the objective in isolation are viable options when choosing indicators that assess equality in some space, especially when assessing equality of opportunity for flourishing.

As discussed, the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach has a conceptual base that recognises the wider spectrum facing us in respect of equality, which is more complex than the utilitarian conceptual base allows. This Aristotelian perspective, discussed in Chapter 2, calls for attention to the interconnectedness of all available indicators in the equality debate, even if this makes the exercise of measurement at times seem insurmountably complex. Also, this conceptual base urges researchers to seek understanding using every mode of vision available, and to search for synthesis between evidence gathered, using both the objective and subjective lens. Most importantly it places the individual voice at the heart of the matter and each person as the bearer of value.

### 3.2.3 A vision of equality inclusive of the Capabilities Approach

The contemporary Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach provides an ethical dimension to equality: a moral imperative that every person demands respect and care, based on the universal recognition that human beings share fundamental characteristics. It is this essential dimension that enables us to focus with confidence on developing opportunities for human

capabilities to be realised and for ensuring that people have the freedom to choose the best path to realise this for themselves, in reciprocity, co-operation and trust with others. It is this same ethical commitment that grounds the need for developing co-operation as a basis for equality of respect and care between people, and thus for creating environments that enable human fulfilment for everyone.

This same commitment gave rise to the United Nations declaration of human rights, for which there is at least in theory agreement between nations. This declaration was created as a response to the horrors of the First and Second World Wars, and in particular the fact that at least seventy million people perished in wars, concentration camps, and gulags in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sennett, 2008: 2). This declaration expresses a perceived need for a universal morality and expresses strong ethical pronouncements as to what should be done. These pronouncements, or rights, are assessed through the scrutiny of public reasoning involving open impartiality. There are many questions to be resolved in respect of human rights. To name a few: How do we classify these rights? Are these rights automatically protected by someone's duty to fulfil them? (But whose duty?) To what extent do these rights apply to everyone in the same way and to the same degree? For example, I have the right to an education, but perhaps only commensurate with my abilities. Sen (2009: 355-87) takes a considered look at these questions, which I will not attempt to answer here.

A further question that requires attention in relation to human rights is: What is the basis of these rights? There is great scepticism as to whether there can be a unifying basis at all, which mainly stems from the subjectivists or relativists. However, using Aristotle's philosophical concepts a case in favour of objectivity can be defended, albeit in non-scientific-style. His philosophy allows for plurality and is sensitive to the subjective viewpoint. Furthermore, it supports natural shared characteristics in human beings, which are evidenced from valid deduction through observation and analysis. In this sense the claim to a common human nature is based on evidence from both the humanities and from scientific understanding of human beings. This evidence is one which we can confidently claim to be plausible. Human rights can also be held to be very basic, morally fundamental, and universal. In this sense, human rights play a similar role to that of basic human capabilities as described in this chapter. They both act as moral imperatives, such that these rights or capabilities must be defended or realised. What is key is that the language of rights or capabilities functions as a call to action in terms of people's duties to one another and to ensure certain freedoms for individuals and

groups. As Nussbaum (2000: 99-101) points out, the language of rights still plays an important role in public discourse as a unifying language.

Whether human capabilities or human rights, we have seen that there is a need in each to acknowledge the ethical dimension. This dimension is necessary for our search in equality as it provides a benchmark for whatever space is being considered. In particular, the ethical dimension included in the Capabilities Approach, as developed by Nussbaum, is particularly helpful for understanding progress in equality of opportunities for realising potential regarding human flourishing. The Capabilities Approach leads us towards a more nuanced approach in respect of understanding equality and its progress in society than other spaces offer, because of its ethical dimension. It provides a sophisticated engagement with the questions about 'equality of what' at every stage. What is crucial, as Putman (1993: 143-158) and Taylor (1993: 207-231) argue, is to recognise the interconnectedness between the scientific and the ethical. This requires several things. In Nussbaum's words, first there is the need 'to reject disengaged pseudoscientific understandings of the human being, in favour of conceptions that give a larger role to people's own commitments and self-understandings' (1993: 235). Second, we need to continue to include rational argument and dialogue between people, which requires ongoing conversation that goes beyond the purely numerical data-crunching exercises in respect of equality.

Such rational arguments will include a dialogue on the numerical data available in various 'spaces' as well as a body of individual accounts, each rooted in the particular historical situation of the contributor. Listening to this body of evidence will describe progress in ways that are not easy to demarcate and that are not simple. As Taylor argues, these accounts are inherently comparative in their understandings of development about equality, rather than absolute (1993: 208-232). As he points out: 'the connections between scientific explanation and practical reason are in fact close: to lose sight of the one is to fall into confusion about the other' (*ibid.*: 230). However when we think of rational argument in respect of understanding equality, we must take account of motivation (of our desires and emotions) as integral elements of evaluation (*ibid.*: 238-240). We can draw here on the Aristotelian view, as discussed in the previous chapter, which insists that emotions are highly discriminating evaluative responses, closely connected to beliefs about what is valuable and what is not. We should acknowledge more fully the interplay between motivation and reason in rational argument, and recognise the importance of each in issues about equality of opportunities for human flourishing.

### 3.2.4 Material equality is only one element when considering equality for flourishing

Above, we have discussed the complexities of the equality debate; the need to be clear about 'Equality of what?'; the search for tools to understand equality from the subjective and objective view; and, the importance of recognising the ethical dimension when working towards equality. The contribution of the Capabilities Approach and how it can be applied when working towards equality has been evident throughout this discussion. Next, and with this backdrop, I turn our attention to the recent contribution in the equality debate, from Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), to understand their claims and to offer some alternatives.

In their book, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, Wilkinson and Pickett believe that income inequality is the reason for many of the problems we have in society today. They claim that income inequality measures the hierarchical nature of societies since 'where income differences are bigger, social distances are bigger and social stratification more important' (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 27). Their evidence for this stems from research data about health and social problems, which they claim to be more prevalent further down the social hierarchy and more prominent in societies with more unequal incomes (*ibid.*: 27-8). Here what matters is not so much the inequality within a particular neighbourhood, but the extent of inequality right across society. They claim that the evidence shows that 'reducing inequality is the best way of improving the quality of the social environment, and so the real quality of life, for all of us' (*ibid.*: 29). They explain that it is because we are individually sensitive to the wider society that inequality has such profoundly negative effects, from health, to education, to well-being. And they believe that we could improve social well-being and the quality of social relations in society, in particular trust and co-operation, if only we reduced income inequality.

Firstly, Wilkinson and Pickett suggest that there are close links between our vulnerability to income inequality and individual psychological problems such as anxiety and depression, which have been on the rise between the 1970s and 1990s. What they claim is not that the rise in psychological problems such as anxiety and depression are triggered by increased inequality, but rather that they have been aggravated by increased inequality (*ibid.*: 31-48). They believe that rises in anxiety have been accompanied by rising narcissism and claim that this increases the threat to the social self, which is largely based on others' perception of one's worth and hence affected by social status. Secondly, they suggest that inequality increases evaluation anxiety, partly owing to the break-up of old-style communities and the resultant lack of

familiar faces between individuals, which has given rise to a constant flux of strangers. They claim that at the core of our interactions with strangers is our concern about the social judgements and evaluations they might make. Hence instead of accepting each other as equals on the basis of our common humanity as we might in more equal settings, getting the measure of each other becomes more important as status differences widen (*ibid.*: 42-3). This, in turn weakens community life and reduces trust (*ibid.*: 45). They also claim that the quality of social relations deteriorates in societies with greater income inequality (*ibid.*: 51-4), and that inequality corrodes trust and divides people.

Wilkinson and Pickett correctly point out that if we live in societies with more social capital, for which they use Robert Putman's (2000) definition as the sum total of people's involvement in community life, then we know more people as friends and neighbours which might increase our trust in people (*ibid.*: 54-8). Furthermore, we might agree that trust leads to co-operation and affects the well-being of individuals, as well as the well-being of civic society (*ibid.*: 56-7). However, saying that where there is social or even income differences it is more difficult to trust others may not be the whole story to explain the existing social issues in respect of trust, or the apparent lack of community cohesion, or community involvement in more affluent countries. If income inequality is not the only factor, what other factors should we address that have a bearing on psychological vulnerabilities of identity and anxiety, or trust and community relations?

First, in respect of anxiety, in answer to Wilkinson and Pickett's solution of reducing inequality to increase the well-being and quality of life for all of us (*ibid.*: 33), we should turn to other issues that have a strong bearing on anxiety and identity, over and above income inequality. The sociologist, Richard Sennett (1998), perceptively links the rise of anxiety and loss of identity to the speed of change in the globalisation of society. As he points out, new developments and skills mean that the skills we have learned or information absorbed become obsolete within short spaces of time. Also the psychological problems mentioned above are here linked with markets valuing the cheapest employee over the more expensive one, who may not have the up-to-date skill. Rather than retrain them, the more experienced, more expensive workers are replaced by the younger version. Sennett rightly points out that instead of trustworthiness, commitment, obligation and purpose, what has developed is individualism (Sennett, 1998: 26). And as Alexis de Toqueville, the 19<sup>th</sup> century writer argues, it is clear that people will be ungratified by the lonely inexpressive end of individualism, as an emotional

relationship can only be meaningful if it is perceived as part of a web of social relations (Sennett, 1974: 31).

It is the weakness of loyalty and commitment that now mark the modern workplace. And Sennett rightly questions the capacity for durable social relations to be sustained in this environment and the difficulties for a human being to develop a narrative of identity and life history in a society such as this. It is worth considering that the reason for this individualism, lack of loyalty and commitment, may not be income inequality *per se*, but the fact that the conditions of the new economy feed instead on experience that drifts in time, from place to place and from job to job (Sennett, 1996: 28). There is a sense here of utter flux which causes the un-rootedness which gives rise to some of the psychological issues discussed here. In the face of such constant change and lack of value of the individual it is difficult to maintain a sense of sustainable self. This leads to a lack of self-value and value of others, and people are not valued because of the dignity endowed to every person by virtue of being human. This can easily lead to anxiety and depression. In the face of this lack of self-value it is essential to build a sustainable narrative. As Sennett writes: 'Narratives are more than simple chronicles of events; they give shape to the forward movement of time, suggesting reasons why things happen, showing their consequences' (*ibid.*: 30). What leads to anxiety in this view is this sense of the clock ticking and time passing, making our experience and our other abilities redundant, as they are not valued because of the fast changing required technological skill set of the moment. As Sennett points out: 'the time frame of risk offers little personal comfort' (*ibid.*: 97).

This personal vulnerability and loss, owing to the fast changing environment in which we find ourselves today, also impacts on the community and on our personal and societal sense of lack of trust and meaningful co-operation. We can agree that social relations deteriorate in less equal societies, but this may not be due to the income differential *per se*. Sennett supports the view that it is lack of communication, individualism, and lack of loyalty and flux in the employment market that corrodes trust. As he says: 'It's no longer news that this middle class world has cracked. The corporate system that once organised careers is now a maze of fragmented jobs' (Sennett, 2008: 34). When discussing the new technological economy, Sennett argues that though many firms still subscribe to the importance of teamwork and co-operation, these principles are often a charade. He does however point to some notable exceptions in the ethos of Nokia and Motorola.

The growth of the new economy has driven many workers, both in the US and the UK, inside themselves. The problem is that those firms demonstrate little loyalty and do not seem to value their employees, eliciting little commitment in return (*ibid.*: 36). In *The Craftsman*, Sennett (2009) argues in favour of recapturing the importance and value of craft and its ethos. He comments that in modern society the craftsman's ethos of doing good work for its own sake is unrewarded or invisible (Sennett, 2008: 37). Furthermore, from a social point of view demoralisation can occur when a collective goal for good work becomes hollow and empty.

Job apprehension, as Sennett argues, quoting the New York Times, has intruded everywhere, 'diluting self-worth, splintering families, fragmenting communities, and diluting the chemistry of the workplace' (Sennett, 1998: 97). This is important, as an apprehension is an anxiety about what might happen, and is created in a climate that emphasises constant risk. Apprehension also increases when past experience seems no guide to the present. In this state of rapid flux, people often resort to superficiality as they try to read the world around them and understand themselves. Images of a classless society, as Wilkinson and Pickett espouse, can lead to a common way of speaking, dressing, and seeing, and thus apparently diminish difference. However, it can also serve to hide more profound differences. There is a surface on which everyone appears on an equal plane, but getting beneath this surface, which is essential to develop a sense of self and interrelatedness, may require a code people lack. The key problem here is that if what people know about themselves is easy and immediate, it may be too little (*ibid.*: 75).

In connection with community participation and co-operation, the modern work ethic, does focus on teamwork, as it promotes sensitivity to others, being a good listener and being co-operative. However, because it is not underpinned by an ethic based on shared human needs, it tends to breed an ethos that remains at the surface of experience. Sennett encapsulates the problem which affects contemporary teamwork in the following words: 'Teamwork is the group practice of demeaning superficiality' (*ibid.*: 99).

The complications that arise when the ethical dimension based on shared human needs is undermined or ignored is made clear in Sennett's work with bakers in the US (*ibid.*: 67). In his study he explains that when he first visited this small *niche* bakery run by Greeks, the character of the workers was expressed at work in acting honourably, working co-operatively and fairly with other bakers because they belonged to the same community. However, when he returned some years later the bakery was owned by a large conglomerate. Now the sense of

belonging had changed and the sense of community had all but vanished. The bakers were treated as units of production, measured against producing the right number of loaves per day. This new ethos reduced their individual sense of value and eroded the ties of communal honour. What was important now was standardised outputs, egalitarian in nature, but the loss of the value of each person and of human relatedness and affiliation that the earlier meaningful community exemplified, was superseded with the value of the flexible, fluid and superficial kind of teamwork.

This example echoes the situation which has arisen since the development of the National Curriculum with standardised targets and measures for educational success. This situation has been criticised by many educationists today (Pring *et al.*, 2009; Alexander *et al.*, 2010; Pring and Pollard, 2011), and I will explore their views in greater depth in Chapter 5 and 6.

Instead of the situation illustrated in this example of the bakers, or indeed in education, where standardised outputs are the norm and people are valued against utility of units of production, what is needed in society today as illustrated by the worrying issues identified by Wilkinson and Pickett, are significant relationships between individuals. These require a kind of trustfulness and an accumulation of shared history that is only possible through genuine shared speech and deliberation, collaboration and care. It is this sense of trustfulness that provides some of the glue that binds individuals, which in turn creates the climate for success to be a reality rather than a mirage. This is the case both at the level of an individual realising her potential or at the communal and societal level of ensuring support for vulnerable people. The challenge to be addressed is not necessarily one of income inequality *per se*. Rather we are faced with both a personal and social challenge to ensure structures which enable people to develop their human capabilities, and in particular their capability for practical reason and affiliation. This in turn nurtures dialogue and collaboration that is meaningful and not superficial, and enables the development of trust and a resulting commitment for co-operation. In addition to these capabilities it is essential to foster environments where imagination and creativity are promoted (considered so crucial in the bakers' example above). It is precisely this ability to imagine different possibilities and futures that is a catalyst for innovation, when combined with the other capabilities aforementioned. It is the development of these capabilities that enables human beings to really live together. In Aristotle's words: 'That's what it means for human beings to live together, not just to pasture in the same place like cattle' (NE 1170b11-14).



Limiting their study to income inequality, Wilkinson and Pickett do not do justice to the complexity of the issue of human flourishing and realising potential. Instead, we should widen our understanding beyond the effects of this one economic space of income differential, and incorporate the human Capabilities Approach into our understanding of human flourishing. The Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach, is one that focuses attention on the ethical dimension, when making comparisons and evaluations and when making decisions for provision in respect of equality. As mentioned above, Nussbaum and Sen argue that we should be considering equality from every possible angle, using all measures available, and not reducing the current problems to one space such as income.

As we saw in this chapter Sennett highlights the erosion of trust in society. But unlike Wilkinson and Pickett's attribution of this situation to income inequality, Sennett assigns this increasing lack of trust to an ever growing loss of identity and meaningful collaboration, exacerbated when the value of individuals is reduced to units of production. Wilkinson and Pickett are nevertheless right to be concerned about people's growing inability towards emotional balance (problems of self-worth and anxiety) and their inability to trust others in the western societies they explored.

We need to move beyond the space of income if we are to address successfully the issues which Wilkinson, Pickett, and Sennett identify. Through the Capabilities Approach, persons can develop emotional balance and trust (also described as affiliation). This approach is the more appropriate space in which to evaluate progress than income alone. Emotions and affiliation are two capabilities from Nussbaum's list outlined in this chapter that we should ensure can be realised by every person. Of course we would equally wish to avoid a situation where an individual's sense of self-worth was over-inflated, or their sense of trust for others was without scrutiny. For this reason there are other essential capabilities that need to be nurtured into this mix towards making judgements, such as practical reason (again on the list of capabilities on offer in this approach).

Furthermore, and in line with the quest for balance, Sennett (2009: 33) reminds us of the need for recapturing the craftsman's ethos that fosters the unity between the hand and the mind. This literal picture of the craftsman at work serves as a metaphor for the importance of developing our ability for making sound judgements, which require practical reason, that is, the application of the unity of the senses and reason towards sound action.

It is precisely by embracing the Capabilities Approach in our search for equality, and not only income, that we create a benchmark capable of shaping societal opportunities that genuinely engender trust, interrelatedness, and co-operation. Within this broad outlook we can begin to move towards real progress which is sustainable as it is underpinned by the ethical dimension that human beings share characteristics and needs that must be recognised. This ethical dimension provides a benchmark which outlines the essential opportunities which enable people to realise their potential and flourish. Without this ethical dimension, we cannot hope to engender deliberated trust, co-operation and community between individuals, and overcome barriers of fear of difference and otherness.

## **Summary**

At present, there is still a tendency towards a narrow understanding of equality from either a utility or resource based space, which does not fully acknowledge that equality in one space often means inequality in other spaces. Unfortunately, this narrow perspective which informs our understanding of quality of life, personal and social development, and thus flourishing, is not fully representative of the complexity of the human condition. As will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, this tendency has also permeated education, particularly since the onset of the National Curriculum in 1988 (Pring, 1989: 69-97). This thesis argues that we must resist oversimplification and come to terms with the demands of human diversity in our understanding of human development, quality of life, and therefore flourishing. As will be discussed in the next chapters, this is particularly pertinent in educational understandings of quality, provision of opportunities and progress. As discussed in this chapter, the Capabilities Approach, which has been developed with success in human development work globally, enables us to resist such oversimplification. What the Capabilities Approach as articulated by Nussbaum and inspired by Aristotle offers, is an important focus based on shared human capabilities, against which to evaluate what is better or worse for human beings in respect of flourishing and realising potential. Importantly, this approach includes an ethical dimension based on shared human capabilities, which calls for the dignity of every person and their need for concern. This approach gives us an innovative way for shaping societal structures and opportunities that enables individuals and groups to work towards realising potential for living well.

Looking through the Aristotelian lens which has inspired contemporary work in respect of human development using the Capabilities Approach, we can best begin to discern elements necessary for inclusion in education which help children and young people realise their capabilities, whatever their situation. This approach provides an important framework and demands that we keep personal morality, good citizenship and state organisation interwoven. Consequently, it has the ingredients of a theory of justice that is powerful and that can help today's governments discern what arrangements they need to make in order to support each person's human capability to lead a fulfilled life.

In Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8, the importance of the Capabilities Approach in education theory and practice will be explored more fully. Before this, it is worth exploring well-being and its interconnectedness with development in general, which includes learning. Hence, Chapter 4 leads us to focus on well-being as a question about happiness, which has been of concern for individuals and societies through the centuries. In the next chapter therefore, I suggest ways in which the Aristotelian capabilities framework affords a significant contribution to our understanding of happiness as flourishing.

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with Sen, I am using the word 'space' in its technical form to denote the chosen focal variable for comparison.

<sup>2</sup> Sen correctly points out that equality is a complex area which has to come to terms with the demands of human diversity. 'Sometimes, human diversities are left out of account not on the misconceived 'high' ground of 'equality of human beings', but on the pragmatic 'low' ground of the need for simplification. But the net result of this can also be to ignore centrally important features of demands of equality.' (Sen, 1992: 1).

<sup>3</sup> For further information on the Human Development Report & Index see <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev/>

<sup>4</sup> The United Nations have published Human Development Reports from 1990 onwards. Human Development Report 2010. *20 Years on: Pushing the frontiers of human development*. 'Human development is about putting people at the centre of development. It is about people realizing their potential, increasing their choices and enjoying the freedom to lead lives they value. Since 1990, annual Human Development Reports have explored challenges including poverty, gender, democracy, human rights, cultural liberty, globalization, water scarcity and climate change.' <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/>

<sup>5</sup> Sen commends the work of Solow for his contribution to the sustainability debate, in respect of incorporating the needs of wider humanity here. But, Sen suggests that Solow should not

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have restricted his evidence to living standards and urges him to go beyond this, and to consider people's freedom and capability in other areas, and thus to seek to safeguard what people value and have reason to attach importance to with reference to sustainability.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle also disputes wealth as key to human flourishing in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1095a23).

<sup>7</sup> <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/>

For example the work of the United Nations in respect of human development and the annual Human Development Reports since 1990 acknowledge that: 'Human development is about putting people at the centre of development. It is about people realizing their potential, increasing their choices and enjoying the freedom to lead lives they value'.

<sup>8</sup> For a deeper exploration of the Rawlsian approach and some of its problems, see Sen (2009: 52-74) or Nussbaum (2000: 63-70).

## Chapter 4

### Happiness reviewed within the context of the Capabilities Approach

I think the things that stop children and young people from having a good life are: wars, unkind people, parents that argue and split up, not having parents, not having enough food and water and not being able to live feeling safe. (9-year-old-girl). (Layard and Dunn, 2009: 151).

Improving people's quality of life requires wise policy choices and dedicated action on the part of many individuals. (Nussbaum, 2011: xi).

### Introduction

The theme of happiness understood in terms of having a good life or a good quality of life is complex and far reaching, abounding in history and burgeoning contemporary research. In view of the breadth of this field, this chapter recognises its limits and therefore attempts neither a wide-ranging historical account in respect of the theme of happiness nor a comprehensive critique of the present measures used or of the ongoing research in this field. Instead, the focus of this chapter is to identify areas where happiness is understood too narrowly or misperceived, and in its place to offer a broader understanding of happiness in terms of flourishing. This view, which includes an ethical framework based on what human beings share across cultures, draws from the contemporary Aristotelian framework of human capabilities known as the Capabilities Approach.

The need for happiness conceived as flourishing is supported by research in philosophy, psychology, and social science. In particular, it follows from Aristotelian thinking as described in previous chapters, regarding what human beings share, our sense of relatedness, and the way we make sense of the world. This ethical framework also present in the Capabilities Approach is capable of shaping government public policy, and helps individuals and groups to plan, make decisions, and act within the context of others, thereby enabling them to flourish and living well. It gives due credence to the interconnectedness of human beings, is sensitive

to their individual context, and demands ongoing reasoning and public scrutiny from individuals and society. Importantly, with regards to children, this ethical framework which defines happiness as flourishing in terms of living a fulfilled life, takes seriously the voice of children such as that expressed in the quotation above, and demands a particular sensitivity from educators to nurture each child's capacity for flourishing.

There is no doubt that happiness has received attention across history with a clear thread visible particularly in philosophical debate from antiquity in ancient Greece to the Enlightenment, and now evident in modern and contemporary debate. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the field of psychology has been prominent in elucidating the key qualities which enable happiness and in seeking measures to understand progress in this area. Philosophy and psychology have been joined by the social sciences, and the culture of monitoring and ensuring well-being is now evident in many areas of society including health<sup>1</sup> and education<sup>2</sup> in the UK. It would be fair to say that society today, like Greek society over 2000 years ago, continues to seek ways to understand how happy its citizens are, what makes them happy, and to ensure societal structures and policies which enable happiness (Nussbaum, 1990: 203).

However, contemporary happiness discourse has a tendency to place a disproportionate emphasis on the individual's positive assessment of their life in terms of subjective well-being. This chapter claims that an analysis of happiness confined to the individual without reference to their relationships is misconceived. This position is supported by the ancient Aristotelian approach which focuses our attention beyond the hedonic understanding of happiness and avows that happiness be understood as the realisation of an individual's capabilities for living well and doing well within the context of others.

Social scientists remind us of the ever greater need to foster pro-social attitudes which increase social capital in our contemporary societies (Putman, 2000; Halpern, 2005, Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). In particular they refer to trust and co-operation as central, especially in the face of considerable economic inequality (Uslaner, 2002; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Importantly, the Aristotelian understanding of happiness and its constituent parts proposed in this chapter, and the contemporary Capabilities Approach, upholds that 'human activity always goes on in complex interdependence' (Nussbaum, 1990: 243). Significantly, this philosophy with its practical application provides a framework within which to promote an outward reaching understanding of human flourishing in individuals and societies. The focus here is the interconnectedness of persons (affiliation) and their ability to develop practical reason. This

philosophy and practical implication addresses concerns voiced by psychologists. Specifically, it challenges the obsession with self-esteem when confined to the individual's subjective well-being in terms of feeling good as a basis for self-worth and happiness (Baumeister, 2003; Emler, 2005), and the tendency to connect happiness too closely with monetary wealth.

Chapter 4 therefore first focuses on views of happiness which the Capabilities Approach would oppose, such as happiness and its relation to money or income, or the hedonic understanding of happiness. Second, I consider the quest for commensurable measures in respect of happiness and well-being adopted by psychologists, social scientists and welfare economists, and find it wanting. In this respect, I argue against the predominant utilitarian measures used for making sense of happiness. Instead I consider understanding happiness to be in essence an evaluative enquiry which requires a framework sensitive to science as well as ethics, and which looks beyond the commensurability of units of happiness or well-being. Third, I identify existing barriers in society which prevent or at least do not foster happiness as flourishing and living well, such as: (1) a decrease in mental health, and a rise in anxiety, stress, and peer relations, including in children; and (2) a decrease in social capital, rising individualism and a decrease in trust and solidarity. Fourth, I propose the Capabilities Approach as one which aids individual and societal flourishing. I propose this approach and its discourse in preference to the prevalent happiness discourse, and suggest it provides an ethical framework essential for persons and communities today.

#### **4.1 Popular understandings of happiness in contemporary society**

The importance of thinking about happiness, which today is sometimes interchangeably defined with well-being, is gaining recognition across the world, with happiness and well-being indices being created by governments and public bodies including the OECD index, *Your Better Life* (2011) <sup>3</sup>. This index was itself informed by evidence from the European Social Survey, in particular its well-being module (Huppert *et al.*, 2009), which was administered in 23 countries with a total sample of around 43,000 adults (aged 16 +). In addition to this, the new OECD index has taken note of the Sarkozy Commission report (Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, 2009) which supports the concept of capabilities for our understanding of quality of life. This report recommends a wider approach than subjective measures of well-being afford.

Much attention has been given to understanding what makes people happy, and today psychology and the social sciences have amassed a wide body of research in this area, some of which will be explored in this chapter. A significant reason for such continued interest in happiness is the fact that it is so highly valued and pursued by individuals and societies alike. Today, research studies show that 'in almost every nation - from the United States, Greece and Slovenia to South Korea, Argentina and Bahrain – when asked what they want most in life, people put happiness at the top of their lists' (Lyubomirsky, 2007:14). However, what they mean when they consider happiness as essential to living well is less clear.

It seems that happiness has been important for people down the ages. For example, looking to the past, in ancient Greece, Aristotle indicates that 'pretty well most people are agreed' that happiness, understood as 'living well and doing well', is the greatest good (NE 10095a15-20). In 1776, recognising the importance of happiness for its citizens, the American *Declaration of Independence* listed the unalienable rights of all men as 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness'. Also during the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the UK, Jeremy Bentham, working towards greater social justice and in an effort to improve the injustice and pain suffered by factory workers of the time, developed the utilitarian position that pleasure is of greatest value. This position further evolved in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as John Stuart Mill worked to promote the utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number, quantified in aggregate units of happiness, which remains popular in contemporary society. Today this understanding enjoys much support from proponents interested in the discipline of welfare economics, including Richard Layard who in recent years has developed the concept of happiness economics (2005).

There is an important question to be examined about the relationship of money or wealth with happiness and how it can be measured. For example: Does economic growth enhance happiness? Also there is the question of which other factors influence happiness, such as personal dispositions, social supports, life experiences, genetics, and others. As these factors are identified, the question of how we make sense of the happiness and well-being of individuals and groups remains pertinent. For example: Can it be measured and what can be learnt from the results of these measurements, and how are these evaluations linked to our understanding of growth in society? This is a major area which I will explore only in brief in this chapter, and with reference to the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach for support.

Through the literature there are wide variances in the definition of happiness and what the term should include. For example, there are questions about whether happiness should be



understood from the perspective of subjective reports alone, or as an objective measure of doing good, or considered from peer reports, or from a combination of these and other factors. Again this is an area which demands close scrutiny and a separate study. For the purposes of this chapter therefore, this wide variation and as yet no clear conclusion about what should be measured in respect of happiness is sufficient to indicate that the debate remains open to refinement. As a consequence, within this open debate, it does seem plausible that happiness could well best be considered from the perspective of the Capabilities Approach. In support of this approach is its rich historical and philosophical provenance (as described in Chapter 1), and its ability to safeguard the dignity of every human person and to identify and stand against distributional inequalities which aggregate measures such as GDP or hedonic measures such as subjective well-being.

#### 4.1.1 Happiness and its relationship to income and wealth

It is true that generally, democratic governments naturally endeavour to promote a better life for their citizens. Until recently the promotion of a better life has primarily focused on promoting economic growth as an important augments of happiness (although health and education continue to be essential foci for life enhancement). Yet, research indicates that 'in most developed nations, increases in income, education and health have arguably not produced comparable increases in happiness or life satisfaction' (Huppert *et al.*, 2009: 301).

A large body of literature on economic growth and happiness indicates that psychologists continue to seek understanding about the relationship of wealth to happiness, and undertake research in order to make sense of this question. As Seligman explains, 'there is universal agreement on two points' in respect of wealth and happiness or well-being (2011: 222-4). When comparing whole nations with each other, it seems that the richer nations with higher GDP in general also have higher levels of life satisfaction. However, above a particular safety net of GDP per capita 'it takes more and more money to produce an increment in happiness' (*ibid.*: 222-4).

It seems that the association between happiness and economic growth or income is not straight forward. According to Easterlin (2001):

At a given time those with higher incomes are happier, on average, than those with lower. Also, at a point-in-time respondents typically feel that they were less happy in the past and will be more happy in the future. Finally, experienced happiness is, on average, constant over the life cycle. (Easterlin, 2001: 472).

The reason for this claim is that 'on average, income and economic circumstances more generally, improve substantially up to the retirement ages; yet, there is no corresponding advance in subjective well-being' (Easterlin, 2001: 469). And yet, although at any one point in time 'those with more income are, on average, happier than those with less', it seems that 'over the life cycle, however, the average happiness of a cohort remains constant despite substantial income growth' (Easterlin, 2001: 465). This is what is referred to in the literature as the Easterlin Paradox (1974). One reason for this paradox seems to be 'hedonic adaptation', which is a phenomenon where human beings become rapidly accustomed to sensory or physiological changes (Lyubomirsky, 2007: 47-49). As a result it is thought that any changes in positive feelings or life satisfaction derived directly or indirectly from increased income or wealth as a result of achieved monetary aspirations are short lived and transitory.

Some psychologists such as Seligman (2011) distinguish between happiness defined in terms of positive feelings and well-being, which in his view shapes life satisfaction overall rather than purely positive feelings. He suggests that 'when life satisfaction is plotted against income, some very instructive anomalies appear that give us hints about what the good life is beyond income' (*ibid.*: 227). Seligman argues that the good life is not about improving happiness, but rather about nurturing well-being, shaped by quality of life which includes positive emotions and engagement, better relationships, meaning and accomplishment (*ibid.*: 238-41). There is an ongoing debate about whether measures implemented by governments should be confined to happiness defined as subjective judgement of positive terms of emotion or satisfaction, or whether measures should be focused instead on well-being defined in broader terms which incorporate subjective as well as objective measures<sup>4</sup>.

#### 4.1.2 Happiness and its relationship to life satisfaction and well-being

Happiness, as this chapter illustrates already seems to be a term with many subtle yet different understandings, which makes discourse about happiness more complex than it would seem. Ruut Veenhoven, the social psychologist interested in the subjective quality of life, seeks

to understand happiness using one of four categories and to measure it with an index analogous to that of GDP (2008: 4-5). Although the four categories identified by Veenhoven could be argued to be interwoven, separately they nevertheless provide a helpful starting point. The reason being, that one of these categories identifies happiness as subjective well-being understood in terms of self reported happiness alone. The idea of happiness as subjective well-being was first introduced by Ed Diener in 1984 (*ibid.*: 10), building on Jeremy Bentham's definition of happiness in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as subjective feeling (*ibid.*: 2). This view has many supporters today, either on its own or combined with other measures (Diener and Seligman 2004: 1-31; Helliwell and Putman, 2004: 1435; Huppert and So, 2009: 1).

As Veenhoven argues, happiness in its widest sense can be used as an umbrella term for all that is good, and in this sense is used interchangeably with well-being or quality of life. However, he divides these qualities of life into four categories: two outer qualities, being livability of environment and utility of life, and two inner qualities, being life-ability of the person and satisfaction with life. Veenhoven only considers satisfaction with life as an indicator of the concept of happiness (2008: 4). For Veenhoven, livability is considered a precondition for happiness, while life-ability is claimed to contribute to happiness. However, neither can be claimed to be identical with happiness. Instead, he considers the core meaning of happiness to be subjective enjoyment of life. Veenhoven also divides satisfaction into four qualities, and only accepts life satisfaction as the core meaning of happiness (*ibid.*: 7-8). Therefore in this sense, 'overall happiness is the *degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his/her own life-as-a-whole favourably*' (*ibid.*: 8).

However, a view of happiness as subjective well-being may be too narrow an understanding of what many prize as the ultimate goal in life, as it fails to recognise other valued elements such as liberty, equality, or fraternity, which for example, the American Declaration of Independence also embraces as valued goals alongside happiness. A broader understanding of happiness which takes into account relationships and the idea of interconnectedness may enable policy makers to nurture co-operation, which as researchers have already identified is an existing barrier to well-being, partly as a result of the decline in levels of community trust (Layard, 2005: 82). Trust is an area which I will consider in greater detail later in this chapter, which may be nurtured by the broader understanding of happiness provided by the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach.

There are researchers in the field, such as Huppert (2009) and Seligman (2011) who have sought a broader conception of happiness, beyond the category of subjective well-being and life satisfaction, to incorporate other criteria beyond the subjective. Seligman, for example, makes the following point:

The old standard of positive psychology is disproportionately tied to mood ... *Life satisfaction essentially measures cheerful mood, so it is not entitled to a central place in any theory that aims to be more than a happiology* ... And it turns out that life satisfaction does not take into account how much meaning we have or how engaged we are in our work or how engaged we are with the people we love. (2011: 13-14).

For Seligman life satisfaction is defined as 'a unitary construct', which he maintains is not adequate to assess well-being or flourishing, which are instead 'multi faceted constructs' (2011: 279). He draws support for his argument from research from the European Social Survey undertaken by Huppert and So (2009), who also seek to measure flourishing rather than purely subjective well-being or life satisfaction. Interestingly, they define flourishing as having high positive emotion, plus being high on any three of the following: self-esteem, optimism, resilience, vitality, self-determination, and positive relationships (Huppert and So, 2009: 2). These, Seligman calls 'stringent criteria for flourishing' (2011: 238).

Yet, using the criteria used by Huppert and So (2009: 2), it could be argued that a person may be described as flourishing without reference to high ranking results in respect of positive relationships. The reason being that this feature is not considered a core feature and is rather an additional feature (one of six, where any three of the six must be chosen to be described as flourishing). Hence, positive relationships are not considered by Huppert and So as a necessary or sufficient criteria for flourishing. In this sense, reaching out to others in terms of relationships or affiliation is not considered necessary for flourishing, only a possible indicator of flourishing. This view is one which is at odds with the Aristotelian view. In conclusion, the broader view of happiness and well-being as flourishing suggested by Huppert and So, though correct in its endeavour to broaden its horizons beyond the subjective well-being view alone, is nevertheless still open to challenges in the weighting given to different aspects which affect happiness. This position does not give sufficient credence to the importance of relationships and our interconnectedness. The issue of weighting and the question of commensurability in our understanding of happiness and its implications for welfare economics (the well-being of society) needs further consideration.

## 4.2 Measuring happiness: The quest for meaningful assessment

Happiness is rising on the political agenda and this calls for measures of how well nations perform in creating great happiness for a great number, analogous to measures of success in creating wealth, such as GDP. (Veenhoven, 2008: 232)<sup>5</sup>

The quest for meaningful measures which can sit alongside measures such as GDP, for governments to implement in their plans for progress in society have been popular for centuries. It is understandable that GDP alone should not be the most prominent indicator to guide plans or actions about progress in society which contribute to better lives for individuals. The quest for measures which we can trust continues, in respect of happiness and well-being. Although there has been support for such a measure since John Stuart Mill, more recently a divergence of view has emerged as to what the measure should include in order to explain most fully the situation being measured. Prominent figures in psychology and economics, such as Seligman (2011) and Layard (2005) diverge in their views. Seligman suggests that we move beyond the term happiness, which he argues is a unitary construct, and instead substitute this with well-being which is a composite concept. However, for Layard this unitary construct is important, since he believes that 'unless we can justify our goals by how people feel, there is a real danger of paternalism' (2005: 113).

However, even if people's feelings need to be taken seriously, Seligman is correct to maintain that happiness, understood only in terms of positive feeling, is not fine-grained enough to take account of persons who would consider that their quality of life is very good but yet do not necessarily feel positive emotion. One problem with using only the subjective measure such as that which Layard proposes in order to avoid paternalism, is that as Seligman indicates, 'just the happiness metric for policy ... undercounts the vote of half of the world – introverts and low positive-affective people' (2011: 239).

In addition, Seligman rightly claims that although additional measures to GDP are important, a metric of happiness defined in terms of only a subjective account of personal feeling 'is a wholly subjective target, and it lacks objective measures' (*ibid.*: 239). Instead, Seligman proposes including a measure which incorporates subjective as well as objective measures. He suggests that in addition to the happiness measure, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment should be included into the metric. This view that subjective measures are not enough is supported by Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi (2009), who assert the

importance of using both subjective and objective measures for assessing well-being. They also recommend producing an approach better capable of informing policy than purely hedonic or economic measures. However, they go further than Seligman, and embrace the importance of the Capabilities Approach when making sense of quality of life.

Some researchers suggest that the 'measures of happiness used differ somewhat with the level of intervention'. For this reason, 'at the individual level we need sensitive measures of happiness of persons, but at the collective level we rather need global aggregates' (Veenhoven, 2008: 3). The question remains however, about whether aspects of the quantitative metrics proposed above may in reality be too crude on their own, to make sense of the happiness of either individuals or of groups. In defence of the quantitative metric, Easterlin (2001) argues the following in respect of the individual:

... although each individual is free to define happiness in his or her own terms, in practice the kinds of things chiefly cited as shaping happiness are for the most people much the same – probably because most people everywhere spend most of their lives doing the same types of things. (2001: 467).

He admits that this is not to say that:

... the happiness of any one individual can be directly compared with that of another. But if one is concerned with comparing the subjective well-being of sizable groups of people, such as social classes, this similarity in feelings about the sources of happiness gives credence to such comparison. (2001: 467).

One problem with this view is that it is not sensitive enough to identify the difference between peoples' subjective feelings of happiness which are based on genuine experiences of well-being, and those which are affected or distorted by cultural adaptation and by 'unreasoning acceptance of persistent deprivation' (Sen, 2009:275). This is the reason why Sen maintains that when understanding happiness and shaping policy which nurtures well-being, 'the need for reasoning about our un-scrutinized feelings can be cogently defended' (*ibid.*: 275). In support of Sen's view I argue in this chapter that the Capabilities Approach allows us to identify distributional inequalities and safeguard the dignity of the individual and of groups, enabling people to develop practical reasoning in their reflective deliberations and choices which promotes individual and societal flourishing.

As explored in Chapter 1, commensurability about evaluative feelings in respect of what makes people happy is unsupported, since as Sen reminds us ‘we cannot reduce all the things we have reason to value into one homogenous magnitude’ and ‘functionings are diverse’ (2009: 239). Two distinct objects are commensurable if they are measurable in common units. However, non-commensurability is present when several dimensions of value are irreducible to one another, such as when evaluating alternatives with non-commensurable objects, like the units of happiness that a concert gives a person with the units of happiness that running a marathon gives another. This is why Sen stresses that ‘reflected evaluation demands reasoning regarding relative importance, not just counting’ (*ibid.*: 241). And to this he adds the importance of public reasoning as a way of ‘extending the reach and reliability of valuations and of making them more robust’ (*ibid.*: 241).

At this point we can conclude that the endeavour of making sense of happiness or well-being in society by adopting a quantitative metric of unit, in terms of subjective or objective well-being, or both, is understandable in our collective wish to create environments and possibilities in which people and communities can thrive and flourish. However, although the sentiment which drives these metrics is commendable, we must be wary of either reducing happiness to un-commensurable units of subjective feeling, or, of confining our understanding of happiness to the results of quantitative measures, whether subjective or objective. Therefore, it is essential to broaden our understanding of happiness or well-being further, embracing the Aristotelian capabilities framework rather than the utilitarian framework of welfare economics. One reason for this is that the capabilities framework takes private and public reasoning seriously, and considers them essential for an account of happiness which is sensitive to the complexity of human beings and their interconnectedness.

It is worth noting that the recent report exploring the measurement of social progress, to which Sen was an advisor, recommends such a far reaching approach, as quoted below. However, time will indicate whether these ambitious proposals will be implemented through careful listening to the voice of individuals and public reasoning, as Sen suggests (2009: 273-276), and not be limited in its interpretation by using quantitative subjective and objective measures alone.

Quality of life depends on people’s objective conditions and capabilities. Steps should be taken to improve measures of people’s health, education, personal activities and

environmental conditions. In particular, substantial effort should be devoted to developing and implementing robust, reliable measures of social connections, political voice, and insecurity that can be shown to predict life satisfaction. (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi, 2009:15).

Before exploring happiness understood within the context of the Capabilities Approach to flourishing and living well, I will identify persistent barriers to flourishing which continue to be a reality for individuals in society today, which prove a challenge to realising the important aspiration articulated by the Sarkozy Commission Report (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi, 2009), as quoted above.

### **4.3 Unsettling evidence of unhappiness in society**

Prominent social scientists such as Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), highlight worrying trends in society today which do not nurture happiness despite world-wide economic progress and rising living standards over recent years, as the quotation below illustrates.

It is a remarkable paradox that, at the pinnacle of human material and technical achievement, we find ourselves anxiety-ridden, prone to depression, worried about how others see us, unsure of our friendships, driven to consume and with little or no community life. (2009: 3).

There is plenty of evidence for these difficult social issues. For example, there is evidence that across the world mental health conditions affect millions of people. According to The World Health Organization (WHO) around 151 million people suffer from depression, and around 844 thousand people die by suicide every year. Also, in low-income countries, depression represents almost as large a problem as does malaria (3.2% versus 4.0% of the total disease burden) (WHO, 2010: 2). Moreover, it is thought that depressive disorders will be the second leading cause of disability worldwide by 2020 (Ibrahim *et al.* 2010). This statistic is supported by studies commissioned by the WHO which predict that by the year 2020, depression will be the second leading cause of mortality in the world, affecting 30% of adults (Murray and Lopez, 1996).



Quoting Barry Schwartz's<sup>6</sup> research of 2000 for support, Lyubomirsky (2007: 37-8) indicates that depression has become an epidemic. She postulates two important forces as contributing factors: one being ever rising expectations for our lives, and the other being an intensifying individualistic culture. Lyubomirsky expands on this individualistic tendency in society:

Our increasingly individualistic culture leaves us all alone to manage our everyday stresses and problems, compelling us to blame only ourselves for our shortcomings and failures. Increasing job insecurity also contributes to the many stressors of modern life. And, perhaps most important, may be the unravelling of the social fabric. Compared to previous generations we feel far less belonging and commitment to our families and communities and are thus less buffered by social support and strong meaningful connections to others. (2007: 37-8).

#### 4.3.1 A focus on children and young people

When we focus on the lives of children and young people, these barriers to flourishing are further borne out by evidence from the Unicef report in 2007, which assembled 40 indicators of child well-being from OECD countries. This study concluded that children in the UK and the US fare less well than in the other 21 countries included in its analysis (Innocenti Report, Card 2007). And as educationist David Carr reminds us, 'to be angry, fearful,... —or even depressed—is to be impelled towards or inhibited from some course of action or other' (2000: 28). In society today, children and young people seem to function with varying degrees of success in ever more complex situations. For example, many young people experience the following: a prevalence in changing family structures, complex and competitive social lives from a young age, rising internet risks, a susceptibility to fast changing identities to keep up with their peers, and role models from the media promoting consumerism, or beauty, or material wealth as the key to happiness.

There also seems to be a rise in anxiety and stress in children and young people's lives, as borne out by government statistics which indicate that 10% of all 5 to 16 year olds have clinically significant mental health difficulties (Layard and Dunn, 2009: 114). In addition, between 1974 and 2004, the rate of adolescents' emotional problems, such as anxiety and depression is said to have increased by 70% (Collishaw *et al.* 2004). There is also evidence of an increase in self-harm and other mental health issues from studies commissioned by the Mental

Health Foundation (2006)<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, as young people's insecurity and stress increases, the standards-driven system of education through standardised forms of assessment is detected by educationists as being a contributing factor (Pring and Pollard, 2011: 39).

In support of Lyubomirsky's hypothesis about the trends in individualism and its negative effects in the previous section above, there is evidence of a decrease in good peer relations as reported by children and young people. In 2007, the UNICEF commissioned Innocenti Report found the UK ranked bottom in respect of peer relations between adolescents, where only 40% of British children over the age of 11 describe their peers as kind and helpful.

Society and its governments recognise that our children will be the leaders of progress towards a flourishing society in the future and hence protecting their well-being and preparing them for the future is the *raison d'être* of world-wide organisations such as UNICEF. Consequently, we should both celebrate the majority of children and young people who are flourishing in society today and encourage them further. We should also be pro-active in our concern and action to safeguard the increasing minority of children and young people who are unhappy and failing to flourish in society today. Education, as will be discussed in the following chapters, plays a formative role in this endeavour, especially in nurturing children and young people to reach a reflective equilibrium towards themselves, others, and as stewards of a sustainable environment.

#### **4.4 Disconnectedness: Increased individualism, decline in trust and solidarity**

Regarding children and young people's well-being and ability to flourish, Layard and Dunn remind us of the importance of social connections as they maintain that 'inadequate respect between people'... 'is what we believe is at the root of our problem' (2009: 135). Social connections between people matter as determinants of well-being. This is a view supported by Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, as indicated by their recommendation to include a measure of social connections when looking at issues of life satisfaction (2009: 15). Wilkinson and Pickett also remind us of the growing research on social cohesion and social capital, which show its close relationship with health and well-being (2009: 78-9). Like research in the area of happiness and well-being, the field of research into social capital is also wide and intricate. This chapter will therefore only focus on the concept in brief, in order to establish its significance in society, to highlight the areas where there is agreement about its connectedness to well-being, and to

identify support in favour of the importance of relationships and trust at the heart of the concept of social capital. For a more comprehensive account of social capital and its intricacies see Putman (2000), Uslaner (2002), and Halpern (2005).

The connections between social capital and well-being are supported by studies such as that conducted by Helliwell and Putman in 2004, where their evidence 'confirms that social capital is strongly linked to subjective well-being through many independent channels, and in several different forms' (2004: 1435, 1444). Here social capital is measured using a variety of vehicles, and understood in terms of 'networks and norms of reciprocity and trust' (*ibid.*: 1437). Halpern also explains, that 'any social structure – short of a fully formal institution – that facilitates co-operation and trust between people can be viewed as a form of social capital' (2005: 292). The core idea here is that social networks have value, both to those within the networks and to bystanders outside the networks. As Helliwell and Putman point out 'social capital can be embodied in bonds among family, friends and neighbours, in the workplace, at church, in civic associations, perhaps even in Internet based 'virtual communities'' (2004: 1436).

Correspondingly, research indicates that those with close friends, or friendly neighbours and supportive fellow workers 'are less likely to experience sadness, loneliness, low self-esteem and problems with eating and sleeping' (Helliwell and Putman, 2004: 1437). In addition, 'the happiness effects of social capital in these various forms seems to be quite large, compared with the effects of material affluence' (*ibid.*: 1437). Hence subjective well-being is best predicted by the depth of a person's social connections. As Helliwell and Putman report, 'most of our measures of social capital appear to have this 'turbocharged' effect on happiness and life satisfaction' (*ibid.*: 1443). And significantly, 'those who believe themselves to live among others who can be trusted will tend to report higher subjective well-being' (*ibid.*: 1442). However, it must be noted that not all the effects of social capital are positive, and some can have devastating effects, such as some networks which 'have been used to finance and conduct terrorism' (*ibid.*: 1437), or 'gangs' (Halpern, 2005: 118-9). Nevertheless, social networks can be a powerful asset for positive action and flourishing, both for individuals and for communities.

The existence and importance of social networks supports the view that well-being and happiness requires a sense of connectedness, and that therefore an analysis of happiness confined to the individual without reference to their relationships is misconceived. Many psychologists today agree that 'the classical theories of happiness were fully right in their

assumption that individual happiness is contingent upon (while certainly not fully determined by) the social order. Some psychologists even start from the thesis 'that happiness must be seen as the outcome of an interaction process between individual aspirations and expectations on the one side, and more or less favourable micro and macrosocial conditions on the other side'. (Haller and Hadler, 2006: 171). Others also remind us that on its own, 'the goal of self-realisation is not enough. No society can work unless its members feel responsibilities as well as rights' (Layard, 2005: 92). Therefore, the 'happiness of a society is likely to increase the more people care about other people' (*ibid.*: 141).

#### 4.4.1 Distinctions in social capital

The notion of social capital is complex and theoretical work in respect of the concept has identified different sub-types of social capital, in particular the distinction between 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital (Putman, 2000: 22-3; Halpern, 2005: 19-20). This is an important distinction, since 'bonding' social capital depicts links among people who are similar, and hence connected, for example, by 'ethnicity, age, social class, etc'. On the other hand, 'bridging' social capital depicts links 'that cut across various lines' of society (Helliwell and Putman, 2004: 1437) and is therefore best understood as outward looking networks which 'encompass people across diverse social cleavages' (Putman, 2000: 22-3; Halpern, 2009: 19-22). Bridging capital is also discussed by Rothstein and Uslaner in terms of 'generalized' trust, which they believe 'links us to people who are different from ourselves', which nurtures 'a concern for others, especially people who have faced discrimination' (2005: 45-46).

If society is to progress in a manner which is sensitive to the dignity of every person and which cares for those who are vulnerable, it is especially important to nurture bridging social capital or generalised trust between different types of peoples. In particular, social capital would be most essential between: (1) those who find it more difficult to trust one another and work together owing to their apparent differences, and (2) those who are unable to translate between different contexts and cultures towards greater understanding.

As experts involved in the report for the Children's Society, *A Good Childhood*, remind us, 'we must acknowledge that prejudice and discrimination are significant barriers to creating the kind of caring, respectful society in which all children can flourish' (Layard and Dunn, 2010: 148). Fostering bridging social capital, or generalised trust as understood above, seems crucial

if our children and young people are to flourish. In respect of increasing bridging social capital or generalised trust, the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach is valuable. As the Capabilities Approach is based on shared starting points between human beings and encourages the development of practical reason and affiliation, it is significant in nurturing meaningful discourse and understanding for deliberated trust and connectedness, all essential for bridging social capital or generalised trust.

Research in respect of social capital suggests a decline in this area, although there is ongoing debate as to the cause of this decline. Halpern suggests that 'the simple hypothesis that social capital is falling in a uniform manner across nations is not borne out by the data' (2005: 222). There does however seem to be consensus about certain areas of decrease and increase respectively. For example, social networks or connectedness related to politics or religion have decreased, and social networks which support leisure time and friendships have increased.

#### 4.4.2 The rise in individualism and the need for solidarity

This fits in with Putman's thesis, and also with the popular interpretation 'that across the world people are becoming more individualistic and even hedonistic' (Halpern, 2005: 223). As discussed earlier, the claim of an increase in individualism is supported by researchers. Lyubormirsky, links individualism with unhappiness in adults (2007: 37), and Layard & Dunn link individualism with unhappiness and lack of flourishing in children and young people (2009: 4, 6-8). Moreover, Layard warns against the 'growth of individualism' which has been evident in the last fifty years which he claims has corroborated towards the decline in community trust (2005: 82). And this decline in community trust, he believes, helps to explain why happiness has not risen in the last fifty years despite continued economic growth (*ibid.*: 82).

Although Layard and Lyubomirsky do not define individualism, it seems from their description of it that they understand it as the tendency of individuals to turn in on themselves and look inwards, rather than individualism understood in the more extreme form as methodological individualism. As Sen explains, 'methodological individualism' is the belief 'that all social phenomena must be accounted for in terms of what individuals think, choose and do, detached from the society in which they exist' (2009: 244). It would be fair to say that the view of psychologists and social scientists mentioned here, and the Capabilities Approach, would not concede the possibility of such detachment of the individual experience from their social

environment and therefore would not espouse the more extreme understanding of individualism. Here, individuals' abilities to live the kind of lives they have reason to value brings in social influences both in terms of what they value and what influences operate on those values. It is hard to envision how persons in society can think, choose or act without being influenced in one way or another by the nature and working of the world around them. Hence, for the purposes of this discussion, the concern is the tendency of individualism to erode affiliation and thus diminish trust between individuals and groups, thereby eroding social capital and creating barriers to flourishing.

Some researchers describe a difference in the characteristics of individualism in different parts of the world. For example, Japan is said to exemplify a kind of 'co-operative individualism', parts of Europe such as Sweden are described as exemplifying 'solidaristic individualism', and the USA and to some extent the UK demonstrate an 'egoistic individualism' characterised by increasing materialism (Sen, 2009: 223-4). A common thread between these is the 'emergence of individualized and privatized consumption patterns' (*ibid.*: 234).

An important point to note here in respect of individualism (regardless of the nuances in its definition) is its negative impact on the broad definition of flourishing which this thesis considers important. That is, individualism seems primarily to nurture an inward focus in persons and groups confined to the needs of the individual or the group. At the very least, individualism results in a blindness or unwillingness to recognise others as important. It therefore does not afford the essential outward looking focus necessary for connectedness and social capital. Such a narrow focus on the individual does not recognise shared human needs and capabilities, and makes it more difficult to build a meaningful public discourse in respect of living well based on shared starting points about humanity. What is most worrying, as Putman and Halpern point out is that:

Notably in the Anglo-Saxon nations ... trends towards individualism and social disengagement have become generalized over recent decades. ... People have been using their loosened social, economic and moral constraints to rid themselves of the potential 'inconveniences of others' in all walks of life ... Sometimes this has been obvious, such as with the growth of gated communities, but in general it has been a more subtle social and psychological withdrawal ... Public values, ... government action and the structuring of a nation's social capital stand together in a dynamic equilibrium, a web of causality. (Halpern, 2005: 242-243).

Consequently, a view accepted by many is that individuals and groups in society need to nurture greater solidarity, or as Halpern puts it, 'more solidaristic values' (*ibid.*: 243). The idea of solidarity has also been identified as key to flourishing by theologians, who define solidarity as co-operative working towards greater social action, based on the dignity of every individual and on respect between persons across the globe (Hanvey, 2011). As Hanvey explains, the dangers of individualism are considerable and the need for solidarity and thus respect and connectedness between people is crucial for flourishing.

Not only does the principle of solidarity ... resist the collapse of society into short term individualism, it keeps us conscious of the historical nature of society and human culture. Without recognition that we have responsibilities to the past, present and future, the moral quality of society is impaired. ... It effectively instrumentalises [persons and groups] to serve the immediate needs of the present and prevents any consideration of the future consequences. ... There is no greater tyranny than the imperialism of the present. In an age that sees history only as a burden and regards cultural amnesia as liberation, the principle of solidarity is an important guarantor of an open society that values its members. (Hanvey, 2011: 6).

In summary, research seems to support the view that well-being requires social interconnectedness, and that this to some extent is correlated with a sense of trust between individuals and groups. This sense of trust is considered essential to the Capabilities Approach with its concept of affiliation. It is agreed that trust is declining, negatively affecting social capital and well-being. Importantly, researchers identify the value of trust and co-operation in our ability to live flourishing lives:

Although we do not, strictly speaking, include social trust within the core definition of social capital, norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness are a nearly universal concomitant of dense social networks. For that reason, social trust - that is, the belief that others around you can be trusted - is itself a strong empirical index of social capital at the aggregate level. High levels of social trust in settings of dense social networks often provide the crucial mechanism through which social capital affects aggregate outcomes. (Helliwell and Putman, 2004: 1436).

The Aristotelian capabilities framework which is discussed below provides a flexible structure within which to understand happiness as flourishing within a fulfilled life, where individuals

develop their capability for practical reason and affiliation. This thesis contends that the contemporary Capabilities Approach, grounded on Aristotle's philosophy, fosters deliberated trust and respect between individuals, and a sense of connectedness and solidarity towards greater social capital, which is so essential to a flourishing society. Although the pursuit of happiness is admitted as being a lifetime's task, the Capabilities Approach with its ancient provenance and philosophy, may prove to be what 21<sup>st</sup> century society so badly requires for its well-being.

#### **4.5 The Capabilities Approach: An important understanding of happiness**

Understanding well-being in terms of flourishing within the framework of capabilities is gaining prominence, as the paradigm of the Capabilities Approach has received recognition in the Sarkozy Commission report chaired by Joseph Stiglitz, with advice from Amartya Sen (2009). Of importance is that this far-reaching report has been influential in its effort to rethink the quality-of-life measurement from the perspective of capabilities. The quotation below, in which Nussbaum comprehensively defines the Capabilities Approach, is significant to the discussion about happiness as flourishing within a fulfilled life.

The Capabilities Approach can be provisionally defined as an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and to theorizing about basic social justice. It holds that the key question to ask, when comparing societies and assessing them for their basic decency or justice, is, "What is each person able to do and to be?" In other words, the approach takes *each person as an end*, asking not just about the total or average well-being but about the opportunities available to each person. It is *focused on choice or freedom*, holding that the crucial good societies should be promoting for their people a set of opportunities, or substantial freedoms, which people then may or may not exercise in action: the choice is theirs. It thus commits itself to respect for people's powers of self-definition. The approach is resolutely *pluralist about value*: It holds that the capability achievements that are central for people are different in quality, not just in quantity; that they cannot without distortion be reduced to a single numerical scale; and that a fundamental part of understanding and producing them is understanding the specific nature of each. Finally, the approach is *concerned with entrenched social injustice and inequality*, especially capability failures that are the result of discrimination or marginalization. It ascribes an urgent *task to government and public policy* – namely,



to improve the quality of life for all people, as defined by their capabilities. (Nussbaum, 2011: 18-9).

This chapter offers a perspective on happiness or well-being which resists commensurability and which is not best understood in aggregate terms of utility, such as the utilitarian quest for happiness seeks to do. Instead, understood within the capabilities framework of the Capabilities Approach, happiness as flourishing takes account of the importance of individual freedoms, choice and voice, and calls for ongoing debate towards an ever fuller understanding. In this sense, the Capabilities Approach is faithful to the concept of plurality and irreducibility in respect of quality of life.

The Aristotle-inspired approach combines 'rigour with concreteness, theoretical power with sensitivity to the actual circumstances of human life and choice in all their multiplicity, variety, and mutability' (Nussbaum, 1993: 242-270). This is possible through the ongoing interplay between individual understandings and contexts, and universal beliefs about grounding experiences shared across humanity. This perspective enables individuals and groups in society to reflect and debate questions about happiness, living well and its constituent parts, in the context of mutual human capabilities and in a way which is sensitive to the individual. It thus provides shared starting points for developing important capabilities, namely practical reason and affiliation. These are considered necessary for happiness, as they enable persons to make positive decisions in favour of their flourishing and to work together with others in an authentic spirit of deliberated trust and co-operation towards a flourishing society. This understanding of happiness as flourishing and living well, has important implications for what we value and nurture as a society, and how we work together to nurture happiness or well-being.

For many years now, Sen and Nussbaum have been advocating the Capabilities Approach to be adopted into social policy in respect of human development. Sen, in his work *Inequality Rexamined* (1992) and *Development as Freedom* (1999), proposes 'to commend the capability framework as the best space within which to make comparisons about quality of life, and to show why it is superior to utilitarian and quasi-Rawlsian approaches' (Nussbaum, 2011: 17-8). Importantly, Nussbaum adopts the term capabilities in her approach in order to emphasise that 'the most important elements of people's quality of life are plural and qualitatively distinct' (*ibid.*: 18). For this reason, aspects of individual lives including health and education 'cannot be reduced to a single metric without distortion' (*ibid.*: 18).

Similarly, others such as Wolff and de-Shalit (2007) support this view, as outlined below. They suggest that well-being is best understood:

... in such a way that everything that affects people for good or ill can figure in an understanding of their level of advantage and disadvantage, accepting that there are many determinants of well-being ... and that they are not all reducible to a common currency. (2007: 8).

Accordingly, they support the view that 'advantage' or well-being, must be 'understood in a *pluralist* form' (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007: 8). Sen and Nussbaum's theory of capabilities in particular is adopted by Wolff and de-Shalit, which together with the pluralist approach in general they consider as the starting point for their position (*ibid.*: 8). Within this view, in order to understand how happy someone is, or their level of well-being, it is necessary to understand how well or badly someone's life is going. This requires attention to what they can do and be and needs to take account of their capability to function. Being attentive to a variety of things such as bodily health and integrity, affiliation, practical reason, control over the environment and other human capabilities is therefore essential for Wolff and de-Shalit.

Enabling social policy with a basis which will carry wide conviction, the Capabilities Approach can help governments, groups and individuals to 'identify the worst off and take appropriate steps so that their position can be improved' (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007: 3). Wolff and de-Shalit seek to promote social equality 'such as relations of community and solidarity between people' (*ibid.*: 6) rather than focus on material equality. This means identifying areas of life, 'which once realised by equal relations, contribute to individual well-being' since 'social equality and inequality, is something which makes individual lives go better or worse, by affecting their sense of belonging to a society, or connection with others; what we ... call affiliation' (*ibid.*: 6). In this profound sense people's lives in respect of happiness and well-being are affected by government policy, by the nature of the society they live in, and by how they regard and treat each other.

As noted in the previous section, there are persistent barriers to flourishing. The social capital literature describes lack of connectedness as a key barrier to flourishing, affected by a lack of trust which results in apathy and an inability to discourse meaningfully and act co-operatively. The idea of interconnectedness in the sense of affiliation is also an important part of our

understanding of happiness as supported by psychology research (Haller and Hadler, 2006: 169). Further evidence from psychology studies also support the link between trust and well-being: 'Greater happiness can be created by improving the livability of society at large, such as by providing a decent standard of living and a climate of trust' (Veenhoven, 2008: 2).

In the light of this evidence, the significance of Nussbaum's claim that the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation are essential for flourishing should be noted. As she maintains: they 'suffuse all the others, making their pursuit truly human' (Nussbaum 2000: 82). This is pertinent as there is consensus in the social capital literature of the link between trust and a sense of connectedness, which in turn supports meaningful discourse, understanding, and action between people (Helliwell and Putman, 2004: 1436). Practical reason and affiliation are in this sense crucial for engendering deliberated trust, capable of fostering complex forms of discourse, reflection, and co-operative action, and which supports concern and reciprocity between human beings, thereby enabling well-being. This is what we should seek to nurture as fundamental for the happiness of individuals and as the bonding element towards social progress. Such an understanding of happiness which cannot be measured by a single numerical scale, takes us beyond an overemphasis on subjective positive feelings. This view of happiness calls us to recognise 'the need of objectivity for communication and for the language of public reasoning' and 'ethical evaluation' (Sen, 2009: 122).

Nussbaum is correct to suggest the Capabilities Approach as an ethical framework. In addition, she defends practical reason and affiliation as two particular capabilities which suffuse all the others towards living well and flourishing, and urges educationists to embrace this view and nurture these capabilities in educational settings (1998, 2010, 2011). As Rothstein and Uslaner claim, 'Education is one of the strongest determinants of generalised trust' (2005: 47, 64). Significantly, trust may prove to be the bonding agent between peoples which enables happiness as flourishing, as the capabilities of affiliation and practical reason are realised. Therefore, education must engage in helping children and young people to develop deliberated trust and co-operation, by nurturing the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation in order to flourish. In particular, education must engage in supporting those living in areas of greatest deprivation who will need particular assistance. This is a particular focus of the following chapters, which explore the importance of the Capabilities Approach in education.

The evidence in this chapter supports the view that helping individuals to flourish and be happy in this sense, is important. Moreover, flourishing has been identified as requiring a sense of connectedness or affiliation, based on a shared understanding of humanity, as well as requiring the capacity to transform concern into positive action and co-operation by making balanced judgements through practical reason. The final part of this chapter will focus on (1) identifying the shared starting points which enable people to reach out to others beyond their own group, which provide the basis for the Capabilities Approach, and (2) exploring the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation which nurture deliberated trust and co-operation. As Rothstein and Uslaner point out: 'When people do not see themselves as part of the same moral community with a shared fate, they will not have the solidarity that is essential for building up social trust' (2005: 61). The Capabilities Approach provides this shared moral sense, and the possibility for solidarity and deliberated trust through the development of the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation.

#### **4.6 Trust and co-operation enabled by practical reason and affiliation**

Not everyone is wholly trustworthy and trust must be placed with care ... Well-placed trust grows out of active inquiry rather than blind acceptance. (O'Neill, 2002: 17,76).

What is needed in society today as illustrated by the worrying issues identified by Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), Halpern (2005), and others, are significant relationships between individuals based on deliberated trust capable of leading to co-operative action. These require a kind of trustfulness that is only possible through genuine shared understanding about humanity as the catalyst to shared speech and deliberation, and collaboration and care. It is this sense of trustfulness that provides some of the glue that binds individuals and which in turn creates the climate for happiness as flourishing to be a reality rather than a mirage.

The binding element between people as outlined here is fragile and dependent on a shared understanding of what humans share. This binding element is susceptible to being thwarted by societal structures which value outputs to the neglect or value of the people who produce them. In the face of this lack of self-value and value of others it is difficult to maintain a sense of sustainable self, essential to building a sustainable narrative based on shared starting points and a sense of connectedness. As Sennett writes: 'Narratives are more than simple chronicles of events; they give shape to the forward movement of time, suggesting reasons why things

happen, showing their consequences' (1998: 30). We need a narrative that is mutually recognised as shared, which gives rise to mutual connections, makes possible meaningful relationships, trust, collaboration, and which enables flourishing. I argue in this chapter that the Capabilities Approach provides the framework for this narrative to develop.

Psychology supports the view that we are by nature inclined to relatedness, that the environment can thwart our development, and that in some respect we need a sense of shared history and experience for well-being (Deci and Ryan, 2002). They suggest that:

... we assume people have a primary propensity to forge interconnections among aspects of their own psyches as well as with other individuals and groups in their social worlds ... [which] must be viewed as a dynamic potential that requires proximal and distal conditions of nurturance. (2002: 4-5).

The shared narrative we seek is here developed in the context of the need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, which are considered universal as based on our human nature, and shaped by the social context. In this context, Deci and Ryan argue that 'needs, when satisfied, promote well-being' (*ibid.*: 22), whereas a social context that thwarts need fulfilment 'diminishes the 'individual's motivation, growth, integrity, and well-being' (*ibid.*: 9). For Deci and Ryan, *competence* refers to 'feeling effective in one's ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities' (*ibid.*: 7); *relatedness* refers to 'feeling connected to others, to caring for and being cared for by those, to having a sense of belongingness both with other individuals and with one's community'. In this sense, the tendency to connect with and be accepted by others 'concerns the psychological sense of being with others in secure communion or unity' (*ibid.*: 7); and *autonomy* 'concerns acting from interest and integrated values' (*ibid.*: 8), not to be confused with independence.

The Capabilities Approach has much to offer if we are to develop deliberated trust and co-operation amongst individuals and groups, and nurture an environment where our innate need for competence, relatedness and autonomy are realised towards our well-being and flourishing. Three elements of this approach are discussed here. First the common ethical evaluative framework of the Capabilities Approach is based on shared grounding experiences from which virtues and virtuous action is understood. This framework then acts as a benchmark for decisions about choosing well and acting well, which take account of the dignity

and potential of every individual. Within this context, the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation are essential for realising well-being and flourishing, in that they enable individuals and groups to make balanced decisions in the context of what human beings share.

In Chapter 3, I explored the notion of a shared nature based on human functional capabilities which all humans share. In this section, the focus is to examine how Aristotle and the contemporary Capabilities Approach fosters connectedness which enables human flourishing, as it enables human beings to understand difference and live together, by developing virtuous action with reference to what human beings share. Here, Nussbaum's article, *Non Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach* will be the primary source for support of Aristotle's views, which she uses to justify the contemporary capabilities list and approach (1993).

What Aristotle seems to do in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (II, 7) is to 'isolate a sphere of human experience that figures in more or less any human life, and in which more or less any human being will have to make *some* choices rather than others, and act in *some* way rather some other' (Nussbaum, 1993: 245). Once each sphere is introduced, in which it is accepted that everyone at some point has dealings, then Aristotle considers what it is to choose and respond well within that sphere - that is - to be virtuous or to make use of these spheres in order to make judgements for choosing and acting well. For example, a sphere of experience is paired with a corresponding virtue term: fear of death with courage; bodily appetites with moderation; distribution of limited resources with justice; association and living together with truthfulness; attitude to the good and ill fortune of others with proper judgement; planning one's life and conduct with practical wisdom, and so on. Of course, there is always the possibility to choose defectively - that is - to over or under react, and the spheres of grounding experiences become the reference point for reaching balanced judgements with reflected equilibrium.

The key point here is that everyone makes some choices and acts somehow or other in these spheres, if not properly, then improperly. As Nussbaum puts it:

Everyone has *some* attitude, and corresponding behaviour, toward her own death; her bodily appetites and their management; her property and its use; the distribution of social goods; telling the truth; being kind to others; cultivating a sense of play and delights. ... No matter where one lives one cannot escape these questions, so long as one is living a human life. ... This means that our behaviour falls, ... within the sphere of

the Aristotelian virtue, in each case. If it is not appropriate, it is inappropriate; it cannot be off the map altogether. (Nussbaum, 1993: 247).

In this sense, we can understand progress in ethics, to be progress in 'finding the correct fuller specification of virtue, isolated by its nominal definition' (Nussbaum, 1993: 248). Put another way, we can identify a very basic universal definition for a particular virtue based on the shared human spheres of experience, and from there make sense of what it means in this instance to act well or rather to flesh out what the virtue term means in the contextual situation. The Capabilities Approach, and the list which Nussbaum articulates, described in Chapter 3, gives individuals and societies a basic ethical framework based on shared grounding experiences, where virtuous action can be evaluated with reference to this framework to help us make sense of what choosing and acting well in the particular instance entails.

Because this framework points to our common features as human beings it acts as a uniting element, which underlines the need for respect between human beings, and the sense that we are all connected by this common framework of shared experience. It is within this framework that affiliation and deliberated trust through practical reason can be nurtured. These recognised common capabilities then have implications on fostering environments where we can develop virtues for realising our potential for flourishing, rather than promoting environments and policies which thwart our ability to flourish. As Nussbaum argues, Aristotle's analysis of the virtues 'gives him an appropriate framework for these comparisons, which seem perfectly appropriate inquiries into the ways in which different societies have solved common human problems' (1993: 249). Within any deliberation, the first stage of the enquiry includes the 'demarcation of the sphere of choice of the 'grounding experiences' that fix the reference of the virtue term' (*ibid.*: 250). The second stage becomes the 'ensuing more concrete enquiry into what the appropriate choice, in that sphere, is' (*ibid.*: 250).

Here is where the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation become especially important in order to help us choose in favour rather than against flourishing. Nussbaum defines practical reason as: 'being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life'(Nussbaum, 2001: 417). Affiliation, Nussbaum defines as: 'being able to live with and toward others, to recognise and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another' and 'having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be

treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others' (Nussbaum, 2001: 417). This is based on Aristotle's claim that human beings feel a sense of fellowship with other human beings, and that we are by nature social animals. For example, 'however varied our specific conceptions of friendship and love are, there is a great point in seeing them as overlapping expressions of the same family of shared human needs and desires' (Nussbaum, 1993: 264). It is this conception of shared universal innate needs which Deci and Ryan describe and research using psychological language (2002: 5-23).

In respect of the Capabilities Approach, it is a helpful ethical framework within which to develop deliberated trust and co-operation between people, by promoting environmental structures which nurture them. This approach encourages individuals to act with reflective equilibrium, taking account of our shared context and needs as human beings. As Nussbaum reminds us regarding the capabilities list, 'this is just a list of suggestions, closely related to Aristotle's list of common experiences' (1993: 265). This leaves open the possibility for refining this list in the light of experience and debate. It is however important to note Nussbaum's claim as essential if we are to develop the kind of flourishing society we seek:

It seems plausible to claim that in all these areas we have a basis for further work on the human good. We do not have a bedrock of completely un-interpreted 'given' data, but we do have nuclei of experience around which the constructions of different societies proceed. There is no Archimedean point here, no pure access to unsullied 'nature'... There is just human life as it is lived. But in life as it is lived, we do find a family of experiences, clustering around certain focuses, which can provide reasonable starting points for cross-cultural reflection. (1993: 265).

The Capabilities Approach seems more necessary than ever in society today, as we decipher happiness in the context of others, and strive to flourish.

## **Summary**

In this chapter I have explored some underlying factors considered as barriers for well-being and flourishing, as identified by philosophers, psychologists, and social scientists. For example, there are growing areas of concern in society, as evidenced in the psychology literature by the rise of anxiety, depression and other mental health issues, in adults and children alike. There is



also evidence of a growing lack of trust and co-operation between individuals and groups, also supported by the social capital literature, and an increase in individualism is considered as a corroborating factor. Some of the worst affected people in the population live in areas with high levels of deprivation. Philosophers such as Wolff and de-Shalit (2007) suggest we focus on the social environment to nurture flourishing, which is what psychologists also describe as psychosocial resources, such as those identified by the psychologists Deci and Ryan (2002) as fundamental needs, such as competency, relatedness and autonomy.

The decrease in people working together in an authentic spirit of co-operation or trust also leads to a superficial narrative (Sennet, 1996), even though in practice we live in a worldwide global community where communication is ever easier. Nevertheless the social narrative in place, often tends towards superficiality and individualism which stands in contrast to the narrative we seek, which is based on trust and solidarity (Halpern, 2005). As Sen (2010) identifies, what is missing is a deep discourse and understanding of others made possible by public reasoning.

I argue in this chapter that happiness as flourishing is best understood within the capabilities framework, which supports a broader view of happiness than afforded by definitions based on individual preference grounded on individual feelings. In this sense, a wider definition of well-being or happiness as flourishing is preferable, which supports 'a state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one's goals, and where one is able to enjoy a satisfactory quality of life' (McGregor, 2007, quoted in Walker, 2009). Practical reason and affiliation are the two capabilities correlated with nurturing flourishing, through virtuous action and involving deliberated trust and trustworthiness. In order to trust, we need to understand what we share, rather than focus on what divides us. Here the Capabilities Approach with shared spheres of experiences provides the ethical framework we seek.

The vocabulary of human flourishing and virtues within the Capabilities Approach can enrich therapeutic or educational endeavours with people who are grappling with issues such as finding meaning in life, making difficult choices or reflecting on what kind of person they would like to be. Given the importance of social relationships for mental health, it is not surprising that societies with low levels of trust and weaker community life are also those with worse mental health (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 70). As will be discussed in the following chapters this is where education plays an important role when grounded on the capabilities framework.

From the evidence of the Childhood Enquiry 2009, Layard and Dunn suggest that ‘a society which practices less mutual respect will produce many types of bad outcome’ (2009: 135). They also highlight the need to ‘change the overall ethos of our society, making it less success-oriented and more generous with respect’ (2009: 135). The Capabilities Approach in education can help create the ethos we seek by nurturing the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation in particular. In Chapter 5, I will explore the Capabilities Approach and its importance in education, with its evaluative ethical framework which calls educators to go beyond the success-oriented utilitarian paradigm which is prevalent at present.

In this chapter therefore, I have argued that a view of happiness as flourishing or living well provides an alternative view of well-being, which is broader than monetary considerations and individual feelings, which can positively affect individuals within society, and which government policy can embrace. Although it does not claim to eradicate the stubborn issues identified here, it has the capacity to nurture the well-being of individuals and to promote the much-needed fusion of horizons between its people, as individuals and groups develop practical reason and affiliation which engenders deliberated trust.

This understanding of happiness has implications when considering learning and teaching and what we have a responsibility to help children develop, in particular, the capability for practical reason and affiliation. We would do well to take consideration of Nussbaum’s view quoted below, as we explore in the next chapter the significance of the Capabilities Approach in education.

[Education] ... draws citizens toward one another by complex mutual understanding and individual self-scrutiny, building a democratic culture that is truly deliberative and reflective, rather than simply the collision of unexamined preferences. And we hope in this way to ... increasingly learn how to understand, respect, and communicate, if our common human problems are to be constructively addressed. (Nussbaum, 1997: 294).

The purpose of this thesis is to establish a case in favour of the Capabilities Approach as a conceptual grounding for education theory and practice, to help children and young people to flourish. This is where we turn our attention to next as we consider the importance of the Capabilities Approach in education.

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- <sup>1</sup> Health and well-being boards are being created across Local Authorities in the UK as part of the new strategy to understand and monitor well-being, in accordance with the recent Public Health White Paper 2010. <http://healthandcare.dh.gov.uk/early-implementers-of-health-and-well-being-boards-announced/> (Last accessed 28/05/11).
- <sup>2</sup> The New Ofsted Framework introduced in 2009 introduced well-being as one of its 8 indicators for evaluation. <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Other/General/Framework-for-the-inspection-of-maintained-schools-in-England-from-September-2009> (Last accessed 28/05/11).
- <sup>3</sup> Here I refer to the Happiness index created in Bhutan, and the recent Happiness index created by the OECD in 2011. This index covers 11 areas: housing, incomes, employment, social relationships, education, the environment, the administration of institutions, health, general satisfaction, security and the balance between work and family. [http://www.oecd.org/document/35/0,3746,en\\_2649\\_201185\\_47837411\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/35/0,3746,en_2649_201185_47837411_1_1_1_1,00.html) (Last accessed 28/05/11).
- <sup>4</sup> For example refer to the debate between Seligman (2011) and Layard, where the former wishes to move away from the concept of happiness altogether and focus on well-being instead, and Layard who defends his position since 2005 that happiness as a subjective measure remains a helpful standalone measure.
- <sup>5</sup> This article is also available online: <http://www2.eur.nl/fsw/research/veenhoven/Pub2000s/2008g-full.pdf> (Last accessed 01/06/11).
- <sup>6</sup> Schwartz, B. (2000) Pitfalls on the road to a positive psychology of hope, in Schwartz, B. and Gillham, J. (Eds.), *The science of optimism and hope: Research essays in honour of Martin E.P. Seligman*. 399-412.
- <sup>7</sup> *Truth Hurts: Report of the National Inquiry into Self-harm among Young People*, Mental Health Foundation, 2006. This study finds that self-harm is a 'hidden epidemic' (2006: 8). [http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/content/assets/PDF/publications/truth\\_hurts.pdf?view=Standard](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/content/assets/PDF/publications/truth_hurts.pdf?view=Standard) (Last accessed 04/05/12).

## Chapter 5

### The significance of the Capabilities Approach in education

#### Introduction

Recent educational research argues that education needs a broader view of what it means to be a humane and educated person than is afforded by a narrow focus on standardised<sup>1</sup> academic success and economic performance (Pring and Pollard, 2011). Moreover, evidence from many sources suggest that existing narrow foci and indicators in use require immediate critical scrutiny and refinement, in the face of persistent poor education and health outcomes, particularly in areas of greatest deprivation. I argue in Chapter 5, that the Capabilities Approach in education, with its focus on human development, could provide a grounding for education theory and practice to adopt the broader view required. The Capabilities Approach may redresses the obsession with an oversimplified narrow standardised framework for educational success. It would do so by enabling educators to focus on nurturing human capabilities which engender flourishing. This approach calls for due attention and care to be given to the particular individual and their context, and thereby resists standardisation. At the same time, the Capabilities Approach could also enable the balanced degree of objectivity required to make judgements about progress and quality. In this chapter therefore, I attempt to defend the significance of the Capabilities Approach in education, with its emphasis on developing practical reason and affiliation, as more profoundly necessary for success in society today than the performative approach in education allows.

In this chapter I explore ways in which the Capabilities Approach could be significant in realising the aim of educating for success when defined with reference to Aristotle's philosophy about human flourishing. As examined in previous chapters, the contemporary Capabilities Approach developed by Nussbaum and the philosophy which underpins it gives structure and guidance to the shared process of *making sense* of life, and of realising potential within the context of human flourishing. This approach, outlines general necessary constituents which enable human flourishing when instantiated and contextualised. It thereby includes a framework within which to understand human development, and to pursue equality which enables capabilities to be realised. When applied to education therefore, the

Capabilities Approach could have much to offer as it provides a 'benchmark' against which to understand and define success, that is more helpful to the view of an educated person we seek here, than the present utilitarian approach prevalent in education.

In respect of flourishing, the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach has the potential to equip learners, teachers, and policy makers, with an ethical dimension much needed in education, based on what we share as human beings. This means that the Capabilities Approach includes an ethical imperative in education for important qualities to be developed and opportunities to be offered which enable flourishing. The approach could provide an much-needed grounding for shaping the learning process, whether thinking about educational reform in general, or pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment in particular contexts. For example, in respect of developing practical reasoning (the ability to act deliberately and effectively within the context of a concept of what human flourishing entails), or affiliation (the ability to relate to others with concern and care for the dignity of every human being), the Capabilities Approach demands that any kind of formal curriculum and assessment process is shaped beyond the confines of a utilitarian stance to teaching and learning to a standardised test solely in service of economic success for the majority.

In respect of making sense of the world and situations in which people find themselves, the Capabilities Approach offers a framework for cognitive awareness and action which embraces a balance between reason and emotion, between the subjective and the objective, and between the individual and the collective. With regards to nurturing human development through education, the Capabilities Approach could help define the purpose and practice of education. Significantly, given this approach is based on a concept of being human informed by shared human capabilities, it is holistic, it takes account of the importance and dignity of every person, it is flexible enough to embrace the needs of the individual, and hence it could be significant to engender flourishing in our 21<sup>st</sup> century society. This approach, which nurtures the child as an active maker of sense in his or her world, stands in contrast to the popular vision of learning, such as that promoted by the *National Curriculum* since 1988, with its standardised agenda, which prescribes and pre-formulates what counts as success (Pring 1989: 69-96).

In Chapter 5, therefore, I will first identify significant issues of concern in respect of children and young people today which call for the Capabilities Approach to be embraced in education. Second, I will consider the Capabilities Approach as a conceptual base for education theory

and practice. Third, I will examine how the school system today serves young people in their attempt to succeed in the broader sense used here, and offer some alternatives for change. As a result, this chapter will prepare the ground for Chapter 6, which focuses on reflective practice within the Capabilities Approach.

### **5.1 Present areas of concern in young people's lives and the need for change**

Before examining the Capabilities Approach in education, I will focus on why we might need such an approach in the first place. Key areas of concern continue to be prevalent, to affect children and young people's path to success in education, and remain a barrier to flourishing for individuals and communities in society.

It is widely accepted that health, psychological well-being and education outcomes are correlated (WHO, 2010b: 3). However, separating the causes for poor outcomes in each area is a complex matter, for which the debate is ongoing and for which conclusive answers remain elusive. What is agreed is that to a large extent these areas of concern are interwoven and dependant on economic, social and material factors. The Marmot Review, *Fair Society Healthy Lives* (2010), suggests that improving health outcomes and reducing health inequalities is a matter of social justice (2010: 9). This requires a focus on giving every child the best start in life by reducing inequalities in early child development, by ensuring high quality early years education, and by building the resilience and well-being of young children across the social gradient (2010: 16). Yet another focus recommended by this report is to enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives (2010: 18). Marmot and his fellow researchers remind us in this review that:

People in higher socio-economic positions in society have a greater array of life chances and more opportunities to lead a flourishing life. They also have better health. The two are linked: the more favoured people are, socially and economically, the better their health. ... We could go a long way to achieving that remarkable improvement by giving more people the life chances currently enjoyed by the few. ... People would see improved well-being, better mental health and less disability, their children would flourish, and they would live in sustainable, cohesive communities. (Marmot *et al.*, 2010: 3).

From the statistics below it is clear that for a variety of reasons, children and young people continue to make decisions which hinder their ability to flourish as much in terms of health, psychological well-being, and education. Generally, those worst affected in terms of positive outcomes in respect of health, well-being, and education seem to be those living in areas of highest deprivation as identified by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)<sup>2</sup>.

Significantly however, according to the report produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2009, *Doing Better for Children*, high public spending on child welfare and education in the UK is failing to produce results in many key areas. The proportion of youth not in school, training or in jobs in the UK remains high, at more than 10% of 15 to 19 year-olds. This is reported to be the fourth highest rate in the OECD, ahead of Italy, Turkey and Mexico. Education results are also considered low relative to spending levels. Moreover, the UK is placed in the middle of OECD comparisons of how well 15 year olds do at school and in terms of the gaps between well and poorly performing pupils<sup>3</sup>. In addition, a study and report produced for the National Equality Panel in 2009 found that both cognitive development and educational achievement were lower for children and young people of all ages living in areas of greatest neighbourhood deprivation<sup>4</sup>.

In respect of health, alcohol misuse is associated with a range of social, physical and mental health problems, including depressive and anxiety disorders, obesity, and accidental injury (Currie *et al*, 2008)<sup>5</sup>. Yet, between 13 and 15 years of age, the prevalence of risky behaviours such as smoking and drunkenness doubled in many OECD countries. Drunkenness in the UK is the highest in the OECD, with one in three 13 and 15 year olds having been drunk at least twice (OECD, 2009).

Another area related to health and education is teenage pregnancy, where the UK reports the fourth highest teen pregnancy rate after Mexico, Turkey, and the United States (OECD, 2009). Victoria Sheard, when deputy head of policy at Terrence Higgins Trust, was reported to say that, 'So long as the number of teenage pregnancies remains high, there is a need for young people to be given more information to protect themselves. That's why we strongly welcome plans to make sex and relationships education a statutory part of the national curriculum'<sup>6</sup>. Although this suggestion is to be applauded, the issues seem more complex than the quick fix approach intended here, in terms of simply providing more information about the facts and easier access to contraception. Evidently, the general picture which appears from the statistics on teenage pregnancy cannot be changed with such simplistic tools. Moreover, research in the

area of early child bearing suggests far greater complexity exists in the narrative of contributing factors than this solution recognises (Nettle and Cockerill, 2010: 1-2, 6-7), which require a more holistic approach than that suggested above. In addition to factual information, individuals would benefit from developing the capability of practical reason and affiliation in order to make sense of their situation, and the information and its implications in respect of their personal and social life journeys and imagined possibilities.

The social narrative outlined in this section thus far, which is a reality for many children and young people today involves delicate decision-making on an ongoing basis. This remains a persistent issue of concern. Children and young people to greater or lesser extents are challenged with making sense of a world which is growing in complexity, and continue to seek their place within it. They are faced with a plethora of decisions. To name a few examples, these include, whether to attend school, to have a balanced diet, to smoke, to drink in excess, to postpone sexual relations until older, or to be proactive about protecting against unwanted pregnancy.

Making positive decisions is made ever more difficult by complex factors including material poverty. Other factors include the increasing reduction in social capital in urban areas, defined as a decrease in social structures facilitating co-operation and trust between people (Halpern, 2005: 292). Regarding young people, this picture of declining trust and co-operation has been identified as being particularly acute in adolescents living in areas of greater deprivation (Nettle and Cockerill, 2010).

Furthermore, other factors contribute to young people's high levels of stress and anxiety <sup>7</sup>. These include, a lack of psychological resources to deal with difficult issues in life, and teaching and learning which does not intersect with the needs of many young people, nor with the difficult issues they face, and which instead overemphasises tests and attainment levels. This in turn augments children's difficulties in making positive decisions. Added to these pressures, globalisation requires ever more sophisticated decision-making abilities from children and young people to be effective contributors and economic performers in society, which is at odds with the prescribed and utilitarian educational experience of many.

Today, with widening access to technological media and communication, there exist stronger media influences towards consumerism and individualism as the solution to well-being, than have been present in the past. In addition, the new face of friendship is hallmarked by virtual



methods of relating through digital technology which require great sophistication and deliberated action and trust in order to enable human flourishing. This is supported by the Nuffield Review which states that ‘something radical has emerged in the last few years affecting how young people communicate with and relate to their friends and acquaintances’, where ‘they have developed their own on-line community networks through My-Space or Facebook’ (2009: 74). Also, beyond the media and digital communication, the increasing cultural mix which children encounter in society today, requires them to be able to translate between various cultures and beliefs, in order to avoid conflict, to communicate effectively, and to live collaboratively.

This seems like an insurmountable challenge for the best prepared adults, yet children and young people are faced with decisions such as these on a daily basis. For example, they must answer questions such as: Should I believe what I see in this advert? Do I buy into this concept of what is beautiful or fashionable or healthy? Should I accept this person as a friend on Facebook? Will it be helpful if I join this gossip-like commentary on Twitter? Should I support this pressure group and join their blog? Will I go on the environmental march this weekend and should I contribute to the community clean-up event, even though my friends laugh at the idea? As the statistics explored above have shown in respect of health, well-being, and education, the situation regarding children and young people making decisions in favour of their own and others’ flourishing is of particular concern. This concern is particularly acute in respect of vulnerable children in areas of high deprivation, given that the pressures they face are greatest and the material and psychosocial resources weakest in this group.

Yet, as a civilised society and as human beings connected to others by virtue of our shared humanity, we have a moral obligation to nurture our children and young people to flourish. As educators we must play our part, even when recognise that enabling young people to flourish, as they make good decisions, relate to others well, and become agents of change, is something in which everyone in society should participate. We accept that this requires joint working by parents, friends, community and voluntary organisations, local and national government policy and provision, including education. Although the education system alone cannot meet this challenge or fully equip children and young people for this reality, the moral imperative remains that as educators we do our best to enable children and young people to develop their capabilities to function and flourish in the conditions they find themselves. The challenge is indeed great, and requires that we find ways in tertiary education as well as school and early years settings for making a difference in this area. This means ensuring that children and young

people have space and time to ask, discuss, and seek answers to important questions about what living well includes, how they wish to live, and what they will do to help others in this journey. This requires engaging children and young people in a process of reflection, enquiry and participation as an integral part of their learning (Nussbaum, 1997). Such opportunities are important if we are to enable children and young people to be more curious, resilient, motivated and interdependent learners, with higher aspirations for their own and their peers' success.

School improvement continues to be a goal for governments around the world and the World Health Organisation urges a collective agreement to improve educational outcomes in order to increase health and decrease poverty<sup>8</sup>. In particular, given the evidence outlined above, what remains an important focus for education today is honing young people's ability for decision-making and for making sense of the situations in which they find themselves, guided by principles about a shared human nature which transcends cultures or material situations. Nurturing practical reason and affiliation, which together enable deliberated trust and co-operation, are crucial in this process, and particularly relevant as we engage within the digital age. The question remains: How can this be achieved beyond the utilitarian-driven Standards Agenda prevalent in education today?

In the next part of this chapter I propose the Capabilities Approach as a way to begin to address this challenge. The Capabilities Approach includes a framework, or universal narrative for what we share as human beings and thus demands that we all engage with an ethical dimension in education. Importantly, the Capabilities Approach, calls us to focus on developing a particular kind of reflective practice, which I will discuss further in Chapter 6. The Capabilities Approach, I believe, can help students reflect more deeply about their past and present, and imagine their future in a balanced, resilient way. The framework included in this approach is crucial when making decisions towards right relations with others, and towards flourishing and hence success.

The predominant performative culture in education which focuses on narrow academic outcomes assessed using standardised tests does not give sufficient space to develop the capabilities considered important for flourishing. In preference, the Capabilities Approach which is based on the Aristotelian philosophy discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, is proposed in this thesis. Significantly, the Capabilities Approach enables educators and learners to embrace the 'principles for the future'<sup>9</sup> outlined by Richard Pring and Andrew Pollard (2011: 6-7) in their

recent report, *Education for All: Evidence from the past, principles for the future*. This report provides a review of research in primary, secondary, and adult education, in addition to well-being reports regarding of mental health. The evidence highlights concerns about the present situation in education and recommends critical scrutiny in this area.

In line with the Capabilities Approach, Pring and Pollard (2011: 6-7) offer principles for the future which embrace the ethical dimension in education, essential for positive change. Pring has been an advocate of including the moral dimension in education for over 20 years (1989: 97-101). Pring and Pollard (2011) articulate the need for the ethical dimension to be reclaimed in educational policy and practice and for young people to be nurtured to develop moral seriousness. They also object to the utilitarian style business language which has immersed many aspects of education. What they do not do in this report (2011) is offer an alternative philosophical base which better suits the principles for the future which they recommend, than the utilitarian stance. This thesis begins to articulate the nature of the ethical dimension sought, with reference to the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach.

## **5.2 The Capabilities Approach**

The Capabilities Approach based on Aristotle's philosophical concepts is an invaluable theoretical grounding and practical guide for education. Nussbaum (2000: 69), makes this clear below, and although her arguments here focus on women's development specifically, the Capabilities Approach suffuses her thinking in respect of education (Nussbaum, 1997,2010):

We want an approach that is respectful of each person's struggle for flourishing. ... This, in turn, requires both generality and particularity: both some overarching benchmarks and detailed knowledge of the variety of circumstances and cultures in which people are striving to do well. The shortcomings of both the utilitarian and the resource-based approaches suggest that we will take a stand in the most appropriate way if we focus not on satisfaction or the mere presence of resources, but on what individuals are actually able to do and to be. General benchmarks based on utility or on resources turn out to be insensitive to contextual variation, to the way circumstances shape preferences and the ability of individuals to convert resources into meaningful human activity. Only a broad concern for functioning and capability

can do justice to the complex interrelationships between human striving and its material and social context<sup>10</sup>. (Nussbaum 2000: 69).

The Capabilities Approach rests on the premise that there exist starting points which all human beings share. It offers people shared general principles for making sense of life, by developing reflective practice as a guide for flourishing. It provides individuals with helpful methods for understanding the context-sensitive and particular situation which enable them to make sense of the here-and-now. The potential strength of the Capabilities Approach in education is that it remains sensitive to the needs and capabilities of the child. For example, at one extreme, in the case of a child with profound learning difficulties, when space in the curriculum is given for this child to reflect by being offered a simple light stimulus towards which she can voluntarily turn, which helps her experience curiosity, joy and calm, it is significant for her development and ability to flourish. The opportunities which we give these children and others with varying learning abilities to reflect on their identity, space and community is important for their development.

Considerations such as these, which go beyond the outcomes driven curriculum and focus on the needs of the individual child in context should concern policy formulation, teaching and learning, or evaluation. The Capabilities Approach could help here to ensure that individuals are given the opportunity to realise their individual capability, while being aware of the needs and capabilities of others. Parallel to this, as the teacher or learner engages in making sense of situations and making decisions in each particular instance, the Capabilities Approach could provide guidance for the teacher based on universal features about human flourishing shared by other human beings which can act as a reference point for their specific deliberation about the particular instance in question.

If we are to address the issues which continue to face children and young people outlined in the previous section, this thesis supports embracing the Capabilities Approach in education which is serious about each person's struggle for flourishing. This attention and care could be particularly important for those who live in areas of greatest deprivation, given that as has been illustrated here, we already know a considerable amount about what kinds of economic circumstances make any flourishing difficult. Given this knowledge, the present emphasis in education on one solution fits all requires change. The Capabilities Approach could provide the general benchmarks for progress and change in this area, remaining sensitive to the particular circumstance of each person. Most importantly, the Capabilities Approach recognises the

complex interrelationships between human striving and its material and social context and includes flexible methods to help individuals and groups develop their most important capabilities and flourish.

I propose that a framework based on human capabilities such as this could enable a more inclusive, broader, and richer way of viewing progress and success in education. It recognises the interdependence between education and other aspects of human development such as health and well-being. This is significant as health and education outcomes are recognised to be closely correlated, and areas of greater economic deprivation indicate difficulties in progress and success in both these areas. Both health and education outcomes can only improve as individuals make positive choices in favour of both healthy choices and sustained positive choices for flourishing.

### 5.2.1 The capabilities theory and list offered by Nussbaum

Both Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, as discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, have developed and continue to support the Capabilities Approach. Nussbaum is particularly concerned with providing a philosophical underpinning for this approach based on Aristotle's ideas of human functioning. Sen does not explicitly do this, though he agrees with Nussbaum's understanding of Aristotle's thinking (Sen, 1992: 39, 2009: 231). Sen also reminds us that education should play a role in broadening human capability, not just human capital. As he points out, this is possible when a person benefits from education 'in reading, communicating, arguing, in being able to choose in a more informed way, in being taken more seriously by others and so on' (1995: 294). While Sen focuses on the role of capabilities in differentiating the space within which quality-of-life assessments are made, Nussbaum goes further and subscribes to a universal list of capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000: 78-80). These, she claims to be cross cultural (*ibid.*: 34, 67, 72-73) and to pertain to every human being as a basic benchmark against which judgements about progress in quality of life can be made (*ibid.*: 74-5, 89). She maintains that these capabilities are founded on the belief that by virtue of being human certain functions are considered particularly central in human life. Consequently, the human capability for this function to be realised, must be ensured by every community or government with reference to the general benchmark provided by the capabilities list (Nussbaum, 1993: 242-69, 1995: 86-131, 2000: 72-101)<sup>11</sup>.

As outlined in Chapter 3, the list of capabilities put forward by Nussbaum, which is not intended to be hierarchical, comprises the following: (1) life; (2) having bodily health; (3) having bodily integrity; (4) being able to use the senses, imagine and think; (5) emotional development and attachment; (6) developing practical reason – being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life; (7) affiliation - being able to live with and toward others, and to be treated with dignity; (8) being able to live with concern for other species; (9) being able to play; and, (10) being able to participate and be a full member of one's environment (2000: 78-80).

Nussbaum identifies these universal functional capabilities of human beings as overarching benchmarks for aspiration. This view considers that certain functions are particularly central to human life and its fulfilment. This framework is respectful of every person's struggle for flourishing and considers each person as an end and as a source of agency and worth in their own right. Therefore, these central capabilities are not just instrumental to further pursuits but have value in themselves, in making the life that includes them truly human. As a result, when the Capabilities Approach is embraced and imbues education it enables educators, learners, policy makers, and the general public to recognise the intrinsic value of education beyond any instrumental or utilitarian ends.

Nussbaum ( 1993: 242-7) draws on Aristotle's view of what human beings share, which he has deduced from the spheres of human experience which figure in more or less any human life and in which all human beings have to make some choice or other. Using this framework, Aristotle seeks to make sense of what choosing well or not entails within each sphere of experience (NE II, 7). From this list of spheres and abilities or virtues for positive action, Nussbaum develops the general but definite list of 'central human capabilities' (1993: 242-69). These she considers to be the general list outlining areas in which human beings need to have a choice to realise this capability or other, if they are to be able to function well and flourish within the spheres articulated by Aristotle. Hence, according to Nussbaum this list 'isolates those human capabilities that can be convincingly argued to be of central importance in any human life, whatever else the person pursues or chooses' (2000: 74). Thus it provides basic political principles that should be embodied in development policy (2000: 74-75).

Critics claim difficulties in Nussbaum's view that this list is subject to ongoing revision and that it should emerge through intercultural ethical enquiry (Clark, Working paper: 7). They point to the fact that this list has not changed in any substantial way over the years despite ongoing

enquiry, and they indicate that the concept of a method of enquiry or reflection such as Nussbaum proposes is unhelpful as it is open to potential abuse. In defence of Nussbaum, though she does not claim her list to be conclusive or changeless, the fact that it has not changed much may support the truth of her claim, rather than count as evidence against it. Moreover, given that the general benchmarks which make up the capabilities list are composed of the particular experiences of individuals, the fact that they have not changed much over time, suggest that these starting points about what we share and need to flourish as human beings may in the round be correctly identified. The evidence both from recent enquiries and from the popular or widely accepted views dating back to ancient Greece would suggest that this may be the case.

In order to test the idea that the list Nussbaum proposes bears general agreement with people, I undertook a further sample enquiry with adults involved in education. I consulted twenty individuals working in the field of education, from the foundation, primary, and secondary stage, and across phases, including school inspectors, managers, school advisers and teachers. They were given a copy of Nussbaum's capabilities list (2000) and were asked to reflect upon this list and identify anything they considered should be removed or added to it. In addition they were asked to identify the extent to which they found this list comprehensive in respect of what human beings share and require to flourish, and the extent to which it was a helpful framework for education.

The feedback from this enquiry was overwhelmingly positive in favour of the human capabilities list as it stands. For example, someone mentioned that we must aspire to this list for ourselves and others. Feedback from early years educators included the point that all 10 statements in the list are key to babies and children. In addition, one individual working across the primary and secondary phase remarked that this list must be our focus and vocation – to help ourselves and in turn others to achieve. Some individuals suggested that affection would benefit from being given a more prominent position, rather than being subsumed into other definitions. Others indicated that a list such as this would be very helpful in schools as the underlying principle through which teachers and learners are able to make sense of their core purpose and progress. One person suggested that a more user-friendly version of this list would be helpful in all large scale institutions, including schools, to guide practice and provision.

Of course this is not conclusive evidence in favour of the capabilities list, but it does suggest that we are exploring in the right area. As Aristotle himself recognised at the end of his discussion on human nature in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Let the good, then, be sketched in this way; for perhaps we need to give an outline first, and fill in the detail later. To develop and articulate those elements in the sketch that are as they should be would seem to be something anyone can do, and time seems to be good at discovering such things, or helping us to discover them. ... it is for anyone to add what is lacking. (NE 1098a20-6).

### 5.2.2 The significance of practical reason and affiliation

In the capabilities list which Nussbaum develops, practical reason and affiliation stand out as of special importance to human development. As Nussbaum suggests the reason for this is that practical reason and affiliation 'suffuse all the others, making their pursuit truly human' (2000: 82). Nussbaum explains that:

To use one's senses in a way not infused by the characteristically human use of thought and planning is to use them in an incompletely human manner. To plan for one's own life without being able to do so in complex forms of discourse, concern, and reciprocity with other human beings is, again to behave in an incompletely human way. (2000: 82).

It is practical reason nurtured through ethical reflective practice that enables us to deliberate on our emotions, needs and motivation within the particular situation in which we find ourselves. This approach spurs us on to seek detailed knowledge of the variety of circumstances and contexts and cultures in which we strive to do well. In this way, the Capabilities Approach is context sensitive, a key requirement for the plural lives of children today. Nevertheless, while considering the particular, this approach enables us to keep the wider narrative always in focus as it claims that human beings share fundamental capabilities. Hence, it offers universal benchmarks about what human beings share which give rise to general principles as a guide for actions. But this approach is not rule-based in any simple sense, as it recognises the nobility of the particular instance as the context in which making sense occurs and decisions about actions are made. The instance, through time and interpretation in turn reshapes the general principles.



An example is helpful here. In respect of education and the contribution of student voice and participation, the very idea that young people have a voice and are able to contribute to shaping their own learning environment and teaching and learning more generally, has developed force since the rise of progressivism. This has arisen as a result of the shared recognition that voice, even young voice, is integral to realising human freedoms and to contributing to the democratic process, without which justice in any area and specifically in education, cannot be ensured. The specific instances when student voice<sup>12</sup> has been included and recognised as important, have enabled the general principle about the importance of everyone's voice, to include the young voice as the norm. Nevertheless, even today, minority groups, such as children, or the elderly, or the disabled, or the poor have to fight continuously to have their voice heard, accepted, and included.

To this day, although student voice is accepted as important, it is often simply heard in the shape of passive contribution through surveys, rather than active participation in shaping the learning landscape. Nevertheless, the general principle that young voice is essential in schools and helps reshape learning and redefine relationships is being accepted and embedded into practice in individual settings. This has resulted from an increase in specific examples of student voice, where they reflect about important issues in their school setting and thereby endeavour to effect change<sup>13</sup>. Fielding (2004), argues persuasively for the transformative potential of students as researchers in developing a radical collegiality where dialogue between adults and young people in schools enables a joint approach to making sense of issues and to effect change.

Given persistent material and other inequalities in society, the Capabilities Approach is more important than ever in developing the essential capabilities of practical reason and affiliation which enable people to flourish in these circumstances. The aim is that these capabilities enable children and young people to make positive choices in respect of their health and well-being, which help them to learn well, as they understand or make sense of the situations in which they live. Realising these capabilities requires reflective practice in order to reason and to engage with others in positive and constructive ways. This process enables individuals and groups to grasp the emotional, cognitive, and social context within which decisions in service of flourishing are made. Chapter 6 and 7 focus on reflective practice in order to nurture the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation. These are considered integral in facilitating individuals and societies to succeed and standards in many aspects of life to rise, as better

choices are made across the board. This entails persons developing a balanced and sensitive understanding of themselves, others, and the environment at large.

The Capabilities Approach recognises and reminds us of the necessity for structured thought informed by emotions and practised individually and with others, enabling people to hone their skills and habits and thereby make sense of situations and take action towards flourishing and success. Here success is considered within the context of both living well and doing well. This may well include necessary skills such as nationally recognised qualifications which are at times a requirement for success in the work place. But more significantly this requires, of necessity, an authentic endeavour in helping children and young people to make sense of themselves and others, as they develop the craft of flexible reflection. In addition, the Capabilities Approach calls policy makers, researchers and educators to be sensitive to diversity, not just in terms of multi-cultural issues, but also by resisting one standard for everyone found in standardised tests and fixed milestones.

The Capabilities Approach in education could help us to examine real lives in their material and social settings and to nurture them from this individual starting point. At the same time, the Capabilities Approach also offers general benchmarks for understand the wider narrative of which these individual instances are a part. It attempts to consider the individual's progress and potential together with the bigger picture of which it is a part. The Capabilities framework could help us steer between the individualist tendency towards the completely subjective on the one hand and the fundamentalist obsession with objectivity on the other. This is particularly significant in education if we are to address some of the stubborn challenges and barriers which children and young people continue to face and need to overcome if they are to succeed. The suggestion here is that adopting the Capabilities Approach in education could help children and young people develop capabilities such as practical reason and affiliation, which enable them to make good decisions in favour of their individual flourishing and to understand the connection and interdependence between their individual flourishing and others' in society.

### 5.2.3 The Capabilities Approach in education theory and practice

As discussed in previous chapters and supported by Sen (2009), there are three major contributions which the Capabilities Approach offers which require consideration, that stand in

contrast to the utilitarian approach so prevalent in economic measurement as well as in education. These are: (1) The importance of considering capability rather than focusing on achievement exclusively, which includes the responsibility and obligations of societies and individuals to help the vulnerable; (2) The importance of considering the plural composition of capabilities and the essential role of practical reasoning for deliberation (since we cannot reduce all the things we have reason to value into one homogeneous magnitude, reflected evaluation demands reasoning, and not just counting)(Emotions are an integral part of this kind of reasoning); and (3) The importance of considering the place of individuals and communities, and their interrelations (Sen, 2009: 235-252). Some preliminary comments are helpful here in respect of the three points above and how these might strengthen education theory and practice.

In respect of the points above, when thinking about educational theories, there are implications for whether the Capabilities Approach supports progressive views as espoused for example by Dewey (1915, 1933) in its earlier formulation; by Bruner's (1960) more recent social-constructivist approach; by Lave and Wenger (1991) in their view of situated learning; and by Silcock (1996, 1999) in his attempt to give progressivism a new voice based on emerging research in developmental psychology. There are some key issues which need exploration. For example, there are questions about whether the Capabilities Approach as a progressive theory in education is susceptible to criticisms about an overly individualistic tendency, or whether it can hold the balance between the capability of the individual and the collective (if we accept that there are capabilities which are in some sense general to all). This thesis attempts to defend the Capabilities Approach against the charge of subjectivism.

Furthermore, in respect of educational practice, there is a balance to be held between an individual and collective focus within learning, and also, between formal structures or models in learning activities and no model. Again, I suggest that although there will always be a tension between having a structure and having no structure, the structure offered by the Capabilities Approach could enable the individual to develop freely and to make sense of their world within parameters outlined by what we all share by virtue of being human. I mention this with particular reference to ethical questioning in respect of reflection, which I will consider in detail and for which I will offer structures informed by the Capabilities Approach.

I suggest the Capabilities Approach as one which underlines the practical responsibility practitioners have in supporting the vulnerable and in providing opportunities and activities

which enable them to make sense of life, to understand others and difference, and to act in favour of a fulfilled life. This approach could offer a framework for personalised understanding, focused beyond the test, to help educators nurture the individuals' essential human resources, with sensitivity to the needs and capabilities of each person within their context and within a shared framework.

In favour of pluralism and the importance of practical reason, if we are to foster sound decision-making as integral to the learning process of living well, the Capabilities Approach could offer a universal framework against which to test any reflective process, and the outcomes which arise as a result of these activities. The model offered for reflection within the Capabilities Approach, which includes enquiry, adopts an ethical reflective framework which ensures learning engages with the interplay between desires, emotions and reason, and considers cognition as encompassing these three elements. Through these models, education practice is able to foster reflection, both individually and collaboratively, as part of the public forum and hence in service of realising fundamental capabilities for flourishing.

When considering the place of individuals, their communities and their inter-relations, the Capabilities Approach takes seriously the contextual nature of identity for individuals and communities. It promotes the coexistence of the particular in its context, with the general benchmark of human capability. Using a flexible process of reflection to synthesise these two aspects, individuals and communities may cultivate a sense of self-awareness, empathy and moral commitment towards one another. For example, space in the curriculum could be secured for children to engage in reflection about the personal characteristics which they value about themselves and their friends, to research and evaluate their local heritage and enquire about what could be celebrated or improved in their community, and to become agents of change by organising and participating in projects which engender positive change in their local society.

Adopting a sensitive framework based on what we share as human beings suggests that the Capabilities Approach could suffuse teaching and learning with an ethical dimension in respect of human flourishing. Regarding teachers, this approach could provide a framework within which to consider the needs and context of the individual and to ensure attention is given to the specific situation which surrounds the life of the child who is learning. For example, this may require ongoing reflection concerning whether the child or young person has eaten enough or at all, or is free to concentrate on what is being learnt and not over-burdened by

personal or social factors such as family difficulties or friendship issues arising from mental or physical health concerns (eg. from stress and anxiety of incontinence). This ethical reflective approach takes the teacher beyond questions of meeting targets through one standardised strategy or another, and could help them embrace the wider context which may enhance or stifle learning.

The broader view of education which could be grounded by the Capabilities Approach, requires not just teaching and learning to the test but also giving time to reflective practice, both individually and collaboratively. The kind of reflection suggested here is not one that is developed using an instrumental approach. Instead, it is connected to practical judgement and developing practice, wisdom and expertise by making sense of situations with care and attention on an ongoing basis. It is such engagement in reflective practice, as individuals and with others, which nurtures people in developing the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation, to become successful decision-makers and more committed to positive action in society. Developing these capabilities often is and always should be part of the weft of school life and be made explicit within the teaching and learning experience of the classroom.

### **5.3 The school system: How it serves young people and enables them to flourish**

Children today have opportunities which would have been considered nigh impossible 100 years ago. We can all agree that education reform has sought to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the educational achievement for all children. Undoubtedly, today this has led to improvements such as better school buildings (on the whole), more up to date equipment, no corporal punishment , and many young people going into tertiary education than did before. All these elements to varying degrees help young people to flourish. However there are stubborn barriers which continue to block children's success in respect of flourishing.

Researchers such as Menter *et al* (1997) offer a critique of the ongoing change which remains for teachers and learners since the onset of the *National Curriculum*. This change has occurred owing to the close alignment between education and economy (1997: p3). The degree of prescribed change in terms of policy revisions, set curriculum programmes, and one-size-fits-all standardised assessments, has in the view of Menter *et al* (1997) reduced the ability of anyone in education to develop effective reflective practice. As I argue in this thesis, reflection is crucial for optimal functioning and thus flourishing. It is this kind of deep and ongoing

reflective practice that enables students to understand the difficult issues which they face and continue to face in their lives and to make positive decisions through careful judgement. The ongoing change and overprescription driven by the market economy of post-Fordism (Sennett, 1998: 39-44) and its technologically-driven division of labour leads to the end of reflective practice for the worker, be they teacher or learner.

This evidence of ongoing change combined with tight prescription, reveals a worrying picture of the way schools, since the onset of the *National Curriculum* and influenced by market forces and ideology, have served their students in respect of enabling them to flourish in their education and life beyond. The quest to continue to improve education for all children by ensuring some level of parity in quality of provision and assessment, and to some extent content, has been a worthy pursuit of the *National Curriculum*. However, the concept of raising attainment levels in specific areas, examined in a standardised manner, and taught according to high levels of prescription, is not an adequate model for education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The evidence today shows that this utility-based approach is not adequate for ensuring parity of quality of education for all (Pring and Pollard, 2011).

Many students today leave school with no model of learning other than that prescribed by this technological approach, and as a consequence leave school with a diminished conception of what being an educated person entails. The Capabilities Approach could help to address the ethical dimension in education, lacking in simplistic views of improvement measured against attainment levels fuelled by the business language rhetoric which drives it. This approach could support students to reflect more deeply and sensitively on their learning, to better understand their context and become decision makers sensitive to the dignity of each person, including themselves. As the worrying data discussed earlier in this chapter suggests, children today need to make better decisions than they currently make, in service of their own flourishing and towards a flourishing society. Policy makers, researchers, and educators now have an opportunity to address this.

### 5.3.1 Concerns fuelled by the factory metaphor

The metaphor of school as factory which dates from the industrial revolution, is one which critics maintain continues to hold its grip (Silcock, 1996: 201)<sup>14</sup>. The factory model developed by Ford (Sennett, 1998: 39) has enabled this metaphor to continue in use. Although the roots

of the factory model became embedded in order to effect improvement, it continues to remain a barrier to success when thinking of education (Menter *et al*, 1996). Some educationists have tried to review and change the metaphor of the workplace, where the job of the teacher is to assign tasks and manage the process for students to complete the work correctly and smoothly (Marshall, 1990: 94-101). Instead, understanding the classroom as a learning setting rather than a teaching factory has been sought.

This metaphor has been hard to change and continues to be given credence as education embraces the language of business and the hierarchy which goes with it. For example speaking of targets and outcomes, standards and quality control is common place. In addition, the idea of managers (teachers) and workers (students) still holds true in much of the language of education. Where it has been replaced to suit the needs of the child, this language has evolved into teachers as service providers and students as customers. This metaphor in education can influence the entire culture of a school and obscure the clarity necessary to maintain the centrality of the ethical dimension about the dignity of every child and our responsibility to enable flourishing through learning. This vision is further obscured through the business language and rhetoric used in education policy today which views teaching as a purely technical matter of reaching targets and learning as a technical matter of achieving targets (Pring, 2004).

Viewing the child as customer of technical skills and certificates in standardised tests misses nurturing essential elements of child development which prepares them for flourishing. Elements such as sparking curiosity about the world and people around them; thinking passionately, creatively and critically about difficult issues with no obvious answer; learning to manage risk, being resilient and valuing interdependence; appreciating the wonder of nature and paying attention to the past, present, and future through careful listening; reflecting on the matter at hand, on progress, on possibilities, and on one another's gifts; participating in caring for one another and the world beyond their own setting; and, developing moral seriousness, commitment, and a vision of what is good. Put differently, this could be understood as learning to read themselves and the world around them accurately and in a balanced manner, through ongoing reflection. These elements should be essential parts of education for all, as Pring and Pollard (2011) support in their recent research.

It is no surprise then that the metaphor of the factory or the business mode, which continues to fuel this view is at odds with Nussbaum's claim articulated in the capabilities list outlined

earlier in this chapter (2000: 69). This metaphor in education is not respectful of each person's struggle for flourishing and does not enable young people to engage with overarching benchmarks and detailed knowledge of the variety of circumstances and cultures in which people are striving to do well. The focus of the factory model is one of utility. Instead what we seek through the Capabilities Approach, is to embrace an ethical dimension which takes into account the dignity of each individual in the context of the capabilities which they share by virtue of being human. Such an approach may in time enable a revised metaphor of growth in education, which I will consider in Chapter 7.

### 5.3.2 Further concerns about the curriculum and the Standards Agenda

With the exception of technology, the curriculum does not seem to have changed much since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Richard Aldrich, the historian of education suggests:

It is a shame upon us all that, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, children in schools in England are following much the same curriculum as at the end of the nineteenth. ...The current list of subjects is no starting point for the creation of a national curriculum for the twenty-first century. (1982: 37).

This point was reiterated at a recent lecture given by Ken Robinson in response to the recent White Paper 2010, *The Importance of Teaching*<sup>15</sup>. Robinson notes that it is depressing that we have a new administration which is trying to lead our schools into the 21st century by means of a detour to the 19th century<sup>16</sup>. Instead, he suggests nurturing abilities for adapting to change and promoting and creating a culture of creativity enabling young people to engage with the complexities of life and the world of business we experience today. In contrast to this subject specific 19<sup>th</sup> century model, the opportunity for reflection across the curriculum enables learners and teachers to cope with change, to be creative, to imagine new possibilities, and to develop the wisdom and judgment for wise action. A cycle of reflection which encourages them to plan, monitor, and evaluate wisely at every point, and with reference to an appropriate ethical framework, is key here.

Despite the economic driven narrow view of education critiqued by Aldrich and Robinson above, which continues to be promoted by the Standards Agenda, school indicators often persist to fall short of the required set targets. Data taken from the Secondary Schools



Performance Table pertaining to 2009/10 states that only 53% of students achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grade A\*-C or equivalent including English and Mathematics GCSEs<sup>17</sup>. Pressure to improve attainment in schools can affect the breadth of students' experience, particularly if curriculum time is hi-jacked by the subjects examined within the standard, or by teaching to the test in respect of these subjects. Educationists remind us that we should 'educate young people in a way that enables the vast majority to feel they have gained something valuable' and avoid this narrow approach which can lead to 'a basic fault in the system' (Claxton, 2008: 17).

One example of a barrier in the system is a prescribed approach to literacy, which continues despite the abandonment of the Literacy Strategy. Directly linked to learning, the National Foundation for Educational Research evaluated the effect on children's reading over ten years of the Literacy Strategy, aimed at improving standards of primary school children. Although they found that reading ability had risen (even though there is still much to be done), they found this to have been at the cost of a decrease in reading enjoyment<sup>18</sup> (Clarkson and Sainsbury, 2007). Parallel to this worrying finding, there is also evidence from studies of progress of international reading literacy that reading for pleasure outweighs other social advantages in the future success of the child (PIRLS, 2006)<sup>19</sup>. This evidence indicates that if education is preparing children for the future, then teaching to the standard test does not seem to have the desired effect, and moreover has become a barrier to children's ability to flourish.

More generally, Layard and Dunn, argue that testing and league tables 'are becoming central to the motivation system of children and teachers' which negatively affects a child's curiosity and excitement about what she learns (2009: 103-4). Layard and Dunn rightly ask:

What happens to the child's incentive to explore beyond what will be tested? What happens to the teacher's incentive to inspire? (*ibid.*: 103).

Drawing evidence from studies conducted by Harlen and Deakin Crick in 2002, Layard and Dunn point out that 'there is a clear danger that education becomes less stimulating when the main incentive is to learn things because they will be tested, and when the fear of failure is a major consideration' (*ibid.*: 104).

Furthermore, a study conducted by the new economics foundation (nef)<sup>20</sup> in respect of young people found that within a matter of a few weeks of entering secondary schools there was a significant drop in 'their ability to be curious and engage in challenging and absorbing activities' (2004: 5). This study also found that: secondary school children seem to become bored, stop learning and no longer enjoy the activities available at school. All of these problems are certain to undermine children's curiosity and satisfaction. The percentage of children who agree with the statement, "I learn a lot at school" falls from 71 per cent to 18 per cent between primary and secondary. Responses to "I enjoy school activities" drops from 65 per cent to 18 per cent'. In addition, they found that, 'well-being falls substantially as children get older. When comparing 9–11-year-olds with 12-15-year-olds, average scores for life satisfaction and curiosity fall by five per cent and ten per cent respectively (*ibid.*: 5).

### 5.3.3 Young people's well-being and ability to flourish in the present system

I will now explore children and young people's sense of well-being more generally and how their experience of school in different ways continues to be a barrier to their flourishing. Although we examined well-being in the last chapter, it is worth highlighting a few issues again here. The present school system with its emphasis on standards and success in exams seems to be contributing to a rise in anxiety and stress in children and young people's lives. For example, a study in 2006<sup>21</sup> reported that self-harm is on the increase. Between 1974 and 2004, the rate of adolescent's emotional problems such as anxiety and depression increased by 70% (Colishaw *et al*, 2004: 1350-62). Moreover, the Innocenti Report (UNICEF 2007) found the UK ranked bottom in respect of peer relations for adolescents, where only 40% of British children over the age of 11 described their peers as kind and helpful. Young people's insecurity and stress seems to be on the rise and the standards-driven agenda is to some extent a contributing factor.

We know that stress is a resulting response to over arduous demands which exceed the resources we have to meet them. Children and young people seem to function with varying degrees of success in ever more complex situations. As discussed earlier in this chapter, their ability to make positive decisions is not as refined as it could be. The education system, if not corroborating the difficult circumstances of young people, is certainly not helping to ameliorate their position by enabling them to make sense of their life in the context of flourishing, and to make decisions in favour of this. To this extent, we must seek broader ways

of engaging in education which encourage reflection, for planning, monitoring and reviewing, informed by the Capabilities Approach.

## Summary

In Chapter 5, I have suggested that children and young people continue to face complex issues in their life which require them to make decisions in favour of their own and their communities' flourishing. Moreover, as borne out by continued poor outcomes in education, health and well-being, the statistics indicate that many children and young people continue to be unprepared to meet these challenges. Despite this troubling situation, which is particularly acute in areas of multiple deprivation, children and young people need to prepare for a future where globalisation is the new reality and digital technology a significant vehicle for connectedness and innovation. They will have to understand what unites human beings in this diverse global society and seek to understand others beyond their own culture or setting. Preparing to flourish in this environment demands that they are able to hone their desires and deliberations in the context of shared human qualities, in order to make judgements in favour of flourishing. In this way they will develop moral seriousness in their decision-making and agency. Combined with this ability they require important psychosocial resources to be curious, motivated and resilient, to remain empathetic, to accomplish deliberated trust, and to develop an attitude in favour of co-operation. As has been suggested in this chapter, developing their capability for practical reasoning and affiliation is significant for this development.

Also described in this chapter are some of the existing barriers present in education which prevent children and young people from success. What is clear from significant educational reviews such as the Nuffield Review (2009) and Cambridge Primary Review (2010), is that this reality is exacerbated by the education policy and structure which prescribes their provision and which holds them accountable. From the evidence gathered here, it seems that the Standards Agenda and the structures developed since the onset of the *National Curriculum* in 1988, have not brought about the flourishing which children and young people require. Standards remain a barrier to success for too many youngsters. In addition, the evidence indicates that young people are less curious, more stressed and anxious, and have lower well-being than their statistical neighbours in the OECD countries. Moreover, the business language that has permeated education adds to the performative culture and does not foster the human

capabilities which young people need to develop in order to flourish. This language of performativity does not promote the moral seriousness necessary for a 21<sup>st</sup> century globalised society, as called for by Nussbaum (1997), Pring and Pollard (2011).

In preference to the performative approach, the Capabilities Approach could give space in education for nurturing practical reasoning and affiliation to help children and young people become wise global citizens. In Chapter 6, I propose a flexible method of reflective practice in education which includes an ethical dimension informed by the Capabilities Approach.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to Pring and Pollard (2011), Peter Tymms questions the concept of standards as it is used today. Tymms illustrates that the current debate on standards is in fact misleading, and that the statutory test data cannot be safely used to monitor standards over time. He urges the government to review what it means by standards and how tests reflect those standards (2004: 477-94).

<sup>2</sup> *Inequalities in educational outcomes among children aged 3 to 16* (Goodman *et al.*, 2009). According to this final report in 2009 for the National Equality Panel, there exist significant links between children and young people living in areas of high IMD and lower educational achievement. As this study indicates, given that higher cognitive development and educational achievement are correlated with better health and psychological well-being outcomes, this is a worrying inequality which must be addressed (Goodman *et al.*, 2009: 5, 32).  
<http://sta.geo.useconnect.co.uk/pdf/Inequalities%20in%20education%20outcomes%20among%20children.pdf> (Last Accessed 04/05/12).

<sup>3</sup> These statistics are taken from OECD (2009) *Doing Better for Children, Country highlights*.  
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/21/6/43590251.pdf> (Last accessed 15/02/11).

<sup>4</sup> *Inequalities in educational outcomes among children aged 3 to 16* (Goodman *et al.*, 2009: 25).  
<http://sta.geo.useconnect.co.uk/pdf/Inequalities%20in%20education%20outcomes%20among%20children.pdf> (Last Accessed 04/05/12).

<sup>5</sup> These references were taken from the *Health at a Glance 2009: OECD indicators*. In respect of non medical determinants of health, in particular smoking and alcohol consumption at age 15. [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/health-at-a-glance-2009\\_health\\_glance-2009-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/health-at-a-glance-2009_health_glance-2009-en) (Last accessed 15/02/11).

<sup>6</sup> Taken from the guardian.co.uk. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/feb/24/teenage-pregnancy-rates-2008> (Last accessed 15/02/11).

<sup>7</sup> *The Innocenti Report* for UNICEF (2007) on the well-being of children and adolescents, ranked the UK worst overall out of twenty-one OECD nations on a range of indicators

<sup>8</sup> The ongoing World Health Organisation research into the Social Determinants of Health seek ongoing improvements in educational outcomes as a positive determinant of health.  
[http://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/en/](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/)

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<sup>9</sup> Pring and Pollard present twelve challenges and twelve principles to enable future policy formulation to meet those challenges, as outlined below (2011: 6-7).

<http://www.tlrp.org/educationforall/EducationForAll.pdf> (Last accessed 04/05/12)

1. Ministers, political advisers, civil servants and educational professionals should acquaint themselves with recent history of education in order to build cumulatively on worthwhile successes and to avoid repeating mistakes.
2. Policy and frameworks of entitlement should reflect the broad aims of education persons, such as: understanding of the physical, social and economic worlds, practical capabilities, economic utility, moral seriousness, sense of community, collaboration and justice, sense of fulfilment, and motivation to continue learning even to 'the fourth age'.
3. In pursuing educational aims, the system of education should recognise the significance of particular economic, social and personal circumstances, and thus enable flexible adaptation of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to meet specific needs.
4. 'Biology is not destiny'. Still more and better investment in the early years is crucial but the brain remains adaptable from experiences and learning opportunities throughout life.
5. A wider vision of education should respect and reward the practical as well as the academic, informal and experiential as well as formal learning, and should draw upon the wide range of expertise within the community.
6. A curriculum entitlement framework should be designed to introduce young people to subjects and the broad domains of knowledge, to practical capabilities and skills, to a sense of achievement, to the 'big issues' which confront society and to the knowledge and dispositions for active citizenship, yet be flexible enough for teachers to adapt appropriately.
7. Teachers' expertise in the enhancement of learning should be supported and challenged by provision for continuing professional development in all phases of education and by a single system of qualified teacher status.
8. The different purposes of assessment (i.e. supporting different kinds of learning, holding the system accountable and certifying achievements) require different and appropriate modes of assessment, and maintenance of appropriate balance between them.
9. Local collaborative and democratic learning partnerships (embracing schools, further education colleges, universities, employers, independent training providers, and voluntary bodies) should be established to promote continuity in provision for lifelong learning.
10. Funding should be directed to locally developed partnerships, with regional oversight by local authorities which will be in a position to understand the educational and training needs of the different phases and communities.
11. Qualifications should reflect the aims of learning, including the practical, informal and experiential, and should provide a framework which is enabling, clear and stable.
12. The Government should ensure necessary resources, teacher supply, legal frameworks, curriculum entitlement and overall accountability, but place responsibility for detailed provision with institutions, partnerships and authorities in particular localities.

<sup>10</sup> For a more in-depth analysis refer to Nussbaum's article (2003: 33-59): Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice, in *Feminist Economics* 9:2/3. Here, Nussbaum articulates objections to a utilitarian approach to assessment in the area of quality of life and human flourishing. She examines Sen's contribution to the debate about human capabilities and his arguments against utility of resources as a sound basis for assessment specifically applied to the area of gender equality. Note that the same argument applies when human capabilities are utilised for assessment of realising potential in education and notions of equality therein.

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- <sup>11</sup> Nussbaum explores this idea in several articles, and provides ways in which capabilities and functions are individuated sensitive to experience and choice (1993, 1995).
- <sup>12</sup> For further detail on research and practice regarding student voice, including the benefits and continuing challenges, see Burton, Smith and Woods (2010) and Fielding (2004, 2007).
- <sup>13</sup> There are various examples where students are developing as enquirers, reflecting and engaging in shaping their learning environment. I am leading work in the UK where in North Tyneside schools in the primary and the secondary stage, children and young people are engaged and trained as student researchers of learning in their setting, and students are involved in a daily cycle of reflective practice.
- <sup>14</sup> Here, Silcock (1996) speaks with reference to Galton's factory models of learning, which claim that successful education will follow from a firm control by teachers over what pupils do, and an associated firm control by governments over what teachers do.
- <sup>15</sup> <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/CM%207980> (Last accessed 04/05/12).
- <sup>16</sup> Reference from an article by P. Henshaw, <http://anthonywilson.posterous.com/the-new-curriculum-a-baffling-detour-to-the-1> (Last accessed 15/04/11).
- <sup>17</sup> These figures were last accessed on 23/02/11, from the Department of Education Website: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000985/index.shtml>
- <sup>18</sup> In particular, the study found that in respect of boys, though 70% enjoyed reading stories in 1998 this had decreased to 55% in 2003.
- <sup>19</sup> <http://timss.bc.edu/pirls2006/index.html> (Last accessed 23/02/11).
- <sup>20</sup> [http://www.neweconomics.org/sites/neweconomics.org/files/The\\_Power\\_and\\_Potential\\_of\\_Well-Being\\_Indicators\\_1.pdf](http://www.neweconomics.org/sites/neweconomics.org/files/The_Power_and_Potential_of_Well-Being_Indicators_1.pdf) (Last accessed 23/02/11).
- <sup>21</sup> *Truth Hurts: Report of the National Inquiry into Self-harm among Young People*, Mental Health Foundation, 2006. This study finds that self-harm is a 'hidden epidemic' (2006: 8). [http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/content/assets/PDF/publications/truth\\_hurts.pdf?view=Standard](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/content/assets/PDF/publications/truth_hurts.pdf?view=Standard) (Last accessed 04/05/12).

## Chapter 6

### The importance of reflection in education within the Capabilities Approach

Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. (Freire, [1970]1996: 62).

#### Introduction

Solutions and tools have been made available to teachers for some years in an effort to improve learning and achieve educational success (still measured in numerical standardised form). Some of these efforts for improvement focus on interventions such as: enhancing thinking or meta-cognition, using *Habits of Mind* (Art Costa); ensuring high levels of challenge in lessons, using *Magenta Principles* (Mike Hughes); or, encouraging engagement for learning, using *Kagan Structures* (Spencer Kagan). These strategies have become popular in schools and are often applied mechanistically by following a toolkit recipe in service of an approach to learning that is driven by technical outputs, defined by utility and endorsed by the language of business. Here, the opportunity in education is often lost to nurture much needed reflection which includes an ethical dimension to consider what living well and doing well entail within and beyond the confines of school or university.

The Capabilities Approach which stands against education for utility alone, could ground and guide education theory and practice. This approach, providing a framework for flexible reflection could enable deep sensitive understanding that helps children and young people improve their learning for life, individually and collaboratively. Recent research commissioned by the Sutton Trust (Higgins *et al.*, 2011) emphasises the importance of learners being able 'to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning' (2011: 19). Linked to this, *how* teaching and learning occurs, is critical to overcoming the learning barriers which children and young people experience, particularly those who live in economic disadvantage. I propose that reflective practice in education within the Capabilities Approach could begin to make inroads in this area.

In this thesis I have argued in favour of an understanding of human flourishing based on Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia* and its constituent parts. Having identified the Capabilities Approach as a contemporary development which builds on Aristotle's philosophy, I have suggested that when embraced by education it could offer a much needed alternative to the existing philosophy defined by performativity. As I argued in Chapter 5, the Capabilities Approach could be as valuable in education as Sen, Nussbaum and others recognise it to be in economics in measures of human development. Significantly, the Capabilities Approach continues to influence political discussions, analysis, and work, as exemplified in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)<sup>1</sup>.

In this chapter, the principal aim is to defend reflection within the Capabilities Approach as helpful in education, with its Aristotelian roots and its focus on *phronēsis* (understood as practical reason or practical wisdom) which requires a balance between thought and emotion. In terms of progressive theories, the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach contributes an explicit ethical dimension. I suggest that reflection within this approach can enrich progressive accounts of education. In respect of practice and evaluation, this approach encourages a synthesis between cognition, desires and emotions and affords an ethical framework within which to make judgements. Reflection within the Capabilities Approach could help children and young people to develop understanding and insight, individually and with others. Importantly, through the insight and understanding they gain from reflection of this kind, children, young people and adults could expand their ability for wise action in favour of their own and societal flourishing. In particular, this kind of reflection is situated in the particular context and thought through with sensitivity to what human beings by nature share.

In agreement with Mahbub ul Haq, the founder of the Human Development Report, this thesis maintains that 'the objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives'<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, this aim could be understood within the context of flourishing as defined by Aristotle and adopted by the contemporary Capabilities Approach. As described in Chapter 5, stubborn barriers to flourishing for our children and young people persist in the UK. Moreover, many educationists agree that the education system as it stands in England is a contributing factor which exacerbates this situation (Pring *et al.* 2009).

The UNDP maintains that 'human development is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accord with their



needs and interests'<sup>3</sup>. As UNDP states, 'this way of looking at development, often forgotten in the immediate concern with accumulating commodities and financial wealth, is not new. Philosophers, economists and political leaders have long emphasised human well-being as the purpose, the end, of development'<sup>4</sup>. Yet education, as constrained by government policy, continues to eclipse this principle with the immediate concern for improving standards using rigid prescribed measures which seek only to prepare children and young people for economic success. However, as the evidence makes clear from those not in education, employment or training (NEET), even this narrow focus has not achieved its target of improving a significant minority of young people's prospects for economic success (Pring *et al.*, 2009: 45-46).

The need for change is strongly voiced by prominent academics in education who have led recent reviews and who have found the present utilitarian approach wanting (Pring *et al.*, 2009; Alexander *et al.*, 2010; Pring and Pollard, 2011). Alongside others, this thesis critiques the Standards Agenda in education which confines learning to reaching standardised numerical targets which are coarsely designed. In preference, it seeks to offer realistic alternatives to nurture learning in respect of flourishing, within the Capabilities Approach. Therefore, in this chapter I put forward a flexible method of reflective practice to help children and young people learn and make choices in favour of their flourishing.

In this chapter, reflective practice will refer particularly to students' learning with respect to developing a flexible approach that includes the ethical dimension which could help young people flourish. Although inter-connected with reflective practice in teaching, for example, as espoused by Donald Schön in his book, *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983), this chapter does not attempt to engage with practitioner reflection-in-action, except where it intercepts directly with issues concerning students' reflective practice.

In Chapter 6 therefore, I will focus first on the evidence from education reviews across the learning stages (Pring, 2009; Alexander, 2010; Pring and Pollard, 2011), and the changes advocated by these researchers which give reason for hope, and which assign credence to this thesis. Second, I will attempt to defend the importance of reflection within the Capabilities Approach and explore its provenance in education. In particular I will: (1) consider its similarities with progressive theories of education, such as Dewey's and Bruner's and seek guidance from these; (2) explain why a progressive approach based on human capabilities, is flexible and child-centred, and yet does not make the mistake of focusing on the child at the expense of learning towards success; and, (3) critique the tendency of a mechanistic method

of reflective practice and the imperialism of the collaborative approach in learning. Third, I will suggest that this flexible kind of reflection includes an ethical dimension at the heart of learning which dislodges simplistic notions of reflective practice.

## **6.1 A reason for hope and a call for change**

### **6.1.1 A long history of criticism of the narrow utilitarian view in education**

Early in the twentieth century academics such as Dewey involved in education were already challenging the narrow objective in schooling of imparting disconnected knowledge of particular subjects to children and young people. As part of this challenge, in the 1970s, Pring writes of the need for developing knowledge of mind, where he defines mind 'as a shorthand form of referring to the many, wide ranging abilities, capacities, tendencies that explain how people act and react and that at the same time seem to escape explanation in purely physical terms' (1976: 7). As Pring maintained, education should be about more than imparting disconnected pieces of knowledge or instruction and should be about educating in a different sense, which does not include drilling students. Consequently, in the sense that Pring advocated, educating should be concerned with the development of the following qualities which constitute the life of a person: 'thoughtful, imaginative, intelligent, sensitive, persevering, strong-willed, affectionate, and so on' (*ibid.*: 7).

Over ten years later and with the onset of a prescribed *National Curriculum*, Pring (1989) articulated the need for a broader approach in education than that provided by *National Curriculum*. This broader approach involves nurturing 'human qualities' or capabilities which enable young people to 'understand themselves, other people and the world around them, and therefore assume some measure of control over their own life and destiny' (*ibid.*: 98). It is about young people 'acquiring understanding and insight' and 'being able to translate those insights into meaningful courses of action' (*ibid.*: 98). Education, in this sense, 'is concerned with helping people to think and to understand. It is about *empowering* them – giving them the mental tools to reflect, to reason, to argue and to solve problems' (*ibid.*: 98).

Pring's thesis considers the curriculum 'as the learning experiences that are planned within the school' (*ibid.*: 2). Like others since (Nuffield Review, 2009; Education for All, 2011), Pring is wise to seek a balance in the curriculum between 'subjects, personal relevance and social utility' (1989: 100). He recognises that in order to arrive at such a balance, the starting point must be a clear understanding of the values or aims which underpin the purpose of education, from which the definition of an educated person is formed. For example, three important traditions in education have varied views based on differing values and aims as their starting point. The first view values subjects above all, and is characterised by a tradition which considers primordial 'the educated person to be one who has been initiated into the forms of knowledge that are represented by long-established subjects' (*ibid.*: 99). The second view, focuses on personal relevance as most valuable and therefore 'starts not with subjects, but with what it means to be, to grow, and to be effective as a person' (*ibid.*: 100). And thirdly, there is the view that 'social utility' as the prime concern for learning, should seek to establish the skills and knowledge required by society to meet the 'job vacancies' and 'future manpower planning targets' (*ibid.*: 100). Arriving at a balance between these three is a complex matter.

The concerns voiced by Pring regarding the *National Curriculum* were quite valid, both in respect of the over-prescription in terms of curriculum and assessment and its overemphasis on utility (1989: 69-96), and with regard to the lack of debate about which tradition and whose values should underpin education in the first place (*ibid.*: 97-11). The need which the *National Curriculum* aimed to meet was that of improving education, through an agreed curriculum framework, with a greater degree of prescription, and with more focused government direction. The evidence which gave rise to it suggested that 'education ... was not coming up to standard: it was not meeting the needs of society, especially industry, and it was not enabling young people to get the best out of life' (*ibid.*: 28). This high degree of prescription and narrowness of curriculum has since been addressed in England with the proposals in *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003). Through these proposals the government gave 'statutory entitlement to a broader curriculum, encouraged wider participation, promoted 'personalisation' of learning, and created an integration of social, health and educational services' (Nuffield Review, 2009: 2).

However, as the Nuffield Review suggests, 'despite what has been achieved', 'problems stubbornly remain' which continue to affect young people's progress and ability to succeed (2009: 3). 'There is continuing low achievement for many, lack of social mobility, [and] constant complaints from employers and others about the standards of those leaving

education' (*ibid.*: 3). In addition the evidence of poor outcomes both in education and in health and well-being highlighted in Chapter 5, support this view. Furthermore, the concerns which Pring voiced in 1989 with respect to a lack of debate and transparency about the aims or ethical dimension in education, continue to be a cause of concern voiced in major educational reviews such as the Nuffield Review (Pring *et al.*, 2009), the Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander *et al.*, 2010), and most recently the review of reviews, Education for All (Pring and Pollard, 2011).

#### 6.1.2 The Nuffield Review of education for 14-19 year olds (2009)

The Nuffield Review published in 2009, was a result of five years of research from a varied team of academics with extensive experience, whose recommendations were drawn from a large number of publications (2009: 209-216). Consistent with the long history of concern outlined above, this review also voices concern about the lack of an explicit ethical dimension in education policy and practice. In addition there are concerns about the narrowness of the curriculum (*ibid.*: 98-103) and assessment procedures which constrain both teachers and learners (*ibid.*: 60-64), and which are fuelled by business language (*ibid.*: 16, 203) unsuitable for nurturing 'educated 19 year olds in this day and age' (*ibid.*: 12, 200).

This review advocates a broader vision of learning and consequently a broader vision of assessment (2009: 204-205), which respects teachers (*ibid.*: 86-88, 205), which listens and includes the voice of young people (*ibid.*: 72-74), and which provides a curriculum framework for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (*ibid.*: 205). As a result it calls for a more 'reflective and participative approach to policy' (*ibid.*: 207), with a clear vision of education and the ethical dimension which guides it. This ethical dimension must take account of and be able to enable teachers and learners to nurture profound respect for the whole person (not just the narrowly conceived 'skills for economic prosperity'), irrespective of ability or ethnic and social background, and in which the learning contributes to a more just and cohesive society.' (*ibid.*: 208). It must have 'system performance indicators 'fit for purpose' in which measures of success reflect the range of educational aims', and consequently a 'redistribution of power and decision-making' which includes the learner and the teacher's voice (*ibid.*: 208).

Although this review articulates the need for regaining the ethical dimension in education and making it explicit, it does not engage with the nature of this dimension and a flexible

framework which enables this dimension to be developed in education. This is what this thesis seeks to do by suggesting the Capabilities Approach, based on Aristotle's philosophy as a sound ethical framework for education.

### 6.1.3 The Cambridge Primary Review (2010)

The theme of the need for an ethical dimension which goes beyond utility is again voiced in this review of primary education published in 2010, *Children, their World, their Education*. Robin Alexander<sup>5</sup>, speaking in 2010, with regard to recommendations made for primary education as a result of evidence from the Cambridge Review, urges us to incorporate a fuller definition of standards which embraces a broader view of what education is for and which recognises the moral dimension. He quotes Warwick Mansell for support in this claim.

The word 'standards' ... has been routinely abused in the last few years, by politicians and others. 'Raising standards' ... is implied to stand for improving the *overall quality of education* in our schools. That, in the public mind ... is what the phrase means. The reality ... however, is that 'raising standards' means raising test scores, as measured by a set of relatively narrow indicators laid down more or less unilaterally by ministers, and often subject to disproportionate influence by the performance of a small group of schools. These scores represent only a sub-set of schools' work. Therefore it is not clear that they stand, reliably, for schools' overall quality. The two meanings are not interchangeable, and should not be treated as such. (Mansell, 2007: 26).

In an attempt to redress this imbalance and as a result of the complete findings from the Cambridge Primary Review, eleven policy priorities for primary education were published and commended to political leaders and schools<sup>6</sup>.

Some of these recommendations are closely aligned with the spirit of the Capabilities Approach. For example, to name a few: the importance of ensuring children are not in poverty and have well-being as well as attain in education; ensuring the UN convention of the Rights of the Child is taken seriously as we develop authentic student voice; ensuring a wider curriculum and life-long learning, thereby taking into account value in areas other than those narrowly viewed as indicative of quality now; recognising that education is at the heart a moral matter; and replacing the pedagogy of official recipe by pedagogies of repertoire and principle. And

this is particularly important, since as Alexander (2010: 14) reminds us, 'Children will not learn to think for themselves if their teachers are expected merely to do as they are told'. These policies if adopted resonate with the Capabilities Approach in education, which this thesis proposes. Reflective practice, the focus of this chapter, is one vehicle for these proposals becoming a reality in education.

#### 6.1.4 Education for All: Evidence from the past, principles for the future (2011)

This 'review of reviews' was led by Richard Pring and Andrew Pollard, two leading academics in this field. The goal of this review was 'to highlight enduring issues and challenges which face policy-makers in contemplating education in England and to suggest principles which might inform future decision-making' (Pring and Pollard, 2011: 5). The report offers twelve suggestions and principles for consideration in future policy formulation. The Review draws upon evidence from the Cambridge Primary Review (2010) and the Nuffield Review (2009), mentioned above. In addition to these, it draws on evidence from other reviews, namely: *Learning Through life* (2009), an enquiry into the future of lifelong learning; *Learning through Life: Future Challenges* (2008), a review of mental capital and well-being; *Now We are 50* (2008), key findings from the National Child Development Study; and, 12 Teaching and Learning Research Programme commentaries published between 2006 – 2010 (*ibid.*: 8-9).

Like previous reviews it asks the question 'what is education for?' and suggests that central to all the reviews from which it draws evidence 'were deliberations about the values which implicitly or explicitly direct educational policy and practice' (2011: 15). Again, it highlights the issue that the 'aims of education are too often seen only in terms of economic and academic success'. It also stresses that 'there is a need to consider the development of the 'whole person'. It voices concern that those aims 'too often focus on individual achievement rather than on the public good', and emphasises the broader purpose and wider benefits of learning, such as 'a concern for the well-being of each person'. Therefore this review considers 'mental good health' as in part an educational matter, 'too often ignored in the provision of formal learning' (*ibid.*: 15-16).

*Education for All* (2011), draws attention to the moral dimension in education which has tended to be neglected in many government documents in recent years. As the review argues: 'values, even when unexamined, still shape in detail the structure and content of education

and training ‘from cradle to grave’ (*ibid.*: 16). The critical problem is that the widely accepted yet unexamined ethical dimension to which the review refers here, has been one of utility or resources. This unexamined aim has resulted in every day practices which follow from an over-emphasis on performance alone. For example this is seen in the narrow regime of SATs tests and consequent impoverishment of learning at the primary stage (2011: 39-40; Cambridge Primary Review, 2010: 16), a narrow view of assessment which categorises as failures the 50% of pupils who do not achieve the targets (Nuffield Review, 2009: 80, 82), and a neglect of less measurable aims such as personal and social well-being as mentioned in the review of Mental Capital and Well-being examined in this review of reviews.

Instead of this unexamined view informed by a utilitarian philosophy, what we need to develop, which would be in line with the wishes of the reviews outlined here, and which would begin to address the stubborn issues that persist in society, is an explicit ethical dimension framed by human capabilities and informed by a shared humanity. Such a view is that expressed by Nussbaum in her development of the Capabilities Approach, which has been widely applied by the United Nations Development Programme, and which education would do well to embrace. It is this philosophical grounding in the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach which this thesis espouses and which this and Chapter 7 explores and applies through reflective practice in education. As this review of reviews (Pring and Pollard, 2011) identifies, what we seek is ‘the vision of society in which learning plays its full role in personal growth and emancipation, prosperity, solidarity and global responsibility’ (*ibid.*: 16).

Developing reflective practice informed by the Capabilities Approach focuses education in this direction, and provides a model which is both flexible enough to meet individual need, and based upon general principles which transcend the individual, context and culture.

## **6.2 Reflective practice within the Capabilities Approach**

### **6.2.1 The dangers of a one-dimensional view of cognition**

A myth is still popular today which maintains that the scientific paradigm should be the only one used to explain progress, capable of producing the answers to questions of ultimate meaning for nature, humanity and the laws that give shape to our existence as we find it. However, many have now questioned this scientific paradigm as the sole window for

understanding and explanation, and have even found it to have a diminished role in explaining progress or making sense of life (Nisbet, 2005: 37). Answering questions of ultimate meaning, or ethics, or more simply answering questions which occur in cross cultural discourse, or even between two people of the same culture are not easily answered using the language of science alone.

People are ever more dissatisfied with their incapacity to reflect in a satisfying way into these questions of crucial importance. They seek a framework for meaningful discourse about complex issues and wish to be able to make positive decisions in favour of their happiness, yet they often lack a sensitive process for so doing. As the theologian Langdon Gilkey reminds us:

For now our questions about the meaning of our work and our lives, of the significance and insignificance of what we are and do ... have no framework in which to find an answer. Above all, our confidence in our own history and so ourselves as a community have been badly shaken: that confidence was based on the assurance that our science and technology were establishing the grounds for a fuller humanity everywhere. Of this hope in the future we are now much less sure. Science and technology seem to be capable of making the world ... inhuman, soulless. (Gilkey, 1981: 24).

By restricting themselves to the paradigm of science and excluding other methods of explanation as valid or helpful, people and societies often believe they will arrive at simple concrete answers about complex issues. Implementing a *fixed rule* such as this, many believe will enable them to answer complex questions about life, their reality, and how to live.

In terms of education research, methods in respect of reflective practice in this area, are too often based on a scientific process, often applied mechanically, with clear cut criteria for success. For this reason, regarding action research and evaluating experimental teaching, Stake and Schwandt remind us of the need to keep a balance between viewing quality as measured and quality as experienced. Quality as measured can be too distanced from experience, and by contrast the discernment of quality in quality as experienced, is a form of practically embodied knowledge – ‘at once both cognitive and emotional’ (2006: 404–418). Whether thinking about education research specifically, or reflective practice in teaching and learning *per se*, structured processes by which we can make sense of things should be ones which are pliable enough to mould themselves to the questions and concerns of the enquiry in order to yield as close an answer as is possible to ascertain in the particular situation.



### 6.2.2 A flexible method of reflection enabling a richer view of cognition

When thinking, working things out, endeavouring to make sense of issues, and when engaging in reflective practice to this end, we should consider Aristotle's example of the stone mason's 'rule' in Lesbos (NE 1137b 29-31). This rule was designed to adjust itself to the intricacies required for each stone carving to be realised, as applied and interpreted by the stone masons. Today, I believe a tool such as this continues to provide invaluable guidance for carpenters and stone masons alike.

It is this picture of a *Lesbian* rule (Lucas, 1955) which lends itself to be applied to the reflective practice model which I propose. This rule is also of relevance when we come to discuss evaluation in Chapter 8. We would be wise to listen to Aristotle's advice when embarking on a method of reflective practice in education. Aristotle maintains that 'our account would be adequate, if we achieved a degree of precision appropriate to the underlying material; for precision must not be sought to the same degree in all accounts of things, any more than it is by the craftsmen in the things they are producing' (NE 1094b 10-15).

Lucas argues that when considering judgements and engaging in dialogue about how we should live or what we should do in a particular instance, the situation is very complex (1995). He recommends we acknowledge that when considering a particular situation with reference to a general rule 'finitude cannot measure what cannot be confined, and limitations of consistency are to be construed not as a rigid *regulus* but as a *Lesbian* rule' (1955: 213). For example, we might consider an example in education where secondary students are asked to make judgements in biology lessons about whether experiments on embryos of less than 6 weeks are always a positive undertaking for society, or even whether the findings from these experiments will enable human beings to flourish. Making judgments in respect of this example might not lend itself to a formulaic style method of reflection where there is a rigid rule from which the answer is made available.

The fact that this question or enquiry involves so many complex issues at once which need to be contextualised makes it very difficult to see how an absolute correct answer, or even a clear answer is possible to achieve. Instead even though we need to acknowledge the importance of such a debate and enquiry and seek as precise an answer as is possible in the situation, it is also essential to recognise that complete precision is not an appropriate paradigm in this case. In the same way, a general rule about what constitutes human thriving can only be interpreted in

the particular situation being discussed, which in turn may shape the rule itself. This does not mean that we are not able to reach deep understanding about what human flourishing entails, but simply that such understanding as we acquire will not always be complete, or transparent, or precise in the formulaic sense.

Nevertheless, the process of engaging with such important questions of human development, scientific progress, and societal beliefs, all require detailed exploration through meaningful dialogue. The capabilities list about what we share as human beings in terms of capabilities to be developed, could enable students to reflect deeply about such issues and to test their ideas with one another against a flexible *rule* based on shared principles which this framework provides. When reflecting in this flexible way becomes routine for students, they begin to acquire greater sophistication in their ability to make judgements within this framework of a shared humanity. They then begin to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning and judgements more effectively, and within the ethical dimension of human flourishing for themselves and society at large. This could be significant since these students will be the scientists of the future, working to enhance or diminish human flourishing with their scientific advancements and their ramifications for action.

It seems to me that the reviews outlined earlier all voice concerns about the utilitarian approach which guides education. Furthermore, there are concerns about the degree of precision which is demanded from education, fuelled by this philosophy and the business language which it has adopted. The reviews all identify the need for a broader view of an educated person than the present rigid paradigm of precise standards, targets and outcomes demands. Moreover they highlight the fact that this narrow view leads to a diminished understanding of what we can know and learn, reduced to easily measured standardised tests and assessed against equally crude, if precise indicators.

What is evident from Aristototle's *Lesbian* rule (Lucas, 1955) is that people are able to explore complex issues by reflecting about these, and can develop a degree of cognition in respect of these using such a flexible rule for reflection. This is the way that effective democratic debate has been conducted down the ages. Notwithstanding, the present educational system continues to demand a one dimensional paradigm in respect of cognition which requires precision confined to technical reason that is inappropriate here.

Instead, the Aristotelian view and the Capabilities Approach which builds on it, recognises that given the complexity of the human condition, cognition requires more than the development of technical reason alone. Instead, cognition must include emotions or desires within it. Nussbaum describes this synthesis of emotions and reason as 'deliberated desire' (1990: 78-9). In this fuller sense, cognition is multidimensional, and since it incorporates the less easily measurable aspect of emotions or desires, cognition in this sense cannot be understood as purely one dimensional in respect of reason. This is the view of cognition which Aristotle puts forward which was explored in Chapter 2 regarding human capability, function, and our shared nature. This is where reflective practice becomes essential in order to notice, consider and take account of all the dimensions within cognition which yield a richer account of reality, even if less precise. Such a flexible process of reflection enables us to plan, monitor, and evaluate situations and issues with finesse.

### 6.2.3 Drawing upon tradition in education for models of reflective practice

A model of learning which is broader and which the present reviews outlined seek, takes the liberal arts seriously for the preparation of informed, independent and sympathetic democratic citizens. This view draws on this richer view of cognition which stems from an ancient western philosophical tradition of which the Greeks were very influential. I will discuss this ancient heritage further in Chapter 7. More recently in history, education theoreticians and practitioners, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778), Pestalozzi (1746 – 1827), Froebel (1782 – 1852), and John Dewey (1869-1952), have all argued in their distinctive ways in favour of this broader view, considering education beyond the pure assimilation of facts and traditions towards a specific utilitarian end. They argue in favour of learning that challenges the mind through active participation in reflection in order to enable children and young people to become active, competent, critical and caring persons in a complex world.

The nuances between these thinkers and others of their time, and their influence on contemporary education, is not the focus of this thesis. However for the purposes of this thesis, the philosopher John Dewey and the psychologist Jerome Bruner will be the principal sources of inspiration in the proposals for reflective practice offered here, both in terms of individuals and groups.

In addition to the reflective practice steps developed by Dewey, and the enquiry cycle developed by Bruner, the principal adaptation proposed in this thesis is that of embracing the Capabilities Approach with its ethical dimension. This kind of reflection, whether undertaken by the student or teacher, is structured by its philosophical framework which includes an ethical dimension. I suggest that the flexible model of reflection discussed in Chapter 7, could be flexible enough to meet the needs of the individual child and allow assessments to be made within the framework offered by the Capabilities Approach.

With regards to offering a practical and flexible model for reflective enquiry of various forms, I shall draw on Dewey and Bruner and gather inspiration from their ideas. The reflection model proposed in Chapter 7, seeks to embrace a balance between desires, emotions and cognition. As I argue, in Bruner's position there is a tendency towards an overemphasis on the cognitive, manifested today in the promotion of 'thinking skills'<sup>7</sup>, although there is a place for intuition. Dewey also provides helpful steps for reflective practice, although practical guidance for its implementation could be stronger, as could be the synthesis between reason and emotion for cognition. This thesis further develops Dewey's ideas about the importance of qualities for reflective practice. By embracing the Capabilities Approach in reflective practice, this thesis seeks to make explicit the ethical dimension within the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach so important for reflection. The ethical dimension in education, guided by the Aristotelian philosophy, could allow for a rich and variegated account of human nature, society and flourishing which structures reflection. It also encourages us include emotions as integral to good thinking.

In Chapter 7 therefore, I set out to extend Dewey's position using the Capabilities Approach with reference to the Greco-Roman view of philosophy as a way of life, and to the spiritual thinking of the Jesuit tradition in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Importantly this Jesuit tradition which has its roots in the Greco-Roman view, was implemented with success at the time in Europe, China and beyond, and continues to thrive today. I attempt to argue that this model for reflection has much to offer contemporary education.

#### 6.2.4 Reflective practice: Dewey and Bruner

Nussbaum, reminds us in her writing that Dewey was one of the most influential and theoretically distinguished American practitioners of Socratic education (2010: 64). For Dewey,

children need to learn to take charge of their own thinking and to engage with the world in a curious and critical spirit, and an important issue with some conventional technical methods of education is the passivity it encourages in students. Instead, as Dewey points out, 'vigour of thought and inquiry' is crucial for the development of flourishing societies. Today, even economists such as Amartya Sen agree with this claim, as he maintains in respect of progress in society that deliberation (meaningful dialogue) is fundamental to its development (2009: 235-252).

Although Dewey (1915: 112-15) was concerned with the issues of his time, some of these issues persist today to varying degrees and continue to be challenges for education. He argues that 'Schools have been treated as places for ... absorbing, and [this] has been preferred to analyzing, sifting, and active problem-solving. Asking students to be passive listeners not only fails to develop their active critical faculties, it positively weakens them' (1915: 11). Instead, what Dewey sought from students was 'the change from more or less passive and inert reciprocity and restraint to one of buoyant outgoing activity' (*ibid.*: 15). But for Dewey, the critical spirit we seek to develop is not just an intellectual skill but is also an aspect of practical engagement, a stance towards problems in real life and a way of engaging with others to solve these. Dewey emphasised that such a focus on real-life activity is pedagogically useful as well, as children may be more curious and focused than if they are passive recipients. As Dewey describes: 'The great thing ... is that each shall have the education which enables him to see within his daily work all there is in it of large and human significance' (*ibid.*:24). Of necessity this approach insists on human relationships rich in meaning, and curiosity.

Reflective practice is important not only as a tool for teaching, but also as an aim of education. This was certainly the case for Dewey since as he put it: 'it enables us to know what we are about when we act' (1964: 211). As such 'it converts action that is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action' (1964: 211). Similarly, the influential German philosopher Gadamer reminds us of the importance of having 'a particular sensitivity and sensitiveness to situations, and how to behave in them' (1975: 17). The kind of reflective practice which Dewey has in mind requires a model or steps which in turn lead to analysis, evaluation, and to further reflective action.

In respect of developing a flexible model of reflection, akin to that of the *Lesbian* rule (Lucas, 1955) identified earlier in this chapter, we can begin by drawing elements from Dewey and what he has to offer for developing reflective practice. Quoting from Dewey (1973: 494-505),

van Manen (1995: 34) points out the steps which Dewey considers necessary in the process of reflection:

(1) 'perplexity, confusion, doubt' due to the nature of the situation in which one finds oneself; (2) 'conjectural anticipation and tentative interpretation' of given elements or meanings of the situation and their possible consequences; (3) 'examination, inspection exploration, analysis of all attainable considerations' which may define and clarify a problem with which one is confronted; (4) 'elaboration of the tentative hypothesis suggestions'; (5) deciding on 'a plan of action' or 'doing something' about a desired result.' (van Manen, 1995: 34).

As van Manen points out here, it is by following these reflective steps that reflective experience towards reflective action is possible. The proposed flexible model of reflection discussed in Chapter 7 incorporate some of these steps. This thesis goes further than the quotation above intends however, in that it strengthens Dewey's concept of cognition conveyed above, by including emotions and desires as significant elements in the process of making sense with reference to an ethical framework, to be incorporated in any process of reflection.

Turning our attention to Bruner, Dewey's approach to reflective practice is further developed in the neo-Vygotskian thrust of Bruner. As explained by Silcock, Bruner's approach is 'founded, normatively, on Vygotsky's contention that mind is structured by society (1978), rather than society being a product of mind' (1996: 204). I will be using an adapted model of Bruner's cycle of enquiry which he proposed in *The Process of Education* (1960). The adapted reflective enquiry model in this thesis is also supported by Dewey's steps outlined above, as it seeks to balance the collaborative with the individual approach. As the reflective enquiry model proposed in this thesis is guided by the Capabilities Approach, it enables us to keep the balance between the personal ability to make meaning independent of the collaborative, and the collaborative pursuit, as a valid way of further shaping meaning. In fact, one of the important characteristics of enquiry learning through this kind of reflection is the scope it allows for 'self-direction' or 'independent thinking' on the part of the learner (Elliott, 2007: 239-40). The Capabilities Approach nurtures the subjective view together with the social discourse enabled by what we share as human beings, which helps us straddle the debate between insisting on an exclusively constructivist or social-constructivist view respectively (Silcock, 1996).

In respect of Bruner, his contribution stems from an important starting point: that 'Learning should not only take us somewhere, it should allow us later to go further more easily' (1960: 17, 20). Hence, he argues that, 'Mastery of the fundamental ideas of a field involves not only the grasping of general principles, but also the development of an attitude toward learning and inquiry, toward guessing and hunches, toward the possibility of solving problems on one's own'. Bruner maintains that children need to be interested in what they are learning rather than being motivated by external rewards or standardised targets. Hence he believes that, 'Ideally, interest in the material to be learned is the best stimulus to learning, rather than such external goals as grades or later competitive advantage' (1960: 14). Contemporary psychology studies also support the importance of interest for learning, in respect of developing motivation and internal locus of control, as important factors for successful functioning (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 68-78). Nel Noddings (2006) also stresses the importance of being interested, to remember what is learnt:

Usually these people have made connections to things that interest them, and this is, of course, the best way to learn. ... When we are genuinely interested, we listen and read attentively, and we relate everything coming in to existing knowledge that acts as a scheme for categorizing and filing. There is no powerful substitute for real interest. (2006: 24).

For this reason Bruner advocates learning through discovery or enquiry as a form of reflective practice. He considers students' intuitive understanding as a precursor to formal understanding. For him, it is intuition that 'yields hypothesis quickly, that hits on combinations of ideas before their worth is known' (*ibid.*: 60). Bruner defines intuition as 'the act of grasping the meaning, significance or structure of a problem or a situation without explicit reliance on the analytic apparatus of one's craft' (*ibid.*: 60). Once this intuitive step is completed, Bruner believes that 'they should if possible be checked by analytic methods, while at the same time being respected as worthy hypotheses for such checking' (*ibid.*: 58).

This thesis builds on Bruner in its approach to reflective practice as it makes explicit the ethical dimension in this process which is based both on intuition (or desires and emotions) and cognition.

### 6.2.5 Reflective practice that is not mechanistic

The endeavour for reflection, whether with an ethical dimension or not, is not always easy to develop in the school setting. In respect of teachers, Zeichner and Liston warn against the tendency in teacher reflection sometimes promoted by the 'reflective practice bandwagon' (1996: 73) which is mechanistic and individualistic. Instead they advocate reflective practice which provides space for 'challenge and support gained through social interaction' which is important in 'helping teachers clarify what they believe and in gaining the courage to pursue their beliefs' (1996: 76). William, in his research promotes teacher learning communities which he argues help teachers to learn together through reflection and 'begin to develop a new conceptualisation of their practice' (2010: 194). This is not easy and goes beyond technical rationality. Crucially, in an often overly-prescribed schedule, these communities require teachers to make space to reflect on their individual practice and to test their reflections with others to refine practice further.

With regards to learning, educationists such as Taber, also warn us that often in schools today the curriculum is so constraining that only 'lip service' is often paid to developing progressive approaches, and when it is, it is done in a superficial way (2010: 245-50). This is sometimes the case in assessment for learning exercises, such as feedback to which students are asked to respond after minimal reflection. For example, when a piece of maths or writing is returned to students after marking, they often include feedback in the form of a comment in green for praise, and one in red or pink outlining an area for improvement. Students are asked to reflect on this feedback and to respond on how they might improve. However, owing to time constraints this opportunity can often be reduced to mechanics, a tick-the-box approach to assessment for learning. Taber (2010) warns us against any superficial approach, and in respect of the science curriculum in particular, he indicates the following:

If such changes in curriculum are to have the desired effect, then it is important that classroom practice undergoes quite radical changes to adopt new pedagogies (Levinson, 2007), and reflects constructivist principles at its core, not at its edges. (Taber, 2010: 245-50).

It is particularly important that the flexible reflective practice model proposed in this thesis is based on the Capabilities Approach, and provides ways in which this practice can become part of the curriculum and be given space there, even as the curriculum stands today. This would



ensure that any reflection process is given the space required and not merely paid lip service or even worse, be reduced to a mechanistic process. This is supported by the findings of the Nuffield Review (2009: 131), which calls for important aspects of learning such as these to be nurtured beyond examination outcomes. For example, a secondary school in the North East of the UK makes time every day for group reflection on a given current theme either chosen by students or teachers, upon which there is time to think, discuss, and react individually and where a group record of the conversation is kept in a class journal. This ongoing conversation includes everyone in the school community and engages with meaningful issues as a communal 'Thought for the Day'.

#### 6.2.6 The danger of overemphasising the collaborative element of reflective practice

Balancing the importance of the individual and the collective processes of making sense of the world within the Capabilities Approach is essential. However, when the concept of teamwork and collaboration is overemphasised and overshadows the individual process of understanding, we should be concerned. In education and the workplace, teamwork and collaboration are often hailed as the new tools for success (partly fuelled by the myth of the success of the factory model in education). I would agree with Elliott (2007: 238) as he draws on Richard Rorty's insistence that those of us engaged in reflective enquiry 'have a duty to talk to each other, to converse about our views of the world, to use persuasion rather than force, to be tolerant of diversity' (1991: 67). However, it is also true that teamwork and collaboration which are hailed to act as catalysts for change and learning, in reality are beset with difficulties and have a tendency to become superficial and hollow.

For example, with reference to the workplace, Sennett (2008) reminds us of this when he describes how collaboration can be shallow as the workforce is reduced to implementing strategies and plans set out by others in respect of which they cannot exercise their judgement or put their stamp. This could be said to apply to the school as a workplace for teachers and learners alike. Within this spirit of collaboration, the constant requirement to take risks and be open to change can lead to an underlying trend in competition and flux in the workplace and the classroom which can lead to lack of identity, self-worth, and anxiety (Sennett, 2008: 34, 37).

While collaboration is an important element for flourishing, if we are to avoid the concerns articulated by Sennett, the ethical dimension which the Capabilities Approach provides is essential for developing connectedness and co-operation in the belief that every human being is worthy of dignity. This can only be achieved if each individual spends time seeking understanding and making judgements by themselves and with others, rather than solely collaboratively. Individual construction of meaning is a necessary component of making sense and making decisions. If the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation are to be developed, what is sought is a balance between the individual and the collaborative approach.

Where collaborative activities are embraced for reflective practice, another area of concern arises when they are implemented without the scrutiny they deserve. For example, collaborative activities in the classroom using teaching and learning structures such as those put forward by Spencer Kagan (2001)<sup>8</sup> are claimed to 'report positive outcomes for students including increased achievement, improved social skills and relations, and improved classroom climate'. Kagan also claims on the official website<sup>9</sup> that this collaborative approach aligns itself with the many 'mini theories of learning' that there are. For example, the list includes: 'cooperative learning theory', 'multiple intelligence theory', 'brain compatible learning', 'essential elements of effective instruction', 'expectation theory', 'learned optimism theory', 'flow theory', 'Vygotsky's theory', 'behaviour theory', and 'transference theory'. This seems like quite a claim, especially given that some of these theories are not easily reconciled with one another. Putting some of these on the same long list (eg. 'essential elements of effective instruction' and 'cooperative learning theory') would at the very least require some justification. 'Kagan structures' in learning, implemented at certain points where collaboration will enable a deepening understanding of others and which foster trust and respect between the team, can be very effective to enable critical interpretative learning.

Furthermore, it is not in dispute that collaborative activities can promote a sense of co-operation when used at the appropriate time. However, it is worth highlighting that an overemphasis on these activities in education cannot solve all the issues that face children today, from raising their self-esteem to making them more positive, to improving their sense of flow, attainment, and democratic involvement (as Kagan seems to claim as outlined above).

Collaborative activities used to the neglect of individual reflection and critique, confines meaning-making to the social sphere, which may reduce us as human beings as it blinds us to the possibility of making meaning from within which is fundamental (albeit using the

conceptual and language structure which we absorb from the community in which we find ourselves) (Silcock, 1996: 205). Restricting understanding to the social sphere rejects totally the important insights made by thinkers such as Rousseau, Dewey, and psychologist Piaget, which have had such influence on constructivist theories of education. Though we may wish to disagree with aspects of how constructivism is developed and defined, it would be unwise to reject their important contributions altogether and to confine learning to socially constructed learning activities.

While acknowledging the importance of both the individual and the collaborative endeavour for reflection and enquiry which deepen understanding, a balance between the two seems to be fraught with danger. The tendency seems to be to steer towards one or the other to the detriment of the necessary balance. Educationists such as Sfard (1998: 4-13) recognise that for learning to take place, understanding must embrace cross contextual boundaries for its success, and that this requires both participation and understanding by the individual alone. A balance between making sense of life as an individual practice and in collaboration with others, is key for understanding and to transfer our learning from one situation to another.

Our ability to prepare ourselves today to deal with new situations we are going to encounter tomorrow is the very essence of learning. Competence means being able to repeat what can be repeated while changing what needs to be changed. How is all of this accounted for if we are not allowed to talk about carrying anything with us from one situation to another? (Sfard, 1998: 9).

A focus solely on the individual, and lack of reference to the importance of the social communities within which learning and understanding occurs, is problematic. As Sfard (1998) reminds us, making sense is embedded in the engagement of the individual in contexts and in constant flux. But this must include that we recognise and respect the importance of the individual endeavour in the process of understanding and making positive judgements. Of course, proponents of socio-cultural approaches would associate with the ideas of situated learning theorists (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and emphasise the importance of context, the nature of the environment and of the place that individuals occupy in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), and their ability to make sense and thus learn through participation in social settings (Le Cornu & Collins, 2004, 27-32). However, this model of the formation of a person as person-in-action, when taken to extreme, presents a challenge to notions that understanding can be owned by the individual.

As philosopher Mary Midgley (1978) reminds us in respect of becoming a member of society, a balance is important between the individual and the collaborative approach to understanding:

... an infant must be programmed to respond to ... [society]. Others give him his cues. But he has to be able to pick them up and complete the dialogue. ... A baby that fails, as time goes on, to smile and talk, laugh and weep, to meet the eyes of those around it, to seek and follow its parent, to treat those around it with affection, to want their company and approval, to play and to explore the world, cannot join its society. (Midgley, 1978: 95-96).

### **6.3 Flexible reflection within the Capabilities Approach and its ethical dimension**

Having established the need for reflective practice which resists the mechanistic tendency, and argued in favour of a balance between individual and collaborative approaches to understanding, this section focuses on the importance of flexibility within a model of reflection, and of an ethical dimension which enables each individual and group to use the model to understand and make sound judgements.

In addition to developing a flexible model for reflection, Dewey also believed important attitudes must coexist with knowledge of the reflective steps or method for the endeavour to be successful. For example, Dewey spoke of the need for developing certain qualities, such as open-mindedness or sincerity, wholeheartedness, responsibility, in addition to the habit of thinking in a reflective way (1964: 224-28). Dewey also writes of reflection as involved in making practical judgements, in particular, concerned with situations about 'things to do or be done, judgements of a situation demanding action' (1916: 335).

This has echoes of Aristotle's account of *phronēsis* (practical wisdom or reason) explored in previous chapters, where attitudes or virtues are required for the process of making good decisions on an ongoing basis. Of course, Aristotle's account of *phronēsis* is characterised significantly by flexibility. Therefore, what begins to emerge here is a picture of reflective practice as something integral to our lives, which is flexible, does not seek absolutes, and is not applied with rigid structures. This kind of flexible reflective practice is something which we can exercise in different ways, when still or when on the go, and which we undertake alone or with others. Today, the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach allows for an account of human

beings which gives depth to our understanding of these virtues and what they entail, as they are not necessarily restricted by the social context. Within this approach, a flexible model of reflection is a tool of the kind which Aristotle (NE 1137b 29-31) had in mind as an essential aid to develop practical reason and affiliation. Furthermore, this flexible method requires us to interpret it and apply it to make it fit the particular situation. In respect of education, this process of reflection or enquiry cannot be reduced to a paper exercise nor be mechanised, and within the Capabilities Approach there is an ethical framework within which the process and fruits of reflective practice are scrutinised for sound judgements to be made in the context of human flourishing.

### 6.3.1 A way forward

We should be bold to try new things and to begin to evaluate the extent to which they are happening in our schools and colleges. Where they are not happening, we must ask why not, and establish whether we are teaching each child to be a critical agent in his or her life, whether they are able to form their own conception of the good, and whether they are becoming engaged in the democratic process which gives dignity to every person.

The approach to reflective practice sought here is one which recognises the need for a shared process of understanding. It supports a public forum which shapes language and meaning, as the framework within which we seek understanding and which supports our individual constructions of the world and the actions that we decide upon as a result. A balance between the public and the private is essential therefore for the rich understanding we seek of the past and present experience, and to envision the future. It is this balance which prevents us from collapsing into the solipsism of the subjective, and which enables us with confidence to reach out towards a fuller, and more complete understanding which reaches beyond the self and embraces the other as integral to this process.

The Capabilities Approach informs the proposed structure for enquiry and reflection detailed in Chapter 7. It acts as the litmus test which grounds the ethical considerations of this process, thereby helping teachers and learners in the process of making sense of life in favour of living well and flourishing. There is a need to provide support for teachers to reflect with a flexible model within an ethical framework and to enable learners to do the same. The model required must not be overly rigorous or rigid which can lend itself to the mechanical interpretation such

as can be the tendency in education today. What we seek to avoid is a stringent method which lends itself to being implemented as a tick-the-box exercise, or a routine and un-reflected practice that follows a generic formula and does not focus on the particular context and needs of the learners in the specific situation. As teachers and learners develop a deep understanding of what they are doing through a flexible model of reflection, this reductionist tendency is avoided. In short, as the ethical dimension or importance of the process is embraced, reflective practice with a rich understanding of cognition becomes a catalyst for deep learning. This kind of reflection could enable students to engage with their subject in both a personal way and in a way which develops their commitment towards others. As they do this individually and collectively, this kind of reflection helps learners engage with issues of human flourishing and become proficient at making sense of life and making decisions in favour of flourishing.

### 6.3.2 A progressive approach which dislodges simplistic notions

This chapter proposes the Capabilities Approach, which some may wish to label progressive, which defines and guides reflective practice for individuals and groups, and which informs the ethical dimension in respect of what is considered to be of value in education. These are critical issues in education as we meet our duty to enable children and young people to make sense of the world and to make positive decisions in their lives. What is proposed here as shaped by the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach, dislodges elements of both constructivist and social constructivist perspectives of progressive education. It dislodges an overemphasis on individualism which can sometimes affect constructivist approaches. And it challenges tendencies of social constructivism to make meaning hostage to a social framework where individual reflection is mostly assimilated as a result of social discourse and restricted as overwhelmingly culture bound.

The Capabilities Approach enables us to seek a balance between a subjective and an objective attitude to making sense of the world, and similarly, a balance between the individual and the collective as essential to any decision-making process. Furthermore, this thesis by embracing the Capabilities Approach, questions tight developmental progression as over-simplistic for the complexity of human beings processes of understanding and making decisions. Significantly, the ethical position understood within the context of what we share as human beings, as explored in Chapter 2, underpins the Capabilities Approach in such a way that it provides the degree of objectivity we need to understand what is valuable. Nevertheless, this approach also

concedes that making sense of life and particular circumstances and issues, is only possible from the particular instance and from within the social setting.

### 6.3.3 A flexible model for reflective practice within the Capabilities Approach

Pring, draws on Dewey for support in promoting reflective practice and enquiry, and thereby seeks to find a more open and child-centred view of education than provided by a narrow focus on subject knowledge acquisition (1976: 47-66). Nevertheless, Pring recognises the need for a degree of objectivity in education, both in terms of ethics and epistemology (Pring, 1976). Both a child-centred view and a degree of objectivity in education are made possible by embracing the Capabilities Approach and implementing it through a flexible model of reflective practice.

Tensions arise when offering any model or method, with the risk that it be reduced to a rigid format, or that it be implemented as superficial means-end style practice where merely completing a prescriptive activity fulfils the criterion for mastery or success . What is sought here by offering a model for reflective practice is a rich and multifaceted process which enables teachers to nurture children and young people to explore how their learning fits into a wider narrative and to embrace their responsibility as participants of a global society. Its success cannot be reduced to the delivery or implementation of the model or method. Instead, its success depends on developing the cumulative ability of students to question, make sense, and develop virtues which enable them to act positively as individual members of one global people. This progressive approach in teaching and learning focuses on the child's needs as central while embracing a flexible model as an aid or structure to the process of understanding. Any model is created to support teachers and learners. And in this case, a flexible model aims to provide support for teachers which is adaptable and which enables as well as requires deep understanding. Importantly therefore, a flexible model seeks to avoid turning the model itself into either a mechanical system or an un-reflected routine practice, which tends towards fixed general formulae to the detriment of the particular needs and opportunities of the child or children in question.

The Capabilities Approach, though progressive, is itself shaped by the concept of a shared human nature and the need for balance in language between complete scepticism and objectivity. Therefore, the progressive flexible model proposed here steers a middle road

mindful to avoid two key tendencies or risk areas. First, it avoids the reduction of success criteria to the adoption of the model itself or to the implementation of certain activities in teaching and learning. Second, it avoids a progressive approach that leads to extreme scepticism or relativism in this process of making sense. For this reason, the proposed model relies on general benchmarks about what human beings share, such as those offered by Nussbaum, as key to the process of making sense for learners and teachers alike. Hence, the approach offered here is challenging to practitioners, as it aims to dislodge them from simplistic notions of progressivism which could leave them open to the risks identified above. Instead this approach calls practitioners to adopt a richer view and practice to help children stay on track and realise their capabilities, and to be equipped with the necessary psychosocial resources and virtues for pro-social action which they need to succeed.

## **Summary**

In this thesis I contrast two approaches in education. One which is rigid, formulaic and utilitarian based, and the other which is more flexible, adaptable to the individual need and context, and which is based upon Aristotle's philosophy and adopted in the contemporary Capabilities Approach.

Therefore, first, this thesis has attempted to reject a mechanistic and formulaic approach to teaching and learning with the objective of reaching externally determined targets with rigid set criteria and indicators for success. As was made clear earlier in this chapter, the need for change from this rigid approach is also supported by significant research in the field of education (Alexander *et al.* 2010; Pring *et al.*, 2009; Pring and Pollard, 2011). This body of understanding advocates amendment in important areas fuelled by the performative culture in education. Alteration is called for in the curriculum and approaches to teaching and learning, in assessment of various areas, in the language used in education at all levels, and fundamentally in a return to embracing the ethical dimension in education which enables aims and values to be made explicit, and which provides guidance and gives meaning to action and evaluation in the field.

Second, and in contrast to the first, this thesis advocates an approach to teaching and learning which has as its central objective enabling children and young people to learn to make sense of the world and realise their potential. This requires a balance in various areas: (1) a balance



between individual and collaborative approaches to understanding; (2) a balance between the needs of the particular child or the context of a specific group, and any externally determined objectives which do not take account of context or specific need or capability; and (3) a balance between some general framework such as that offered by the Capabilities Approach which provides a level of objectivity sought, and a flexible method of reflection which enables teachers and learners to nurture the individual child and young person to develop their capabilities and realise their potential with reference to the capabilities list.

As supported by significant research advocating change, in this thesis I suggest embracing the Capabilities Approach in education, whose philosophy offers a flexible *rule* or model for reflection as a significant tool which could enable teachers and learners to thrive. I argue in favour of a less precise definition of cognition than the one sought by the present Standards Agenda in education. Nevertheless, I defend the significance of a flexible method of reflection based on Aristotle's philosophy and developed within the Capabilities Approach. A richer understanding of cognition which includes emotions and desires is part of this approach, in contrast to one that restricts cognition to technical reason. In Chapter 8, which focuses on evaluation, I attempt to defend the merits of this flexible model of reflection within the Capabilities Approach.

Importantly, the Capabilities Approach, based on what we share as human beings, could enable us to hold a view of understanding that is to some extent 'objective' as it is formed in the context of what we share as human beings, and the principle that each human being is worthy of dignity and respect. Nevertheless, the Capabilities Approach also requires persons to make sense of the world from their own specific situation which is to some extent bound or at least constrained by its context and culture. Making sense of life here recognises the importance of participation and engagement with others, both as enabling us to appreciate the context and culture which binds it, and then to begin to seek beyond it.

Through opportunities in schools and other educational settings, a flexible model of reflection which is undertaken by the individual and the group, could enable teachers to help learners 'grow' as they understand their world more fully and seek out solutions in favour of their own and societal flourishing. This reflective approach to teaching and learning stands in contrast with teaching and learning which is confined to reaching externally determined targets and measures, and provides a far richer view of learning which continues throughout life. Thus in Chapter 7, I explore ideas in which this flexible method of reflection could be used by teachers

and learners towards greater understanding, to nurture interest and curiosity, and to instil the craft of making wise judgements for the common good.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information about the Human Development Reports and the Human Development Index (HDI) is available at the following web address: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev/> (Last accessed 17/04/11).

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev/>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev/>

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev/>

<sup>5</sup> Robin Alexander argues in a recent Lecture that there is an urgent need to redefine standards, and provides a list of helpful pointers for policy makers and schools alike in respect of improving children's education in the broadest sense of the word. For a transcript of this lecture: [http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/downloads/publications/public\\_lectures/Simon\\_lecture\\_text.pdf](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/downloads/publications/public_lectures/Simon_lecture_text.pdf) (Last accessed 23/02/11).

<sup>6</sup> Cambridge Primary Review (2010), *After the Election: policy priorities for primary education*, Cambridge, University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, may be downloaded at [http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/downloads/POLICY\\_PRORITIES\\_BRIEFING.pdf](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/downloads/POLICY_PRORITIES_BRIEFING.pdf) (Last accessed, 04/05/12).

<sup>7</sup> One example of enquiry used today is the thinking skills projects developed by educationists in Kings College, London, named CASE and CAME, whose aim is that of accelerated cognition through science and maths education respectively. [CASE: Cognitive Acceleration Through Science Education and CAME: cognitive Acceleration Through Maths Education. <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/education/research/crestem/CogAcc/Cognaccel.aspx> (Last accessed 04/05/12).

I will not comment on these programmes here except to mention that cognition, described as 'thinking skills' is considered as the skill of the future. The reasons given for the greater importance of thinking skills today than ever before are connected with the rapid changes in the economy which are being fuelled by new information and communication technologies, which themselves require more people to be actively involved in decision-making than ever before (Weggerif, 2002). However, some warn us against viewing thinking as a skill, and instead propose considering thinking as a personal quality to act in a certain way (Johnson and Siegel, 2010: 8).

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.kaganonline.com/free\\_articles/dr\\_spencer\\_kagan/research\\_rationale.php](http://www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/dr_spencer_kagan/research_rationale.php) (Last accessed 13/02/11).

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.kaganonline.com/free\\_articles/dr\\_spencer\\_kagan/research\\_rationale.php](http://www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/dr_spencer_kagan/research_rationale.php) (Last accessed 13/02/11).

## Chapter 7

### **Reflection as a way of life for growth: Learning from traditional tools of reflective practice**

#### **Introduction**

‘Education is ... a matter of empowering children to think, ... to reason, to argue, to question, to respond intelligently to difficulties’ (Pring, 1989: 110). These are wise words which academic education reviews as well as employers continue to request of education today (Pring *et al.*, 2009: 11; Leitch Review (2006), in Pring *et al.*, 2009: 66). In addition, Pring maintains that the focus of any educational debate, whether about learning or evaluation ‘must be, but frequently isn’t, an understanding (controversial though it is) of what it means to be and to grow as a person’ (2004: 5). However, as ascertained in Chapter 5, statistics in respect of education, health and well-being highlight issues of concern regarding poor outcomes for children and young people. Added to these issues, Chapter 6 suggested that educational research highlights ongoing features in the system of schooling which contribute to the burden of disaffection in learning for young people. In particular, the reviews examined mentioned the standardised system of targets and testing, and the assessment system of accountability as issues of concern, which are both prominent owing to the performative culture in education.

The present standardised approach, with clear linear targets and objective measurable outcomes akin to algorithms was discussed in Chapter 6. It was found to often overshadow teaching and learning which nurtures children to think, to reflect, to argue, to question, and to respond intelligently to difficulties. Making explicit the ethical dimension in education was argued as crucial to help children make sense of their lives as they plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, and learn to live well in relation with others. As discussed in previous chapters, this thesis maintains that the Capabilities Approach provides the ethical basis we require, and Aristotle’s notion of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) and its flexible method of reflection cultivates children and young people’s ability to think and act well in order to flourish and succeed beyond the narrow definition of success provided by standardised measures.

In this chapter I will focus on examples of reflective practice through enquiry, individually and collaboratively, which help persons make sense of life, make positive decisions and flourish. The examples proposed here in respect of teaching and learning dislodge simplistic notions of reflection. The reason for this, as explored in Chapter 6, is that the flexible method of reflection should incorporate the flexibility necessary for deepening understanding, which yields precision sufficient for the subject of realising potential in respect of *eudaimonia*. This method of reflection, as it draws on the Aristotelian concept of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) and seeks to nurture this capability in teachers and learners, embodies a rich account of cognition which includes emotions and desires. In this way it is sensitive to the individual and their subjective view. In addition, because this model is considered in the context of the Capabilities Approach and our shared humanity it also incorporates the degree of objectivity required for a shared understanding in society, which transcends cultures.

Education within the Capabilities Approach contains an ethical dimension which recognises the dignity of every human being and the existence of shared human capabilities. It is this ethical dimension which shapes our responsibility as teachers to ensure that we take notice, take care, act well, and learn from our mistakes, and that we provide opportunities which nurture learners to do the same. One important aspect in which this is made possible is through reflection. As I argue in this chapter, a method of reflective practice which engages directly with this ethical dimension equips us more fully to deliberate on our emotions, needs, and motivation within the particular situation in which we find ourselves. In addition, reflection of this kind requires participants to understand the wider narrative within which their specific circumstances and enquiry fit. Consequently, this approach spurs us on to seek detailed knowledge and understanding of the variety of circumstances and contexts and cultures in which we strive to do well, and to gain insights from this which guide our actions. This particular kind of reflective practice therefore, is crucial for becoming an educated person able to flourish.

Ensuring space in schooling for reflective practice of this kind could make a significant contribution towards realising what Pring describes as:

The educated person - what we hope 'to produce' as a result of our school curriculum – [children and young people] endowed with the capacity to reason and to reflect, ...[and] the capability of translating this knowledge into practice. The educated person, thus

armed, takes responsibility for his or her own life, not in an arbitrary fashion, not in a state of ignorance, but mentally and morally prepared for such a task. (Pring, 1989: 98).

The recent Nuffield Review reminds us that 'part of the problem we are facing is the failure to learn from the past. The problems are not new. And there are solutions to be found in previous ... practices which have now been forgotten or rejected, ... taking place, often unnoticed, under our very noses' (Pring *et al.*, 2009: 85). This chapter looks to the past, to the Greco-Roman tradition of philosophy as a tool for life and as a way of life, and later to spiritual traditions in theology which developed from this earlier thought, namely the 16<sup>th</sup> century Jesuit spiritual tradition of daily reflection. This heritage, as discerned in this chapter, has much to offer the flexible method or tool of reflection proposed here, which is invaluable in education for the present day and the future. Embracing this legacy from the past, capable of enriching the life of both children, learners, and educators today is an opportunity to be grasped. Drawing from this heritage of practice and considering reflection within the Capabilities Approach, in this chapter, I propose a particular kind of reflective practice as a way of life. The kind of reflective practice which I advocate, further extends the ideas provided by educational thinkers such as Dewey and Bruner outlined in Chapter 6.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In Part One, I look to the past for exemplars which could be embraced today, first from the Greco-Roman tradition, and second, from the Christian spiritual tradition of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Third, I offer a process of reflective enquiry which adopts the Capabilities Approach. I suggest that reflective practice of this kind nurtures practical wisdom in the Aristotelian sense, whose purpose is to enable flourishing. Moreover, the kind of reflective practice proposed comprises aspects from the past traditions aforementioned which continue to be valid in contemporary life. In Part Two, I will explore the growth metaphor in education and propose a way to defend the concept of growth in education, understood as a nurturing of practical judgement where growth is realised through the process of making mistakes which requires ongoing reflection within the Capabilities Approach. As a result, I will attempt to salvage the growth metaphor within the context of the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach, which provides an understanding of 'what it means to be and to grow as a person' (Pring, 2004: 5) which is invaluable when included in the discourse of learning and evaluation in education.

## Part One

### Reflective enquiry which draws on the Greco-Roman and Jesuit tradition

Educationists today remind us that there is 'a persistence of technical rationality under the banner of reflective teaching', where some reflective practice models 'limit the reflective process to a consideration of teaching skills and strategies (the means of instruction) and exclude from the teacher's purview ethical and moral realms of teaching' (Zeichner and Liston, 1993: 75). In this sense teaching 'becomes merely a technical activity' and yet as they argue, although the technical aspects of teaching are important 'they cannot be separated from the values that underlie them' and the 'inherent ethical quality of all teaching practice' (*ibid.*: 75). Dunne and Hogan (2004) also recognise the integrity of teaching and learning beyond the confines of technical rationality, and Hogan supports practical philosophy in education in an effort to reframe 'teaching as a way of life' (2004: 18-34). I argue that the Capabilities Approach with its roots in the ancient Greek philosophy of Aristotle underlines the importance of practical reason as an essential capability for reflective action. Furthermore, this approach provides the ethical framework required for developing reflection as a way of life for teaching and learning.

With regards to the learner, viewing the child as customer of technical skills and certificates of standardised tests, misses nurturing essential elements of child development which prepares them for flourishing. These elements include: sparking curiosity about the world and people around them; thinking passionately, creatively and critically about difficult issues with no obvious answer; learning to manage risk, being resilient and valuing interdependence; appreciating the wonder of nature and paying attention to the past, present and future through careful listening; reflecting on the matter at hand, on progress, on possibilities, and on one another's gifts; participating in caring for one another and the world beyond their own setting; and developing moral seriousness and commitment and a vision of what is good. As Pring and Pollard (2011) identify in their recent research, such aspects should be essential elements of education for all. These elements enable people to make sense of life at every age. As Hadot explains from the Hellenistic and Roman traditions<sup>1</sup>, these elements are incorporated in the practical process of philosophy: 'learning to live', 'learning to dialogue', and 'learning how to read' (1995: 81-109). As the vast body of understanding from the past indicates, this is

a lifetime's task of growing to realise potential enabled through reflective practice, individually and by engaging with others.

### **7.1 The Greco-Roman tradition of philosophical reflective enquiry as a way of life**

The extensive research which Pierre Hadot (1995), a historian of philosophy, offers in his book *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, will be the principal source of evidence in this chapter to identify the heritage of Greco-Roman thought and practice, elements of which rightly continue to permeate the present day. As described by Hadot and his colleagues, this tradition later influenced Christian approaches to reflection which continue to thrive in contemporary society. Moreover, Hadot maintains that the *Spiritual Exercises* developed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the founder of the Jesuit order, Ignatius of Loyola, are a 'Christian version of a Greco-Roman tradition' (*ibid.*: 82). Later in this chapter, I will explore the Jesuit *Examen* together with its ongoing development of reflective practice today. Both the Greco-Roman and the Christian traditions aforementioned will inform the kind of flexible reflection proposed in this thesis, given the strong thread that runs through them which is still relevant for individuals and society. As Hadot's words indicate, this inherited body of thought and practice with its important connected strands, which continues to influence Western thought today, has evolved from one generation of tradition to the next while remaining faithful to its ancient roots:

The problems, the themes, the symbols from which Western thought has developed were ... received ... for the most part in the form that was given to them either by Hellenistic thought, or by the adaptation of this thought to the Roman world, or by the encounter between Hellenism and Christianity. (Hadot, 1995: 2).

The thread that runs through these traditions holds three functions for development as essential for the self and its relations: to desire flourishing, to judge in favour of flourishing, and to be motivated in action for flourishing. These three functions for development (desire, judgment, motivation to action) evident in Greek thought were also exemplified in later Roman and Christian traditions. For example, these elements are present in the processes practiced by Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations* in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century, and later in the Benedictine tradition from the 7<sup>th</sup> century and Ignatian tradition from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which continue to be practiced today (*ibid.*: 11).

According to Hadot, it is the shared experiences and ideals identified by the philosophical schools, such as Stoicism, Epicureanism, Platonism, Aristotelianism, which are the legacy of ancient philosophy to Western civilisation. Though different, these philosophical schools share the belief that it is essential to give meaning to one's life based on certain shared values such as the belief that we are not alone and must live with reference to others, that each person is worthy of dignity and respect, and that we should live life by paying close attention to situations and taking notice of things as though we are seeing everything both for the first time and for the last (*ibid.*: 34-35).

Philosophy as a way of life, rather than being concerned with the acquisition of purely abstract knowledge, developed tools or exercises aimed at 'realising a transformation of one's vision of the world and a metamorphosis of one's personality' (*ibid.*: 21). Therefore, the philosopher needed to be trained not just how to speak and debate, 'but also to know how to live' (*ibid.*: 21). As a consequence, philosophy was intended 'not simply to develop the intelligence of the discipline, but to transform all aspects of [the person's] being – intellect, imagination, sensibility, and will' (*ibid.*: 22).

As mentioned above, reflective practice in the Greco-Roman period as developed by practical philosophy is examined by Hadot under helpful headings, including: (1) 'learning to live', (2) 'learning to dialogue', and (3) 'learning how to read' (*ibid.*: 82-110). The philosopher Paul Grosch (1999), reminds us that this approach to reflective practice developed in the Greco-Roman period is:

... not about the short-term skill acquisition which allows us to make a conventional success of this life, a success measured in terms of product, performance and outcome; instead it is about the rich and variegated long-term cultivation of the virtues: the careful development of the ... human excellences or qualities of both mind and character. (Grosch, 1999: 190).

These ways of learning inform the kind of reflective practice method proposed, including practice for learning through enquiry. Therefore, a brief exploration of what these aspects of learning in the Greco-Roman period involved is helpful at this point.



### 7.1.1 Learning to live

This aspect of learning is focused on listening and observing attentively. Although all the philosophical traditions aforementioned include these to greater or lesser extents, learning to live is mapped out by Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (30BCE – 50 CE), with two lists which include elements essential for learning to live. The first list includes: research, thorough investigation, reading, attention, self-mastery, and indifference to indifferent things. The second also includes: remembrance of good things, and accomplishment of duties. In addition to Philo's contribution, Hadot draws from Seneca and Plutarch, explaining their reflective enquiring approach:

First thing in the morning, we should go over in advance what we have to do during the course of the day, and decide on the principles which will guide and inspire our actions. In the evening, we should examine ourselves again, so as to be aware of the faults we have committed or the progress we have made. (Hadot, 1995: 85).

The importance of seeing the broader picture, that is, the wider perspective in any reflection or enquiry, is developed when particular attention is given to the process of living guided by principles about what we share as human beings. This ongoing search for the meta-narrative engenders a sense of connectedness. Hence the ability to see how the individual instance fits into a wider context can ameliorate the prevalent tendency towards individualism and solipsism. This is the case as this aspect of reflection calls the individual to think by themselves and with others about their specific situation and to consider the particular with reference to a conception of what constitutes flourishing. And it is in this wider context that particular understanding is gained about the good individual or society, as guided by a general framework such as that offered by the Capabilities Approach.

*Learning to live* also enables individuals and groups to develop an ability for gratitude, nurtured by looking at situations with such care as if it were the last time. As Horace writes: 'Believe that each day that has dawned will be your last; then you will receive each unexpected hour with gratitude' (quoted in Hadot, 1995: 96). In today's language we understand this ability for gratitude as one that extends to showing gratitude to others and which contributes to our ability to flourish as individuals and as a society. This linkage between gratitude and well-being is one which psychology research supports, which is also related to our ability for

developing social connections and engaging and doing things for others (Lyubomirsky, 2007: 123-151).

Paying attention to the particular and the particular instance by really taking notice, also has the capacity to foster understanding about our connectedness to other human beings and to the world at large. Recognising how we are connected to others and to the world around us is a profound ability which enables individuals to question contemporary society's fascination with autonomy to the exclusion of trust, co-operation and care (what Nussbaum describes as the capability of affiliation, 2000: 78-80, 2001: 417). Practising gratitude and developing a sense of connectedness with others contributes to the sense of well-being which Aristotle describes as *eudaimonia*, which we call happiness or fulfilment. Fulfilment in this sense, as reflected within the context of others and the wider narrative, prevents focusing only on the individual feeling good, and encourages us to reach out and connect with others as essential for flourishing. Some psychologists reiterate this today when they suggest that happiness is likely to be a bi-product of purpose, community, solidarity and justice (Nettle, 2005: 176-8; Lyubomirsky, 2007: 38-52).

Taking notice of nature is another theme in this aspect of learning, which promotes the sense of awe and wonder which enables individuals to view themselves within the global context. Philo writes poetically about this sense of awe and wonder and of connectedness:

... those who practice wisdom ... are excellent contemplators of nature and everything she contains. They examine the earth, the sea, the sky, the heavens, and all their inhabitants; they are joined in thought to the sun, the moon, and all the other stars ... and so ... it goes without saying that such [persons], make of their whole lives a festival. (quoted in Hadot, 1995: 98).

Strong echoes of this approach of *learning to live* are evident in the 16<sup>th</sup> century reflective practice model of the Jesuit *Examen*, upon which I will draw for the method of reflective practice through enquiry proposed in this chapter. Moreover, the capabilities list explored in Chapter 5 and 6, will provide the framework of 'principles' to which Seneca and Plutarch allude for this process, which are considered necessary to 'guide and inspire our actions' (quoted in Hadot, 1995: 85).

### 7.1.2 Learning to dialogue

This aspect of learning concerns the famous philosophical method of Socratic dialogue which is a dual model involving discourse with oneself and discourse with others. This mode of reflective practice is described as a spiritual exercise practiced in common (*ibid.*: 90). What is significant about learning to dialogue is that it develops an ability for 'authentic presence of the self to itself and of the self to others. As Hadot explains:

... the Socratic and Platonic dialogues exhibit this authentic presence in the way that they show that what is most important is not the solution to the particular problem, but the path traversed together in arriving at this solution (1995: 20).

It is this essential dimension which forces the dialogue to be a concrete and practical exercise. Plato's writing therefore develops a model for *learning to dialogue* where:

... with a great deal of effort, one rubs names, definitions, vision and sensations against one another; ... one spends a long time in the company of these questions; ... [one] lives with them. (quoted in Hadot, 1995: 92).

And in the *Republic* (450b), Plato explains that this is a lifetime's task: 'for reasonable people, the measure of listening to such discussion is the whole of life' (quoted in Hadot, 1995: 92).

It is worth noting that echoes of this kind of dialogic talk to deepen understanding continues to influence educationists today, who promote the value of authentic dialogue in teaching and learning (Lipman, 1970; Mercer, 1998, 2008).

### 7.1.3 Learning how to read

This aspect of learning is about developing the art of reading, rather than 'merely barking at print' (Grosch, 1999: 193). As discussed in Chapter 5, this is a particular concern of the result of the literacy strategy in recent years, which although it has raised levels in reading ability, it has done so to the neglect of the love of reading, which is so important for *learning how to read*. In addition this aspect is about critical questioning of the apparent wisdom of the written and uttered word. For example, in contemporary society this is of particular importance to a

considered understanding of what is available on the internet or what is transmitted on television, radio, or voiced on twitter or blogs generally.

In addition, this kind of learning is crucial in education, and supports the value of literature, in contrast to the present view of English as a school subject which maintains its importance primarily with regard to developing communication skills and effective use of language. Instead, learning how to read literature is vital as Smith makes clear, in that it 'foregrounds attentiveness, engagement with text, scepticism toward received wisdom, and a tolerant yet still critical openness toward others' readings' (2003: 392). Significantly, learning how to read literature:

... moves us away from "thin" moral ideas, such as those of praise and blame, to "thicker" moral notions. It teaches us to think in these richer and more particular ways, and so to see gradations and subtleties in the moral behaviour and characters of those around us. (Smith, 2003: 392).

To sum up, the important balance maintained in the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition described here is one between insight and understanding acquired as a result of reflective practice towards self-knowledge by the self, and by his or her interaction with others and the world beyond. It is worth noting that here we have a balance between what educationists espouse as a constructivist and social constructivist model of understanding, discussed earlier in Chapter 5 and 6. Today there can be a tendency or bias for collaborative learning which does not allow sufficient time or space for the individual making meaning or understanding. As this Greco-Roman tradition makes clear, this would be a great loss for our understanding of human development and its effect on teaching and learning in education, and the contemporary kind of reflective practice offered in this chapter ensures the balance required which the Greco-Roman tradition exemplifies.

Of great significance, as the voices of the past with their cumulative wisdom advice, reflective practice enables individuals to gain a deeper, more authentic and therefore more precise vision of the world, and of their place for agency within it. It insists on paying close attention to the particular, on looking deeply, on being aware of the wider narrative, and on the need for personal thought combined with dialogue with others. Such reflection therefore, is capable of ameliorating human fears and worries, as individuals and communities know themselves better and begin to understand their particular context and position within the wider world.

This long precedent of reflective practice which has helped many, continues to be pertinent for us today. When embraced in teaching and learning, even within specific subjects, it is an invaluable contribution to education as it enables persons to embed a deep kind of reflective practice in their personal and societal journey towards realising potential. A word of warning: this reflective process cannot be understood within the present linear approach to teaching, learning, and assessment. It is more subtle, and non-linear than this and is therefore better understood within the Aristotelian philosophy proposed in this thesis, which stands in contrast to the performative culture in education today. This point is discussed further in Chapter 8, in respect of evaluation in education.

As Hadot (1995) identifies, what is persuasive about these four aspects of learning in philosophical practices of antiquity is their transformative nature. That is, they enable the development of affiliation and practical reason (also referred to as practical wisdom or *phronēsis*), which both Aristotle from this Greek tradition and today the contemporary Capabilities Approach recognise as essential elements for flourishing and realising potential. Hadot reminds us that:

... there are some truths whose meaning will never be exhausted by generations of man. It is not that they are difficult; on the contrary, they are often extremely simple. Often, they even appear to be banal. Yet for their meaning to be understood, these truths must be *lived*, and constantly re-experienced. Each generation must take up, from scratch, the task of learning to read and to re-read these “old truths”. (Hadot, 1995:108).

## **7.2 Reflective practice in the Christian spiritual and theological tradition**

As Hadot’s evidence suggests, philosophy appears ‘in its original aspect: not as a theoretical construct, but as a method for training people to live and to look at the world in a new way’ (1995: 107). His thesis claims that ‘Christian spirituality has been the heir of ancient philosophy and its spiritual practices’ (*ibid.*: 127). There are strong echoes of the Greco-Roman approach evident in the spirituality of the desert fathers in the Egyptian desert in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century, in particular St. Anthony (*ibid.*: 131-136), and later in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, St. Cassian who wrote about the lives of the desert fathers (Funk, 1998). Later still, in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century, the spiritual and theological thinkers who proceeded them such as St Augustine of Hippo and the Benedictine tradition universalised by Pope St. Gregory the Great, respectively, also continue

this heritage of thought and practice. More recently, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, this thread remains present in the reflective practice model of the Jesuit tradition of the *Spiritual Exercises*, in particular the *Examen*. However, it is worth remembering that monasticism in Egypt and Syria was born and developed in a Christian milieu, rather than as a direct result of intervention of any philosophical model. Nevertheless, under Alexandrian influence certain philosophical spiritual techniques were introduced into Christian spirituality which permeated through Christian thought and practice. According to Hadot, this had important consequences which are evident to this day:

The results of this was that the Christian ideal was described, and, in part, practiced, by borrowing models and vocabulary from the Greek philosophical tradition. Thanks to its literary and philosophical qualities, this tendency became dominant, and it was through its agency that the heritage of ancient spiritual exercises was transmitted to Christian spirituality: first to that of the Middle Ages, and subsequently to that of modern times. (1995: 140).

### 7.2.1 The *Examen* and its applications for reflective practice in education today

Jesuit scholars acknowledge that the *Examen*, or examination of consciousness, is an ancient practice in the Church, and that versions of this practice were used by philosophers of ancient Greece (Hamm, 1994: 106). The *Examen* was promoted by St. Ignatius in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as one of the exercises in his manual, *The Spiritual Exercises*. Jesuit writers have grappled with the importance of this practice and today continue to explain it in ways that foster and encourage its practice by many (Aschenbrenner, 1972; St Louis, 1991; Hamm, 1994; Gallagher, 2006), whether religious or secular (Martin, 2010). This approach to reflection is considered essential as 'a daily exercise of discernment in a person's life' (Aschenbrenner, 1972: 14).

The *Examen*, is composed of five flexible steps. Recommended as the first step in this process is identified by some writers as 'reflective thanksgiving' (Aschenbrenner, 1972: 17). This is understood as a sense of gratitude, as 'the stepping-stone to love' which seeks 'to express itself in deeds' (Louis, 1991: 161). The second step in the process is then about seeking self-understanding, or enlightenment about desires, feelings and motivations, as well as omissions of the same (Martin, 2010:90). The third step in the process is the 'review of the day'. The purpose here is to recall everything, taking notice of what made one happy, stressed,

confused, kind, loving, and so on. This process involves 'everything: sights, sounds, feelings, tastes, textures, conversations, thoughts, words and deeds, as Ignatius says' (2010: 91). The fourth step is about focusing on one of the elements noticed, which surfaces most readily for which one is regretful, or which with hindsight could have been handled differently, or which requires improvement or change. The fifth and final step is looking outwards to the future with hope. Hence, the concluding step of the *Examen*, 'is focused towards the future and its choices, decisions, postures and attitudes' and how one looks 'to the future', 'in light of this process of reflection' (Louis, 1991: 162).

Some have described this method of reflection as designed to enable us 'to find more readily what we desire' (Gallaher, 2006: 113). This is also the reason why others acknowledge this method as an examination of 'consciousness' (Hamm, 1994: 106). This process 'puts a special emphasis on feelings' (*ibid.*: 106) on 'paying attention to felt experience' (*ibid.*: 110), 'since feelings are the liveliest index to what is happening in our lives' (*ibid.*: 107), and reminds us that 'an unattended emotion can dominate and manipulate us' (*ibid.*: 109). Therefore, such reflective practice is said to enable individuals to develop 'the contemplative capacity' (Gallagher, 2006: 118), to take notice or pay particular attention to the detail of our lives, our relationships, and actions. It is also clear that for Ignatius, 'the practice of reflecting on one's experience of service' is also critical (St Louis, 1991: 154), since this is 'a vitally illuminating and dynamic experience of reflection that both celebrates and enhances one's awareness of and response to' others (*ibid.*: 154). This exercise 'includes a reflective awareness of the events, circumstances, relationships and experiences that have shaped one's history and [which lead] to this present moment of self-awareness' (*ibid.*: 156).

This kind of reflection, although about nurturing self awareness, is not 'an empty self-reflection or an unhealthy self-centred introspection' (Aschenbrenner, 1972: 15) of the kind prevalent in the tendency towards individualism in society today. Instead, it is a 'gradually growing appreciative insight into the mystery which I am' (*ibid.*: 17). This is made possible as an ongoing reflection of the self within the context of others and the world around them. It is about developing authenticity which requires a deep awareness of self-in-context, rather than being 'superficial and insensitive to the subtle and profound ways of ... our hearts' (*ibid.*: 15). Therefore the specific exercise of *Examen* is 'ultimately aimed at developing a heart with a discerning vision to be active continually' (*ibid.*: 16).

In this kind of reflective practice, knowledge is never considered as 'end in itself, but is always a means to moving to deepening freedom' (St Louis, 1991: 157). One seeks 'to know and understand precisely in order to choose more freely' (*ibid.*: 157). The purpose of reflection here is the 'search for that understanding which leads to purification of choice' (*ibid.*: 158). This search for understanding puts feelings and desires at the centre of the reflective process. Interestingly, there are echoes in this view of the fuller understanding of cognition which this thesis seeks, which as explored in Chapter 6, incorporates desires and emotions as integral to cognition. In this fuller sense, knowledge is made possible and evolves as deliberated desire, which enables us to make judgements for action towards flourishing. This method of reflection is one that is in sympathy with the Aristotelian understanding of practical reason which this thesis seeks to enable young people to develop through reflective practice. This Christian method with its Greco-Roman heritage could be adapted and used in education. Given the *Examen's* sympathetic exposition and its clear guidance in respect of its well defined steps or method, I will draw inspiration from this reflective model for education today.

It is worth noting that the Ignatian *Examen* is a religious practice which is undertaken in the context of the individuals' relationship with Jesus. Hence the key question: 'How has one's life progressed in that characteristically Ignatian movement from knowledge to love to service (Ex 104)?' (St Louis, 1991: 159), is all understood as part of a process of deepening relation with God. Notwithstanding, this model for reflection lends itself to be adapted for non Christians, and is a helpful process which considers the individual within the context of others and wider world. Given Ignatius's implicit definition of the authentic human person as 'one who is free precisely in order to respond in mutuality of love' (*ibid.*: 160), it is possible to deduce that this striving for authenticity to self and others applies to Christians and non-Christians alike. It is this sense of mutuality which is crucial for human relations, in particular our sense of affiliation identified by Nussbaum earlier in this thesis.

To summarise, these five steps compose the following process: (1) express gratitude, (2) seek understanding, (3) review the day or situation, (4) focus on an omission, a regret, or need for change, and (5) plan for the future informed by this reflection. This process is intended to be very flexible and Jesuits today engage with each step in flexible order, according to the requirements of each reflection. For example, it is sometimes helpful to begin with step 3 - a review of the day or situation, and then identify gratitude about a particular aspect or praise what went really well - step 1. From there, one can progress to step 2 - to understand the situation better, and to step 4 - focusing on a particular element of regret, or which was



omitted or forgotten for some reason, or which can be improved or changed. Finally, step 5 - planning for the future, can be undertaken. This cycle can be carried out for each particular issue or topic under consideration. Significantly, Jesuits today have also adapted this reflective practice as a communal process, which highlights this kind of discernment's collective benefit and applicability to communities (Shano, 2009: 250-60).

This method of reflection is particularly helpful when considering life situations and making choices about different issues: whether a particular aspect of life, a specific difficult situation within the context of other human beings, a sensitive consideration of possible intended or unintended ramifications of an issue, etc. It is easy to see how this method might be used in the classroom situation for both individual reflection and group reflection, for learners and teachers alike. Another Jesuit writer, Joseph Tetlow, puts the *Examen* into the contemporary context describing the process of 'discernment in a nutshell', in a way that makes its benefits explicit for living well.

Human beings are moved by a dense complex of motives, both in the things we do from day to day and in our big decisions. What drives a young woman to become a doctor or a young man to be an engineer? Many things contribute: success, altruism, interest. Or what drives a woman who has smoked for years to quit or an obese man to get thin? Again, many things contribute: fear of death, desire for health, concern of family. But they all interact in a kind of movement that eventually drives the person to act ... Ignatius learned to think about those dense complexes of motives - images, ideas, attractions, revulsions . (Tetlow, 2008)<sup>2</sup>.

Reflective practice such as this could contribute to the journey of becoming an educated person within society, and therefore may be significant for the vision of education for all described by researchers like Pring and Pollard (2011), as outlined in Chapter 5.

### **7.3 A method of reflective enquiry within the Capabilities Approach**

Reflection through enquiry within the Capabilities Approach calls educators to make time to enable students to identify their desires, emotions and critical thinking abilities. Engaging in a flexible method of reflection, students examine their desires, emotions and thoughts (that is, how they feel about something, what they believe to be the case and how they think about

these and make sense of them in a critical manner). Significantly, they do this within a normative framework of shared capabilities which transcend cultures by virtue of the humanity which all individuals share (based on the capabilities list identified in Chapter 5). The reflective enquiry model proposed adopts aspects of the cognitive and participatory approaches important for Dewey and Bruner, while including space for desires and emotions within cognition, and engaging in ethical assessments integral to the process of enquiry which focuses on realising potential with reference to the framework provided within the Capabilities Approach as a general guide.

Based on Aristotle's philosophy, this flexible method seeks as part of its process, for enquirers to cultivate emotionally appropriate responses to a situation as applied within any enquiry. This is the case as implementing the enquiry process seeks to nurture practical reason or wisdom, which in the Aristotelian sense involves thinking about what to do when one has already grasped the emotional context of the situation. Hence students take notice of how they feel and what they believe as part of an enquiry, not just focus on the critical thinking, or purely rational cognitive aspect of a reflective enquiry process.

When students and teachers take note of this account of enquiry, which includes reflection as an integral part, they may be better prepared to make informed judgements which shape their life towards positive action. In addition, the enquiry model proposed here also entails attention to others' thoughts, feelings, imaginations, discoveries, which contribute to the body of inherited ideas and beliefs which help us work through and make sense of the specific situation or issue. In addition to this inherited body of insight and understanding, we can make sense of the present and plan for the future as we discuss and dialogue about issues with others. The heritage from the Greco-Roman tradition becomes evident here with the importance given to: paying attention, dialogue with ourselves and others, reading beyond the superficial, and seeing the particular issues within the bigger picture. Moreover, it is this process, guided by the framework within the Capabilities Approach, which enables us to engage adequately with the ethical dimension and which provides the necessary catalyst for positive action and commitment to others.

### 7.3.1 A method of reflective enquiry which promotes ethical questioning

The reflective enquiry method offered here, entails that any enquiry process include the following though not necessarily in a linear or ordered form:

- Takes notice and is attentive to both personal and others' desires, emotions, and cognition, to inform the enquiry with greatest sensitivity;
- Enables students to be explicitly aware of the influence of desires, emotions, and cognition on their learning and on their actions and commitment to others;
- Encourages students to develop a sense of affiliation, nurturing deliberated trust and pro-social attitudes;
- To question their views, progress and conclusions, individually and as a group, within the ethical framework provided by the Capabilities Approach, in particular the dignity of every person, to understand the broader narrative for this enquiry;
- To be critical, to seek insight beyond the superficial, or the obvious, and to understand complexity in relation to making sense.

As Pring argues: 'knowledge and know-how are not essentially commodities; rather they are individual attainments of socially developed modes of thinking and operating'. Therefore, 'their acquisition lies in the introduction to a form of social life and their legitimacy lies in their capacity to withstand social criticism'. Consequently a curriculum that is geared to the development of a person should foster general qualities such as 'openness of mind, a concern for the truth, a collaborative spirit, and a sense of humility before the achievement of mankind, whether they be artistic, literary, technological, ... or religious' (Pring, 1976: 21-22). As explored in the *Examen* earlier, seeking this deeper and more complex form of knowledge which involves our understanding of ourselves and others, and which is enabled through affiliation, is what is sought here. The enquiry process as described above, embraces this deeper understanding of making sense.

The process of enquiry which can be implemented within and beyond the school timetable, though not a fixed rigid model, does require regularity within learning. What is crucial is ensuring learners have time within school, whether in subject lessons, or through cross curricular work, or both: to ask questions and be attentive to the issues involved, including their feelings in respect of these; to discourse with others about the relevant issues and gain a deep understanding of the situation under question; to see the bigger picture within which this question is relevant; and to begin to be guided by the ethical framework offered within the

Capabilities Approach as they develop a sense of commitment to social action for individual and societal flourishing.

In respect of practical teaching structures or models which are popular, there has been an overemphasis on developing cognition using logical reasoning while the role of emotions have been downplayed or not given priority, time wise. Johnson and Siegel (2010) offer a thorough exploration of the issues involved in teaching thinking as a skill with its emphasis on rational cognition to the exclusion of emotions, in the format popular in education today, and provide a thorough critique. The process of enquiry provides a perfect environment in which to explore the ethical dimension and application of what is being learnt. It does this through personal reflection and group reflection involving collaborative discourse. This process where reflection is integral, adds the missing element necessary for cognition which this thesis seeks, which is often absent in cognition towards 'thinking skills'. This thesis maintains that this process of enquiry is an essential aspect of education, capable of nurturing insight and action towards flourishing. Therefore, implementing the process of enquiry to examine and reflect on ethical questions begins to address the need in educational practice to nurture human flourishing and active commitment in society today.

There are several ways in which this might be undertaken. An extended enquiry can be directly focused on ethical issues of human flourishing, such as one focused on what humans need to flourish. Another approach would be to use enquiry as a framework for specific subject lessons, where time is set aside at different points in any lesson to ask, discuss, and respond to emotions and thoughts about ethical questions, in addition to developing cognitive reasoning or critical thinking as a 'thinking skill'. For example, students engage in a cycle of reflective practice whereby they first reflect on an enquiry question, individually or with others, and give time to discover the implications of this question. Secondly, they go deeper into their enquiry paying attention to themselves, others, the world at large, and interpreting their perceptions within the ethical framework provided in the Capabilities Approach. Thirdly, having established the implications of their findings, students are able to consider a personal or societal response to the issue under enquiry. This process involves a cycle of questioning and reflection which can follow the pattern, 'what', 'then what', 'so what', where reflection upon the implications of their findings demand some commitment from the enquirer as to what influence the findings have on him or her.

Over time and as students become more proficient in this process of learning as a way of life, it is possible to conclude that the heritage of the Greco-Roman process of reflective practice will enable students to make sense of life at a deeper level than often possible, to understand issues beyond the superficial level, to critique popular thought, and to develop a personal commitment based on the ethical perspective fostered by the Capabilities Approach. They will inevitably be better able to pay close attention to the particular issue; to be fearless and critical in looking deeply and including their understanding and insight in the process of making sense of issues and situations; to look into themselves and reach out to others with awareness of the wider narrative; and, to be guided through the Capabilities Approach to a personal commitment to their own flourishing and that of others. This process is similar to what Hogan describes as the 'what', 'why', and 'how' of evaluation as learning from the teachers' perspective (2004: 30), which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.

### 7.3.2 Reflective practice and evaluation

The benefits of the process of reflective practice which this chapter has discussed are not easily measured in the standardised sense. The difficulties of a single measure will be discussed in Chapter 8, where the importance of evaluation within the Capabilities Approach will be the focus. At this point it is worth noting that there is a sense in which education will always fall short of its quest for effectiveness in this process of reflection and enquiry towards insight and positive action, since learning as a way of life, as proposed in this chapter, is a lifetime's task for which school years can only hope to provide the starting point. What is key is the persistent attempt of teachers and students when learning and evaluating or both, that they do justice to those with whom they engage, the texts they read, the histories and narratives to which they listen, the experiments they undertake, etc. As Smith suggests:

This is not just any kind of alertness, but a matter of close reading rather than skimming, of carefully attending - listening - to those with whom we engage, whether they are people or texts. (2009: 437).

Elsewhere, Smith (2012) writes of the need to accept that in one sense 'education is always bound to fail', and critiques the way 'we expect education to produce the goods, and the wrong kind of goods at that' (*ibid.*: 10). Regarding teaching and learning, as well as in matters of evaluating progress and quality, Smith (2012) warns against unreasonable expectations

which are only achievable by reducing education to a mechanistic endeavour judged in respect of its utility. In his words:

Education is bound to fall short, because it is the nature of education that it is always-to-come. That is why our stance towards it can only and rightly be one of *faith*. (2012: 10).

Smith supports the importance of learning as a way of life and the belief that 'perhaps learning is not always a matter of building and progressing: sometimes it involves remembering, forgetting, going backwards, going over the same ground again and again' (2012: 6). This kind of learning, which is also applicable to the understanding of evaluation which is proposed in Chapter 8, 'casts meaningful learning [or evaluation] as more like a conversion, a reorientation ... than the steady accumulation of knowledge' (*ibid.*: 6).

As will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8, the kind of flexible method for reflective practice offered in this chapter, which requires critical interpretative understanding, is intertwined with evaluation. The flexible method proposed in this chapter in respect of learning as a way of life, which requires learning to live, to read, and to dialogue, as part of the development of the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation, is equally necessary in the process of evaluation in education (whether by the learner, teacher, or researcher). Here, the interplay between learning and evaluation is evident, as is the notion that one is not possible without the other, since the very process of learning requires ongoing evaluation as a critical part, and every instance of evaluation is to some extent a learning process which requires reflective practice.

For example, an evaluator who has a heightened awareness and ability for reading the situation correctly and discussing this with others with sensitivity and critically will understand the subtleties of a text or an event, and will understand its meaning without seeking certainty. They will arrive at their evaluated conclusion through careful reflection and with reference to a shared humanity. Significantly, this activity is in itself a learning process.

In Chapter 8, I discuss the importance of including this method of reflection in the evaluative process, together with the inseparability of the concepts of learning and evaluation.

## Part Two

### The growth metaphor in education reviewed within the Capabilities Approach

In general, the significance of metaphors is in their ability to help us understand the world, in particular abstractions and complex phenomena. Halstead suggests that 'we make use of our imagination to explore complex ideas and develop our understanding in terms of more readily understood social and physical experiences, and conceptual systems are built up on these metaphorical foundations' (2003: 83). Metaphor thus becomes a 'conceptual and experiential process that structures our world' (*ibid.*: 83). Although the imagination is crucial, since 'human thought (unlike artificial intelligence) is essentially imaginative', the imagination does not operate as 'a kind of cognitive wild card' (*ibid.*: 84). Rather, it operates in a 'regular, systematic fashion which is open to investigation and analysis' (*ibid.*: 84), given that it is 'grounded in human embodied experience' which 'acts as a constraint on the imagination' and challenges claims about the 'arbitrariness of meaning and radical relativism of our concepts' (*ibid.*: 86). In particular, the growth metaphor with regards to education, understood in the manner so described, is the focus of this part of the chapter, where growth as a metaphor in education is defended as significant.

Concerns fuelled by the Factory metaphor in education aligned to the Standards Agenda and an outcome based curriculum focused on utility, was challenged in Chapter 5. A different metaphor popular in education especially associated with progressives, warrants exploration in this chapter, as it is closely associated with notions of realising potential and what this entails. The metaphor of growth is the focus of this part of Chapter 7, towards a reviewed understanding of growth within the Capabilities Approach which includes an ethical dimension within it that stands in contrast to education defined in terms of utility.

In this part of the chapter I will engage with several issues in turn: (1) the problems with the notion of growth aligned to realising potential of the whole person where success entails completeness; (2) issues concerning the child-centred approach of progressive thinkers who promoted the concept of growth in education; (3) a revision of the growth metaphor which salvages aspects of the idea of growth as significant to our understanding of education, when focused on developing the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation which enable wise judgements to be made throughout life.

## 7.4 A critique of the concept of growth defined in terms of completeness

In the article, *Postmodernism and the Education of the Whole Person*, Paul Standish critiques the idea of growth when understood as a concept confined to the school years. This definition resulted from connecting the concept of educating the whole person with the concept of reaching full height growth in humans. This view of educating the whole person implies a sense of completeness in our understanding of growth which is at odds with the idea of growth as continuous throughout a lifetime.

Standish distinguishes us from our ancestors, in that 'we find ourselves in a world where disparate and competing demands are placed on us'. As a result, he argues that for some people 'success in specialised roles restricts a more rounded development'. He points to education which in his opinion 'has encouraged precisely this' (1995: 121). This culture of utility has been discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 as a barrier to educational development in respect of flourishing and educational success. The culture of performativity has caused an imbalance between those who succeed, where success is understood using narrow measures such as standardised tests, and those who fail, even though perhaps capable of success in other aspects if measured in other ways.

Standish describes the 'unhealthiness of this fragmentation' or imbalance where some are 'well fed on the proteins of the grammar school curriculum but deficient in the vitamins of personal and social education'. He explains that 'there is a need for a balanced diet and whole food'. Standish claims that it is against this background that 'the education of the whole person is understandably emphasised', especially by those 'concerned to resist instrumentalism in the aims of education' (1995: 122).

Standish maintains that the idea of 'wholeness or completeness' can be problematic (*ibid.*: 122). For example, this is the case where completeness 'takes the form of an integrity realised where we are rational self-legislators, the autonomous architects of our own lives' (*ibid.*: 122). Similarly there are concerns with notions of completeness where 'completeness is to be achieved through the acquisition of a package of skills or competences' so popular of 'curriculum planners' (*ibid.*: 122). Another sense of completeness which is concerning 'involves the unfolding of an essential self' through 'discovery' or sometimes 'through something like the natural growth of a plant' (*ibid.*: 122). Finally Standish identifies a concern with completeness viewed as 'achieved through self-exploration', where 'through counselling we



can achieve the wholeness of self-fulfilment, a realisation of our human potential' (*ibid.*: 122). In these ways, the concern for wholeness relates to a more pervasive concern with completeness.

This idea of growth into wholeness which includes completeness, is exemplified by the emphasis on learning as 'modular' (*ibid.*: 122 ), and by 'modes of assessments which are exhaustive' (*ibid.*: 123). The concern with educating the 'whole person functions as an overarching rationale for the organisation of the education system and for curriculum decisions', functioning as a 'formal structuring principle' (*ibid.*: 124). Hence a young person is said to be educated in this sense once they have learnt a set of clearly defined learning objectives within a specified curriculum, only judged through certain identified subjects, and have achieved a certain standard in their GCSE, or GCEs, or have completed the prescribed number of modules in respect of these, which in both cases have been assessed using numerical standardised measures.

This requirement for completeness in the need to educate the whole person and which defines realising potential, shapes our understanding of growth in education. However, completeness diminishes the understanding of growth in the Aristotelian sense sought in this thesis. Within the concept of growth is included the orientation towards flourishing, which is a lifetime's task. It acknowledges that human beings live with imperfection and continually struggle to make wise judgements in favour of living well and doing well, and to consider their decisions in the context of others and the good of society as a whole. This conception of growth requires the kind of learning as a way of life described in Part One of this chapter, including the need to learn to read, to dialogue and to live within a framework that recognises the dignity of every human person. This involves critical yet sensitive interpretative understanding such as the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation enable.

However, growth which includes completeness does not take account sufficiently of the importance of the human condition to live with imperfection, to use practical reason, and to be interconnected with others and otherness. It does not nurture affiliation or practical reason which this thesis considers essential for making wise judgments in favour of flourishing and realising potential. In respect of affiliation for example, Standish uses Othello's torment as 'an emblem of his inability to live with the imperfection of the human condition' (*ibid.*: 130). Furthermore, Othello's inability to develop the capability of affiliation lies in the following dilemma: 'Either I am complete as I am or I am not. If I am not complete, I do not live up to my

*understanding* of what it is to be a successful human being. If I am complete and successful, then I cannot leave myself open to otherness, to change, even though I know this to be necessary to being (human) in the world' (*ibid.*: 130). For Standish, Othello's 'is to be an achieved and complete identity' (*ibid.*: 130) which prevents him from connecting with others, giving of himself, and truly growing as a person. Regarding practical reason, I use an example in Chapter 8, from Jane Austen's novels, where Austen demands of her characters that they pay particular attention and do justice to the subjects they are assessing, which is not a characteristic which can be completed in school alone or easily measured through standardised tests.

This idea of physical growth of the body at full height is at odds with the understanding we need from a concept of growth in respect of the development of the person as educated. As Standish argues with regards to the development of a person, and in this sense with regards to education, 'there is no end' (*ibid.*: 133). In other words, we must 'think of coming to this understanding as part of becoming educated' (*ibid.*: 133). Standish accuses modernism because it 'assumes the possibility of ... completeness' (*ibid.*: 133) and argues as follows:

In various ways educational theory and practice is inclined towards a belief in a grand design. Ideas of the whole person are manifestations of this; so are some smaller scale aspects of the curriculum. These suggest that the process of education makes sense in terms of the possibility of its completeness. In opposition to this, ... the assumptions of the grand design are at odds both with human nature and with education, and ... the reasons for this are to be understood conjointly. There is a disanalogy between health [full growth] and education which the metaphor of nutrition belies. ...The analogy with physical health facilitates ... skill-talk and an approach to curriculum which is mechanistic in style. ... In this it helps to clear the way for accounting and evaluation. ... It loses sight of the (qualified) ways in which being a whole might make sense and in this loses something of education. (Standish, 1995: 133).

The concept of growth which includes the development of the whole child does not finish when the child becomes an adult. The idea of developing the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation critical in the Capabilities Approach, allows for this understanding of growth as ongoing rather than growth understood in purely skills-based terms where once the skill is acquired growth has occurred. I will explore this notion in greater detail in section 3 below.

Before that I will attend to the growth metaphor as associated with progressive thinkers and the difficulties concerning the child-centred approach connected with growth.

### **7.5 The growth metaphor and issues concerning the child-centred approach**

The growth metaphor in respect of education has received particular criticism from those who promote the 'subject based curriculum', or the 'useful curriculum' (Pring, 1989: 99,100) exemplified by the factory metaphor. However, as Pring identifies, this 'useful curriculum' is accompanied by the culture of what works (Oancea and Pring, 2008). It is therefore understood within the language of performativity, where outcomes and targets confine the idea of growth, in respect of the 'growth of knowledge', to a 'narrow concern' (Pring, 1976: 9). In an attempt to regain some of the valuable aspects of the child-centred approach which include the concept of growth, Pring suggests the following wider concern, which stands in contrast to the performative culture in education:

In educating we are concerned with the development, indeed enrichment, of mental life, and that central to such development is the growth of knowledge ... so long as a sufficiently generous analysis of knowledge is accepted ... that does justice to the manifold way in which people in general, and these pupils in particular, are consciously engaged in a number of activities. (Pring, 1976: 9).

Pring suggests a wide understanding of growth when defending the importance of the growth of knowledge in education and argues that the focus of any educational debate 'must be, but frequently isn't, an understanding (controversial though it is) of what it means to be and to grow as a person' (2004: 5). This requires attention to the individual and his or her development, and in this sense is child-centred. By contrast, in the factory model of education, all children are fed an identical diet of facts within a predetermined process which constitutes learning, such as that challenged by Dickens in *Hard Times*. In contrast, this attention to growth which Pring proposes, includes Hogan's suggestion of drawing from Plato's *Republic* the benefits of safeguarding 'the healthy growth of the imagination' (Hogan, 1983: 44), which enables us to understand others and ourselves more fully, and to resist being confined to facts.

In contrast to the culture of performativity, the recent Nuffield Review (Pring *et al.*, 2009) supports Dewey's thinking, where 'Education as growth and adaptation' is the metaphor

(2009: 17). The Nuffield Review identifies that Dewey, recognised 'the danger of the 'false dualism' of the 'academic' (the transmission of knowledge) versus the 'vocational' (the narrowly conceived training to reach targets), and argued for the integration of practice with the world of ideas ('the accumulated wisdom of the race') (*ibid.*: 17). Here, the process of growth occurred as 'the young person adapted to new situations, faced problems that need to be solved, endeavoured to make sense of experience and learned to extend and benefit from relations within the wider community' (*ibid.*: 17).

The concept of growth in respect of education has been a concern for many centuries now and has been associated with the narrative of progressivism which includes a significant group of figures such as – 'Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Dewey' (Darling and Nordembo, 2003: 289). In this chapter I will not engage with a full historiography of progressivism<sup>3</sup>, but will illustrate certain themes which have shaped the view of child-centred education which promotes the concept of growth. For example, Darling and Nordembo suggest that: for Comenius, 'it is the children's own experience that is important'. For Rousseau, 'childhood has its own ways of seeing, thinking and feeling; nothing is more foolish than to try and substitute our ways'. For Pestalozzi, the development of the theme of educating the whole person is key: 'head, heart and hands'. For Froebel the focus is unfolding of children's awareness and understanding through the practical and creative activities which children naturally want to engage in, which is 'often checked by misguided adults'. And more recently, Dewey's thought was very influential in the UK during the 1960s, especially on 'Government reports on primary education, and on a generation of trainee teachers' (Darling and Nordembo, 2003: 289-291). Following a period of extensive criticism of Dewey in the early 1980s, there has been a revival of Dewey's thought, in particular in support of the importance of 'political education' and 'the renewal of democracy in schools' (*ibid.*: 289-291).

Connected with the progressive movement, the growth metaphor has had a 'significant influence on educational thought' (Hamm, 1989:20). As Hamm explains, the metaphor continues to hold sway with notions such as 'fulfilling the potentials of each child', 'individualized instruction appropriate to the uniqueness of each child', 'education to meet the needs of each child', 'children should be self-directed', etc (1989: 20). These notions are recognisable today, for example, in the concept of personalised learning, assessment for learning, and autonomous or independent learning. Hamm, quoting Dearden, argues that the growth metaphor has become so central in educational thinking, that it functions 'as a symbolic image, pregnant with meaning and rich in emotional appeals' (1989: 20). However, as

he suggests, 'a good metaphor is not always good in every context', and closer analysis of the metaphor of growth 'reveals a number of disanalogies or faulty comparisons' (1989: 21, 22).

The child-centred approach of some of the progressives, which supports the growth metaphor, can be distinguished by two traditions, as Pring describes:

[1] ... between, those who emphasize the individual nature of growth - the gradual development of potential that is there waiting to be recognized, fertilized, watered, or just allowed to grow (the horticultural metaphor is powerful among the followers of Froebel and Pestalozzi) - and, [2] those who stress the social context of development ... where the social nature of this process of growth is emphasized. (2004: 82).

In this second sense, growth is not an unfolding of what is already there, and instead is 'a gradual expansion of one's experience and understanding through the interaction between a person and the social and cultural environments in which he finds himself' (2004: 82).

With regards to those who emphasise the individual's nature of growth and the unfolding of potential, the aptness of the growth metaphor is evident, where education like growth are both understood as ongoing and continuous. However, as examined in section 2 above, Standish (1995) identifies the problems with the idea of growth as unfolding potential which are too closely associated with the notion of completeness. In this sense the metaphor can falsely parallel physical growth with intellectual, social, or moral growth, where physical growth reaches maturity at a specified time and other types are ongoing throughout the life of the person. Similarly, this commitment to growth does not always fully explain the direction of growth which is sought, since it seems to allow for growth in ways which thwart the potential of the individual and which damage the good of society. Hence, some 'growth theorists' in simply seeking more growth in individuals do not recognise the problem that growth towards 'over-acquisitiveness or selfishness' (Hamm, 1989: 22) can be an aspect of human potential which educators would not wish to encourage.

Nevertheless there are other aspects of the growth metaphor which are helpful, that is, it 'hints at' the view that education has 'intrinsic value' (Hamm, 1989: 21). However this is not without complication. For example as Dewey puts it, 'the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end' (Dewey, quoted in Hamm, 1989: 21). According to Pring, for Dewey 'growth is not an unfolding of what is already there' but rather a 'gradual expansion' of

experience and understanding nurtured within the 'social context' (2004: 82). The growth metaphor in this sense involves connections between significant and meaningful experiences, integration and internalisation of experiences through enquiry. Here, growth is focused on what is relevant to the learner. In this sense there is an ethical dimension in this notion of growth (in 'how to decide what is of most worth?', where the 'valuings of the learner' are the ultimate concern and define the meaning of growth (2004: 83).

Dewey's attempt to challenge the view 'that knowledge can be uncovered as a definite and permanent truth', some suggest, led him to argue in favour of 'a new understanding: that knowledge is individual, instrumental and relative' (Darling and Nordembo, 2003: 292). With regards to the metaphor of growth in education, this has profound implications for what is considered 'valuable' and 'meaningful' in respect of teaching and learning which nurtures growth (Pring: 2004, 80-98). Pring maintains that Dewey's suspicions of a theory of value which assumes some general criterion of value, independent of what the individual feels to be valuable, led him to 'characterize value through the formal characteristics of growth of experience itself', and 'there was no external criterion to appeal to' (Pring 2004: 84). If this interpretation is correct, as disputed earlier, 'the most obvious difficulty in such a theory of value is that it does not exclude the growth which, on other grounds, we would wish to dismiss as grossly immoral' (*ibid.*: 85). A pertinent example is the petty thief, whose experiences 'open up the possibility of an interesting and varied life of crime' (*ibid.*: 85). Pring suggests that in this view, 'Dewey did not find in his formal characterisation of growth a principle by which he could exclude as non-valuable any particular, substantive experience' (*ibid.*: 85).

With regards to meaning, this pivotal focus on the individual's experience defines meaning in terms of what the individual experiences as significant, or of interest. In this sense, what 'comes from outside has to be accommodated within the learner's own frame of reference' which is 'tied up with his or her experience and pursuits of matters of interest' (Pring, 2004: 91). What appears to be challenged is the 'public nature of the concepts we employ, the interpersonal standards to which enquiry must submit, the possibility of giving an objective account of reality, a notion of truth that is related to standards other than personal satisfaction and utility' (*ibid.*: 91). This is what leads Darling and Nordenbo to describe Dewey's account of knowledge as 'individual, instrumental and relative' (2003: 292).

Pring's objection to this notion of child-centredness and growth is based on his view that one cannot develop a 'theory of meaningfulness' without accepting the 'impersonal and

*intersubjective standards of meaningful discourse that are embedded within different intellectual, moral and aesthetic disciplines*’ (2004: 92). An inter-subjective framework such as that of the Capabilities Approach, could offer the point of reference necessary within which individuals can test their perceptive experiences.

Notwithstanding Pring (2004) and Darling and Nordembo’s (2003) critique of Dewey as espousing overly subjective or relativist tendencies, it should be recognised that Dewey’s views have often been misunderstood or ‘misread’ when grouped together with earlier progressives such as Rousseau (Fairfield, 2009: 14, in Fleming, 2012: 37). Instead, Dewey’s concern was to advance understanding by making connections and therefore he challenged dualisms which led to extremist tendencies (*ibid.*: 37). Dewey’s starting point could be understood as being ‘the basic human organism and its relationship to the environment’ (*ibid.*: 38), and his child-centred perspective and understanding of growth thus focuses on actively preparing a student for future life which entails participation in society to help her shape and realise her capacities (1897). Unlike the accusations to over-subjectivity, this understanding suggests that growth requires both the individual and society, that it forms part of a life time’s work where education expands beyond school and where a balance is sought between individual growth and its interdependence with others and its natural heritage. Dewey describes this well:

I believe that all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race. This process begins ... at birth and is continuously shaping the individual’s powers, saturating his consciousness, forming his habits, training his ideas. ... He becomes an inheritor of the funded capital of civilization. (1989: 4)

Nevertheless, the tension between the private and public sphere and seeking balance between these requires ongoing attention and reflection. Hence the psychologist David Smail, rightly critiques the concept of growth which overemphasises subjectivism, where the inner creative spirit overrides the public concern, as ‘people are brought up to believe that they can, so to speak, whistle up a viable world from within themselves, that all that matters is creativity – seen as some kind of inborn trait – and ‘personal growth’, that satisfactory living is in some unspecified way to do with the unfettered exercise of will’ (1996: 73). Smail challenges education understood in terms of this kind of growth because it involves ‘unleashing the potential of ‘inner worlds’, and weakening if not prescribing many of the categories of the outer world’ such as critical interpretation tested dialogically (*ibid.*: 73). Moreover, ‘carried to

its logical extreme, which of course it couldn't be, this kind of cultivation of individual interiority would result quite literally in madness' (*ibid.*: 75). As Smail is correct to defend:

Meaning is public, not a private construct , and if we didn't live in ... a world whose principal features we all recognised and spoke about in the same way - we would not be able to operate a society at all. (1996: 75).

It is the factory metaphor which has been critiqued by those who in modern times challenge the performative culture in education and instead espouse the growth metaphor. Through the growth metaphor, important elements are defended, including: personal development, the importance of the individual's perspective in assessments about learning, and the importance of experience in the process of making judgments. As discussed in this section, there are difficulties associated with the notion of growth as a suitable metaphor regarding education. Nevertheless, there is merit in the attempt to salvage the growth metaphor, which defends essential aspects of learning as a way of life, and which stands in contrast to the performative culture.

## **7.6 Salvaging the growth metaphor within the context of the Capabilities Approach**

Educationists such as Nyberg recognise the unhelpful tendencies which have arisen from the view that somehow 'growth *is* education' (Nyberg, 1975: 28), and others acknowledge that the growth concept has 'become central in educational thinking', but challenge the view of growth as 'the definition of education' (Hamm, 1989: 20). This understanding which reduces education to growth, leads to viewing education as something natural which will happen unaided by teaching, or to be focused entirely on the individual's preferences which teaching should nurture irrespective of other considerations. This tendency leads to an over individualistic view of human beings who should be left to grow naturally, or an over subjective view with an 'anything goes' approach, where all learning as chosen by the student is equally valid. Rightly, there has been considerable critique of the growth metaphor, which Nyberg (1975: 23-31) explores in his article, *Pruning the Growth Metaphor*, where he suggests that growth and education are in some way interlinked and affected by one another.

When considered within the Capabilities Approach and the concept of shared capabilities, the growth metaphor provides a richer conception of child-centred education, which does not



make the mistakes of focusing on the child at the expense of learning. Nyberg, in his argument of 'growth as education' (1975: 31) in terms of 'expansion' manages to salvage something of this metaphor as helpful for our understanding of teaching and learning. Nyberg contends that growth should be understood as 'expansion' in terms of 'opening wide' (1975: 28) as illustrated below:

In a way, one might think of expansion as the common term which signifies the overlap of certain aspects of the terms "education" and "growth". Notice that this is not a case of identity, but a case of limited similarity in the area of overlapping aspects ... a manner that shows the close relationship of those terms. (1975: 28, 29).

When the concept of growth is understood in education within the Capabilities Approach, this idea of expansion gives us some indication of when to provide structure and when to allow freedom of exploration, of when to nudge or challenge and when to let children be, as they enquire and reflect.

In considering the concept of expansion, the Capabilities Approach provides an understanding of what expansion, or growth for that matter, entails. This is not about expanding whatever interest the child has, or about motivating children in the sense of purely inciting an emotive element within them, such as emotionally rousing or stirring up children in readiness to learn. Pring argues against this emotional inciting of children and concludes that 'stirring children up, if successful, would result in stirred-up children, not necessarily in interested children' (2004: 89). Growth in respect of education is also not about expanding all potential, but rather about expanding every persons' capability for practical reason and affiliation, and their capacity for critical reflection within the context of a shared humanity. This view of growth within the Capabilities Approach is a fruitful way in which we can salvage the growth metaphor which includes the ethical dimension, and yet is not confined by the overly subjective or reduced to the emotive.

Growth in the sense of developing the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation as described in detail in Chapter 5, is what is proposed here. Nussbaum explains the significance of growth in these areas for the ability of individuals to make good judgements within the context of what is good for society. She maintains that the capability for practical reason and affiliation enable individuals and groups in the following significant aspects given that the lack of such capabilities has disastrous consequences:

To use one's senses in a way not infused by the characteristically human use of thought and planning is to use them in an incompletely human manner. To plan for one's own life without being able to do so in complex forms of discourse, concern, and reciprocity with other human beings is, again to behave in an incompletely human way. (2000: 82)

For this reason, practical reason or the ability to make wise judgements, is integrally intertwined with affiliation, the ability to empathise and reach out to others with care and solidarity. Nussbaum reminds us that 'the human world is held together by pity and fellow-feeling', which enables people 'to deal with suffering', and thus 'their morality is a response to the fact of suffering' (1990: 375). This response entails both the development or growth of affiliation and practical reasoning.

Dunne puts this a different way when defending the benefits of the Aristotle-inspired concept which is present in the Capabilities Approach. He identifies that, 'In this conception, speech, expression, deliberation and action are the essential tokens of our humanity; and all of them are practised in essential relationships of interdependency with others' (2006 :13). He expands this line of argument by drawing on Plato with regards to his important image of dialogue 'as the rubbing together of two fire-sticks neither of which, on its own, can produce the illuminative flame' (Republic 435a) (Dunne, 2006 :13). In this way, Dunne highlights the importance of affiliation or the interrelatedness of persons, which together with critical interpretative reasoning is then refined to make wise judgements. In the Aristotelian sense, our practical reasoning begins with perception which is refined into 'deliberated desire' (Nussbaum, 1986: 308), and which is tested in discourse with others and against the framework of a shared humanity outlined in the capabilities list.

The Capabilities Approach, with the importance of practical reason and affiliation is significant to our understanding of growth, as it salvages an aspect of the idea of growth which informs and shapes education within the capabilities framework and Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia*, explored in Chapter 2, 3, and 4. Viewing education within the wider context of enabling young people to flourish and thus grow in this sense, is not an individualistic or selfish pursuit towards realising potential. On the contrary, this journey of growth becomes possible in the context of and with reference to others, in our ability to relate and care for others, and in our ability to make deliberated judgements towards action for our personal good and the good of others in society. This is the ethical dimension we seek, and here the growth metaphor is

helpful in a view of education which has 'intrinsic value' (Hamm, 1989: 21), given its aim of enabling growth towards flourishing.

As a result, the Capabilities Approach informs the kind of growth we seek. It enables us to understand what flourishing entails and what diminishes it. The Capabilities Approach provides a view of the growth metaphor which seeks to realise potential while at the same time acknowledging that certain potentials should not be actualised (eg. violence in certain situations, freedoms in others). In this sense not everything should be nurtured to grow and the child needs guidance and needs to have opportunities to decipher these for him or herself through reflective practice, thereby developing practical reason towards positive action. In the last resort we are preparing children for making judgements on their own, and part of this training includes the learner making mistakes in this process of deliberation. Precision as was discussed earlier is not the aim, but rather flexibility in understanding towards making wiser judgements.

The growth metaphor understood in the context of the Capabilities Approach recognises that not all human potential leads to flourishing. As Hamm reminds us 'not all of a child's potential *can* be fulfilled ... furthermore, some potential *should* not be fulfilled (1989: 22). For example, there will be times when children and young people have tendencies to realise potentials which do not nurture flourishing in the Aristotelian sense discussed in this thesis. This is the case where children have a tendency to take other children's property, or find it difficult to restrain their aggression towards others and are violent. Another example includes young people who engage in antisocial activities, or in risky behaviours such as riding their motorbikes too fast and without a helmet, thereby endangering themselves and others. Later in life, in adulthood, there may be examples in the workplace where fraud takes place, or scientific experiments which are detrimental to societal flourishing are undertaken. These tough, persistent and real issues in society which affect individuals and groups need to be recognised, and growth should instead be considered with reference to the capabilities list outlined in Chapter 5.

Education which engages in helping children and young people to grow and realise potential which enables human flourishing as described in Chapter 2 and 4, may curtail behaviours and attitudes which diminish or are a barrier to flourishing. The ability to flourish grows as individuals develop their practical reasoning and affiliation and make good judgements in their particular situations. This process of making judgements goes beyond rule compliance, and it is

reflective practice which can have a significant impact in helping learners to make positive decisions themselves with reference to the capabilities framework, rather than simply by following rules. Furthermore, this view of growth as education is correct in its characteristic as 'ongoing and continuous' (Hamm, 1989: 21).

Of course, if left to grow naturally developing potentials which are barriers to personal and societal flourishing could be disastrous for success in terms of *eudaimonia*, and for people's ability to co-operate with, care for, and relate meaningfully to others in society. This has implications for educators to engage in nurturing the capabilities for flourishing, such as practical reason and affiliation, and in intersecting when these are being thwarted. Again, within the framework of the capabilities list which Nussbaum provides, it is possible for both teachers and learners to make judgements about which action or what learning enables growth or leads to *eudaimonia*, and which tendencies are preventing them from realising potential in this sense. This is where the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate situations and learning is key. Such understanding will require a sophisticated degree of reflective practice, both from teachers and learners to ascertain the extent to which they are reacting and making judgments in a balanced way, and to refine their judgements if they are over or under reacting to any given situation. Importantly, these judgements are tested dialogically and in turn further refined. It is reflective practice within this framework which the Capabilities Approach promotes which can enable persons to make inroads to personal and societal flourishing. Space which promotes this kind of teaching and learning is vital in education.

Growth understood within the capabilities framework is an important concept which enables understanding of what is entailed in the educational journey of every individual, which is deeply dialogical, and whose ethical dimension is a shared humanity. In this sense the journey of growth may involve persevering in the face of difficulties and temptations, overcoming obstacles, following the right signposts, discarding unnecessary baggage, passing through a particular landscape, focusing on the destination, helping others along the way, and refusing to turn back. This core metaphor of growth which finds many variations on the theme as depicted here, are all possible through the development of practical reason and affiliation, and resist the solipsistic tendency into the overly subjective, through the public language of discourse and a shared ethical framework which transcends individual cultures.

## Summary

This chapter was divided into two parts. Part One addressed the problem which educationists suggest is facing education, that is 'the failure to learn from the past' (Pring *et al.*, 2009: 85). In this chapter therefore, I expanded on the notion of reflection by looking to the past, in particular, reflective practice from the Greco-Roman heritage of philosophy as a practical tool for life (Hadot, 1995), and the later tradition of 16<sup>th</sup> century Ignatian reflection which evolved from these philosophical roots, with its flexible reflective cycle.

I argued that much can be learnt today from the heritage of practical philosophy with its emphasis on 'learning to live', 'learning to dialogue', and 'learning how to read'. I proposed that education should embrace these elements of learning crucial for contemporary education beyond utility. This approach, I suggested can be further combined with flexible structures from the 16<sup>th</sup> century spiritual reflective practice known as the *Examen*, in order to provide a helpful cycle of reflective enquiry for contemporary education. In particular I draw on the five step cycle of reflection of the *Examen*, which focuses on (1) expressing gratitude, (2) seeking understanding, (2) reviewing the day or situation, (4) focusing on an area for improvement, and (5) planning for the future or next step, which I maintain can extend present notions of reflective enquiry in education.

This heritage of reflective practice is well-placed to reframe teaching and learning as a way of life (Hogan, 2004) and provides helpful ideas for practice and evaluation within the framework of the Capabilities Approach which promotes essential ethical questioning and enquiry. Crucial for human development or growth, is education as a way of life which engages in this kind of reflective learning. It strives to spark curiosity in children; to help them think passionately and critically about difficult issues with no obvious answer; to help them manage risk, be resilient, value interdependence and never give up; to appreciate the wonder of nature and pay attention to the past, present, and future through careful listening; to engage in planning, monitoring and reviewing their lives; and, to participate in positive caring action developing moral seriousness based on a shared humanity.

The growth metaphor in education is contentious, and in Part Two of this Chapter I sought to salvage something of the concept of growth in relation to education. I argued that the difficulties faced by the growth metaphor and its child-centred tendency to subjectivism, which does not consider others, can be overcome when reframed within the Capabilities

Approach. The heritage of reflective practice within the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach, I believe, salvages an understanding of growth in education which avoids the tendency towards subjectivism or individualism, and which considers growth from the perspective of a lifetime, assessed in the context of an ethical framework based on shared human characteristics and capabilities. For this reason the metaphor of growth when linked to educating the whole person must not include a notion of completeness within it (Standish, 1995), but rather must be viewed as ongoing throughout life. Therefore, I defend the growth metaphor in education when focused on nurturing practical reason and affiliation, where growth is realised through the process of making mistakes and ongoing reflective practice tested with others, within the Capabilities Approach.

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<sup>1</sup> Hellenistic and Roman: Hadot describes this further: 'these words themselves open an immense period before us.' (1995:53) - 'with the emergence of the new form of Greek civilization beginning from the moment when Alexander's conquests and, in their wake, the rise of kingdoms extended this civilization into the barbarian world from Egypt to the borders of India, and then brought it into contact with the most diverse nations and civilizations. The result is a kind of distance, a historical distance, between Hellenistic thought and the Greek tradition preceding it.' (*ibid.*: 53). This period leads onto the Roman, which 'covers the rise of Rome, which will lead to the destruction of the Hellenistic kingdoms, brought to completion in 30 BC with Cleopatra's death. After that will come the expansion of the Roman empire, the rise and triumph of Christianity, the barbarian invasions, and the end of the Western empire. We have just traversed a millennium. But from the standpoint of the history of thought, this long period must be treated as a whole (1995: 53).

<sup>2</sup> Here, Tetlow (2008) describes the Examen for contemporary audiences, though he does so within the Christian context in the main. <http://ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/discernment-of-spirits/discernment-in-a-nutshell/> (Last accessed 25/04/11).

<sup>3</sup> For a thorough overview of the history of progressive education see Darling and Nordembo's account of important arguments in this area (2003).

## Chapter 8

### Evaluating quality and success in education within the Capabilities Approach

There is a natural continuum between wonder and story-telling, between story-telling and theorizing: continually we seek to expand the comprehensiveness of our grasp. But if it is a universal human desire to grasp the world and make it comprehensible to reason, then it seems clear that oversimplification and reduction will be deep and ever-present dangers. (Nussbaum, 1986: 260).

### Introduction

In this chapter I argue in favour of the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach as an alternative to the utilitarian framework, for evaluations in education. The ethical framework in Capabilities Approach is significant for judgements in education, as it supports a sensitive, interpretative understanding in respect of evaluation, in contrast to the prevalent linear explanations sought by the performative culture in education.

The Aristotle-inspired ethical framework which I suggest, embraces the concept of human flourishing or fulfilment as defined in Chapter 2, with its notion of non-commensurability at the heart of any discourse about what is valuable in education. In matters of evaluation, what evidence is justified for inclusion, what cannot be excluded, and what counts as quality, good, or success, cannot be reduced to a single standard. At present, the non-utilitarian ethical dimension which I propose is often neglected in education owing predominantly to the misguided quest for objectivity which seeks scientific-style proof and conclusive knowledge in areas where it is not appropriate to ascertain such precision (Midgley, 2004). The Aristotelian perspective is important in education, since as already discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, the ethical framework offered by the Capabilities Approach enables the appropriate degree of objectivity for judgements to be made in this area (Aristotle, NE 1098a25-30; Nussbaum, 1986, 1993, 2001). In particular, when judging quality and success in various areas of education, this approach overcomes the 'false dualism of the quantitative/qualitative distinction' identified by Pring (2000:247-60; 2004: 240-3).

In education the yearning for objectivity and proof, misconstrued as only satisfied by a (quasi) scientific approach (Bridges, 2009: 497), has been fuelled in recent decades by the culture of 'performativity', described as 'efficiency measured according to an input/output ratio' (Lyotard, 1984: 88). This (quasi) scientific tendency in evaluation in education has been critiqued by educationists across the field (Dunne and Hogan, 2004; Law, 2004; Bridges and Smith, 2006; Oancea and Furlong, 2007; Bridges, Smeyers and Smith, 2008; Bridges, 2009; Pring *et al.*, 2009, 2010; Alexander, 2010; Pring and Pollard, 2011).

In contrast to this paradigm, the Capabilities Approach proposed in this chapter, with its ethical framework, offers an opportunity for re-balancing the scales. It seeks more sensitive evidence which enables a broader understanding of evaluation in respect of quality and success in education, with reference to what persons can be in order to flourish. The framework proposed here does not presume to yield the degree of objectivity claimed by the (quasi) scientific paradigm critiqued by Bridges (2009), and consequently rightly falls short of offering conclusive proof or knowledge in this area. Nevertheless, such a framework with its a flexible method of reflective practice, requires an interpretative view and allows for an appropriate degree of objectivity to be ascertained.

This chapter is composed of two parts. In Part One, I concentrate on exploring the present situation with regards to evaluation in education today, and its difficulties. In Part Two, I propose the Capabilities Approach as one that provides the much needed ethical dimension for education and evaluations therein, which the present performative discourse in education does not include.

Therefore in Part One, I focus first on the philosophical critique of the popular claim that we live in a scientific age which provides all the information we require to make sense of life, make judgements, and guide actions. As Mary Midgley suggests, this view is misguided as it reduces the complexity and plurality of the human condition to a 'metaphysical simplicity' (2004: 49). Instead, what is required is a more sensitive form of reasoning which allows for deep understanding in our judgements in this area, understood within the ethical dimension proposed in this chapter.

Second, I examine the present context of evaluation in education and expose the rhetoric of the scientific age as wanting when applied to the field of education. Such an approach in education often diminishes and constrains our value judgements to a utilitarian framework.



When defending the importance of an ethical dimension in education, Pring, correctly reminds us that the focus of any educational debate 'must be, but frequently isn't, an understanding (controversial though it is) of what it means to be and to grow as a person' (2004: 5), which cannot be reduced to a single objective standard or explained in simplistic ways.

Third, I seek support from educationists, who like Pring, propose a more sensitive approach to establishing trustworthy evidence and who are in favour of a greater balance in evaluation than that afforded by the (quasi) scientific approach in both educational research, and teaching and learning in schools. What is sought here is a place for evaluation which is more akin to an art than a science (Bridges, 2009), while resisting being overly-subjective and non-comparable .

In Part Two of this chapter, I focus on the importance of the ethical dimension within the Capabilities Approach for evaluation processes in education, and what this might entail. Although Part One finds growing support for a broader perspective in education which breaks free from the confines of measurement, there remains a lack of conviction to postulate an ethical dimension which education can embrace with confidence and trust as an alternative to the utilitarian perspective. I propose therefore, the Capabilities Approach as one which allows a much needed sensitive evidence-source for evaluation, free from the framework of utility.

## Part One

### Evaluation in education today: The need for greater balance

#### 8.1 A plural discourse to calm the imperialism of the scientific paradigm

The desperate search for certainty breeds an obsessive tendency which continues to be evident in society today. There is a perceived need to take refuge in the isolated discourse of science or logic, and to identify with this rational sphere to the exclusion of all other forms of discourse available. This perennial danger illustrated by the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, which troubled Aristotle thousands of years ago, is one that Nussbaum (1986: 260) warns against. The tendency to accept the supremacy of single explanations continues to affect the social sciences, including the field of education. Obvious examples of this approach are Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs) in the primary stage and the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs). This narrow outlook which seeks certainty by measuring with one standard, or by confining evaluation to the metric view is critiqued by educationists who argue in favour of a broader understanding of evidence for judgements about educational research and practice (Bridges, Smeyers and Smith, 2008).

The philosopher Mary Midgley, in her book *The Myths We Live By*, suggests that the attempt to understand human nature gives rise to the desire for humans to distinguish themselves from animals, resulting in the perennial human effort to distance itself from animals through appeal to reason. This tendency was further heightened during the Enlightenment, although as she argues, in spite of many 'minor gains' the Enlightenment 'could not produce that total revolution' which dismissed so many important aspects of the human condition (2004: 137). But there remain vestiges of the age old tendency to create a strict division between human beings and other animals which continue to give rise to conflicting ideas about the meaning of the human/animal frontier. This false dualism affects human identity and nurtures its tendency to define itself with reference to science alone, promoting this as the only authentic voice of explanation and understanding. This has given rise to the notion that humans identify themselves as 'thoroughly scientific beings, individuals too clear-headed and well-organised to use blurred or ambivalent concepts' (Midgley, 2004: 137). This view, prominent in many areas of private and public life has permeated education resulting in a sometimes narrowed vision.

This is paradoxical, as the appeal to science was envisioned to yield greater precision and to overcome opacity, rather than to constrain discourse and horizons of understanding to a narrow view.

Midgley identifies in her writing (1978, 1994, 2004), as the Aristotelian perspective underlines, that simple descriptions arrived at using a narrow vision of reality lead to deficient representations of the human condition, resulting in blinkered and inadequate definitions about terms, and judgements about situations. In reality, the concepts that we actually use in everyday life are blurred or ambivalent. 'Notions such as love, care, trust and consent are incredibly complicated' and Midgley draws evidence for this view with regards to friendship, where she identifies that what we mean by a friend is not a simple concept (2004: 137). For example, in order to be a good friend or decide who are good friends and how to nurture them, we require a deep understanding of what a friend *is*. This process of understanding involves a serious attempt at gathering evidence about the various elements of this instance of friendship which together constitute a thorough definition of the term. In this attempt for knowledge which is not of a logical kind, it would be ill-conceived to seek certainty. Hence, some argue that this kind of 'practical judgement' 'plays a central role in science and mathematics, properly understood' (Bridges, 2009: 514). This chapter maintains this is often even more acutely so in education. As Midgley maintains, the conviction that the scientific view is the only valid one which sheds light on reality, is ill conceived.

The standards of clarity that we manage to impose in our well-lit scientific workplaces are designed to suit the preselected problems that we take in there with us, not the larger tangles from which those problems are abstracted. (2004: 137).

Midgley's claim to seek broader evidence for our judgements is supported by Nussbaum in her interpretations of the Aristotelian position of explanation, as one best informed by multi-various evidence beyond the confines of the metric or the commensurable (1990: 56-66). Nussbaum maintains that Aristotle 'stresses complexity and context' (*ibid.*: 72) rather than a scientific model to ascertain what is involved in practical judgements. Good deliberation in this sense requires, 'flexibility, responsiveness and openness to the external'. As Nussbaum concludes: 'to rely on an algorithm here is not only insufficient, it is a sign of immaturity and weakness' (*ibid.*: 74).

With regards to evaluations in education what is often needed is not a scientific model promising precision in terms of certainty, but rather interpretative understanding. Here the distinction between the philosophical concepts of *erklären* and *verstehen*<sup>1</sup> can help. The former concept depicts clarity in terms of a single explanation of the type promoted in the Enlightenment, whereas *verstehen*, depicts a different and broader kind of understanding which requires sensitive interpretation and allows for multiple perspectives as valid references of the same reality. This latter kind of understanding is described by the philosopher O'Hear, as the 'sort of understanding that recognises that a particular gesture in a classical sculpture is full of grace' (1987: 105). *Erklären* and *verstehen* are two different forms of reason (Montefiore, 1998: 314). *Verstehen*, while 'not conforming to the patterns of the natural sciences, can nevertheless be thought of as expressing and adumbrating canons of rationality' (O'Hear, 1996: vii). *Verstehen*, as interpretative understanding, is essential for evaluation in education research and practice and should not be overshadowed by *erklären*.

Aristotle in his writings warns against seeking scientific-style precision where it is not appropriate (NE 1098a25-30), especially in deliberations about evaluative matters in a persons' life and progress. For example, in respect of a person learning to read, they cannot be said to succeed simply because they have achieved a standardised literacy test. In reality, learning to read is more complex and involves learning to make sense of life through subtle and complex pictures or narratives. This is evident in an individual or a group seeking a sensitive interpretation of a poem or a character in a novel. It is not precision of the metric or factual kind which will yield the understanding which does justice to the description of the character or situation in the narrative being evaluated.

This is something that Jane Austen demands of her readers and her characters where in '*Northanger Abbey*, for example, Catherine Morland must learn that the real world is not a gothic tale', or in '*Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet must learn to make more measured judgments about situations and people (instead of yielding to the prejudice of the title)' (Smith 2003: 386-387). As Austen's readers tend to the texts with sensitivity, they learn to read the human situations within the novels with care and to connect this understanding to the context of their own lives, thereby enabling the individual to read other texts and human situations with greater sophistication and to make sound judgements accordingly. These kinds of judgements require an interpretative evaluation which is rigorous, which yields sensitive understanding, and where the use of metric measures and facts would often be inappropriate. In evaluations about education progress and quality, or for example success in educational

literacy, what is required is sometimes an interpretation which is more diffuse and sensitive than precise, yet nevertheless yields understanding which is communicable to others as a true evaluation.

In an effort to combat the over-reliance on measurable precision, Midgley proposes a non-linear approach instead of the popular reductive linear pattern provided by algorithms in mathematics. Others, such as philosopher John Haldane (1990) with support from G. K. Chesterton also challenge this linear approach exemplified by the 'scientific rationalist', who claims universality only 'in the sense that they take on a thin explanation and carry it very far' (1990: 71). As he points out, 'a pattern can stretch for ever and still be a small pattern' (*ibid.*: 71). Like Midgley, Haldane also argues against what he describes as the 'scientific rationalist' and compares him to 'the consistent maniac in combining an expansive reason with a contracted common sense' (*ibid.*: 71). Instead, Haldane proposes a different kind of reason, one which is informed and shaped by common sense. The different kind of reason described here which is similar to the non-linear approach proposed by Midgley, 'is exercised in association with experience and insight and no presumption operates requiring simple unity either in the phenomena or in their explanation' (Haldane, 1990: 71).

While Midgley (2004) recognises that the linear approach is important for testing particular pieces of reasoning, she argues that this kind of Cartesian thinking which developed as a defence against scepticism is not reflective of our reality. Rather, we exist 'as interdependent parts of a complex network, not as isolated items that must be supported in a void' (*ibid.*: 25). Our experience is not sharply divided into subjective and objective points of view but rather 'spreads across a continuous plane', and 'virtually all our thought integrates material taken from both the objective and the subjective angles' (*ibid.*: 24). The linear approach is not always appropriate especially in matters of morality (that is, questions about how we should live, or what enables humans to thrive). Such questions must take account of a wide discourse and allow a place for sensitive interpretation which does justice to the particular being assessed. Montefiore, also argues against the strong divide or false dualism exemplified in the 'apparently distinct divide' between causal discourse and normative discourse, or between scientific and literary forms of discourse and understanding. He maintains that these forms 'may be more closely and intricately bound up with each other than may have appeared at first sight' (1998: 321).

Consequently, Midgley argues in favour of the benefit of representing ‘the development of our knowledge’ as an ‘interaction with the world around us, leading to growth’ (2004: 26), and proposed the language of exploration rather of the linear. Exploration includes multiple discourses available for human deliberations, since ‘often it is our powers of perception that are central to the work, rather than the consecutive reasoning that can easily be tested’ (*ibid.*: 26). The language of exploration enables pluralism and stands against the ‘conviction that one fundamental form underlies them all and settles everything’ (2004: 27). Hence, Midgley suggests using images such as that of *many-maps*, or of viewing the world as a *huge aquarium* which though ‘we cannot see it as a whole from above, so we peer in at it through a number of small windows’ (*ibid.*: 27). As she describes, ‘we can make quite a lot of sense of this habitat if we patiently put together the data from different angles’ (*ibid.*: 27). Significantly, when engaging in discourse to evaluate aspects of the world, and when making judgements about education in particular, Midgley’s quotation is important:

All perception takes in only a fraction of what is given to it, and all thought narrows that fraction still further in trying to make sense of it. This means that what we see is real enough, but it is always partial. And a good deal of the narrowing is within our own control. (Midgley, 2004: 28).

This view is also found in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, which begins with the claim that ‘all human beings by nature reach out for understanding’ as distinct from knowledge as certainty. Furthermore, at the beginning of Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle points out that our first encounter with the world is through the *phainomena* (NE 1145b3), which Nussbaum translates as the ‘appearances’ (1986: 240-263), that is, the way things first appear to us through our powers of perception. These appearances act as a window into understanding the world which enables human beings to make sense of life, and hence any method which is trustworthy is ‘committed to and limited by these’ (*ibid.*: 240).

Nussbaum argues that Aristotle defends the position that all human beings are inclined to sort and interpret the world for themselves, ‘making distinctions, clarifying, finding explanations for that which seems strange or wonderful’ and human beings ‘seek to comprehend and grasp the world under some general principles that will reveal an order in its multiplicity’ (1986: 259). Language is a public endeavour, as discussed in Chapter 1, developed within a shared sphere of understanding based on common ground between each individual’s perception. Thus, what makes utterances and judgements intelligible between individuals and groups ‘is a background

range of values and ideals, furnished partly by our culture, but also, more deeply, by our common species-repertoire' (Midgley, 2004: 96).

However, 'in our anxiety to control and grasp the uncontrolled by *technē*' (technical expertise /knowledge), 'we may all too easily become distant from the lives that we originally wished to control' (Nussbaum, 1986: 260). Consequently, Nussbaum suggests that Aristotle believes that most of us have become strangers to some aspect of the life we live and the language we use, 'through the grip of hedonism, materialism, mechanism, or some other simple picture' (*ibid.*: 260). Instead, Nussbaum invites us to view education, not as a technical matter, but rather as a matter which requires practical reasoning and affiliation, which is deeply ethical.

For example, a group of teachers evaluating 13 year old Kevin's achievement and progress in class, cannot simply rely on data from tests measured against targets to make their evaluation. Instead they would seek to understand what might be expected from children at different stages in life, and look at Kevin's particular situation, wider history, friendships, learning in other areas, at different times of the day, etc. In short they would gather all the possible information as perceived from their particular perspective. They would then test their understanding with other teachers, with Kevin himself where appropriate, including listening carefully to evidence from Kevin where he has received peer feedback, etc. The teachers would in this way endeavour to work out and understand Kevin's position within the wider picture of Kevin's life. They would find ways in which they and their colleagues can nurture him and help him plan, monitor, and evaluate situations and material effectively to succeed and flourish. To judge his progress as good, simply within the context of his target set against the single standard, or his test scores marked against this single standard, is not to seek appropriate understanding or to do justice to the person being evaluated. Moreover, in this sensitive approach towards Kevin, teachers develop their capacity for affiliation towards him, as they grasp the wider context in which he is living and working and thus 'warm to him' as they empathise with his situation and inspire him towards further development according to his need. And this capacity for affiliation to Kevin in the action and attitude of his teachers enables him in turn to develop affiliation towards others.

With regards to evaluation in education and the search to establish evidence which we can trust and which most comprehensively interprets the reality we perceive with its complexities, it is wise to recognise the following:

Our human nature, exists in a continual oscillation between too much order and disorder, ambition and abandonment, excess and deficiency, the super-human and the merely animal. The good philosopher [or evaluator] would be the one who manages humanly, guarding against these dangers, to improvise the mean. (Nussbaum,1986:262).

The extent to which evaluation in education seeks or achieves the balance recommended here by the Aristotelian position which Nussbaum elucidates, requires further exploration in the form of the following question: What evidence, which methods, and which conceptual framework enables a balanced judgement and understanding about education research or practice?

## **8.2 Balanced evaluation in education: Acceptable evidence, methods and concepts**

Working towards the balance recommended by the Aristotelian position, and in order to understand what this might entail for evaluation in education, this part of the chapter focuses on four areas: (1) the kind of evidence and the methods which evaluation in education sometimes promotes, and the difficulties these present; (2) critiques by educationists seeking a more balanced approach; (3) distinct approaches which draw on Aristotle's views proposed by educationists in respect of research; and (4) difficulties arising from the business language prominent in education resulting from the conceptual framework of utility, which highlights the need to articulate an ethical dimension such as the Capabilities Approach affords.

### **8.2.1 Evidence and methods: The discourse of 'what works' and of the (quasi) scientific**

This part of the chapter explores discourse in education which has been reduced to a 'metaphysical simplicity' (Midgley, 2004: 49), such as the fundamentalist paradigm of *scientism* which demands certainty and single explanations. There are inherent difficulties in this position, where deliberations are only considered trustworthy using a numerical single standard and the only acceptable evidence is that of '(quasi) science' (Bridges, 2009: 497).

Various examples of the 'what works' culture are identified by Oancea and Pring (2008), such as the National Centre for Educational Research (NCER), whose preferred model and hence sources of evidence are 'experimental design interventions', in particular 'Randomised



Controlled Trials'; 'systematic syntheses of research, and in particular experimental research and quantitative findings' (*ibid.*: 18-19). Oancea and Pring argue that the key issues of contention about the 'what works' culture of research lie in 'the policy-driven filtering of evidence on technical grounds, the hierarchies of knowledge on which this filtering draws, and the standard-setting exercises that narrow the contribution of research to policy and practice to a purely instrumental role'(2008: 19). At one extreme, these research initiatives described by Oancea and Pring, advocate the following: (1) a view of knowledge that favours 'commensurable standards of scientificity across the natural and social sciences' which also apply to education; (2) a hierarchy of knowledge which most values experimental design to the exclusion of other qualitative methods; (3) instrumentalism in the sense of 'pre-defined practical ends and deliberation about the means of attaining them'; (4) a view of the 'dynamics of knowledge as controllable'; and (5) a 'technical view of quality assessment' (*ibid.*: 20).

Oancea and Pring (2008) argue that the model of 'what works' is often a restrictive model. They draw support from others such as Sanderson (2003) to critique this approach as an 'instrumentalist-rationalist conceptualisation of the role of research', with an 'aspiration for certainty that often obliterates the complexities of particular situations'. This approach, they argue, does not always sufficiently 'account for knowledge of the world as 'taken' by the person'. It therefore 'fails to recognise the ethical and social nature of education practice, and the encounters of practical wisdom and technical rationality within it' (Oancea and Pring, 2008: 22), which this chapter proposes is endorsed by the Aristotle-inspired contemporary Capabilities Approach.

These educationists have challenged the narrowing of research by the 'what works' culture at its extreme (Oancea and Pring, 2008), whose focus is to 'improve' learning, 'raise standards', and make schools 'more effective' (Pring, 2004: 204,) by using exclusively scientific tools. These critics suggest that this culture reduces what is meant by evidence to the commensurable and the metric which negates the validity of different kinds and strengths of evidence which should be considered acceptable. They therefore argue in favour of widening the discourse about what counts as evidence. Oancea and Pring (2008) accept that validated evidence about 'what works' could be viewed as 'an effective response to recent criticisms of education research', and an 'effective way of discarding certain instances of poor research practice' (*ibid.*: 23). However, at its extreme, they acknowledge that this culture fuels the discourse based on 'narrow assumptions about knowledge, which run against some core

principles of education research' (*ibid.*: 23), such as those promoted by the need for conclusive proof or causality in epistemology.

A more balanced approach to evaluation which focuses on critical understanding, will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter. Suffice to identify at this stage that critical understanding in the form described by Bridges (2009) or Eisner (1985, 2002), is crucial for sensitive evaluation in education.

An example below exemplifies the concept of effectiveness and efficiency when considered only within the framework of science, that measures success against a single numerical standard which must be reached, is inappropriate for the task of evaluating fully whether a child is developing their literacy capabilities. Evaluating improvement in the literacy standards of primary school children is measured by counting the number of children who at KS1 and KS2 standardised tests attain the required level, as compared to previous years' results. This measure does not take account of 'whether they read books' (Oancea and Pring, 2008: 25), and if they do when they do so and how it helps them and what they learn from them at various times. For example, children may take books to read in bed and share the reading experience with a parent, or when older may read them to analyse style of writing, or to understand a human situation or dilemma which sheds light on an element of their lives, etc. An overly narrow measure, such as the standardised tests in the Primary stage, fails to recognise the importance of many other aspects which should be considered as part of a balanced and richer evaluation of literacy. This would depend on a wider definition of literacy, which is not measurable by a single standard, which would include elements such as, deepening curiosity, empathy, and enjoyment, as well as the technique of deciphering words.

The difficulties of a single standard measurement for literacy are exemplified in the results of a research study (also discussed in Chapter 5) which found that enjoyment in reading reduced as literacy standards increased. This study indicates that it is enjoyment in reading which promotes literacy beyond childhood, rather than mere technical ability to read words (Clarkson and Sainsbury, 2007). And worth noting is also the finding that reading for pleasure outweighs other social advantages in the future success of the child (PIRLS, 2006)<sup>2</sup>.

Smeyers (2008) also identifies aspects of the scientific approach of social science style evaluations in education as problematic. He reminds us that causality seems to pervade our thinking in this approach, as was exemplified by Oancea and Pring's description of the culture

of 'what works' at its extreme. Smeyers identifies that contrary to the rhetoric of social science discourse, evaluations and conclusions derived from quantitative approaches such as randomised controlled trials assumed to be relatively unproblematic as evidence, in reality often yield over-simplistic and questionable conclusions. The reasons are multiple and include for example: rapid changing contexts, atypical samples, disparity between sample population and target population, difficulty with generalisations across contexts, etc (2008: 72-80).

Smeyers argues that:

... even if one accepts that one can measure an event according to the degree of probability, most scholars will accept that contextualisation of theoretical insights is necessary, which comes down to a much more moderate version of what science is capable of, compared to a stance where causality exclusively rules. (2008: 64-5).

Smeyers does not discount the potential benefit of large scale studies altogether, 'even if they flirt with the paradigm of causality' (*ibid.*: 80), given that 'correlations seem to invite the reader to see a mechanism that can in some way be used for particular purposes' (*ibid.*: 80). Nevertheless, expectations of the kind of knowledge these studies can yield should often be reduced, while resisting the tendency of concluding that 'not understanding everything is equated with not understanding anything' (*ibid.*: 80).

Before exploring a balance in evaluation which is more suitable to education than that of the paradigm of *scientism*, it is worth noting Davies' conclusions that 'all attempts to measure learning are imperfect' (2003: 83). He argues that 'the gravity of these imperfections depends on the purposes of the assessment', and in his view 'the current approaches to assessment in the UK and USA are counterproductive even if education is seen as the servant of a competitive economy' (*ibid.*: 283). Furthermore, in other articles Davies suggests that 'enough has been said to cast doubt on an unreflective adherence to procedural objectivity and high standards of consistency' (Davies, 2006: 499).

### 8.2.2 Seeking a balance in evaluation which takes account of various kinds of evidence

When defining research, Oancea and Pring (2008) defend the importance of two aspects in particular: (1) 'the systematic gathering of evidence', and 'the systematic analysis of the conceptual framework within which that evidence is gathered' (2008: 23). They argue that

what may be considered as 'systematic' enquiry is best not confined to one particular model (*ibid.*: 24). Instead they maintain that 'systematic' should include multi-various approaches rather than the linear ones sometimes promoted by the culture of 'what works' described in the previous section.

When thinking about a systematic approach which is sensitive to the subject matter of evaluation in education, it is also important to maintain the notion of rigour or quality. But rigour in the sense sought here is not understood as a 'rigid format' but rather as a flexible approach which includes systematic seriousness. As Pring (2004: 212) points out, it is necessary to explore what 'systematic' means within different kinds of appeal to evidence which include rigour, but which are not susceptible to the extreme of the (quasi) scientific paradigm. The notion of systematic includes '*rigour*' which requires 'traditional qualities such as reliability and validity', 'integrity', and 'consistency of argument' (Bridges, 2009: 500). However, the meaning of these terms requires deliberation beyond that afforded by the narrow confines of the (quasi) scientific definition. As Bridges suggests with regards to research, establishing the claim to 'rigour' must include not just 'seeing what is in a research text', but also the ability to see this in 'relation to a much wider understanding of what is in other texts' together with 'seeing what is going on in the wider world of education and politics' (*ibid.*: 509).

Consequently, Bridges (2009) concludes that 'perhaps we are looking entirely in the wrong direction in expecting even a (quasi) scientific answer to a question about 'quality assessment' (*ibid.*: 511). Rather than employing a scientific language to describe such a process, Bridges suggests talking about "*appreciating*' the quality of something' (*ibid.*: 511). This approach is not dependent on the metric but rather on '*discernment*', which suggests an '*intelligent and informed appreciation*', 'one capable of observing relatively nuanced differences between one object of appreciation and another' (2009: 511). Hence, drawing from Eliot Eisner, Bridges proposes that 'assessment owes more to aesthetics than to science – that is perhaps more akin to *connoisseurship*<sup>3</sup> than to measurement' (*ibid.*: 511).

Such an approach defined by attentive deliberation requires an acceptance of the interpretative qualitative view ascertained by the particular in context, which the (quasi) scientific approach to evaluation would not accept as valid. There exists a divide between the scientific and other claims to knowledge which is problematic, as identified by Montefiore and other philosophers earlier in this chapter, in the false 'distinct divide' between the 'scientific

and the literary', or the 'causal and the normative' (1998: 321). Pring critiques the divide between these two claims to understanding which restrict evaluation to either quantitative or qualitative data respectively. As he argues, this divide has 'created the false dualism between the quantitative and qualitative approaches to research (2004: 212). In order to close the existing divide, Pring suggests the need to examine more carefully various kinds of evidence which 'legitimately enter into educational deliberations' (*ibid.*: 212). Hence as he maintains, problems arise not over the need for evidence but over opposing positions of what is to count as evidence. And the 'danger lies in the imperialism of any one form of discourse together with its distinctive notion of evidence' (*ibid.*: 211) tipping the balance one way or the other. Examples of this are found in the 'what works' culture, which often only accepts evidence which presumes proof and can be proved through scientific explanation.

Pring warns in other works that 'the first thing to say about evidence is that it must not be confused with proof' (Oancea and Pring, 2008: 25). In order to avoid the extreme position of seeking proof in respect of evidence Pring suggests that 'what counts as evidence will depend upon the kind of discourse one is engaged in' (2004: 203), which should include the deliberations of practical reason and be inclusive of the objective and interpretative perspectives. He identifies the trap of dualism when it comes to evidence, which arises as a result of different groups claiming positions at each extreme of the (quasi) scientific /interpretative spectrum. Pring recognises that 'to contrast so starkly the large-scale explanations of human behaviour ... with the uniqueness of the individual human condition, which escapes any such pigeon-holing, is a false dualism' (2004: 208).

Instead, Pring suggests that educational practice requires 'judgements about 'achievement' as well as about the 'ability to achieve' and about the 'capacity to have the ability to achieve' (2004: 204). And given that these require various types of evidence appropriate for each evaluative discourse, they depend on a balance between different kinds of explanations arrived at using a variety of appropriate data. Rather than applying the restrictive label of either quantitative or qualitative, as these overlap to greater or lesser degrees in the evaluation process, it is less distracting and more fruitful to consider data free from the divisive categories encouraged by often false differentiation.

In the quest to broaden what counts as evidence to include practical judgement, Oancea and Pring (2008) draw on Aristotle's thinking for support, as they seek to establish greater balance in evaluation than sometimes found in the 'what works' culture described above which can

restrict evidence to one extreme. In particular they identify practical reasoning as essential to broaden discourse in evaluation, and argue in favour of its critical importance for value judgements in education. They claim that such a shift in perspective, would resist confining evidence to only one extreme, and would accentuate important features for evaluation in education. These include 'communicative processes' 'based on dialogue and argumentation' about what is appropriate in particular circumstances, 'the uncertainty and pluralism of praxis', and 'the need for free, open normative debate to replace the mechanistic appeal to pre-determined standards likely to privilege the more powerful' (2008: 22-23). Quoting Sanderson, they argue that as all these aspects are included and nurtured, 'the question for teachers is not simply 'what is effective', but rather, more broadly, 'what is appropriate for these children in these circumstances' (Sanderson, 2003: 341, in Oancea and Pring, 2008: 23). Rightly, Oancea, Pring, and others, contest the culture of evaluation which overemphasises metricity and a single standard, and the tendency it has to exclude or marginalise the concern for what may be educationally worthwhile.

This crucial point will be discussed at greater length below within the context of the Capabilities Approach as one which provides the ethical dimension required to make judgements about what is worthwhile, and which shapes our discourse about what counts as evidence in education which seeks the balance outlined above. Here, the rhetoric of efficiency and effectiveness must be balanced by discourse about what is worthwhile.

Before attending to this however, Oancea and Furlong (2007) develop thinking about knowledge and evaluation focused on the debate about quality in educational research which merits discussion. They draw on Aristotle's views which are pertinent to the quest for greater balance in the discourse of evaluation in education.

### 8.2.3 Aristotle-inspired evaluation: Oancea and Furlong on three domains of knowing

Bridges (2008), suggests that 'notions of quality are often confused with (narrow) expectations of what will count as research at all' (2008: 42). Oancea and Furlong (2007), agree with this position and challenge the sometimes extremist position of the 'what works' model. Instead, they search for a systematic approach which includes trustworthy evidence and which considers quality as excellence from a wider perspective than that afforded by the scientific model. Drawing from the Aristotelian perspective, they seek to widen the discourse about

evaluation in education research beyond the constraints of the extreme which demands certainty. As Oancea reminds us, with regards to judgements about research 'the grounds for certainty are always problematic' (2005: 178).

Oancea and Furlong (2007) search for greater balance in this area of evaluation, and in their article propose three different conceptions of reasoning as valid, which embrace varying evidence in respect of evaluation in educational research. Their argument is developed using concepts drawn from Aristotelian philosophy which consider three domains for knowledge: '*theoria* (contemplation); *poiesis* (production); and *praxis* (social action)' (2007: 124). Within each domain there is space for excellence, 'epitomized by three further concepts': '*epistēmē theoretike* (knowledge that is demonstrable through valid reasoning)'; '*technē* (technical skill, or a trained ability for rational production)'; and '*phronēsis* (practical wisdom, or the capacity or predisposition to act truthfully and with reason in matters of deliberation, thus with a strong ethical component)' (*ibid.*: 124).

With regards to judgements about quality in education research, Oancea and Furlong (2007) advocate three domains of knowledge as valid forms of evidence, and suggest it is possible to identify different forms of excellence in these different domains. Here, judging quality in 'applied and practice-based research' cannot be achieved by 'fine-tuning a single set of criteria to cut across its possible embodiments', but rather by 'capturing the deep distinctiveness of the three domains and of their expressions of excellence, while at the same time allowing for compatibility' (2007: 124-5).

In providing an explanation of these domains in practice, Oancea and Furlong explain critical features of each domain and how they work. First, with respect to *epistēmē*, or demonstrable knowledge they suggests that 'application', from this perspective, 'normally translates as a gradual gliding from the general to the particular, and from the abstract to the concrete' (*ibid.*: 125). Excellence in this mode of knowledge involves developing 'scientific' knowledge 'about things that are universal and necessary' (*ibid.*: 125).

However, although Oancea and Furlong (2007) quote Aristotle for support, in his writings when he considers *epistēmē* it is expressed as being knowledge of why observations are the way they are of necessity, that is, owing to universal laws. Here the appropriate explanation, after research, would be a set of universal laws from which the observed phenomenon follows logically. This expresses the results of the research, and does not inform about valid reasoning

with regards to the methods of research. Moreover, evaluative questions about education cannot be explained using theoretical knowledge of the kind offered by *epistēmē* and instead require a different kind of explanation such as that informed by *phronēsis*. It is difficult to see how *epistēmē* might be applicable to judgements about excellence in evaluations about education, as Oancea and Furlong seem to suggest. As Nussbaum argues, Aristotle would consider ethical reasoning to yield inexact results, which requires practical reasoning rather than scientific reasoning of a logical necessary kind expressed as *epistēmē*. As this thesis argues (and compare Oancea and Pring, 2008; Bridges, 2009; Pring and Pollard, 2011), education discourse whether about research or practice is an ethical concern which requires the ethical dimension, and which must resist being confined to the scientific.

Second, with respect to *technē*, Oancea and Furlong (2007) describe it as a technical skill connected with the area of 'production', which 'concerns the activity of installing order' or identifying the best structure or method, where 'practice is seen as the pursuit of predefined ends through the careful selection of suitable means' (*ibid.*: 125). This process involves 'design and planning' and concern for 'efficient use of the resources available' (*ibid.*: 125-6). As Oancea and Furlong suggest, 'research and its findings may assist this process and provide the rationale for (some of) the choices being made' (*ibid.*: 125-6). However, although excellence in *poiesis* may be *technē* as Oancea and Furlong suggest, it is not clear what the framework against which *technē* is ascertained consists in, if it is not that of utility. Since the framework of epistemic knowledge is the universal which defines the instance by necessity, *technē* requires a framework which by definition cannot be of the kind which results in *epistēmē*. From the tone of their argument it would seem that Oancea and Furlong would not wish to adopt the framework of utility for their understanding of *technē*. However, this question of an appropriate framework for this domain of knowledge and excellence is left unanswered by them.

Nussbaum is helpful here in her understanding of *technē* as 'a deliberative application of human intelligence to some part of the world, yielding some control'. As she maintains, 'the person who lives by *technē* does not come to each new experience without foresight or resource' and 'possesses some sort of systematic grasp, some way of ordering the subject matter, that will take him to the new situation well prepared' (1986: 95). Nussbaum explains that for Aristotle, a *technē* 'comes into being when from many notions gained by experience a universal judgement about a group of similar things arises' (*ibid.*: 95). In this way a general theory is arrived at, not in the sense of *epistēmē*. Hence, though '*technē* can rightly be a



precise understanding', as Oancea and Furlong (2007) suggest, it only yields the kind of precision appropriate to the subject matter. In the case of human beings, Aristotle reminds us that precision in respect of ethics, which includes questions about what is worthwhile in education, is only possible according to the nature of the subject matter, which in this case is not compatible with scientific precision, or technical utility. Instead the precision required must arise from practical judgement. At best what we can hope for is the technical excellence or precision of the builders of Lesbos who 'measure with a flexible strip of metal that bends round to fit the shape of the stone and is not fixed' (NE 1137b30-2) (Nussbaum, 1986: 301). However it seems to me that this is not what Oancea and Furlong (2007) have in mind when they suggest *technē* as a domain of excellence for evaluation in education.

Third, Oancea and Furlong (2007) propose practical wisdom, or *phronēsis*, as the third domain of knowledge important for research as it takes account of the 'messy' (Law, 2004) character of the relationship between research and practice. They note that excellence in this sense is not understood in any scientific or technical sense and is not defined by 'external ends'. In addition the excellence of practical wisdom (which I refer to interchangeably as practical reason) 'involves deliberation about ends and reflective choice, and so is ultimately both educational and social' (Oancea and Furlong, 2007: 126). It also requires 'an act which is more akin to perception ... than to the application of general rules' (*ibid.*: 126).

However, there are difficulties here too, although they claim accurately with support from Nussbaum, that 'perception can respond to nuance and fine shading, adapting its judgement to the matter at hand in a way that principles set up in advance have a hard time doing' (1986: 300-301). The difficulties lie in that Oancea and Furlong (2007) do not explain the framework within which experience perceived is further defined and understood with a 'thick' rather than 'thin' definition. I shall be arguing in the next part of this chapter that the Capabilities Approach provides the framework needed to arrive at the 'thick' definition sought.

Nussbaum supports the view that Aristotle has such a framework in mind, which he describes as our shared humanity, and from which the capabilities list which Nussbaum postulates arises (2001: 416-418). Importantly, it is this framework, or general conceptual understanding of humanity, which enables the particular experience to be tested within the context of the perceived general framework (1993: 242-270). This makes possible the 'thick' definition sought of quality or excellence in the particular instance. However, although Oancea and Furlong

mention that there is an ethical dimension (2007: 131), they do not suggest the nature of this dimension or advocate an ethical framework such as this.

Furthermore, although there is no excellence in the sense of a technique for practical reasoning, Oancea and Furlong (2007) do not articulate that within the concept of *phronēsis* there is a flexible method which facilitates the individual experience to inform the resulting judgement, and which is communicable between persons with reference to some common framework. I suggest something like this flexibility in an extract from Henry James later in this chapter. Oancea and Furlong explain that:

practical judgement is ethical, and professional, and ultimately human, which is why practical excellence is so difficult to achieve, to describe, and to assess. It is the practically wise person who chooses the salient issues and sets the implicit standards through the very act of her judgement and in the concreteness of her situation. (2007: 126).

This begins to sound very subjective in its rightly interpretative approach. They do not make explicit in this claim, as they need to do, that in order to ascertain some degree of objectivity in any interpretation, there must be a common framework which enables the assessment or evaluation to be made.

By contrast, Nussbaum suggests the capabilities which we share as the conceptual framework we require for judgements to be made about what is good and what is just. It is such a framework which shapes the standards we choose by which judgements can be made about what is worthwhile in education, and what excellence entails therein. In other words, Aristotle's ethical framework recognises which lives are fulfilled within the context of a shared humanity which respects the dignity of every person and enables their capabilities to be realised. Therefore, interpretative judgements about the particular are made within this general framework. Evaluations or judgements are developed with reference to and within the context of the extent to which shared capabilities are nurtured or not.

Oancea and Furlong (2007) rightly move the discourse of evaluation in education away from the scientific paradigm, and make a case for discourse to include the three Aristotelian domains of knowledge and excellence. In particular, they suggest *epistēmē*, *technē* and *phronēsis* as domains which the discourse should embrace for a fuller understanding or

explanation of excellence in our judgements in this area. However, in education at present, excellence within the epistemic domain is defined by a single metric standard. Within the technical domain it is understood as means-end within the frame of utility. And, within the domain of *phronēsis*, judgement has the tendency to be overly subjective without a common framework of reference for evaluation. The degree of compatibility between these domains remains uncertain owing to the distinctly different conceptual frameworks which shape these domains in education.

What Oancea and Furlong (2007) endeavour to do in their argument is commendable in its attempt to expand the boundaries of evidence towards an interpretative explanation. In the form of *phronēsis*, this includes domains of knowledge beyond the fundamentalist scientific approach, or the technical approach. And their efforts have already engaged many educationists in the discussion (2007:134). However, if education is acknowledged as an ethical matter, it is difficult to understand what the ethical dimension would be which enable these domains to be compatible, as Oancea and Furlong suggest they may be (2007), unless it is something like the Capabilities Approach with its understanding of human potential.

The language they promote does suggest an ethical approach which includes ‘deliberation, reflexivity, and criticism’ and ‘receptiveness and dialogue’ (2007: 132), and demands listening carefully, together with being thorough. But unfortunately, Oancea and Furlong do not commit themselves to an ethical framework. In fact they do not enter this discourse at all. In not offering an explanation of what the ethical dimension entails, as they promote the significance of the domain of *phronēsis* for making good judgements about excellence in education, their contribution to the debate about evaluation falls short of the impact it could have. Instead, the ethical framework offered by the Capabilities Approach emphasises elements of *phronēsis*. These include taking time, listening carefully, and doing justice to the situation being evaluated as essential for judgements about education, which would also inform any technical explanation in the field.

What should be noted as significant about the contribution which Oancea and Furlong (2007) make to the debate about evaluating excellence in education, is the language which they argue education evaluations must embrace, which is nurtured by the concept of *phronēsis*. *Phronēsis* and the language it promotes for evaluation will be discussed below in greater detail in the context of the Capabilities Approach. Suffice at this point to highlight some of the language proposed such as, ‘deliberation, reflexivity, and criticism’, ‘engagement’, ‘plausibility’,

‘salience/timeliness’, ‘receptiveness and dialogue’ (2007: 132). I suggest that such language is essential to the sensitive approach to evaluation sought in education. First, however, a critique of the predominant language in education of managerialism and performativity will be the focus of discussion.

#### 8.2.4 Language matters: performativity and managerialism in the culture of utility

The language of ‘engagement’ with a text, of ‘transaction between teacher and learner’, of ‘intrinsic value’ of an activity, of ‘struggle to understand’, of ‘personal enrichment’ seems inimical to the language of targets and of standardized performance indicators. (Pring, 2004: 205).

As discussed in Chapter 5, concerns fuelled by the factory metaphor of education stemming from the industrial revolution continue to be prevalent in the language of education today, in the shape of business language, and the focus on managerialism and instrumentalism which it encourages. An example of this is evident in Elliott’s (2004) critique of Hargreaves position on evidence-based practice. Elliott argues against the view ‘that the major task of educational research is to improve the *performativity* of teachers with respect to the outcomes of their teaching’ (*ibid.*: 166). The language which describes teaching as instrumental by being directed towards bringing about a specific and prescribed set of learning outcomes for all pupils, judged against one standard of performance, is misguided in its means-end approach. Of concern is that this approach is further supported by the language of outcome-based education. As Elliott argues, this language and the culture it promotes mistakenly specifies that learning outcomes should be the same for all pupils, ‘operationally defined as *exit behaviours*, and progress towards them measured against *benchmarks*’ (*ibid.*: 167).

This language framework, or engineering model as Elliott describes it, treats practices as ‘manipulative devices (technologies) for engineering desired levels of output’. Instead of this instrumental model of utility nurtured by the language which supports it, Elliott argues in favour of placing ‘the judgement of teachers at the centre of the research process’(2004: 170). This approach would then stand against the instrumental framework of utility and the language it promotes, which ‘prioritizes *target-setting* and forms of evaluation and quality assurance which measure the *performativity* (efficiency) of practices against *indicators* of success in achieving targets’ (*ibid.*: 170). Instead, he suggests a different conceptual framework

than that of instrumentalism, such as that provided by Aristotle which supports the idea of education as an intrinsic rather than extrinsic good. Elliott maintains that it is not extrinsic goods such as those of utility, but intrinsic goods which should define the norms and values and thus the language we use in education. These include amongst others: being able to make connections between specific human activities, developing a wider pattern of meaning in life, and having one's perspective transformed by what is being learnt, which defy being understood with reference to one standard or metricity. It is commendable that Elliott defends the need for an *ethical perspective* from which 'goods internal to a practice are distinguished from external goods because one cannot specify them independently of the activities and processes the practice itself consists of' (2004: 171). However, although Elliott alludes to the benefits of an Aristotelian perspective, he does not articulate the nature of the ethical perspective needed, or how it might shape practice and evaluation which stands against instrumentalism.

Smith (2010) when writing about university education also cautions against education of the instrumental kind:

It is not easy to articulate the vision of university education as something which broadens your mind, expands your horizons and generally turns you into a more civilised person, without prompting people to ask 'yes, but what's the point of it, though?' It is distinctly difficult to explain that part of why we have higher education is to preserve, explore and develop forms of rationality different from the prevailing instrumental kind. (Smith, 2010: 41).

If we are to succeed in articulating and promoting a view such as that espoused by Smith, an ethical dimension that is appropriate for education must be provided for understanding what we do, why we do it, to evaluate how we are doing, and to promote language sympathetic to this approach.

Elliott and Lukes (2008) argue in favour of a different language and a different approach in education which takes evaluation beyond the instrumental framework. They draw on Nussbaum's claim that 'almost every area of social life' is mistakenly dominated by the 'science of measurement' in favour of consequentialism, rather than supportive of the Aristotelian conception of practical rationality or *phronēsis* (Nussbaum, 1990: 55). Elliott and Lukes oppose the language of 'driving up standards' fuelled by the maximisation principle 'which presumes

that the practices of schools and teachers only have value if they produce good consequences that can be quantified in terms of a single metric that applies generally across the system' (2008: 100). Given their views that instrumentalism in education is not appropriate, we must begin to articulate the ethical dimension and guiding framework for evaluation which is required, such as the Capabilities Approach provides.

#### 8.2.5 In Summary

Consistent with Nussbaum's interpretation of Aristotle's views described in the first section of this chapter, it is fair to surmise that the dominant culture of 'what works' critiqued by educationists does not always seek the balance sought for sound judgements in education. This is the case when it over-emphasises metricity<sup>4</sup>, commensurability, and utility. Furthermore, this extreme is fuelled by the language of managerialism and performativity which is critiqued widely by educationists. In contrast, Oancea and Furlong (2007) urge the conversation to move beyond the extremes sometimes evident in scientific paradigm, and to embrace domains of excellence for evaluation to be accepted such as that offered by the Aristotelian concept of *phronēsis*. The domain of practical reasoning, or *phronēsis*, can be developed within the context of the Capabilities Approach, together with affiliation, as critical for a sensitive yet thorough approach to evaluation within an ethical framework beyond utility.

## Part Two

### Evaluation within the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach

The Capabilities Approach is 'defined as an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and to theorizing about basic social justice' (Nussbaum, 2011: 18), and any assessment within this approach takes each person as an end and a bearer of dignity. In this chapter, I propose an ethical dimension more appropriate to education than the existing dimension of utility prevalent today. In this part of the chapter I argue in favour of the Capabilities Approach in education and focus on the following areas: (1) education as value-laden, where the ethical dimension provided by the utilitarian framework is unsuitable to nurture fulfilled human beings; (2) the Capabilities Approach and in particular practical reason and affiliation as essential for critical understanding in education; and (3) evaluation as a way of life understood within the capabilities framework.

The popular (quasi) scientific approach used for evaluation in education which demands certainty has been critiqued widely by educationists and social science researchers, including Eisner, 2002; Dunne and Hogan, 2004; Law, 2004; Pring, 2004; Bridges and Smith, 2006; Oancea and Furlong, 2007; Smeyers and Smith 2008; Bridges, 2009. In particular, as discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, educationists argue that the Standards Agenda in the UK shaped by this approach requires revision. Some claim that benchmarks such as the single standard and quantifiable measures used in tests such as SATs, GCSEs, GCEs, and others in the UK, constrain judgements about the success and progress of school age children and young people to a narrow view of what being an educated person entails. On its own this approach is insufficient if not misguided (Pring *et al.*, 2009; Alexander, 2010; Pring and Pollard, 2011). In respect of education research as discussed in this chapter, the sometimes overzealous quest for certainty has also been critiqued by educationists (Oancea and Furlong, 2007; Elliott and Lukes, 2008; Smeyers, 2008; Bridges, 2009) and proposals made for broader domains of knowledge and excellence to be accepted in the field (Oancea and Furlong, 2007). There is a recognition that with regards to evaluations about learning 'no one size fits all' (Pring *et al.*, 2009: 66).

Significantly, for many years educationists such as Pring (1989) have advocated that the ethical dimension in education be recognised. As discussed in Chapter 6, more recently this recommendation continues to be exhorted as illustrated by education reviews such as the

*Nuffield Review* (Pring *et al.*, 2009), the *Cambridge Primary Review* (Alexander *et al.*, 2010), and most recently a review of reviews, *Education for All* (Pring and Pollard, 2011). This view is also evident in the field of research, where many educationists highlight the importance of an ethical dimension in evaluations in this area, even if they do not articulate what such an ethical dimension entails (Eisner 1985, 2002; Pring, 2004; Oancea and Furlong, 2007; Elliott and Lukes, 2008; Oancea and Pring, 2008; Smith, 2008; Bridges, 2009).

### **8.3 The ethical dimension in education**

Educationists such as Winch and Gingell remind us that education is deeply ethical:

Education ... is at least partly about the overall aims that society has for itself and how these aims are realised in practice. It cannot, therefore, be a neutral technical exercise, but is invariably deeply ethical ... bound up with ideas about the good society and how life can be worthwhile. (Winch and Gingell, 2004, Preface).

Articulating an ethical dimension which shapes what is educationally worthwhile beyond utility is essential for all aspects of education including evaluations in respect of research and practice. As many educationists advise, the utilitarian paradigm which influences educational discourse and narrows evaluation to commensurable measures requires revision (Pring, 1989, 2004; Oancea and Furlong, 2007; Alexander, 2010; Pring and Pollard, 2011). Moreover, they appeal for a reviewed understanding of the ethical dimension in education. As discussed in Chapter 3 and 4, evaluations about human development, including education, do not lend themselves to being defined or measured using narrow economic or even happiness measures. However, despite the appeal by educationists for a different approach than that afforded by the culture of performativity, their arguments fall short of articulating what such an ethical dimension entails.

This thesis engages with the ethical dimension in education and attempts to provide some answers regarding the nature of this dimension. Within the ethical dimension proposed, what is 'educationally worthwhile' is understood within the wider context of what is 'worthwhile' for human development and fulfilment in the Aristotelian sense, with particular reference to the Capabilities Approach (described in detail in Chapter 3 and 5). For that reason, the position developed in this chapter maintains that evaluation is best undertaken and understood within



this Aristotle-inspired ethical framework, rather than within a utilitarian context, or even as some would argue in a context that is value-free.

It would not be contested by many that 'to educate someone is to enable them to learn those things that are regarded as valuable in some way' and that the person is to some degree 'transformed for the better' (Oancea and Pring, 2008: 28). In this sense education is an evaluative term, where quality, or excellence, or success, can only be judged with reference to the value system which is applied. As Pring *et al.* (2009) suggest: 'Education is not ethically neutral. Values matter. We cannot avoid the tricky question as to what values and whose aims should prevail' (2009: 201-202).

A brief journey through history and the changing prevailing values is worth noting here. Hogan (1992), provides a helpful account of the historical transition of prevailing values. The Greco-Roman era, shaped by writers such as Plato, Aristotle, and later by Cicero and Quintilian, understood the ethical dimension of education as an endeavour towards personal fulfilment and the good of the community (*polis*). This ethical dimension in education, values what is good for the person and the community which includes 'a shared understanding of being governed by some publicly recognised virtues (e.g. courage, truthfulness)', and 'a shared sense of disdain for some publicly recognised vices (e.g. cowardice, underhandedness)' (Hogan, 1992: 138). However, the authority of the *polis* with its prevailing values about human flourishing were later superseded. From 800 AD, the authority of Christendom 'marked the institutional beginnings of a new cultural pattern which, despite recurring setbacks and even decisive rifts, was to remain the prevailing one in Western history for a thousand years' (*ibid.*: 138). As a result, the pursuit of learning 'came to be publicly viewed within boundaries fixed by the Church's interests and doctrines'. This prevailing authority was finally contested by the Enlightenment which challenged the 'rule of established authority and tradition' (Hogan, 1992:139).

The Enlightenment adopted technical expertise as the prevailing value in education, resulting in education being relegated to a means towards technical success in an ever growing industrialised culture. This resulted in the dominance of schooling as an instrument for the production of 'human capital' (1992: 143). In other words, it valued the cultivation of learning for harnessing wealth and prepared the learner with appropriate instrumental skills. As Hogan points out, this 'recasting of education into a sub-species of political economy' marks the rejection of 'the more noteworthy traditions of learning which distinguished the classical and

Christian periods of Western civilization'. It also marks 'a decisive stage in the march of utilitarian ideas' (1992: 144), which this thesis contests. Instead the prevailing value or ethical dimension which this thesis promotes, is one where teaching, learning and evaluation 'engage both intellect and sensibility', and which supports 'efforts to unearth and to bring to fluency such abilities as are native to each pupil and are worthy of disciplined nurturing' (*ibid.*: 145). In particular the abilities of practical reason and affiliation, being intertwined since practical reason is essentially dialogical, are valued in the Capabilities Approach and its ethical dimension.

Oancea and Pring (2008) suggest that the utility based approach, which is easily quantified and presumed to produce the necessary 'skills' required for employment, remains the framework of choice for learning and evaluation today, because 'people have different ideas of what constitutes an educated person' and there is no 'universal agreement' on what the prevailing values should be (2008: 29). Furthermore, there is a tendency within the performative culture of education to view education as value-free, outside the rubric of the ethical and within the paradigm of science.

The culture of 'what works' with its (quasi) scientific approach to evaluation is often a prime example, where evaluation is presented as purely pragmatic or a matter of common sense and even free of any pre-determined position. Even if this approach yielded objective understanding in any meaningful way, which is a notion contested earlier in this chapter, it cannot be supported as value-free, since at the very least it must be accepted as utilitarian in its instrumentalist approach. Bridges and Watts argue that it is misconceived to maintain that an advantage of evidence-based education is that it is 'free of ideology, of pre-determined positions' (2008: 55). As has been discussed in the earlier parts of this chapter, the culture of 'what works' in education fuelled by the language of performativity and managerialism, in reality mostly values utility to the exclusion of other aspects of education.

At present, a goal of education is to prepare students for the world of work and as a result, teaching, learning, and evaluation is heavily influenced by the discourse of business and wealth production in its outcome-based utilitarian approach. However, there is evidence that the performative culture in education which values technique above other qualities is being contested by employers and academics in the world of business. In particular, 'employers complain that [employees] lack the skills, knowledge and attitudes which serve business and the economy (Leitch Report, 2006)' (quoted in Pring *et al*, 2009: 66). Such knowledge and

attitudes include the ability to work collaboratively in a filial manner and the ability to make judgements which are wise. Furthermore, support for the importance of these abilities is found in articles by business academics such as Porter and Kramer (2010), who maintain that solutions towards sustainable business growth lie 'in the principle of shared value' (*ibid.*: 64), where such capabilities are essential. In addition, academics and writers in the field of business value practical wisdom as critical for leadership (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2011), and uphold the value of 'collaborating for the common good' (Tierney, 2011: 38). Even in the area of business which is the preserve of economics, employers value the capabilities of practical wisdom and affiliation in their employees as important for the fulfilment of individuals and the success of their business. This is a message that educators and politicians should heed as they review their understanding of evaluation in education in accordance with what is valued as worthwhile in the Aristotelian sense, rather than that confined to utility alone.

There is support from employers, business academics, and educationists for valuing capabilities to be developed in education beyond basic skills for output maximisation in utilitarian terms. This requires a sensitive approach to evaluation which incorporates the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation in particular. However, what educationists do not provide, is the nature of the ethical dimension which enables these value judgements to be made across individuals and cultures, while being sensitive to the context and the individual. What is clear is that some common framework is required to agree prevailing values which enable evaluations about what is worthwhile to be ascertained.

Oancea and Pring suggest that 'there is by no means universal agreement on what those values are' and 'people have different ideas of what constitutes an educated person' (2008: 29). Although this may be true, there does seem to be agreement, at least as claimed by psychological studies, about what people value and consider to be worthwhile, which as the studies indicate goes beyond utility. For example participants in a study conducted in 40 countries across the world articulated wisdom and knowledge, courage, justice, humanity, temperance, etc. as intrinsically valuable. (Peterson and Seligman, 2004)<sup>5</sup>. There may well be dispute about the interpretation of these values and whether one particular instance is commensurable with another of the same general value across cultures. Nevertheless, there is evidence that at the general level there are features about human beings which are shared, and which in the very general sense transcend cultures (Nussbaum, 1986; 1993; 2000; 2011). This supports the Capabilities Approach in education which provides a general framework for a common understanding about what constitutes fulfilment, based on values shared across

humanity, and which calls for every person to be educated such that they are able to be fulfilled by doing well according to values such as these.

Furthermore, education, which educationists support is an evaluative concept, requires the ability to evaluate as precisely and sensitively as the subject allows. When evaluation is undertaken within the Capabilities Approach, this means making sound judgements which are sensitive to the dignity of every person rather than based on their degree of economic usefulness. These judgements are arrived at as a result of critical interpretation of the particular instance which involves practical reason, and where possible tested dialogically with others, which is where practical reason and affiliation interrelate. This immediately moves the debate away from the value framework of utility and the metric measure. As discussed in Chapter 3, Nussbaum (2000) and Sen (2009) advocate the Capabilities Approach which stands in contrast to the utilitarian approach with its demand on commensurability which does not do justice to the dignity of every person and does not include a suitable framework which enables sound judgements about what is worthwhile to be made. The ethical framework included in the Capabilities Approach which enables persons to make sound judgements through the development of practical reason and affiliation tested against a notion of a shared humanity, is suitable in education where the utilitarian frame is not.

The capabilities of practical reason and affiliation are distinct from the skills promoted by the 'what works' culture which often aims to prepare students to maximise function in economic terms. Yet, as the studies mentioned in Chapter 4 illustrate and the Easterlin paradox exemplifies, fulfilment does not consist in economic output or income enhancement. It would be ill-conceived to evaluate what is worthwhile about education and to identify excellent examples using the framework of utility which may serve economics to the exclusion of other important areas of development. Instead, we turn to the Capabilities Approach for the ethical dimension which enables sensitive and critical evaluations in education to be made.

#### **8.4 The Capabilities Approach with its emphasis on practical reason and affiliation**

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the Capabilities Approach shapes our understanding of an educated person based on the concept of a fulfilled human being, rather than understood in terms of their level of production in the economic sense, or their level of positive feeling in the hedonic sense. This approach provides a common language for understanding progress and

success in education informed by what we share as human beings and a conception of what constitutes fulfilment. Within this approach evaluation is understood as a 'discursive form of analysis' (Nussbaum 2011: 62), where judgements in education include more diverse evidence than that allowed by the narrow approach of the scientific paradigm.

The criteria which define the standard by which quality is established and evaluations made in a particular field should be the summary of wise decisions, rather than reductionist summations resulting from the fundamentalist quest for certainty. These should include and take account of new wise decisions, and be open to ongoing revision as new evidence from good judgement arises. Nussbaum explains this point below, which is pertinent for education and its evaluation:

Good judgement, once again, supplies both a superior concreteness and a superior responsiveness or flexibility. This requirement of flexibility, so important to our understanding of Aristotle's non-scientific conception of choice, is then described in a vivid metaphor. Aristotle tells us that a person who attempts to make every decision by appeal to some antecedent general principle held firm and inflexible for the occasion is like an architect who tries to use a straight ruler on the intricate curves of a fluted column. Instead, the good architect will, like the builders of Lesbos, measure with a flexible strip of metal that 'bends round to fit the shape of the stone and is not fixed' (1137b30-2). Good deliberation, like this ruler, accommodates itself to what it finds, responsively and with respect for complexity. It does not assume that the form of the rule *governs* the appearances; it allows the appearances to govern themselves and to be normative for correctness of rule. (Nussbaum, 1986: 301).

This process therefore begins from the individual's perception, which Nussbaum refers to as 'appearances' (1986: 301). These perceptions are then interpreted critically with reference to the objective general understanding of a shared humanity and what fulfilment entails. Understood in this way, evaluations are neither value-free nor confined to relativity where there is no ethical point of comparison between judgements. As Nussbaum suggests: Value is anthropocentric, not fixed altogether independently of the desires and needs of human beings; but to say this is very far from saying that every preference of every human being counts for evaluative purposes. (1990: 62).

What is sought here in respect of evaluation, which is made possible through the ethical dimension provided in the Capabilities Approach is what Nussbaum describes as ‘discernment’ and ‘perceptive equilibrium’ (1990: 165), made possible through the capabilities of *phronēsis* (practical wisdom or reason), and *affiliation* described in detail in previous chapters. In good deliberation and judgement, ‘the particular is in some sense prior to general rules and principles’, and ‘an approach to ethical judgement that omits awareness of and response to these particular contextual features is deficient’ (*ibid.*: 165). However this does not mean ‘discarding the guidance of general principles’ such as those provided by the capabilities list outlined in Chapters 3 and 5. It is such general rules which ‘provide an invaluable sort of steering, without which perception would be dangerously free-floating’ (1990: 165).

Although judgement within the Capabilities Approach begins with each human perception, the process of practical judgment or *phronēsis* includes deliberation of the situation perceived which is critically interpreted and where possible tested through discourse with others. And it is the shared conceptual framework articulated through the capabilities list described in Chapters 3 and 5 which allows preferences to be tested and reinterpreted within the framework of our shared humanity, which transcends cultures. In other words, evaluation within the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach involves the rankings of the person of practical wisdom, and are arrived at individually and as a result of collegial discourse. This sensitive, yet critical interpretative process, is what is required for evaluation in education. This process is shaped by evidence we can trust and engages in discursive analysis of cultural norms, both personal and social within a framework of care, friendship, and respect (affiliation incorporates these three concepts).

The Capabilities Approach as defined in Chapters 3 and 5 in particular, recognises essential elements for educational success which must be included in educational discourse and inform the judgments we make in this area. Such elements include the development of the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation, which Nussbaum argues are ‘architectonic’ (2000: 131). Practical reason and affiliation are capabilities which have been discussed in detail in previous chapters. For ease in this chapter, a quotation from Nussbaum’s description of each capability is outlined below:

**Practical Reason.** Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life. (2001: 417).

**Affiliation.** Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for others human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction to be able to imagine the situation of another... being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. (2001: 417).

It is these capabilities in particular which enable balanced judgements to be made, as we learn to read a situation or text, to listen and be attentive. Judgements made through practical reason (*phronēsis*) and affiliation, take account of the historical heritage, the here and now, as well as the possible dreams fostered by the imagination. Nevertheless what is sought in such judgments are truth claims in respect of what is being evaluated, but not as manipulated or reduced by the reductionist scientific paradigm critiqued earlier. Nussbaum makes this clear:

... the discovery that truth is to some extent or in some manner human and historical certainly does not warrant the conclusion that every human truth is as good as every other and that such time-honoured institutions as the search for truth and the rational criticism of arguments have no further role to play. (1990: 222).

The Capabilities Approach and the critical interpretation made possible through practical reason and affiliation yields the truths we can trust in respect of evaluation in education. As Nussbaum reminds us, in 'the world as perceived and interpreted by human beings, we can find all the truth we need' (1990: 223). Significantly, this 'Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy, with the notion of *phronēsis* or practical judgement and affiliation at its heart, gives us crucial insight into the kind of business that education uniquely is' (Bridges and Smith, 2006: 417) which enable good judgments to be made about quality and progress in this field.

Bridges (2009) defends Nussbaum's work as important and applicable to quality assessment 'because it is to do with a sense of life, of what constitutes human beings and human experience and the values that lie at the heart of it and how, as a consequence, things are to be understood and evaluated' (*ibid.*: 513). In agreement with Bridges (*ibid.*: 513), two particular features of Nussbaum's argument stand out as critical for the kind of evaluation which this thesis supports: 'the noncommensurability of valuable things' and the demand for 'the priority of perceptions' which allow 'a much finer responsiveness to the concrete – including features that have not been seen before and could not therefore have been housed in any antecedently built system of rules' (Nussbaum, 1990: 36-37).

## 8.5 Evaluation within the Capabilities Approach: Flexible critical interpretation

Oancea and Furlong (2007) emphasise that 'research in education ought to be assessed in the light of what it wants and claims to be, and not through a rigid set of universal 'standards' (*ibid.*: 112). This is also true of assessment in learning. The flexible general framework and interpretative method sought instead of the 'rigid' one critiqued by educationists is exemplified in the Capabilities Approach with its ethical dimension which shapes what is valuable and worthwhile in the context of our shared humanity.

For this reason, assessment about progress and success in education is not appropriate using a single standard of evaluation, such as SATs, GCSEs, or GCE. The reason for this with regards to for example, learning to read, to dialogue, and to live well through reflective practice as described in Chapter 7, is that universal standards only yield information about the numbers who can pass the test and give little as to the person's development in the areas here mentioned. Pring *et al.* point out that 'simply counting the number of GCSEs passed at different grades fails to capture what was deemed important in terms of the pursuit of excellence' (2009: 63). Moreover, 'good performance is not necessarily educational; and an 'output' of high achievers does not equal an 'output' of educated people' (*ibid.*: 63). This is why the Nuffield Review (2009) stresses that 'using GCSE or GCE A-level attainment as a proxy measure requires faith in an assessment process that is not necessarily designed to capture holistically the wide range of understandings, intellectual virtues or practical capabilities' (*ibid.*: 63).

Further evidence that this approach to evaluation is misconceived is provided by higher education admissions staff who agree that 'the ability to read critically, write fluently, and discuss and apply ideas - are consistently under-developed in their new entrants' (2009: 63), even though they succeed in accordance with the universal standard measure of GCEs. Instead, as admissions staff highlight, evaluation about quality and progress must take account of students ability to read critically and discuss and apply ideas.

Instead of this rigid rule which Nussbaum challenges and which the scientific paradigm for evaluation exemplifies, the flexible rule which Aristotle describes being applied by the carpenters of Lesbos (Nussbaum, 1986:301), and which the Capabilities Approach promotes, yields the kind of understanding sought for evaluation about teaching, learning, and research. This is a sensitive interpretative yet critical understanding akin to that described earlier in the



chapter as *verstehen*. Support for a more flexible approach to critical interpretative understanding is given by educationists including Eisner (2002), who describes it in terms of connoisseurship and criticism, and Hogan (2004), who advocates teaching as a way of life.

### 8.5.1 Critical appreciation and connoisseurship

Eisner suggests we consider learning and evaluation, as an art instead of a science (2002). He argues against the tacit undertaking in much evaluation and learning which only accepts a (quasi) scientific system of efficiency to achieve the aims. Instead, he suggests that there are times when efficiency is not appropriate and what should be sought in its place is connoisseurship and critical appreciation. For example efficiency is out of place when making judgements about various meaningful activities in life. As Eisner puts it: 'few of us like to eat a great meal efficiently or participate in a wonderful conversation efficiently, or indeed to make love efficiently. What we enjoy the most we linger over' (*ibid.*: xiii). Efficiency in these examples is not the approach required to yield understanding in these cases. And Eisner believes this extends to education, especially with regards to important learning in the arts. He maintains that assessing student performance, for example, 'almost always must take into account that which cannot be measured' (*ibid.*: 169). The reason for this is that 'measurement is one way to describe the world', yet 'measurement is a description of quantity' and 'some descriptions require prose – even poetry!' (2002: 169). Hence Eisner appeals not to efficiency from standards, but to critical understanding, since standards are only considered helpful to this process when they are 'viewed as aids, as heuristics for debate and for planning' (*ibid.*: 173).

In respect of teachers, for example, Eisner promotes a 'practical hub around which conversations can take place among teachers and others working in a school' (2002: 173). This practical conversation between teachers is also promoted by educationists such as Black and Wiliam (1998) in their research on assessment for learning which now emphasises the benefit of teacher learning communities. However, in practice, such teacher communities and the conversations they contain can sometimes confuse various kinds of assessments which reduces the conversations from assessment for learning (AfL), to assessment for accountability (AfA) or assessment for selection (AfS). This is identified as a difficulty by the Nuffield review which points out that although, AfL 'seeks to record what has been learnt' and AfS 'seeks to discriminate between the learners', these are sometimes 'confused' and conflated in the

language of targets and mechanistic conversations of how to achieve them (Pring *et al.*, 2009: 81).

This tendency is also present in the classroom where students are encouraged to either self-assess their own learning, or peer-assess one another's learning, as part of the Assessment for Learning initiative, which the Nuffield review commends when undertaken 'accurately' and not 'confused' with other kinds of assessment (Pring *et al.*, 2009: 81). In reality, student assessments 'for learning' are too often made within the context of whether they are on target, or have achieved the appropriate level, and thereby miss the opportunity to critically understand essential aspects about their learning activity and process which are beyond the confines of the outcome-based paradigm in respect of evaluating and thus learning.

Eisner recommends evaluation in education as 'educational criticism', which is 'descriptive', 'interpretative', 'evaluative', and 'thematic' (2002: 187). Such educational criticism is attentive to what 'has been perceived', interprets the perception with reference to 'theory, experience and context', makes judgements about 'educational value', and provides 'general observations and conclusions derived from what is being described, interpreted, and evaluated' (*ibid.*: 187). For Eisner, 'educational criticism is intended to avoid the radical reductionism that characterises much quantitative description' (*ibid.*: 189). Instead he defends evaluation 'designed to provide a fine-grained picture of what has occurred or has been accomplished so that practice or policy can be improved and high quality achievement acknowledged' (*ibid.*: 189).

Eisner advocates two processes important for evaluation: 'connoisseurship' as 'the art of appreciation' and 'criticism' as 'the art of disclosure' (1985: 92). 'Connoisseurship is private, but criticism is public' and 'effective criticism requires the use of connoisseurship' (*ibid.*: 93). However, in confining 'connoisseurship' to the private sphere, Eisner does not acknowledge the importance for the connoisseur of testing and refining her thinking and findings dialogically by testing her ongoing thinking with others. This element seems an integral part of what being a connoisseur entails. In this sense the concept of 'connoisseurship' would best include the concept of affiliation in order to recognise the dialogical aspect which supports practical reason.

Nevertheless, it is significant to note Eisner's conclusion:

Since educational evaluation has, as its ultimate objective improving the quality of the educational life students lead, I see no reason why we should not exploit the various forms of understanding that different knowledge structures can provide. Educational connoisseurship and educational criticism represent two modes through which we come to understand and express what we come to know. ... What we need today is a breakthrough in conception, a wedge in the door of possibility. Educational connoisseurship and educational criticism, it seems to me, offer some promising possibilities, not only for broadening the base of educational evaluation but for helping those of us in the arts committed to the improvement of the process of education. (Eisner, 1985: 101-102).

For individuals or groups to arrive at a critical understanding in education the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation are particularly significant. They are important for evaluating an educational situation, activity, written text or debate; for making judgements about it in the context of what is valuable and worthwhile with reference to a shared humanity; and in order to empathise appropriately and respond accurately to the context under evaluation. These capabilities enable the evaluator not to over or under react, but to arrive at a balanced judgment of the particular instance. The student will develop this ability and the teacher and researcher will assess progress and quality by applying these capabilities herself.

This kind of reflective practice required for evaluation is akin to that described in Chapter 7 in respect of learning, and I would argue is equally applicable to evaluation. Both require a similar kind of critical interpretative understanding. The flexible method for evaluation described here, understood as a way of life, requires learning to live, to read, and to dialogue, as part of the development of the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation. In addition, the evaluator must have a conception of the common good provided by the capabilities list in order to make evaluations which reach beyond the subjective individual interpretation and which respect the dignity of every person. An evaluator who has a heightened awareness and ability for reading the situation correctly and discussing this with others with sensitivity and critically will understand the subtleties of a text or an event, will understand its meaning without seeking certainty, and arrive at their evaluation through careful reflection and with reference to a shared humanity.

Here the interplay between evaluation and learning is evident, as is the notion that one is not possible without the other, as every instance of evaluation is to some extent a learning process, and each learning process requires evaluation as a critical part. In this sense, the concept of learning as a way of life, described in Chapter 7, can be extended to understand evaluation as a way of life, rather than a rigid process.

### 8.5.2 Evaluation within teaching and learning as a way of life

Hogan (2004) proposes the concept of teaching and learning '*as a way of life*' (2004: 18). He suggests that this way of life requires making 'an occupational commitment to a form of action that has an authority of its own and responsibilities of its own, and to understand that these two features constitute the integrity of that way of life' (*ibid.*: 19). Teaching and thus evaluation as a way of life, receives 'its distinctive character from its inherent relationship to learning as a human undertaking, and from the significance of this more inclusive undertaking for how life is to be lived' (*ibid.*: 27). For Hogan, this requires an active relationship between teaching and learning, and evaluating which attends with an 'incisiveness of mind and an openness of heart to inheritances of learning' and which tries to 'discern in these inheritances what is most deserving of one's convictions and sustained practical efforts' (*ibid.*: 30-31).

Noddings (2004) also argues in favour of the central importance of the teacher and the need for sensitive yet critical assessment of her teaching and her students learning, as 'she sets an example with her whole self – her intellect, her responsiveness, her humour, her curiosity ... her care' (*ibid.*: 162). Noddings considers this necessary if 'teachers are to meet responsibility for the development of their students as whole persons'. Moreover, 'relations of care and trust also form a foundation for the effective transmission of both general and specialised knowledge' (*ibid.*: 162). This position adds support to the importance of affiliation as a necessary capability for teaching and learning and assessments therein, and brings to the fore the ethical dimension essential for education which this thesis advocates.

The process of affiliation as well as practical reason described in the Capabilities Approach, requires a flexible rule such as that proposed by Aristotle in the builders of Lesbos. The flexible process proposed is exemplified for Hogan in the approach of 'historical Socrates of Athens' (2004: 21), who he describes as the best exemplar of teaching as a way of life. He suggests that Socrates discovered the real significance of learning, '*as it became his distinctive way of life*'

(*ibid.*: 22). The most important lesson for Socrates, which applies as much to learning as to evaluation, was that 'limitation, partiality, lack of finality and not least fallibility are probably inescapable features of all human efforts to understand and know' (2004: 22). As Hogan explains, a Socratic understanding of teaching and learning, which includes evaluation, involves a critical understanding of the 'what', 'why', and 'how' (*ibid.*: 30). A 'what', Hogan identifies as 'a specific body of aims and contents', that is, educational substance which includes the voices of tradition; a 'why' involves a 'sense of purpose and rightness in the sense of 'educational purpose'; and a 'how' involves a 'range of attitudes by which the aims are pursued' and by which there is an 'active, searching engagement with these voices' (*ibid.*: 30).

Like the kind of reflective practice advocated in Chapter 7, evaluation by teachers and learners which engages with questions regarding the what, why and how, require certain processes made possible through the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation. As Hogan suggests, these include 'daily practices' such as 'giving an attentive ear to the many and different voices of tradition in order to elicit most promisingly what is addressed to human imagination and sensibility by these voices' (2004: 30). And on the part of the teacher it requires an ongoing ability to dialogue and refine their 'range of communicative capacities in order to elicit these responses from students and to nurture them to a self-critical and an increasingly fluent engagement with these voices' (*ibid.*: 30). In this way teaching as a way of life, which involves ongoing evaluation and nurturing students to evaluate wisely themselves, 'is constituted by the complex practice of bringing about and sustaining relationships of learning in which the voices of history, of poetry, of science, etc. are enabled to speak, and to get a critical yet a generous response from learners' (*ibid.*: 30-31). Importantly, for Hogan, this approach to teaching, learning, and thus evaluation, requires the following:

... consciousness of the inherent limitations of even the best of human enquiries; an acknowledgement of both the modesty and the ever-emergent prospects that befit learning [and evaluation] as an unfinished and unfinishable undertaking; the self-critical insight that teaching is itself a form of learning-anew with others, where the teacher acts as listener, questioner, instructor, guide and as a responsible and caring leader. ... Teaching as a way of life then is ... a singularly conversational way of being human. (Hogan, 2004: 32).

### 8.5.3 Examples of evaluation: Interpretative understanding versus a narrow approach

In this section I will discuss some examples in respect of reading a text and evaluating it within the Capabilities Approach, which illustrate what the flexible process of evaluation entails. This differentiates what constitutes a sensitive critical interpretation of a text or a situation with examples which illustrate a more narrow approach. The Aristotle-inspired approach, as Nussbaum suggests, 'remains close to the world of particulars, directing the reader's attention to these and to experience – including the emotions of experience – as the sources of ethical insight' (1990: 238-239). In addition the interpretative approach proposed here has 'the dialectical power to compare alternative conceptions perspicuously, contrasting their salient features' (*ibid.*: 238-239).

The importance of the ethical dimension of this approach is that it enables the evaluator to be 'affectionate yet critical, attentive and responsive to particularity while committed to explanation' (1990: 239). Importantly, it refrains from the temptations of the seductive power of a rigid abstract rule with the power to lure the reader, or evaluator 'away from the richly textured world of particulars to the lofty heights of abstraction' and from 'the messy and difficult world we live in to a world made more simple and schematic' (*ibid.*: 238).

The first example, is taken from the work of Charles Dickens and illustrates a rigid approach to evaluation based on utility, which this chapter challenges. Below is a quotation from *Hard Times* by Dickens which describes accurate yet narrow evaluation using the paradigm of utility. This vignette depicts a teacher seeking a very specific and precise kind of evaluation and learning from their student, to the exclusion of all other forms of sensitive evaluation and learning. Here, Thomas Gadrind assigns his student Sissy Jupe with the task of describing a horse, and illustrates how his rigid frame for evaluation, where only facts count for success, leaves Sissy quite lost for words in her apparent 'failure'. In this approach there is only room for one kind of evaluation, understanding and thus learning about a horse which is meaningful:

Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth. (Dickens, 1854 [1969]: 50).

For the teacher, Thomas Gadrind, the aim and process of evaluation is clear, yet as this chapter has argued it is misconceived:

You are to be in all things regulated and governed, ... by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. ... you must use, for all these purposes, combinations and modifications of mathematical figures which are susceptible of proof and demonstration. This is fact. This is taste. (*ibid.*: 52).

Dickens critiques the way in which teachers of the time where learning to teach and evaluate with scientific precision and where the value of education is extrinsic and subsumed within the value of utility. He writes of teachers that they 'have been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs' (*ibid.*: 52-53).

In addition, English specialist Craig in his commentary of *Hard Times* in the Penguin edition of 1969, maintains that Dickens' criticism 'of the over-factual, over-trained M'Choakumchild' still holds true and is evident today in 'contemporary HMI's, headmasters, and even some college principals to the effect that the colleges force their students to 'cram' an 'immense preponderance of names, dates, and facts, which have to be *remembered* but not *digested*' (1969: 319). Craig, suggests that Dickens challenges the dragooning of children in schools and of workers in factories, where what is evident is 'the human cost of industrialization in its early stages, when minds and bodies have to be forced into exactitudes and regularities which are unnatural and at the same time indispensable to the large-scale, technically precise production on which our way of life depends' (1969: 320).

By contrast, a second example elucidates a kind of evaluation which is sensitive and demonstrates a subtle and rich understanding of what is being observed and described. This example of sensitive evaluation and appreciation of quality is taken from Henry James' novel, *Wings of the Dove*, and exemplifies a method of assessing and understanding which is not reduced to the factual as measurable, but which resembles the delicate methods proposed by Eisner above. In the extract below, a character in the story named Kate Croy, assesses herself from her reflection in the mirror:

She was handsome, but the degree of it was not sustained by items and aids: a circumstance moreover playing its part at almost any time in the impression she produced. The impression was one that remained, but as regards the source of it, no

sum in addition would have made up the total. She had stature without height, grace without motion, presence without mass. Slender and simple, frequently soundless, she was somehow always in the line of the eye – she counted singularly for its pleasure. (1909: 9).

Bridges (2009) notes of this extract from James' novel that it represents the kind of evaluation we seek, that is, a kind of assessment which 'owes more to aesthetics than to science – that is perhaps more akin to *connoisseurship* than to measurement' (2009: 511). He identifies several significant points from this extract which exemplify the kind of evaluation which this chapter favours. Firstly, Bridges notes that quality is 'not sustained by items and aids' and in that sense 'we are looking at pure quality unadorned'. Secondly, he identifies that the '*qualities* the writer attributes to the woman (stature, grace and presence) are discerned in spite of the absence of their quantitative measures (height, motion and mass)' (*ibid.*: 512). Hence he points out that 'the total impression is explicitly something quite different than could be achieved by adding up the sum of its parts' and that 'the observation of these qualities elicits a response of pleasure in the beholder' (*ibid.*: 512). However, I would disagree with Bridges' conclusion that in this example 'James has quality assessment in a nutshell' (*ibid.*: 512). The reason being that although James' sensitive kind of assessment is commendable, it demonstrates where Eisner's idea of *connoisseurship* can go wrong by being defined by and confined to the 'private' sphere. Instead, this thesis supports through the Capabilities Approach, that evaluation undertaken with practical reason and affiliation involves a dialogical dimension which refines and guides the private or first 'appearance'.

The kind of sensitive evaluation sought here becomes more significant in respect of evaluations about education where the ethical dimension surfaces to the fore. As Smith and Standish (2007) maintain, this requires that we 'dwell thoughtfully upon what is implied in a particular ethical situation or predicament' (2007: 200). They suggest that in order 'to decide what to do from the right kind of receptivity and trust, to do justice to the persons involved, one can use poems, art of calculative reasoning' but that these all require the concept of 'enquiry-as-interpretation', and an effort to 'make sense for oneself' (*ibid.*: 200). In this sense they support the Aristotelian picture of *phronēsis* suggested in this thesis as significant for evaluation which embodies the ethical dimension beyond utility. Moreover, affiliation is also recognised as important as they identify that 'a secure group where mutual trust is fostered is one capable of contemplating and joining in the play of meaning' which is key for the



interpretative understanding required (*ibid.*: 4). This approach embodies the notion of evaluation as a way of life which Hogan (2004) supports.

This chapter argues that an ethical dimension shaped by a shared humanity which the Capabilities Approach promotes is necessary for evaluations in education, as it enables individuals to be attuned to the situation being evaluated, and hence to perceive the particular with care, dignity, and with an understanding of the wider picture of which it is a part. Jane Austen in her novels provides examples of the need for sensitivity when making judgements. She also illustrates the importance of doing justice to the situation by understanding the complexities involved, which all require the ethical dimension to be recognised as shaping the process of evaluation. Thus her characters face the demand, 'that they respond to each other honestly and accurately' (Smith, 2003: 386).

In respect of *Pride and Prejudice*, Smith (2003) suggests what Austen requires of her characters in order that they make good judgements. 'Elizabeth Bennet must learn to make more measured judgements about situations and people (instead of yielding to the prejudice of the title), while Darcy must learn that accurate judgements are not enough; they must be made in a spirit of humility' (2003: 387). In this sense, good evaluation, like the good novel, is marked by 'a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity', since the judgements the characters face, and the literary critic is concerned with 'are judgements about life' (*ibid.*: 387).

It is only when the ethical dimension becomes integral to the process of evaluation and thus of making good judgements, whether in a novel, about a novel, or about education, that the appropriate degree of precision is achieved through sensitive interpretation of the particular reality, within the context of the general framework of a shared humanity. This is similarly important, whether it concerns the author's depiction of characters in a novel, or the readers' evaluation of the novel and its character. In the case of education, this is important where the teacher assesses students in her class, where students assess themselves and one another, or where the researcher assesses quality in respect of teacher and learner assessment or assesses other research.

## Summary

As was discussed in Chapter 3, there are widely accepted concerns with a narrow approach to evaluation generally in society, and in particular in the areas of economics, health, and environmental or educational development. It was argued there and later in Chapter 4 that understanding quality or success in human development using an economic metric is very restrictive and that attempts at commensurability in respect of development are inappropriate. In the field of education, the over reliance on the scientific paradigm for making judgements about quality and success continue to be questioned by many (Oancea and Furlong, 2007; Bridges, 2009; Pring 2004). Some of these issues were discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, in particular in relation to the factory metaphor for education and the language of performativity which was found wanting as an adequate model for understanding, discussing and assessing educational quality, progress and success. In addition, in respect of human flourishing, the hedonic approach popular in utilitarianism was challenged in Chapter 4, where the narrow understanding of happiness based only on reports of people's 'feelings of well-being' was argued to be unhelpful to our understanding of flourishing. Furthermore, the attempt at commensurability of value judgements about well-being was considered misconceived.

Limiting our judgements about value to data which is oversimplified to a single standard, numerically measured in formulaic style, and confined to the quantitative sphere to be considered trustworthy and to yield knowledge, does not yield the understanding of human flourishing we require. Instead what has been proposed is the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach which allows us to approach data with greater sensitivity and to consider a wider breadth of data in our considerations. This approach takes account of the particular recorded and the varied interpretations these yield, and is inclusive of contextualised voices (whether adult or child) as essential to the heuristic process. In particular, the data sought and interpreted must be sensitive to the concept of human perception as the starting point or the window into understanding. Paradoxically this very window that is human perception or 'appearances', as Aristotle described them, is itself restricted and cannot yield conclusive knowledge of the kind sought by technical rationality. Nevertheless the normative framework of our shared capabilities which Aristotle proposes as the common and flexible guide for our value judgements, ensure the degree of objectivity we require.

The perspective proposed in this chapter enables a way of seeing and recognising what counts as quality, progress and success in education, which is sensitive to the particular context, and which is mindful of the complexity of assessing human development in the educational sphere. This approach admits that any view or evaluation must rely on the historical accumulation of evidence dependent on human judgement in order to be trustworthy. And it is this forming and reforming of the general view or generic criteria, or the universal, by the particular voices through time, that provides the rich standard we must seek, not a quasi 'scientific' approach.

Most importantly the Capabilities Approach includes the ethical dimension necessary for judgments to be made about what is better or worse in respect of evaluations about education. It is not appropriate in this area to seek proof, or to demand complete knowledge of the kind sought in the sciences. As Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, the German philosopher and dramatist of the 18<sup>th</sup> century suggests, 'accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason' (1956: 53).

Nevertheless this should not imply that we fall into complete subjectivity and any evidence is as valid as any other. We do require criteria for the trustworthiness of evidence, but such criteria instead of being criteria defined by certainty, should best be considered as criteria defined by plausibility. It is the benchmark provided by the Capabilities Approach and the flexible and collegial methods employed by the person of practical reason and affiliation which yield the degree of objectivity appropriate to the subject of human development, of which education is an essential part. It is through this process of reflective practice that evaluation becomes a way of life, within and beyond education. As Aristotle's counsel suggests:

One must ... not look for precision in the same way in everything, but in accordance with the underlying material in each sphere, and to the extent that is appropriate to the inquiry. (NE 1098a25-30).

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<sup>1</sup> *Erklären* and *verstehen* : For a fuller debate of these concepts refer to a series of philosophical essays, which editor O'Hear (1996) describes in the preface of the book, as an attempt to explore the questions as to whether reason might take different forms depending on subject matter. These essays formed the Royal Institute of Philosophy's annual lecture series for 1995-96 , where the contributors examine whether in the human world, forms of thought and knowledge exist which, while not conforming to the patterns of the natural sciences, can nevertheless be thought of as rational .

<sup>2</sup> <http://timss.bc.edu/pirls2006/index.html> (Last accessed 23/02/11).

<sup>3</sup> For further explanation of the notion of *Connoisseurship* refer to Elliot Eisner (1985), Chapter 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Metricity* is a term coined by Nussbaum in describing the science of measurement as composed of four constituent claims: *metricity*, *singleness*, *consequentialism*, and *maximisation*. Here, Nussbaum defines *metricity* as 'the claim that in each situation of choice there is one value, varying only in quantity, that is common to all the alternatives, and that the rational chooser weighs the alternatives using this single standard' (1990: 56-66).

<sup>5</sup> Peterson and Seligman found evidence for values shared by many, expressed as a set of six human virtues ubiquitous to human flourishing.

## Conclusion

### **Education: The broader perspective offered in this thesis**

In this thesis, I have put forward an alternative philosophy to that of performativity, offering a broader understanding of what we mean by an educated person than the performative culture in education allows. The Aristotle-inspired contemporary Capabilities Approach proposed, as developed by Martha Nussbaum in particular, allows for different descriptions of the good life referenced against essential shared human capabilities which enable human flourishing. Importantly, the Capabilities Approach focuses on a person's opportunity and ability to realise their capabilities with reference to what is intrinsically valuable and an understanding of human beings as more than economic units. It is an approach which relies on human judgements resulting from sensitive interpretations of specific situations which are complex and varied. It is therefore not reducible to a single scale of measurement. This approach constitutes an ethical dimension which is inclusive of and attends to vulnerable groups and individuals. It demands that opportunities are made available in societal structures, especially education, for persons to develop capabilities integral to realising potential such as practical reason and affiliation.

I have proposed the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach in an effort to redress the theoretical bias that exists in education towards two unhelpful utilitarian foci: First, the focus on defining educational success in terms of employment outcomes, and second, the focus on individuals passing prescribed exams measured on a single scale which in turn values only educational activities which fit on this scale. This utilitarian tendency towards instrumentalism and technical reason in education today, with its narrow definition of what is valuable, has rightly been critiqued by educationists. For example, some have challenged the tendency to reduce activity in education to a mechanistic approach judged in the main against criteria of productivity using impersonal processes that greatly diminish the relevance of judgements made by individual practitioners (Dunne and Hogan, 2004). Of particular concern, the performative culture in education with its misplaced value on productivity often measures success against a single standard which overshadows important complex values. These include, the value of listening attentively, of being open to ourselves, of attending to others and the world, and of developing a vision of the good in the context of others (Smith, 2011). The result

of this narrow view prevalent in education is a loss of a much-needed ethical dimension which goes beyond utility.

Education reviews such as the Nuffield Review in 2009 recognised that endeavours in education have been made following the 2006 Education Act in England to break free from the performative culture. These efforts have focused on developing a more holistic approach in education attentive to the well-being of young people, the need for greater inclusion, and to promoting more radical ways of learning. Examples of these include the official emphasis of Every Child Matters on personalised learning and assessment for learning. Other initiatives include: The RSA: Open Minds Project, or Futurelab: Enquiring Minds programme (Pring *et al.*, 2009: 77, 79, 201). Notwithstanding these endeavours, the Nuffield Review and more recently Education for All (2011) are right to continue to call for a broader definition of what counts as an educated person. As these reviews indicate, education is not ethically neutral and acknowledging the ethical dimension in education and developing moral seriousness in the field is necessary.

As I have argued in this thesis, questions should prevail in education about which are the appropriate values and aims, and these can only be justified through dialogue and argument based on what human beings share, and need to be understood through practical rather than technical reason. However, these questions cannot begin to be answered without some theoretical groundwork. Although the aforementioned education reviews stress the need for the ethical dimension they do not go far enough in articulating the conception of its nature and the kind of theory needed to support it. In order to address this issue, I have attempted to articulate the nature of this ethical dimension with reference to the Capabilities Approach and its underlying principles. I have therefore argued in favour of the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach espoused by Nussbaum, whose contribution strengthens education in its attempt to answer these questions and to move education beyond the limits of the technical perspective.

Arguably, Aristotle's philosophy, and particularly the *Nicomachean Ethics*, provide the much-needed theoretical groundwork for the ethical dimension sought in education which challenges the present performative culture. In particular, Aristotle's understanding of human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) respects human complexity and offers an important general outline of human nature. He suggests that specific human capabilities are developed in order to realise potential with reference to a good life. What each good life looks like in practice is diverse, yet certain characteristics can be universally recognised as present in each instance. At

the heart of Aristotle's view of ethics is the need for insight (*nous*) and practical reason (*phronēsis*) in our search for understanding. The evaluative process requires a shared language about humanity and the need for relationships to test our developing understanding. This view does not allow for a reductive single measure of the good which yields an incomplete explanation. Instead, it relies on the cumulative complex human process of sensitive evaluations which yield wise judgements, drawing from every available source whether scientific or not. Aristotle's philosophy stands in contrast to the standardised approach to measuring success and realising potential prevalent in education today and provides us with a far-reaching ethical dimension which contrasts with the narrow position of performativity.

Aristotle's complex view of human flourishing within which realising potential is understood, challenges contemporary ideas of happiness or well-being as measurable on a single scale. Instead, Aristotle contributes an understanding of happiness in the context of flourishing as a life well lived, through practical reason, deliberated trust, and bonds of care promoting positive social action. This practical philosophy requires individuals and groups to participate in the public arena and to reflect carefully about issues using this shared understanding of human flourishing.

Nussbaum (1993) draws and builds on aspects of Aristotle's philosophy as she develops the contemporary Capabilities Approach. In particular, she draws on his understanding of human flourishing (*eudaimonia*), including the ethical claim that certain human abilities ought to be developed and that society ought to offer opportunities for these. I have argued that with its capabilities list (which is open to continual refinement), this contemporary approach is well-placed to challenge the performative culture in education. Significantly, the Capabilities Approach enables us to redefine our understanding of an educated person as someone who is not just technically competent in an area of productivity, but as one who is more crucially a sensitive, empathetic interpreter in every situation.

I suggested that the Capabilities Approach strengthens education in its quest to nurture well-being and realise potential because it requires that key capabilities such as practical reason and affiliation are developed as an integral part of the process of education. Practical reason and affiliation are considered essential in enabling persons to realise their potential as happy, trustworthy, thoughtful, and engaged social beings. At present however, these capabilities are often sidelined by the Standards Agenda in education.

Given the evidence of mental health issues (WHO, 2010) also affecting children and young people (UNICEF, 2007), there is considerable urgency to review our understanding of happiness and well-being and its relation to education and realising potential. Many children in England today still fail to thrive in school and some drop out altogether. Added to this, rises in mental health issues connected with stress and anxiety are linked with statutory forms of standardised assessment. Although present forms of standardised assessment promise precision of evaluation they often lead to evaluations insensitive to diversity and potential beyond the narrow measure. They do not consider context sufficiently, or specific obstacles, or needs faced by individuals which may limit their ability to flourish within the standard or in respect of other measures. This reality gives energy to the argument of this thesis against a performative emphasis in education and in favour of the Capabilities Approach with its emphasis on well-being. This approach provides practical guidance for education which includes a strong theoretical basis and does not make the mistake of reducing everything of value to one measure.

The flexible method of reflective practice in the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach is well-placed to re-focus teaching and learning with its emphasis on the ethical dimension in life. This particular kind of reflection draws on the Greco-Roman heritage of philosophy as a practical tool which I discuss in Chapter 7. In addition and building from this early tradition, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Ignatian practice of the *Examen* as a daily cycle of reflection is one which continues to thrive today used by individual and groups. I suggest in Chapter 7 that this regular cycle of reflection when adapted for education further enriches the flexible method of reflection promoted within the Capabilities Approach. I have argued that this kind of reflection is relevant and significant in contemporary education, particularly in its support of ethical questioning which refines the ability to 'read' situations accurately and react in a balanced manner. Thus, reflection grounded on this tradition strengthens already established enquiry methods in teaching and learning. With regards to evaluation in education, the Capabilities Approach and its particular kind of reflection helps evaluators make sensitive judgements based on a variety of evidence. In this sense, the Capabilities Approach is important in that it enables educationists to resist oversimplification and reductionism in evaluations about progress and success, and instead to be satisfied with only as much precision as is appropriate from sensitive interpretative understanding which includes the ethical perspective.



## **Perceived limitations of the Capabilities Approach: Implications for education**

Within the Capabilities Approach literature there is an acknowledged possible tension between the goal of basic capability equality on the one hand and the objective of capability expansion on the other (Alkire, 2002; Clark, 2005). In addition, the informational requirements of this approach can be very high and some researchers in health have struggled to make it operational as there are difficulties in measuring capabilities and their development, even if they can be identified. For example, Anand developed 60 indicators of capability aligned to Nussbaum's capabilities list which limits its usability in its complexity, and Coast has developed an index of capability for use with the elderly which limits its capacity for generalisation beyond the elderly (Lorgelly *et al.*, 2005). Notwithstanding these difficulties, many credible attempts have been made to investigate and evaluate social issues using the Capabilities Approach, including: inequality, well-being, social justice, gender, social exclusion, health, disability, child poverty, and identity. A particular example of this is the Human Development Index which specifically includes education (Clark, 2005). Importantly, when applied in education the Capabilities Approach broadens the informational base of evaluation, refocusing on persons as ends in themselves.

As I have argued in this thesis, Nussbaum's contribution with its definite list of capabilities has developed beyond Sen's framework to include a theory of what is valuable to guide moral judgements. Though some consider this list to be confused, others defend it as a systematic process which uses criteria for well-being and humanity as a starting point for constitutional discussions. Grounded on Aristotle's philosophy, this list should not be understood as a top-down and prescriptive view of western opinion, but rather 'as a hypothesis about what would over time become acceptable starting points for discussions in each society, as a rational interpretation, implication and evolution of their values' (Gasper, 2004: 187). Nussbaum's list should therefore be critiqued primarily for its potential for abuse rather than its method (Clark, 2005), a point which Nussbaum herself accepts.

The difficulties in applying the Capabilities Approach in a particular area of social action (including education) require ongoing consideration and awareness of its limitations in particular contexts. Nevertheless these difficulties have not been found to invalidate its soundness and strength as a theory, and the ethical dimension it supports I have argued in this thesis to be crucial in education. What is most significant here when adopting the Capabilities Approach in education, despite its difficulties and imperfections, is that Nussbaum's list of

capabilities, in particular practical reason and affiliation, represents a way of looking and understanding any particular situation which goes beyond utility and which includes within it the ethical dimension required. For these reasons, the Capabilities Approach requires education practice and evaluation to be mindful of and include in its reflections the following concerns:

... content and potentials in diverse important areas of people's lives, with attention to holistic cases and to a broad range of evidence, including from fiction, poetry and biography, as well as from conventional social science sources; and using rich pictures of mind, personhood, emotions and language to explore the human content of evidence, including its emotional content. These features form an interconnected package and are important for building both relevant ethical theory and concern and compassion for other persons, and for motivating and sustaining action. (Gasper, 2004: 188).

### **The Capabilities Approach in practice: Distinctive views of reflection and understanding**

There are various ways in which this approach is applicable in education and I have mentioned examples in this thesis including the flexible method of reflection integral in this approach which contains ethical questioning and views education as a way of life.

Although there has not been room in this thesis to focus in depth on practice in line with the Capabilities Approach it is worth mentioning a few instances here. Exemplars are being developed through programmes in primary schools in the North East of England which focus on students looking deeper at their social world, reflecting on and discussing social situations which enable them to thrive and those which diminish them, and practising being agents of change in their communities. Practitioners developing this programme indicate that the students are developing in positive ways, and their ability to write, communicate, and engage sensitively and positively has been heightened when immersed in this programme.

In the secondary stage, schools in this area of the country have created programmes of daily reflection on an ethical theme where there is time for personal thought, group dialogue, and engagement with issues which they would not normally encounter in their daily curriculum. As the programme has developed students have become involved in designing the topics for

reflective practice themselves which require the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation to be further refined.

Learners as enquirers and researchers have also developed in the secondary and primary stages in schools in North East England. They have engaged in methods of reflective enquiry based on the principles of the Capabilities Approach. Their flexible structure requires them to undertake a process of enquiry: (1) agree on a set of qualities which they consider essential for flourishing learners and outstanding teachers, (2) in groups, embark on observing a variety of learning situations in school focusing on the teacher and the student perspective, (3) make sense of their observations, test them against their theory, and provide exemplars of good practice which they share with others in the school, to be further refined as the next step in their cycle of reflection.

These three examples have been significant for practice as they enable learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning and decisions within a broad narrative, and to engage in a structured process of reflection applicable to any situation. Also important has been the opportunity for practitioners to reflect individually and with others about their practice and the children in their care. Within this context, they are better able to view and review their aspirations and expectations of the children they teach, in order to nurture their learning and progress within the ethical dimension of realising potential.

With regards to applying the Capabilities Approach to research and evaluation, there is an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of children and young people living in social disadvantage and failing to realise their potential in school and beyond. The emphasis on reflection in the Capabilities Approach and the ethical dimension which it includes could help guide sensitive exploratory research to understand the wider narrative of these children's lives and to ensure they receive the support required. In particular, further connections could be made between children in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) and other areas of social difficulty, including *Troubled Families*. Understanding the intersections between different needs in society and their contexts more fully could contribute to ameliorating some of the difficulties faced by individuals and groups. Here, focusing on human capability could help disadvantaged individuals and their families be better supported to thrive in society today.

## Limitations of this thesis: Opportunities for the future

When considering the practical implications of this thesis, two aspects stand out. Firstly, it provides an alternative philosophy to the performative culture in education, and secondly, it offers a set of ideas about how education can help young people to flourish. Developing this position embodied the ongoing challenges present in bringing abstract philosophical concepts to the practical area of education, and required delving well beyond the education literature within a limited time frame. Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to search in various disciplines beyond education, including philosophy, psychology, social sciences, theology, history, and literature in order to seek understanding and evidence in support of my argument, and to relate the abstract to the practical. The constraints of time and length, together with the attempt to interweave understanding from various disciplines and to synthesise concepts with practice, has resulted in various limitations in this thesis. In particular I wish to note three of these below.

1. I am aware that writing a thesis in education and not primarily in philosophy, the philosophical position for which I have argued has not received the nuance of argument or detail that it deserves. For example, this has been the case in respect of Aristotle's philosophy, and more generally with regards to questions about ethics which include concepts from epistemology and metaphysics. More specifically, there has not been adequate space for a thorough discussion of the ongoing debate about interpretation of various aspects of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, resulting in a rather course-grained exposition of the idea of human flourishing and its associated philosophical concepts. In addition, making connections between the language of varying disciplines as diverse as psychology and poetry in an attempt to support the argument in this thesis has required being satisfied with a lack of refinement in the translation and understanding which each discipline deserves.
2. Educational practice focused on developing the ability to think and act well continues both in west and eastern cultures, and I acknowledge that an in-depth exploration of this practice has been limited in this thesis. There is a need to examine some of these programmes further, including their philosophical underpinnings and how they may connect with the Capabilities Approach, and the development of practical reason and affiliation. For example, I would like to consider further programmes such as those in India inspired by Tagore which draw on art and the humanities to develop a public culture of

sympathy and imagination (Nussbaum, 2010); enquiry-based learning approaches including those developed by Forest schools in Northern Europe which focus on learning in the outdoors; approaches which promote self-organised learning using digital media (Mitra, 2012); and other practice around the world which focuses more generally on students 'Learning to learn' (Higgins, 2009).

3. Developing practical programmes arising from the flexible methods of reflection for which I have argued in this thesis, have not been part of the scope of this work. For example, reflective practice traditions of earlier centuries could be embraced in education today to develop the capabilities of practical reason and affiliation specifically, such as the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition of learning as a way of life, and the 16<sup>th</sup> century daily cycle of reflection of the *Examen*. In particular, there may be opportunities for applying these concepts to practice with children and practitioners more fully as part of an approach to enquiry learning, peer learning, coaching, and mentoring. Similarly, with regards to evaluation there has been little space to attempt to assess learning through reflective practice in the spirit of *phronēsis*. The importance of the Capabilities Approach needs further testing in education and this thesis has been limited in its scope to develop this area, and I would seek to undertake further research using these principles and the flexible methods of reflection I have argued for here.

In conclusion, there is further research needed to explore more fully the significance of the Aristotle-inspired Capabilities Approach in education. Nevertheless, I have strived to show in this thesis that this approach and its philosophical principles offer a broader understanding of what we mean by an educated person than the performative culture in education allows, which strengthens education theory and practice. Crucially, this approach is inclusive of and sensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups and individuals in society, it redefines our understanding of realising potential which includes an ethical dimension, and it offers practical ideas about how education can help all young people live a fulfilled life.

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