Education at the intersection of environmental, epistemic and transitional justices

An initial scoping review

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About JustEd

JustEd is an international comparative mixed methods study that explores the lived experiences of secondary school learners of environmental, epistemic and transitional justice. We produce insight into how learner experiences translate into actions to advance Sustainable Development Goals 13 (Climate Action) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

The JustEd study is delivered by researchers at the University of Bath (UK), the University of Bristol (UK), Group for the Analysis of Development (GRADE) (Peru), Gulu University (Uganda) and Tribhuvan University (Nepal). JustEd is funded by the UK government's Grand Challenges Research Fund (GCRF).

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Abstract

This paper is the final of four theoretical background papers for *JustEd* – a research project that aims to understand how secondary school learners' knowledge and experiences of environmental, epistemic and transitional justice, in and out of school, relate to learners' intended actions with respect to SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 16 (peace) in Nepal, Peru and Uganda. This paper starts to identify the links between these justices in education and points to the ways that they can be complementary to, and enriching of, social justice perspectives. Through exploring the links across the three justices, we suggest that there are two key relationships between education and these multiple justices. The first is *education as a means to achieve different forms of justice* in the ways that education can lead to justice, for example, how access to schooling is considered a distribution of resources, or how learning about past conflict could enable positive peace. The second is *education as an (un)just space* in the ways that teaching/learning processes and social practices in classrooms, schools and in the wider environment reflect and embody different forms of justice.

1. Introduction

This paper is the final of four theoretical background papers for *JustEd – education as and for environmental, epistemic and transitional justice to enable sustainable development[1]*. Our project aims to understand how secondary school learners' knowledge and experiences of environmental, epistemic and transitional justice, in and out of school, relate to learners' intended actions with respect to SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 16 (peace) in Nepal, Peru and Uganda. In the background papers that have focused on each of the justices in education (Balarin et al. 2021; Paulson et al. 2021; Nuwategeka et al. 2021), we have conceptualised each justice in education in the following ways:

Environmental justice in education identifies the ways pedagogic and learning processes include the right to nature and the rights of nature both in the curricula/textbooks and in learners' classroom experiences. Central to this is also recognition of the 'away from school' experience and knowledge of teachers and students in their daily lives in their environment. In JustEd, we are focusing on the relationships between in and out of school knowledges and experiences, and between young people and their environments. We are exploring to what extent education related to the environment is taught as a 'justice' issue and how learners respond to both formal curriculum and informal forms of knowing to develop their understanding and actions for their and nature's futures.

Epistemic justice in education explores how different types of knowledge, and whose knowledge, are included, taught and assessed in schools. An epistemic justice approach to education advocates for multiple forms of knowledge in the curriculum and classroom practice. In JustEd, we are studying the ways that epistemic injustices, specifically in relation to marginalized groups, climate action, violence and peace, are reproduced through global norms, national policies and curricula, and school-level materials, language use and pedagogical processes. We seek to understand the ways that such epistemic injustices are, and can be, questioned and ultimately ruptured to enable fairer and more just futures.

Transitional justice in education identifies the material and policy changes alongside the pedagogic and learning processes needed to recognise the dignity of individuals and groups, acknowledge past violations and injustice, repair and redress the causes, effects and legacies of past violations. It also considers the multiple and complex ways that education contributes to past, current and future (in)justices. In JustEd, we are particularly exploring how conflict is included in education policies and the secondary school curricula, the ways that they are taught and learnt within classroom contexts where young people may experience everyday manifestations of violence and how such knowledge and experiences may impact on young people's future actions related to peace and the environment.

Drawing on the first three background papers, this paper starts to identify the links between these justices in education. Through this, we build on the growing body of literature that has brought together different forms of justice to analyse educational policies and practices, although we note that the majority of this writing has explored social justice in conversation with one of these other forms of justice (see, for example, Menton et al. 2020; Milligan 2020; Novelli, Lopes Cardozo & Smith, 2017). The emphasis on social justice is an important one, and we are inspired, in particular, by those scholars who have drawn on, and built upon, Nancy Fraser's writing on redistribution, recognition and representation to consider just education systems (Fraser 2009); a point that is further elaborated in the *Epistemic Justice in Education* background paper (Balarin et al. 2021).

We will revisit the relationships with social justice in future writing, but in this paper we focus on the three justices from the first three papers – environmental, epistemic and transitional. We see these conceptualisations of justice as complementary to, and enriching of, social justice perspectives. In the following sections, we draw out some of the intersections between the three justices that have been identified in the background papers, particularly where these intersections manifest in educational arenas. Through a consideration of education as and for justice, we suggest that education is an intersecting space for the interplay of both knowledge and experience of different (in)justices.

2. Intersection of Epistemic and Environmental justice in Education

The literature reviewed in the *Environmental Justice in Education* paper makes some clear links between environmental and epistemic justice, albeit that the literature rarely uses either of the terms explicitly. Nuwategeka et al. (2021) suggest that scholars and educators should recognize that epistemic justice and environmental justice are complementary: achieving both forms of justice relies on the recognition and fostering of skills and knowledge which in turn are criteria for changing the production and consumption patterns of all sectors of society which is needed to assure the survival of humanity as a whole. If we particularly focus on these 'two sides to the same coin' in education, there is significant evidence that these epistemic injustices in relation to what knowledge has been privileged is also present within education systems. Significant attention has been paid to the ways that formal schooling and the global world order reproduce epistemic injustices for young people, denying worldviews and perpetuating relationships of domination (Hoppers 2017; de Sousa Santos 2015; Silova, Rappleye & You 2020). The persistent dominance, in particular, of Eurocentric scientific knowledge in education curricula globally has been widely critiqued (e.g. Masaka 2019).

Alongside and in response to this, the contributions of Indigenous knowledges for sustainable living, particularly through knowledge of ecosystems and nature, are being extolled (Manyike and Shava 2018). Sumida Huaman (2017) suggests the importance of Indigenous knowledge systems as environmental knowledge for both their contextualisation in the place, land and peoples that live there and in their accumulation over time. As Tanyanyiwa (2019, 3) explains the knowledge "is environmentally determined and … the socio-economic, physical, and spiritual understandings inform the people's survival strategies over a long period of time." From a biocentric perspective, which highlights our responsibility to non-human life, we can go further to suggest that it is not only about people's survival but also their contribution to the flourishing of all beings.

There is a growing body of literature that has highlighted the potential for 'hybridized knowledge' within climate education (Glasson et al.

2010). Tanyayiwa (2019), for example, presents a case study from the Goromonzi district of Zimbabwe about the ways that Indigenous knowledges and Eurocentric scientific knowledge about climate change could become complementary within the secondary school curriculum. His conclusions highlight ways that this could lead to more contextually grounded understanding among young people in their response to climate change. However, these conclusions echo critiques about the tendency for Indigenous knowledge to be seen as something informal with limited examples of how multiple knowledges being recognised within the formal education system and suggests a need for educationalists to actively bring Indigenous knowledge to the fore in educational curricula (Wiredu 1995).

The epistemic question here not only relates to what knowledge is recognised but who decides what is included in the curriculum, taught in the classroom and assessed in examinations. It is useful to consider the conceptualisation of epistemic justice as the equality of not only recognition but also production and consumption of knowledge (Hall, Godrie & Heck 2020, 35). This suggests that it is not enough to include different knowledge systems without a genuine acknowledgement and acceptance of the contribution of these knowledge systems to knowledge generation about climate action. Masaka (2019, 298) takes this further by arguing that it is about how Indigenous knowledges are taught and how it leads to the 'awakening of the agency of learners so that they contribute meaningfully to the determination of their own destiny'.

One way to increase epistemic justice in formal education comes from the pedagogy of experiential learning. Phyak (2021, 219), writing from the context of Nepal, argues convincingly for the importance of "building educational practices upon the lived experiences of the people, particularly Indigenous and ethnic minorities… [which] could help us resist the destruction of languages, epistemologies, and linguistic/epistemic self-determination of communities." Kalungwizi et al. (2020), through a case study of tree-planting in a Tanzanian teacher college, have highlighted the potential for such experiential learning to lead to positive actions related to environmental sustainability. This is just one example of how

learners could be encouraged to bring their own experiences and epistemic contributions. There is a need for greater understanding of the ways that such equality of knowledge consumption and production could be possible in multilingual and predominantly teacher-led classroom practice.

While much of the literature that points to the intersection of epistemic and environmental justice in education pays attention to Indigenous knowledges, the suggestions in *the Epistemic Justice in Education* paper related to children's knowledge are also relevant here. Children's experiences of the world, and their experiences of the world as they grow up and age, are and will be different from those of the adults who teach them, and this is no less true in relation to the state of the environment and climate change than it is for any aspect of social change.

Epistemic analyses of education suggest that traditional teaching methods and theories see learning as one-directional (e.g. Murris 2013), but educational theorists have proposed that education can be transformative when educators focus on teaching not the subject, but the learner, and this means embracing education as a co-constructive process where learners as well as educators play an active role in making meaning and collaboratively engaging with the world around them and developing critical awareness as a core competence to fully act as epistemic subjects (e.g. Bernstein 2000, Macmurray 1957). Through this model we can see great potential in the possibilities for co-produced exploration about just futures.

Environmental justice movements are gaining momentum among youth in different parts of the world (Svampa 2020). The school climate strikes are just one example of young people taking action about the future (see, for example, Vanessa Nakate's leadership in Uganda). Learning from young people's perspectives on the planet, educators have responded in solidarity (e.g. 'Calling Educators to Action on Climate Crisis', https://educators-for-climate-action.org/petition/). Environmental justice is conceivable through young people's experiences, demands and actions, and in the process young people are not only making themselves visible as knowers, they are showing that they can become epistemic leaders.

3. Intersections of Epistemic and Transitional Justice in Education

At the policy level, education has often been seen as a tool for transitional justice, particularly in relation to cultural recognition claims. Transitional justice bodies regularly call for curriculum revision or reform and in certain cases this has happened, with curricula that acknowledges victims of conflict and includes human rights and citizenship content (Paulson and Bellino 2017). Recommendations are often more ample, including for systemic reforms oriented towards epistemic justice; one clear example of this is the call for intercultural and bilingual education in the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission final report (CVR 2004). As with the discussion related to environmental justice in the previous section, there are significant epistemic questions about who is involved in such decision-making processes and whether testimonies of individuals from marginalised groups particularly affected by conflict are deemed valuable or relevant (Fricker 2007). This is especially important in the case of policies where "the historicity, sources, and consequences of…dominant assumptions and arguments are underexplored" (Phyak 2021, 226). Here, it is important to understand the ways that educational policies can reflect the epistemic contributions and silences in formal transitional justice processes, such as Truth Commissions. In the *Exploring Transitional Justice in Education paper* we reflect on the ways that victims provided testimony in Ugandan and Peruvian Truth Commissions but were excluded from the final review and decision-making process (Paulson et al. 2021).

At the curriculum design and classroom level, the literature on education and conflict is clear in its assessment that education can contribute both positively and negatively in transitional societies. One key critique is for the top-down nature of curricular content and teaching resources related to teaching about recent violence. As Tania Saeed (tweet, May 4, 2021) succinctly argues "a curriculum pushing a singular narrative of identity is perpetuating violence not cohesion". The conflict and education literature can tend to focus on the curriculum level, but by bringing transitional and epistemic justice into conversation, we can also envisage the ways that education, and classroom contexts in particular, can be a site of memory (Paulson et al. 2020). By this, Paulson et al. (2020, 433-434) explain that classrooms can be one site

for the "interplay between the desired narrative…, the actual meanings that (different groups of) people make of the past…the memories they bring from other experiences, spaces, places, the silencing processes that value certain memories and not others, and the importance of emotional and embodied practices and responses." Sriprakash et al. (2020, 7) specifically suggest an expansion of the types of historical practices and sources used in education to include recording of life histories, public testimonies, performances of song and dance and visual sources. Such multilingual and multimodal ways of remembering and sharing memories of past and ongoing injustices point to a potential way to rupture the epistemic injustices and silencing that have often accompanied history education about conflict.

Our understanding of transitional justice in education, thus, suggests the importance of going beyond the static, top-down, singular narrative, to classroom practice which encourages memory work and sharing of learners' perspectives and experiences. Fricker's writing offers a useful conceptualisation for understanding the ways that this is dependent on teachers and other learners having "a certain reflexive critical awareness of the prejudicial distortions mediating between herself as hearer and her particular interlocutor, and in so far as she is able to correct for that distortion" (2007, 99). Central to Fricker's concept of reflexive critical awareness is the view that it is not only personal differences that will determine how a teacher will hear a learner's testimony but also that it will be situated within the socio-cultural and historical context. Relevant to the discussion of transitional justice is that the classroom may itself be a setting, and also be part of the wider community, where there has been 'little critical awareness of the construction' of conflict narratives so is "a setting in which people are not generally in a position to possess the virtue of testimonial justice vis-á-vis identity prejudice" (Fricker 2007, 99). This omission points to the importance of exploring both the pedagogic approaches that can enable young people to be able to give testimony in the classroom and the socio-cultural contexts (including teachers' pedagogy and experiences) that shape these everyday interactions.

A final important point that starts to emerge from the intersection of these two bodies of literature is

the ways that classrooms can be sites of both epistemic and direct violence. In the discussion of the Peruvian case study in the epistemic justice in education paper, we reflect on how the prevalence of authoritarian models of discipline may hinder the ways that learners can equally participate in knowledge production and consumption. There are also similar accounts of the continued use of corporal punishment in Nepal (Pathak 2017) and Uganda (Nyatiko & Allida 2018), despite government policies outlawing it. This, again, reminds us that in discussions of transitional justice in education, we cannot only look back to injustices and violence of the past, but also consider the ways that violence, in all its forms, continues in the present and future.

4. Intersections of Environmental and Transitional Justice in Education

There is increasing recognition in the environmental and conflict literature that current global environmental crises are not only an act of ecological violence but also can contribute to increased violence within and beyond national boundaries (Naoufal 2014). Environmental change which leads to natural resource, land and water scarcity can jeopardize local peace processes and further marginalise particular communities. In Peru, for example, official information by the Ombudsman Office confirms that –starting in 2004 when systematic data collection started – 'socio-environmental conflicts' have been the predominant ones (over 70% in the last monthly report of April 2021). These are predominantly conflicts that place local communities against mining companies and central government around water issues, including destruction, pollution and appropriation of water sources (Defensoria del Pueblo 2021). Furthermore, all along Peru`s republican history (since at least 1821), access to land has been at the center of social conflict in then predominantly rural Peru. In Uganda, by contrast, conflict has particularly tended to focus on land ownership. Through a case study of the Apaa evictions in Amuru District in Northern Uganda, Kobusingye, Van Leeuwen & Van Dijk (2017) highlight how contemporary land conflict cannot be separated from its historical political and social context. This is supported by Salehyan (2013) who questions the linear relationship between climate change, in particular, and conflict, suggesting that the

relationship cannot be dehistoricised or decontextualized from political and social factors.

The lack of consensus here points to the potential contribution for environmental and peace education in shaping young people's future actions. In both the environmental and transitional justice literatures there is a strong narrative about the unfair impact of ecological and human violence on particular peoples in the past and advocacy for fairer distribution of resources in the future (see Perry 2020; Nuwategeka et al. 2021 and Paulson et al. 2021). However, there is very limited discussion of the intersections of these with education, and the literature that does exist tends to focus on informal learning spaces (e.g. Gachanga and Walters 2015). The literature related to education, conflict and peace does not only focus on educating about the past but also the ways that education can be an important driver for both peacebuilding and exacerbated violence (e.g. Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Paulson 2008). Recent work to conceptualise education as a process of transitional justice opens possibilities to both identify the multiple faces of education in promoting and hindering peace and to take steps to remedy and transform injustices present in education (Paulson and Bellino 2017). The links to wider forms of justice have tended to focus on the links to distributional and social forms of justice which remain and these remain important for meaningful transformation of education that remedies past and enduring inequalities (e.g. Novelli et al. 2017). However, we also see clear links between this literature's focus on educating for the future and the environmental justice literature. We are excited by the imagining of education as a site for reparative and restorative justice, as well as a space in which the transformative and forward-looking aims of transitional justice can take shape.

One potential is put forward here by Sriprakash et al. (2020, 9) who view education for reparative futures as an education "that fosters processes of reparative remembering; questioning received narratives and supporting histories that 'revindicate' the lifeways of the oppressed." This call for education for reparative futures echoes Davies' description of the 'dual gaze' of education, as a space which looks back, through teaching the past, and forward, by shaping young people who will build towards their futures (2017). This 'dual gaze' also recalls the arguments from Komakech

(2012) to challenge the linearity of progression from spaces of conflict to peace and suggests the complex task that education policymakers and practitioners face.

We see close resonance, here, with environmental justice concerns in this conceptualisation of education as both a space for learning about the causes of injustices but also about shaping collective, shared futures. The emphasis on multiple futures – purposively used by Sriprakash et al. (2020), Silova et al. (2020) and others – is also an important point for epistemic governance and what Mignolo (2011) describes as 'an open horizon of pluriversality'. Through the acknowledgement of pluriversal accounts of the past and visions for the future, a reparative and just education system may become possible. However, as we discuss in the *Exploring epistemic justice in education* paper, recognition of multiple knowledges necessitates also the ability to act.

5. Education as and for justice

Across the three justices and the interplay between them, it is clear that education, interpreted in its broadest sense, has a potentially significant role in both perpetuating and enabling (in)justices. We suggest that education is a space in need of just transformation and that there are two key relationships between education and justice:

1. *Education as a means to achieve different forms of justice:* in the ways that education can lead to justice, for example, how access to schooling is considered a distribution of resources, or how learning about past conflict could enable positive peace.

2. *Education as an (un)just space:* in the ways that teaching/learning processes and social practices in classrooms, schools and in the wider environment reflect and embody different forms of justice.

We suggest that the experiences that learners have of education as just (or unjust) also likely bears on the ways in which individuals can go on to enact justice and sustainable development and the contributions that education systems can make to driving these processes. We find the notion of education as and for justice a useful framing for our study where we will explore some of the following questions:

- How are different knowledges/perspectives/narratives included in the curriculum and how are they taught, learnt about and assessed? How can new knowledges lead to positive actions for ourselves and all other living beings?

- What pedagogic approaches and classroom dynamics support/deny learners' ability to make epistemic contributions (e.g. giving testimony, reflecting on how they live with nature in their homes)?

- How can learning about (in)justice and the past enable learners to envisage and enact more just futures? In what ways do experiences of (physical epistemic, environmental) violence influence this learning?

- How can education (in all its forms) challenge injustices and inequalities? How do the specific justice concerns of the individual/community/region impact on this?

We ask these questions in countries where questions of environmental, epistemic and transitional justice are pertinent but in very different historical and contemporary contexts:

- In Nepal, where the legacies of conflict and risk of natural disaster disproportionately affect rural communities;

- In Peru, where natural resource extraction and the impact of global warming exacerbates poverty for Indigenous communities who were disproportionately victims of Peru's armed conflict; and

- In Uganda, where conflict, particularly in the Northern part of the country, has led to unsustainable livelihood strategies (e.g. charcoal production) and economic marginalisation.

For more details about the three justices in these countries and a background to education in each country, please see the three background papers (Balarin et al. 2021; Nuwategeka et al. 2021; Paulson et al. 2021) and country profiles (Balarin, Salgado & Sarmiento 2021; Singh et al. 2021; Nuwategeka, Komakech & Ajok 2021).

We also ask these questions in recognition of the tensions highlighted within the literature about (1) translating acknowledgment into validation of alternative narratives in pedagogic practice; (2) how education can be both a site of memory,

reparation and building towards more positive futures and a space where hegemonic values are taught that can fuel injustice and violence; and (3) the suitability of experiential and learner-centred models of education in resource-poor settings. We finish by acknowledging that this paper is just the start of developing our research across the three justices in education and look ahead to a very exciting and complex undertaking ahead.

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