

Concept Paper

# Educational Psychologists as ‘Dissenting Voices’: Thinking Again about Educational Psychologists and Social Justice

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**Abstract:** This paper locates the educational psychologist’s (EP) involvement in addressing social justice in practice. It uses some philosophical ideas from Jacques Rancière, particularly the idea of the distribution of the sensible and dissensus, to help us question how systems that are aimed at contributing to a socially just society can limit social justice itself. Whilst the argument of this paper is applicable to educational psychologists internationally, this paper is situated within a Scottish context. It uses a vignette to draw out a philosophical reading of the EP’s involvement in the narrative. This paper gives some examples of how structures that are aimed at supporting social justice often position the EPs within these systems so that thinking, being and doing are shaped according to the structures that they inhabit. The establishment of such structures and discourses have limited the meaning and implementation of social justice. This means that the identity of both those requiring the involvement of the EP, as well as the EP and other professionals is determined in terms of their ‘proper place’ and their activity is determined in terms of its ‘proper function’. The paper argues that EPs can interrupt the procedural flow and provide a dissenting voice which can ultimately lead to social justice in ways that the normal flow of procedure does not.

**Keywords:** social justice; distribution of the sensible; dissenting voices; educational psychologist; Jacques Rancière; Scotland



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## 1. Introduction

This paper looks at the role of educational psychology within a social justice framework. The role of the educational psychologist (EP) is tightly linked to the concept of social justice and EPs “are appropriately placed to be involved with the promotion of social justice through their work with individuals and school systems” [1] (p. 379), [2]. In this regard, numerous authors and professional bodies for educational psychologists argue that professionals are ideally placed to advocate for social justice and against injustice even in established policies and practices [3]. Shriberg and Desai [4] promote advocacy, in that they encourage school psychologists to take a more critical stance regarding institutions. The participants in Schulze et al.’s study [1] regard it as involving an active, motivating, ongoing movement, which we link to Clare [5] who termed social justice as an aspiration. In Scotland, the role of educational psychologists (EPs) is to bring about support to individual children and young people directly and/or through working with and through others. With a focus on prevention and early intervention, EPs undertake research and contribute to the professional development of educators and other professionals to enhance outcomes for children and young people. As will be explained later, improved attainment and positive outcomes are believed to contribute to social justice in education in Scotland.

We authors agree that EPs are appropriately placed and invite readers to ‘think-again’ [6] (p. 122) about where the EP fits within social justice discourse and also about the EP’s role in providing the dissenting voice within structures and discourses established as being about social justice. The idea of thinking again is taken from Jean-Francois Lyotard [7,8] who argues that, in a world that identifies success with saving time, the flaw

in thinking is that it wastes time. Blake et al. [6] build on Lyotard's argument and write that "to think *again*, then, will be to waste time twice over" (emphasis in original, p. 1). The authors further promise readers that their book will not save them time. The idea of 'waste' is conceptualised as such in our contemporary societies, what Lyotard [7] (more than 35 years ago) considered the 'postmodern condition'. For Lyotard, our contemporary societies are obsessed with efficiency and effectiveness, which he termed 'performativity,' where the focus of power "is based on its optimising the system's performativity" [7] p. xxiv. As a result of this, Blake et al. [6] argue that one of the effects of postmodernity "has certainly been a kind of intellectual paralysis" (p. 5) as we aim to bypass thought in our preoccupation with 'what works' and the keywords of postmodernity seem to carry "a self-evident desirability, an appeal to the instincts of all reasonable and civilized men and women" [6] (p. 5). As a result, "it has become hard to think" [6] (p. 5).

This idea of thinking again structures this paper. We draw upon ideas from the French philosopher Jacques Rancière to help us think, to show us a way out of the intellectual paralysis. Jean-Philippe Deranty [9] argues that Rancière has a "fundamental commitment to equality" (p. 9). He offers an alternative which allows for the voices of people to emerge, voices that have been excluded from political participation [10], as will be explained further in the paper, thus relating his idea of equality to democracy. Hence, we use Rancière's writing as our theoretical framework. The paper starts by defining social justice, but it quickly articulates that systems and structures, often initiated with the best of intentions, have an impact on how we go about our daily lives. This is the case with social justice: systems and structures are enacted to enable justice in situations of inequalities, yet these systems are aimed to streamline action, often with a view to measurable impact as an outcome. The issue with systems is that we fit comfortably in them, and we are relieved that the responsibility of thinking and deciding is taken away from us. When comfortable, thinking and actions outside what is expected tend not to occur to us, a reflection of that intellectual paralysis mentioned above. We explore this in Section 3 'A System of Structures'. Many times, EPs function within these structures and we give examples of this in Section 4: The Educational Psychologist within Structures. The next section 'A Dissenting Voice within the 'Social Justice' Sensible' draws upon Rancière's writing to enable us to make the familiar look strange, thus questioning the intellectual paralysis. The role of the educational psychologist, we argue, is to be one of 'dissent' within a Rancièrian perspective, thus giving social justice structures the possibility to be just.

This philosophical oriented paper uses a vignette as a stimulus to the ensuing discussion about structures that are established to bring about social justice and how the EP works within them. The vignette is divided into two parts. The first part highlights how social justice becomes embedded in structures and where the EP works within them. The story is continued in the second part in which we argue that EPs with their training and critical formation are well placed to be the dissenting voice in the structures discussed in the first section. This vignette is not constructed from data gathered from empirical research. It is constructed by one of the authors who is a practicing EP within Scotland. While this vignette is based on real-life events and situations, it is made up of multiple experiences which were re-storied. The vignette was shared with several practising and academic educational psychologists for their feedback and comments and was modified accordingly. The scientific contribution of this paper is the introduction of philosophical discourse, particularly a Rancièrian one, to the issue of social justice to educational psychology practice. The impact aimed for is that practitioners question their practice and their role within the structures where they practice.

## 2. Vignette: First Part

The family, residing in a large inner-city Local Authority, had several children in various levels of the early years of schooling. Intensive support was being given to this family: structural modifications were being made to their home in an attempt to make it a comfortable and safe place to live in; the family was supported in the

management of their finances, as they were running the risk of losing their home; the children's health was monitored satisfactorily. The concerned Head Teacher supported the single parent and made him feel as welcome as his children were in the school environment. The Head Teacher was very good at passing on, in a non-judgemental way, the message that while she understood the challenges that the parent faced and while she appreciated that the children's school attendance was unobjectionable, she was nonetheless concerned at the regular lateness of the children entering school every morning.

The educational psychologist's role was to ensure that barriers to children's learning and development were removed. When she first met the children's father, she noticed but did not comment on a stiffness in his movements. Later on, when speaking to another professional who had worked with the family for a while, she inquired whether the father had any mobility difficulties. The EP then doubted herself when she was told that there were no issues with the dad's health, put it at the back of her mind, and moved on to focusing on what was more directly within her remit. She had conversations with the Head Teacher and with the children's individual teachers. The EP observed the children in their classrooms and chatted with them about strategies to support their father in the mornings in his efforts to get out of the house on time so that they could arrive in school just before the start of the school day. Her conversations with the teachers and Head Teachers were encouraging as all the children seemed to be eager learners without suggestions of specific learning difficulties. The children's regular lateness meant that they missed the literacy session which took place at the start of the school day. This risked having an impact on their attainment. Changing the timing of this session to accommodate this family would have meant issues with staffing and timetabling, leaving a negative impact on the school. Anyway, fixing that would only mean that the children would be missing something else. The general feeling was that the father needed to get organised enough in the evenings to have all the children's uniforms and bags ready for them to wear when they woke up. That meant that they could have their breakfast and be ready to arrive at school on time. The drive was to help the parent become responsible enough to look after his own children.

A chance mention in a multi-agency meeting concerned the father's own health, as he had a condition which was being monitored by doctors. The dad reported that he was up to date with his own GP visits and medication. This satisfied the group of professionals. Targets at the end of the meeting were drawn up which were very similar to those drawn up at the end of the previous meeting. At the top was the need for children to come to school on time. All professionals, and the father, agreed that he needed to be more organised, and to get the children up, teeth brushed, breakfasted, dressed, get their coats and shoes, and school bags, out of the house at the right time. Some support for the family needed to be found temporarily until the father could fend for himself and his children. The EP also agreed that this needed to happen, with some qualms . . .

The above vignette demonstrates a scenario which many educational psychologists (or school psychologists, as they are known in different countries) will recognise. The aim of this vignette is to contextualise social justice in a particular moment in time, as social justice from its very nature is in a continuous process of negotiating a balance between the needs of society in a globalised world and the needs of the individual. Fraser et al. [11] claim that it is the "individual who suffers injustice, even though they do that by virtue of being cast in some group or another" (p. 379). When one thinks about social justice, disparity and unfairness come to mind. It seems to presume a wrong which is then righted, an imbalance which is brought to equilibrium. This requires an action by an actor who first recognises the imbalance and then seeks to address it. Multiple factors construct the context of the

above vignette. Some of these are issues of poverty, parenting and attainment, all of which are complex and multi-layered, each having a reciprocal impact on the other and affecting identities and ascribed social positionings [12].

We ask readers to think again about these issues which are in our everyday vernacular, and which we may have therefore become accustomed to using without thinking about the historical complexities, depth and power issues behind them. Phrases, such as ‘closing the poverty-related attainment gap’ [13] become divorced over time and use from their moment of birth, from the original rationale, meanings and evidence, which were all related to the aspiration of social justice. Elsewhere we have used the idea of shorthand to describe the reductive process that our thinking adopts when such terms enter our everyday discourse [14]. Yet these phrases and terms bring with them the multiple structures, laden with complexity and possibly even contradiction, that construct social justice to be understood and make sense in particular ways. The dynamic force that is social justice is channelled to flow through the established structures, for example, the poverty-related attainment gap in Scotland where we authors currently work. The first part of the vignette is situated within these discourses, so that the family’s poverty, its impact on parenting and the children’s attainment, together with the professionals’ roles to address these, are placed within established procedures and structures.

### 3. A System of Structures

There are bigger structures and discourses that influence how the injustices experienced by this family are being addressed. These systems are created incrementally with the aim of bringing about a more socially just society, one which enables Bell’s “full and equal participation of all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs” [15] (p. 3). They aim to provide for all fairly and to give chances to everybody to better their situation. All the actors and their actions are played within these structures and discourses. In enacting these roles, they establish a balance that is closer to being socially just. While equality is mentioned, equity is given value, as the needs of individuals vary according to their circumstances. It stems from the idea that we do not all start running the race from the same starting line, although the finishing line is more or less the same. Bell continues her definition of social justice to highlight the importance of equity:

Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. [15] (p. 3)

This section dwells for a short while on these bigger structures and on the power these discourses have in shaping and enacting social justice. The following are examples of such structures.

Scotland rates 31st for maths in the international OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment which measures 15-year-olds’ ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. The desire of every participating country is always to move up the ranking. This placing draws attention on groups of 15-year-olds that are not performing at the required level. This often leads to discourse of the ‘attainment gap’ which Scotland has adopted over the last 20 years. The focus in Scotland is that the attainment gap is directly associated with poverty. As Suso and Ellis [16] argue:

There is clear evidence of a persistent gap in attainment between pupils from the richest and poorest households in Scotland. This gap starts in preschool years and continues throughout primary and secondary school. In most cases, it widens as pupils progress through the school years. Most importantly, the poverty attainment gap has a direct impact on school-leaver destinations and thus the potential to determine income levels in adulthood. (p. 3)

An OECD [17] report focusing on quality and equity of schooling in Scotland concluded that “Little of the variation in student achievement in Scotland is associated with the

ways in which schools differ. . . . Who you are in Scotland is far more important than what school you attend, so far as achievement differences on international tests are concerned. Socio-economic status is the most important difference between individuals" (p. 15).

Linking poverty to attainment has resulted in the formation of discourse such as the following: "Children living in the most deprived areas in Scotland are '6 to 13 months behind their peers in problem-solving at age 5; 11 to 18 months behind their peers in expressive vocabulary at age 5; and around two years of schooling behind their peers at age 15'" [18] (p. 5).

This caused the Scottish Government to place improving school attainment as its single most important objective. Numerous policies are in place to target closing the attainment gap. Two examples worth mentioning are: The Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland [19] which promotes a child-centred, multi-agency approach to tackling economic disadvantage based on the principles of early intervention and prevention so that families do not fall into poverty; prioritising the skills, knowledge and views of individuals requiring support; promoting the rights of a child to be involved and heard in decisions that affect their lives. The second example is the formulation of a new curriculum (Curriculum for Excellence) [20] which sets out the aims, principles and approaches that underpin the educational system for three- to eighteen-year-olds. The curriculum promotes important themes that aim to empower the delivery of education to disadvantaged groups: it makes literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing the responsibility of all teachers; it promotes flexibility, personalisation and choice; and it challenges schools to develop in their pupils four capacities, one of which is to be 'successful learners'. This 'journey of excellence' was to be supported by developing a system of identification of needs, called Getting it Right for Every Child [21]. GIRFEC is designed to focus attention on how schools might better meet the needs of all students, including educationally and economically disadvantaged students. Its SHANARRI Well-Being Indicators (Safe, Healthy, Active, Nurtured, Achieving, Respected, Responsible and Included) have encouraged a focus on disadvantaged groups.

A Scottish Attainment Challenge [14], based on the rationale and positive outcomes of the London Challenge [22], is underway. However, Joan Gaynor Mowat [23] argues for caution when she critiques the approach the Scottish Government has adopted with regards to how it conceptualises and addresses the stated problem attainment gap associated with socio-economic status. She argues that "the problem cannot be addressed by focusing primarily, and almost exclusively, on the school as the agent of change and that the starting point for change should be addressing endemic inequalities in society" (p. 300).

Furthermore, there has been an investment in the Pupil Equity Fund, which is allocated to schools according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, a system which is based on postcodes. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a relative measure of deprivation across 6976 small areas. If an area in Scotland is identified as 'deprived', this can relate to people having a low income, but it can also mean fewer resources or opportunities. The SIMD looks at the extent to which an area is deprived across seven domains: income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime and housing [24]. The Pupil Equity Fund focuses on improvement activities in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing in specific areas of Scotland with the aim to support and complement the broader range of initiatives and programmes to ensure that all of Scotland's children and young people reach their full potential [25]. From 2021 to 2022, £195 million of targeted funding are being invested to help close the poverty-related attainment gap. Chris Thornton [26] conducted an evaluation on behalf on the Scottish Government on the Attainment Scotland Fund and highlighted a range of factors as contributing to positive impacts, including increased staffing and staff time, more sharing of practice within schools and across school clusters, and a stronger focus on tailoring approaches to pupils' needs (p. 5). However, the evaluation also highlighted challenges around staff recruitment, training and capacity building, and the resources required for initial planning. The evaluation claims that "schools perceived ongoing reduction in resourcing as limiting the extent to which Attainment Scotland Fund interventions were 'additional' to where schools expected to be. For example, some

indicated that the impact of targeted intervention was offset by an overall reduction in pupil support, and that some targeted interventions were meeting needs that schools had expected to be provided through core funding" [26] (pp. 6–7).

In parallel with government and local authority measurements, there are also non-governmental organisations that complement these systems and structures. As an example, the definition of poverty given by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation [27] has been a guiding definition adopted by numerous bodies. Poverty is "when a person's resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation)" (p. 3). The Foundation reminds us that poverty is dynamic; it is "not a static condition. Resources rise and fall as do needs and people's ability to meet them. Individuals can move in and out of poverty over time" [27] (p. 5).

These structures are more complex than our outline above, and our intention is not to give a comprehensive overview of such structures that are social justice driven. We have named them as examples because we want to show how social justice is layered through these systems and discourses. It is made to function within these structures, and its dynamic force becomes sedimented through processes and procedures. These structures bring with them a language, several processes and a myriad of roles, all with their own particular systems. As an example, we mention the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) Teachers, whose very title places such teachers firmly in the PEF system aimed at supporting the poverty-related attainment gap. In return, the PEF system is reinforced by the existence of these roles.

#### 4. The Educational Psychologist within Structures

The aforementioned vignette seeks to place the role of the EP within the complex structures and networks mentioned above, and this will be explored further in this section. The role of the EP will be further explained through the use of Rancière's ideas.

The role of the psychologist in education has evolved to become one of the safeguards in a local authority's education provision (or redistribution) to make sure that everyone is being reached. The report Making a difference to excellence and equity for all: The future of educational psychologists in Scotland [28] outlines that EPs:

... advise education authorities, school staff and, importantly, parents/carers on the needs of children and young people with additional support needs (ASN) and the educational provision required for them. Educational psychologists have a unique role in working at different levels within the education system, linking casework to the development of policy and strategy ... Much of this work results in raising attainment and equity for all, thereby extending beyond those children and young people with ASN. (p. 1)

The EP's desire to support the family in the vignette needs to be framed in terms of making a positive impact: "School psychologists can act as systems change agents for the benefits of children and families" [29] (p. 454). The EP thus expects to work in a context where social justice is a core value and an aspiration [6]. When the EP starts working in an Educational Psychological Service, the EP focuses on learning about systems and structures within the particular context and how these translate to people. Interestingly, the document mentioned above [28] highlights four principles which need to be applied to support EPs in carrying out their roles: all four principles mention organisations and structures that EPs interact with and are part of (p. 13). One of the EPs in Schulze et al.'s [1] study mentioned how detrimental it was for service users when they lacked "the sort of knowledge about how you work the system, how you find your way through what is a very bureaucratic special needs system, how you access support ... " (p. 389). Through the EP's role of identifying the educational needs of a child or a young person, the EP is one of the responses of the local authority to the acknowledgement of social injustice. The EP role is one of the layers in the local authority which exist to ensure equitable education for all. This role is to identify the educational needs of children and young people so that these needs can be met by the resources within the local authority in their effort to redistribute.

The EP is one professional in a system that has been established over time whose processes and procedures have been set up for efficiency, effectivity and positive impact. The system aims to have them function almost automatically so that they serve both the people who live within the geographical area as well as the local authority itself. Within the structure, Rancière helps us to think how these processes and procedures ‘make sense’, as do the roles of the various professionals who work with them and within them. Everything and everyone have their place, “through allotment and through justification” [30] (p. 47), so that everything acts according to its ‘nature’ [31] (p. 101) and determines their thoughts and actions. The structure (or system) has a hierarchical distribution, where everyone’s identity is determined in terms of its proper place and their activity in terms of its proper function, without needing to be reminded. These identities are not neutral but are laden with a sense of being, doing and acting, of seeing, hearing and saying, of assuming and thinking. Rancière views these identities within the system consisting of its many self-perpetuating structures, as part of the *partage du sensible* (distribution of the sensible) [32]. Within this distribution, those defined as poor are placed in a position of poverty, which is generally one where they are recipients of resources to compensate for poverty. The professionals, on the other hand, have a commitment to compensate with the aim of eradicating it. It is safe to assume that these identities are not equal. The distribution is constituted by those who have a part in the hierarchical distribution, that is, those who are fit to make decisions about other people’s lives and ‘create’ other lives within the distribution. It is also constituted by those who have no part of the distribution but have lives created for them. There are those who make decisions about the hierarchy of distribution and those who are made to fit, even by the very criteria of eligibility.

Thus, EPs know who they are, and what is expected of them. When EPs believe that they are about to overstep the boundaries of their role, they know with whom they need to check this. If an idea for a project is being floated, it needs to be pitched to stakeholders or gatekeepers in language which is consistent with the discourse which comprises the objectives or mission statement of the structure within which they work. The distribution of the sensible has checks and balances which help the structure stay strong and functioning. The *partage du sensible*, therefore, is a delimitation of space and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolve around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and the possibilities of time [32] (p. 58).

Here we would like to emphasise the idea of a ‘proper place’ as argued by Rancière [33]. This proper place in society is not accidental, but it is related to pre-established criteria of knowledge. These give predictability and some form of certainty, and as such they are welcomed in society. Paul Standish [34] terms this a ‘closed economy’ and claims that it is difficult to think outside these closed exchanges:

The problem is precisely that many people cannot think outside its terms [the economy of exchange]. There is something curiously self-reinforcing, self-perpetuating and, for some, seductive about this entire way of thinking. (p. 57)

The reassuring predictability that comes with such structures has criteria against which everything is measured. It can be noted in meetings at various levels of the structure that there are hierarchies and that these predetermine expectations and plans. Speech is heard if it fits what is termed as speech, but it can also be ignored as noise if it does not seem to have a place within the structures of the particular meeting. Thus, some speech is seen as ‘noise’ whereas other speech is seen as ‘voice’. Speech which is ‘voice’ is that speech which is expected in the ongoing scenario. It is a question of determining if ‘sound’ is made intelligible or not: “I hear you and listen to you, but this listening and hearing is determined according to existing order” [35] (p. 25). If it is considered ‘unintelligible’ then it is “not just marginalised within the system, but made invisible by the system” [36] (p. 63). It is sound that is determined as ‘counted’ or ‘uncounted’. The meeting in the vignette follows a proforma and the speech that is given attention to is that which is deemed to answer the

questions in the proforma. The different professionals know at which point in the meeting they are called upon to speak. The allocation of a place comes with accompanying speech, which raises a number of important questions: *Who can see and speak? What can be seen and spoken? What is recognised as visible and speech?* The EP in the vignette is called upon to speak when the children's education is being discussed, and she is not expected to contribute when their health is mentioned. She also needs to speak in a particular language that is often imbued with terms of attainment and well-being.

In this section of the paper, we wanted to highlight how the EP in the vignette is caught in the expected way of being, doing and seeing. Yet, we want to write about the double bind that the EP is caught in: the EP's role to contribute to a more just society, even if this means challenging structures and systems, and working within a socially just system that has a pre-established distribution of what justice implies and means and how this can be attained. At this point, we go back to the vignette, and draw readers' attention to the 'qualms' which the EP feels although she agrees with her fellow professionals about the plans set in the meeting.

### 5. Vignette: Second Part

As the EP walked away from the meeting she reflected on her own struggles that morning with her own smaller family, as they went through the motions of leaving the house to get the children to school on time. It seemed to the EP that this normal happening of getting the children up and in school on time was too tall an order for this single parent with numerous young children and a baby. The EP had experience as a carer for a family member who had a similar health condition and brought this experience to reflect further on the impact that the father's health difficulties had on his energy levels, discomfort and limited movements. She wondered whether the father felt that this information did not have a place in a meeting about his children's well-being. The EP made inquiries about the father's condition and asked him how it impacted his daily life. In a subsequent meeting, the EP consciously emphasised the issue of the father's health and brought it front and centre in the story of this family, insisting that this exacerbated all the other factors (e.g., possible sleepless nights and late mornings because of a teething baby; difficulties managing the dynamics of the children in the morning routine, etc) which made it difficult for the family to come to school on time. Realising that perhaps this was a new bit of information about the family, the EP purposefully made an emphasis on the debilitating nature of this health issue, knowing how sometimes health issues trump all others. While agreeing that things were moving forward for this family, the EP was firm in her suggestion that the family needed ongoing sustained support as opposed to temporary help, at least until the children had grown up enough to support their father to get them to school on time. The EP suggested that expecting the parent to see to his children unsupported in the morning could be seen as unreasonable, as he was physically unable to meet such expectations with the consistency which was required. The narrative of the family changed in these meetings—the father's health condition was given more prominence so that the target topmost on the list was to find the sustained support which the family needed. The onus was off this family; they were a little bit more understood.

### 6. A Dissenting Voice within the 'Social Justice' Sensible

When we discussed the distribution of the sensible (*partage du sensible*) above, we were only partially correct in our reading of Rancière. This is because Rancière plays with the double meaning of the French word *partage* [37] (p. 95). On the one hand, it means what we are sharing, referring to the collective, to what binds us in the commonality: this we explained through his idea of place in the societal order. However, the second meaning of *partage* implies separation, it refers to sources of disruption or dissensus of the same order.



It is to the latter meaning, that is dissensus, that we now turn our attention. In this section, Rancière's ideas are used to analyse the vignette focusing more on this second part that emphasises the 'qualms' which the EP feels, that as will be discussed now, can allow for a more just situation to emerge.

The EP in the first part of the narrative tentatively asks about the parent's physical movement. Not being a medic, the EP is unsure about this perception and about whether the EP can ask about this, knowing that her role is certainly about the children's school attendance and attainment: "She then doubted herself when she was told that there were no issues with the dad's health, put it at the back of her mind, and moved on to focusing on what was more directly within her remit" (from part one of the vignette). She relegates her speech to 'noise', which means that she is "saying nothing worth hearing" [32] (p. 74), rendered it invisible, and focused instead on the speech which would be listened to as 'voice'. She has internalised her place in the distribution, therefore developing a particular kind of 'intelligible' voice. Her tentativeness is quickly and easily turned to doubt and to silence. However, the minor mention of the parent's health issues in the multi-agency meeting seems to allow the EP to officially take notice. The EP pauses in her procedural thinking but reminds herself that this is not the 'voice' which is expected from her. She goes with the flow of the meeting which puts topmost as a target that the children need to come to school on time on a regular basis. Yet, she walks away from the meeting with some qualms. Rancière writes about "the grain in the machine" [38] (p. 3): something has interrupted the smooth flow, and this is not going to be silenced. Her thoughts and actions between this and the following meeting seem to contribute to the preparation of a declaration which would be listened to as 'voice'. In this official forum, when her professional views are sought regarding the children's education, she pronounces this view which elevates the minor isolated mention of the parent's health condition to a space where its impact on the daily life of the family and its impact on the children's education and learning can be recognised, appreciated and therefore acted upon. The group at the meeting listens and pauses, as this new perspective is assimilated, after which the plan is accommodated to enable the family to benefit from this new perspective. Thereafter, whenever the children's school attendance or lateness is mentioned, it will always be accompanied with this explanation. This displaces the burden of responsibility from the father who struggles with his mobility in the mornings. Hence, meeting the needs of these children will mean finding sustained support in the mornings for the family. It is no longer a question of a temporary band aid, but requires a plan based on an understanding of the impact of this health condition.

The EP's pronouncement creates a disruption in the flow of the distribution of the sensible, and this flow is questioned, shaken and disturbed, albeit temporarily. The psychologist intervention is seen as disrupting, creating a dissensus, within the above reading. She breaks the structure of the meeting, mixing topics in the same sentence, where they would otherwise be mentioned separately, with forewarning from the chair of the meeting, through pronouncing the title of another section.

Thus, a dissensus within the social justice distribution is created that allows for something new, something unexpected to be heard and acknowledged. The issue here is that we do not know when it is going to happen—it cannot be planned for—and we need to be on the alert for such moments because they are not signposted. This disruption, which Rancière terms as 'wrong' because it is out of its expected place [31] (p. 39), allows us to question the order of the system and presents itself as an alternative. When writing about school psychologists, Allan Johnston [39] captures the above perfectly as follows:

You can subvert the assumption that everyone's going along with the status quo by simply not going along. When you do this, you stop the flow, if only for a moment, but in that moment other people can notice and start to think and question. (p. 613)

The grain in the machine which interrupts the flow for the EP, which makes her say something to change the flow of the meeting, can be read as a moment when the

psychologist's intervention allows justice to emerge within the distributed layers that are there to ensure social justice. The social justice that we are referring to understands justice more as a process, and a becoming, that can never be captured through performative acts. We iterate that we are not diminishing the importance of performative acts of social justice, but social justice is far more than the collective sum of performative acts. It is an opening in the flow that the psychologist brings to the meeting which is already socially just. Elsewhere, we have drawn upon Jacques Derrida's [40] work to bring a distinction between law and justice, and the argument here is very similar. The law is there to provide stability within contexts, yet the historicity and political structures of law transform it into procedural and performative acts. Derrida quickly points out that one could be within the law, and still not be just, for justice is more than following procedures. Justice is when the collectiveness of the law is negotiated to the particular, and it is in this moment that justice occurs. For Derrida this is a moment that can be felt (see also [1], p. 387), rather than one which can be described, let alone prescribed, in legal or philosophical terms (or for the purpose of this paper, in educational and psychological terms). This is not a call to do away with structures or procedures, but is a call to awareness that there is always more to social justice than can be provided by a structure. Mary Clare [41], in fact, challenges school psychologists to use their professional status to examine privilege—their own privilege as well as the privilege of others—in a critical manner and then to bring both their logical and their relational selves into the picture when seeking to act in support of social justice. Essentially school psychologists should access their hearts as well as their brains (p. 335).

## 7. Conclusions

The EP in the vignette has let herself feel the discomfort of her qualms and is able to reflect on their appearance in her thoughts. We would like to emphasise that the vignette and the argument of the EP having a dissenting voice could be applied in any context where EPs work within or alongside structures. We acknowledge that it is not only psychologists who can engage in dissensus, as such dissensus can be enacted by all those who are part of this distribution. However, for the purpose of this paper and given that we are writing this from an EP perspective, our focus is on the EP and her work. The EP's qualms cause her to 'think again' about the decisions which at first glance ticked all the boxes and cause her to doubt whether these decisions were actually socially just. There is an effortful pause, in which the EP asks 'why?', 'why not?' or 'what if?' (amongst others) when something is mentioned as a given. The qualm, the uncertainty [10], is the aforementioned grain which enters the machine. This often causes a pause as professionals search for justifications, and 'think again' about the taken-for-granted views and plans. We believe that such 'thinking again' is necessary for the recognition that there is an injustice in the system that was established to bring about social justice, and this then leads to the 'thinking again' about the current distribution. As Blake et al. [6] mention above, we do not consider this 'thinking again' as time wasted, particularly within the profession of the EP as it values critical reflection and, as we are arguing, enables further movement towards social justice.

We encourage EPs to continue to listen to qualms as opposed to silencing them, to give space to their intuitions when things do not feel right, even when this means going against what is expected and therefore destabilizing standard processes. Schulze et al. [1] quote an EP saying "... we also need to be brave" (p. 391). Suzette Speight and Elizabeth Vera [42] argue that there is a risk that EPs "can end up reinforcing oppression" as they are part of the distribution "and are unable to see its weakness and therefore are rendered unable to critique the system" (p. 87). This paper suggests that the EP (although this could be applied to any psychologist) allows herself to have a dissenting voice. If dissent is expressed, it could bring about dissensus to disrupt the flow of the established order which sometimes becomes complacent and unable to see the injustice which it was created to address. It is an irony, a contradiction (what Derrida calls 'aporia'), that the very structure which aspires to social justice finds itself more distant from that aim because it tries to pin it down. As Rancière argues, we are not saying that this is wrong, or negative. We question, alongside

Ranci re, whether there is more to social justice than what has been constructed as social justice. However, if we acknowledge that social justice is more than the sum of what we do, then we can see the work of EPs with their dissenting voice as part of a journey. Their contribution helps in always refining our understanding of social justice and how to aspire towards it.

We want to conclude the paper by questioning what enables EPs to have a dissenting voice and, in some way, to challenge the distributed sense of social justice. We believe that this is the willingness of EPs to engage with the qualms that the ‘other’ causes [43]. This can also be aided through critical reflection in supervision. This willingness to acknowledge and engage with otherness opens possibilities in the educational psychologist for doubt, surprise and astonishment. This will allow for the vulnerability that comes with the constant questioning of what is just.

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