

social justice  
dispositions informing

teacher practice

in advantaged  
and disadvantaged  
secondary schools

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What are the *social justice* dispositions informing teachers' practice?

How are *activist* dispositions in teachers revealed in different contexts?



## Activist dispositions for social justice in advantaged and disadvantaged contexts of schooling

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### ABSTRACT

This article advances current conceptions of teacher activism through an exploration of the social justice dispositions of teachers in advantaged and disadvantaged contexts of schooling. We interrogate the practices of teachers in a government school, with a high proportion of refugee students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds, in a high-fees, multi-campus independent school, and in a disadvantaged Systemic Catholic school to illustrate how Bourdieu's notion of dispositions (which are constitutive of the habitus) and Fraser's distinction between affirmative and transformative justice are together productive of four types of teacher activism. Specifically, we show that activist dispositions can be characterised as either affirmative or transformative in stance and as either internally or externally focused in relation to the education field. We argue that the social, cultural and material conditions of schools are linked to teachers' activist dispositions and conclude with the challenge for redressing educational inequalities by fostering a transformative activism in teachers' practices.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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### KEYWORDS

Disposition; social justice; activism; Bourdieu; (dis) advantage; context

# Project publications

- Gale, T., Cross, R. & Mills, C. (2019) Researching teacher practice: Social justice dispositions revealed in activity. In Lynch, J., Rowlands, J., Gale T. & Parker, S. (eds.) *Practice Methodologies in Education Research*. London: Routledge.
- Mills, C., Gale, T., Parker, S., Smith, C. & Cross, R. (2019) Activist dispositions for social justice in advantaged and disadvantaged contexts of schooling. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 40(5), pp. 614-630
- Molla, T. & Gale, T. (2019) Positional matters: School Leaders Engaging with National Equity Agendas. *Journal of Education Policy*, 34(6), pp. 858-876.
- Gale, T., Mills, C. & Cross, R. (2017) Socially inclusive teaching: belief, design and action as pedagogic work. *Journal of Teacher Education* 68(3), pp. 345-356
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- Mills, C., Molla, T., Gale, T., Cross, R., Parker, S., & Smith, C. (2017) Metaphor as a methodological tool: Identifying teachers' social justice dispositions across diverse secondary school settings. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 38(6), pp. 856-871
- Gale, T., & Molla, T. (2015) Social justice intents in policy: An analysis of capability *for* and *through* education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 30(6), pp. 810-830

COMING SOON

*Social Justice Dispositions in Education*. London: Routledge.

# So many questions, so little time

The project identified 5 dispositions related to SJ:

- 2 positively disposed to SJ (**activist**, deliberative)
- 3 negatively disposed to SJ (indifferent, resigned, egocentric)

- **Why do this research?** motivated by the strong association between socioeconomic status and educational attainment; and the sometimes disconnect between a teacher's belief (e.g. gender equality) and practice/action (e.g. excusing domineering male behaviour)
- **Where did you do it?** 16 Ts and 10 HTs in 10 advantaged and disadvantaged secondary schools in Brisbane and Melbourne, Australia
- **How did you do it?** **OBSERVATIONS/ VIDEOS** of Ts: what does a teacher's practice say about: who are the students? what constitutes student participation? what is being learned? what is the social contract? **INTERVIEWS** with HTs: stimulated consciousness awakening (Bourdieu); with Ts: stimulated recall (Calderhead) and stimulated critique (Gardiner)
- **What do you mean by social justice?** equality, equity, entitlement, recognition, respect, representation, capabilities (Rawls, Fraser, Sen)
- **What is a social justice disposition?** dispositions constitute 'the habitus' (Bourdieu); social justice dispositions are the *tendencies, inclinations, and leanings* that provide un-thought or pre-thought guidance for socially just practice. SJDs revealed in the project = activist and deliberative dispositions
- **What do you mean by teacher practice?** teachers' purposive action collectives; e.g. pedagogy but also what teachers purposively do in other teacher-student inter-actions and teacher 'activity' (Vygotsky) more generally
- **What is an activist disposition?** the tendency or inclination to struggle against the social order or doxa (Bourdieu)

See here for a fuller discussion of the project's theoretical and methodological issues: <https://bit.ly/3tikvdw> Access Passcode: A6f\$QbZ5

# Types of activist dispositions directed at achieving social justice

Informed by Fraser's distinction b/w  
affirmative and transformative remedies to injustice

Stance / ↓ within- & between-field positions →	Internal to the field (of education)	External to the field (of education)
<p><b>Affirmative activism</b> – ameliorating the <u>effects</u> of injustice and disadvantage</p> <p>activism: struggle against the social order</p>	<p>e.g. responding to pupils' immediate needs (e.g. food, clothing, housing, health, textbooks, etc.), enabling them to attend school</p>	<p>e.g. brokering disadvantaged pupils' access to tertiary ed, to work; creating opportunities for pupils to give to others in need</p>
<p><b>Transformative activism</b> – restructuring the underlying <u>generating</u> frameworks that create injustice</p>	<p>e.g. creating opportunities for all pupils to have a voice in classrooms; challenging gender stereotypes; accepting over-age refugees into school</p>	<p>e.g. (modelling) advocating for change with governments; working with communities to make changes</p>

- NB: 1. analytical categories; data doesn't fit neatly but characterised as being more of one type than another  
2. fields are relatively autonomous; there is always potential for cross-field effects (Lingard & Rawolle)

# From affirmative to transformative activist dispositions

Bourdieu: **position-takings / stances**  
tend to map onto **positions**

Stance / ↓ within- & between-field positions →	Internal to the field (of education)	External to the field (of education)
<p><b>Affirmative activism</b> – ameliorating the <u>effects</u> of injustice and disadvantage</p> <p>can/should teachers compensate for society?</p> <p><b>Transformative activism</b> – restructuring the underlying <u>generating</u> frameworks that create injustice</p>	<p>e.g. realising the needs, ending disadvantages (food, clothing, housing, health, etc.)</p> <p>Almost exclusively teachers in disadvantaged schools</p> <p>↓</p> <p>e.g. creating opportunities for all pupils to have a voice in classrooms; challenging assumptions; accepting</p> <p>Mostly teachers in disadvantaged schools</p>	<p>e.g. brokering opportunities for pupils' advantaged schools, to work; creating opportunities for pupils to give to others in need</p> <p>Mostly teachers in advantaged schools</p> <p>↓</p> <p>e.g. (modelling) advocating for change with governments;</p> <p>Very few teachers in advantaged and disadvantaged schools</p>

Teachers with a transformative activist disposition tend to:

- engage in a 'radical re-envisioning' of curriculum and pedagogy (Luke)
- take a critical view of assumptions and norms that inform policies and practices within education