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**The Role of Education Support Professionals in Supporting the Whole Child:  
A Capabilities Approach**

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Doctor of Education

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## **Abstract**

In this dissertation I set out to apply Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach to an exploration of the work of Education Support Professionals (ESPs) in the United States. ESPs are the non-teaching/non-administrative staff in schools. They are the clerical staff, the custodians, the food service staff, the health aides, the paraeducators, the security staff, the skilled trades such as plumbers, the technical services staff, and the transportation staff such as bus drivers. In the United States ESPs make up as much as a third of the adults working in a school district. Yet, they are often absent in the research and policy discourses. To consider their work, I used three major components. The first was Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach. The second was the idea of a holistic approach to children, often referred to as the whole child, and, in the U.S. policy framework, the Whole Child Approach. The third component was the consideration of the voices and views of Education Support Professionals.

Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach is a normative framework that asks about the real opportunities people have to do and be. Framed around ten Central Capabilities, I believe it is a useful tool for considering what policies, programs, and practices should be in place in our schools and for examining the ones that are in place. The Whole Child Approach is a voluntary policy framework that is rooted in a holistic view of what children need to thrive. Derived from the work of Nel Noddings on the Ethics of Care, it has served as a reference point for educators, families, and policymakers seeking an alternative to a high-stakes, test-based accountability system. The idea of ESPs as a group worth considering is borrowed from the National Education Association (NEA), the largest educator organization in the U.S. I share the NEA's view that the nine disparate job categories of ESPs share common responsibilities for students that transcend their job descriptions.

Because ESPs have been largely ignored in the prevailing education discourse, their voices and views are not often heard. In this Dissertation, I set out to engage directly with ESPs, doing so through a series of focus groups conducted in the fall of 2017 in Utah. In these groups, participants discussed their work, how they understood the idea of the whole child and they began to interact with Nussbaum's Central Capabilities.

Based on the research conducted I offer the following broad findings. Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach can serve as a useful tool for engaging people who work in schools,

as well as parents and students in considering what schools should be like and how they should treat students. Its application to the Whole Child Approach or other emerging policy frameworks can offer a better understanding of what is needed for students to have real opportunities and to develop the capabilities they need for adulthood. I also argue that ESPs can and should be seen as professionals in education, whose voices and views should be valued.

## **Table of Contents**

List of Tables .....	v
List of Images.....	v
Acknowledgements .....	vi
Author's Declaration.....	vii
Chapter One: Setting the Stage .....	1
1.1 Chapter Introduction .....	1
1.2 Aims and Research Questions.....	3
1.3 Conceptual Frameworks.....	3
1.4 Background and Relation to My Professional Practice.....	5
1.5 The Research Process.....	7
1.6 Voices, Views, and Analysis.....	8
1.7 Chapter Conclusion .....	8
Chapter Two: Terms of Engagement .....	10
2.1 Chapter Introduction .....	10
2.2 The U.S. Context.....	10
2.3 The Utah Context .....	16
2.4 The Capabilities Approach.....	16
2.5 The Whole Child Approach .....	34
2.6 Relationship Between the Capabilities Approach and the Whole Child Approach.....	39
2.7 Policies, Programs, and Practices.....	41
2.8 Chapter Conclusion .....	43
Chapter Three: The Creation of Education Support Professionals .....	44
3.1 Chapter Introduction .....	44
3.2 Who Are Education Support Professionals? .....	44
3.3 But Are They Professionals?.....	47
3.4 Constructing the Education Support Professional Identity .....	48
3.5 Education Support Professionals in Research.....	51
3.6 Chapter Conclusion .....	55
Chapter Four: Paradigm, Methodology, and Methods.....	56
4.1 Chapter Introduction .....	56
4.2 Beliefs and Views.....	56
4.3 Choosing Focus Groups .....	60
4.4 Empirical Research and Direct Engagement with the Central Capabilities.....	62
4.5 Power.....	64

4.6 Ethical Approval and Considerations.....	66
4.7 Organizing the Groups and Recruiting Participants.....	67
4.8 The Focus Groups .....	68
4.9 Transcription and Scanning.....	72
4.10 Data Management and Analysis.....	75
4.11 Reflections on Research Quality and Process .....	77
4.12 Chapter Conclusion .....	79
Chapter Five: Voices of Education Support Professionals .....	80
5.1 Chapter Introduction .....	80
5.2 “The Most Important Thing About My Job” .....	81
5.3 The Whole Child .....	85
5.4 Engaging with the Capabilities Approach and the Central Capabilities .....	98
5.5 The Central Capabilities.....	104
5.6 Capability Pathways .....	117
5.7 Students with Special Needs .....	124
5.8 Families, Parents, Responsibilities, and Values .....	127
5.9 Chapter Conclusion .....	130
Chapter Six: Re-engaging and Looking Forward .....	132
6.1 Chapter Introduction .....	132
6.2 Unterhalter’s Three Applications of the Capabilities Approach to Education Research .....	133
6.3 Policies, Programs, and Practices for a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach.....	137
6.4 The Question of Professionalism .....	149
6.5 Care, Safety, and Geborgenheit.....	153
6.6. Personal Practice .....	155
6.7 Limitations and Reflections on the Quality of the Research.....	156
6.8 Looking Forward.....	158
6.9 Chapter Conclusion .....	160
Appendix One: Nussbaum’s Central Capabilities.....	162
Appendix Two: Ethical Approval.....	164
Appendix Three: Focus Group Guide and Cards for Capabilities Activity .....	165
Appendix Four: Example of Coded Transcript.....	168
Appendix Five: A Brief History of the Utah School Employees Association .....	169
Appendix Six: Profiles of Three Districts .....	170
Appendix Seven: Best Practices in Using Qualitative Data Analysis Software .....	171
References .....	173

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: ESP Jobs in the United States .....	46
Table 2: NEA and the Whole Child .....	50
Table 3: Participant Demographic Information .....	69
Table 4: Frequency of Capabilities in Card Activity (Part 1) .....	102
Table 5: Frequency of Capabilities in Card Activity (Part 2) .....	103

## **List of Images**

Drawing 1: Sam, Paraeducator, District Three.....	86
Drawing 2: David, Custodian, District One .....	90
Drawing 3: Ken, Paraeducator, District Two .....	91
Drawing 4: Maria, Paraeducator, District Two .....	92
Drawing 5: Tori, Bus Driver, District Three.....	93
Drawing 6: Margaret, Paraeducator, District Three .....	96
Drawing 7: Tina, Custodian, District Three.....	97
Photograph 1: Louise, Paraeducator, District One .....	119
Photograph 2: Louise, Paraeducator, District One .....	119
Photograph 3: Tanya, Clerical, District Two.....	120
Photograph 4: Nina, Clerical, District Three .....	122

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### **Author's Declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Nora Lerdau Howley

Signature:

## **Chapter One: Setting the Stage**

### **1.1 Chapter Introduction**

The discourse of public education<sup>1</sup> in the United States is replete with discussion of teachers and principals.<sup>2</sup> This is true of the discourse that appears to center academic achievement as measured by test scores as the way student and school success is understood.<sup>3</sup> It is also true of the counter-discourse on the need for schools to support students in a more holistic way. This latter discourse goes under many names such as “whole child”, “social-emotional learning”, and/or “safe schools”. These names share a common thread that school is more than the academics and that students’ success in school should be viewed by more than test scores. As I will discuss further below, these terms can all be viewed under the broad label of “whole child”.

For the most part, these discourses ignore the 20% to 30% of the adults who work in a local school district and are not teachers or administrators. They are the Education Support Professionals (ESPs). They are the bus drivers, the food service workers, the custodians, and the paraeducators, to name just some of them. These are jobs that, for the most part, do not require a college degree or a professional license, but as I will argue below, the people in these jobs are well positioned to have a major impact on student experiences in schools. In the United States large numbers of students travel to school in iconic yellow school buses. The drivers are the first and last person to see them each day. Food service workers prepare and serve the school meals that most students in the United States eat. Custodians (also called janitors) clean school buildings, repair equipment, and are responsible for opening and closing school buildings each day. Paraeducators (also called paraprofessionals) work with teachers in classrooms to support student learning. These workers and their ESP colleagues have been historically overlooked in education research in the United States.

I have used three major components to frame and shape this research. I have drawn on the idea of quilt as a useful metaphor to consider how they relate to each other. This is not the common quilt metaphor of pieces fitting together in the patchwork top (Koelsch, 2012;

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<sup>1</sup>In the United States, the term “public education” refers to education provided with state funding by local school districts. The Scottish equivalent term is “state education”.

<sup>2</sup> In the United States, a principal is the school-level administrator, equivalent to the head teacher in Scotland.

<sup>3</sup> I recognize that this may seem like a strong statement but, since the passage in 2001 of *No Child Left Behind*, scores on a variety of achievement tests have been at the center of school accountability systems in the United States. For more on this, see Chapter Two.

Collins, 2016). Rather, it is the layers of the quilt that I draw on. The base of the quilt is Martha Nussbaum's account of the "Capabilities Approach", a normative framework that asks the question, "What are people actually able to do and to be? What real opportunities are available to them?" (2011:x). The ten Central Capabilities proposed by Nussbaum offer, I suggest, a useful tool for considering what policies, programs, and practices should be in place in our schools and for examining the ones that are in place. With its emphasis on lives actually lived, I sought in this work to use the Central Capabilities to engage my participants in a discussion about their work, what schools should do, and the lives of their students.

The middle layer, or the batting of the quilt, is the idea of the whole child as represented in the U.S. policy framework referred to as the "Whole Child Approach". As I will discuss further in Chapter Two, the idea of the whole child is one that has many meanings and interpretations. The Whole Child Approach offers a way to link the Capabilities Approach to existing policies, programs, and practices in U.S. schools. The Whole Child Approach was developed and promoted by the education membership organization ASCD<sup>4</sup> (formerly known as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development). ASCD is the largest voluntary education membership organization in the U.S. With over 100,000 members, including principals, teachers, school/district administrators, and academics, it is a leading voice in U.S. education policy.

The top layer of my quilt is composed of the voices and views of Education Support Professionals (ESPs). The grouping of a set of disparate jobs under this label is one that I have borrowed from the National Education Association (NEA). As I will explore further in Chapter Three, it is an idea that is based on the view that these non-teachers/non-administrators can be seen as sharing some common responsibilities for supporting the whole child, despite the fact that they hold a variety of jobs and work in a variety of settings. Also in Chapter Three, I will argue that related to the absence of ESPs from the education discourse is their absence from the research literature. I will return to this challenge in Chapter Four.

However, a quilt is more than just the layers. Rather it is stitched together to keep the layers connected. In this work, the stitching can be seen in the methodology that was

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<sup>4</sup> ASCD is open to members internationally, though its primary membership and influence is in the United States.

designed to allow ESPs to access the multiple layers of the quilt; the Capabilities Approach, the Whole Child Approach, and their own views and voices, and to engage with these ideas through activities and discussion.

## **1.2 Aims and Research Questions**

The aim of this dissertation was to extend the work I started during the Educational Futures course in the second year of the University of Glasgow EdD program. I set out to consider the following research question:

How can the Capabilities Approach be applied to expand the understanding of the work of ESPs?

This work is a partial response to the problem I have identified - that ESPs are often overlooked in the research and policy discussions of how to support students in school. In this dissertation, my intention is to offer a consideration of ESPs' work, through the lens of the Capabilities Approach, that can contribute to reframing of their work to benefit students and potentially enhance their status within the school community and school improvement efforts.

## **1.3 Conceptual Frameworks**

As I discussed above, I constructed this research using three major components: Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach; the whole child as exemplified in the Whole Child Approach; and a consideration of the idea of the Education Support Professional (ESP). The first two will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two, and the third will be explored in Chapter Three, but I will provide a short introduction to each of them here.

As Nussbaum describes it, the Capabilities Approach is built on the question of what people are actually able to do to live a worthwhile life. She offers the Capabilities Approach as "an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and to theorizing about basic social justice" (2011:18). Her identification of ten Central Capabilities offers a broad and universal list of what constitutes such a life, while acknowledging that the specifics in each area may be variable. Since its introduction in the work of Amartya Sen and then Martha Nussbaum, the Capabilities Approach has been applied to a wide range of human experiences and situations, including education. In Chapter Two, I will expand on my use of the Capabilities Approach as a tool for critically exploring and understanding my research question. While little application of the Capabilities Approach to the context of public education has taken place in the United States, I was influenced in thinking about

my own work by two studies focused on education in Scotland. Sweenie (2009) used the approach to consider issues in the lives of young people who are not in school or employment. Hedge and MacKenzie (2012) used it to discuss issues of inclusion of students with what, in the USA, we would refer to as special educational needs. For me, these two works offered a window on a different way of thinking about educational issues and led me to a deeper interest in Nussbaum's approach. In Chapter Two, I will also discuss additional applications of the Capabilities Approach to education, including some that have offered critiques of elements of Nussbaum's approach.

Part of the power of the Capabilities Approach is found in the many ways that it has been applied across fields. This has led to a variety of conventions in how it used such as Capabilities vs. Capability, and capitalization vs. non-capitalization). I have made the decision to use the term Capabilities Approach (CA) to encompass all of the accounts, except when quoting a writer who uses a different formulation. When referring to Nussbaum's account, I use the abbreviation CA<sup>N5</sup>.

In the United States, the debates over how to understand school success are ongoing. One voice in that debate has been the nonprofit education membership group ASCD. Its Whole Child Approach, with five specific tenets for considering policies, is described as:

an effort to transition from a focus on a narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and success of all children. (ASCD, n.d.)

I will provide a fuller explanation of the five tenets in Chapter Two, but they can be summarized as follows:

Each child, in each school, in each of our communities deserves to be healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. (ASCD, n.d.).

By calling it the Whole Child Approach, ASCD places its policy framework in the context of the popular term "whole child". It is a term that is widely used and carries many meanings. In Chapter Two, I will explore the development of the term further, but I want to note here that it is often applied to any approach to education that seeks to apply a holistic or developmental lens to meeting children's needs. It is used to describe schools that, among other things:

- provide arts, music, and/or drama programs;
- provide spiritual or religious education;

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<sup>5</sup> This abbreviation is borrowed from Hedge and MacKenzie (2012).

- address children's physical and mental health needs; and/or
- are small in size.

For example, a public charter school in Massachusetts describes itself as “designed to educate the whole child providing year-long courses in art, music, languages, technology and physical education” (The Milford Daily News, 2018). I will also describe in Chapter Four how I incorporated the five tenets of the Whole Child Approach into my analysis.

The third component on which this work is founded is a consideration of the idea of the Education Support Professional (ESP). NEA recognizes nine categories of jobs as being part of this larger group in primary and secondary schools (a full list is included in Chapter Three). ESPs are the non-teaching, non-supervisory staff in schools. This includes jobs such as teaching assistants, custodians, bus drivers, food service workers, and health room aides. It does not include staff with advanced degrees such as school psychologists or social workers. According to NEA, ESPs comprise up to 20% to 30% of a school district's workforce. Additional research from NEA finds that ESPs are more likely than other school staff to live in the district in which they work (National Education Association, 2015). Chapter Three will discuss ESPs in more detail, including information about their education and salaries. In Chapter Three, I will also discuss the idea of professionalism, employing the work of Hargreaves (2000) to discuss how ESPs' status as professionals might be understood. Additionally, in Chapter Three, I will explore some of the previous research that considered their work.

#### **1.4 Background and Relation to My Professional Practice**

The path to this dissertation started during the second year of the EdD program in the course on Educational Futures. The assignment in that course was to identify an area of education relevant to our professional practice and consider what futures might look like in that area. Offered the opportunity to consider in a more speculative way some of the “big” questions that had brought me to the EdD program in the first place, I started to think about how the CA<sup>N</sup> might inform a preferable future for primary education in the United States, with a focus on those things beyond the taught curriculum that students need to be successful in school and beyond. This led me to consider more deeply the role of the non-teaching, non-supervisory members of the school staff. This group includes custodians, bus drivers, food service workers, and paraeducators. I will explain more in Chapter Three about these jobs, including identifying equivalent jobs in the British context. I set out to imagine how their work might be conceived of in relation to Nussbaum's Central

Capabilities, responding in part to NEA's work to communicate the value of the work of ESPs in relation to ASCD's Whole Child Approach. Chapter Three will offer a fuller explanation of NEA's approach.

Writing the Educational Futures paper exposed two challenges for me. The first was to consider how to use the CA<sup>N</sup> in the current education discourse in the United States. This discourse, which I will explore further in Chapter Two, is rooted in a high-stakes accountability system of student success measured by test scores (Darling-Hammond, 2007, Glassman, 2012). It also includes a counter-narrative of the whole child. That narrative, in turn, is given a policy framework through the Whole Child Approach, a framework that seeks to look beyond test scores and high-stakes accountability. With little application of any account of the CA to education in the United States, I found little to build on and felt that the resulting paper was only scratching the surface of what was possible. The second challenge was the small body of research literature about ESPs and their work. It was in this that I saw the beginnings of an opportunity to contribute, albeit in a small way, to the creation of new knowledge. And while the Education Futures paper was a start, the challenges it exposed formed the basis for this dissertation.

An EdD is designed to be embedded in professional practice. My own professional career is one that has not followed any obvious straight line. Starting as a classroom-based early childhood educator, I later earned an M.A. in health education and worked for 15 years in the field called school health, working with national organizations that supported educators in the field. Throughout that time, my work focused on policies, programs, and practices that crossed disciplines to support students. So, while the CA<sup>N</sup> was new to me, the Whole Child Approach and ESPs were not. My work in the past had included working with staff from ASCD as they developed what became the Whole Child Approach. In that time, I also spent four years working with an NEA affiliate, the NEA Health Information Network, which focused on healthy schools. That work included working closely with a number of ESPs to support programs to build their professional capacity and to address many of the issues that emerged in this dissertation.

In 2013, I started working as an independent consultant to nonprofits and unions; in 2014, I enrolled in the University of Glasgow EdD program. From 2016 to 2018, part of my work was as a consultant to the Utah School Employees Association (USEA), an affiliate of NEA. USEA is unique among NEA state affiliates in that it represents only ESPs (in other

states, ESPs and teachers are represented by the same affiliate). More information about USEA can be found in Appendix Five. During the same time period, I also worked with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the NEA Foundation<sup>6</sup> on projects designed to support the whole child in schools. These experiences combined to reinforce my view that what was missing from much of the work was the inclusion of ESPs in the discussion. My work with USEA played a particularly important role in this research. The staff and elected leadership of USEA were generous in their time and support to set up the focus groups that were at the center of this dissertation. But, in addition, the time I spent with them and with USEA members considering how to improve the professional development available to ESPs in Utah reinforced my view that these are members of a group of education staff whose voices and views matter.

### **1.5 The Research Process**

As described in the previous section, working with ESPs has been a significant part of my professional practice for the last several years. But it was also important to me to place this work within the context of my professional and personal “praxis”. Praxis can be defined as action undertaken with the intention of doing the right thing (Kemmis & Smith, 2008). Part of doing the right thing in the context of this dissertation was to recognize that any discussion of the work of ESPs would be stronger, in my view, if it incorporated their voices and views. While teacher criticality and reflection are considered an important part of their professional status (Hargreaves, 2000), ESPs are rarely given that opportunity, and where they are given that opportunity, that work is not well documented. In Chapter Four, I will provide detail on how I placed this research within an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006) that was supplemented by the influence of the ideas of action and participatory research—particularly the importance of dialogue and the elevation of the voices of those whose lives are under consideration (Padilla, 1992). By engaging with Utah ESPs through structured focus group discussions, I have sought to give voice to how these ESPs view their work, particularly in relation to the ideas of the whole child and the Capabilities Approach.

As I will expand on in Chapter Four, I chose focus groups to allow participants to interact with each other and to build on each other’s ideas. In Chapter Four, I will also provide

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<sup>6</sup> The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is one of the largest funders of public health research and initiatives in the U.S. It currently has significant grantmaking in support of healthy schools. The NEA Foundation is affiliated with NEA and provides grants to NEA members and their school districts in support of educational improvement.



additional information on the entire process, including the ethical approval and related issues. Following approval by the University ethics committee, I worked with USEA staff to schedule three focus groups and recruit participants. The groups were conducted in November 2017 after working hours in locations convenient to the participants; 22 people participated across all three groups, representing five of the nine job ESP categories. In each group, participants discussed their work, their understanding of the whole child, and using Nussbaum's list, identified those capabilities they believe to be most relevant to schools and why. They also participated in two voluntary activities on these topics. With the permission of the participants, I recorded the discussion for later transcription. I also took pictures of the drawings and cards used in the activities. After transcribing the audio recordings, I coded the transcript and the visual images. All of these data were then used for the analysis. I will provide further detail on this process in Chapter Four and discuss the analysis in Chapter Five.

### **1.6 Voices, Views, and Analysis**

Chapters Five and Six will offer my interpretation of the focus groups, based on the data collected. Chapter Five will focus primarily on the voices and views of participants, and Chapter Six will focus on my interpretations. I will consider the findings in relation to the governance of education in the United State and what the impact on policies, programs, and practices in schools might be. I will then return to the question of the professional status of ESPs, considering my findings in relation to the ideas of Hargreaves (2000) on stages of professional status. The next section in Chapter Six will discuss ideas of care and safety in schools that emerged in the research. I will speculate on how discussions of these issues in the context of the Capabilities Approach might be enhanced through the use of the German concept of *Geborgenheit* (Hutta, 2009). I will then reflect on how this work has impacted my professional practice. I will close the chapter with reflections on the limitations of the research and identification of additional areas of research, returning to the opening metaphor of quilts.

### **1.7 Chapter Conclusion**

This introduction has set out the structure and format for this dissertation. I have introduced each of the main elements around which the work is shaped. I have also provided some background on what led me to this research topic, placing it within my professional practice. I have also described how, using an interpretivist research paradigm, I chose to use focus groups to engage with ESPs in Utah to elicit their views on the whole

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*

child and the CA<sup>N</sup>. In the next chapter, I will expand on the context of public education in the United States and further explore the concepts of the whole child (as presented in ASCD's Whole Child Approach) and the CA<sup>N</sup>. I will also discuss how I use the terms policy, program, and practice in the context of U.S. education.

## **Chapter Two: Terms of Engagement**

### **2.1 Chapter Introduction**

In this chapter, I will set out the terms on which I am engaging with two of the major concepts that have shaped this research: the Capabilities Approach and the Whole Child Approach. To properly situate these concepts within my professional context and the context of my research participants, I will start the chapter with a brief overview of public education governance and funding in the United States. Public education in the United States is governed by a complex, multilayer structure that includes roles for federal, state, and local governments. I will provide a brief overview of that structure as well as discussing the major relevant federal education programs. Because, in the United States, much of the responsibility for the provision of public education rests with each of states, I will also discuss some of the relevant state policies in Utah, where this research was conducted.

Next, I will describe my understanding of the CA, with particular attention to Nussbaum's account. I will also examine other accounts, including those that have critiqued elements of Nussbaum's, with a focus on accounts that I have used to inform my work. I will then examine how various accounts of the CA have been used in consideration of education issues. After considering the CA, I will turn to the Whole Child Approach, considering it as a policy framework drawn from a much broader use of the term "whole child". I will go on to begin to examine how elements of the CA<sup>N</sup> might be potentially realized through the Whole Child Approach. I will conclude the chapter by setting the stage for Chapter Three, in which I consider the construction of the Education Support Professional (ESP) identity and how that has been done in relation to the Whole Child Approach.

### **2.2 The U.S. Context**

My intention in this section is to provide a brief overview of those elements of the governance and policy context for education in the United States that I see as most relevant to this dissertation. In all 50 states and the District of Columbia, there is universal free primary and secondary education, which starts with kindergarten (usually age five) and continues through grade 12 (usually age 17 or 18). This system of education is governed by a complex, multilevel structure that includes oversight, funding, and granting of rights to students and their families at the federal, state, and local levels. To add to this complexity, for the past 27 years, the traditional public education system has been expanded,

sometimes with great conflict, to include charter schools<sup>7</sup> and voucher programs (Malin, Hardy, & Lubienski, 2019). Charter schools are public schools that operate independently of local district oversight while still being subject to the same state accountability system; voucher programs, at the state level, direct public funds to private schools for specific students with little or no accountability.<sup>8</sup> And although the participants in this research come from within the traditional public school system, these other school types also employ ESPs. In Chapter Six, I will discuss how additional research could involve these other types of publicly funded education.

Although the language and specific provisions vary from state to state, all 50 states and Washington, D.C.<sup>9</sup> contain language in their constitutions that can be interpreted as a “right to education” at the state level. This placement of the “right to education” at the state level was reinforced by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973, when it ruled that there was no federal right to education. The federal government’s role has been tied directly to laws, policies, programs, and funding designed to address issues of inequity (Parker, 2016). Legal placement of the right to education at the state level is accompanied by a strong historical allegiance to an ideal of local control through school districts at the county, town, or other level (such as townships, villages, or multi-district partnerships).

These districts operate the schools, hire the staff, and provide oversight through an elected local school board.<sup>10</sup> Each state creates districts differently, and the number of districts varies widely from state to state and is not directly related to population. For example, California has a population of about 39.5 million people and 977 school districts while Illinois has a population of about 12.7 million people and 852 school districts. There are about 13,000 local school districts nationally. Additionally, in some states, individual charter schools or clusters of charter schools are treated as independent districts for the purposes of certain programs. For example, in Washington, D.C., which has a population of less than one million people, there are over 60 local districts, including the traditional District of Columbia Public Schools, and approximately 60 individual charter schools or charter school groups.

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<sup>7</sup> Minnesota passed the first state charter school law in 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Charter school support and opposition has crossed political parties while voucher programs are generally more supported by Republican policymakers.

<sup>9</sup> Washington, D.C. is not a state but, for purposes of education governance, it has a state education office and is considered a state.

<sup>10</sup> While most school districts have elected school boards, there are several urban school districts that are under direct control of the Mayor.

Funding for education in the United States comes from tax revenue at each of the levels. At the state and local levels, the primary sources of funding have historically been property taxes and sales taxes. Recently, some states have started dedicating a portion of the proceeds of state-run lotteries to education. These state and local funds comprise about 90% of the funding for primary and secondary education, with most of that coming from state revenues. It has been argued that the reliance on property taxes exacerbates differences in per-student public expenditures between districts (Baker, Farrie & Sciarra, 2018). The balance of the funding for education is from the federal government and is tied to programs that are designed to address issues of poverty, disability, and disadvantage.

This limited scope of federal funding does not mean the federal government is without influence in education policy and practice. Indeed, the federal funding and oversight of the federal programs to address inequity have a significant impact on the policies, programs, and practices at the state and local levels. The largest federal education programs are contained in the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, which was first passed in 1964 and which was most recently reauthorized in 2015 as the *Every Student Succeeds Act* or *ESSA*. Its stated purpose was, and is, to advance equity through targeted interventions for poor/disadvantaged children or those with special learning needs (Carr & Modzeleski, 2014). This includes large federal programs such as Title I, which provides grants to states and districts with large numbers of low-income children; Title II, which provides grants to states and districts for teacher preparation and professional development; and Title IV, which provides grants to states and districts for activities related to safe schools.

The previous reauthorization in 2001 (under the name *No Child Left Behind* or *NCLB*) created a vastly expanded oversight role for the federal government, including the creation of the first federal school-level accountability system. This system explicitly framed equity in education in terms of student test scores. It encouraged states to explore the opportunity to link teacher evaluations to those same tests. Additionally, it also created financial punishments for schools and districts that were not able to show progress on these tests. These changes were a significant extension of the federal government's authority, in that these changes required any district that received federal education funds to include all students in the same accountability system. The federal role also included direction to the states on how to measure excellence and equity.<sup>11</sup> By identifying which subjects were to be

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<sup>11</sup> Federal law explicitly prohibits the U.S. Department of Education from requiring specific curricula,

tested and how often students were to be tested and by linking federal funding (or the loss of that funding) to these test scores, *No Child Left Behind* was presented, in the words of the then Secretary of Education Rod Paige, as a path away from “the soft bigotry of low expectations” (Paige, 2004). Instead, it offered, in his view, an education system where, it was claimed, disaggregated test scores would lead to high achievement for all.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the programs contained in *ESSA*, there are several other federal policies that support programs that provide significant funding and oversight to states and school districts. Like *ESSA*, these are designed to address or ameliorate some condition that is seen as contributing to educational inequities. Two of the largest are the programs and services provided under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* and the school breakfasts and lunches that make up the federal school meal programs. Both of these programs are the source of significant funding to support the hiring of ESPs, particularly paraeducators and food service workers.

*IDEA* governs the provision of educational services to students with special needs, including requirements about the type of education and services students are entitled to, as well as the rights of their parents/guardians in the district’s process of creating Individual Education Plans (IEPs). *IDEA* also provides funding to local school districts, via the states, to deliver those services, although the act has never been fully funded by the U.S. Congress. Nussbaum (2006b) has suggested that the requirements of *IDEA* embody the spirit of CA<sup>N</sup>; this is one of the only areas of primary or secondary education in the U.S. that she has addressed. Many of the services students receive are provided by paraeducators and other ESPs. As I will discuss further in Chapter Five, the issues of education for students with disabilities emerged as a significant issue for research participants.

The second program is the provision of meals in schools through the *National School Breakfast and Lunch Program*, funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.<sup>13</sup> This program, first created during World War II, provides funds to districts, via states, to subsidize the cost of meals provided in schools. These meals are available to all students

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standards, or assessments. So, despite these requirements, it was still left to states to set their own standards and assessments. In 2009, a number of states created a consortium to develop the Common Core State Standards, which states could adopt and/or adapt.

<sup>12</sup> Recently, under the Trump administration, there have been efforts to minimize the oversight role of the federal government except to push for greater privatization. However, the basic programs remain in place as the law has not been changed.

<sup>13</sup> Most states administer this program through the state department of education.

on a sliding scale with the lowest-income students receiving meals free. The vast majority of school districts nationally participate in the program.<sup>14</sup> While only one food service worker participated in this research, the importance of feeding hungry students was raised by some of the other participants in the focus groups.

Despite these policy and programmatic efforts, access to a high-quality education remains uneven. Huge resource gaps across schools and districts compromise the ability to provide basic, let alone high-quality, education (Tienda, 2017). A recent study from the Education Law Center at Rutgers University (Baker, Farrie, & Sciarra, et al, 2018) found that there are wide disparities in school funding levels across states and that the gap between the highest- and lowest-funded states is growing. In addition, the study found that the majority of states have funding systems in place that do not account for the need for additional funding in high-poverty districts. One consequence of the inequalities in funding can be seen in inequalities of course offerings among and within districts. Recent data from the U.S. Department of Education shows that students of color are less likely to take advanced mathematics or science courses in high school. They are also less likely to have access to the gateway courses, such as Algebra 1 in middle school, that will allow access to the higher mathematics courses in high school (Sawchuk, 2018). But it is not just math and science where these inequities can be found. A simple comparison study conducted by a parent-led advocacy group compared schools that enrolled a majority of students of color with a comparable-in-size school in the same district or a neighboring district that enrolled a majority of white students. Among their findings were the following:

- Schools serving primarily students of color offered fewer foreign languages and fewer years of the languages offered.
- Access to Advanced Placement (college-level) courses varied, with schools serving predominantly white students offering a wider range of courses.
- Schools differed greatly in the number and variety of arts and music classes offered as well as the number of available sections at the secondary school level. (Journey for Justice Alliance, 2018:5)

Other advocacy groups have suggested that schools and districts, particularly those serving low-income children and children of color, have dropped non-tested subjects such as health education, physical education, and/or the arts. They also suggest that, in the name of test

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<sup>14</sup> It is not possible to say exactly how many participate because USDA numbers include many single charter schools or charter school networks that are considered separate districts for the purpose of school meals.

preparation, schools have eliminated or reduced recess, shortened lunch periods, and eliminated counselors and other health professionals (see, for example, Dillon, 2006).

The creation of this high-stakes system and the inequities it has caused have not gone uncontested. While there are a number of different discourses that form the counter-narratives, they share the expression of a more holistic view of education and its purpose. As I will discuss further below, these discourses have shared a language of considering the whole child. One of the most prominent expressions of this perspective has been found in ASCD's policy framework, the Whole Child Approach. This approach emerged in 2005 from a special issue of the ASCD publication *Education Leadership*.<sup>15</sup> This issue gathered a variety of voices to express concern about what they saw as the limitations of the policies resulting from *No Child Left Behind*. In one article, Nel Noddings asked, "What does it mean to educate the whole child?" (2005b). While her answer was embodied in her own philosophy of care in education, ASCD leaders found resonance in the question and in the phrase and, in 2007, the organization launched its Whole Child Approach. At the same time, the use of the term "whole child" gained currency as a way of thinking more broadly about what children need in and from their education. I will explore this further later in this chapter and will then examine in subsequent chapters how the ESP participants in this research understand the term. I will suggest in those discussions that the Whole Child Approach and the ideas of the whole child can be seen as containing elements of Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach.

The change in the name given to the primary federal education law from *No Child Left Behind* to *Every Student Succeeds Act* can be seen as signaling a slight shift in perspective with elements of a whole child view emerging. The new act included changes that might be seen as reflecting a view of student achievement that moves beyond test scores. While the basic framework of the *NCLB* legislation was maintained, states are now required to select an additional nonacademic indicator for accountability purposes. States took different approaches to identifying this indicator, with 34 states selecting chronic absenteeism as their indicator (Blad, 2017). Chronic absenteeism is a complex problem with a variety of causes, such as family conditions, health problems, and/or student disengagement (Attendance Works, 2018). By including this indicator, it can be argued that a slightly more holistic view of children is in place in the accountability system.

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<sup>15</sup> *Education Leadership* is described as being written by practitioners for practitioners.



### **2.3 The Utah Context**

In Utah, state funding constitutes 66% of government education spending in the state. Federal funding constitutes an additional 7%. The balance comes from local property taxes and other local revenues. The State Board of Education is elected on a nonpartisan basis from 15 districts. The State Board of Education appoints a State Superintendent of Education.<sup>16</sup> The state board serves as the primary education policymaking entity at the state level although the state legislature and governor may also create policies through the legislative process. Policies can be seen as falling into one of three types of oversight:

- Policies that require that school districts and/or schools to follow existing federal policies. For example, Utah has a policy that requires school districts to follow federal standards on the nutritional content of foods sold in schools outside the meal programs.
- Policies that require that school districts and/or schools do something specific. For example, Utah policy requires that every school district develop and implement a policy on bullying, harassment, and intimidation. The state policy describes how the district shall develop the policy and what elements need to be covered. It also details the requirements for training, and in this case, ESPs are included in the required groups.
- Policies that recommend that school districts and/or schools do something specific. For example, in enumerating school district responsibility for students who are placed on long-term suspension or expelled, the state encourages, but does not require, districts to operate an alternative education program.

Utah has policy requirements in many areas that can be linked to the themes that emerged during this research, although as I will discuss further in Chapter Five, participants did not address policies much in their discussion. Rather, these policies, like the federal policies referenced above, can be seen as shaping the context in which participants work.

### **2.4 The Capabilities Approach**

My interest in the CA<sup>N</sup> grew out of the exercise of imagining a future for primary education in the United States that looked beyond test scores and the high-stakes accountability environment I described above. In looking at how opposition to that perspective was developing in the United States, including the promotion of the Whole Child Approach, I believed that it would be helpful to develop a philosophical approach that is linked to the ideals of liberal education - that is, education that has breadth, that is

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<sup>16</sup> The process for selecting state boards of education and the state superintendent vary from state to state.

noninstrumental, and that emphasizes autonomy. This ideal resonated with me as an appropriate counter to the prevailing test-driven discourse. With this in mind, I chose the CA<sup>N</sup>. Unlike the Whole Child Approach, the Capabilities Approach is not a policy framework. Rather, as a normative partial theory of justice (Nussbaum, 2011) that offers a way to consider issues beyond a single policy framework. As I will discuss further in Chapter Six, policy frameworks come and go, so it was also important to me to use an approach that could be applicable across frameworks and over time. Additionally, while Nussbaum has written little on primary or secondary education in the United States, she does consider *IDEA* a policy that potentially embodies the CA<sup>N</sup> in its focus on the flourishing of the individual student (Nussbaum, 2006a, 2011). *IDEA* provides the policies and funding for the hiring of a large number of ESPs, so this added to my interest in applying the CA<sup>N</sup> to this work. Later in this section, I will expand on Nussbaum's views on *IDEA*.

The CA has its origins in the field of development economics, where it was first conceived by Amartya Sen as an alternative to the use of gross domestic product for measuring and comparing development status within and across countries. Sen argued that using gross domestic product measures alone masked the real differences between the conditions and opportunities people have. Rather, the CA argues that the appropriate measures of a society's well-being are an individual's real opportunities to live a life she values (Sen, 2009). And from its initial formulation, uses of the CA have expanded, with scholars in a range of disciplines taking it up and applying it in their fields including in child development, education, health, and technology. Nussbaum's significant undertaking was to apply the core ideas of the approach to the construction of a basic theory of justice (2003, 2006a, 2011). As such, I felt that it could provide a useful tool to examine the views of ESPs in ways that might transcend a particular policy framework.

Regardless of application or understanding, differing accounts of the CA share a focus on the question "What is each person able to do and to be?" (Nussbaum, 2011:18). At the heart of all accounts is the individual and her real opportunities and experiences. Sen (2009) argues that if lives are assessed in terms of capabilities, rather than by measures such as income or happiness, then a wider view of human life is seen. The approach allows for consideration of a whole life, including (but not limited to) health, education, social relationships, work, and family (Robeyns, 2017). It is this inter-dimensional, holistic view that, I believe, makes it a useful tool in considering issues of education in response to a

high-stakes, test-driven accountability system.

While I will start this explication of the CA with Nussbaum's account, I do not want to ignore other accounts that share a focus on the individual but take different stances on other elements (Robeyns, 2016). These differences are, in part, related to the purpose of a particular account, with Nussbaum suggesting that there at least two versions or purposes of the Capabilities. She says,

My own version puts the approach to work in constructing a theory of basic social justice,[and] adds other notions in the process (those of *human dignity*, the *threshold*, *political liberalism*). (Nussbaum, 2011:19, emphasis in the original)

In contrast, she goes on to say,

Sen's primary concern has been to identify capability as the most pertinent space of comparison for purposes of quality-of-life assessment. . . .

(Nussbaum, 2011:19)

Others have suggested that Nussbaum is not giving full recognition to the wide range of scholarship that has developed, and that there are now many accounts (Robeyns, 2016, 2017). However, as I will explain below, I have chosen to focus on Nussbaum's account, so I will start my explication with that. In considering education issues I have also drawn on the work of others, including Robeyns (2003, 2016, 2017), Saito (2003), Unterhalter (2003, 2013), and Walker (2003, 2006) and will take up that work later in this chapter.

### **Nussbaum's Account of the Capabilities Approach**

Above I noted that Nussbaum asserts that the Capabilities Approach "has (at least) two versions, in part because it has been used for two different purposes" (2011:19). Her account applies the approach to constructing a theory of justice that describes a threshold level of capabilities, or as she describes it "a partial and minimal account of social justice" (2006a:71). She does not lay claim to her account being the only version but contrasts her account with those, which she links to the work of Sen, that use capabilities as "the most pertinent space of comparison for purposes of quality-of-life assessment" (Nussbaum, 2011:19). I am cognizant that this bifurcation has been criticized for seeming to exclude many of the applications of the approach by other scholars who apply capability theorizing to a specific field, including education (Robeyns, 2016).<sup>17</sup> However, I start with Nussbaum's application because it is positioned as a basic partial theory of justice that is

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<sup>17</sup> Robeyns refers to this body of work as the field of "capabilitarian scholarship" (2016:399).

not context-specific (Nussbaum, 2006a). And as I will discuss further below, the idea of a set of capabilities that all people have the right to was one that my participants actively engaged with. Nussbaum identifies what she calls the five “essential elements” (2011:19) on any account of the CA that is being used in a partial theory of justice. These five essential elements are offered below.

First, each person must be treated as an end in herself and not as a means to another’s ends. In the CA<sup>N</sup>, the basis for assessing if a society is just and fair is not based on a calculation of the average but on an assessment of what opportunities are available to each individual person. This is because people vary in what resources they need. They vary also in their ability to convert those resources into functionings. (I will discuss functionings in further detail below.) These variations are a central feature of human life (Nussbaum, 2006a). Nussbaum makes no apologies for what she describes as a profoundly liberal view in which each person is worthy of dignity and respect by virtue of her personhood and regardless of any other feature, such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, or immigration status. While some capabilities scholars have suggested that this focus on the individual does not require a liberal political view, even those critics recognize that this idea is at the heart of the CA<sup>N</sup> (Robeyns, 2016).

Second, the approach is focused on choices people have and the freedoms they have to make those choices, not on the actual choices that people may exercise. Nussbaum (2003, 2006a, 2011) and Sen (2009) are very clear that there is a distinction between people’s capabilities and the actual functioning of their lives, that is, what they actually do with the capabilities they have. For example, two people may both not be eating. One may not be able to eat because she has no money to buy food. The other may be able to buy food but does not because she is fasting for political or religious reasons. In this case, she has the capability to eat to, but chooses not to exercise the functioning to eat (Sen, 2009). Nussbaum (2006a, 2011) suggests that this distinction may need to be modified when considering the lives of some people, such as infants, children, and the severely disabled, whose developmental agency may be severely limited or where requiring certain functions is necessary to fostering adult capabilities. Nussbaum notes that being able to read is so essential (in most societies) to achieving capabilities throughout life that mandatory school attendance across a particular age span will be reasonable (2011). However, once attendance is required, the school’s physical plant<sup>18</sup> may offer real or constrained choices.

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<sup>18</sup> ‘plant’ is the US term for physical buildings, structures, and workings.

Consider the opportunities for the student who uses a wheelchair for mobility and attends a school that offers certain job skills courses only in a building that is not wheelchair-accessible. In this case, the student cannot make real choices about what job skill courses to take. However, if the building is wheelchair-accessible, she can make real choices based on her interests because all courses are equally open to her. I will discuss further below the distinctions between capabilities and functionings from a theoretical perspective and, in Chapter Five, I will explore how the participants approached this question.

Third, the approach is pluralistic about values. In her accounts, Nussbaum asserts that this is an approach that can transcend differing views of the meaning of and purpose for life. She writes, “Many people who are willing to support a given capability as a fundamental entitlement would feel violated were the associated functioning made basic” (2006a:79). She uses as her example a religious group, the Amish, who do not participate in elected politics for religious reasons but make no objection to others having that right and exercising it. While this distinction may seem clear-cut, it is, I believe, more complex. For example, there are some areas, such as the reproductive health of women (which Nussbaum includes specifically in the capability of *Bodily health*), where the values of some will lead them to “feel violated” if someone else exercises a particular functioning, such as using birth control. I would suggest that a challenge in the application of the CA<sup>N</sup> is that people will have beliefs that may inhibit their willingness to see certain functionings as acceptable within a particular capability, despite Nussbaum’s ideal that pluralism is a necessary element in the approach.

Fourth, the CA<sup>N</sup> is concerned with addressing entrenched social injustice and inequality, particularly when these inequalities lead to the lack of capabilities. While it may seem to be a tautology to describe a theory of justice as being about injustice, it is important to note Nussbaum’s reminder that within the CA<sup>N</sup> it is necessary to look at social systems and structures, not just individual behaviors or beliefs. In the case of research such as the work I conducted, it is a reminder that, while I may be exploring individual beliefs, the implications are systemic. This will be reflected in the discussion in Chapter Six.

Fifth, the CA<sup>N</sup> ascribes an urgent role to the government and by extension to social policy. Others have taken a different view. Robeyns suggests that while “most capabilitarian scholars envision a task for the government and public policy, there is no theoretical reason to believe that this *needs* to be the case” (2016:403, emphasis in original). She asserts that

other institutions may be equally or even more important. Indeed, in her accounts of women in India, Nussbaum gives great weight to the role that nongovernmental organizations play in supporting capabilities. But for Nussbaum, these organizations operate within a framework in which the state has the ultimate responsibility for ensuring justice. This research applies the approach to the government-provided and government-regulated field of public education. This is where the participants worked, and they did not dismiss the role of this governmental institution in supporting student capabilities.

As scholarship using the various accounts of the CA has expanded, the inevitable issue of the meaning of particular terms has arisen. Like other scholars, Nussbaum has a particular vocabulary, which I review here. For Nussbaum, *Capabilities* are defined as “the answers to the question, ‘What is this person able to do and to be?’” (2011:20). They are not merely internal characteristics; rather, they are some combination of a person’s internal abilities with the freedoms and opportunities that exist within her social, economic, and political environment. Nussbaum refers to this as a person’s *combined capabilities* (2011).

Recognizing the importance of a person’s characteristics, such as her health and her emotions, Nussbaum calls these *internal capabilities*, making clear that these are not fixed or unchangeable. Instead, they develop (or are developed) in the social, economic, and political context. This idea that *internal capabilities* are not fixed becomes important in considering issues of education and human development because otherwise there would be little purpose in nurturing or educating those with some limitation, such as a physical or cognitive disability. Indeed, as I will discuss further in Chapter Five, the issue of how the Capabilities Approach understands the lives and rights of those with disabilities was one that the participants paid attention to in my study.

*Functionings* are the things that people actually do based on their capabilities. They are, in Nussbaum’s view, the “active realization of one or more capabilities” (2011:25). I described above the example of the person who is starving for economic reasons and the person who is fasting for political or religious reasons. They have the same functioning, but their capabilities are distinct. Conversely, two people may have similar capabilities for travel, but one may choose to stay home and the other to wander the world, choosing different functionings. Capabilities create the opportunities for functionings to occur. Take, for example, the woman who uses a wheelchair to get around. Her internal capabilities, combined with her education, may give her the capability and the desire, to be employed as an on-site construction supervisor. She may have a wheelchair, but until a ramp (a social

condition) is built from the sidewalk to the on-site office, she is not able to exercise her functioning as an employed worker. In this example, the CA<sup>N</sup> understands this to be a limitation on her imposed by social and physical structures and looks to remedies that are external to her, such as the requirement to make workplaces wheelchair-accessible.

I will now turn to one of the key elements of Nussbaum's account and the one that is perhaps the most contested part of her account, namely her creation of a list of Central Capabilities that are universal and encompassing all human experience (2000, 2006a, 2011). A complete list of the Central Capabilities can be found in Appendix One While some, including Sen (2004), have argued against such a list, it is important, before looking at the list itself, to explore Nussbaum's own stipulations regarding the list within her account as a partial or minimal theory of justice (2006). Nussbaum makes clear that her list is not set in stone. Instead, in her words, it is "open-ended and subject to ongoing revision and thinking" (2006a:78). She notes that the list is specified in highly abstract and general terms, leaving the delineation of specifics to "citizens and their legislatures and courts" (2006a:79). She readily acknowledges that there will be variation across nations and that a certain amount of leeway has to be accorded each nation. She describes her intent to create a list that may be endorsed by people who "have very different conceptions of the ultimate meaning and purpose of life" (2006a:79). She further notes that it is in the discussions of the list that agreement and revision will occur. Examples of this discussion and revision can be found in Wolff and de-Shalit's work (2007) in which they used the list as a starting point for their examination of the idea of disadvantage. Other examples these discussion and potential revisions can be found in Unterhalter (2003) on gender, Potsi (2016) on early childhood education, and Wimborne (2018) on post-16 education. I will return to each of these contextual uses of Nussbaum's lists later in this work. It is worth noting here that each of these studies found that valued capabilities in each context contained many elements of Nussbaum's list. Later in this chapter, I will examine some of the critiques of Nussbaum's list as I consider other versions of the Capabilities Approach that have informed my work. In Chapter Five, I will discuss how the research participants engaged with and understood Nussbaum's list.

In her account, Nussbaum further stipulates that these capabilities are based on the social justice question: "What does a life worthy of human dignity require?" (2011:32). Her answer is that it requires an "ample threshold" level of each of the ten Central Capabilities and that the role of government is to create the conditions for ensuring that threshold. The

particulars she leaves to each nation, which presents a challenge, particularly in considering the CA<sup>N</sup> across national borders. In *Creating Capabilities* (2011), Nussbaum argues that the nations are the correct, if imperfect, institution for ensuring capabilities. Her argument is based on an understanding that nations, even imperfect democracies, are more responsive to their citizens than philanthropies or corporations. Nussbaum argues that the focus on the real opportunities that people have and not on the functionings they exercise allows for the creation of a political context in which people can support rights that they themselves may not choose to exercise. She goes on to assert that the inclusion of freedom of speech, association, and conscience in the Central Capabilities ensure support for pluralism within the approach.

Her final stipulation is that there is a need for separation between “issues of justification and issues of implementation” (2006a:80). By this she means that while the list is a basis for political principles in any country, she does not “license intervention with affairs of a state that does not recognize them” (2006a:80). It is important to recognize that this declaration is made within the context of nation to nation. It does not speak about intervention from the federal to state level in the United States, where the legal precedent and the formulation of the federal role in education is based on intervention from the federal government in support of the protection of rights. I believe that Nussbaum’s discussion of the role of *IDEA* as essential to supporting the capabilities of students with disabilities (Nussbaum, 2006a, 2009, 2011) offers an example of how Nussbaum can be understood to be looking to the federal level to ensure capabilities across the states.

In Nussbaum’s view, each of the ten Central Capabilities is unique and can stand on its own but are each essential for a life of dignity. They have, in her words, an “irreducible heterogeneity” (2011:35), as a nation cannot trade off one for the other. In other words, they are non-fungible. Rather, each must be secured and protected. She goes on to say that justice demands that “they be secured to each and every citizen, up to some appropriate threshold level” (2006a:175, emphasis in the original). Nussbaum provides an example in which a government cannot ask citizens to forgo religious freedom even if they have sufficient health and food. Within the context of education, I would suggest the case of the capability of *Play* as an example of this non-fungibility. In primary school, this is often achieved through recess. Some schools in response to perceived educational imperatives have cut recess from the schedule. In this case, the capability of *Play* is denied, even while the capability of *Senses, imagination, and thought* may be enhanced through extra reading



If all of the Central Capabilities are important and irreducible, what is the relationship between them? Can it really be said that all are equally important? To address these questions, Nussbaum brings into the discussion the ideas developed by Wolff and de-Shalit (2007) of *corrosive disadvantage* and *fertile functioning*. Wolff and de-Shalit developed these in response to several questions, including:

What is it to be disadvantaged? What is it to be poor, disabled, terminally ill, an immigrant, a single mother? Why do many people share an intuition that being poor is humiliating? (2007/2013: vii)

Based on a large number of interviews, Wolff and de-Shalit developed these concepts to describe the varied relationships that might exist between capabilities in particular contexts. A *corrosive disadvantage* is a lack of a particular capability that creates a situation that makes the achievement of other capabilities extremely difficult and that can impact the individual's ability to even strive for that capability. Conversely, a *fertile functioning* (which Nussbaum [2011] refers to as a *fertile capability*, preferring precision of terminology over alliteration) is one that by its presence opens the way to achieving other capabilities. In thinking about the difference in terms, I would suggest that for Wolff and de-Shalit the choice of the word "functioning" can be seen as being in response to specific contextual situations. By contrast, Nussbaum is considering the larger and less context-specific situation, where a "capability" is the more appropriate term. Neither Nussbaum's work nor Wolff and de-Shalit's work makes the claim that the same capabilities play these roles for all people. While my research did not explicitly ask participants to discuss how they saw the relationships between capabilities, I will discuss in Chapter Five several examples of how participants positioned the relationship between capabilities. This will include the accounts of three participants who created life-span narratives that linked all of the capabilities in what I have termed *Capabilities Pathways*.

Children and the "disabled" (this is the term Nussbaum uses) have a special place in the CA<sup>N</sup>. Indeed, the potential of the CA<sup>N</sup> to address justice for the disabled at the heart of her argument for it (Nussbaum, 2006a). The same might be said for the potential of the Capabilities Approach to address issues of justice for children. One challenge for both these groups is that the Capabilities Approach is one in which, for most adults, specific functionings within an achieved capability are a matter of individual choice. But what about those people, such as children, who are generally recognized as not having the

developmental autonomy to make such choices? Nussbaum resolves this by saying that it is acceptable within the approach to require certain functionings because they are so important to achieving other capabilities as the person matures. As discussed above, Nussbaum argues for the fertile role of education and therefore it is acceptable within the approach to require children of some age (say younger than 18) to attend school. Yet as I will discuss further below, it may not be this simple: participation in education in a particular form or place may actually inhibit or hinder capability development.

Although I did not set out to consider children with disabilities or issues of special education in particular, both of these emerged as important topics for the participants in my study. In the United States, *IDEA* requires public education services for the disabled through age 21, well past the school-leaving age in all states. As I will discuss further in Chapter Five, a number of the participants worked with students with severe disabilities across age ranges. These are young people whose needs for additional supports and care will continue into chronological adulthood, and participants talked about the role of schools in preparing them for life after school. In considering the chronological adult with serious disabilities, Nussbaum argues for the greatest autonomy and choice possible for them. She also recognizes that these are individuals with severe cognitive or mental impairments that will make it impossible or at least very difficult for them to make choices or evaluate risks. In this case then, it is appropriate to consider functionings. However, she argues, this is not to mitigate the importance of ensuring that they have as many real opportunities to achieve the Central Capabilities as possible.

This section has provided an overview of Nussbaum's presentation of the Capabilities Approach, and I have highlighted some of my own critique of her account while explaining how it will serve as the foundation of my research. In the next section, I will examine how other articulations of the Capabilities Approach have engaged with and responded to Nussbaum. My focus in this upcoming section will be on the critiques that have informed my research and my use of the CA<sup>N</sup>.

### **Other Accounts of the Capabilities Approach**

Having examined Nussbaum's presentation of the Capabilities Approach, I will now shift to looking at how other versions of the approach engage with hers. These other accounts share many of the features of Nussbaum's, such as the focus on the individual and the focus on what people are actually able to do, but there are also some issues of significant

disagreement between accounts. Some of these, I suggest, are rooted in the different purposes for which the approach is being used. Maybe the most significant of these disagreements is the question of the list of Central Capabilities and, correspondingly, the issue of whether if there is to be such a list, how should it be created.<sup>19</sup> Although I discussed this briefly above, I will return to it now as the debate about the list and its creation was a factor in the development of my research design. Additionally, this difference has informed the discussion of how the CA is applied to education, which I will turn to in the next section of this chapter.

As discussed above, Nussbaum has taken the position that within her theory of justice, there are a set of broad capabilities that focus “on the protection of areas of freedom so central that their removal makes a life not worthy of human dignity” (2011:31) and that these are universal at the broad level in which she presents them. She also makes clear that this set of capabilities should be subject to discussion, refinement, and specificity based on the circumstances. She also acknowledges that there are those, including Sen, whose accounts of the CA will disagree with her on the idea of a list of Central Capabilities (Nussbaum, 2006a, 2011). Indeed, Sen asserts that selecting relevant capabilities for consideration should be done through public discussion and participation. Yet at the same time, he acknowledges that there are some capabilities, such as being well nourished, being disease-free, and being educated, that “would seem to demand attention in any theory of justice and more generally in social assessment” (Sen, 2004:78). Additionally, he is concerned that the creation of a single list runs the risk of freezing in time our understandings of capabilities and making refinement difficult. However, he also acknowledges that any application of the approach must consider its purpose and that lists will be needed (Sen, 2004).

I highlight this difference between Nussbaum and Sen on the issue of a list because it forms the basis of much of the discussion in the literature. I believe, however, that Nussbaum’s account, in her own telling, allows for both discussion and refinement across countries and over time. As I will discuss in Chapters Five and Six, one of the findings in my research was that groups of school employees, without any previous knowledge of the CA<sup>N</sup>, were able and eager to engage with the list and found it relevant to their work. Indeed, their engagement with the list is rooted in the issue raised by both Nussbaum (2006a, 2011) and Robeyns (2003) that any refinement or development of a list must start

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<sup>19</sup> Many of the versions that critique Nussbaum on this point refer to the Capability Approach in their work.

with something and then take into consideration specifics of place, culture, and setting.

Before moving on to the question of how refinement and engagement with the list might be accomplished, I want to respond to the assertion that there are (at least) two distinct accounts. Certainly, Nussbaum argues this, but so too does Robeyns (2003) who offers an account, distinct from Nussbaum's, that is contextual and that offers multiple uses, including academic, activist, or policy-oriented. Based on my experience conducting this research, I would argue that the issue is not that clear-cut. Rather, the need to measure capabilities raises the question of who is engaged and how they are engaged in creating the metrics for measurement.

Sen (2004) makes very clear his belief that in any discussion of justice, it is required that those whose lives are under consideration be included in that discussion. This is different from Nussbaum's process, which she describes as building on her experiences engaging with others but not directly engaging them in the formulation of the list (2011). Others have extended Sen's argument by identifying processes for that engagement in the creation of contextually specific lists (Robeyns, 2003; Walker, 2006). Robeyns (2003) outlines four steps for the development of lists and then applies them to the case of capabilities for gender equality. She describes them as follows:

1. Facilitate unrestrained brainstorming by the person or persons creating the list.
2. Test a draft list by engaging in the academic, political, and grassroots literature on the issue (in this case, gender equality). She notes that it is critical here to include the views and information of those who are "less familiar" to the researcher (72).
3. Engage with existing lists, such as Nussbaum's and others.
4. Debate the list with others, which she rightly points out is the purpose of the particular article.

As I will discuss in Chapter Four, this process has influenced my approach to this research, in that I think it is important, as does Nussbaum, to check with those whose lives are under consideration about their understandings of Nussbaum's list. Unfortunately, Robeyns does not expand on how she enacted the second step, but I suggest that while reviewing existing literature is important here, engagement with those whose lives are under consideration should go beyond literature and should allow people to engage directly with the idea of capabilities. I further suggest that this type of discussion can benefit from having some list as a starting point.

Walker, in considering the development of a “provisional, situated list of education capabilities, with specific attention to gender equity in contemporary South African schools” (2006:168), built on the process outlined by Robeyns (2003). In addition to the review of relevant documents and literature, Walker conducted interviews with 40 adolescent girls about their lived experiences. While these interviews do not appear to have asked about specific capabilities or used the language of capabilities, it seems that she used capabilities culled from her review of other lists to shape her interview questions. She then used the interviews and her research to create a list of eight capabilities that are specific and situated and that are the responsibility of the state (as the provider of education) to protect and provide. Her final list of eight capabilities that in some cases, such as the capability she labels “bodily integrity and bodily health” are similar to Nussbaum’s while including language that is situational to the school, “being involved in sporting activities” (2006:180). In my view there is more overlap between Walker’s list and Nussbaum’s than difference.

While both Robeyns and Walker in these articles are critical of Nussbaum on the issue of a single list and while Robeyns has identified additional critiques (2016, 2017), I suggest that there is nothing in these critiques that disputes the value of Nussbaum’s list as an important tool in the application of the CA, particularly in using it as a starting point in engaging in discussion with people in particular contexts. Indeed, such discussions serve as the refinement that Nussbaum herself calls for and also offer the opportunity for contextual specificity that the critics call for. The work of Wolff and de-Shalit (2007), which I discussed earlier in this chapter, offers an excellent example of how this process can work in that they actually asked people about what each of the capabilities meant to them within a context of discussing disadvantage.

### **The Capabilities Approach and Education**

One area of general agreement in the field of the Capabilities Approach is that education plays a number of critical roles in the realization of capabilities, with both extrinsic and intrinsic benefits (Hart, 2012a; Saito, 2003; Walker, 2006). Speaking on the power of basic education, Sen notes that “widening the coverage and effectiveness of basic education can have a powerfully preventive role in reducing human insecurity of nearly every kind” (2003:para. 4). Nussbaum argues that education offers intrinsic joy as well as the necessary critical thinking skills for participation in democracy. Education can provide the path to

understanding oneself as connected to others by a common humanity. It can also, she asserts, develop the “narrative imagination” in which one can put oneself in the place of others (Nussbaum, 2006b:220).

In her list of Central Capabilities, Nussbaum places education firmly within the capability of *Senses, imagination, and thought* while also linking it to the capability of *Affiliation*. She also is very clear that she sees education at a variety of levels as critical to the development of all other capabilities. In other words, it is a *fertile functioning* (2011). In *Women and Human Development* (2000) and other works, Nussbaum creates narratives of the lives of women in India that make this point very compellingly. She describes the intrinsic joy of women as they develop plays and songs about their lives. She also describes the immediate material benefits that accrue to these women in the development of capabilities of *Affiliation* and *Bodily health* that are a result of their educational experiences. And while she has not written extensively on the role that the CA<sup>N</sup> might play in consideration of education issues in the United States, her writing on issues of the education of those with developmental and physical disabilities in *Frontiers of Justice* (2006a) and *Creating Capabilities* (2011) positions the CA<sup>N</sup> to be seen as a useful tool for thinking about “a different set of questions about education” (Walker, 2006:164).

In general, Nussbaum appears to position participation in education as an unqualified good. However, this may not always be the case. In a critique of Sen, Unterhalter (2003) raises an issue that I consider can also be applied to the CA<sup>N</sup>. Unterhalter argues that in Sen’s account, education (defined as access to school) is seen as an unqualified good that will always lead to the enhancement of a person’s capabilities. As Unterhalter says, this “fails to take account of the complex settings in which schooling takes place” (2003:7). Rather, schools may be places where students are not safe from violence, including sexual, which may impede their ability to be educated. Recent school shootings as well as the efforts to address the school-to-prison pipeline in certain high-poverty schools provide two examples of how this insight might be applied in the context of education in the U.S. And as I will discuss further in Chapter Five, several participants discussed instances of students being unsafe in school. Unterhalter makes an additional and related criticism of Sen that I would suggest is also applicable to Nussbaum. Unterhalter argues that Sen’s account does not give proper consideration to the questions of the type of education or the pedagogy. His account, she argues, gives:

... no account of the differences in the form or outcome of education. It is

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
not concerned, for example, with the range of epistemic privileging in  
different education systems and the diverse effects of these. (Unterhalter,  
2003:8)

Nussbaum argues that it is the role of governments to ensure that their citizens achieve a threshold (unspecified) in all of the capabilities. She takes governments that do not do so to task, saying,

If NGOs that have no equipment and no money, only heart and mind and a few slates can accomplish so much, there is no excuse of government schools the world over to lag behind. (2006b:394)

Yet the systemic inequities are not just a matter of lack of government will or resources. Rather, they may be part of an active government policy in support of inequity. One example of this would be the school funding formulas I discussed earlier in this chapter, formulas which tie funding to property values. It is in these cases that the CA<sup>N</sup> as a tool for engaging people in specific contexts, such as what schools should be like, may support changing government policy. This is one of a number of possible applications of the CA<sup>N</sup> to education. As Otto and Ziegler (2006:270) note, the approach can offer a conceptual framework for looking at education, but it does not supply “a coherent educational ‘theory’” (2006:270). Its strength is in the tools and frameworks that it can provide for the consideration of all facets of education.<sup>20</sup>

Unterhalter (2013) presents three distinct paths for the application of the approach to considering the value of education, how it should be offered/delivered, and its role in fostering social justice. The first path is that the approach can be used to examine questions of how conditions, practices, and policies in school and/or surrounding communities enhance or constraint education-related capabilities. The second is that it can be used to examine how education can serve as a multiplier or enhancer of other education-related capabilities (or how lack of education can impede the development of other capabilities). The third is to explore what different people such as students, parents, and educators value “within and about” education: (2013:187). This framework is a valuable starting point and informed my thinking in this research. However, I suggest that these paths are not as completely distinct from each other as Unterhalter presents them. Rather, as I will discuss

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Hart (2012b) offers an interesting approach to considering context by applying the work of Pierre Bourdieu to look at the role that aspirations play in education-related capabilities

in Chapters Five and Six, the process of engaging with people about capabilities can surface beliefs and questions in each area. These in turn can be used to shape further research and discussion in each of the three areas.

One of the challenges I faced in this work was the limited body of scholarship that had applied any account of the CA to the context of public education in the United States. Therefore, in shaping this work and my approach, I turned to others' uses to shape my thinking. One of these is Walker's work to develop a set of capabilities for the assessment of gender-based educational equality in South Africa. Building on the process described by Robeyns (2003) for selecting capabilities, Walker (2006) engaged with existing lists within the approach, with capabilities she drew from policy documents, such as the post-Apartheid constitution and the *1996 Act*. She then worked directly with South African female students to hear their stories through interviews. The interviews were designed to "establish what capabilities these girls value to live the lives they choose" (Walker, 2006:171). While she does not detail her methodology, she does say that she based her interviews on photographs produced by the girls in response to prompts to document their lives in and out of school. As with Robeyns (2003), the article itself is designed to serve as the beginning of the debate with others. However, through engaging with the students themselves, Walker reminds us that

. . . nowhere is education an uncomplicated "good"; it produces justice and injustice, equity and inequity, and the issue is to understand why and how.  
(2003:169)

But highlighting both of these factors, within the education system (as seen through a capabilities lens), Walker offers a way to think about the policies (and practices) that need to be in place. While all children have a right to education, a capabilities lens shows us that not all can participate in "what we understand to be education" (2006:163).

A recent application of the CA<sup>N</sup> in education can be found in Potsi (2016). In this work, the author uses the approach to evaluate early childhood curricula in Greece as well as the beliefs and practices of Greek early childhood teachers. If Unterhalter's three paths (2013) are applied to this work, it could be seen as addressing the first and third. In other words, Potsi considers how the conditions and practices of early childhood education enhance or constrain capabilities and what teachers value in education. Drawing on the literature on what constitutes best pedagogical practice in early childhood education, she identifies four of Nussbaum's Central Capabilities that "form the cornerstone of early childhood



*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach* education” (Potsi, 2016). These are the capabilities of: *Senses, imagination, and thought; Affiliation; Play; and Emotions*. Potsi’s work then goes on to examine teacher beliefs and practices in relation to these capabilities, using survey results to develop her findings and recommendations for professional preparation programs

Just as gender inequalities in education are a natural area of investigation for the CA<sup>N</sup>, so too are questions surrounding the education of children with special needs. Nussbaum (2006a, 2011) makes very clear her view that one of the most important things that the Capabilities Approach does is allow us to address issues of justice for those with special needs. In *Frontiers of Justice* (2006a), she tells with great passion the stories of three children (one her nephew) who experience physical and mental disabilities. She argues that it is the CA<sup>N</sup> that can allow us to ask: what is justice for these people? Put another way, she asks us to consider what is needed to allow each of these individuals to convert resources into functionings. For example, it is the lack of wheelchair ramps that disable the wheelchair user in achieving capabilities such as *Control over one’s environment* or *Affiliation* rather than the fact that she needs a wheelchair.

This is one area where Nussbaum does turn to issues of education policy and practice in the United States (or anywhere in the developed world). She sees in *IDEA*, with its requirement for Individual Education Plans and its requirement that children with disabilities be educated in (in the words of *IDEA*) “the least restrictive environment”, the policy embodiment of the Capabilities Approach (2006a). However, as Hedge and MacKenzie (2012) discuss, the Capabilities Approach can also allow us to interrogate such policies and their implementation to ask if children are receiving what they truly need.

The issues of special education took on a particular importance in this work based on the discussions that occurred in the focus groups (see Chapter Five). A number of participants found a great deal of resonance with the CA<sup>N</sup> as they considered the special education students they work with. Building on Nussbaum’s premises, Terzi (2005a, 2005b) offers two reasons why the CA<sup>N</sup> is valuable in considering these issues. First, the approach places human diversity and individuality at the center of any evaluative framework. Again, the individual is an end in and of herself, and the evaluation unit is the individual. Second, she asserts that the approach is aligned with the political demands of the disabled for participation, access, and voice in determining the conditions of their lives. Like Nussbaum, Terzi argues that the CA<sup>N</sup> leads to the prioritization of inclusion to the greatest

degree feasible. The harm caused by exclusion in this argument is “morally untenable in that it evidently breeches the entitlement to equal respect of some individuals, namely those who are excluded” (2005a:217). Terzi concludes that the CA<sup>N</sup> provides a lens through which we can consider the policies, practices, and funding for education of children with special educational needs. Because it offers a “a relational focus on what individuals are able to do and be in their particular social and political contexts” (Hedge & MacKenzie, 2012:329), the CA<sup>N</sup> can be a powerful tool for considering what students need. And as I will argue further in Chapter Six, its applicability for students with special needs means that it is applicable for all students.

Within the context of special education in the United States (as defined by *IDEA*), the provision of appropriate environments and services has been characterized by a tension that has pitted the needs of students with identified special educational needs and those who have not been so identified. In this view, the inclusion of students with special educational needs is often seen as being to the detriment of other students (Kleinhammer-Tramill, Burrello & Sailor, 2013). But it is not only the non-special education student who can be harmed by a poorly managed “inclusive” placement (Hedge and MacKenzie, 2012). Within this discussion the CA<sup>N</sup> is offered up as framework for a comprehensive reconceptualization of special education in the United States to a

temporally-bounded instructional support system for any student in the public schools who might need support to achieve his or her full capabilities. (Kleinhammer-Tramill, Burrello & Sailor, 2013:3)

Without addressing either the legal implications of such a policy shift (it would not be allowed under current *IDEA* regulations), I suggest, is an important articulation of what the CA<sup>N</sup> can offer consideration of education policy and practice. Similarly, Glassman (2011) proposed that the CA<sup>N</sup> should be the underlying principle of the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. This, he suggests, would

represent a move away from static, generalised testing and national and international comparisons, and towards an emphasis on meeting the needs of individual learners. (2011:162)

While this recommendation did not come to fruition, the name given to the current iteration - the *Every Student Succeeds Act* - might be seen as a tiny step toward an education paradigm that is focused both on the individual learner and her success.

In this section, I have set out to consider the application of the Capabilities Approach within education and addressed the framework proposed by Unterhalter (2013) for considering capabilities, education, and social justice. In the next section, I will turn to the middle layer of my metaphorical quilt—the Whole Child Approach (and related ideas of the whole child). These are significant elements in education discourse within the United States and, I suggest, can be seen as containing elements of the CA<sup>N</sup>. The subsequent section will explore the relationship between the two approaches.

## **2.5 The Whole Child Approach**

Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that the Whole Child Approach and the related concept of the whole child can be seen as containing elements of the CA<sup>N</sup> when looked at within the context of the U.S. education system. The whole child concept is not unique to the United States; however, my consideration of it is focused on its use in the United States. As described earlier in this chapter, the term “whole child” seems to have become more visible in United States education discourse since the publication of an article by Nel Noddings in 2005 (although earlier references can be found). Noddings asks, “What does it mean to educate the whole child?” In another publication that same year, her response was situated within her ideas of care and caring in schools. Noddings states, “In a democratic society, schools must go beyond teaching fundamental skills” (2005b:3). This article appeared within a context of response and counter-response to *No Child Left Behind*, which had been in place for four years. While Noddings agrees with critics who described *NCLB* as an unfunded mandate on states, districts, and schools that relied too much on testing, she argued that this was an insufficient position. Rather, she asserted, educators, parents, and policymakers should be questioning what the aims of education are and how can/do public schools serve a society that sees itself as democratic.

Noddings proposes that the answers to these questions are rooted in the idea of nurturing a well-rounded student through education that promotes not just test scores but also, among other things, health, vocation, ethical character, and happiness. She says that these are not things that can be measured by learning objectives but rather are fostered in the types of environment and pedagogy that are adopted. These are also things that require the school to interact with other institutions and systems, such as health care, faith communities, and even the private sector. As Noddings writes, “The massive human problems of society demand holistic treatment” (2005b:5). While Nussbaum and Noddings approach the issues very differently, they share a commitment to liberal education, with Nussbaum proposing

that her CA<sup>N</sup> is directly linked to the aims of such an education and Noddings describing what the ideal education system in a democracy should do, with an emphasis on active opportunities to practice care and be cared for.

But what does Noddings mean by the term “whole child”? First, she means that students are to be seen as “whole persons” (2005b:8), not student numbers. As a person, each student has physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs that must be addressed and nurtured, not through a learning objective but through a learning environment that fosters these needs and pedagogy that allows for exploration, creativity, and sensitivity. As I will discuss further in Chapter Five, these were views that some of the participants expressed in response to a question about what the idea of the whole child meant to them.

It is from Noddings’s view, with input from many others, that ASCD developed its formal framework, the Whole Child Approach. After I outline the formal approach, I will then turn back to other uses of the term “whole child” before moving on to an expanded examination of the relationship between the Whole Child Approach and the Capabilities Approach. After this article (Noddings, 2005b) appeared, ASCD convened education stakeholders through a variety of venues, including its annual meetings, small group discussions, and policy roundtables.<sup>21</sup> From that process, they developed five policy tenets, called the Whole Child Approach, that were designed to describe

an effort to transition from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and success of all children. (ASCD, n.d.)

These tenets, released in 2007, are:

1. Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.
2. Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.
3. Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.
4. Each student has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults.
5. Each student is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or

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<sup>21</sup> At this time, I was working for the Council of Chief State School Officers and participated in some of these discussions.

further study and for employment and participation in a global environment.

(ASDC, n.d.)

As the largest voluntary education membership organization in education in the United States, ASCD has no formal role in policymaking. However, it can use its size and reach to influence and inform educators and education policymakers at all levels. Since the release of the tenets, ASCD has sought to promote them through technical assistance grants to school districts, recognition programs, and partnerships with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention<sup>22</sup> (focused on the first tenet). And last year the Ohio Department of Education (2018) placed the ideas of the whole child front and center, citing ASCD's approach, in its five-year strategic plan. One organization that has embraced the idea of the whole child is the National Education Association (NEA), particularly in relation to the work of ESPs. As I will explore further in the next chapter, meeting the needs of the whole child is a central element of the construction of ESP identity from the nine disparate job categories.<sup>23</sup> NEA finds a role for each of the ESP job categories in achieving one or more of the tenets of the ASCD approach (Brinkley et al., 2015). I will return to the question of how ESPs themselves understand the whole child in Chapter Five.

The adoption of a formal set of tenets does not mean that the term “whole child” is not used in other ways. Before moving to examining the relationship between the CA<sup>N</sup> and the Whole Child Approach, I will explore a few examples from the research literature and from popular use that, I believe, exemplify common understandings of the term “whole child”. What these applications of whole child share is the idea that the child in school is more than just her academic performance. This idea is particularly linked in some of the research literature to meeting the needs of students from low-income families. For example, in writing about the federally funded Head Start program, Zigler & Bishop-Joseff (2010) titled one chapter “The Cognitive Child Versus the Whole Child: Lessons from 40 Years of Head Start.”<sup>24</sup>

Martin, Fergus, & Noguera (2010:196 ), exploring the conditions that created a highly successful, high poverty school serving mostly immigrant students, focused on the school's

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<sup>22</sup> This partnership led to the creation of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child framework for school health.

<sup>23</sup> NEA also uses the phrase “whole student”. However, much of their material is drawn directly from ASCD, and the use of the term “student” instead of “child” is in response to the concerns of their members who work in post-secondary education and do not see the young adults they work with reflected in the term “child”.

<sup>24</sup> Head Start is a federally funded program that promotes school readiness of children under five from low-income families through education, health, social, and other services.

transformation to a “full-service community school.”<sup>25</sup> In engaging with school staff, families, and community partners to explore what had led to the school’s success, they received the repeated response, “To meet the needs of the whole child” (2010:205). Meeting these needs was equated with the wrap-around services of the community school and the enrichment programs in the arts and related areas that were part of the school’s basic fabric of operation. Also included in this understanding of meeting the needs of the whole child were the school’s core values of “respect, responsibility, tolerance, and kindness” (2010:213). At the heart of the school community’s use of the phrase “whole child” appears to be the ideas that the child is again more than her academic achievements and that students should receive supporting services, such as health and enrichment in the arts.

In examining another high-performing, high-poverty school with primarily African American students, Wiggan and Watson (2016) use the concept of the whole child to describe a set of pedagogical and cultural practices that they identify as the belief that “it takes a village” (782). This belief includes using culturally responsive teaching practices, building cultural connections, and focusing explicitly on character development. In this case, too, the idea of educating the whole child is identified by staff as the reason for these practices. The village that is required to meet the needs of the whole child includes community partners that offer a variety of enrichment opportunities, including art, music, drama, chess, and science. In this research, as in the study above, the authors report a school-wide identification with the idea of supporting the whole child through holistic approaches.

One of the most recent examples of the use of the term whole child is the announcement by U.S. basketball superstar LeBron James of the funding of a new public school in his hometown of Akron, Ohio. The I Promise School is designed to particularly meet the needs of students who have been failing in other school settings. The school’s master plan says,

The I Promise School will accelerate students’ growth using a model that includes rigorous problem-based, inquiry-oriented learning with an equal balance of social emotional supports and trauma-informed practices to educate the whole child. The I Promise School also incorporates specific

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<sup>25</sup> Community schools, sometimes referred to as full-service schools, provide students with access to a range of services such as mental health, social work, and after-school programs through partnerships with other agencies and community groups. They include opportunities for extended school days and often offer adult education or other services to families.

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
strategies to engage family and community partners into the educational  
ecosystem. (I Promise School, 2017:4)

While there are these more publicized, more visible uses of the term whole child, the term is also used broadly and with multiple meanings in general discourse about education and schools. When starting this research, I set up a Google News alert that provided me with a daily summary of news articles in English that used the term “whole child”. To illustrate the multiplicity of meanings, I selected three days in May 2018 (as I was first writing this section) and identified the following usages of the term “whole child”:

- The whole child as a focus on health and wellness: “The school gardens and plans for freshly made school lunches are part of the district’s philosophy of focusing on the needs of the whole child” (Emerson, 2018).
- The whole child as focusing on the arts: “During the candidate interviews that eventually led to her being named superintendent of the Duval County Public Schools, Diane Greene made a strong statement in support of arts education as essential in educating the whole child” (Hyatt, 2018).
- The whole child as offering education that is student-centered: “From my perspective in visiting other districts across the country through my work with a variety of national organizations, I believe Park City School District keeps its students at the center of key decisions, and models whole-child practice” (Jill Gildea, quoted in Cortez, 2018).
- The whole child as dealing with emotional health, trauma, and adverse childhood experiences: “So this is a way for us to help in our role as counselors and social workers and looking at the whole child. It will help them to be more successful academically, which is what the focus has been” (a school counselor quoted in Wilson, 2018).
- The whole child as including religion and faith in education: “It’s the Catholic school mission to educate the whole child, infusing religion across all subjects” (parent seeking to open a new school quoted in Smith, 2018).

With the idea of the whole child encompassing so many elements, some of which resemble Nussbaum’s capabilities or elements of ASCD’s five tenets, it can be difficult to know what is meant in the usage. It can be a term where both the user and the hearer think they understand what is meant within a specific context, yet their understandings may be very different. The Whole Child Approach offers one path to specificity. Examining the Whole

Child Approach through the lens of the CA<sup>N</sup> may allow for more specificity and a contextual response to the demands of policymaking and implementation.

## **2.6 Relationship Between the Capabilities Approach and the Whole Child Approach**

What might an explication of the relationship between the CA<sup>N</sup> and the Whole Child Approach help us do in considering education and schools? I suggest that it can help to address the question raised by Dadvand and Cuervo (2018) regarding what the pedagogy of care looks like, not in the schools described by Noddings, but in what Dadvand and Cuervo refer to as “performative schools”. (I interpret this term to mean schools operating in the type of high-stakes, test-based accountability system in place in the United States.) I suggest that exploring how the Whole Child Approach, a policy framework, can be seen as containing elements of the CA<sup>N</sup> and can provide a way to think about the former’s operationalization.

In the performative context of achievement, the Whole Child Approach tenets might be seen as necessary only to the extent that they contribute to academic achievement. By employing the fundamental question of what people are actually able to do and by considering Nussbaum’s list of Central Capabilities, it should be possible to consider if a particular policy, practice, or program in response to one or more tenets is serving students holistically. As with Unterhalter’s (2003) critique of Sen, we can ask if a school is a place that supports or suppresses flourishing. It is possible to see in the Whole Child Approach a focus on the individual, similar to that in the CA<sup>N</sup>. In the Whole Child Approach, each tenet starts with the phrase “Each child is”. I will make the case through this dissertation that the ethically individualistic stance of the CA<sup>N</sup> with its focus on real opportunities can add to the policy framework of the Whole Child Approach, as well as support continuity when the inevitable shift in policy frameworks occurs.

One challenge in exploring the relationship between these two concepts is that Nussbaum is clear that her list is about the lives of adults. For example, she describes the capability of *Control over one’s environment* as including rights and real opportunities for political participation, property rights, and employment rights. These may not seem directly applicable to the lives of children. But this capability also includes elements such as “freedom from unwarranted search and seizure” (2011:34), which is a real issue for students in this environment of school metal detectors and police officers. And as I will discuss further in Chapter Five, this idea of control is one that resonated strongly with



participants, particularly in thinking about students with disabilities, including their political participation. To begin the explication of the relationship, I will now look at three of the five Whole Child Approach tenets and consider how various items on Nussbaum's list of Central Capabilities might be connected to them. I will return to all five in Chapter Six.

*Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.* The most obvious connection here is to the capability of *Bodily health*, which according to Nussbaum is the idea that a person is "able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter" (2011:33). In schools in the U.S., each of the areas Nussbaum places in this capability can be represented in the health program of the school.<sup>26</sup> The idea with this tenet that students should be able to both learn and practice a healthy lifestyle can be seen as similar to being able to have good health. School meal programs, which are offered in almost every public school in the U.S., are key to achieving good nutrition, an important part of the capability of *Bodily health*. This tenet can also be seen as connected to the capability of *Play*, which includes, in Nussbaum's account, recreational activities. The capability of *Play* can be aligned with the health aspects of physical education (which offers teaching and practice for an important part of a healthy lifestyle) and the play elements of recess (which can offer unstructured opportunities for physical activity). Additionally, this tenet is linked to *Life*, through the elements of health that can reduce the risk of dying prematurely or in such poor health that life is not worth living

*Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.* This tenet may be seen as containing the heart of the CA<sup>N</sup> in that physical and emotional safety are considered crucial to students' ability to flourish in school and achieve other capabilities. In the broad areas of physical and emotional safety, I suggest, can be found elements of the capabilities of *Bodily health*, *Bodily integrity*, *Control over one's environment*, *Emotions*, *Play*, and *Life*. Recent school shootings in the U.S. have highlighted the importance of physical safety in schools. The safety debate has also raised questions about what it means for students to have control over their environment. Does the presence of armed police in schools create a safer environment, or does it decrease the control that students have over their lives? What does it mean for bodily integrity or the

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<sup>26</sup> Reproductive health services are provided at some school-based health centers located in secondary schools.

emotional safety of students when 15 states still allow corporal punishment in schools (Clark, 2017)?

*Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.* This view of what students do and have in school can be seen as most closely linked to elements from the two capabilities that Nussbaum most directly connects to formal education: the capabilities of *Senses, imagination, and thought* and *Practical reason*. Active engagement of students can be seen as related to “critical reflection” (Nussbaum, 2011:34) about one’s life and learning. Additionally, Nussbaum describes the use of imagination and the arts that can also be seen as connected to the actively engaged student. The element in this tenet of connection might be seen in the capability of *Affiliation* through engaging with and showing concern for others. Indeed, through community service programs for students or community partnerships for programs, many schools seek to actively build community connections.

In this section, I began to explore how the tenets of the Whole Child Approach might be seen as containing elements of the CA<sup>N</sup>. I will return to this question in Chapter Five with the thoughts and voices of the ESPs who participated in the research and then again in Chapter Six, where I will propose a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach as a tool for policymakers and educators. In the penultimate section of this chapter I will offer a brief discussion of the ideas of policies, programs, and practices as they are applied in this research.

## **2.7 Policies, Programs, and Practices**

In Chapter Six, I will address my research questions through some of the options for policies, programs, and practices. In this section, I will discuss how I use each of these terms and, through an example from my professional practice, will explicate my understanding of them in the context of U.S. public education.

Trowler defines policy as

a specification of principles and actions, related to educational issues, which are followed or which should be followed and which are designed to bring about desired goals. (2003:95)

Policies are created by those in authority, whether at the federal, state, local, or building level, to direct how the education system operates and what those working in schools should do (Carr & Modzeleski, 2014; Trowler, 2003). Braun, Maguire, and Ball (2010) use

the term enactment<sup>27</sup> to describe what happens in schools after passage of the policy. By this, they mean that policies are not “simply implemented”; rather, they are “interpreted and ‘translated’” by those in the school environment. Similarly, in a discussion of reading policy in the United States, Coburn (2005:477) makes the point that policies, once passed, are reconstructed and reshaped as they are put into place. She argues that teachers make sense of policies “through the lens of their preexisting knowledge and practices” (477). She terms this process “sensemaking”, and like Braun, Maguire, and Ball (2010), she argues that what actually takes place in the school in response to policy mandates is always within the context of what has gone before.

In the United States, this policy enactment or sensemaking is often seen in terms of the programs and practices that are in place in the school (Dana Carr & Modzeleski, 2014). Programs are understood to be formal interventions that are put into place in response to a policy, such as a particular reading program. Practices are those things that actually happen, whether drawn from formal policy or from beliefs about what should be done. Both programs and practices can be seen as part of the policy enactment process, although given the plethora of policies a school must respond to (Braun, Maguire, and Ball, 2010), it may not always be clear what policy is being enacted. In each school, there is the formal or taught curriculum. There is also the hidden curriculum—in other words, all of the social and physical conditions of the school that support or impede learning. These are the things that students learn from—the way they are treated, the kinds of programs that are available, and the way they see adults interacting, just to name a few. These are the programs and practices, and they are as much a part of the experiences of those in the school community as the formal written policies and curriculum.

To explain how this might unfold in a school in the United States, I offer an example from my past work. The nonprofit organization I worked for oversaw a grant program designed to increase the number of children eating breakfast at school. This grant program was made possible by a federal policy that allows school districts that include schools with significant numbers of low-income children to provide breakfast free of charge to all students, regardless of income. The grant program provided financial resources to school districts to start a breakfast in the classroom program. The practices - such as how to implement such a program, who needed to be involved in planning, and how records were to be kept - were developed by each school in response to its unique circumstances.

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<sup>27</sup> In general, in the United States, the term “enactment” is used only to mean the passage of policy.

The federal policy was not the only policy in operation as the program was implemented. The state might need to enact a policy to allow breakfast in the classroom to be counted as instructional time. The school might need policies on how children who are late to school will get their breakfast. The latter is a good example of where there might also be no written policy and the school might develop a set of ad hoc practices. Regardless of the particulars, this is an example of how the policies that inform practices emerge from different levels of governance. For school-level practitioners, it is not always clear where a particular policy originates. And when a policy does not achieve the aims assigned to it, it may not be clear where the problem lies. It might be that the programs that are in place are in conflict with the policy or it might be that staff practices are out of alignment.

While much of the discussion of how policies are enacted or made sense of has focused on teachers, I believe that the same points can be made about ESPs. Braun, Maguire, and Ball (2010) acknowledge this by including teaching assistants and other nonteaching staff in their research. In a further article drawn from the same research, Ball et al. (2011:632) suggest that teaching assistants can be seen as “receivers” of policy. They participate in the enactment, but they may not know why or the context for the policy. Indeed, they may not be aware that there is a formal policy. When they are aware of the policy, they may see their role as seeking guidance on what to do, rather than interpreting or being creative in the enactment of the policy. In Chapter Six, I will return to the questions of ESPs and policy enactment and potential future research that might explore their role in it.

## **2.8 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter, I set out my terms of engagement with two of the key concepts employed in this research - the CA<sup>N</sup> and the Whole Child Approach. I also provided an overview of the relevant elements of U.S. education policy and the policy context for the state of Utah. I laid out my understanding of these two approaches, their application within education in the United States, and how they might be seen as related to each other. Finally, I discussed the idea of policy, program, and practice as a tool for considering a Capabilities-informed Whole Child Approach. In the next chapter, I turn to the other major element of this research which is the group of school employees referred to as Education Support Professionals. This will include an examination of how their work and identity has been shaped in response to the Whole Child Approach.

## **Chapter Three: The Creation of Education Support Professionals**

### **3.1 Chapter Introduction**

The National Education Association estimates that 20% to 30% of the staff in public school districts are not teachers, administrators, or other certificated professionals such as social workers or psychologists (Decision Demographics 2017). Rather, these staff belong to nine disparate job categories, and they provide everything from direct instruction of pupils to the maintenance of school buildings and buses. In 2001, NEA, which had previously referred to these staff as “Education Support Personnel”, shifted to the term “Education Support Professionals” (ESPs). This change was designed to signal that the work of ESPs could be seen as directly supporting students in their education. It was also designed to position as ESPs as equal professional partners to teachers and others in schools.

This perspective was reinforced when NEA adopted the Whole Child Approach through an active partnership with ASCD. At the heart of this partnership was promotion of the idea that the work of ESPs is critical to the ability of schools to achieve the five tenets of the Whole Child Approach (Brinkley et al., 2015). Since that initial partnership, NEA has continued to advocate for the professionalism of ESPs through increased attention to their capacity to access high-quality professional development and their role as active partners with administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders such as parents in setting and implementing school-level policies and practices.

In this chapter, I will focus on the construction of the ESP identity from the nine job categories and the development of professionalism as part of that identity. I will start with information about the nine job categories included under the umbrella of ESP. I will then provide my account of how using the term Education Support Professional creates certain understandings about the work these staff do and what it means to consider them professionals. To do this, I will draw on the work of Hargreaves (2000), which is widely used in the United States. The final major section of this chapter will explore the themes that emerged as I examined some of the previous research in the education field that I viewed as relevant to this research undertaking.

### **3.2 Who Are Education Support Professionals?**

According to NEA, there are just under 2.1 million support staff in the 13,000 local school districts of the United States; these individuals work in nine broad job categories (Decision

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach* (Decision Demographics, 2017). The table below provides information on the numbers working full-time in each of the specific job categories in the U.S. and in Utah and is drawn from NEA's *ESP Data Book* (Decision Demographics, 2017). It is important to note that not all of these ESPs are NEA members and this table provides a snapshot of the distribution across job categories all ESP nationwide and in Utah,

**Table 1: ESP Jobs in the United States**

<b>Job Category</b>	<b>Term Used in Findings</b>	<b>United States</b>	<b>Utah</b>
Clerical Services (secretarial, clerical, financial, and administrative support)	Clerical	359,462	4,067
Custodial and Maintenance Services (building and grounds maintenance and repair) <sup>28</sup>	Custodial	331,703	4,487
Food Services (planning, preparation, and delivery) <sup>29</sup>	Food Services	251,962	2,892
Health and Student Services (nursing assistants, health and therapy support, community/family welfare services)	Health	27,235	141
Paraeducators (paraprofessionals, classroom assistants, teacher's aides)	Paraeducator	763,247	8,333
Security Services (school guards)	Security	31,311	62
Skilled Trades (carpenters, plumbers, locksmiths)	Skilled Trade	36,671	169
Technical Services (computer specialists, audiovisual specialists, information technology specialists)	Technical	66,436	726
Transportation <sup>30</sup> (bus drivers, bus aides, <sup>31</sup> schedulers)	Transportation	204,162	2,158
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,072, 189</b>	<b>23,035</b>

<sup>28</sup> British term: “janitor” or “caretaker”.

<sup>29</sup> British term: “dinner lady”.

<sup>30</sup> In the United States, most school bus drivers work directly for school districts. When the work is contracted out to a private company, the drivers are usually driving an iconic yellow school bus. This does not include drivers of coach buses used for long-distance field trips.

<sup>31</sup> Some bus aides may be counted in the paraeducator category depending on the district's policy.

NEA estimates that nationally more than half of ESPs work at least 40 hours a week in their ESP job. Utah has the lowest percentage of full-time ESP workers, with only 46% working full time in their ESP job. Additionally, ESPs in Utah have the shortest average work week at 27 hours a week. Nationally, about 20% of ESPs belong to NEA, with smaller percentages belonging to other unions such as the American Federation of Teachers or the Service Employees International Union. However, nationally, most ESPs do not belong to any union or association. Across all of these job categories, the majority of these workers are employed directly by their school district, with a small number of districts contracting out some jobs to private companies. This is particularly true in areas such as food service and transportation. Nationally, the average salary of a full-time K-12 ESP is \$30,000 per year, and in Utah it is just under \$28,000<sup>32</sup> per year (Decision Demographics, 2017).

### **3.3 But Are They Professionals?**

What sets NEA's approach apart from the other unions representing workers in these jobs is the use of the term "professional" to describe them. By calling ESPs professionals, NEA seeks to communicate a particular understanding of their work and value. The audiences for this message are twofold. There is the internal audience of current NEA members, particularly ESP members, and potential members. For this audience, the message is one that challenges them to view their work in schools as important and tied to student success. The second audience is an external one of school boards, school administrators, parents, and others who are involved in the management of and advocacy for schools. For this audience, the message is that these members of the school workforce should be considered essential partners in education.

The view that these staff are professionals is not universally shared. I propose that the professional status of these workers can be seen as "essentially contested" as Hargreaves (2000:152) says of the how the professional status of teachers has been understood. As with teachers in Hargreaves's pre-professional age, the work of ESPs has been seen as a demanding but not technically difficult (Hargreaves, 2000:153). The ESP is seen a replaceable worker whose job is often tied to issues of order and control in the school environment. As with teachers in an earlier age, they are often seen as "only needed to carry out the directives of their more knowledgeable superiors" (Murray, 1992: 145, quoted in Hargreaves, 2000:156). Hargreaves argues that:

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<sup>32</sup> £24,040 and £22,437 on August 18, 2019.



*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
[g]iven the growing diversity of our classrooms and of students' learning needs within them, it is important to confront these images and discourses of professionalism that deny the difficulty of teaching. (Hargreaves, 2000:157)

In my view, these words and this view can also be applied to ESPs, and I will return to this idea in the final chapter. Additionally, the research gap I will discuss below is part of this pre-professional status. In other words, ESPs' work has not been considered worth researching. By identifying them as professionals, NEA seeks to move ESPs beyond this pre-professional status. In the next section, I will explore further how NEA has used the Whole Child Approach as part of this process of professionalizing ESPs.

### **3.4 Constructing the Education Support Professional Identity**

In the introduction to her translation of *The Odyssey*, Emily Wilson notes that words chosen by a translator to describe a group of people tell us how the translator views those people and how the reader is to view them. She cites the example of the women who work involuntarily in the household of Odysseus. Previous translators chose to use the word "servant", but Wilson chose the word "slave". Her translation choice positions the women differently in the story and shapes the reader's understanding of their situation and their limited personal agency (Wilson, 2018). So, too, by calling the members of these nine diverse job categories "Education Support Professionals", NEA helps to shape the understanding of others and the ESPs themselves.<sup>33</sup> What is at the heart of this evolution of identity is the idea that while the actual work they do, such as cooking and serving food, may seem to be the same as the work of a restaurant employee, it is not the same because its purpose is different. It is not just food preparation but part of a support system for students and their education. Its purpose is not just to put food in front of an eater but rather to nourish the child so she can fully participate in her education.

The development of this professional identity has happened over many years. NEA was founded in 1927 as an organization of teachers and administrators (administrators are no longer members). The first members among the jobs now considered ESPs were "Educational Secretaries", who became eligible for membership in 1967. Five years later, the category of "Auxiliary Personnel" was added to make paraeducators eligible. And in 1980, NEA added the membership category of "Educational Support Personnel", which

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<sup>33</sup> Of the three major organizations representing school employees, only NEA uses the term Education Support Professional. The American Federation of Teachers uses the term "Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel", and the Service Employees International Union just refers to them as school employees.

covered all nonteaching education employees and allowed them associate membership. Subsequently in 1988, their membership status was changed to allow them to be full members, and by 2001, they were transformed from “Personnel” to “Professionals”. This was followed in 2002 by the creation of a department within NEA dedicated to meeting the professional needs of those members; it is called the Education Support Professional Quality (ESPQ) Department (NEA, n.d.b). I contend that it is with the creation of a dedicated department that the ESP identity can be seen as fully institutionalized.

Following the release of ASCD’s Whole Child Approach in 2007, NEA started to use the language of the Whole Child Approach, culminating in an advocacy document released in 2015 with ASCD—*NEA Education Support Professionals: Meeting the Needs of the Whole Student* (Brinkley et al., 2015). The publication examines each of the five tenets, describing how the work of ESPs contributes to the achievement of each. It also contains examples of specific ESPs who have been recognized for work in each area. I suggest that this publication can be seen as the comprehensive statement from NEA of the relationship between the work of ESPs and the Whole Child Approach.

In Table 2, I have provided excerpts from this publication to present NEA’s perspective. It includes quotes from the publication as well as two examples for each tenet.

**Table 2: NEA and the Whole Child**

Whole Child Approach	NEA Says . . .
Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle.	<p>“Every day, in every public school, ESPs are keeping students healthy” (Brinkley et al., 2015:11).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A paraeducator realizes students are hungry over the weekend and packs food backpacks with her colleagues.</li> <li>• A secretary, in the absence of a nurse, makes sure that a diabetic student gets her insulin.</li> </ul>
Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults.	<p>“Every day, in every public school, ESPs are keeping students safe” (Brinkley et al., 2015:15).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A bus driver knows the proper evacuation and safety procedures for his bus.</li> <li>• A secretary intervenes in bullying to protect both the student who is being bullied and the one who is bullying.</li> </ul>
Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community.	<p>“Building relationships and treating each student as a unique human being is an approach in which ESPs excel” (Brinkley et al., 2015:21).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A paraeducator creates a garden for special needs students.</li> <li>• A custodian paints his floor scrubber as the school mascot and reinforces positive behavior through engaging students in keeping the school environment clean.</li> </ul>
Each student has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults.	<p>“Education Support Professionals (ESPs) keep students supported and may be the one caring and nurturing adult that every student needs to succeed. This support is personalized and unique to the student’s life circumstances” (Brinkley et al., 2105: 25).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A custodian starts a program to distribute coats and school uniforms.</li> <li>• A school secretary has toiletries for students who need them.</li> </ul>
Each student is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment.	<p>“Education Support Professionals (ESPs) keep students challenged by maintaining high expectations for every student. . . . ESPs can make those true connections with students that can increase their self-esteem and provide them with the confidence to dream” (Brinkley et al., 2015:29).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paraeducators create a website to reinforce what students are learning in the classroom.</li> <li>• A paraeducator works on the data team to support meaningful use of data to individualize student learning.</li> </ul>

### **3.5 Education Support Professionals in Research**

In the previous section of this chapter, I showed how NEA has created an ESP identity in explicit alignment with the Whole Child Approach. In Chapter Five, I will explore how the ESP participants in this research positioned themselves and what elements of the Whole Child Approach emerged as they discussed the ideas of the whole child and their work. I also noted that this view of ESPs and the use of the term Education Support Professional is not universally shared. In this section, I will turn to the question of how other researchers have considered ESPs.

As I noted earlier in the chapter, ESPs' status as "pre-professionals" (using Hargreaves's [2000] categories) can be seen as contributing to the challenge in finding relevant research to review. Confronting the lack of research, Conley, Gould, and Levine (2010) suggest that there appears to be an overall marginalization of the work of ESPs and the ESPs themselves that is reflected in a limited body of research. Researchers looking at issues related to school safety have noted the same gap. In work examining bullying and sexual harassment on school buses, Allen et al. (2003) and deLara (2008) make the point that bus drivers themselves are often left out of the discussion in how to address these problems. Similarly, Byrne's (1997) discussion of bullying in Irish schools argues that while much of the bullying in schools occurs outside the classroom, the efforts to prevent it or intervene when it occurs rarely engage the nonteaching staff.

Writing for school administrators, Conley, Gould, and Levine (2010) assert that despite the lack of attention in the education management literature, the ESP staff, whom they refer to as "support personnel", are critical to supporting students academically and beyond. They note that there exists an informal recognition of how these staff keep schools healthy and safe as well as contributing to school culture. For example, new teachers are told by professors and mentors to cultivate good relationships with the custodians and secretaries, who are, the authors say, often described as "the glue that holds a school together" (Maxwell, 2004:5 cited in Conley, Gould, & Levine:2010:311 ). The custodian is "a visible and relevant member of the school community, in part because he or she is present during the school day and at all events held at the school" (313). The importance of the relationships support staff members have with students, colleagues, families, and community members is positioned as key in their importance within the school. In terms similar to those used by participants in this research, custodians are described as "role

models” for students. Secretaries are often the first person a visitor to the school encounters; their interactions with families and community members can help to set the tone for how they or their students feel about the school. Paraeducators, particularly those working in special education, provide not only instructional support to students but are also likely to be the staff to whom a parent comes with concerns. Paraeducators are also often in places in the school, such as the playground, where students may find it easy to approach them with their issues and concerns.

In considering the research that has incorporated ESPs, there are a few examples in which the authors note the “obviousness” of including ESPs in consideration of the school culture and climate. Waterman and Burstyn (2008) describe a report on a Scottish anti-bullying program authored by Munn (1993). They report that Munn suggests that since support staff are often the ones to witness bullying, it does not make sense that they would not be part of trainings on appropriate interventions and responses. Byrne (1997) notes that the nonteaching staff are important parts of the school community because they are often in the places where bullying occurs and that any program that does not engage them is not likely to be successful. Similarly, in looking at a whole-school violence prevention program in a small “alternative”<sup>34</sup> school, Waterman and Burstyn (2008) found that the program’s success was attributed by the school administrator and teachers to the involvement of the entire staff. The support staff who participated in the research are reported as having expressed a great deal of enthusiasm for the school, the work, and the students, even though these students might be thought of as among the most challenging in the district.

The authors suggest that at the heart of this enthusiasm was the “belief that each of the students need their care” (Waterman & Burstyn, 2008:48). While not suggesting that the school staff had consciously accepted Noddings’s ethics of care in schools, Waterman and Burstyn (2008) note that caring was “manifested in a variety of ways” (48). Custodians described their work in terms of making the school a clean and safe place for learning because the students deserve such an environment. Themes of care further emerged as the hall monitors described how they tried to greet each student individually and positively. They “felt it their responsibility to get the students’ day off on the right foot” (49). Byrne takes a slightly different perspective on the idea of care. He suggests that the key to engaging the nonteaching staff (and others in the community that surrounds the school) is

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<sup>34</sup> In this context, an alternative school is one run by a local school district to serve students who had been caught carrying a weapon in their home school.

to “make them feel they are part of a caring school community” (1997:261). While he does not go on to say how that could be done, by raising this issue Byrne might be seen as calling for a wide view of care in schools that encompasses all staff and students.

Preventing and/or responding to bullying, violence, and sexual harassment can all be directly linked to the second tenet of the Whole Child Approach, that each child learn in a physically and emotionally safe environment. But it is not the only theme that emerges from the limited research literature on ESPs. Themes related to the tenets of support, engagement, and challenge all emerge in a variety of ways. The latter is particularly present in the literature on paraeducators who have an explicit academic job. (See, for example, Alborz et al. [2009], Blatchford et al., [2009], and Jones et al., [2003].) Health, safety, caring, and support merge in the work of deLara (2008). Among her examples is the instance of a school bus driver, realizing that a child was not able to come to school showered and with clean clothes, arranged with the school and the family to get the child to school early so that the child could bathe at the school.

Scott’s (2007) ethnographic study of custodians in three schools in a single district provides one of the most in-depth examinations of the work of a group of ESPs that I was able to locate. She describes the custodians in two of the schools as seeing themselves as “caregivers” and as “social-educators”. At these schools, the custodians actively participated in supporting children through simple things like opening milk cartons and also involved themselves with discipline. These custodians described part of their job as helping to teach children how to behave. One of the custodians in her study took the role of educator even further and set up an after-school reading program for the second grade. Scott notes that at the third school, which was the highest-income school she studied, the custodians did not hold these views. She connects this to the income status of the families in the school but does not report directly exploring this in her interviews with the custodians. She concludes that based on the multiple roles these custodians take on in supporting the whole child,

. . . all school personnel have the potential of serving as caring professionals who can assume Noddings’ ethics of caring. (Scott, 2007:254)

Another perspective on the work of ESPs can be found in a 2012 study by Bayat, who set out to investigate the “much neglected phenomena of school administrative clerks” (Bayat, 2012:64) in South Africa; these clerks can be seen as equivalent to school clerical staff in

the U.S. The administrative clerks play significant administrative roles in the schools, roles that can be seen as exceeding their job descriptions or their pay rate. In this work, Bayat (2012) employs the concept of “contributive justice”, which he defines as being focused on what people do (as opposed to what they get) to analyze the different impacts that the clerks have on the school environment. He describes three areas in which administrative clerks undertake actions that can be seen as contributing to justice in the school environment:

- Practices of “sway” (Bayat, 70), in which through their regular actions the clerks are able to influence the decisions at the school in ways that they think contribute to making the school a better place.
- Practices of pedagogic support, in which they seek to be role models for the students or to meet unmet needs such as hunger or the need for other resources.
- Practices of care, in which they seek to offer direct care to the students, such as when a student comes to the office sick and needs to be attended to.

Closely tied to the idea of care and the whole child is that of the ESP as deeply connected to the school community. If the school community is considered not just the building but also the neighborhood around it and the people who come into it, ESPs can be seen as truly part of that larger community. NEA (n.d.a) reports that 75% of ESPs live in the school district where they work. As early as 1972, Rafky described custodians as “a *major* link between the school system and the community” (1972:5, emphasis in original) through their roles as taxpayers and parents. Similarly, Waterman and Burstyn (2008) noted that many of the nonteaching staff in the alternative school came from the same neighborhoods and ethnic communities as the students. The staff viewed this as an important part of their link to the students. These connections were seen as valuable by the administrators, parents, and students, all of whom saw them as partners in the school’s work. Sometimes a custodian, who knew a parent from the neighborhood, would be the first person that parent approached when coming to school, and the custodian saw it as part of her/his job to help that parent connect to the right person in the school and to feel welcome.

As I will explore more fully in Chapters Five and Six, the issues and experiences of students with special needs arose as an important topic for participants. One group of ESPs, paraeducators, play a particularly important role in the education of these students, and there is increasing attention being paid to their work in the research literature (see, for example, Chambers (2015)). Most of this work focuses on paraeducators’ professional

development and/or on their role as part of a team providing services to students. However, as emerged during the focus groups, they are not the only group of ESPs working with these students, and there is still a research gap when it comes to the other ESP groups.

### **3.6 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter, I provided an understanding of how ESP identity has been constructed to define the work of the nine disparate job categories. In using the ESP label, NEA started making the case for understanding these jobs as more than a person who cleans or provides meals. By then connecting the idea of the ESP to the Whole Child Approach, NEA went one step further and explicitly positioned ESPs' work in relation to ideas of care that can be seen as related to those Noddings articulated (2005a, 2005b). This is not to suggest that the people who are in these jobs adopt this identity or that, if they do, there is a single understanding of what it means. Rather, I suggest that this adoption of the idea of care through the whole child is an essential element of the construction of the professional identity of ESPs.

While the research base is not extensive, the ideas of caring as expressed in the five tenets of the Whole Child Approach can be seen in the research. However, the gap that a number of researchers have identified makes it difficult to say that the understanding promoted by NEA is shared more widely. Rather, the research points to gaps in questions asked and voices heard, including the voices of ESPs themselves. This absence of ESP voices and views was central to the decisions I made regarding research paradigm and from that my methodology and methods. In the next chapter, I will discuss these in more detail and will return to ESP voices in the subsequent chapter.



## **Chapter Four: Paradigm, Methodology, and Methods**

### **4.1 Chapter Introduction**

In the previous two chapters, I discussed the three major components on which I based this work. In this chapter, I will move to the next phase of the research process, which entailed conducting qualitative research with ESPs in Utah. It is my intention in this chapter to lay out the decisions I made going into the research and to reflect on the process. The chapter will start with a discussion of my research paradigm and then move to my methodology and methods. In the final section of the chapter, I will set the stage for the data analysis and discussion of the findings in the next chapter.

### **4.2 Beliefs and Views**

I have made the case in previous chapters that the participants in my research are members of a section of the education workforce whose roles are not often considered and whose voices and views are not often heard in the various arenas where education discourse occurs particularly research and policy. As pre-professionals (Hargreaves, 2000), they are treated as if, and sometimes told, they are replaceable.<sup>35</sup> This absence is a significant oversight and a lost opportunity (Conley, Gould & Levine, 2010). And while I recognize that it not possible with one dissertation to change the world (or even the field), my professional engagement with ESPs in my work with NEA and its affiliates since 2010 led me to see this gap as significant and worth addressing through a small-scale research study.

When I started my career in education in the late 1970s, I was, like many of my peers, deeply influenced by Paulo Freire. Even as I studied to pass the state teacher licensing exam, I wrestled with the questions he raised about how to create humanizing pedagogy that was rooted in the experiences and knowledge of the student (Freire, 1970). As I reflected on my work since then, I realized how much of an influence this question has been on my career. In particular, his call for educators to truly listen and respond to those we seek to educate and engage (Freire, 1970) had a strong influence on me as I developed my approach to this research. I sought to develop an approach that would allow me to shape my research around the views, beliefs, and understandings of ESPs.

In seeking an appropriate research paradigm, I reflected on the critiques of the CAN, discussed in Chapter Two, paying particular attention to those who argued that the voices

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<sup>35</sup> For example, Susie a paraeducator in the District One group said, “They tell us, ‘You’re a dime a dozen, we can replace you anytime’, it kind of hurts your ego a little bit.

of those whose lives are under consideration should be heard in the identification of the capabilities that matter most in a particular context (see, for example, Robeyns [2003] and Walker [2006]). As I discussed in Chapter Two, these critiques do not mean that Nussbaum's list is not an appropriate starting point for engagement with people. Rather, they are, in part, about Nussbaum's method for creating the list of Central Capabilities rather than the actual content of the capabilities. Among the issues raised by these critiques is the question of how people in a particular situation understand the Central Capabilities and what that understanding means to them in their context. These factors informed my choices of paradigm and methods, including data collection and analysis.

### **Paradigm to Methodology to Methods and Then on to Analysis**

Denzin and Lincoln define a paradigm as the "net" that contains all of the researcher's premises (2000:19). Starting with this idea, I moved to a metaphor of a box, as I felt that a net risked losing something that would matter. I crafted an understanding of my paradigm as a storage box that contained four dimensions: the perspectives - epistemological, ontological, ideological, and axiological - that I brought to bear on this research. I understand the paradigm to be what shaped all of my choices in response to the research question, starting with the methodology. Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) note that while the terms "paradigm" and "methodology" are sometimes used interchangeably, the paradigm is what "sets down the intent, motivation and expectations for the research" (194). From these, I formulated a set of methodological considerations and selected the specific methods for collecting the data and then analyzing it. In attempting to draw a line from paradigms to methods, Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) note that methodology can be thought of as the overall approach to research, an approach that is rooted in the researcher's paradigm. They contrast this with methods, which are the forms, procedures, and tools of data collection and analysis.

In the next section, I will outline the views that made up my paradigm; in particular, I drew from what Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) refer to as an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm.<sup>36</sup> At times in developing my paradigm, I struggled with specifying a line between "interpretivist" and "constructivist". Ultimately, I would say that I have conducted this work within an interpretivist paradigm while being influenced by elements of constructivism.

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<sup>36</sup> Lincoln and Guba (2000) use the term "constructivist" to describe a similar approach; their usage added to my confusion.

### **Why an Interpretivist Paradigm?**

In this section, I will provide a brief overview of each of the elements that comprise the paradigm I have adopted. Epistemologically, I approached this work with the view that there was not a single truth that I was seeking to uncover. Rather, I saw this work as exploring with the participants their understandings or truths at the time we spoke and in response to the specific prompts and questions I developed. My perspective was that in the interactions between the participants, the concepts under consideration, and myself, there was the potential for the participants to create understandings of these concepts, particularly in relation to their work as ESPs. This creation may be seen as limited to the time during which we were discussing these questions. It is this element that, I suggest, can be seen as being influenced by a constructivist approach. Once the participants shared their constructions, I interpreted their words and images to draw some conclusions as well as to identify further questions for exploration.

Ontologically, I approached this work with the view that constructions of reality are shaped by the social conditions in which people operate, as well as factors such as race, class, gender, and geography. As people tell their stories and participate in the discussion, these factors intersect, often in ways that may not be obvious to the researcher. With that in mind, I approached this work with a belief that the construction of reality the participants shared in the moment was unique to each of them at that moment but that it was also constructed in response to each other through the discussion in the particular focus group. In reflecting on this, I realized that one of the limitations of my research method was that the small-scale nature of this research meant that I could not explore, beyond what people volunteered, how various elements of personal identity influenced their responses. It has been argued that exploring these different elements of identity is critical to truly understanding people's lived experiences at different points in their lives (Crenshaw, 1991; Walby, Armstrong, & Strid 2012).

Ideologically, I was challenged in the development of my research paradigm. I was drawn to a perspective that co-construction of research, including research questions, would have been my ethical ideal, particularly when seeking to engage those whose voices are not often heard in education research. Yet I could not find a way to make a truly participatory approach work within the context of an EdD program and the need, as I understood it, to be the definer of the research question and approach, let alone writing the dissertation. As I

will discuss in Chapter Six, I do believe that the topics under consideration in the dissertation are ripe for further research. Based on the positive responses of the participants, I also believe that that participatory research approaches could add significantly, particularly in consideration of questions of how ESPs are part of whole school approaches to meeting the needs of the whole child.

Consideration of ideology includes questions of how participants are viewed by the researcher. Varcoe (2006) notes that the researcher seeking to engage people whose lives are very different from hers is challenged to not allow her own knowledge and skills to dominate the research process. Varcoe describes how her work within a participatory action research framework required that she pay attention to how participants, some of whom served as active co-researchers, understood and interpreted the research questions and process. It was important to me to find an approach that offered me a way to demonstrate a respect for the knowledge of participants as well as for their capacity to engage with a complex set of ideas in the CA<sup>N</sup>, ideas with which I could not assume they had any prior experience. As I will describe in greater detail below, I chose to do this by providing a brief introduction to the approach and giving each participant a set of cards with a brief summary of each of the Central Capabilities. I then sought to have the participants shape that part of the discussion with an open-ended opportunity to respond to what I had shared.

Axiologically, what drew me to this work was an affinity for the normative values that underlie the CA<sup>N</sup> as well as the values of a holistic view of meeting the needs of each child found in the Whole Child Approach and related ideas of the whole child. Having worked with ESPs in Utah and other parts of the country deeply influenced my beliefs about the value of these jobs and the people who do them. As I discussed in Chapter Three, their absence from the education discourse leaves a gap in considering how schools meet the needs of students in equitable ways.

With a paradigm constructed, I then turned to the question of what methods and instruments I should use, as well as developing the ethical considerations and measurement of the “goodness” of the work. In the next section, I will turn to my choice of researcher-moderated focus groups that included participant activities. These groups were designed to create a structure for conversations between participants and between participants and myself. They were also designed to give participants the opportunity to directly interact

with the Central Capabilities. In the next section, I will describe in detail the process I went through in selecting the focus groups. I have sought to weave the discussion of the quality of the research throughout; however, in section 4.6 I will specifically address the ethical approval process, and in section 4.11 I will return to the issues of the quality of the research.

### **4.3 Choosing Focus Groups**

Focus groups have grown from a tool of the marketing professional into an accepted part of the academic research repertoire (Basch, 1987; Williams & Katz, 2001). Basch (1987) notes that focus groups offer a way to learn about beliefs, attitudes, and values that may not emerge through individual interviews as the group members respond to each other. In this section, I will discuss the benefits of focus groups, provide a brief comparison of focus groups and interviews, discuss the limitations of focus groups, and explain why I chose focus groups.

Focus groups are defined as

a small gathering of individuals who have a common interest or characteristic, assembled by a moderator, who uses the group and its interactions as a way to gain information about a particular issue. (Williams & Katz, 2001:para. 4)

Some researchers have suggested that focus groups are a positivist tool that is to be used to uncover “objective facts about the attitudes and opinions of the group” (Munday, 2006:95). I disagree with this perspective based on the views of researchers such as Easter et al. (2007) and Ritchie and Herscovitch (1995), whose work I will discuss further below. I also disagree based on my own experience using focus groups professionally to address a wide range of topics and with very diverse participants.

Within the small body of existing research involving ESPs, I was not able to identify any that used focus groups. However, in health education and health promotion (where I worked for many years), focus groups have been used with so-called “blue-collar” workers and/or less educated participants in ways that I deemed relevant to my work. The primary relevance to my work here was how these research examples used focus groups to create opportunities for the participants to discuss previously unexplored questions. For example, Ritchie, Herscovitch, and Norfor (1994) used focus groups to explore the beliefs of blue-collar workers regarding cardiac health. Through the shared discussion and interaction of

the group participants, the authors found that the participants constructed an understanding of heart disease and risk factors that ran counter to many of the assumptions found in the research literature about how blue-collar workers understand these issues.

Similarly, Easter et al. (2007) used focus groups to explore the experiences and beliefs of blue-collar Latinas regarding work and stress. While the topic and conceptual frameworks are very different from my work, Easter and her colleagues were seeking to learn from a group that, according to them, had been previously overlooked in the relevant research literature. While the authors do not provide detailed information about their methods or about dynamics within their groups, they do note that participant discussions helped to shape shared understandings among the participants (which the authors identify as both a strength and a limitation of the method). The authors make particular note of their conclusion that, as with the work of Ritchie and colleagues (1994, 1995), these focus groups offered the researchers ideas on new ways (to them) of looking at meeting the needs of blue-collar Latinas, including the need to recognize the structural factors such as low wages that were sources of stress for the participants. These are ideas that might have been missed had the participants not had the chance to engage with each other.

The importance of exploring and possibly creating shared understandings is stressed by Warr, who asserts that “collective narratives that are further flavored by the local circumstances of participants’ lives” (2005:200) offer a different perspective from discussions carried out one on one. The building of a layered discussion can offer the opportunities to explore convergence and divergence among the participants. As I will discuss further in the next chapter, I found that it was in the questions that participants asked each other that some of the liveliest discussion occurred. Participants also challenged each other to think beyond an initial response. For example, in one group a participant said early in the discussion that in her work as a scheduler in the bus depot, she did not have an impact on students. In an interview setting, it would have been up to me, as interviewer, to explore or challenge that view and that might have been taken negatively or been seen as me “leading” the participant. But it was possible for one of her bus driver colleagues to challenge her in a respectful and friendly way, putting to her that her construction of bus routes directly impacted student and staff safety. At this point, the participant laughed and, as the conversation proceeded, was very involved in the discussion, linking her work to supporting the bus drivers, who in turn saw themselves as having a great deal of impact on students.

However, focus groups are not without limitations and potential pitfalls (Jowett & O'Toole, 2006). Group dynamics may impede the discussion in ways that cause the views of the entire group not to be heard or explored. Differences in status or comfort level or the participation of a strong personality may lead to varying levels in participation (de Ruyter, 1996; Gibbs, 1997). A member of the group may have a view that is markedly different from the group and may not feel able to share it or to defend it if challenged. This limitation challenges the moderator to recognize what is happening and respond in ways that neither privilege nor stigmatize that view and/or the person expressing it. Conversely, Warr (2005) points out that while these differences may exist, group members, particularly if they are known to each other or see each other as peers, may challenge each other to greater clarity in ways that would be unwelcome from an outside moderator as in the example above. In this research, the members of each group all came from the same school district and knew some of the other participants. In none of the groups, though, did the entire group know each other.

Focus groups are, of course, not the only approach to gathering information through discussion. Individual interviews offer the opportunity to explore another's views through dialogue. They can offer the opportunity for deeper discussion and probing than may occur in a focus group (Seidmann, 2006). As I will discuss below, some of the small body of published research literature in which participants are directly engaged with Nussbaum's list takes the form of interviews, and certainly far deeper probing can occur when the conversation is between researcher and a single participant. So while both focus groups and interviews have value as research methods, I ultimately chose to use focus groups, convinced by the suggestion of Ritchie and Herscovitch that focus groups may lessen the sense that participants may have of being "researched upon" (1995:473) that can come in a one-on-one interview, especially if the topic or material is potentially new or unfamiliar. As I will discuss below, in the section on power, the differences in education level between the participants and myself was something I was acutely aware of and actively seeking to mitigate.

#### **4.4 Empirical Research and Direct Engagement with the Central Capabilities**

As noted earlier, one of the major critiques of Nussbaum's account of the Capabilities Approach has been the lack of direct engagement in the development of the list by those whose lives are under consideration. Nussbaum herself makes the case that there is an important role for debate about the list itself and about what is valued within the list

(2006a, 2011). However, that is not the task she undertook, leaving it to others to do this. In this section, I will discuss some of the work that has sought to use the list of Central Capabilities as the basis for empirical research.

Wolff and de-Shalit (2007) took up Nussbaum's challenge in their work exploring the idea of disadvantage. They used the Central Capabilities (and several capabilities they added, drawing from research literature on poverty and disadvantage) as the empirical element in their exploration of how disadvantage is understood. In this work, they used interviews, which they also describe as semi-structured discussions, to directly engage about the capabilities with those whose lives were under consideration, those who might be seen as experiencing disadvantage, and those, such as social workers, who worked with the disadvantaged. The interviews, they write, were designed to "examine our philosophical intuitions and theories" (2007:11). This direct engagement allowed them to explore with participants how the participants understood the Central Capabilities, particularly in relation to the concept of disadvantage. They describe their work as setting out to create a process of joint learning in which participants learned from the ideas presented and the researchers learned from the participants' reflection on their learning. By introducing the Central Capabilities to their participants, Wolff and de-Shalit offered them a new way to think about their experiences using terms or language that may not have been familiar to them. It is through the dialogue of the interviews, including questions to the interviewer, that participants' ideas are shaped. Similarly, in the focus groups I conducted, participants had questions to me about language, terms used, and Nussbaum's work in general. When I answered their questions, their understandings changed, and in the group setting, they informed each other as well as me as the researcher.

A recent dissertation by Wimborne used a similar approach with English students in post-16 education. In this work, he employs the Capabilities Approach to explore and understand if and how post-16 education can be seen as contributing to "preparedness", which

refers to the capability that young people have to live a life they have reason to value once they complete their post-16 studies. (Wimborne, 2018:74).

Wimborne uses Nussbaum's Central Capabilities as part of an interview script where he shares the capabilities as a way to introduce the students he is interviewing to the approach, gets some general reflections, and then moves to a discussion of the students' particular



experiences in post-16 education. Based on these interviews, he then creates a framework for post-16 education that is informed by the students' responses.

As I sought to conduct this research in a way that included the voices and experiences of ESPs, these two research studies were very influential. In both of these works, the researchers based their work, in part, on the interactions of their participants with Nussbaum's Central Capabilities. This informed my own approach, and I believe it contributes to the overall quality of the research (see more on this in section 4.11) because the approach I have taken has been successfully adopted by other researchers. Specifically, it contributes to the credibility of my work by increasing the confidence in my findings. It also contributes to the transferability of my work, demonstrating that the approach of directly engaging participants with the elements of the CA<sup>N</sup>, particularly the Central Capabilities, can be applied to different groups of participants in different contexts.

#### **4.5 Power**

In his discussion of interview-based research (including focus groups), Seidman (2006) makes the case that the interviews will be impacted by issues of access, hierarchy, and power. He goes on to argue that researchers cannot ignore this but must recognize and account for it. In particular, he focuses on hierarchical relationships, such as teacher-to-student relationships where, while access may be easy, the power that the researcher/teacher holds can negate the perceived ability of students to freely choose to participate. And even if participation is truly free, then the power differential might be such that participants believe that certain answers are preferred. In this case, my relationship with my participants is not and was not hierarchical, and as far as I can tell, I have no direct power in my relationship with them such as teacher to student or employer to employee. Yet as I developed the plan for this research, I found myself asking questions about the balance of power between my participants and myself. In particular, the differences in education level that were likely to be in place became an issue for consideration. I have an advanced degree (an M.A., with this research being part of the process of achieving an EdD.). According to NEA, fewer than 30% of ESPs nationally have a two- or four-year college degree or higher; however, 92% of them have completed secondary school. In Utah, about 30% have a two- or four-year college degree, and most have completed high school<sup>37</sup> (Decision Demographics, 2017). And while *Creating Capabilities* (Nussbaum, 2011) was written as a mass-market paperback for nonacademic audiences, the author and

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<sup>37</sup> The exact percentage for high school completion in Utah is not available.

her ideas are not widely known in the United States outside of academic and policy circles, and the book is fairly complex. For these reasons, I felt that I could not assume that participants would be comfortable with the type of discourse Nussbaum undertakes. Conversely, I believed that it was imperative that I not assume that they would not be. And indeed, as I will explore in Chapters Five and Six, many of the participants became very engaged with Nussbaum's ideas as I presented them.<sup>38</sup>

In a related possible power differential, I have spent the last 20 years of my professional life working in policy and programs in education and health at the national level. I have worked closely with ASCD staff, including those who developed the Whole Child Approach. I participated in some of the meetings in the early 2000s where the ideas that became the Whole Child Approach were developed. These experiences give me a level of knowledge about it that is very different from that of the participants. Many of them had heard of the concept of the whole child, but none of them referenced the ASCD Whole Child Approach (despite promotion of the approach by NEA and Utah School Employees Association).

The difference in education levels combined with this nonfamiliarity with the concepts and the limited time of the focus groups put the onus on me to create tools and approaches that did not exacerbate existing inequalities while also acknowledging power issues. This required me to strive to present the concepts to the participants in ways that would allow them to begin to interact with the ideas without a great deal of reading. This obligation to make material accessible extends to how I shared my findings with them. As detailed in my ethical approval application, discussed further below, I created a plain language version of the findings that all participants were sent via email at the address they provided in the informed consent process.

But the power is not only on one side. As invited and voluntary participants, those in the room hold a power to share or not share their views as they see fit. While I have to hope that the participants were frank and honest, I recognize that they may have chosen not to be for a variety of reasons. This might include language issues (at least one participant did not have English as a first language and she was among the more reserved members of her group), concerns about views that differ from the group (though the conversation was

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<sup>38</sup> One participant asked for the publication information for *Creating Capabilities* and ordered it online after the focus group.

lively and there were examples of disagreement), or the fact that some of the participants may just have been tired (all three groups were held in the later afternoon/early evening after work). Regardless of the reason, I was obligated to remember and respect the power that participants may choose to exercise, even if I was not aware of it.

#### **4.6 Ethical Approval and Considerations**

Prior to beginning the recruitment process for the focus groups, I completed the necessary ethical approval forms in September 2017. A copy of the approval can be found in Appendix Two. This process involved providing copies of all the materials to be used, including the focus group guide, the informed consent forms, and the materials for the activities. In addition to the issue of access to the materials in plain English discussed in the previous section, I addressed the issues of confidentiality in recruitment and data management.

Recruitment was managed through email invitations distributed by staff of USEA to three local association presidents, who in turn emailed them to their members. The USEA staff and the local presidents did not know who participated in the groups. Each participant was given an information sheet that explained the purpose of the project, explained the format, and noted that the focus group would be recorded and that drawings and other activities would be photographed. The information sheet and the consent form each participant received also explained that participation was voluntary and that participants could refuse to answer any question or cease their participation at any time. I also explained to the participants how confidentiality would be maintained using the numerical identifier that I would assign to them to track their drawings and images in the data management system. The identifier was a combination of a letter code for the district and the number of the participant on the sign-in sheet.

I also notified participants that if I heard anything that made me worried that someone, including the participant, might be in danger, I would inform the appropriate authorities. Participants were asked to maintain the confidentiality of the discussion, but in the participant information sheet, I noted that I could not guarantee this. In the ethical approval application, I noted that the topics under discussion were not anticipated to be of a sensitive nature. I explained that I would have available to me a list of referrals to local resources as well as access to the Utah 211 system (211 is a social services referral system that is maintained by the United Way charity and offers support in a wide range of areas).

Finally, the application also addressed the use of a pseudonym in the write-up and dissemination of the findings.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed some of the ethical considerations that arose for me in conducting this research. First and foremost was the need to demonstrate respect for the participants through the research process. As I described above, my axiological position of affinity for the normative values of the Capabilities Approach and the holistic view of the Whole Child Approach were what drew me into this research. These were coupled with respect for the work of my participants. Yet it was critical that this respect and my desire to center their voices not lead me to romanticizing them (Pendlebury & Enslin, 2001). My challenge then was to create a research situation in which participants had agency to participate as fully as they wanted to while maintaining my critical stance through my analysis and interpretation. I will return to these issues below through a discussion of the focus group process in this chapter and through my reflection in Chapter Six on the process of conducting this research.

#### **4.7 Organizing the Groups and Recruiting Participants**

Research conducted in an organization requires recognizing that access to participants is controlled by others. USEA generously made the commitment to support my work primarily with identification of local associations<sup>39</sup> and sites in which to conduct the research as well as assistance with actual recruitment. USEA support offered me what Saunders (2012) refers to as “cognitive access” to the potential participants; in other words, the access I had went beyond in-name only. One of the members of the field staff identified three local associations where local leadership was receptive to helping recruit participants. Using information provided by me, the local leader identified the location and time (within the date and time parameters set by USEA in coordination with me) and sent an email of invitation to the local association membership. At that point, the local leader and the field staff member had no further role in the selection process, other than also securing the meeting space and providing refreshments.

There are many reasons why participants may choose to self-select into this type of discussion. It may be that they responded, “because they have strong feelings or opinions about the research, consider it important or interesting, and so are willing to devote their

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<sup>39</sup> Local associations are school district level affiliates of the state association. Each is led by locally elected leadership. See Appendix Five for additional information on USEA’s organization and structure.

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach* time” (Saunders, 2012:43). While this may seem like an unquestioned benefit, it can offer a “skewed” set of views, particularly if the subject of discussion is seen as very controversial or provocative. But as with the limitations discussed above, this is one that needs to be acknowledged as such. As I have noted above, I am making no claims to the generalizability of my finding and believe that self-selection was an appropriate method because of the need for participants who were interested in being part of the discussion.

#### **4.8 The Focus Groups**

I conducted focus groups in three districts (which I labeled as Districts One, Two, and Three). The first two groups had six participants each, while the third had ten, amounting to a total of 22 participants. While I cannot be sure what accounts for the difference in participation levels, it may have been due to the particular schedule in the specific district. In District One, the group was held at the district’s transportation office (referred to as the “bus yard”). In District Two, it was held in a meeting room in the district’s central office, reserved by the local association president. The group for District Three was held in offices of the USEA (which is in the district immediately north of the District Three boundaries). (Additional information about each district can be found in the Appendix Six.) Groups were held in the later afternoon/early evening after participants had completed their work day. Each host venue provided drinks and some light refreshments for participants. As I will discuss in the next section, each group discussion was very different.

In the next chapter, I will share the findings from each group, including extensive quotes that provide a name and job category. To provide a sense of each group, Table Three provides information on each of the participants drawn from the participant data sheet each participant completed; names have been changed to pseudonyms.

**Table 3: Participant Demographic Information**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Job/ESP Job Category (If Different)<sup>40</sup></b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Louise	Paraeducator	One	Female
Neil	Custodian/Custodial and Maintenance Services	One	Male
David	Custodian/Custodial and Maintenance Services	One	Male
Carleen	Paraeducator	One	Female
Susie	Paraeducator	One	Female
Quintin	Custodian/Custodial and Maintenance Services	One	Male
Ken	Paraeducator	Two	Male
Olivia	Clerical/Clerical Services	Two	Female
Elizabeth	Clerical/Clerical Services	Two	Female
Tanya	Clerical/Clerical Services	Two	Female
Maria	Paraeducator	Two	Female
Nina	Clerical/Clerical Services	Two	Female
Sam	Paraeducator	Three	Male
Margaret	Paraeducator	Three	Female
Shula	Food Service	Three	Female
Tammy	Clerical	Three	Female
Tina	Custodian/Custodial and Maintenance Services	Three	Female
Emanuela	Custodian/Custodial and Maintenance Services	Three	Female
Cathy	Paraeducator	Three	Female
Kymie	Transportation	Three	Female
Rich	Transportation	Three	Male
Tori	Transportation	Three	Female

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<sup>40</sup> See Table One.

Across the three groups, five of the nine ESP job categories were represented. As I noted in Chapter Three, many ESPs in the United States are not members of any union. Utah is a “right-to-work” state, which means that even if a local association is recognized by the school district as representing a group of workers, membership cannot be a condition of employment. This means that, in any given school district, not all job categories will have members in the local association. This lack of representation from some job categories does add another limitation, and in Chapter Six, I will discuss how future research might engage with members of those job categories who were not represented in this study.

As participants arrived for each group, I gave each of them a copy of the participant information sheet, a consent form, and a participant data sheet. These had all been approved as part of the University’s ethical approval process (see above). I also asked each to put their first name on a cardboard table tent. Once all participants had arrived and participants had a chance to review the participant information sheet and complete the demographic information and informed consent forms, I began the group. I opened the groups by welcoming and thanking them. I then asked if there were any questions about the materials they had read and completed. I then reminded them that the group would be audio recorded, including while they were working on activities (this information was also on the consent form). After these preliminary remarks, I asked if there were any objections. This question was repeated once the recorder had been turned on. I also referred them to the participant information sheet to remind them that confidentiality could not be guaranteed. I then asked the participants to introduce themselves to the group. In all three groups, some participants knew each other at least slightly, but some did not. I believe that this may have contributed to the overall relaxed atmosphere of the discussions but may have also inhibited some people. These introductions also served to allow me to learn voices and begin to associate voices with specific people.

Each group lasted approximately 60 minutes and was a combination of discussion in response to broad guiding questions and two activities. The discussion outline was used and involved a combination of discussion in response to guiding questions and two activities (see Appendix Two). An outline of the discussion guide is below:

- Introductions
- What is the most important thing you do in your work and why?
- What does the phrase “whole child” mean to you?
- What do you think about the idea that schools should support the whole child?

- Activity: Create a picture of how you think your work supports the whole child.
- Introduction and reaction to Nussbaum's Central Capabilities.
- Which capabilities do you think schools should be part of creating and developing? Which ones do you think your job impacts? Why?
- Final thoughts.

In the next chapter, I will present the findings in the same order in which the discussion unfolded. However, in this section, I will offer a brief overview of the flow of the discussions. Following the introductions discussed above, each group started with the participants sharing what they considered the most important thing they did in their work. Discussion then moved to their understanding of the phrase “whole child”. This part of the discussion concluded with an activity in which participants drew a picture in response to the prompt “how does your work support the whole child?” I chose to use this type of activity, recognizing that while some participants may not be completely at ease in discussions, the use of activities such as drawing can allow some participants to share ideas and thoughts they may not otherwise (Ritchie & Herscovitch, 1995; Ritchie, Herscovitch & Norfor, 1994). As with the card activity described below, these types of activities offer a way for participants in group discussions to gather and share their views in response to a prompt. My selection of this type of activity was based on my professional experience. In 2016, I was part of a team working for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (MMS Education & Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2016) to convene a series of community workshops on the topic of healthy schools. These meetings included diverse community group members—including parents, students, school personnel, and community organizers—and were focused on the barriers to healthy schools and participants' ideas for solutions. To help maximize participation, each activity started by having participants write or draw their answers to the questions before talking. The group members then took turns sharing. This allowed participants to gather their thoughts before talking. The images were then used in a further activity to cluster related solutions and prioritize them. In debriefing at the end of the meetings, the participants indicated that they found the activities to be engaging and meaningful.

Participants in my focus groups were told that if they did not want to draw a picture, they could use words. In the first group, two participants did this, but in the other two groups all the participants drew pictures. These picture responses were then shared and expanded on



in response to questions from the participants or me. Some of these will be discussed in Chapter Five.

The discussion then shifted to the CA<sup>N</sup>. I provided a brief introduction to Nussbaum's idea of the Central Capabilities. I gave each participant a set of cards (see Appendix Three for the full text of each card). On the front of each card was the shortened version of the capability (as detailed in Nussbaum, 2011), and on the back was a shortened version of the definition (also from Nussbaum, 2011). Participants were given a few minutes to look at each card and ask questions. Participants did not have many questions initially, but as they read the cards and thought about the activity, they reacted to the idea of capabilities (described below). As I will detail in the next chapter, this discussion allowed for clarification of the explanation I had provided. After several minutes, I opened the discussion by asking participants for their thoughts on what they had been reading. In the final activity, I asked participants to look at the cards again and, working individually, identify those they thought schools could/should be involved in promoting. I will discuss this activity in greater detail in the next chapter but want to note here that participant reactions varied greatly, with some selecting just a few capabilities as relevant to schools and others selecting more. Three participants in two different groups developed a linked view of the capabilities that I have called a *Capabilities Pathway*. At the completion of this activity, participants were asked to leave their sorted cards on the table with their name card (and I took pictures after the group left). Several of these photos are included in the next chapter.

The discussion closed with a "round-robin" in which participants were asked to share any final thoughts or things that they felt were particularly important that they might not have had a chance to share during the discussion. While each group completed all of the activities, District Three was short on time, and the final part was rushed (this was due both to the large size of the group as well as the arrival of a couple of participants just before the beginning of the group). This, again, is another limitation to the finding and will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

#### **4.9 Transcription and Scanning**

Following all three groups, I transcribed each audio recording. Both the transcript and the audio files were uploaded to a secure computer (password protected). I then scanned each of the drawings and uploaded those. Finally, the photos of the card activity were uploaded.

Based on the recommendation of several colleagues, I used Express Scribe (n.d.) for transcription. This program allows for the variation of speed of the playback to allow for fully capturing what was said. I transcribed by listening to the recordings, with my field notes next to me. I typed what I heard, stopping and going back when necessary. Because slowing down the sound may distort some speech, I then listened to the entire recording several times to make any corrections in the creation of the first draft of the transcript. After completing the first draft of the transcript, I printed it and listened to the entire audio again, making corrections as needed. I repeated this process, using the field notes where it was not possible from the audio to identify who was speaking. My field notes were a running track of who was speaking, with a couple of words to note ideas they were discussing. For example, in the discussion of the most important thing about their job, the note would read:

\*Susie<sup>41</sup>: relationships

\*Louise: different grades same thing

Where there were long periods of quiet while participants were doing activities, those were noted. I made some attempt to capture the side conversations that occurred during these periods but was limited by the ability of the recorders to pick up the quiet voices of people at work.

While the above describes the process I followed in transcription, I want to reflect here on the process and decisions I made in this process before moving on to discussing the idea of the transcript as data. Transcription can be undertaken along a continuum with a naturalistic approach (every utterance is transcribed, and grammar is uncorrected) to a denaturalistic approach (in which elements such as coughs, interjections, and pauses are removed, and grammar is corrected). These two approaches can be seen as representing different views of language and the purpose of transcription (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). Depending on context, setting, or participants, these approaches can also reveal or protect confidentiality. The various approaches can also provide information to researchers in such a way that researcher bias may occur. Oliver and colleagues share the example of research in the U.S. with HIV-positive men who have sex with men, where transcription captured geo-ethnic accents that are often perceived as being a marker of poor education. These accents may also include grammar that may, to a non-speaker of that accent, change the meaning of what is said (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). In making my choices in transcription, I stayed closer to the naturalistic. I did this for several reasons. First, I was in

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<sup>41</sup> These examples use the aliases assigned. Original field notes have the participants' real names.

the room when these groups occurred, so a naturalistic transcription is what I heard, and the analysis is mine alone. In this instance, I had the opportunity to seek confirmation in the moment if something was said that was not clear. My second reason was that the discussion in these groups was designed to address what I thought might be new or challenging ideas. Naturalistic transcription allowed me to capture how the participants were approaching and, in some cases, struggling with these ideas. To have removed the hesitations and pauses would have led, I believe, to a loss of information necessary for my reflection.

Poland (1995) suggests that researchers conducting interviews and focus groups need to be cautious that they do not treat the transcript as the true data that neutrally replicates what was said and done. Transcription can add or subtract from the data (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; Poland, 1995; Tilley, 2003), particularly as it can leave out intonation that may indicate mood or intent (sarcasm, for example). I chose to transcribe the recordings myself and use that process to reflect on what had been going on in the room as people talked. As Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) suggest, it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the data, particularly as I built on my notes on who was speaking and (occasionally) adding clarification where sarcasm was employed in a way that would not be apparent to someone who had not been in the room. Transcribing, with its process of listening and listening again, allowed me to begin to identify the themes and the codes that would develop from the participants themselves. In this way, transcription was the beginning of the analysis and cannot be separated from it.

Once the transcription was complete, I uploaded the audio file and the transcript into the qualitative data management program Dedoose (2019)<sup>42</sup>. Dedoose is a web-based application, developed at the University of California, Los Angeles with support from the William T. Grant Foundation.<sup>43</sup> Originally designed to facilitate large mixed-method research, it can be used to manage the coding and analysis of multiple transcripts, pictures, and other materials. I will discuss below the benefits and risks of using such a program and how I chose to use it. I then scanned the drawings completed by the participants and added them to the Dedoose project I had created. Finally, I added the digital photographs that I had taken of the card activity. Each of the audio recordings and transcripts is linked to one

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<sup>42</sup> Dedoose is in ongoing development and as a web-based program, each version replaces the previous one. The date here is for the most recent and therefore accessible version.

<sup>43</sup> The William T. Grant Foundation is a U.S. grantmaking foundation. Its focus is supporting research with a particular interest in mixed methods focused on improving the lives of young people.

of the three groups, and each visual is linked to the relevant group and to the individual participant (by their pseudonym). I will discuss this further in the next section.

#### **4.10 Data Management and Analysis**

With the proliferation of qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) and its increased use by researchers, questions have been raised about the best practices with respect to both use and in how transparent researchers should be in reporting their use. The details of the software use are often sparse, and this absence of information can be seen as weakening the research through a lack of transparency (Paulus et al., 2017). In setting out criteria for best practices, Paulus and colleagues say:

Reports of QDAS must be sufficient to enable readers to understand why software was used, how and why it was used, and how effective it was.  
(2017:43)

They propose seven best practices for transparency that allows the reader to understand which software was used, why it was selected, and what impact it had on the research. These are explained in further detail in Appendix Seven. It is important to note here, software, while a useful tool, is not substitute for carefully considered coding, analysis, and in-depth familiarity with the data (Salmona and Kaczynski, 2016). As I will describe below, my process required me to assign codes, consider meanings, and interrogate what lay under the patterns that Dedoose revealed based on the coding I had done.

Morgan (1997) asserts that, as with other qualitative data (such as interviews), codes can be developed through approaches which vary from applying “a priori ‘templates’ to the coding to those that produce the codes through an emergent encounter with the data” (60). He notes that both are acceptable and that the choices made should be in line with the goals and paradigm of the research. With this in mind, I chose to use a blended approach. Initially, I developed two sets of codes, the first based on the ten Central Capabilities and the second based on the five tenets of the ASCD Whole Child Approach. The codes I initially developed were:

- Central Capabilities codes: *Life; Bodily health; Bodily integrity; Senses, imagination, and thought; Emotions; Practical reason; Affiliation; Other species; Play; Control over one’s environment*
- Whole Child Approach codes: Healthy; Safe; Engaged; Caring; Challenged

As I engaged with the data, several themes started to emerge in which participants

discussed things that did not appear to be aligned with either of the two code sets. I added these codes and marked the data accordingly. These codes were:

- Inseparability of the capabilities
- Holistic view of the whole child
- Fun<sup>44</sup>
- Values
- Parents/Families

Where it was appropriate, I coded sections of text using more than one set of codes, reflecting my interpretation of overlapping content. An example of a coded excerpt can be found in Appendix Four.

Morgan (1997) noted that, in considering the analysis of focus groups, there have been different views on whether the appropriate unit of analysis is the group as a whole or the individual. He goes on to make the point that while individual responses are the primary data, it is important for researchers to consider those individuals within the group context. It is important, he argues, to recognize that participant response may be, at least in part, what they are because they are given in a group. This was a particularly important perspective for me in the context of the participant discussion where participants' responses to my questions were, in part, constructed in discussion with others in the group. Additionally, the ethical individualism of the CA<sup>N</sup> requires me to consider each of the participants as an individual, not only as part of the group.

It is also important in focus group analysis to be clear in demarcating individual views and opinions that may be expressed in opposition to the group as well as those areas where the group appears to agree (Kitzinger, 1995). It is also important that the analysis consider the use of humor (if there is any) and questions participants may ask of each other or the moderator (Kitzinger, 1995). Kitzinger (1995) also notes that a robust analysis of a focus group should include examples of interactions, not just single responses. I will provide several of these examples in Chapter Five.

An additional issue raised by Morgan (1997) and Kitzinger (1995) is whether and how to apply quantitative reporting to the qualitative data of the focus groups. The latter argues that “. . . it is not appropriate to give percentages in reports of focus group data . . .”

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<sup>44</sup> In Chapter Five, I will discuss how the idea of fun can be seen as aligned with Nussbaum's capability of *Play*. However, at the initial coding, I considered it a separate code because it was first brought up as a deep personal belief about the value of a participant's work.

(Kitzinger, 1995:301). Morgan (1997) approaches the issue differently in discussing whether or not to count the occurrence of codes. While there are complex statistical analyses that can be performed on qualitative data, this is not the approach I chose to take. Following Morgan (1997), I used Dedoose to produce simple frequency counts of the appearance of particular codes and their co-occurrence. I used this count as a reference to remind myself where to look in transcripts and photos for particular capabilities and to help contextualize the frequency or infrequency of particular responses.

#### **4.11 Reflections on Research Quality and Process**

In considering the quality of research in this type of non-positivist paradigm, it has been argued that it is not appropriate to use the statistically driven standards of reliability and validity used in quantitative positivist or non-positivist studies (Lincoln, 1995). In an article that can be seen as laying the groundwork for ongoing discussions of what constitutes quality when qualitative research is employed, Lincoln (1995) describes the then emerging criteria as rooted in relationality, “that is they recognize and validate relationships between the inquirers and those who participate in the inquiry” (278). Later, Morse et al. (2002) asserted that it is incumbent on those who conduct qualitative research to pay attention to its quality during the research process and not wait until the research is complete. In the selection of focus groups, I tried to pay attention to several things to shape the overall quality of the work. While not in any particular order, the elements I identified were: consideration of the power relationships between the participants and me; how to use the activities to create opportunities for all participants to be active in the discussion; and the dynamics within each group that might impede discussion.

While there is debate over the use of the language of validity and reliability (Morse et al., 2002) or trustworthiness (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Morrow, 2005), at the heart of both approaches is, in my view, the researcher’s commitment to transparency and reflectiveness in her work. I have discussed earlier in this dissertation issues such as what factors informed my paradigm, my own position in relation to the participants, and ethical issues. I have sought to be as transparent as possible in this work, providing information not just on how the data were collected but also on the analysis and the analytic tools, such as the qualitative data software and the transcription process. Later, I will discuss the limitations of this work coupled with ideas for its extension, how my own professional practice has evolved as this work has evolved, as well as considerations for how the work might inform

professional education practice in the United States. I will turn now to the criteria for trustworthiness laid out by Korstjens and Moser (2018).

Credibility is the “confidence that can be placed in the research findings” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121). In reflecting on my work, I must recognize that while another researcher viewing the same data might draw a different set of conclusions based on her own worldview, I believe that I have spent enough time and thought with the underlying concepts and the empirical data to state that my findings and discussion are plausible. Additionally, I will share significant excerpts from the data in the next two chapters.

Transferability is the “degree to which the results ...can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents” (Korstjens & Moser, 2017:121). This criterion is reflected in the presentation in the Appendix Three of the focus group guide and the activity cards. The discussion in Chapter Six focused on limitations and extensions will propose how the findings might lead to other research.

Dependability is the “stability of the findings over time” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121). This research design did not allow me to check findings with participants as Korstjens and Moser suggest. And as I discussed above, my paradigm reflected my belief that participant views will change over time. Indeed, the process of interacting with each other and the Capabilities Approach is likely to contribute to changes in views. As an example, Rich, who participated in the group in District Three, asked for information on how to order *Creating Capabilities* (Nussbaum, 2011) and did so after the group. If he went on to read the book, it would be surprising if his views did not change in some way.

Confirmability is “the degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121). Again, different researchers, looking at my data and sharing my paradigm, would, I suggest, likely come to similar findings. However, because, as I have discussed above, this work is deeply rooted in my own professional practice, it would be hard to say that they would see it in exactly the same way. Rather, I hope that in taking the work as a whole, other researchers could follow the theoretical and methodological moves made and see how they led to the findings I present.

In reviewing these criteria, it was hard not to see this as a checklist of things to be considered after the fact. However, I see it as a documentation and presentation of issues that were on my mind throughout the research process. This leads back to Korstjens and Moser's (2018) final criterion – reflexivity - which opened this section.

#### **4.12 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter, I described the research process from creating a paradigm to analyzing the data, closing the chapter with reflections on the quality of the research. I have sought to show how my development of an interpretivist paradigm with elements of constructivism, informed the rest of the research process. The work was primarily interpretivist, in that it is my interpretation of the participants' words and images. These words, though, were constructed by them, partially in response to each other. Focus groups were selected because, I believed, they offered a way to engage a discussion that would allow participants to construct their ideas and responses as individuals interacting with other individuals. In the next chapter, I will turn to the participants' words, drawings, and activities to explore their understandings of their work, the meaning of the term "whole child", and their reactions to Nussbaum's Central Capabilities.



## **Chapter Five: Voices of Education Support Professionals**

### **5.1 Chapter Introduction**

In this chapter, I will share the voices and views of the Education Support Professionals (ESPs) who participated in this research. My intention here is to report their words and share their drawings and card activities. I intend to begin the process of connecting their views to the literature. While the focus group discussion guide was designed to engage the participants with ideas of the whole child and the CA<sup>N</sup>, additional themes emerged that cut across these topics. These included particular attention to and concern about students with special needs, a focus on families, and the need for students to learn the values that, in the views of participants, would prepare them for the future.

The first sections of this chapter will be organized in the same order as topics were discussed during the focus groups. The chapter will start with a discussion of what the ESPs considered the most important element of their job. I will then turn to their discussion of the whole child. While this discussion did not formally reference the Whole Child Approach, I show in this section how the tenets of the Whole Child Approach arose in their discussions. Next, I will turn to the CA<sup>N</sup> and the participants' interaction with Nussbaum's Central Capabilities, discussing each of Nussbaum's Central Capabilities in turn. I will then focus on the accounts of three participants who created what I have termed *Capabilities Pathways*. These narratives describe the understanding of these participants that achieving in one capability area could lead to or support achievement in the next one, which in turn contribute to a good life overall.

The next sections of this chapter will then turn to the other themes that emerged across the discussion. The first of these will look at the lives and situations of students with special educational needs. While I did not set out in this work to focus on these students, the topic emerged based on the experiences of the participants. In this section, I will return to Nussbaum's discussion in *Frontiers of Justice* (2006a), in which she argues that the lives of those with disabilities are central to the idea of capabilities as a partial theory of justice. The second of these themes was a discussion that emerged across groups on what participants saw as gaps in children's lives in the area of values and how they see those gaps as relating to perceived challenges or limitations on the part of parents.

I will close the chapter by returning to the discussion from Chapter Two of the relationship between the Whole Child Approach and CA<sup>N</sup>. This, in turn, will set the stage for the

discussion in Chapter Six, where I will return to some of the issues raised in Chapters Two and Three and reflect on how what I have found in this research has changed my understandings and views.

## **5.2 “The Most Important Thing About My Job”**

This work was premised on my view that ESP voices are not often heard in education discourse in the United States, nor is their work given much consideration. Participants in this research came to this table on the basis of a shared identity, that of Utah ESP. They came with a shared interest or willingness to talk about their work. Yet I could assume that there were also many things they did not share with each other. And although the participants in each of the focus groups came from the same district, I could not expect that they would know each other (see the discussion of this in Chapter Four). They also worked in a number of different job categories, and I could not assume they knew much about the work of others. A high school custodian may not have much interaction with a preschool paraeducator, for example.

With this in mind, the first discussion topic was designed to help participants feel comfortable in the focus group and to create a discussion environment in which I sought to make clear that I value their work and their views of it. Themes that emerged from this portion of the discussion included the idea of building relationships with students, fostering a love of education, creating safe environments, and helping students develop responsibility and values. As I will try to show in the excerpts below, these themes emerged in the discussion as intertwined elements of what the participants value about their own work. And even before any discussion of either the concept of the whole child or of CAN, themes that I suggest can be aligned with one or both of those, started to emerge.

### **Relationships**

Participants expressed the importance of their work in terms of relationships with students. In District One, Susie (paraeducator) jumped right into the discussion and incorporated her fellow paraeducators. She said,

*... [W]e think one of the most important things is a good relationship with our students.*

In a similar vein, Louise (paraeducator) noted that although she worked with preschoolers and Susie with post-high school special education students, they both focused on

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*

relationships and instilling “a love of education”. For her, having good relationships at school was critical to students developing that love of education.

Quintin (custodian) described himself as someone who believes in fun. For him, the idea of fun was at the heart of his support for students. He also saw it as key to creating a desire on the part of students to be in school. And he noted that it was part of his job to create that desire. He said,

*I believe the kids need to want to be there and if I can give them a break sometimes . . . some of the hardest kids, the teachers can't deal with them, but they can come and I can razz them or whatever, but not the teacher.*

This belief in the importance of relationships is supported by research. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes,

Research has shown that young people who feel connected to their school are less likely to engage in many risk behaviors, including early sexual initiation, alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, and violence and gang involvement. Students who feel connected to their school are also more likely to have better academic achievement, including higher grades and test scores, have better school attendance, and stay in school longer. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018)

In Chapter Six I will suggest that this research on the importance of relationships might be brought to bear in considering how to conceptualize the Whole Child Approach tenet of connections and its relation to Nussbaum's *Affiliation*.

### **Safety**

A second theme that emerged in this portion of the discussion was that of safety.

Custodians in Districts One and Three all said that the most important part of their job was creating a safe physical environment. Bus drivers and a bus scheduler in District Three also identified safety as the most important part of their job, although the scheduler was not so certain at first as shown in this exchange between Kymie (scheduler) and Tori (bus driver):

Kymie: *I keep bus routes economical.*

Tori: *She makes them safe, too. She makes sure we have left-hand turns<sup>45</sup> at signal lights instead of strange places.*

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<sup>45</sup> In the United States, a left-hand turn requires the vehicle to cross the road in the path of oncoming traffic.

Safety was seen as more than just a physical matter. Carleen and Tori commented:

*. . . [W]e try to make our room the safest place in the building. That they can come and tell us anything they want. (Carleen, paraeducator, District One)*

*In my training, I was told that I may be the first person they see in the morning and I may be the last person they see at night, so you want to make sure a child knows you care about him. (Tori, bus driver, District Three )*

Again, I will return to this theme later in the chapter, where I will discuss how this understanding of safety can be seen as linked to a number of Central Capabilities.

### **Responsibility and Values**

Among the themes that emerged across the entire discussion was that of helping to instill a sense of responsibility in students as well as helping to shape their values in positive ways as captured in this quote from Dave (custodian, District One):

*I try to teach the kids at my school to be responsible for their own messes they make and have them learn to try and keep their areas and their places clean. And they're learning responsibility, so that when they grow up and go to other schools, they know they are supposed to respect other people's property.*

The issues of responsibility and values were ones that emerged throughout the discussions. I will return to these themes later in this chapter to examine them across the discussions.

### **Feeding Children**

Across all three groups, only one food service worker participated. She was unequivocal in her view that feeding children who need it was the most important thing she did. While hers was the only mention of this issue at this point, it emerged during later discussions on the whole child and the Central Capabilities, where other participants noted the importance of school food programs and the people who work in them. I highlight this in this section because it was critically important to this one participant.

### **Money and Programs to Support Students**

This part of the discussion in District Two was slightly different than in the other two districts because four of the six participants did not work directly with students. Rather, they were clerical staff working in their district's central offices. All four of them supported programs (partially federally funded) specifically designed to address inequities. The other

two participants in this district both worked as paraeducators with students and their families through some of those programs. Ken worked primarily with students whose families were in crisis and with students who were involved with the court system in some way. Maria worked in the program supporting homeless students and also served as her district's Native American liaison. These participants seemed more aware of the particular funding and programs that their district had to support students than participants in other groups. For the four clerical participants, the ability to be part of programs that help students was the most important thing they thought they did. They described their work as essential to keeping those programs functioning and available to students and families. They said:

*I have funding that provides extended school day programs, before and after school, and extended in the summer. Those resources that I manage get down to the student as early as preschool and past high school actually.*  
(Tanya, clerical)

*So I work with kids who are "youth-in-care", and I basically connect them with all of these services because they don't know what they are and they are in need of them.* (Ken, paraeducator)

*I think my job is necessary to support directors and then in turn helps families, students, and other district personnel.* (Olivia, clerical)

This view of the importance of funding was also important to Kymie (bus scheduler) in District Three. She said,

*I make sure they qualify for state aid.*<sup>46</sup>

### **Links to the Whole Child and the Capabilities Approach**

These responses came early in the discussion, before I had introduced the concepts of the whole child or the CA<sup>N</sup> to the participants. I did not have any preconceived ideas about what their answers would be to the question of what the most important thing about their job was. From their answers emerged themes that can be seen as connected to the Whole Child Approach and the CA<sup>N</sup>. These include the themes of safety (which Nussbaum locates in the capability of *Bodily integrity*) and hunger (which Nussbaum locates in the capability of *Bodily health*). As I will discuss later, the focus on relationships can be seen as tied to

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<sup>46</sup> The state of Utah provides support on a per-student basis to help districts cover the cost of transporting students by bus to/from school.

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
ideas in the Whole Child Approach about caring and to Nussbaum's capabilities of *Emotions and Affiliation*.

At this early stage of the discussion, participants identified support for students as being linked to the particular programs that help students and their families, such as the school meal programs, Title I (which provides targeted educational services for low-income students), special education, and transportation to/from school. Each of these programs might be seen as helping to establish the "threshold level" of capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011:33), which Nussbaum argues a "decent political order must secure to all citizens" (2011:33). While Nussbaum does not discuss specific programs, other than *IDEA*, her discussion of the role of the public school system in securing the capabilities of students with special educational needs lays a foundation that I will use to suggest that her argument can be extended to all students. Nussbaum writes,

Still, it would be progress if we could acknowledge that there really is no such thing as "the normal child": instead there are *children*, with varying capabilities and impediments, all of whom need individualized attention as their capabilities are developed. (Nussbaum, 2006a:210, emphasis in original)

### **5.3 The Whole Child**

As I discussed in Chapter Two, the term "whole child" can mean different things to different people. In this section of the focus group, I asked participants to use the term however they might have understood it. In Districts One and Two, participants were in general agreement that they had heard the term before, whereas in District Three, none of the participants said they had heard the term before. In none of the groups was anything that could be identified as the Whole Child Approach mentioned. This was not unexpected. While ASCD is a leading education organization in the United States, it is not an organization that targets ESPs for membership. And while NEA has embraced the five tenets in relation to the work of ESPs, that is at the national level. Based on my own experience with national NEA communications, it is not surprising that those messages do not seem to have reached individual members.

Several of the participants expressed an understanding of the term "whole child" to mean a holistic view of the child and her life. They said,

. . . [I]t's their whole everything, their attitude, their relationships. (Quintin,

*As a school district, we care about the individual child, from the time they get up to the time they leave us. From are they okay when they come to school, are they okay when they leave us and go home. So basically their whole being as far as they are safe, are they learning, are they having equal access to things that other students have, and are we being fair? Are we treating them with respect? (Olivia, clerical, District Two)*

*I agree and the whole child and not just “we’re an educational system” and it’s not just “are you getting good grades?” We’re even concerned with their basic needs. Are they being taken care of? Do they have food? Do they have a support system? (Elizabeth, clerical, District Two)*

*[I]t’s spiritual, everything. (Maria, paraeducator, District Two)*

Sam (paraeducator, District Three) captured the holistic view in his picture (page 86).



*whole child juggling*

Picture titled “Whole Child Juggling” Balls read: Life skills, Emotions, Food/Nutrition, Cleanliness/Toileting. Basic Education

**Drawing 1: Sam, Paraeducator, District Three**

While ASCD does not address families explicitly in the Whole Child Approach<sup>47</sup> and mentions the community only in the context of students being engaged with the larger community, participants highlighted families and communities as crucial in supporting the whole child. This perspective was particularly strong among the District Two participants as exemplified below:

*. . . [W]hen you say the whole child, you also have to put in the family. We guide parents to resources, grandparents to resources. . . . It's not just the whole child. The whole child becomes the whole family.* (Tanya, clerical, District Three)

This understanding of the importance of considering families did not mean that some participants were not critical of them. Later in this chapter, I will explore the complex view of families that emerged. Some of the participants described families, particularly parents, as challenged to do the kind of parenting that participants thought they should. One participant said:

*. . . [W]ith my kids, some of their parents, they don't know how to be parents. That's why the kids are where they are at.* (Ken, paraeducator working with students in foster care and/or involved with the juvenile justice system, District Two)

As I will discuss later in this chapter, this view was closely entwined with participants' views of their jobs as including helping students to develop responsibility and other positive values.

As the discussion of the whole child continued, participants described their work in ways that can be seen as aligned to elements of the Whole Child Approach, and I will provide some examples of these in this section. One other idea that emerged here was that of the importance of fun. The Whole Child Approach does not have a place for this, but I will return to this below in discussing Nussbaum's capability of *Play*.

### **Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle**

As participants discussed both the importance of their work at the beginning of the focus groups and how their work supports the whole child, the idea that their work helped to improve the health of students emerged in several ways. First was through the school meal

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<sup>47</sup> In its partnership with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child framework for school health, families and communities are explicitly called out as two of the ten essential components of the framework (Kolbe, 2019).



*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*

programs and the provision of healthy food to children. This was brought up by staff doing a variety of jobs, not just the one food service worker who participated. Participants said:

*Every kid's got to eat, and not every child has breakfast in the morning.*

(Rich, bus driver, District Three)

*Creating a safe place for them, happy, healthy, a full belly.* (Shula, food service, District Three)

*The first thing I want to do is make sure the kids are in school and they (the school) provide breakfast, lunch. . . .* (Maria, paraeducator, District One)

*One of the things that didn't get mentioned is that we feed kids every day, breakfast, lunch, and sometimes that could be all they get, and the kids come hungry and if they don't get to eat, they're probably not as focused in class that way.* (Neil, custodian, District One)

Access to medical service and medication was also brought up as an important element of how the work of ESPs can support the whole child. Louise noted that it is not just the licensed medical staff who help to fulfil this tenet. She said,

*. . . [W]e also have nurses<sup>48</sup> who take care of their needs who then, let's say if a child needs medication, whether it's the nurse or the secretary doing that. The secretary, like you said, might be the first one a child goes to with a bleeding leg, so there's a lot of that in everyone's job. So just because your title of secretary doesn't mean you're still not helping that whole child.*

(Louise, paraeducator, District One)

One participant drew on her own childhood experience to talk about the importance of physical health in schools, taking up the idea that health cannot be seen as just treatment or medication. She said,

*Physically, well I remember, years ago, we did the "Presidential whatever"<sup>49</sup> and we had to pass so many sit-ups, pull-ups, and we had to do*

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<sup>48</sup> While nurses are not generally considered ESPs, many schools do not have a full-time nurse and may use a health room technician or certified nursing assistant, who are considered ESPs. In addition, other staff, such as secretaries, may need to provide some health services.

<sup>49</sup> In 1966, President Lyndon Johnson created the Presidential Physical Fitness Award, the name of which was later changed to the President's Challenge Youth Physical Fitness Awards Program. It is currently run as a public/private partnership with many schools still using it.

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
*all of that and you got some kind of badge. . . . So, I think, it's having*  
*programs that helps to make them... physically fit, but having fun, keeping*  
*your body healthy.* (Kymie, bus scheduler, District Three)

**Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults**

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, when participants reflected on the most important thing about their job, safety was front and center for many of them. In alignment with the ASCD tenet, these participants conceptualized safety as both physical safety and emotional safety. The excerpt below from District One is a discussion between Neil, David, Quintin (custodians), and Carleen (paraeducator). It shows how participants built on each other's understandings during the focus groups. They said:

Neil: . . . *providing a clean and safe environment for the students, staff,*  
*people that come to school . . . providing a clean school.*

David: *I was just agreeing with Neil, just having a clean, safe environment.*

Quintin: *We're maintenance, custodial, and the one thing is the building. . . .*

Carleen: *It's the same stuff, we try to make our room the safest place in the*  
*building. That they can come and tell us anything they want, anything on*  
*their mind. And they can have a place to chill out for a minute, even though*  
*we are running groups.*

**Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community**

In the discussion in District One, the custodians expressed their belief that it was important for them to support students in being engaged in learning. A significant part of their understanding was how they helped students learn responsibility for self and others. In the excerpt and drawing below (Drawing Two, page 90), David shares his perspective on his job and (as I will discuss further) his view of himself as a role model. He said,

*I try to teach the kids at my school to be responsible for their own messes*  
*they make and have them learn to try and keep their areas and places clean.*  
*And they're learning responsibility so when they grow up and go to other*  
*schools, they know that they are supposed to respect other people's property.*  
(David, custodian, District One)

- Teach value of cleaning up after yourself
- Tell kids of other things we do to keep building running
- Team work/(Everyone helps everyone)
- Be example

- Teach value of cleaning up after yourself
- Tell kids of other things we do to keep building running.
- Team work  
(Everyone help everyone)
- Be example

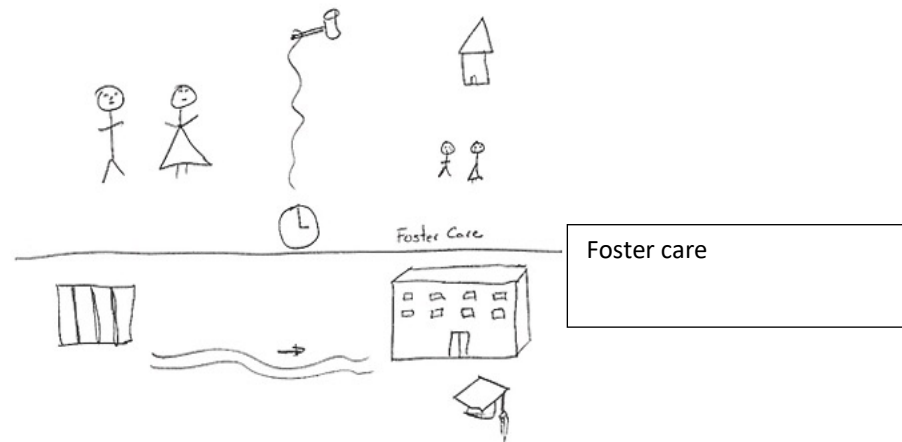


## Drawing 2: David, Custodian, District One

Similarly, Neil expressed the idea that the social context of the school and the relationships with other people, including the ESPs, are important to engagement with learning. He said,

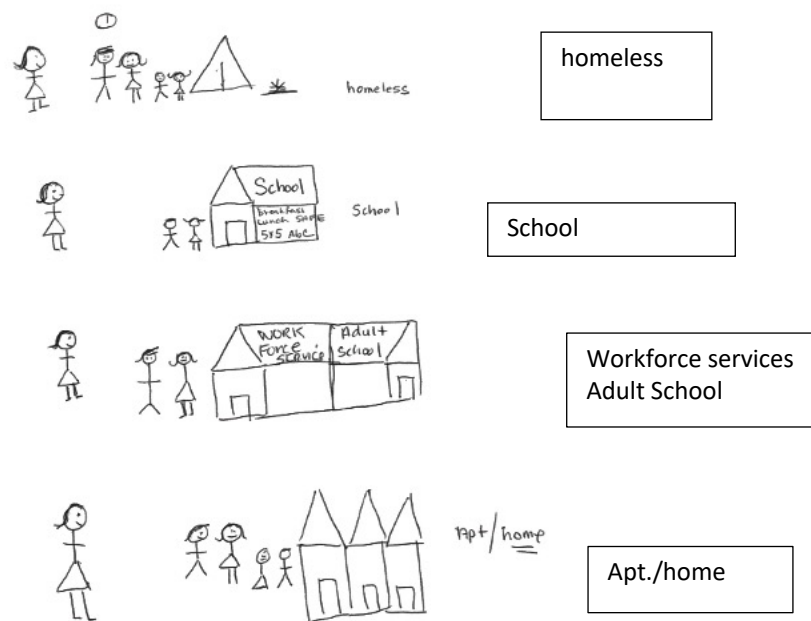
*I think traditionally kids come to school and they're like math and spelling and subjects, and there is so much more that kids can experience being in the classroom. There's the social aspect of being around the students and other adults and experiences they have. (Neil, custodian, District One)*

In District Two, Ken and Maria (both paraeducators) worked in programs specifically designed to connect students to the community and the community back to the schools. Ken's drawing (Drawing Three, page 91) and the explanation of it that he shared with the group shows his role in supporting students who are in the community but who may be lacking parental supports. These are students in foster care and students who are in the juvenile justice system.



**Drawing 3: Ken, Paraeducator, District Two**

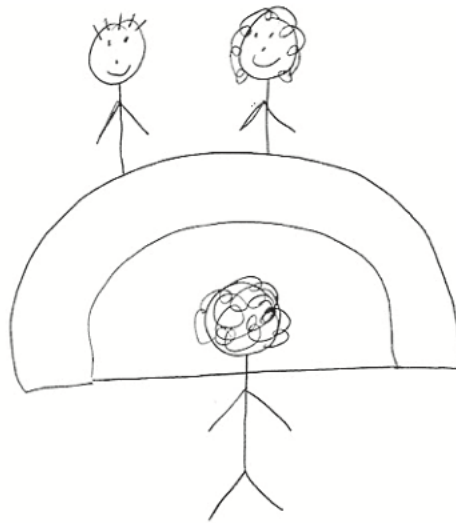
Maria, in her drawing (Drawing Four, page 92) and in her accompanying explanation, shows herself on the side, reaching out to families who are homeless, connecting them to programs at school, helping the adults get training and education, and finally helping the family move into a new home.



**Drawing 4: Maria, Paraeducator, District Two**

**Each student has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adult**

It is not easy to separate the idea of support from the idea of care; however, some of the responses stood out for capturing the idea of caring combined with support. Through her drawing and its caption (Drawing 5, page 93), Tori (bus driver, District Three) expressed her idea that support for teachers was support for students.



*Support the teachers who are teaching  
“the whole child”.*

Support the teachers who are teaching the  
“whole child”

### **Drawing 5: Tori, Bus Driver, District Three**

Quintin saw that his love of fun (see more on this below in the discussion of the capability of *Play*) allowed him to support students in a highly personal way. He said,

*You can see that I believe in fun . . . but I believe kids need to want to be there, and if I can give them a break sometime, be it at the lunch room or wherever, that “hey, you, now we’re going to let you slide on this one or that one”. But some of the hardest kids, the teachers can’t deal with them, but they come, and I can pass the or whatever. . . . So it’s the lives of the kids too, not just the building. (Quintin, custodian, District One)*

David expressed his view that as a man working in a predominately female-staffed school, he had a special responsibility to support boys who might not have men in their lives. He said,

*We’ve got a couple of kids at our school, you know at an elementary school,*

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
*it's mostly female there, so a lot of time the custodian and the principal are*  
*the only males there and there are a lot of kids who don't have a male role*  
*model at home. (David, custodian, District One)*

One element of this tenet that did not emerge for many of the participants was that of qualified staff. As discussed above, the pre-professional status (Hargreaves, 2000) of ESPs means that it may not be clear what constitutes highly qualified. While some ESP jobs have very clear training and certification requirements (such as bus drivers, who must have a Commercial Driver's License, or food service workers, who are required to take certain courses by the U.S. Department of Agriculture), other jobs do not have such requirements. Both NEA and USEA have identified professional development as one of the most important issues facing ESPs. One participant, Louise, did talk about how access to job-embedded professional development helped her be a better support to her students. She said,

*We just recently had a speech therapist in the building along with us. We just had a training on how speech and language really that it impacts their learning so much. And you think about the fact that if a kid, again we're talking young child, but any child, who doesn't understand a basic concept word like "next to" or "behind" or "beside" or these things then, they look like they have bad behavior because they don't know what the teacher is asking. (Louise, paraeducator, District One)*

**Each student is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment**

ESP jobs, other than that of paraeducator, may not seem to be tied to students' academic success. Yet participants in these groups expressed concern about how students will develop the necessary skills to be successful in life. Participants saw that they had a particular responsibility in the area of "soft skills",<sup>50</sup> such as responsibility and working with others. I have discussed these soft skills briefly above and will return to them later in this chapter.

One response, which stood out from others, came from Shula, a food service worker in District Three. Working in a high school setting, she expressed frustration with what she

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<sup>50</sup> Soft skills are defined as those skills that are interpersonal/intrapersonal and that are not technical. This includes things like communication, problem solving, and personal interactions (Grugulis & Vincent, 2009; Hurrell, 2016).

saw as a set of bureaucratic requirements that prevented students from developing important skills they would need as adults. In the extended excerpt below, she expresses her frustration and her perspective that these requirements are in direct conflict with the school's stated goals of preparing students for further education. She said,

*Well, in the nutrition, with the nutrition situation, where every child has to have a certain number of components<sup>51</sup> otherwise or they have to pay a different price or they can't have. In order for it to be a reimbursable meal, it has to have three components. Well, I think it's a wonderful thing, but I feel that once a child is in high school, they should be able to have that choice. And as long as we make those choices available to them. . . . We're preparing them for college and the real world, yet they can't make their own decision on what to eat? And it's a really hard thing. And as a cashier it's a very difficult thing. And the arguments. "Well, I'm sorry, but the only way this is going to change is if you write your senator". That's the only thing you can say, cause our hands are tied and it is a really difficult and now there's a new program, where we can't even talk to the child about money. We can't even use the word money, and these kids don't understand. And it's very . . . cause they want to pay their bill, but we can't even tell them how much they owe. And as a high schooler it's, these kids are very frustrated and very discouraged. "Have to tell my mom". "Well, you have to go on this site and mom has to call". And I understand the embarrassment issue. A child should never be refused lunch. They should never be embarrassed about. That would just be horrible. But on the other hand, if a child asks you how much, you know, they owe, so they can tell their mom, I also feel that they should be able to be told. They're adults, we want them to be treated like, to act like adults, but then we don't treat them like adults. I think there's a really difficult line there. You know, especially for high schoolers. (Shula, food service worker, District Three)*

This lengthy excerpt demonstrates, in my view, a complex view of her role in the enactment of two policies, each of which was put in place, at least in part, to support students. The policy on what constitutes a meal was designed to ensure that students receive a nutritious meal. The policy on payment was designed to ensure that no student

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<sup>51</sup> In school food programs, a component would be a food from a particular required food group such as a fruit, a vegetable, or a protein.



was shamed for not having money in their meal account. Yet in Shula's view, it seems that while the polices may support physical and emotional health and safety, they work against students' interest by not helping to prepare them in other ways for adulthood.

For some of the participants who were paraeducators working with students with special education needs, preparation for life after school meant more than further education.

Margaret (paraeducator, District Three) portrayed herself in her picture and caption (Drawing Six, page 96) as a person who is teaching independence, showing love, being positive, and showing security to students.



Teaching independence  
showing love  
being positive  
showing security

Teaching independence showing love being positive showing security
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#### **Drawing 6: Margaret, Paraeducator, District Three**

The need to think beyond further education about what preparation for life after school should be was also shared by Rhonda (paraeducator, District One), who works with older students. She said,

*. . . [W]ith my set of kids . . . if they don't know how to read by the time*

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
*they're 19 and they've been through, the chances are that it's not going to be the most important thing. If they can't write, it's not going to be the most important thing. So that's where you've got to switch over and get creative with what those skills that they are going to need. You know, to get on the bus. . . .*

The use of drawings helped participants such as Tina and Emanuela (custodians), whose first language was not English, to describe their views. Tina's drawing (Drawing 7, page 97) expressed her image of how she saw her work creating a happy place for students.



**Drawing 7: Tina, Custodian, District Three**

She said,

*Well, like a happy place, a beautiful place, but with still having rules that we have to respect. (Tina, custodian, District Three)*

As noted above, Tina was not a participant who said a lot. Her drawing captures a view that would be very common in Utah, a school playground with mountains in the

background. At the same time, there is a stop sign and road markers, which may speak to the rules. It is possible, I believe, to see this image as trying to capture her idea that part of her job is to help create a place for her students that is both loving and safe.

In this section, I discussed some of the ways that participants reacted to the idea of the whole child and how they understand the work they do as connected to this idea. While we did not use the Whole Child Approach in this part of the discussion, it offered a way for me to categorize their responses. Their views were expansive, with many of them seeing the idea of the whole child as one that is holistic and encompasses multiple facets of children's lives. It is this holistic view that sets the stage for the next section, in which I will discuss their engagement with Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach.

#### **5.4 Engaging with the Capabilities Approach and the Central Capabilities**

Despite her international reputation, Martha Nussbaum and her work do not appear to be well known outside of academic and/or highly educated circles in the United States. It would not have been reasonable for me to expect that participants would necessarily be familiar with her work. As I discussed above, based on this understanding, I sought to structure this part of the group to include a brief overview of and introduction to the idea of the CA<sup>N</sup>, using Nussbaum's words, before turning to the Central Capabilities.

In each of the groups, participants seemed eager to engage with the ideas. Indeed, the use of Nussbaum's language—that this is an approach that asks, “What is each person able to do and to be?” (2011:18)—resonated with people, as did the idea of discussing what it is that makes a life worth living and what a life with dignity can look like. This initial interest was stronger in the groups in Districts One and Two. Participants said:

*They are all useful. They could all be put to use somewhere.* (David, custodian, District One)

*It correlates with life.* (Neil, custodian, District One)

*It's all about human. It's about us. People, kids.* (Tanya, clerical, District Two)

This sense of affinity was not, however, universal. Some participants expressed concern that Nussbaum's account of the Central Capabilities as being required for a life with dignity meant that those who may not have one or more of the capabilities as described by Nussbaum (particularly students with special needs) are being somehow blamed for their

limitations. They expressed concern that Nussbaum was saying that these students are not deserving of dignity if they did not “achieve” these capabilities without support. This exchange between Carleen and Susie (paraeducators, District One) about the capability of *Bodily health* exemplifies that concern:

Carlene: *I don't know. That's why I wanted to talk. Susie and I work with special needs kids, so when I got to the health one, some of these kids aren't healthy and it's not their fault. It's not anything they've done to themselves, you know, they've just been born with syndromes and things that hold them back, or they're just not the healthiest of people. . . .*

Susie: *Cause what comes to mind with the bodily health, being able to have good health. It's important but. . . .*

Carlene: *But sometimes you've just got the genes you're given.*

Another critical view was taken by Tori who articulated a view that no one has control over their lives, so even if justice requires people to have these capabilities, they can be snatched away. She said,

*I think she's (Nussbaum) wrong, because no one has control over any of this. . . . I mean you're here and you do what you do but walk out the door and a drunk runs you over. (Tori, bus driver, District Three)*

This type of fatalism can, Nussbaum recognizes, have an impact in setting expectations about what a life worth living is like. She discusses this mostly in terms of gender, with women who are subject to extreme gender-based violence inhibited in considering what this type of life might be. However, Nussbaum is also clear that this type of fatalism must not be a constraint on the state and its institutions, such as the public schools, to develop and ensure capabilities. As for Tori, despite her skepticism at the early part of the discussion, she continued to participate actively in the group, and I will share below her thoughts about one of her disabled students.

This initial misunderstanding of Nussbaum's premise proved a challenge for me. On the one hand, I was concerned that the misunderstanding might prevent discussion of the approach because the participants were rejecting its basic premise and I felt a need to respond to them. On the other hand, since part of what I was seeking to learn was how my participants responded to the ideas, I was concerned that too strong a correction would tip the conversation toward participants giving the responses they thought I wanted.

In the first example, I responded by probing gently, asking Carleen and Susie if they were saying that other capabilities were more important. They agreed that they were and went on to say that they thought it was important that the students have the best health possible. And this perspective is similar to that expressed by Nussbaum in talking about children with special needs (2006a, 2011). In the second example, it was other participants who responded, discussing what the experience of the lives of children with severe disabilities was like and if they understood their limitations, whether this made them happy or unhappy.

During the open discussion on the Central Capabilities, participants had the opportunity to reflect on the full set of capabilities, including identifying which, if any, of the capabilities had particular resonance for them and which, if any, did not. Just as Nussbaum gives special attention within the CA<sup>N</sup> to the lives of those with disabilities, many of the participants focused their discussion on students with special needs. This included participants who work directly with these students as well as some, such as custodians, who do not. The inclusion policies required by *IDEA* (see Chapter Two) have provided greater visibility to these students as well as exposing more school personnel to a range of disabilities. As I will discuss further below, these students stayed at the center of much of the discussion of specific capabilities.

In addition to discussing the capabilities, participants took part in an activity where they were asked to prioritize, rank, or otherwise identify the capabilities they felt were most relevant for schools to be supporting or promoting. With the exception of one participant in District Three, all of the participants took part in this activity.<sup>52</sup> Participants took different approaches to this, with most focusing on what they saw as the most important capabilities for schools to focus on. Table 4 provides an overview of which capabilities each participant chose to focus on in the activity. I created this table as part of my analysis, using it to help me see possible patterns across the three groups. Had there been opportunities for follow-up with individual participants, this data might have served as a useful tool in exploring why they selected certain capabilities rather than others. For example, it stood out for me that while Nussbaum identifies the capabilities of *Senses, imagination, and thought* and *Practical reason* as most connected to education, a number of participants did not select

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<sup>52</sup> This participant had been very active during the discussion but did not offer any explanation of her decision not to participate.

these in the activity. Half of them did not select the capability of *Senses, imagination, and thought* and seven did not select the capability of *Practical reason*. At the same time, the capability of *Affiliation*, was selected by 15 of them. The reasons behind these choices would be worth pursuing in future research.

**Table 4: Frequency of Capabilities in Card Activity (Part 1)**

	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Bodily Integrity</b>	<b>Bodily Health</b>	<b>Control Over Environment</b>	<b>Emotions</b>
<b>Tanya</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Nina</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Ken</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Sam</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Quintin</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Louise</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Margaret</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>David</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Tammy</b>	X		X		X
<b>Neil</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Carleen</b>	X	X		X	X
<b>Elizabeth</b>	X				X
<b>Susie</b>	X	X		X	
<b>Kymie</b>	X			X	
<b>Olivia</b>			X		
<b>Emanuela</b>		X			
<b>Maria</b>					
<b>Rich</b>					
<b>Cathy</b>	X				
<b>Tina<sup>53</sup></b>					

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<sup>53</sup> Tina chose not to complete this activity

**Table 5: Frequency of Capabilities in Card Activity (Part 2)**

	<b>Life</b>	<b>Other Species</b>	<b>Play</b>	<b>Practical Reason</b>	<b>Senses, Imagination, &amp; Thought</b>
<b>Tanya</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Nina</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Ken</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Sam</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Quintin</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Louise</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Margaret</b>	X	X		X	X
<b>David</b>	X	X	X	X	
<b>Tammy</b>		X		X	X
<b>Neil</b>			X		
<b>Carleen</b>			X		X
<b>Elizabeth</b>	X		X		X
<b>Susie</b>			X	X	
<b>Kymie</b>		X			
<b>Olivia</b>				X	
<b>Emanuela</b>				X	
<b>Maria</b>				X	
<b>Rich</b>	X				
<b>Cathy</b>					
<b>Tina<sup>54</sup></b>					

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<sup>54</sup> Tina chose not to complete this activity



## **5.5 The Central Capabilities**

### **Relationship Between the Capabilities**

Participants had a range of reactions to Nussbaum's list. While some concentrated on one or two of the capabilities, others focused on all ten. For some participants, what Nussbaum calls the "irreducible heterogeneity" (2011:35) was what stood out. They said,

*That's what I like about these cards—they're all important. It's hard to rank them on a list of the most important. They could all be ranked together.*

(Neil, custodian, District One)

*. . . [I]f you take one these things away, it's harder to use the things that are available. . . .* (Rich, bus driver, District Three)

Nussbaum says that despite the "irreducible" nature of the capabilities, some will at some points or in some lives be more fertile than others. That is, they will contribute to the achievement of other capabilities. Similarly, and acknowledging the work of Wolff and de-Shalit (2007), she notes that the lack of some other capabilities may be particularly corrosive (Nussbaum, 2011). In considering what role the school could play, some participants expressed an understanding that, I suggest, can be seen as supporting a view of a fertile relationship between capabilities. They said,

*I feel like all of these had to do with school or they lead into life after school. That's why we learn to have these, practical reason and control over one's environment. That if you've learned everything, and that's the goal of teaching, is to be able to do that so you do have life, a quality life.* (Ken, paraeducator, District Two)

*I kind of put mine in a few different orders as I was thinking about what should the schools be supporting. And you know, mine was like life and play and the senses and the emotions and the affiliations, and then it all really comes together with school, but then the others are a big part of that, and as we talked the whole child and the community and the family, all the other aspects come into it also.* (Elizabeth, District Two)

As I will discuss later in this chapter, three participants in Districts One and Two constructed narratives of connection and fertile relationships between the capabilities across the lifespan; I refer to this type of narrative as a *Capabilities Pathway*. My

conceptualization of the participants' work, as I will also discuss below, borrows from Wright (2012) and her theorization of capability chains. However, before examining those pathways, I will offer a view of participant reactions to each of the individual Central Capabilities. These are presented in the same order as Nussbaum presents them and with the intent of drawing out how the participants themselves understood each. I also include in each of these sections a reference to the findings of Wolff and de-Shalit (2007).

### **Life and Bodily health**

Nussbaum defines the capabilities of *Life* and *Bodily health* as follows:

*Life.* Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length, not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.

*Bodily health.* Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter. (Nussbaum, 2011:33)

Participants linked these two capabilities very closely in their discussion, and to avoid redundancy, I will present them together. Participants said:

*I started with life, because without a start, you can't have an end.* (Tanya, clerical, District Two)

*. . . [S]chools should be supporting life, among other things.* (Elizabeth, clerical, District Two)

But the question of what constitutes a normal life span or good health was not completely unproblematic, as seen in this excerpt in which Nina wrestles with the idea of what constitutes a normal life span. As she spoke, others in the group, particularly Ken, were nodding in agreement. Nina said:

*What is normal? . . . When I thought of like Little House on the Prairie<sup>55</sup> where they live to like. . . . They died early because of the diseases and whatever, but we're in an age now where people live, but not to a normal life, but because some people live in a . . . technology keeps them or medical. So, I think, what is a normal length? Who decided what normal is?*

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<sup>55</sup> *Little House on the Prairie* was part of a series of books written by Laura Ingalls Wilder about her childhood in America in the latter part of the 19th century. The first book was published in 1932. From 1974 to 1983, it was a popular U.S. television show.

As discussed earlier in this section, some participants expressed some frustration that the CA<sup>N</sup>, at first look, appeared to diminish the value and rights of those with disabilities. In the exchange quoted earlier in this chapter, Susie and Carleen expressed a view of the disabled student that I suggest is actually in line with Nussbaum (2006a)—that the life of each person has value and that, within the CA<sup>N</sup>, it is the responsibility of the government, in this case the school, to support the development of her capabilities to the greatest degree possible. Susie went on to talk about one of her students, making it clear that while she valued *Bodily health*, she did not view perfect health as required for a life with dignity. She said,

*I have a student who is in really poor health, but she still wants to come to school, she still wants to participate, she still wants to do, she still wants to live her life.* (Susie, paraeducator, District One)

Susie's reaction to this is not unlike that reported by Wolff and de-Shalit (2007), where they quote one of their participants saying,

. . . [I]t is ridiculous to claim that if your body is not perfect you can't achieve a good life. (52)

Further discussion with Susie and Carleen elicited the view that while ideal health is not required for a life with dignity, such a life does require that every student should have the best health and quality of life possible, thus capturing the essences of Nussbaum's view, I believe. And while many of the participants included *Bodily health* among those capabilities that a school should be supporting, they differed in their views of what the role of the schools is, as seen in this discussion from District Two:

Elizabeth (clerical): . . . *I think good health comes from—it's the parent's responsibility.*

Tanya (clerical): *I disagree.*

Ken (paraeducator): *But I also, but I thought of school lunch what are we feeding the kids, what are we teaching them is good health.*

School meals were also part of David's (custodian, District One) view. He said,

*I saw the one about being in good health. A lot of time kids aren't really, they learn that, but they don't get taught at home. If you don't have good*

### **Bodily integrity**

Nussbaum defines the capability of *Bodily integrity* as follows:

*Bodily integrity.* Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction. (Nussbaum, 2011:33)

This capability emerged as one that was important or relevant to many of the participants, with 12 of them including it in their card activity. As with *Life* and *Bodily health*, this was a capability that many of the participants discussed in terms of students with disabilities.

They said,

*Yeah, the um, I've got four of them stuck out, affiliation, bodily integrity, control over one's environment, life. Those are really important for those kids.* (Carleen, paraeducator, District One)

*I saw that and I was thinking of handicapped. Cause my wife is handicapped and could not move from place to place.* (Ken, paraeducator, District Two)

Nina (clerical, District Two) expressed the view that a major element in the district's special education program was to ensure that students with disabilities had the freedom to move around.

Threats to *Bodily integrity* were also addressed. Margaret (paraeducator, District Three) spoke with anger in her voice about adults whom she saw as violating the personal space of students. She said,

*I was looking at the bodily integrity, and it's like they are able to move. Sometimes they're not. It's like Sam said. I work with kids who are not able to move, and when someone touches their wheelchair, you are violating their space. Because you're touching their wheelchair and they didn't say you could. They cover their eyes, thinking it's funny, and now all of a sudden you are violating the fact that they can't see any more. And it's not funny because you are taking away their freedom to do whatever they can. . . . But I don't want to see restriction in them with the things they are capable of*

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
doing. If they are capable of seeing, they should be able to see, no matter  
what. Nobody should cover their eyes. (Margaret, paraeducator, District  
Three)<sup>56</sup>

In District Two, the conversation looked at this capability beyond students with special needs. Participants said:

Nina (clerical): *I see it like coming from another country that's in chaos, war. . . . And being able to move freely, as a family. I don't really look at it as a child. But then the second part, to be secure against violent assault. I don't think children have that option because they live in the family. And if that situation is violent and nobody picks up on that, then they're stuck there unless they have support people who have seen the violence and then, like the kids you work with [to Ken], they get removed from the home.*

Tanya (clerical): *But if you think about it backwards, being able to move freely from place to place. Is it a freedom that if they're in that situation, do they feel like they have that freedom to get out of that situation?*

Nina: *That you put yourself first. That wherever you're at, you feel safe [all agreeing] and being safe, meaning that you can make your own decisions. There are some boundaries, but for the most part you're the one that's making that decision, that choice, and hopefully if there's a violent situation or an assault or anything that's not appropriate, you're able to move from it.*

The depth of feeling about this was demonstrated by a number of the other women responding “yes, move”.

Wolff and de-Shalit (2007) reported that their participants expressed similar concerns about the idea that this capability could be seen as implying that bodily perfection was required for a life with dignity. Others of their participants spoke to the idea that violence and assault are major threats to *Bodily integrity*.

### **Senses, imagination, and thought**

Nussbaum defines the capability of *Senses, imagination, and thought* as follows:

*Senses, imagination, and thought.* Being able to use the sense, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a “truly human” way; a way

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<sup>56</sup> This anecdote was deeply troubling. I spoke with her after the group, and she explained that she had reported this according to her school district's policies.

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*

informed and cultivated by adequate education, including, but by no means limited to literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid nonbeneficial pain. (Nussbaum, 2011:33)

In setting out this capability, Nussbaum makes it clear that she sees education as central to its fulfillment. Ten of the participants saw it as relevant to schools. In District Two, participants expressed a view of this capability that can be seen as aligned with that expressed by Nussbaum. They said:

*. . . [I]n the world we are in today, where it's data-driven and test scores matter so much and all of that, I don't think kids are being allowed to use their imagination as much. And I also think in looking at sense, imagination, and thought, you know preschool, now Head Start, preschool being offered we in education, we want them so they can be prepared to do better in school, but they are starting, a lot of these kids are missing that social, these connections. So again, not allowing them to use their imaginations. . . . So senses, imagination, and thought, I just think it's a hard thing on our society right now. . . . This is something that is lacking in our kids. (Nina, clerical, District Two)*

*I was thinking the same thing. I was looking at this one and said, "Senses, imagination, and thought goes with Play. Do our children play, do they know how to play and use their imagination? 'Reeer' with a paper plane in the car. Do they know how to do that?" (Tanya, clerical, District Two)*

Wolff and de-Shalit (2007) do not have much to say about this capability, noting that while their participants did not necessarily agree with each of the elements Nussbaum includes in it, they generally saw it as a valuable capability.

## **Emotions**

Nussbaum defines the capability of *Emotions* as follows:

*Emotions.* Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)  
(Nussbaum, 2011:33-34)

In District Two, this capability generated a discussion of the importance of emotions and what emotions mean for children and adults. Participants said:

Tanya (clerical): *This is powerful for me, emotions. A lot of our kids and even adults, aren't free to express their emotions. . . . Sometimes you need to cry—it's cleansing. Be quiet; don't laugh. Well, maybe they need to laugh—it brings out endorphins. So this is pretty powerful.*

Ken (paraeducator): *Suck it up.*

Olivia (clerical): *And I think that sometimes, as educational professionals, we're taught don't let kids get too attached to you, because that's not the right, that's not good for them, that's not good for you. But I never agreed with that. I think there are boundaries, but we have to allow kids to feel safe and attached to us in some way. Whoever we are, a secretary, a custodian, that they should be allowed to, without them being reprimanded or the employee being seen as breaking the rules for having that.*

Nora (moderator): *Ken, you are nodding. Do you want to add anything?*

Ken: *No, because sometimes in the school, those adults there are the only positive people that some children have in their lives. We need to remember that.*

While other groups did not discuss the capability of *Emotions* in this depth, Louise (paraeducator, District One) identified it as one of the essential, formative elements in her *Capabilities Pathway*, which I will discuss in more detail below. Wolff and de-Shalit report that this capability was “generally accepted with little comment” and that “those who did discuss it further suggested that one could have a relatively good life without this functioning” (2007:53). They speculate that this view might be the result of people asking

themselves if they need emotions or if they are living lives dominated by others' emotions, one's own emotions may be a burden.

### **Practical reason**

Nussbaum defines the capability of *Practical reason* as follows:

*Practical reason.* Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)  
(Nussbaum, 2011:34)

Participants positioned *Practical reasoning* as connected to education. The discussion below from District Two includes a comment from Olivia that explores this connection. This discussion also captures the group construction of understandings that I had hoped for. The participants said:

Elizabeth (clerical): *Practical reasoning?*

Olivia (clerical): *As an adult, I think that means through your connection or through your religious affiliations or whatever, you find good and then you know the basis of good and reflect about it in your own life. Like "Am I doing good things? Am I being a good person? Am I following the rules?" That's how I see it.*

Maria (paraeducator): *I thought it was kind of limiting because the conception of the good—it's not always good. . . .*

Tanya (paraeducator): *I am not naive, and I don't think there's not bad things that happen, but I want it to be all good.*

Olivia: *So now that you've said a couple of things, I think that like in the moral sense you pretty much, whatever religion you believe in, or if you're a good person, or if you're not affiliated to just one religion. But just that you believe in to say, "Okay, you're a good person, there's this thing" and then you reflect, "Is my life doing that?" And you're able to make changes where there's . . . but if you standard yourself to the conception of what is for you to be good . . . cause when you say the conception of the good . . . good in education? I just think this is hard.*

All: *It's a hard one.*

Nora (moderator): *That's okay. It can be hard.*

Maria: *And it says to engage in critical reflection, and I felt that not all of us*



*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach can have that opportunity to reflect and be critical.*

Unknown: *Some of us don't want to.*

Maria: *Take responsibility to. . . .*

Ken (paraeducator): *That's true.*

Maria: *That responsibility to . . . and I think that's where it . . . it's about one's life. I don't know. I think about to engage and sometimes we just don't have that opportunity to do that.*

Ken: *The place I got hung up on this was I was thinking of it as a kid and I was thinking how much critical reflection does a child have? Cause they're always in the moment. How they feel in that moment.*

Although this capability was not discussed in the other two groups, it did appear in card activities of many of the participants and within the *Capabilities Pathways*. For Wolff and de-Shalit (2007), this capability was treated with skepticism by their participants. Some felt that it reflected an “intellectualist bias” (2007:53) on the part of philosophers, and others doubted that it could be important since so few people did it. However, within the context of this work, I suggest that the capability of *Practical reason* including critical reflection was valued and seen as things schools could contribute to.

### **Affiliation**

Nussbaum defines the capability of *Affiliation* as follows:

*Affiliation.* (A). 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. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.) (B) 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. This entails provisions of nondiscrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin. (Nussbaum, 2011:34)

Nussbaum's formulation of the capability of *Affiliation* is long and complex. Participants tried to make sense of it and responded in a variety of ways. In District One, Louise (paraeducator) placed *Affiliation* in her *Capability Pathway*. During the discussion portion

of the focus group, she expressed her belief that it was among the most important for “these kids”, meaning the special education students she works with. All of the other participants in this group included it in their card activity.

The ability to affiliate oneself with others was seen as being central to being treated with dignity. Nina reflected on *Affiliation* as follows:

*by affiliating yourself with others, being treated as a dignified human being.  
Hoping that all the affiliations, the people who are with you, being that you  
are affiliating with them, they are going to continue to help you and guide  
you. (Nina, clerical, District Two)*

There were differing perspectives on what the role of schools is and should be in supporting affiliation. Elizabeth (clerical, District Two) expressed the view that schools should be helping students develop this capability. Maria (paraeducator, District Two) questioned whether the practice of assigning students to particular classes might be seen as limiting the students. She went on to note that students:

*pick and choose their friends, sometimes it what's thrown in there, but they  
find their own affiliations.*

For Wolff and de-Shalit (2007), the capability of *Affiliation* was one that generated some of the deepest discussion. They do not share particulars but do note the following:

. . . [I]t is very clear from our interviews that this category takes on huge importance for many people, although what precisely they have in mind, varies considerably, from involvement in an active community, to having a few good friends. (2007:54)

In Wolff and de-Shalit's framework of thinking about the relationship between capabilities and disadvantage, *Affiliation* seems to be one of the capabilities that can serve as a buffer or protective factor in the face of other disadvantages. It can also be lost when one's life circumstances change through factors like job loss or illness, and that loss compounds the problem. This ability of affiliations to serve as protective factors can be seen, I suggest, as related to the protective ability of relationships and connectedness discussed above.

### **Other species**

Nussbaum defines the capability of *Other species* as follows:

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
*Other species*. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature. (Nussbaum, 2011:34)

For several participants, this capability emerged in the discussion as important to human well-being. Louise (paraeducator, District One) saw it as a crucial part of preschool experiences through animals and pets. In District Two, Tanya (paraeducator) placed it into her *Capabilities Pathway*. She said:

*Then I thought, then when you start to learn about your senses, you start to attach yourself to animals, plants, nature. Cause you're starting to realize that you want a pet. You want a little puppy, you want a kitty cat, you want a little goldfish. Don't know why anyone would want a goldfish, but they want a goldfish.*

Nina expressed this as a fertile capability whereas Quintin expressed its potential to be a corrosive disadvantage if a person does not have it. They said:

*. . . [I]n order to continue to live, you have to learn to respect animals, plants, and nature because you wouldn't be here if there wasn't plants or animals.* (Nina, clerical, District Two)

*Look at the people who don't have those things, look at the people who don't have affiliations with animals, what mass murders, you know what I'm saying.* (Quintin, custodian, District One)

For Wolff and de-Shalit (2007), the capability of *Other species* was one that most of their participants did not see as very important. Some saw it as a luxury that was not central to flourishing. But for some of their participants, either those who had been homeless or who worked with the homeless, a relationship with an animal (usually a dog) had the same fertile qualities described above.

### **Play**

Nussbaum defines the capability of *Play* as follows:

*Play*. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.  
(Nussbaum, 2011:34)

As discussed earlier in this chapter, participants in District One identified “fun” and

“creating fun” as among the most important elements of their job, tied to their work in supporting the whole child. In the exploration of Nussbaum’s Central Capabilities, *Play* emerged as important to participants in all three groups for both students and adults. David said:

*I know it feels good, that one, that play. We mentioned about that earlier, about being able to play and make kids laugh. Any of those is in there.*

(David, custodian, District One)

Play was recognized by participants as important for adults as well as for students.

Participants said:

*Learning to play, we’ve got to play ourselves, we’ve got to have good health ourselves. If we don’t learn to take care of ourselves, if we don’t learn to play ourselves, how can we bring it on to somebody else?* (David,

custodian, District One)

*. . . [W]ho doesn’t want to play?* (Quintin, custodian, District One)

*I love the play. Being able to laugh, to play, being able to enjoy recreational actives. You hope that for every child and that as an adult, I think we go back to some of our memories of play.* (Elizabeth, clerical, District Two)

Wolff and de-Shalit do not devote any discussion to this capability. However, they highlight that at least one of their participants may have seen a fertile role for *Play*, noting that drug addicts lose the ability to play.

### **Control over one’s environment**

Nussbaum defines the capability of *Control over one’s environment* as follows:

*Control over one’s environment.* (A) *Political.* Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. (B) *Material.* Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of

Of all the Central Capabilities, this might be one that seems to speak more to the lives of adults than to children, in that many of the elements that comprise this capability are seen, at least in the United States, as adult privileges, including political participation, property ownership, and employment. For some of the participants, this was a capability that children will lack by virtue of being children. Others, however, saw it as one that students should have in some areas, and like *Bodily integrity*, this was a capability that was addressed in the context of students with disabilities, including those in the age range of 18 to 22. Participants said:

*They have to feel that they have control over something because I think a lot of them in their homes they may not have a lot of control and not really with the politics, although, never mind. I was going to say, like for some reason all the kids were Trump supporters. I'm just saying. It was like. . . . They have no idea, but that's where they were heading. But the material environment, you know they all aspire, no matter how "low functioning" [she used air quotes] or whatever to owning property, having a job, which is what we work on a lot, is job skills. But they still have the hopes and dreams that go with that one—controlling your environment. (Susie, paraeducator, District One)*

*In fact, today, one of my high school students, he has to be all by himself on the bus. He doesn't like the noise, he doesn't like the people, he doesn't like this. I don't go down the right street. And that just like that. And to me, none of these are for him. He has to go to school, and he has to get on that bus. And they everybody has to, yeah, yeah [mimicking student agitation]. And it's like. . . . (Tori, bus driver, District Three)*

In District Two, the discussion of the capability of *Control over one's environment* started with Olivia's (clerical) observation that children don't have control over their environments. Rather, they are bound by "the choices we make as parents". In her view, adults can have this capability but not children. However, she saw a role for schools in supporting the development of this capability, saying that in school students can "learn to make choices that will help better their environment". Rooted in her work with students and families who live in very poor circumstances, she saw school as a way for lives to

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
change. She said:

*The kids can break out of that cycle to some extent. And be able to have control over their environment. But they need people like support people to teach them those things.*

Ken (paraeducator) took a similar view, *seeing Control over one's environment* as both critical to a good life after school and the result of a good education. He said:

*That's what we have to learn to have these—practical reason and control over one's environment. That if you've learned everything and that the goal of teaching is to be able to that so you do have life, a quality life.*

Rich (bus driver, District Three) believed that schools could and should promote the capability of *Control over one's environment* in students looking to later in life. He noted that family circumstances, however, might prevent students from achieving this type of control, no matter what schools do. As with the capability of *Play*, Neil (custodian, District One) saw this as one that also impacts adults, talking about his aging mother-in-law, for whom losing control over her life was very upsetting. This resonated with others in the group who also were trying to meet the needs of aging parents.

For Wolff and de-Shalit (2007), this capability was one that their participants generally accepted, though they differed on what constituted control. Among those participants whom they describe as poor, being completely dependent on others was seen as losing this control, with the dependency worse than the poverty. And while some of their participants rejected the element of private property, others did not. The authors contend that how people view this capability is tied to their culture. However, they do not expand on this.

## **5.6 Capability Pathways**

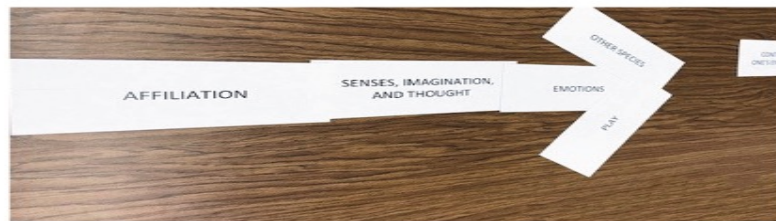
While Nussbaum (2006a, 2011) positions each of the Central Capabilities as unique and inseparable from the others, she also recognizes that there may be some capabilities that are so important in achieving others that they can be seen as *fertile functionings* (or *fertile capabilities* in her language) and that education can play that role (Nussbaum, 2011; Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007). Drawing on the work of Wright (2012), Wimborne (2018) suggests that the metaphor of links (as in a chain) can help to understand how capability development or the lack of development in one area can support these *fertile capabilities* or impede (in this

For Wright (2012), who positioned her work within Sen's account of the CA, the metaphor of the capability chain allowed her to consider a set of individual life narratives to see common capabilities that contributed to the flourishing of the women in her study.

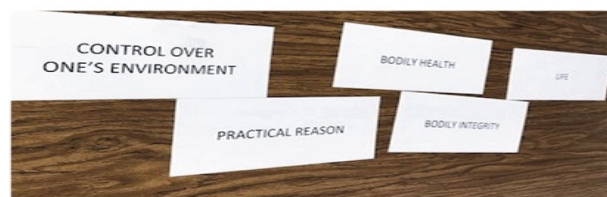
Wimborne (2018) uses the chain metaphor to propose a set of linked capabilities that are required for identity formation among the post-16 English students in his study. He drew his capabilities from a number of sources, including Nussbaum's list, and then, using his interviews with students, developed his proposed list.

I did not begin this work with any *a priori* theory about the relationship between capabilities, other than accepting the idea of *fertile capabilities* and *corrosive disadvantages* and the idea that some of these relationships might be close to universal within a particular social context whereas other relationships may vary greatly from person to person. Additionally, I did not explicitly ask participants to consider the relationship between various capabilities, feeling that time allotted for the groups would not allow a full discussion on this. However, there was space for some participants to create their own version of the relationship between capabilities. Working with the cards and not discussing their work with other group members, three participants (one in District One and two in District Two) created a narrative of linked capabilities through a human life. Unlike the chain metaphor employed by Wright (2012) and Wimborne (2018), I see these narratives as describing a path through life, which I have termed a *Capabilities Pathway*. Two of them were described as one-way paths, in which securing (or achieving) one capability leads to or contributes to the next. The third was circular but shared the idea of one capability leading to the next and had the further idea that over the lifetime there are cycles of influence from one capability to another.

In District One, Louise (paraeducator) created her path by breaking the capabilities into two sets, in which those in the first picture led to those in the second (Photographs 1 and 2, page 119).



**Photograph 1: Louise, Paraeducator, District One**



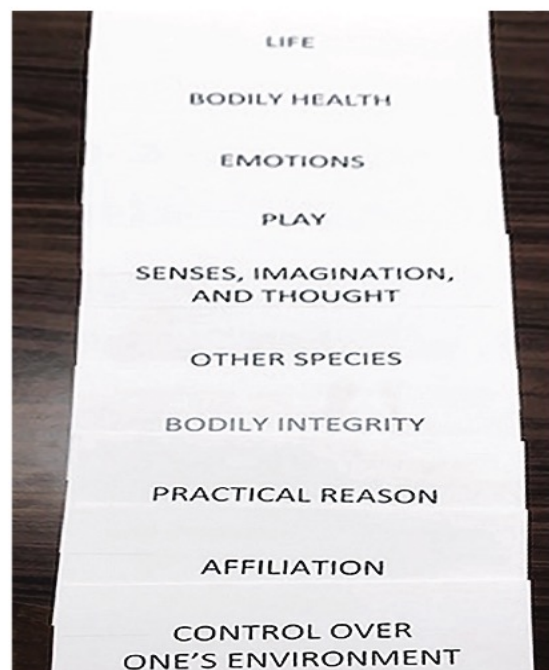
**Photograph 2: Louise, Paraeducator, District One**

Louise said:



*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
*I looked at Affiliation; Sense, imagination, and thought; Emotions; Other species. You know they have animals, pets. And Play. To me, these, in my realm, were important. I think these then as the child grows these [holding up other cards], then these, become more important to their lives. So I think these [first set] are precursors to these [second set]. That's how I read them. (Louise)*

In District Two, Tanya (clerical) lined up all Central Capabilities to create a full life story (Photograph 3, page 120).



**Photograph 3: Tanya, Clerical, District Two**

Tanya said:

*You have to have beginning. What's the first thing after you take your first breath, your health? What do they do? They check you and then you. You have all these emotions come out, cause you start crying as a newborn, and we don't stop crying until you're gone. Because it's an emotion we have to go through. And after we learn to start coping with it, we're little kids and we play. We need play time—it helps us to develop social skills, it helps us*

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*

*to develop as a human being. Then we get to use all those senses. Then I thought, then when you start to learn about your senses, you start to attach yourself to animals, plants, nature. Cause you're starting to realize that you want a pet. You want a little puppy, you want a kitty cat, you want a little goldfish. Don't know why anyone would want a goldfish, but they want a goldfish. You have this integrity for your body, because if you're not healthy, you can't move around. And you need to be safe. You need to feel safe. And little kids sometimes don't feel safe, not at home, not at school, not anywhere. So then you start learning about practical reason, what's safe, what's not safe, where you can't go, what you can do . . . and then I thought, once you start making these decisions, you start affiliating with other people. You start to get to older ages where you start to gather in groups. And then, you finally get control over your environment.*

In the same group, Nina (clerical) also told a life story through the capabilities, in which the development of one capability shapes the development of the next one (Photograph 4, page).



**Photograph 4: Nina, Clerical, District Three**

Nina said:

*The way I see it I kind of put my own life into it and knowing what I've done with my children and how I would like, knowing working in the school for so long now and the different areas of the school I've worked with. To start off your life, you have to be in good health, it's your basic needs, which then goes to your senses and imagination because you're wanting to teach those kids to build those senses and be able to imagine and think and reason, which you do that and you fortify that with being able to play. Which then goes into your emotions, being able to say, "while I'm doing all this my emotions". By being taught that your emotions change with different things that are going on. So showing that emotions. Every emotion is good, and there's a time and a place for it. Which then goes into bodily integrity*

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*

*because with that you're hoping that then you learn to move freely. And that*  
*122if there is something that is not secure against a violent assault or*  
*something like that, you're starting to learn that's not right and how do you*  
*get yourself out of it? By affiliating yourself with others, being treated as a*  
*dignified human being. Hoping that all the affiliations, the people who are*  
*with you, being that you are affiliating with them, they are going to continue*  
*to help you and guide you. To continue what you've learned before which*  
*then you can control your; maybe your own environment. That it's no one*  
*controlling it but you are participating in now and controlling. This comes a*  
*little bit so then in order for you to continue to live you have to learn to*  
*respect animals, plants, and nature because you wouldn't be here if there*  
*wasn't nature, if there wasn't plants or animals. All of these things help us to*  
*be human beings and to be living human beings. So these resources are a*  
*crucial part of our lives because there was a rhyme or reason why they were*  
*put here. And as things are leaving or things are dying out, then you have to*  
*learn to respect them. Cause how do you get those that are leaving to come*  
*back? Which then sends you into practical reasoning because I think that's*  
*where you're looking at your life and the good and the bad, everything, by*  
*reflecting on your life, which then leads to life. And where I said, "What is*  
*considered normal length?" is how you live here. Some of us might die*  
*young, but we lived, but they may have fulfilled a full life. Some of us might*  
*live for 100 years, but if that life was all pain, then it wasn't. . . . So I don't*  
*think there's a normal.*

Why might the pathway account of the relationship between the capabilities be useful in considering the school context? As with the account of Wolff & de-Shalit (2007), the pathway account suggests that, at different periods of one's life, different capabilities might have a more fertile role (or their lack might have a more corrosive role). The pathway accounts share an understanding that each of them matters, that there is, in Nussbaum's words, an "irreducible heterogeneity" (2011:35) among the Central Capabilities while recognizing that at different points in a person's development, different capabilities will be more or less important. It is not clear to me that participants in my study understood Nussbaum's stipulation that the Central Capabilities are non-fungible (2006a, 2011) and if that they did, how that might have influenced their view. Nussbaum's stipulation though is directed at society (in the form of government), so it may be that one social institution,

such as the school system, may need to prioritize the capabilities it supports or promotes. In Chapter Six, I will return to the question of how these findings might inform what schools should be doing or, to borrow a phrase from Wimborne, what “a ‘capability friendly’ school environment [might] look like” (2018:121).

### **5.7 Students with Special Needs**

I did not set out to write particularly about the Capabilities Approach and students with special needs. Yet just as Nussbaum centers the lives of those with disabilities in her published work on the Capabilities Approach (2006a, 2006b, 2011), so too did my participants. In my view, there was something about the approach that made sense to them in thinking about these students. One factor in this was the number of participants who were special education paraeducators. However, I suggest that it was also due to the impact of *IDEA* on the composition of student populations in public schools. As I discussed earlier, this federal law has led to many more students with disabilities receiving their education in mainstream schools, with supports, as well as ensuring that the things they need, like bus transportation, are available (Burrello, Sailor & Kleinhammer-Tramill, 2013). Therefore, it is not only the school staff in “special” schools who work with special education students.

While Nussbaum centers her discussion of disabilities on those with cognitive disabilities (2006a, 2006b, 2009, 2011), I believe that the same arguments can be applied to those with physical disabilities. Indeed, she uses an example from Sen’s work of a person in a wheelchair whose capabilities are enhanced not just by the wheelchair but also by the ramps and curb cuts (Nussbaum, 2006a). In considering what participants said in the focus groups, I believe they were considering students whose disabilities were cognitive or physical or both.

Nussbaum’s position is that the CA<sup>N</sup> is one that can answer two challenges. The first is the direct challenge of meeting the “real and important” needs of “our fellow citizens, and fellow participants in human dignity” (2009:331). The second is the indirect challenge of how the Capabilities Approach performs in comparison with other theories of justice. In *Frontiers of Justice* (2006a), she says that she is focusing on the second challenge, while touching briefly on the first. But the first challenge is the one that the participants in my study surfaced. They focused on the practical issues in schools, such as how students are treated, what policies schools enact, and how families should be supported. In these focus

groups we did not explore the Capabilities Approach in comparison to any other theory of justice.

The experiences of these participants with students with special needs is probably directly related to the impact of *IDEA*, which required schools to provide services, including one-on-one paraeducators when appropriate. It opened up participation in education in so-called “regular” schools (schools that serve students without identified special needs) to many students who might otherwise have been placed in special schools. (A good discussion of this can be found in Chambers [2015] although her focus is primarily on paraeducators.) Nussbaum has argued that *IDEA* is a policy that is the Capabilities Approach in action, while still acknowledging that policy implementation is “far from being perfect, in theory or in practice” (2006a:208). This is due to a lack of funding, large case numbers, and the differing ability of parents to navigate the complex, legalistic system of application and appeal that is often required for parents who may not be happy with the decisions of the school system. As school employees whose work puts *IDEA* into practice, the participants in this research, I suggest, shared a belief that the special education students they work with or serve have the same needs and rights as other students. They spoke about the students they worked with as individuals, stressing the ways they worked with them as based on knowing them and their needs. It was also important to them that students not be blamed for their problems or challenges.

Applying the  $CA^N$  to the special education program seems a reasonable place to start a discussion of what a Capabilities Approach to education might look like (or in other words, what a capabilities-friendly school might look like). The  $CA^N$  starts with the question of the dignity of students. It does not neglect the idea of care, which can be seen as a basic requirement of a decent society but does indicate that the form that care should take should be informed by dignity and the fulfillment of the Central Capabilities to the greatest degree possible. Based on the discussions in the focus groups, I suggest that the participants would share Nussbaum’s view of the importance of the dignity of individuals in providing care.

Care, though, can be a complicated idea. In Chapter Two, I discussed how the Whole Child Approach has its roots in Noddings’s views on care (2005a, 2005b). Yet I find Noddings’s discussion of care and students with special educational needs troubling and potentially at odds with the Capabilities Approach. I will discuss it here in preparation for exploring in the next chapter what a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach might look like. In

*The Challenge to Care in Schools*, Noddings specifically addresses the question of “caring for those who are separated from us by some form of disability” (2005a:124). Her argument for this distance is rooted in her view that we are challenged in “eliciting or recognizing forms of response with which we are familiar” (2005a:124). This distance, in her view, means that our “shallow line - ‘everybody’s equal’- ... belies actual conditions and widespread human reactions” (2005a:124). Specifically, she notes that a “severely mentally retarded person” (2005a:124) cannot reason, but that when treated with care, other responses such as pleasure or a sense of play can be elicited. Yet in the brief discussion on students with disabilities in the context of schools, she says this:

Nurses and physical therapists could contribute much to the standard education of students and teachers by helping them to understand the wide variety of human responses and how to encourage those most highly valued.

Again, there is no fully adequate substitute for direct contact. (2005a:124)

While I cannot know what Noddings was thinking when she wrote this, it is possible, in my view, to interpret this as meaning that the reason for having students with severe special needs in schools is so others can learn to care. This is in contrast to my understanding of Nussbaum’s argument—that these students should be there for their own benefit and the development of their own capabilities. While I recognize that this might be an oversimplification of Noddings’s own views, I highlight it because it may inform how some think of the issue within the Whole Child Approach.

Others who have considered the CA<sup>N</sup> in relation to students with special needs have stressed that a significant element in its value is that it contains both normative and political dimensions (Terzi, 2005a). The former, including its ethical individualism, dignity, and care, might allow us to ask questions about how a particular policy, program, or practice supports capabilities. It can be argued that the CA<sup>N</sup> might offer a way to bridge what appear to be two opposing perspectives on how to conceptualize difference, disability, and special needs. Terzi notes:

The “dilemma of difference” consists in the seemingly unavoidable choices between, on the one hand, identifying children’s differences in order to provide for them differentially, with the risk of labelling and dividing, and, on the other, accentuating the “sameness” and offering common provision, with the risk of not making available what is relevant to, and needed by, individual children. (2005b:444).

The CA<sup>N</sup> might be seen as considering how a student's impairments (or internal capabilities) and the environment interact while centering the idea of dignity of each individual learner. Additionally, as a normative theory, the CA<sup>N</sup> allows us to do this and make demands on the government, in this instance on the public education system, for the services and environments to which students are entitled. This includes examination of the pedagogical practices that are required for students to participate, the supporting services such as nursing care that may be needed, and/or the funding to support these practices and services (Terzi, 2005a, 2005b).

Of course, as with other discussions of school and education, it is important to recognize that participation in a particular school setting might not be enhancing of capabilities (Unterhalter, 2003). Earlier in this chapter, I discussed how one participant described how some of her colleagues had covered the eyes of students who have limited ability to speak or move. Margaret (paraeducator, District Three) understood that this behavior is the opposite of enhancing capabilities. In the next chapter, I will return to the question of what we might take away from the questions of students with special needs to inform how all schools should meet the needs of all students.

### **5.8 Families, Parents, Responsibilities, and Values**

While I had expected to hear about parents and families during the discussions, I had not expected the strong articulation among several participants, particularly custodians, that a crucial part of their job was to help teach students values and the right way to behave based on those values. Scott (2007) described a similar view in her ethnographic study of custodians in three schools, where she observed custodians stepping in to correct and manage behavior in the lunch room. She describes this as the adoption of the role of "loving father" (2007:246). This role adoption, she says, was rooted in the belief that parents and families were not teaching these things. A slightly different perspective on this was described by Devine (1996), who found in the low-income urban schools where he was conducting his research that some students looked to the security staff (who were not police officers) for relationships that would be more like what they would have with a counselor. Here, too, some of the security staff were very proud of these relationships because they allowed them to provide this guidance on values and behavior, guidance they thought students were not getting at home.



The participants in my focus groups who took this role on saw it as a responsibility, not necessarily a parental one but a broader social one. David said:

*And so that's where we are good examples, we've got to understand the whole child and ask them the things they like to do, things they want to do later in life. They'll learn about the whole child themselves, what their dreams are, what their goals in life are. (David, custodian, District One)*

The discussion continued, with participants very clear about the importance of teaching values. Participants said:

Quintin (custodian): *I totally agree. We need to teach morals, all the time. You see someone picking on someone or someone lying. I don't care what they did, the lying was worse. And so they get in trouble for lying, not because of what they did. It's like "you guys could have just got off, but no you had to lie to me, too". You know, so it's for us. We teach so much morality. I don't know about you guys, but I am always trying to teach them, "No, this is not right". We as a society don't go with that.*

Carleen (paraeducator): *They are not getting near enough of that at home, and we have to teach it.*

Nora (moderator): *So that's part of the whole child?*

Carleen: *That's what I'm thinking*

Quintin or David: *Yes!*

David's drawing (Drawing Two, above) illustrated the connection between the teaching of the skill of cleaning up after oneself to the idea that doing so is part of being a member of the community and is the right thing to do. He went on to say,

*. . . [I]f a child comes up and spills their tray when they are trying to dump it in the garage can, I make them clean it up. I don't go clean it up myself. We're supposed to be there to help them. . . . I make them because that's teaching the kids that if they make a mess, they need to clean it up.*

While this may sound harsh, he was clear that he does this out of care and concern and wants them to also feel good. He said,

*We've just started a thing, in my school, a golden broom award. All the kids, if they have, if they leave their room nice and clean, my other custodians, it's up to their judgment, but if their room is nice and clean, they will get a point and whoever has the most points at the end of the week, I made a little golden broom to hang on the door and if they have the most*

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
*points they get to display that golden broom on the door. And a lot of the younger kids, they are so excited to see that golden broom hanging in their room.*

David then went on to say:

*. . . [W]e've got a couple of kids at our school. . . . You know at an elementary school it is mostly female there, so a lot of time the custodian and the principal are the only males there and there are a lot of kids who don't have a role model at home. . . . And there's one in particular that causes a lot of problems in class and he'll either ask to come and see me or he'll ask to see the principal because he loves the interaction with the male-to-male contact.*

While participants did not make a direct link to any particular capability, I suggest that the development of these values and relationship skills can be seen as connected to the capabilities of *Affiliation* and/or *Practical reason*. The tie with the former is that these are ways of being and behaving that participants think are necessary to the ability to live with others, to be respected, and to have self-respect. The tie with the latter is that for the participants who raised these issues, they described not just ways of acting but also a desire to have students be able to think of others and what is good for them.

This concern about families was not limited to the custodians discussed above. Other participants shared concerns that at least some families were not able to meet their children's needs. Carleen said,

*. . . [T]he number of kids who don't have both parents or live with their grandparents or have these other problems in their home, it's doubled,<sup>57</sup> you know, there are just so many more of them.* (Carleen, paraeducator, District One)

Her colleague Louise (a paraeducator who works in the district's preschool program) talked about how hard it is for new parents, who may not have a lot of experiences with interacting with the school. Maria (paraeducator, District Two) described the homeless or migrant farmworker parents she worked with as often having had very bad experiences with school; she saw it as part of her job to make sure they saw their children's education as primary (as well as their own). While participants were generally sympathetic to the

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<sup>57</sup> This is an estimate from the participant; I was not able to confirm if it reflects the actual changes in the district.

challenges facing families, they also saw families as lacking certain things and felt that schools and people in them needed to fill those gaps. Oliva said,

*Social skills matter. How you treat people matter. . . . How you interact with people . . . all of that matter and I think it's our responsibility as an educational facility to provide an opportunity for children to learn because obviously and honestly, a lot of our kids aren't getting that at home. (Olivia, clerical, District Two)*

As I discussed earlier in the chapter, two participants focused on the role of connections and relationships. Those drawings by Ken and Maria (Drawings Three and Four) took a view of families as facing real challenges and needing support.

Only one participant appeared to be unsympathetic to parents. Tina (custodian, District Three) talked about the areas where she saw parents as demanding more of the schools and school staff than they were willing to give themselves. One such incident that happened the morning of the focus group, an incident which was clearly fresh in her mind, involved a district about two hours away in which, she alleged, parents who spotted a school bus driving erratically did nothing but film the incident without notifying the police.<sup>58</sup> She said,

*. . . [T]hey expecting a lot from us and we are under the law of every little thing, they want from us everything, but when it's their part, they don't do it a lot.*

Similarly, she saw parental hypocrisy in the demands for rigid nutrition standards and the poor nutrition quality (in her opinion) of the food sent in the packed lunches of students who were not eating school meals.

## **5.9 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have sought to elevate the voices of the participants through their words and pictures. I have shown how they understand the idea of the whole child and their reactions to the CA<sup>N</sup>. In general, participants expressed an understanding of the whole child that can be seen as in alignment with the tenets of the Whole Child Approach. They responded to the CA<sup>N</sup> and the Central Capabilities in ways that said to me that they found the ideas relevant and that seeking to develop lives with dignity was part of their work and the work of schools. They also noted, as does Nussbaum, that the Central Capabilities can offer a way to think about issues in the education of students with special needs.

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<sup>58</sup> See Fox13Now (2107) for a description of the incident that is different from Tina's.

For some of the participants, too, the idea of helping students to develop appropriate values and become responsible members of the community played an important role in their consideration of these issues. Finally, some of them believed that parents are not always able to provide what students need; they saw themselves as helping to fill that gap. They do this, in their view, through relationships and role modeling but also through their connections to specific programs and services.

## **Chapter Six: Re-engaging and Looking Forward**

### **6.1 Chapter Introduction**

In Chapter One, I presented my metaphor of a quilt with its three layers: the CA<sup>N</sup> as the base, the Whole Child Approach as the central layer, the voices and views of Education Support Professionals (ESPs) as the quilt top with the research methodology connecting ESPs to the other elements in the metaphorical form of the stitching together of these layers. In this chapter, I will return to these three layers and discuss how they can be seen in relationship to each other. My intention here is to return to the words of the participants and consider how what I have interpreted from their words relates to the theories and previous research of others. I further want to consider how all of this in turn might inform professional practice in U.S. schools and my own personal professional practice.

Before laying out the contents of this chapter, I want to reflect on what, in my view, may be one of the most important findings: the interest and willingness of the participants to engage in this work, particularly the consideration of Nussbaum's Central Capabilities. The type of reflective discussion that participants engaged in is viewed as a mark of professionalism in education (Hargreaves, 2000, Schön, 1983). When an opportunity was created, these ESPs acted as professionals. Later in this chapter, I will discuss in greater depth the implications of my findings as a whole for professional practice in education, but I believe there is no doubt that ESPs can act as professionals when given the opportunities.

Going forth in this chapter, I will start by considering my findings in relation to two complementary frameworks. The first, which I discussed in Chapter Two, I have borrowed from Unterhalter (2013). The second, which I also discussed in Chapter Two, is that of looking at these findings specifically in terms of the policies, programs, and practices of schools in the United States. As I will discuss below, this latter framework offers me a way to position these findings in relation to the governance of education in the United States. I will then return to the question of professionalism in greater depth. In this section, I will discuss how my findings might inform the movement of ESPs from Hargreaves's (2000) pre-professional category to a category of professionals. Following this section, I will return to the issue of care. How can the views shared by participants be seen in relation to Nussbaum's ideas of care, and how might those provide a significantly different view of care than that offered by Noddings (2005a, 2005b)? In this section, I will propose that the German concept of *Geborgenheit* may offer a different way to consider care that complements the use of the CA<sup>N</sup>. In the next section, I will turn to the reflection on how

this work has impacted my professional practice. I will close the chapter with reflections on the limitations, additional research issues that I view as important, and considerations of the changing policy environment in the United States and what this work might say in response to those changes.

## **6.2 Unterhalter's Three Applications of the Capabilities Approach to Education Research**

In this section, I will return to Unterhalter's 2013 article, in which she offers three distinct applications of the CA to research in education. The context for this article was a review of Nussbaum's *Creating Capabilities* (2011). In that review, Unterhalter expressed the view that it was important to recognize the wide body of research and scholarship in which the CA is applied to the field of education and which goes beyond what Nussbaum discussed in the book. To make her point, Unterhalter proposed three distinct sets of research questions on capabilities and education. The first set of questions is framed by the overarching question of what different people value in and about education. The second set asks in what ways education serves as a multiplier or enhancer of other capabilities. This set of questions also asks how a lack of education might impede the development of other capabilities. And the third set asks how the conditions, policies, and/or practices in a school or its surrounding community enhance education-related capabilities (Unterhalter, 2013). While Unterhalter presents these as distinct and separate questions, I suggest that they are interrelated and that answers in one area will inform work on the others. Indeed, as I will discuss below, it may be hard to treat them as separate questions.

In considering these three sets of questions, I want to highlight the important distinction between the school as a place with particular conditions and education as a process of learning or an outcome, such as the achievement of a degree or certificate (Unterhalter, 2003). This distinction is an important one as it recognizes, as I discussed earlier, that conditions in a specific school may impede capabilities in contrast to the ideal of what education can or should provide. This distinction emerged in the discussions among participants of the particular policies (such as those concerning school meals) or practices (such as Margaret's story of her colleagues' behaviors). Participants, in my view, were well aware of the limitations on capabilities that certain practices or policies may cause while still generally seeing schools, particularly the schools and school districts they work in, as having the potential to support students in achieving capabilities.

Turning back to the three questions, I will start by considering what the participants valued

about education as embodied by the schools where they work. Among the things they valued most were relationships that support students, the creation of environments that are physically and emotionally safe, and the school's role in helping students and families meet their basic needs. They also saw the school as an institution where students can and should be taught responsibility and values as part of preparing them for life after school. In District One, Susie (paraeducator), who worked with older students with learning disabilities, said,

*With my set of kids who are 18 to 22, special needs, if they don't know how to read by the time they're 18 and they've been through, the chances are it's not going to be the most important thing. . . . So that's where you've got to switch over and get creative with what those skills that they're going to need. You know, to get on the bus and go down to Walmart, you know, so their mom doesn't need to take them, so that automatically moves you into more of the whole child than reading or writing or that kind of stuff.*

A similar view of the importance of school preparing students was expressed by Shula (food service worker) in District Three, discussing what she saw as the overly rigid rules of the school meal program on what foods a student can have as part of a reimbursable meal. She said,

*I feel that once a child is in high school, they should be able to have that choice. And as long as we make those choices available to them, I think they need to. We're preparing them for college and the real world, yet they can't make their own decision on what to eat?*

Other than the paraeducators, participants did not provide direct instruction to students. This may have been a factor in why, for the most part, they did not discuss what are often seen as the traditional purposes of education such as literacy and numeracy. Louise (paraeducator, District One), who worked with preschool students, spoke about the importance of the school in teaching her students the skills needed for communication, but at the same time she spoke of the importance of creating an atmosphere where students could dance and feel safe; it seemed to me that she gave these items equal weight. Maria (paraeducator, District Two) was the one participant who did speak directly of literacy and numeracy. Working with homeless families, she saw a direct connection between the lack of literacy and numeracy skills and the conditions of these families. In her view, it was important to not lose sight of the educational purpose of school while still supporting and nurturing students and their families. She said,

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
*I feel a little differently because, I feel like education should be education institution [sic], their primary purpose . . . but this other stuff needs to be there. It needs to be there, but our focus is if we can get them education, then maybe they could be self-sufficient, and that's all part of our goal, too.*

In considering what they valued about school, participants also stressed the importance of the school serving not just the child but also the people in the child's family and community. Elizabeth (clerical, District Two) said,

*Yeah, we as an educational system want to educate that whole child, but as we were talking before that the whole child isn't just the child. It's the community that they live within, their family aspects.*

I suggest, then, that based on my findings, these ESPs value the school that has the potential to develop capabilities and indeed that has a role in doing so. However, they do not necessarily agree on which capabilities matter the most and which are the most relevant to schools.

In seeking to answer Unterhalter's (2013) second and third questions, I have found it difficult to treat them as separate questions. Rather, participants generally accepted the idea that schools and the education they offer will improve children's lives. Those, like Quintin (custodian, District One), who placed great value on the relationships that staff form with students did so because they believe that it is through these relationships that students will develop the wherewithal to succeed in school academically. Yet they also recognized that certain policies or practices could actively impede capability development. Two examples of this can be found in District Three. The first is in Shula's view, shared above, that the rules of the food service program impede student preparation. A starker example can be found in Margaret's (paraeducator, District Three) description (see Chapter Five) of the threats to the safety, bodily integrity, and control over their environments of students when adults do not behave appropriately.

One of the most important elements of Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach is her assertion of the irreducible heterogeneity of the Central Capabilities. She says,

*A nation cannot satisfy the need for one capability by giving people a large amount of another, or even by giving them some money. All are distinctive, and all need to be secured and protected in distinctive ways. (2011:35)*

Nussbaum goes on to acknowledge that sometimes there may need to be "tragic choices" (2011:37) where the conditions may require a choice that enhances one capability at the



expense of another. However, should this be the case, Nussbaum calls on us to ask,  
How might we possibly work toward a future in which the claims of all the  
capabilities can be fulfilled? (2011:38)

The three participants who created the *Capability Pathways* and accompanying narratives,<sup>59</sup> in my interpretation, took a view of the capabilities that recognized each one as distinct. They did not address the issue of trade-offs as Nussbaum did but in their sequencing were describing a relationship between each of the capabilities that could show that a focus on one would, in turn, support the next one. Louise (paraeducator, District One) presented the capabilities of *Affiliation; Senses, imagination, and thought; Emotions; Other species; and Play* as being built within schools and leading to the development of the other capabilities. In District Three, Tanya (clerical) presented the capabilities sequentially, with *Life* at the beginning. In her view, schools help to develop each of these through the years, leading to the capability of *Control over one's environment*. Nina (clerical, District Three) also started her pathway with *Life* but presented her selected capabilities as a cycle, so in her view, the achievement of all capabilities might be seen in having ongoing control over one's life.

Nussbaum (2011) describes a person's internal capabilities as 'states of the person (not fixed, but fluid and dynamic)' (Nussbaum, 2011:21) and so things like her personality, state of bodily fitness, and health. Within particular social contexts and conditions these internal capabilities become part of her combined capabilities. But internal capabilities, while of the person, are not fixed or unchangeable. Rather, they can be modified, nurtured, or stunted by social conditions. She says:

One job of a society that wants to promote the most important human capabilities is to support the development of internal capabilities—through education, resources to enhance physical and emotional health, support for family care and love, a system of education, and much more. (2011:21)

It was in discussions of the lives of students with disabilities that participants expressed a view that can be seen as similar to Nussbaum's. In addition, one possible way to consider the *Capability Pathways* is to think of the relationship between capabilities as an understanding that internal capabilities in one area, when supported by the right conditions, can help to create the conditions for internal capabilities in another area. This area in turn

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<sup>59</sup> See Chapter Five for pictures and narratives of each of these.

is either nurtured or stunted by the conditions and so on.

In examining the answers to Unterhalter's (2013) questions through the data I collected, I can begin to conclude that, as noted earlier, the participants in this research found the CA<sup>N</sup> and the ten Central Capabilities to be a reasonable way to think about schools and their work in particular. But, and maybe more significantly, this small research has shown that it is possible to engage people directly with the complex ideas that comprise the Capabilities Approach and the idea of Central Capabilities. But as has been noted before, the CA<sup>N</sup> is not a prescription for policies; instead, it is a normative theory, a way of describing what should be. It has been asserted that it is not possible to simply develop policies from such a theory. Rather, a normative theory allows one to ask questions about how a particular policy or set of policies might enhance or diminish justice (Brighouse, 2002; Unterhalter, 2003). In my view, this application of a normative theory can be extended beyond the policies to the programs and practices that are the enactment of policies. In the next section, I will look explicitly at what a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach might be and the role of ESPs in such an approach.

### **6.3 Policies, Programs, and Practices for a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach**

Unterhalter notes that any consideration of the Capabilities Approach in education must recognize that,

*...schools are not outside society. It seems to me, political and social analyses are crucial to make the capability approach "real" and that the capability approach without an explicit acknowledgment of the salience of social theories of inequality lays itself open to becoming a hollow mantra. (Unterhalter, 2003:19)*

This section will examine the implications for policies, programs, and practices in U.S. schools based on what I am calling a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach. It does so, recognizing, as Unterhalter says above, that schools operate in a broader social context. They reflect social inequalities and can serve to reproduce or disrupt those inequalities. I have not tried in this work, nor will I try in this section, to offer the explanation for those inequalities. Rather, I propose that a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach can offer a way to contribute to the disruption rather than the reproduction of inequalities. In this section, I will not seek to offer a complete list of possible policies. Indeed, there is always another possible policy that can be offered. Instead, I will return to the five tenets of the Whole Child Approach, a recognized policy framework in the United States, and reconsider, in light of thoughts of the participants and consideration of Nussbaum's Central

Capabilities, what the policies, programs, and practices are where ESPs can have a significant role, including those in job categories that were not represented among the participants. As Louise said,

*So there's still other people that aren't represented here that are affecting the whole child. Guess I just wanted to make sure they were represented.*

(Louise, paraeducator, District One)

And lest this seem too idealistic, this is work that is being done in U.S. schools. In St. Louis, Missouri, researchers at Washington University have been working with local schools on a number of related projects designed to improve outcomes for students. According to Cambria (2019),

Now, eight years later, everyone in the school—from maintenance staff to teachers—uses positive behavioral techniques and data to address the wellness and potential of every student. They were proud to share that Bryan Hill [Elementary School] now has a 98 percent attendance rate—one of the best in the City of St. Louis.

In Chapter Two, I offered Trowler's definition of policy as a

specification of principles and actions, related to education issues, which are followed or which should be followed and which are designed to bring about desired goals. (2003:95)

Policies can be made in the public or private sector (companies and private schools have policies). My primary focus here is the policies governing public schools.<sup>60</sup> These are the policies that are made

on behalf of the state by its various instrumentalities to steer the conduct of individuals, such as teachers or students, and organisations, such as schools or universities. (Taylor et al., 1997:2)

Policies in education, through their text and the context in which they are created and disseminated, offer an account of those norms valued by the state or those who have influence on it in an education system. For example, the current debate in the United States (mid- 2019) over the arming of school personnel is, only in part, about whether or not this would make schools safer. It is also about the value some people place on a particular

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<sup>60</sup> In the United states private schools may be covered by some of the same policies to the extent that these schools may participate in public programs or be licensed by the state to operate. For example, in some instances, students with severe educational challenges may be served under IDEA in a private school.

interpretation of the Second Amendment<sup>61</sup> and about the value others place on creating an environment where safety does not rely on weapons. There are not hard and fast lines on this. Some who would describe themselves as “supporters of the Second Amendment” find the idea of armed teachers and ESPs distasteful and counter to what the culture of school should be. Conversely, some who value safety see armed staff as necessary in a violent and armed culture. Policies are intended to direct the conduct of those in schools. To continue with the example above, even among those who believe that policies should allow armed school personnel, there is disagreement about who should and should not be armed and under what conditions. And while policies may call for particular conduct, policy alone cannot guarantee it.<sup>62</sup>

Policies are also the way institutions manage calls for change, sometimes in ways that do not require significant changes on the part of the institution.<sup>63</sup> Again, to return to the policy option of arming school personnel, these proposals are offered in response to calls for change after a particular kind of school violence—a mass shooting. They are offered, by some, as an alternative to other policies that restrict access to guns in the broader world. Others would argue that they are offered as a way of avoiding the need for comprehensive mental health programs.

In education, as in other fields, it is rare that a policy emerges in a vacuum or is drafted upon a blank slate. Rather, new or revised policies join a crowded field of other policies, sometimes trying to solve the same problem and sometimes working in direct opposition to one another (Taylor et al, 1997; Trowler, 2003). Even before the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in February 2018, there were a number of states, including Utah, that already allowed school staff who held concealed carry permits to bring those weapons into schools.<sup>64</sup> These policies coexist with other policies that call for counselors and require the school to teach about mental health. Some

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<sup>61</sup> The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, passed in 1791, reads “A well regulated Militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed. The interpretation of this language that is at the heart of the debate over gun control in the U.S.

<sup>62</sup> For example, see the story about the high school security guard who left his gun in the school bathroom (Mongelli & Jager, 2019).

<sup>63</sup> There may be no better example of this than the many instances in the 1980s British sitcom *Yes Minister*, where top bureaucrat Sir Humphrey Appleby uses the creation of new policies to ensure that the Minister’s calls for change, in fact, lead to no change.

<sup>64</sup> In 2017, I had a conversation with a member of the USEA staff about whether or not the association should offer the necessary course to allow a school employee to get a concealed carry permit. His argument, as the potential instructor, was that it was better for school employees to learn from someone like him who actually had worked in a school and understood school culture. Ultimately, the association decided not to offer such a course.

might see these as being in conflict while others would see them as supporting each other.

Programs and practices are not separate from policies. They are the enactment of policies (Braun, Maguire, & Ball, 2010). They can be understood as the actions taken in the school as a move toward the intentions of the policy or away from them. Programs and practices can be formal or informal, and it is from these actions that the unintended as well as the intended consequences of a policy (Taylor et al., 1997) manifest themselves. For example, Pike (2008) describes an English primary school dining room where, in response to policies to promote healthy eating via the school-provided meal, the staff created a set of practices that, in her view, stigmatized students who brought lunches from home. She is clear in her account that this was an unintended consequence of the way the policy was put into practice. The policy did not explicitly call for the stigmatization of a group of students.

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between policy, program, or practice. School staff may say they are aware of a program or they may report employing a particular practice, but they may not be aware of the policy that directs that program or that practice (if there is such a policy). In this research, school meal programs (breakfast and lunch) were described by several participants as important in meeting the needs of the whole child or in reference to the capability of *Bodily health*. The administration and implementation of school meals can be used as an example of this point. In the United States, there are federal policies (overseen by the U.S. Department of Agriculture) that set the parameters for these programs, including funding, eligibility, and nutrition standards. States, in turn, have policies regarding how schools in their state participate and which state agency will regulate (usually the state department of education). Local school districts in turn have policies regarding how the programs will be implemented in their schools.

During the years of the Obama administration, in response to the identified problem of low student participation in breakfast programs, the U.S. Department of Agriculture created a new policy that allows school districts to offer breakfast free to all students if the poverty rate in the community is high enough. To take advantage of this policy and make it fiscally sustainable, many school districts created breakfast in the classroom programs. These programs move breakfast service from before the official start of school to after, which increases participation. This program in turn required some states to create policies to declare that time spent eating breakfast after the start of school, in the classroom, was instructional time. Finally, individual school principals, teachers, and staff had to develop

the specific practices for their implementation. These included things like how records are kept, how trash is collected, and how leftover food is managed.

Policies, programs, and practices all work together, and in considering a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach, it is important to recognize that some things are difficult to fully regulate with policy. Schools may have policies that prohibit bullying, but that is not the same as creating a school environment in which all are viewed as being worthy of being treated with dignity. Before moving to some of the specific policies suggested in the Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach, I want to consider what others have said about the role of public policy in supporting the development of capabilities.

Vaughan and Walker (2012) have postulated that policies can impact the development of capabilities in two significant ways. The first is through the impact the policies have on the goods and services that are available to people, such as what food is available through school food programs or its cost, how school buildings are maintained, or what type of discipline programs are in place. The second is through the policy's influence on the social context in which people operate. An example of this from outside education can be seen in how policies that require curb cuts not only directly improve the access of those in wheelchairs (or those pushing strollers) but can also lead to a wider expectation that these people will move through public spaces. An example from within schools can be seen in the policies that seek to expand participation in the school breakfast program. Those policies, such as breakfast after the start of school and universal eligibility, not only add resources that students can use for the functioning of eating but also serve to destigmatize participation. Eating breakfast at school no longer is seen as something that only "the poor kids" do but rather a normal part of the school day that helps everyone get the day off to a better start (Food Research & Action Center, 2016). Through the impact on resources and context, these policies not only expand access to the functioning of eating healthy food but also contribute to a student's ability to access other functionings at school, such as being able to concentrate because she is not hungry.

Terzi's (2007) account of education within the CA<sup>N</sup> offers another tool for considering education policy. She suggests that there is, within the approach, a basic capability to be educated because an education (the particulars are not specified) opens the door to so many other capabilities and functionings. While Nussbaum does not specifically identify education as a basic capability, her view of it as foundational or fertile is not in conflict

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach* with Terzi's view. Terzi (2007), in agreement with Nussbaum, also recognizes the intrinsic value of education. She asserts that any consideration of policymaking in education that is rooted in the Capabilities Approach needs to take into account both of these and do so in ways that sees them as interrelated. The basic capability to be educated can, in many cases, only be met if other capabilities, for example, *Bodily integrity*, are achieved and, particularly as students mature, if they are able to develop a preference for the intrinsic value of education. At the same time, the intrinsic value of education can, I believe, support the development of other capabilities such as *Control over one's environment*. This type of interrelationship between capabilities can be seen in the *Capabilities Pathways* I discussed in Chapter Five.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, the Whole Child Approach was offered by ASCD as a way to frame policies, programs, and practices within U.S. education discourse in such a way that an alternative to the high-stakes accountability version of education could be sought. The question I want to consider here is what might be different about ASCD's Whole Child Approach if the Capabilities Approach were used to inform it in considering those things. As Walker writes,

We might ask the important question: if our intention was to promote capabilities in education, how would we deploy our available financial resources? These resources might include school buildings, books, computers, the teacher-pupil ratio, class size, and so on. (Walker, 2006:166)

Based on my research for this dissertation, including the direct engagement with ESPs, I propose here four principles for a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach that can be used to help answer Walker's question.

First, I suggest that capabilities-informed means that resources are not deployed "equally" across districts, schools, or students. Rather, it means that they are distributed with attention to individual needs, including what is needed to convert those resources into real educational opportunities. This is often described in the U.S. as "equity" versus "equality" (Levitan, 2016). This is routinely done in state and school district funding formulas that reflect the needs of the students in each school rather than operating purely on a "per-student" formula. It could be broadened beyond funding to consider where particular programs or services are deployed.

The second principle is that the dignity of the individual should underpin our consideration

of policies, programs, and practices. Examples of the application of this principle can be found in school districts where children whose families have unpaid school meal debt (not all families that need help are enrolled in the free/reduced fee program) are not publicly shamed at the meal line by being given a different meal, such as a cold sandwich rather than a hot lunch (Long, 2018). Another example from the school meal program is the use of point-of-sale technology to allow each student to enter a PIN when collecting her meal. This stands in stark contrast to my experience growing up in which students whose families paid full price for a meal would get a blue ticket and those getting free meals a red one. Everyone knew who the “poor kids” were.

The third principle is that tenets of the Whole Child Approach are understood as contributing to an account of flourishing that goes beyond test scores. While this may seem to be self-evident, in reflecting on my own professional work, I realized how easy it is to slip into an account of the value of each of these that focuses only on test scores.<sup>65</sup> And while it would be disingenuous to ignore academic outcomes, using a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach requires pushing beyond test scores in determining what is valued. Within this, I propose that Nussbaum’s ten Central Capabilities remain a useful way to consider flourishing.

The fourth principle is that all members of the school staff, including ESPs, teachers, and administrators, have a role to play in supporting this approach and should be included in the development of appropriate policies, programs, and practices. Bayat (2012) describes how administrative secretaries often do this without formal recognition. I suggest that this role should be recognized and formalized. This principle, like the one above, requires that we look beyond test scores. For example, a custodian who keeps the air quality in the school good through a functioning HVAC system can be seen as contributing to the academic achievement of students (Environmental Protection Agency, 2016; Kolbe, 2019). But with so many other factors contributing to student achievement, it would be possible to have good air quality but poor achievement. If this is the case, would the custodian and her work be of no value? I would say, no, because good air quality contributes to flourishing in other ways, not least of which is *Bodily health*.

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<sup>65</sup> In reflecting on this, I realized that I had, at an earlier point in my career, done just this, giving several presentations on the contributions of school health to academic achievement without reflecting on its other benefits. The danger, of course, with an approach such as this is that if one cannot not show a test score benefit, one may be out of luck in promoting a policy, program, or practice.



In Chapter Two, I began to consider how elements of the CA<sup>N</sup> might be found in the Whole Child Approach, particularly which of Nussbaum's Central Capabilities might be seen as best connected to each of the Whole Child Approach tenets. There I focused on three of the five tenets, finding it harder to make connections in the other two. I will now return to that discussion and, informed by the views of the participants, consider what each of these tenets might look like when informed by the Capabilities Approach.

### **Each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle**

Health is a broad area, encompassing many elements; indeed, ASCD and the CDC have identified ten components that make up this one tenet and produced a model called the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child. Each of these components in turn has policy, program, and practice options almost beyond measure. In a recent report at state policies in this area prepared by the U.S. research organization Child Trends in partnership with the National Association of State Boards of Education, researchers identified well over 100 variables for consideration (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2019).

Like Nussbaum (2011), who identified proper nourishment as part of the capability of *Bodily health*, participants saw school food programs as vital to student health. I have discussed above some of the policy, program, and practice implications of enacting school meals from a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach. And with the roots of the school food program in the U.S. in poverty alleviation (Howley, 2009), it is not difficult to see it as more than an enhancer of academic achievement (Kolbe, 2019). This is a program that runs on the labor of food service workers. A Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach suggests that in addition to their required food safety training, there is a need for professional development on cooking, nutrition, and interactions with students to promote healthy eating.<sup>66</sup>

Health must include access to medical care. This ranges from a frontline nurse who can administer required medications and deal with illness and injury to health aides for students with chronic medical needs and even to full-service primary care services such as school-based health centers. In the discussion in District One, Louise (paraeducator) addressed providing health in two ways. The first was the need for nurses; she coupled this with concern that other staff, such as clerical staff, are often the frontline health providers

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<sup>66</sup> Examples of efforts to do this have included Kate Adamick's "Boot Camps" (Johnson, 2011).

A Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach would start with the resources that are already available. *IDEA* requires school districts to provide the health services any student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) calls for so the student can participate in school. But this is only one group of students and addresses their physical health in only a small way. With many students lacking access to a reliable primary care provider such as a pediatrician,<sup>67</sup> school-based health centers are primary care practices that can meet student and family medical needs. The decisions about where to locate these centers is a resource issue. The principle of dignity can be met through the way in which students and their families can access care. Here again, by making care easier to access, school-based health centers can support dignity. As with other elements of health, the link to academic achievement is clear, but this is not the only reason to provide these services (Kolbe, 2019). One of the arguments I have sought to make throughout this dissertation, an argument that was reinforced by the participants, is that ESPs play important roles in all aspects of the life of the school. In consideration of health, I have already discussed the role that non-health staff play in managing medication. Custodians are on the frontline of cleaning up bodily fluids and, like all staff, are required to have annual blood-borne pathogen training.

Nussbaum places access to shelter within her capability of *Bodily health*. Participants did not, seeing it as more related to the capabilities of *Bodily integrity*, *Control over one's environment*, and *Life*. Regardless of the capability in which it resides, access to shelter, or lack of it, can be seen as an issue to be addressed within several of the tenets of the Whole Child Approach, including this one. In the United States, every school district is required to provide supports to homeless students to ensure that they stay in school, regardless of their physical address.<sup>68</sup> Maria (paraeducator, District Two) worked in that program in her district. Here, dignity is an important principle, whether it is how students are able to access their former school or the bus driver who makes sure that a student with a long bus ride is made welcome and has something to eat.

The importance of physical activity was discussed in District Three by Kymie (transportation), who remembered her own participation in the President's Physical Fitness

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<sup>67</sup> In the United States, pediatricians are primary care providers who serve children from birth through adolescence.

<sup>68</sup> Under the federal McKinney-Vento Act, school districts have extra obligations to homeless students to ensure they can enroll in school and access related services. Each school district has a staff member who works as the Homeless Liaison, who provides services to support homeless students and their families.

Program. Nussbaum (2011) suggests that the capability of *Play*, through its physical aspects, can be seen as related to the capability of *Bodily health*. Here, a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach suggests that schools should have the policies, programs, and practices to promote active recess and the policies to prohibit schools from withholding recess as punishment. (I will return to the capability of *Play* in the section below on safety.) Maybe the most important implications for ESPs in thinking about the capability of *Play* in the context of health are the need for the skills to lead active recess or activity in the classroom.

In her discussion of the capability of *Bodily integrity*, Nussbaum (2011) positions it as being about safety, primarily physical but also emotional. However, I propose that it is also related to dignity. For example, for students with special medical needs (such as a student with a catheter), their sense of *Bodily integrity* (or even *Control over [their] environment*) may be in question with every interaction with another person providing their care. Holding onto the principle of dignity requires consideration of these two capabilities in the provision of health services and programs.

**Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults**

Safety, both physical and emotional, was a major theme for the participants. In Chapter Two, I suggested that it might be the tenet where the CA<sup>N</sup> could be most fully seen. Being safe and feeling safe may be the most *fertile capability* or *corrosive disadvantage* in relation to school (Unterhalter, 2003). The principle of resource allocation in this area requires that, in the discussion of safety, both physical and emotional safety be considered. Identifying how to allocate resources in response to need cannot be done without the views of students and their families.

Policymakers need to understand what students say makes them feel safe. By considering the full range of capabilities offered in Nussbaum's account, the interrelatedness of physical and emotional safety can be taken into account. And while something like the quality of the water in a school is an obvious physical safety (or health) issue, poor water quality may contribute to a feeling of emotional unsafety. Its existence may send the message to students that the school administrators (or other policymakers) do not respect or care about them. Indeed, it may be seen as an affront to dignity. In a different example,

policies such as those requiring restorative justice practices<sup>69</sup> are premised on the idea that if all parties are treated as deserving of human dignity, a safer environment is fostered. In other words, physical safety and emotional safety can be enhanced.

Among the nine ESP job categories, custodians and bus drivers are often thought of as most directly connected to physical safety. This is where their training is focused. Yet participants who were from those categories were just as eager to discuss their role in emotional safety. They talked about things like fun or being the person who kept a troubled child feeling safe. Several of them talked about their role in building relationships, particularly with those students who might not be as comfortable at school. Similarly, paraeducator participants in District One discussed how they try to create safe spaces in the classrooms.

What I draw from the commitments to physical and emotional safety demonstrated by the participants in this research is that policies in this area need to ensure that ESPs are included in the planning, implementation, and professional development that goes into creating physically and emotionally safe schools. As noted by participants, the bus driver is often the first person each day a student interacts with, setting the tone for her school day. It makes no sense that discipline on the bus is not managed under the same rules as in the school building, but as a friend who is a Utah bus driver<sup>70</sup> pointed out to me in another context, drivers need particular training to manage discipline while driving a large bus down the highway at 60 miles per hour.

### **Each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community**

In Chapter Two, I posited that among the Central Capabilities most relevant to this tenet are those of *Senses, imagination, and thought, Practical reason, and Affiliation*. On further reflection, I would add that the capability of *Control over one's environment* and the capability of *Play* might be seen as connected to this tenet. Woven through these capabilities is the need for recognition of the cultural resources that students bring with them to school (Walker, 2003). These resources are rooted in the broader community and

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<sup>69</sup> There are a variety of definitions of restorative justice in schools; in general, these are programs that encourage students to consider their behavior, its cause, and its effect on others. These conversations often include the victims or those impacted by the behavior. A key element is some form of making amends. These programs are positioned as an alternative to policies that exclude students unilaterally, such as suspension or expulsion.

<sup>70</sup> She was not a participant in this research.

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach* should be built upon to support students.

In the focus groups, participants identified a number of other factors that contribute to the building of connections. In the discussion in District One, Dave and the other custodians spoke about their view that part of their job was to help students build a sense of responsibility to the wider school community. Another example is the discussions in Districts One and Two of the importance of the capability of *Other species* and the students' relationships with them. Participants viewed those relationships as an important part of building responsibility and connections. In District Two, the participants shared their understandings of the importance of the programs they worked in to helping students and their families stay connected to the community. For Ken and Maria (both paraeducators), this included making connections for the students and their families to community programs. Drawing on the research on the importance of relationships discussed in Chapter Five, this tenet can be enhanced by considering the relationships of respect that Nussbaum centers in her discussion of the capability of *Affiliation*.

**Each child has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults**

In a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child approach, class size and student/teacher ratio might be seen as one of the primary resource issues. It could be argued that, in its original definition, personalization could be seen as a strategy for dignity. But this is the case only if it is done in ways that are designed to help students achieve the wide range of capabilities that are of value. In other words, personalization cannot be the reason for diminished expectations. Paraeducators, particularly those working in special education, already play an important role in providing personalized education. For them to do so in ways that support students within a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach, they require appropriate professional development (Chambers, 2015). One example of this from the focus groups was offered by Louise (paraeducator, District One), who shared her experience of the professional development she and her colleagues received from a speech therapist and how that changed her view of what she was supposed to be doing.

The second part of this element addresses the issues of caring and qualification. As I will discuss more below in Section 6.5, caring is a theme shared by the CA<sup>N</sup> and the Whole Child Approach. Participants expressed their belief in the value of caring in a number of ways, including their belief about the importance of their relationships with students. In a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach, ESPs are included in the consideration of

how schools create environments in which students are surrounded by caring adults. The call for adults in schools to be qualified requires consideration of the issues of professionalism and professional development. While I will return to this in Section 6.4, I want to note here that if staff are to receive this professional development, it most likely will need to be made available after they are hired. Most of these jobs are not ones that have a clear preservice track.

**Each child is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment**

While a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach must look beyond test scores, it cannot ignore academics. This Whole Child Approach tenet offers a potentially broad view while appearing to focus primarily on the extrinsic value of education. In a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach, preparation for success after school would be conceptualized as fostering the intrinsic love of learning. It must also include supporting students in developing the agency to set their own goals, not merely to follow the goals of others (Vaughan & Walker, 2012). Schools should be places that foster

collective problem-solving, through processes of critical dialogue, respect, inclusion of diverse perspectives and “reasonableness”, that is the willingness to listen to others whose views, histories, and experiences differ from one’s own. (Walker, 2003:174)

A Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach can be seen as the basis for what Walker refers to as a “pedagogy of inclusion” (2003:176). This is not inclusion in the special education sense necessarily but in the sense that all of the Central Capabilities, particularly that of *Affiliation*, are promoted. A pedagogy of inclusion also is founded on the dignity and value of each individual student and, therefore, prepares each student. If this type of pedagogy is to be achieved, what then does it mean for ESPs and their status as professionals?

## **6.4 The Question of Professionalism**

In Chapter Three, I described how the NEA, as the largest organization representing educators in the United States, has made the professional status of ESPs central to its arguments for their value within in the public education system. This claim to professionalism is key to their efforts to improve the status, working conditions, and pay of ESPs. In an ideal situation, their value would not be determined by a label, but it is the NEA’s view that, in the current structure in the United States, recognition of a professional

status is required. This view is not merely a position to be used in advocating for better pay and working conditions. Rather, it is at the heart of a program of work designed to build the capacity of ESPs. Hence, for example, a food service worker in a school is not just like a food service worker in a fast-food restaurant, but rather is working in a role in which she should have the capacity to engage with colleagues on questions of what is best for students (personal conversation with Amber Parker, Director of ESP Quality, National Education Association, October 22, 2019) . But some might suggest that it is too much to ask of ESPs that they engage in the work that is required by professionalism, particularly with respect to the ongoing questioning of what is best for students. I believe that the answer to that question is in part based on how professionalism is understood and how it is understood in the US context. In Chapter Three, I argued that one way to consider this is in the work of the framework of Hargreaves (2000), who is widely cited and used in the United States. In his framework, ESPs can be seen as pre-professional. Their work is seen as demanding, by them and by others, but certainly not difficult. However, I would argue that ESPs' work *is* difficult and requires particular training, skills, and the exercise of judgment. Tori (bus driver, District Three) made it clear that her ability to safely deliver children in a 30,000-pound bus is a demanding skill that many do not have. Others spoke of the emotional demands they felt to keep students safe. And still others, like Kathy (paraeducator) in District One, spoke of the professional training they and their colleagues need to be effective.

Positioned within the pre-professional category, ESPs are seen as only needing to carry out directives from those such as teachers or administrators who have more knowledge or skill than them (Hargreaves, 2000). And whether or not they must be seen as professional to be valued, this dissertation offers an example of how ESPs can act in ways that are aligned with professionalism in education. In particular they can, and I suggest that they do, consider the ethical and programmatic issues in the development and implementation of the policies, programs, and practices of a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach. Such a suggestion sits well with but extends David Carr's argument that teachers need moral wisdom (1992) and that education is a moral and ethical endeavor (David Carr, 2000). An example of participation in the development and implementation of the policies, programs, and practices, drawn from my professional practice, is in the work of the Westfall Local Schools (Ohio). Here a district wide effort has led to a whole raft of changes for paraeducators, including participating as members of "Teacher-Based Teams" and "Building Level Teams", both of which are structures of collaborative planning,

professional development, and professional improvement in the service of improving student learning.

When Hargreaves wrote in 2000, he argued that teachers were moving out of the age of the autonomous professional and into in the age of the collegial professional. They were, in his view, moving toward a fourth age that might be either post-professional or postmodern. The latter, he argued, was the preferred path in that it was “open, inclusive and democratic” (167). It required teachers to move from collegial to collaborative. And while Hargreaves did not see a significant role for ESPs in this preferred future, I suggest that an account in which ESPs are recognized as able to act as professionals is in the best interest of students and in line with a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach. This approach, with ESPs included in the professional community, can help to inform the response of some of the issues in schools that Hargreaves described as driving teachers toward the post-professional age. Teachers are, in his view, called upon to “pool resources, and to make shared sense of and develop collective responses towards intensified and often capricious demands on their practice” (Hargreaves, 2000:162). He identified a number of conditions that he saw as driving the need for collaborative practice among the teachers. Three of these are particularly relevant for ESPs and their work.

First, is the “[a]ddition of increasing ‘social work’ responsibilities to the task of teaching” (Hargreaves, 2000:163). Focus group participants, while not using the same terms, offered similar descriptions of the conditions in their schools. They described the challenges of their students from poverty, hunger, and/or emotional distress. Some of them saw it as part of their job, regardless of job description, to help address or ameliorate these through formal programs or informal efforts to reach out to students. Others, particularly bus drivers, articulated a recognition that they may be aware of issues before teachers or administrators are. I suggest that a system that engages all school staff, recognizing their unique skills, can provide a stronger response of the school to these “‘social work’ responsibilities” (Hargreaves, 2000:163).<sup>71</sup>

The second challenge, Hargreaves says, is the “[i]ntegration of special education students into ordinary classes” (163). While Hargreaves only addresses this in terms of

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<sup>71</sup> A related idea that is gaining popularity in the United States is that of the “full-service community school” in which social services are explicitly co-located at the school and in which there is a staff person who serves as the coordinator among all the services and the school.



collaboration between classroom teachers and special education teachers, the reality of this in the United States is that paraeducators (among others) are key to meeting the needs of special education students. Even without a wholesale rethink of special education as discussed above, a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach requires the recognition of paraeducators and others who work with special education students as collaborative professionals who do more than just fulfill teacher direction. NEA is currently developing a joint professional development course for teachers and paraeducators to improve their capacity to work together. Its title—*Building Winning Teams*—incorporates the idea of collaboration across professional groups.<sup>72</sup> As with Potsi's (2016) work with early childhood education, consideration of the most relevant capabilities for the work of ESPs could strengthen these types of professional development.

Hargreaves's third challenge is what he describes as the “[g]rowing multicultural diversity” (2000:163) of public schools. As discussed earlier, ESPs are more likely to be living in the district where they work. They may in fact be more representative of the diversity of the district. Hargreaves argues that this diversity challenges teachers to recognize the diversity and adapt their teaching accordingly.<sup>73</sup> This task is likely to be easier through collaborative work with ESP colleagues. Several of the participants in District Two identified as a positive the fact that they lived in the district and shared a Latinx<sup>74</sup> background with many of the students. By recognizing their expertise and experiences and by including them in professional collaborations, the district may be better positioned to respond to the needs of students and families.

It has been suggested by Gewirtz and Cribb (2009) that the high-stakes accountability context of education has been characterized by a de-professionalizing of teachers through increasing regulation leading to loss of autonomy. This description corresponds to one of the two potential scenarios for the profession proposed by Hargreaves (2000): the post-professional. He describes this as a return to something similar to the pre-professional age, where teaching once again is seen as an activity that does not require significant professional skill. One example of this might be seen in some of the “alternate

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<sup>72</sup> Private communication with NEA staff.

<sup>73</sup> The idea that cultural diversity is the only type of diversity that requires teachers to modify or individualize teaching practice is one that, I believe, is insufficient. Even students from the same cultural background have diverse learning needs that need to be addressed. Rather, there may be certain factors that are cultural, and teachers may improve their practice through engagement with colleagues from those backgrounds. However, seeing only apparent cultural differences risks stereotyping that can set unrealistically high or low expectations.

<sup>74</sup> “Latinx” is a gender-neutral term used in the United States to reference Latin American cultural identity.

certification” programs in the United States such as Teach For America<sup>75</sup> (Lahann & Reagan, 2011; Thomas, 2018). Another example might be the popularity of scripted instructional programs in reading and math.

Alternatively, Hargreaves proposes a “postmodern professionalism that is broader, more flexible and more democratically inclusive of groups outside teaching and their concerns than its predecessors” (2000:167). This type of professionalism is one that has room for both teachers and ESPs to work together as professionals, each with a different type of expertise. He goes on to note that this type of professionalism can only take place through a “conscious *social movement*” (2000:168, emphasis in original) that brings people together. Unfortunately, he later argues against “the introduction of more unlicensed and uncertificated adults performing educational work in schools” (2000:170). I would counter that the Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach I proposed above requires that all work in schools be considered educational and that it is in a collaborative, postmodern professionalism that teachers and ESPs can work together to provide both instruction and support to students, while acknowledging that professionalism may look different across different ESPs groups.

## **6.5 Care, Safety, and Geborgenheit**

The participants in this research project expressed a strong sense of care for their students. Woven together for them was the idea that it was through their relationship with students and the creation of emotionally and physically safe environments that this care was demonstrated. Relationships of care were also expressed through helping students develop responsibility and good behavior, such as cleaning up their mess in the lunch room. Ideas of care and good relationships can be seen in the debate in the United States over how to make schools safe. At the risk of oversimplification, one account of safety is that it is something to be achieved by the hardening of schools through arming staff, bullet-proof backpacks, stricter discipline, and similar ideas. The other account calls for schools where everyone is treated respectfully and the emotional needs of students are taken into account.<sup>76</sup> These are also schools that work to break what is called the school-to-prison

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<sup>75</sup> Teach For America is a U.S. nonprofit that recruits recent college graduates and, after a short training period, places them in high-poverty school districts. Its approach has been controversial and sparked significant discussion about the best way to ensure high-quality teachers, particularly in high-poverty districts.

<sup>76</sup> Another currently common frame is that of the need to make schools “trauma-informed”. I am choosing not to address this particular frame, because, in my opinion, the need to critically respond to it is a dissertation in and of itself. See, for example, Clark (2016) as a discussion of how the use of a trauma-informed lens can contribute to stigmatization of certain populations.

pipeline, in which students of color are disproportionately punished for minor infractions through suspension and expulsion in the name of school safety, leading them to the juvenile justice system. This second view, I believe, can be understood to be based on ideas of care and dignity that are similar to those expressed by Nussbaum (2006a, 2011).

Yet physical safety cannot be ignored either, and while the issues of guns and metal detectors may be the most obvious in the discourse, there are also many schools where the physical plant is falling down around students and staff. These conditions can cause physical harm but also can cause emotional harm. When students protest against metal detectors, it is not because they want guns in schools; it is because they see the metal detectors as diminishing their dignity.

Within the Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach discussed above, physical and emotional safety can be seen as entwined, but too often, I find, they are treated as separate issues that do not influence each other. Wimborne (2018) proposed that the German concept of *Geborgenheit* could help bridge this divide in that it could offer an expansive and capabilities-focused view of safety in school. Since there is little scholarship in English that has employed this concept, I am cautious in proposing it here. However, I consider it an idea that could help to inform some of the additional research discussed below.

Hutta defines *Geborgenheit* as describing “a sense of being nested within a sheltering space to which one can open up” (2009:256). I see in this a view similar to that expressed in *District One* by Carleen (paraeducator), who said,

. . . *[W]e try to make our room the safest place in the building. That they can come and tell us anything they want, anything on their mind. And they can have a place to chill out for a minute. . . .*

This conceptualization of places that support physical and emotional safety can be seen in the idea that *Geborgenheit* is “being in safety”, where schools create conditions for learning and flourishing that “can only take place in an environment that is free of fear and the risk of harm” (Joseph & Dinah, 2017:260). Sedmak proposes that *Geborgenheit* can be seen in two ways. First, it is a thing with its own intrinsic worth: “It is good in itself to experience *Geborgenheit*” (2016:238). Second, he argues, it is also a means to an end. It is the basis from which students can build the capacity to tackle life’s inevitable difficulties. It is, he says, “the means to an end, namely agency and responsibility” (2016:238). As with education, *Geborgenheit* can be seen as having intrinsic and extrinsic value.

In German thought, *Geborgenheit* has been used to consider the experiences of children in homes and in the family (Hutta, 2009; Sedmak, 2016). Hutta built on this traditional usage to think about safety in the community in ways that I think could also be applied to schools. He argues that in thinking about safety, the question should not be “‘how safe do you feel?’ in X, but ‘what makes you feel *geborgen*?’” (2009:258). Of course, this is easier in German where this single-word concept is used, but his point is that this idea can move the discussion away from a dichotomy of safe/not safe or order/disorder to a discussion of the structures and relationships that can help students flourish. I propose that *Geborgenheit* can be thought of as capturing, at least in part, the importance of relationships in schools as factors in the achievement of capabilities. Applied within a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach, it might be a way to capture how we want students to feel so that they can flourish and achieve the Central Capabilities as they move into adulthood.

## **6.6. Personal Practice**

In considering how this dissertation has changed or transformed my personal professional practice and commitments, I will present two areas for reflection. The first is those beliefs or values that have been reinforced or altered through this project. While I came into this work due to my affinity for Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach, the engagement with participants and their interest in discussing and working with it has reinforced my view that it is a valuable tool for considering issues in education. Using it has meant that, even outside the research, I find myself asking different questions when engaged with colleagues. This has been most apparent to me recently in work I am doing related to school breakfast programs. As my colleagues and I think about the messages we want to communicate about the programs, I have pushed us to think more broadly than “breakfast equals achievement”. And indeed, in interviews conducted as part of my professional practice, participants in schools that had added breakfast after the bell programs talked about how the breakfast program helped to build relationships in the classroom (NEA Foundation, 2019). This project has also given me a set of tools for talking about the work of ESPs. I recently had the opportunity to contribute to the review of a proposed research agenda related to a new framework on social, emotional, and academic development (Aspen Institute, 2019). Because of this research and my ability to talk about it, I was able to get the work of ESPs included in the research agenda, including the following research question, which I helped to draft:

How can teachers and paraeducators work together to support high-quality

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach*  
implementation of practices, and what do they need to support  
implementation? (Jones et al., 2019:24)

Second, undertaking this degree has shaped my views on “what next” in my professional career. I took on this degree during a period of taking a step back from the day-to-day work I had been doing for almost 20 years. Now as I come to the end of this period of my life, my approach to my work has been transformed. Throughout it, I have worked as an independent consultant for a range of different nonprofit and union clients. While at the point of writing this I am not completely clear on how this next phase will unfold, I am exploring how to create a practice that will allow me to continue to work with and support ESPs and to explore and write about the issues raised in this dissertation. This includes some of the questions discussed below as future research questions.

### **6.7 Limitations and Reflections on the Quality of the Research**

It is important to note here that one of the major critiques of Nussbaum’s creation of the list of Central Capabilities, from Sen (2004) and others, is that the list freezes in time some capabilities and may exclude others. While Nussbaum (2006) has offered her own response to this critique, it is worth noting here, that this exploratory research did not set out to specifically challenge the Central Capabilities, but rather to use them as the basis for discussion while remaining aware of criticisms of her approach.

I have tried my best to conduct research that offers an interpretation of the participants’ views that reflects their thoughts but, of course, the study has limitations which I will discuss here. However, despite these, this study has been conducted in such a way as to be replicable by others and to be expanding on as discussed in the next section Time, or lack of it, was, in my view, one of the major limitations. Each focus group was only 60 minutes, which limited the time available for exploration and discussion. Additionally, there was not the opportunity for follow-up with participants or the chance to get their reactions to findings. The findings presented here can be seen as a snapshot, my interpretation of a particular set of moments in time. I noted in Chapter Four the influence of Freire (1970) on my thinking, and I recognize that I may not have lived up to the spirit of his work. Yet since part of the impetus for this work was the gaps in the education research that I identified, it is my hope that “. . . with their voices and reflection entered in the literature, other investigators may now determine . . .” (Fink & Ramstetter 2018: 943) how other ESPs in other settings view their work and experiences and from that research continue to

consider how they might best meet the needs of students.

In Chapter Four, I also discussed the question of identity in relation to ontological considerations. I noted there that due to the small-scale nature of this research, I was not able to explore with participants in any depth how various elements of personal identity might influence their perspectives. This meant that there was almost no discussion of issues of race, ethnicity, or class. At this time in the U.S., it is hard to think of an issue where those things do not matter to people's perspectives. As Appiah notes, these elements of our identity give us "contours, comity, values, a sense of purpose and meaning" (2018:32). The normative individualism of the CA<sup>N</sup> does not ignore that these elements of identity can influence our views of our realities but also shape the real opportunities that may or may not be available to us. Further research using the CA<sup>N</sup> could seek to address these issues in more explicit ways.

Conducting further research, whether through group or individual interview, that explored these elements of identity would not be without challenges. Conversations about social identity can be quite difficult, particularly where they may touch on issues of social inequity and privilege (Miller, Donner, & Fraser, 2004). The social contexts in which the group is conducted including the group composition, the identity of the facilitator, or sponsorship of the group can have an impact on the data collected. Group members may self-censor in response to one or more of these elements (Hollander, 2004). While there are no simple solutions to this issue, it is one that needs attention and thought in undertaking further research. One example of this would be focus groups in which participants shared some common element of identity, and/or questions were asked to elicit responses related to participant identity. Huer and Senze (2003), note that including individuals from the community in question in the planning such research is a required first step.

Participants were told from the beginning that their involvement was voluntary. Respect for personal agency was key. I sought to respect that throughout and can offer several examples here. While all participants in all groups participated in some way, participants were free to choose not to respond to particular questions. In the drawing activity, several participants chose to write words only, others drew pictures and wrote, and still others drew and did not add words. In the card activity in which participants were given a great deal of flexibility in how they responded, one participant chose not to participate. These

can be seen as limitations, but do not, in my view, diminish the overall “goodness” of the research.

In Chapter Four, I discussed my understanding of what constitutes quality in this type of research including reflecting on the credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of the process and the findings. While it is always possible to do better, I would say that I am satisfied that I did the best I could in each of these areas and that what has been presented here lays a reasonable foundation for future research. In the next section, I will turn to what some of that future research might be.

### **6.8 Looking Forward**

In Chapter One, I proposed the idea of a quilt as a metaphor for how the various elements of this dissertation related to each other. In this section, I will propose some other research quilts. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. Like policies, there is always another research question that can be asked.

Before moving on to these other quilts, I think it is important to consider how my use of the quilt metaphor helped to shape my work throughout. As I noted at the beginning, the most common use of quilting metaphors are based on the top and the patchwork element. Koelsch (2012) proposed this patchwork metaphor as a way to “present participant data as both unique and part of a larger whole” (829). She suggests that just as each piece of a patchwork can be seen as a single work, it is only in putting them together that the full picture is created. But this view only describes the quilt top and ignores the other elements that make it a quilt. Putting in wool batting rather than polyester makes for a warmer quilt. The type of material chosen for the base may add to or subtract from the ability of the quilt to stand up to use. Each of these layers can be changed and combined in different ways and this recognition proved useful as I considered how this small, exploratory research project might be extended. Additionally, methodology, thought of here as the stitching that holds the quilt together, can be modified to allow for different methodologies to connect participants with the conceptual layers of the quilt.

I will start with the quilts that contain the same base and center layers, but where the top layer might look different. In this set of quilts, the work is extended with different groups of ESPs, or it involves going deeper with a group of ESPs from the same job category. There is also research that could be done to look across the school community to examine

how others view ESPs and how they might view a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach. Finally, there is the research that looks not at ESPs but at others in the school community.

The second set of quilts also has a base of the Capabilities Approach, but in the middle layer the Whole Child Approach is replaced. As I described it above, the Whole Child Approach is a policy framework, and new policy frameworks will arise. In the past year, while I was conducting this research, that is what has happened. On January 15, 2019, a new framework for social, emotional, and academic development was released by a bipartisan commission under the sponsorship of the nonprofit Aspen Institute<sup>77</sup> (Aspen Institute, 2019). With six tenets, some of which overlap with the Whole Child Approach, it is poised to replace the Whole Child Approach as the policy framework that people look to as a potential counterweight to the neoliberal education agenda. It is new and unexplored, but I believe that examining how it might include elements of the Capabilities Approach or be strengthened by the Capabilities Approach offers a variety of research opportunities. Among these then would be a similar set of explorations about how it is understood by ESPs.<sup>78</sup>

Of course, I need to look beyond the metaphorical quilts. As I discussed earlier, I believe that there is value in further research that examines if and how the concept of *Geborgenheit* might enhance our understanding of safety in schools. How might it relate to the ideas of the real opportunities people have to be safe in school? Is this a concept that might help create a fuller understanding of the interrelationship between different capabilities in supporting safety? These are questions that I believe deserve further exploration and attention, particularly from scholars who can access the broader German literature that employs the concept.

Finally, I think there are opportunities for extending all of these research areas with a variety of methods, including interviews, focus groups, and potentially participatory action methods that allow staff in schools to create the research questions and be co-researchers. Wollff and de-Shalit (2007) used extended interviews across two countries (Israel and

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<sup>77</sup> In the U.S. context, “bipartisan” refers to an explicit effort to ensure that the membership of the Commission (which had no governmental status) represented experts and leaders from both the Democratic and Republican parties and that the work of the Commission was not tied to any political party.

<sup>78</sup> I think it is important to be transparent in noting that I was one of hundreds of people involved in providing feedback on drafts of this report and its ancillary materials. There are several places where attention to ESPs was included in the report, including in the research agenda, as noted above.



England) with participants who were identified as experiencing disadvantage and others who worked with them. These in-depth interviews allowed them to dig deeper on individual views than a focus group might have. Yet, as I have discussed above, the ability of participants to discuss issues with each other offered the potential for developing other types of understanding.

Yet another possible approach to additional research would be to engage ESPs, other members of the school staff, family members, and even students in action research projects in which they can, “organize the conditions under which they can learn from their experiences and make this experience accessible to others” (McTaggart, 1991). This type of research, in which the Central Capabilities might be used by those in the school to consider what a school should actually look like and how it should operate, offers two potential benefits. First, it is in line with the recognition that those whose lives are under consideration should have a say in identifying capabilities (Robeyns, 2003; Walker, 2006). Second it has the potential to contribute to the development of capabilities through the action research process (Walker & Loots, 2018). Third, it offers ESPs the opportunity to engage in the type of reflection that is integral to their status as professionals (Schön, 1983).

## **6.9 Chapter Conclusion**

In this work, I have sought to make the case that the account of the Capabilities Approach set forth by Nussbaum offers a useful way to consider the role of Education Support Professionals in supporting the whole child. I have argued that there are many ways in which many, if not all, of her Central Capabilities can be linked to the policies, programs, and practices that take place in school. If education is to serve its role of being not just about social reproduction but also “a major source of social transformation” (Walker, 2003:169), then a normative theory that speaks to dignity, respect, and the idea that there are certain things that all people should have the opportunity to experience is needed to underlie the policy framework that is being employed. And in this case, I have applied it to the Whole Child Approach.

This research has also contributed to the scholarship of the CA<sup>N</sup> by directly engaging a group of blue-collar workers in the United States in considering it. Nussbaum was clear in her presentation of the Central Capabilities that this was a list that should be debated and that how each capability is achieved could look different within different contexts (2006a,

2011). The type of research I conducted can be seen as part of this process of engagement and debate.

In addition to making a case for the applicability of the CA<sup>N</sup> this work centered the experiences of ESPs. As I argued, ESPs are a part of the education workforce who are under-considered. Treated as “pre-professionals” (Hargreaves, 2000), the participants in this research demonstrated the ability to reflect on their work and engage in consideration of it in relation to several different frameworks. They demonstrated that they can be seen as professionals.

It has been suggested that the CA<sup>N</sup> can be seen as an alternative to the deficit thinking that has underpinned much of the discussion in U.S. education discourse (Anderson, 2013; Glassman, 2011; Toson & Frattura, 2013), and I agree with this. Indeed, part of its power is its ability to inform shifting policy frameworks. Asking the question “what is each person actually able to do?” requires that we look at the entire school community, including ESPs, to create the schools that students need. Whether it is a Capabilities-Informed Whole Child Approach or a Capabilities-Informed approach to Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, using the Capabilities Approach can advance the provision of more equitable education environments.

## **Appendix One: Nussbaum's Central Capabilities**

From Nussbaum, 2011, 33-34

1. *Life*. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. *Bodily health*. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
3. *Bodily integrity*. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction
4. *Senses, imagination, and thought*. Being able to use the sense, to imagine, think, and reason — and to do these things in a “truly human” way, a way informed and cultivated by adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid nonbeneficial pain.
5. *Emotions*. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)
6. *Practical reason*. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)
7. *Affiliation*. (A) 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. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.) (B) Having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of nondiscrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.

8. *Other species*. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature
9. *Play*. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
10. *Control over one's environment*. (A) *Political*. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. (B) *Material*. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods) and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

## Appendix Two: Ethical Approval



College of Social  
Sciences

02/10/2017

Dear Nora Howley

### **College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

**Project Title:** The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child:  
A Capabilities Approach

**Application No:** 400170026

The College Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: 02/10/2017
- Project end date: 30/06/2020
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the CoSS Research Ethics Administrator before research commences. Permissions you must provide are shown in the *College Ethics Review Feedback* document that has been sent to you.
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research: ([http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_227599\\_en.pdf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_227599_en.pdf)) (Unless there is an agreed exemption to this, noted here).
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The *Request for Amendments to an Approved Application* form should be used:  
<http://www.gla.ac.uk/colleges/socialsciences/students/ethics/forms/staffandpostgraduateresearchstudents/>

Yours sincerely,

Dr Muir Houston

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## **Appendix Three: Focus Group Guide and Cards for Capabilities Activity**

### **University Ethical Approval Question 7a.**

#### **Participant Demographic and Contact Information to be obtained at start of focus groups**

1. Participant Name
2. Participant Identification Number (assigned by researcher)
3. What is your job category? (check all that apply)
  - a. Clerical
  - b. Custodial and Maintenance
  - c. Food Service
  - d. Health and Student Service
  - e. Paraeducator
  - f. Security
  - g. Skilled Trades
  - h. Technical Service
  - i. Transportation
4. What is your primary worksite?
  - a. School building
  - b. District office
  - c. Other
5. Which primary grades do you work with?
6. Do you work with other grades? If so, which ones?
7. District name (will only be used to report on size of district)
8. Email address (to allow me to contact you with a summary of the research)
9. Gender (optional)
10. Ethnicity (optional)
11. Age (optional)

#### **Focus Group Topics**

1. Introductions.
2. The most important thing you do in your work? Why?
3. What does the phrase “whole child” mean to you?
4. What do you think about the idea that schools should “support the whole child”?
5. Projective activity: Create a picture of you how you think your work supports the whole child.
6. Introduction and reaction to Nussbaum’s list of central capabilities.
7. Which capabilities do you think schools could be part of creating and developing? Which ones do you think your job impacts? Why?
8. Ranking the capabilities.
9. Final thoughts.

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LIFE

-----

BODILY HEALTH

-----

BODILY INTEGRITY

-----

AFFILIATION

-----

OTHER SPECIES

-----

PLAY

-----

SENSES, IMAGINATION, AND THOUGHT

-----

EMOTIONS

-----

PRACTICAL REASON

-----

CONTROL OVER ONE'S ENVIRONMENT

-----

Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves

---

Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about one's life

---

Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length

---

Being able to have good health

---

Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault

---

Being able to live with and interact with others AND being able to be treated as a dignified human being

---

Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and natures

---

Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities

---

Being able to use senses, to imagine, to think, to reason

---

Being able to participate in the political choices that govern one's life AND being able to control one's material environment such as owning property, having a job, etc.

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## **Appendix Four: Example of Coded Transcript**

Note: All names (except mine) are the aliases assigned for this research.  
This excerpt is taken from the District Two focus group.

**Nora:** *Now that you've had a chance to take a quick look at them, any thoughts about them? Do any of them speak to you?*

**Tanya:** It's all about humans, It's about us. People, kids.

Codes (17741-17795)

CAN-INSEPARABILITY OF CAPABILITIES

**Nora:** *Others?*

**Olivia:** Control over one's environment. I don't believe children have control over their environment. Because, ultimately, I think the choices we make as parents is what determines the environment around them. So, I think that as adults we can control our environment, but children don't have the choice to control their environment. They're just put in the environment that they were born into.

Codes (17817-18205)

CAN-Control Over Environment

**Nora:** *Do you think that as we think about through the life cycle, that fostering the capability to have control over one's important is something we would want to see happen?*

**Olivia:** I think yes, I think that partly in school, they learn to make choices that will help better their environment. Cause, I see a lot of our kids and our families are aching, at least when I used to work in a different department. The kids can break out of that cycle to some extent. And be able to have control over their environment. But they need people like support people to teach them those things.

Codes (18388-18791)

CAN-Control Over Environment

**Nora:** *Okay, other folks' reactions to that one or to others?*

**Nina:** So, this has to do with how kids feel?

**Nora:** *These are Nussbaum's big picture things about the capabilities for people writ large. She is thinking up here at the high level, what makes a just world.*

**Nina:** This one about being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length. What is normal?

**Ken:** What is normal?

**Nina:** What is normal now-a-days?

**Ken:** unintelligible

Codes (19073-19248)

CAN-Life

## **Appendix Five: A Brief History of the Utah School Employees Association**

The Utah School Employees Association (USEA) was founded in 1929 as the Utah Building and Grounds Association (UBGA). The original members were primarily supervisors in the custodial, maintenance, and building and grounds departments in schools across Utah. Other workers in the jobs now referred to as Education Support Professionals (ESPs) were admitted as members starting in 1938. The primary original purpose of UBGA was to be a social organization.

From 1995 to 1996, members undertook the work needed to transform the organization from a social organization to a statewide collective bargaining organization known as the USEA. This included a dues increase from \$1.00 a year to \$18.00 a year. These changes allowed the organization to develop bylaws, formalize structures, and hold an annual convention. At this point, the organization also began offering a life insurance benefit to members for a small payment. It also affiliated with the American Association of Classified School Employees (AACSE), an organization of otherwise unaffiliated associations.

At the height of its membership, in 1999, USEA represented over 6,000 workers in Utah school districts, both rural and urban. In that year, USEA leaders decided to end the organization's affiliation with the AASCE and began the process of becoming a statewide affiliate of the National Education Association (NEA). This decision placed USEA as the sole statewide ESP-only affiliate of NEA. This decision allowed USEA members to access the benefits of NEA membership and to be part of a larger national association.

In 2017, when this research was conducted, USEA had been undergoing several years of NEA-supported organizational transformation. This included a focus on the ideas of ESPs as critical to serving the whole child, the professionalization of ESP jobs through a focus on job-relevant professional development, and the recruitment of new members with the retention of existing ones.

## **Appendix Six: Profiles of Three Districts**

As of October 2016 (the last year for which data are available), Utah had 41 school districts, serving 644,476 students. There were an additional 71,194 students enrolled in charter schools and 212 students attending the Utah School for the Deaf and Blind (Utah State Board of Education, 2019).

**District One** is in the northern part of the state. It has 24 schools serving about 11,600 students. The district is 86% Caucasian, 11% Hispanic, and 1% each American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, and multiracial; 38% of the students are economically disadvantaged, 13% are identified as disabled, and 3% are English Language Learners (ELLs).

**District Two** is in the center of the state. It has 20 schools serving about 11,700 students. The district is 52% Hispanic, 42% Caucasian, 2% Black, and 1% each American Indian and Asian; 81% of the students are economically disadvantaged, 13% are identified as disabled, and 19% are ELLs.

**District Three** is also in the center of the state. It has 51 schools serving almost 34,000 students. The district is 74% Caucasian, 16% Hispanic, 5% multiracial, 2% each Black and Asian, and 1% Pacific Islander; 29% of the students are economically disadvantaged, 12% are identified as disabled, and 6% are ELLs.

(All district information comes from Utah State Board of Education, n.d.)

## **Appendix Seven: Best Practices in Using Qualitative Data Analysis Software**

Paulus, et al (2017) in responding to the increased use of qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) noted that the details are often sparse, and this might be seen as weakening the research through lack of transparency. They argue that the researchers need to provide information that is sufficient to allow the reader to understand how and why the software was used. They propose seven best practices, which I detail here along with my response based on my usage.

1. *Identify which software version is used and, if using a web browser, which browser.*

I worked with Dedoose version 8.0 using Chrome as the browser of choice, based on the recommendation of the Dedoose support team. Browser choice may impact how a web-based software package runs, and Chrome was recommended by Dedoose as the most compatible.

2. *Use an active rather than passive voice when describing software use to make clear that the researcher, not the software, is conducting the analysis.* I have applied this recommendation throughout.

3. *Provide a description of what the software is generally used for without using jargon and provide a rationale for why the researcher selected it for use.* Dedoose is one of many programs that exist to help manage qualitative data sets. Dedoose allows for multiple data (transcripts, visuals, audio) to be uploaded into a single “project”. Once data were coded within Dedoose, I was able to search across several transcripts and visions for particular codes, identify where codes might co-occur, and create visuals to represent these patterns. By applying these tools to the data, I was then able to go back to the transcripts and pictures to further explore what the analysis had highlighted and use these data in shaping my findings. I chose to use Dedoose this way because I had learned from both my the trial study conducted as part of the Research Methods portion of the EdD program and from previous work doing research the challenges of viewing, finding, and extracting information across several transcripts and pages of visuals.<sup>79</sup>

4. *Cite the resources consulted when learning about the software.* After being

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<sup>79</sup> As part of the coursework in the University of Glasgow EdD. program, I conducted a small-scale trial study in 2017. Part of the purpose of this trial was to determine if the methods under consideration for the dissertation research were feasible and appropriate. In addition, my professional work often involves focus groups and other research based on group discussion.

*The Role of Education Support Professionals in Promoting the Whole Child: A Capabilities Approach* introduced to Dedoose through work colleagues who specialize in mixed-methods research, I taught myself to use the software through the program's online video training, user manual, and support community. I was also able to interact with the Dedoose help desk for one-on-one responses to queries. It was this latter support feature that directed me to use the Chrome browser rather than the browser I use for other applications.

5. *Describe the features used at each step of the process.* As noted above, Dedoose was developed specifically to support mixed-methods data sets. A key feature is that the researcher is able to link individual records and survey responses to data such as test scores and education outcomes. Since I was not using many of the data types Dedoose supports, I did not use many of the features it offers. As noted above, the primary features I used were related to the ability to search by code across multiple types of data, such as transcripts, photos, and drawings.
6. *Substantiate any claims of improved study quality.* This may be the most challenging criterion to meet, as I can only assert, based on prior experiences, that the features I used allowed me to do analysis that, had I relied only on paper transcripts and print-outs of drawings, would have been more challenging, particularly in seeing patterns of co-occurrence of particular codes.
7. *Reflect on the merits and limitations of QDAS use in the study.* Of course, the use of Dedoose or other qualitative data analysis software is not unproblematic. There is the risk of confusing the automation of information management with the automation of the analysis. Salomona and Kaczynski (2016) assert that while such software is quickly becoming standard in qualitative research, it is not a substitute for carefully considered coding, analysis, and in-depth familiarity with the data..

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