

EXPLORING DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MORAL  
DIALOGUES WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

by

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative research built upon a sociocultural approach to moral functioning to examine how six university students living in Vancouver defined social justice. Two research questions guided this study: 1) How do participants define social justice? and 2) How do they perceive their definitions of social justice are informed by their cultural background? Six semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data, during which the participants engaged in moral narratives that drew upon their past experiences, events from their sociocultural contexts and a fictitious narrative provided by the researcher. Through moral narratives, therefore, the participants crafted their definitions of social justice, defined as conceptual systems mediating their moral actions (e.g., reflection, dialogue, imagination, and creativity, among others). Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, three main themes were identified across the data: 1) equality and non-discrimination as core aspects defining social justice, 2) pathways from social injustice toward social justice, and 3) authoring themselves through moral dialogues. Participants not only defined social justice but expanded their inner moral dialogue, allowing them to reconstruct their past experiences and imagine possible social justice futures. These findings are potentially relevant: 1) to the literature on moral development; and 2) to intercultural educational curricula and pedagogy.

## **Lay Summary**

This study inquired into the construction of university students' definitions of social justice, and gathered insights about the way the participants' cultural backgrounds informed their definitions. In addition, the study addressed a gap in the traditional literature regarding the influence of culture on moral functioning. According to Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b), the structural-developmental paradigm lacks sensitivity to the role of language and culture in moral functioning. Addressing this gap using a sociocultural approach enables attention language and culture by defining moral functioning as a psychological functioning that is mediated by language and cultural systems of meaning making. Research participants engaged in moral dialogues to define social justice and injustice. Three main themes were identified across the data: 1) equality and non-discrimination as core aspects defining social justice, 2) pathways from social injustice toward social justice, and 3) authoring themselves through moral dialogues.

## **Preface**

The research is an original and unpublished work by the author, Natacha Monestel Mora. The Behavioural Research Ethics Board of British Columbia gave full board approval to this research in March 20, 2017 under the UBC BREB Certificate number H16-02181.

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## **Dedication**

To Adri

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the last five decades, moral psychologists have been immersed in a debate about whether or not moral functioning<sup>1</sup> is universal. For example, Piaget (1951/1995) and Kohlberg (1981) claimed that moral development is a cognitive process that follows general patterns across genders and cultures. More recently, however, some scholars have argued that cognitive, emotional, behavioural, contextual and cultural factors influence the way individuals construct, interpret and understand what they consider to be socially just and unjust (e.g., Johanson & Hannula, 2014; Juujärvi et al., 2010; Tappan, 2006a; Turiel, 2006). A sociocultural approach, which has argued that moral functioning is mediated by culture, suggests that even early moral actions, such as empathetic feelings, follow different trajectories, depending on the interaction between sociocultural contexts, cultural tools, and individuals' interpretations of experience (Tappan, 1997, 2006a, 2006b). From this perspective, shared social practices enable human beings to engage in moral dialogues by using mediational means, including words, discourses and ways of using language, and these moral dialogues, in turn, shape their moral functioning.

This study inquiries into the cultural construction of university students' definitions of social justice. One of the goals of this study is to examine the way individuals use their mediational means to interpret their moral actions. Analysing participants' definitions of social justice contributes to addressing a gap in the literature on moral development by questioning its suggested universality and hierarchical developmental structure (Gilligan, 1982; Tappan, 1997, 2006a, 2006b). From a sociocultural approach, Piaget's and Kohlberg's structural developmental models lack sensitivity to the role of language and culture in moral functioning. Further, some

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<sup>1</sup> Moral functioning here is understood as a higher psychological function built through actions mediated by cultural tools (see Tappan, 1997, 2006a, 2006b).

authors have claimed that there is a lack of clarity in explanations regarding delays and regressions across Kohlberg's stages of moral development (Gilligan, 1982; Tappan, 1997, 2006a, 2006b).

Based on a sociocultural approach, I posed the following research questions: 1) How do participants define social justice? and 2) How do they perceive their definitions of social justice are informed by their cultural background? In the following three sections of this chapter I provide a brief overview of this study, including: 1) an introduction to the research context, 2) an overview of the conceptual framework that informs this research, and 3) the methodology.

### **1.1 The research context: Vancouver, a global city**

It is well known that Canada is a multicultural country. Even before the European occupation, Canada's history had been characterized by encounters between different cultural groups. Prior to colonial times, these lands were inhabited by more than 50 Indigenous cultures, with more than a dozen distinct language groups (Berry, 2011). However, it was not until the 1970s that Canada officially recognized its multicultural character. In 1971, Canada approved a policy of multiculturalism, through which the Federal Government declared its commitment to its culturally diverse heritage. In addition, it is important to highlight that this country was the first to ratify the *United Nations Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* in 2005. Those steps represent the Government's intention to build a multicultural vision for Canadian society (Berry, 2011).

According to Sandercock and Brock (2009), before the 1970s, Vancouver, following Canada's regulations and laws, was open only to accept Anglo-European immigrants. Although there was a large flow of immigration from China, during the 19th Century, policies excluded any cultural group other than Anglo-Europeans. During that time, Chinese immigrants were seen

as low paid workers that contributed to the expansion of manufacturing, rather than citizens with the same rights as those from the dominant cultural group (Mackey, 2002). Later, the growth of extensive capital projects and international markets coincided with changes in multicultural policies, making Vancouver more open to Asia-Pacific capital and human flows (Sandercock & Brock, 2009).

More recently, globalization has impacted Canada's cultural diversity. Global agreements between nations have influenced not only the economic aspects of human life; social and cultural factors have also changed due to relationships beyond national borders (Monestel, 2013; Wells, 2015). This phenomenon involves the internationalization of the mode of production: global capital flows pass through local contexts, transforming legal instruments, civil society's activities, labour force demands, migration patterns and mass media (Monestel, 2013; Moos & Skaburskis, 2010; Wells, 2015). As a result, legal documents, socioeconomic activities, and people all over the world are more tightly connected.

Globalization has contributed to shift the local practices and structures (e.g., institutions, organizations, policies) of developed countries. For instance, by the 1990s, Canada began experiencing significant increases in immigration patterns, transforming its intercultural relationships, labor market, public policies, and economic activities among other aspects. According to Hou and Bourne (2006), between 1991 and 2000, 2.2 million immigrants were admitted into the country. This phenomenon was felt more strongly in three Metropolitan Canadian Areas –Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal– where about 74% of immigrants settled (Statistics Canada, 2006). Thus, by the 2000s, the proportion of immigrants in Vancouver's population was around 40% (Statistics Canada, 2006), one of the highest in the Western world in

the last century (Hou & Bourne, 2006). Consequently, in this study, Vancouver is viewed as a globalized context where intercultural relationships take place.

This shift in local structures brought three immigration pathways: economic immigrants, family reunification, and refugees. By this time, Vancouver experienced the introduction of new values, traditions, consumption patterns, institutions and business networks due to its rich cultural diversity (Sandercock & Brock, 2009). Since 1980, the most representative immigration flow came from Asia, mostly from China: Hong Kong, the Peoples' Republic of China, and Taiwan. People from the Philippines, Vietnam, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are also considered to be large visible minority groups. More recently, people from Africa, West Asia, the Middle East and Latin America are contributing to Vancouver's overall cultural diversity. These recent immigration pathways are mostly characterized by what Sandercock and Brock (2009) defined as economic immigrants. That is, by 2002 almost two thirds of immigrants living in Vancouver were entrepreneurs or skilled workers followed by their families, and only 7% of immigrants were refugees (Sandercock & Brock, 2009).

This significant change in Vancouver's population has posed challenges related to its capacity to integrate the inflow of diverse cultural groups. The city's changes in laws, regulations, and markets are not enough to handle the transition that immigrants from different cultural backgrounds must tackle. National, provincial and municipal agencies, along with NGOs and civil society organizations, are working together to create programs to deal with those challenges (Sandercock & Brock, 2009).

These efforts to integrate immigrants have not developed without criticism. According to Mackey (2002), to create a sense of national identity, Canada's multicultural policies, institutions and official history have fostered what tends to be to a myth of tolerance towards cultural

minorities. This myth is historically grounded on an idea of tolerance that contradictorily coexists with European occupation and domination over non-Western cultures (Mackey, 2002). The idea of tolerance is rooted in the contradiction between a discourse of inclusion that contrasts with discriminatory practices and attitudes against non-Western communities and their systems of thought (Mackey, 2002). According to Hiebert and Ley (2003), since colonial times, European representation of cultural “others” has defined the way Canada has recognized different cultural groups. That is, other cultural groups have been accepted under a condition of cultural assimilation of Anglo-European values, practices and ways of living (Hiebert & Ley, 2003).

Currently, immigration policies in Canada have been framed according to international market demands, trades and regulations (Mackey, 2002). In this sense, some scholars have defined them as globalized regulations that control human and capital flows from developing to more industrialized countries (Grosfoguel & Cordero-Guzman, 1998; Mackey, 2002; Sandercock & Brock, 2009). Thus, it could be said that the main purpose behind Vancouver’s immigration regulations is economic growth, rather than fostering diversity, intercultural exchange or integration. Specifically, in order to be included and have access to economic opportunities, most immigrants arriving in Vancouver must assimilate the globalized Anglo-European culture (Hiebert & Ley, 2003).

Further, globalization processes, such as immigration, are reshaping notions of childhood and youth (Wells, 2015). Changes in the relationship between local versus global have influenced the context within which what it means to be a child or an adolescent is defined. Therefore, these processes are potentially impacting children and youth development trajectories. For example, a global perspective about children’s rights and how to protect them has emerged

from the impact of NGOs all over the world, and from the influence of international law on national legal systems (Wells, 2015). Thus, Vancouver's local regulations might be influenced by global legal documents that promote a particular notion of childhood and youth.

Along with social institutions such as family, school and religion, international actors and global laws have become structures that shape children's experiences (Wells, 2015). After WWII, most countries around the world ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In doing so, a globalized discourse has been interacting with local social organizations, different historical backgrounds, national laws, diverse cultural values, distinct ways of living, and complex meanings regarding what is socially just and unjust. For that reason, it could be said that this globalized discourse turns out to be one of many cultural tools, through which recent generations are shaping their moral actions and, more specifically, their concepts of social justice, as they engage in globalized and culturally diverse social practices. Given this context, it is relevant to examine how university students from Vancouver define social justice.

## **1.2 An overview of the conceptual framework**

The research questions, the methodology and the subsequent analysis were informed by four key concepts that are briefly discussed in this section. Following Tappan's work (1991, 1997, 2006a, 2006b), I first describe the concept of *mediational means* to explain the interplay between sociocultural context<sup>2</sup> and higher psychological functioning from a Vygotskian perspective. Second, to go deeper into a sociocultural approach to moral functioning, the concept of *inner dialogue* gives an overview about how higher psychological functions transform dialogically, through particular actions performed in relation to a specific social context. Third, through Bakhtin's notion of *authoring* utilized by Tappan (1991), I explain how individuals

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<sup>2</sup> Sociocultural context and sociocultural setting here are understood as individuals' cultural, historical and institutional context (Wertsch, 1991)



become authors of their own narratives. The concept of *moral imagination* is discussed as way to expand Tappan's argument regarding the use of mediational means not only to shape moral actions to reconstruct past events and answer to immediate demands, but to imagine social futures that are potentially more socially just, beyond their concrete contexts (Vadeboncoeur, 2017; Vadeboncoeur, Perone & Panina-Beard, 2016).

### *1.2.1 Mediational means*

To examine moral functioning, Tappan (2006a) drew upon a sociocultural approach that has centered its analysis on three elements. First, it is focused on understanding human action as a whole; moving away from the perception of emotion, behaviour and cognition as separated dimensions. Second, this approach pays attention to the person who performs such action, who is defined as agent (Tappan, 2006a). Third, it is relevant to analyse how, by using cultural tools, agents transform both tools and themselves through action. In this regard, Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b) clarified that from this perspective, cultural tools are understood not only as physical instruments mediating human activity, but also as words, language and discourses employed by human agents (Tappan, 1997, 2006b).

Similarly, Wertsch (1985) argued that the concept of cultural tools must be extended beyond the perception that they are only physical instruments mediating individuals' actions. Indeed, psychological functioning involves the use of mediational means that are also cultural tools exemplified in cultural semiotic systems, like words, concepts, speech, and forms of discourse. Following Wertsch (1985), Tappan (2006b) defined the concept of mediational means as a specific kind of cultural tool; he described them as linguistic or semiotic tools mediating between individuals' sociocultural contexts and their psychological functioning. Thus, agents perform their actions by employing language, words and discourses; understanding discourses

“as anything that humans do in their everyday lives that involves speaking” (Tappan, 2006a, p. 353).

When mediational means embedded in social contexts are internalized by agents, they can use and transform them to guide their actions (Wertsch, 1985). Internalization, from this approach, does not mean that individuals absorb mediational means passively. Instead, moral functioning is defined as a process through which individuals establish a dialogue between culturally shared discourses, other individuals, and their own inner speech. An example of this process could be illustrated by individuals considering religious values mediating their actions regarding what is socially just and unjust. By considering such values available within their sociocultural context, persons may first internalize them, and through this process transform them to act according to their own religious position. Internalization, hence, implies that agents may transform their mediational means as they become psychological phenomena (Wertsch, 1985). When individuals build their definitions of social justice, for instance, they consider their religious values, experiences, and social practices to elaborate different ideas about what is a socially just action.

### *1.2.2 Inner dialogue*

Following this line of thought, moral functioning is defined as a process constituted by dialogical actions. Human actions are viewed as unique acts embedded in communicative processes that are tied to singular sociocultural contexts. Agents’ moral actions, therefore, are in constant relationship with their contexts, and in permanent dialogue with others (Tappan, 2006a); by using mediational means individuals shape their moral actions through their own dialogue with others. For Tappan (1997), “while Vygotsky postulated a variety of means by which mental life is semiotically mediated, he focused primary attention on the ways in which language, in the

form of inner speech (with its unique syntactic and semantic qualities) functions as a psychological tool” (p. 86).

Thus, as a psychological tool, internalized language is in continuous dialogue with an individual’s sociocultural context. As such, “inner speech never consists of pure monologue, in which a person simply talks in a single, solitary ‘voice.’ Rather, there is always a dialogue between at least two voices” (Tappan, 1997, p.87). For Tappan (1997), children learn to communicate face to face with others first, and as they internalize communicative actions by engaging in everyday social practices, they begin to establish dialogues in private. This is, for Tappan (1997), the beginning of psychological functions that allow people to coordinate their actions according to their interpretations regarding their experiences in specific sociocultural contexts.

Moral functioning, from this perspective, is viewed as constituted by actions that are not just the expression of private inner thinking, moral functioning is a process through which private and social speech encounter and transform each other. Language, therefore, is essential not only to represent what is socially just and unjust within a specific society; it is also a means through which individuals analyse, criticize, communicate, transform and create new mediational means (Tappan, 2006a, 2006b).

To better understand moral functioning as constituted by dialogical mediated actions, Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b) built upon Wertsch’s (1991) scholarship to examine how by expressing utterances, individuals are also communicating different perspectives through their inner dialogue. An utterance is always expressed by a specific voice; an expression that is historically and socioculturally situated, and hence, articulated from a particular perspective. For Wertsch (1991), social languages are types of voices communicating specific utterances, and

speech genres are ways of uttering shaped by shared actions in a sociocultural context. These concepts are central to understand the dialogical nature of moral functioning; together speech genres and social languages, in part, constitutes discourse (Wertsch, 1991). He described speech genres as forms of semiotic actions “in which linguistic units are understood as abstracted from individual communicative contexts” (p. 39). Social languages are “types of social speech” (p. 57) that exist beyond concrete face to face communication. Thus, the interplay between voice, social language and speech genre contributes to the formation of social discourse informing individuals’ moral functioning.

Similarly, the dialogical nature of moral functioning was highlighted by Vadeboncoeur and Rawolle (2003), who built upon Bakhtin’s (1993) concept of answerability. Answerability is a response to universal assumptions about ethical principles. As opposed to the idea of a priori rational mental schema as the basis of human consciousness, this perspective emphasises that psychological functioning is built from specific concrete experiences through which individuals make sense of their actions. This argument is relevant for this research, because it brings about what Vadeboncoeur and Rawolle (2003) defined as the relationship between an individual’s response to immediate and singular experiences and her understanding of them. In contrast to universal claims about moral development, the sociocultural approach considered in this study provides an explanation about the process through which people establish their moral dialogues by interacting with their contexts. That is, how they use forms of discourse to provide an answer to specific circumstances and create new meanings derived from their actions (Vadeboncoeur & Rawolle, 2003).

To illustrate this, consider the example of a child who grew up with specific religious instruction and first internalizes the values fostered by her parents. Later, this person may

interact with new discourses, at school, through mass media or via his or her peer relationships. In that moment, previous religious values enter dialogue with new mediational means and concrete experiences. Hence, her inner speech interacts with different voices and discourses that may be transformed through social communication, and at the same time transform and create new experiences.

Human action is performed by using mediational means. Those means may not only guide individuals' actions or responses to specific circumstances, they are also transformed, shaped and rejected depending on the social context. By providing this rationale, this perspective offers an alternative explanation that contrasts with critique to the structural developmental model of moral development (e.g. Kohlberg, 1981; Lapsley, 2006), critiquing its lack of sensitivity to the role of language and culture (Tappan, 1997, 2006a, 2006b). Rather than looking for a priori and universal mental schema irrespective of the context, this standpoint begins with the sociocultural context to understand moral functioning.

### *1.2.3 Authoring*

By arguing that human actions are socially and historically shaped, Tappan (1991) noted an analogy between narratives and human experience. Specifically, "human experience occurs inexorably in time and in relationship, the fundamental dimensions of narrative" (Tappan, 1991, p. 8). Thus, for Tappan (1991), the function of narratives is to address events through a sequence that provides meanings around what is socially just and unjust. In this sense, narrating may be considered as an action by which human experience is represented, imagined, interpreted and transformed. When individuals consider their actions, they explore why they may act in a particular way. These actions involve other people's voices, discourses, feelings and arguments

located in a specific space and time and all these components constitute a narrative (Tappan, 1991).

According to Holmes (2005), narratives consist of telling, recording, constructing and reconstructing people's life experiences in order to make sense of their actions. Moreover, in this study, narratives are also understood as means to represent and give meaning to human actions (Tappan, 1991). That is, when individuals recount their actions, they also provide meanings to them by using mediational means (e.g., concepts, discourses, words). Narrating here is also consider an action through which new moral dialogues are created and transformed. On this subject, Tappan (1991) stated that agents address their actions based on their previous experience, along with others' previous experience and particular context conditions. Therefore, they may transform past events into a story or narrative and create new meanings through this exercise, which at the same time provides new interpretations about what is just and unjust in present and future circumstances.

Regarding the concept of authoring, Tappan (1991) posed the following question: How do we author our moral narratives? Following Bakhtin's (1981) theory, Tappan (1991) claimed that utterances in general and moral mediational means in particular, may be socially shared meanings that become personal when individuals establish a dialogue between their inner speech and their sociocultural contexts. Through that dialogue, individuals not only express, but also build their experiences. In this way, they become architects of their lifeworld, as well as authors of their narratives (Tappan, 1991).

It is important to clarify that the process through which individuals become authors of their own moral narratives is a dialectic relationship between socially shared meanings and the way individuals transform and own mediational means through their narratives. In authoring,

individuals may transform social discourses into new forms of discourse (Wertsch, 1991).

Consequently, the process of authoring new moral meanings is tied to a speaking self, and to the faculty to clearly express conflicts about what should be socially just or unjust to make sense of individuals' actions. In this regard, Tappan (1991) argued that agents should assume responsibility for their actions.

Different but related to the concept of authoring, the notion of authority refers to “the degree to which one voice has the authority to come into contact with an interanimate another” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 78). This concept brings about the idea that there are socially shared discourses that are constituted by inflexible meanings, for example, religious, political and moral discourses are authoritative discourses. In contrast, internally persuasive discourses are more flexible and, therefore, generative. Internally persuasive discourses are more easily borrowed and used to generate new utterances through dialogue. When this happens, Tappan (1991) argued, individuals become authors of their own moral dialogues.

#### *1.2.4 Moral imagination*

As highlighted above, moral functioning is understood as constituted by actions through which individuals are in constant dialogue with their sociocultural contexts; each action is seen as a source that allows agents to establish moral dialogues by using mediational means (Tappan, 1997, 2006a, 2006b). The concept of moral imagination is relevant to expand this argument, and to better understand the role of imagining and creating in the dialogical construction of new cultural conditions by using mediational means (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016). Moral imagination, according to Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016), is a psychological function shaped by the social context that includes how individuals experience, value and enact social relationships beyond their

concrete contexts; moral imagination is “the foundation for moral feeling, thinking, and action that creates possibilities and pathways for cultural transformation” (p. 3)

Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) argued that “play, imagination, and creativity are positioned as social practices that draw upon psychological functions that are themselves pathways for both the engagement with and the renewal of culture in response to changing conditions” (p. 4). The creation of new practices and meanings emerge as humans imagine different possible scenarios beyond their concrete sociocultural contexts. Imagination allows individuals not only to engage in social practices, but also to internalize them and, therefore, transform them. Once internalized, agents may be able to use and transform mediational means to also change their environment and their actions; since socially shared mediational means are cultural tools, they can also be used, shaped and transformed, according to the individuals’ imagination, creativity, and developmental experiences (Wertsch, 1985).

Drawing upon Vygotsky’s theory, Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) argued that children use imaginative play to act as if they are engaged in social practices that are not possible in their concrete context. By using objects as if they are something they are not, they imagine scenarios that are not accessible to them. Through play, children separate meanings from physical objects and actions, and impose new meanings (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016). In this way, imaginative play becomes a social practice through which objects and actions are transformed and new social futures are created. At the same time, imaginative play is source of intersubjective exchange, through which children not only make sense of their sociocultural contexts, but also transform and create new shared understandings (Göncü, 1993). Hence, imaginative play and imagination cannot be understood without connection to sociocultural and historical conditions that are grounded in the intersubjective shared space.



The growing ability of children to impose abstract meanings on objects transforms the imaginary situation (Vygotsky, 1967). Their increasing capacity to think in concepts allows them to imagine possible social practices less tied to the concrete contexts. Through intersubjective interaction, negotiation and dialogue, what once required physical objects becomes symbolically represented (Göncü, 1993). Later, during adolescence, the ability to conceptualize becomes stronger and pushes creativity forward. Namely, the creation of new meanings that can be organized into conceptual systems becomes possible through dialogue between inner and social speech. In other words, abstract concepts are shared, used, created and transformed due to the ability to conceptualize (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016).

In this study, examining imagination and creativity is central to understand individual's moral functioning from the early years, when children imagine situations shaped by roles with rules, to the emergence of their conceptual thinking during adolescence and beyond. Their ability to think in concepts shape the internalization of moral mediational means, as well as how they are used to transform sociocultural contexts. In this sense, this research aimed to explore how university students define social justice as a concept that allowed them to make sense of present and future actions, and established new moral dialogues through their narratives.

### **1.3 Research methodology**

This qualitative study consisted of semi-structured interviews to respond to the research questions. While a large body of research on the field has attempted to verify mainstream moral psychology's principles and universal assumptions (Johansson & Hannula, 2014; Juujärvi, et al. 2000), through this research I explored participants' definitions of social justice using a sociocultural approach. In this endeavour, I consider theoretical insights about the role of dialogue between inner speech and sociocultural context, and the relevance of conceptual

thinking for moral functioning (Tappan's 1991, 1997, 2006a, 2006b; Wertsch 1985, 1991; Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016; Vadeboncoeur, 2017). My specific research questions were: 1) How do participants define social justice? and 2) How do they perceive their definitions of social justice are informed by their cultural background?

In order to address the questions, the semi-structured interviews were conducted with six (two women and four men) university students from 18 to 35 years old. Interviews were first audio recorded and subsequently transcribed for further analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002). Therefore, the interviews were organized, described and interpreted by identifying core patterns and meanings (Patton, 2002).

#### **1.4 Summary**

In Chapter 1, I provided a brief description of this research, as well as an overview of the conceptual framework and methodology. Globalized socioeconomic processes are transforming local cultural patterns both shaping and reshaped by culturally diverse perspectives. Thus, examining how university students define social justice in relation to their cultural background is significant to understand their experiences, and challenge the suggested universality of moral development. That is, exploring participants' definitions of social justice provides an explanation of how these university students from a diverse and globalized context, articulate their definitions of social justice through narratives, and how they establish a dialogue between their experiences and sociocultural contexts. Authoring moral narratives and imagining new ethical possibilities from the participant's point of view, are posed as alternatives to foster non-authoritative moral mediational means. In the following pages, I delve deeper in these arguments. In Chapter 2, I provide an extended examination of the literature. Chapter 3 describes the methodology, the research design and the participants. Informed by a sociocultural approach

and participants' responses, Chapter 4 presents three themes grounded in the data. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the thesis findings and discusses their possible implications for education.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter is structured around four main topics that inform the rationale, research questions, and methodology of this study. I begin with an overview of the concept of justice as a universalized notion, not only within the field of moral psychology, but also as part of political discourse that has historically served to maintain specific social power structures. In so doing, I identify some gaps in the literature about moral development, in order to address them from a critical perspective. In the second section, a sociocultural approach is described as a framework that overcomes the limitations of universal models to explain moral functioning. Building on this argument, the third section describes a sociocultural approach to participant's moral functioning. Then, in section four, a brief overview of the conceptual framework that supports the use of narratives in social sciences and moral development is discussed.

### **2.1 The debate about the universality of moral development**

Given the debate around the universality of moral development, it is important to begin with a brief review of the most prevalent and traditional moral theories. By doing so, I provide a description of two different North American models that define the concept of justice as part of individuals' moral development: 1) The structural-developmental approach that draws upon Piaget's and Kohlberg's theories and 2) Gilligan's critique of these theories. At the end of this section, I provide an example of how a universalized discourse, informed by Western and Christian political and economic domination, has been fostered by the United Nations' (UN) human rights documents and regulations.

### *2.1.1 The structural-developmental approach*

By the 1930s, Jean Piaget was a pioneer in postulating that morality evolves as cognitive schema moving through hierarchal stages. His main point was that moral development goes beyond behaviour regulation based on customs and authority, thus, conceiving moral development as grounded in cognitive structures that follow general patterns (Turiel, 2006). By the 1980s, Kohlberg widely extended this perspective, turning it into the most prominent paradigm in the field of moral psychology (Killen & Smetana, 2006). It was central for him to understand the many ways people conceptualize moral conflicts, depending on their gradually more sophisticated thinking of reciprocity and justice (Kohlberg, 1981). His empirical findings showed that the interaction between cognitive structures and individual's environment pushes thinking through six hierarchical stages that move away from immature to more complex structures of thought (Kohlberg, 1981). When in contact with the social environment, these structures of thought follow similar trajectories to reach the most mature expression of moral thinking.

Although Piaget and Kohlberg did not reject the influence of sociocultural contexts over moral development, their perspective looked for innate, individual and natural patterns. That is, they located the ontogenesis of moral thinking in individuals' intramental cognitive structures, which they considered cross-culturally invariant (Tappan, 1997, 2006b). More recently, this line of thought has been identified under the label of structural-developmental paradigm of moral development (Killen & Smetana, 2006), based on the idea that moral judgments develop through progressive stages of thinking.

Killen and Smetana (2006) have argued that, from this perspective, moral thinking is based on "progressively more differentiated and integrated concepts of justice" (p. 5). Structural-

developmental scholars continue drawing on Piaget's and Kohlberg's idea about immature stages that evolve towards more complex structures of thinking (e.g., Gibbs, 1992; Lapsley, 2006; Thoma, 2006; Turiel, 2006). In doing so, this theoretical framework has argued that moral development moves away from stages characterized by concrete reasoning embedded in concrete social interactions, towards a more abstract analysis of moral conflicts that contemplate justice, rights and welfare issues (Turiel, 2006).

More recent scholars continue working on models based on Kohlberg's (1981) postulates by claiming that during the pre-conventional Stage, children evaluate what is just and unjust in terms of adult's and peer's approval or disapproval (Gibbs, 1992). Justice here is understood as an exchange system that includes favors, concrete goods, and punishments. Later, more reciprocal relationships are reached through interchanges with peers. As individuals look for more reciprocal social interactions, they enhance their cognitive equilibrium and movement toward higher moral stages (Lapsley, 2006). Specifically, this theoretical framework posed that morality is not only transmitted by adults, but also by experiences with peers. In this way, moral development progressively moves from an heteronomous or authoritative judgements to more autonomous moral thinking (Gibbs, 1992; Kohlberg, 1981; Lapsley, 2006; Thoma, 2006).

Regarding conventional reasoning, this approach has suggested that children and adults take into account norms and rules in order to analyse their moral conflicts. For that reason, the awareness or sense of belonging to a group is crucial at this level. It is also valuable to promote reciprocal relationships and socially stereotyped roles, such as being the best friend and the loving wife. Thus, the notion of justice developed at this stage is related to the idea of keeping mutual relationships, being a good member of society and supporting social institutions and laws to enhance social equilibrium (Lapsley, 2006).

Subsequently, post-conventional reasoning requires more mental abstraction, because it takes place when individuals ponder social conventions that they consider unjust or inadequate (Gibbs, 1992). At this level, they are more identified with general moral principles that go beyond rules, expectation or social conventions. Following this line of thought, Turiel (2006) argued that this stage is characterized by its correspondence with a kind of philosophical thinking that follows universal moral obligations that search for consensus, based on the notions of justice, welfare and rights. Philosophical principles, at this stage, are tested to prove their logical consistency, as well as their correspondence between practices and discourses (Turiel, 2006).

Although structural-developmental models still claim that morality is rationally determined, more contemporary literature on the subject has acknowledged that while reasoning can inform moral feelings, emotional experiences can inform moral thinking as well (Turiel, 2006). Moreover, from this perspective, an individual's moral behaviours (prosocial or antisocial) are based on the interplay between reason, emotion and sociocultural factors. However, the idea that humans behave morally only when they are capable of making decisions cognitively justified is central to this approach (Turiel, 2006). From this perspective, although many factors may influence moral development, it is only when people provide reasons about their acts, that those acts can be considered morally justified. Such justifications follow similar trajectories, as they have been linked to cross-cultural patterns of thinking.

The suggested universality of moral development has been challenged by a number of scholars (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Tappan, 1997, 2006a, 2006b). Factors such as lack of empirical support for the post-conventional thinking across cultures and genders, or unclear conceptualization of key concepts (e.g., stage and structure), are critiques of this model. Further, according to Tappan (2006b), this perspective remains weak in explaining “developmental

‘deficits’, ‘delays’ and ‘regression’” (p.15), from its understanding of the development of morality through hierarchical stages. For that reason, neo-Kohlbergian authors have argued that it is important to come back to the philosophical roots present in Piaget’s and Kohlberg’s theories, in order to unpack the logic behind their claim for universal philosophical principles informing individuals’ thinking (Turiel, 2006).

For example, Turiel (2006) noted that Kohlberg and Piaget based their theories on the work of Kant, Mill and Rawls, among others, to support their understanding of the conceptual and philosophical foundations of moral thinking. Even the latest structural-developmental approach defines moral reasoning through specific philosophical traditions embedded in Western thought, such as Greek, Roman Stoics, Nussbaum and Rawls (see Turiel, 2006, p. 9). Based on these philosophical schools of thought, Turiel (2006) has argued that moral reasoning is based on morality of welfare, justice and rights. From this standpoint, in other words, individuals across cultures tend to justify their moral decisions by considering such universal ethical principles.

#### *2.1.2 Gilligan’s model: A specific critique of the structural developmental approach*

About 30 years ago, Gilligan (1982) challenged the universality claimed by traditional moral psychology. Instead of interpreting moral development as hierarchical cognitive moral structures, Gilligan (1982) claimed that moral development is the outcome of socialization patterns that foster specific ways to voice moral conflicts. She argued that women and men have different ways to respond to moral conflicts; women tend to embrace moral decisions by considering responsibilities in relationships, and men tend to be more centered on maintaining equity, obligation and fairness through the application of norms, rules, rights and general principles.



With empirical evidence, Gilligan (1982) showed that, from early childhood, traditional socialization patterns foster separation, competition and individuation in boys, and sensitivity, intimacy and care feelings for others in girls. For that reason, she argued that women and men tend to experience different developmental trajectories. She also noted that later, during adolescence and early adulthood, those differences tend to be more evident, and that they have been detected by the social sciences in general, and by developmental psychology in particular.

From Gilligan's (1982) perspective, traditional interpretations of human development (e.g., Freud, Piaget, Kohlberg) have assumed a male model as if it was the ideal way to experience the passage through different life stages. Specifically, by looking for universals, mainstream psychology has identified one way to achieve what Gilligan (1982) calls modern corporate success, which is related to the development of skills historically associated with the male gender. Carrying on this argument, Gilligan (1982) expanded her criticism to mainstream scholars by saying that their findings are built upon social power structures that have marginalized women. Authors such as Freud, Piaget and Kohlberg, she argued, have fostered the idea that sensitivity and caring represent deviant features that hold back the optimal human development and that they are less usual in men's development (Gilligan, 1982).

As for Gilligan's (1982) critique of Piaget's and Kohlberg's moral theories, she claimed that they were not able to show that "women's difference is rooted not only in their social subordination but also in the substance of their moral concern" (p. 15). Thus, her critique is also focused on the lack of recognition of women's particular abilities for being aware of others' needs, and their importance for moral development. For Gilligan (1982), Piaget and Kohlberg did not appreciate the ability to pay attention to other's voices and consider them in their moral

decisions. By doing so, these authors failed to show that females tend to develop strong empathy skills, which has been recognized as central components in the development of prosocial skills (Eisenberg, Zhou & Koller, 2001).

Regarding Kohlberg's model, Gilligan (1982) noted that by favoring individuation, individual achievement and personal autonomy as ideal development patterns, he located empathetic skills in the third stage of his six-stage structure. In this way, Kohlberg (1981) placed moral decisions inspired by rules (stage 4), over feelings of connection to others guiding people in their moral decisions. This hierarchy also assumes that the highest expression of moral development (stages 5 and 6) are reached through the understanding of the philosophical principles informed by a dominant discourse on justice and rights (Gilligan, 1982). Although Kohlberg showed that this sequence was suitable within his original samples, Gilligan (1982) concluded that when his model is applied to groups different from North-American men, the highest stages are rarely accomplished.

Through her empirical work, Gilligan (1982) showed that universal assumptions derived from Kohlberg's theory were biased, since they are grounded in research whose participants were only North-American males. In Kohlberg's model, therefore, women tend to score lower than men, and "the 'goodness' of women, their care for and sensitivity to the needs of others, are those that mark them as deficient in moral development" (p. 18). In this way, Kohlberg's model portrayed care for and sensitivity to others' needs as deficient moral development stages, subordinated to arguments that consider social rules and universal principles to solve moral conflicts as manifestations of higher moral reasoning.

Gilligan's (1982) insights led her to pose her own model, through which she documented the existence of two different kinds of moralities: the morality of care, more evident in females,

and the morality of justice, associated with male trajectories. Rather than describing progressive stages inside individuals' mind, when accounting for differences between male and female moral development, she argued that their socialization patterns led them to differently identify and express themselves through language, and according to their relational experiences. Although her first findings revealed that both kinds of moralities were related to gender socialization patterns, her subsequent work has been crucial to raise questions regarding the ways in which not only gender differences, but also differences in culture, race and class influence moral functioning over the life course (Tappan, 1997).

For Gilligan (1982), it is language what allows us to understand ourselves and others, as well as our relationships and actions. It is through language, therefore, that we can understand individuals' moral voices. This argument is clear when she defined her concept of "voice" as follows:

When people ask me what I mean by voice and I think of the question more reflectively, I say that by voice I mean something like what people mean when they speak of the core of the self. Voice is natural and also cultural. It is composed of breath and sound, words, rhythm, and language. And voice is a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds. Speaking and listening are a form of psychic breathing. This ongoing relational exchange among people is mediated through language and culture, diversity and plurality. (p. xvi)

Thus, she referred to voice as an instrument or channel that mediates this relationship, and for this reason, Tappan (2006a, 2006b) considered her theory to be relevant for a sociocultural approach to moral functioning.

Gilligan's model, therefore, is consistent with efforts to understand how language, words and forms of discourse shape individuals' responses to moral conflicts (Tappan, 1997, 2006b). Through her concept of moral voices, she brings about how different answers to moral conflicts are drawn on different forms of discourse, which might be used according to the context where the action takes place (Gilligan, 1982; Tappan, 1997, 2006b). For instance, depending on the specific situation and her personal history, a person could respond to a moral conflict based on feelings of connection and responsibility with others, and argue that the best option for this specific circumstance is keeping harmonic relationships (morality of care). Some others might answer to a similar moral conflict by saying that rights and rules must be enforced, even at the expense of interpersonal relationships (morality of justice).

Differences in using distinctive voices are understood, according to Gilligan (1982) and her colleagues (e.g., Johansson & Hannula, 2014; Juujärvi, Myyry & Pessa, 2010; Walker, 2006), as two different ways of articulating moral conflicts, rather than stages of moral thinking placed into a single hierarchical scale. Furthermore, according to Tappan (2006b), Gilligan's more recent findings suggest that although each kind of voice has been related to female's or male's moral functioning, it is more common, within North American individuals, to use both kinds of voices across their lives. In this sense, empirical evidence has shown that gender differences in moral development are more related to cultural values, and to the way the context guides gender socialization (Eisenberg, Zhou & Koller, 2001; Juujärvi et al., 2010).

Considering Gilligan's (1982) work, Tappan (2006b) also noticed that moral voices could be seen as mediational means used by agents to shape their moral actions. This interpretation led him to pose that, as mediational means embedded in social structures, shaped by a morality of care and justice, are always related to different ways of using power and authority. Tappan

(2006b) claimed that, in the contemporary United States culture, there is a dominant discourse on justice and rights that has been more public and powerful than the discourse of care. In this context, moral decisions mediated by the justice discourse tend to be more valued than moral conflicts mediated by care, and this legitimacy is also related to gendered power relationships, privilege and authority. Considering Tappan's (1997, 2006b) and Gilligan's insights, the following section provides a brief review of the Western universalized discourse on human rights.

### *2.1.3 Human rights: A discourse embedded in Western thinking*

In this segment, the roots of a globalized discourse and how it became part of the project of modernity is examined. Relevant questions about this issue are: Is there a hidden agenda behind a universalized perspective of human rights in a diverse world? How does a global discourse interact, contradict or even dominate local contexts and values? Many authors have argued that the UN's human rights discourse, embedded in the project of modernity, coexists with political, economic and even epistemological colonial structures (e.g., de Sousa-Santos, 2003; Grosfoguel, 2006; Mignolo & Escobar, 2010). In this respect, Quijano (2010) argued that most of the successful Western nations that dominate the international political and economic agenda owe their development to the colonized world's oppression.

This argument is better understood in relation to the social and historical context through which the UN human rights discourse, as it is globally known today, emerged. According to de Castro-Cid (2004), this doctrine has its roots in the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Europe's sociopolitical context was convoluted as a result of the Protestant Reformation, and those in power started to introduce the idea of freedom of worship

as a way to ease these tensions. In doing so, an emerging idea of dignity was expanded by claiming that all humans were valuable before a Christian God.

In this attempt to control religious confrontations, ideas about what should be Christian rights and the obligations were examined by drawing on older texts taken from Roman law. That is, since the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Catholic Church in Rome had adopted the *Corpus Juris Civilis of Justiniano*, which was a legal system based on Greco-Roman moral principles (de Sousa-Santos, 2003). By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this legal framework served to avoid social conflicts and to establish new moral standards and values around the ideas of dignity, freedom and rights (de Sousa-Santos, 2003). Such ideals became stronger, and after the Renaissance they influenced the cultural movement known as the Enlightenment. Later, these philosophical principles promoted by the elites of the time, constituted and inspired the subsequent sociopolitical order resulting from the French revolution (de Sousa-Santos, 2003).

According to de Sousa-Santos (2003), these sociopolitical transformations could not have happened without the bourgeoisie's increasing economic power. The occupation and plundering of the —New World America— by this time, promoted ideal economic conditions to empower the bourgeoisie in their claim for freedom from the feudal powers. This new social, political and economic context allowed the advent of the industrial revolution and capitalism. By this time, the increasingly powerful European bourgeoisie gained the means to spread their cultural values and domination around world, and by colonizing Africa, Asia and Australia the new capitalist order was consolidated (de Sousa-Santos, 2003).

It was under those circumstances that European concepts of freedom, dignity and rights were used not only to empower the bourgeoisie and release them from feudal political organization, but also to exterminate people and other forms of thoughts through colonization (de

Sousa-Santos, 2003). For this reason, some scholars have argued that the principles of the Enlightenment inspired the Western occupation, which later became the expansion of the project of modernity and the nation-state sociopolitical organization (de Sousa-Santos, 2003; Quijano, 2010). Over the course of such history, Western human rights discourse became stronger, since it was part of emerging nations' ideals, and their legal systems. However, although the colonies later became nations, in this context, Western human rights ideals coexisted with social structures that retained their oppressive colonial conditions (Quijano, 2010).

Later, the arrangements made after WWII contributed to the global expansion of the nation-state endeavour and its system of thought (de Sousa-Santos, 2003). Therefore, it could be said that the UN human rights actions, normative framework and philosophical principles emerged through a history of political, economic and even epistemological Western domination (de Sousa-Santos, 2003; Grosfoguel, 2006; Mignolo & Escobar, 2010). This discourse has grown parallel to the internationalization of the neoliberal economic model led by the most powerful countries (Harvey, 2005). As a result, the globalization of what once was a European system of thought and sociocultural context is still having an impact over local contexts. In other words, international regulations and global economic agreements have transformed local legal systems, along with their civil society's activities, labour force demands and mass media around the world (Harvey, 2005; Monestel, 2013; Wells, 2015). Considering this scenario, some scholars have claimed that the current global socioeconomic and political organization, its values and ways to understand what is just and unjust, are based on an oppressive Western paradigm (de Sousa-Santos, 2003; Grosfoguel, 2006; Mignolo & Escobar, 2010).

## **2.2 A Sociocultural Approach**

In the previous section, I discussed some critical arguments that question not only the universal assumptions posed by the structural-developmental approach to moral development, but also the discourse that legitimizes a universalized perspective of humans' rights and social justice. In this segment, I expand my review of a sociocultural approach as a way to move beyond the identified gaps in the literature. I mainly build upon the work of Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b), Wertsch (1985, 1991) and Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016), in order to elaborate an alternative understanding of moral functioning.

In this endeavour, I begin with Wertsch's (1985) and Tappan's (1997, 2006a, 2006b) conceptualization of the Vygotskian concepts of mediational means and mediated action. Then, I describe the dialogical nature of moral functioning, also widely analyzed by Wertsch (1991) and Tappan (1997, 2006a). The work of Vadeboncoeur, et al. (2016) and Vadeboncoeur (2017) is considered to draw on the Vygotskian interpretation of the concepts of imagination and creativity. In so doing, I intend to elaborate Tappan's (1997, 2006a, 2006b) insights regarding how, by using mediational means, individuals can transform them, and hence, change themselves and their contexts through this process. Building on Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) and Vadeboncoeur (2017) I examine how, by imagining through different social situations, individuals use, internalize, and create new mediational means.

### *2.2.1 Mediated action*

Analyzing Wertsch's (1985) elaboration of the concept of mediational means —also conceptualized as cultural and/or semiotic tools— is essential for this study in order to understand moral functioning from this perspective. For Wertsch (1985) one of the core aspects of Vygotsky's theory is the process of mediation. Since higher psychological functioning evolves



from social interaction, he argued, considering the role of the means mediating such interaction is key to understand human development.

From Wertsch's (1991) view, the course of human development is located in the relationship between individuals' psychological functioning and their sociocultural context, which includes individuals cultural, historical and institutional contexts. Following Vygotsky's theory, Wertsch (1991) argued that we need to explain the means that constitute such relationships. Although Vygotsky defined the concept of cultural tools as both physical instruments and semiotic means, Wertsch (1991) built on the way language, words, and discourses mediate the development of higher psychological functioning. He supported the idea that by disclosing meanings embodied in sign systems and their mediational capacity, we are able to explain the nature of human psychological functioning. In doing so, we can also bridge what has been usually isolated in traditional social sciences, namely persons' inner thinking and society (Wertsch, 1991).

To better understand the idea of means mediating human activity, it is also important to delve into Wertsch's (1985) conceptualization of the Vygotskian concept of higher psychological functioning. In this regard, he clarified that the distinction between elementary and higher psychological functioning lies in their origins. Elementary psychological functioning arises from natural processes that constitute the biological conditions through which skills like perception, involuntary reflexes or attention develop. In contrast, higher psychological functioning arises through the use of mediational means embedded in the interaction between individuals and their sociocultural contexts (Tappan, 2006a, 2006b; Wertsch, 1985). The kind of ability that originates from the latter is what, according to Wertsch (1985), distinguishes humans from primates, and can be explained through principles different from those behind the

elementary or natural psychological functions. The emergence of higher psychological functioning, therefore, entails the use of semiotic tools through social interaction, enabling the rise of its conscious realization (Wertsch, 1985), when individuals consciously guide their higher psychological functions to transform not only their environment, but also the mediational means inherent to this process.

Wertsch (1991) and Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b) agreed that, as higher psychological functioning cannot be accomplished without the use of mediational means, human activity might be explored by examining individuals using these means. Tappan (2006b) highlighted that a sociocultural approach seeks to understand “human action, rather than ‘cognition’, ‘emotion’, or even ‘mental functioning’” (p. 3). His point is that it is crucial to keep in mind that human action is defined as an activity by which emotional, behavioural and cognitive functions, altogether, interact with the sociocultural context (Tappan, 2006b; Wertsch, 1991).

Therefore, an appropriate way to address research questions from a sociocultural approach involves the idea of human activity as the primary unit of analysis (Tappan, 1997, 2006a, 2006b). Exploring persons acting with mediational means is the way to understand shifts in human development. Such an action is broadly defined by Wertsch (1991) as mediated action, which might be understood by exploring the dynamics between two elements: 1) *agents* using 2) *mediational means* to accomplish their actions (Tappan, 1997, 2006a, 2006b). As much as the agents use and transform mediational means, such means shape their mediated actions and, hence, their psychological functioning and its transformation.

According to Wertsch (1985), understanding the Vygotskian concept of internalization is important to provide an adequate explanation about the transformative properties inherent to the process of mediated action. Since the interpretation of the term internalization has been

controversial, Wertsch (1985) clarified that it should not be understood as a passage whereby internal psychological functions become a copy of an external world. Instead, he suggested that internalization refers to a transformative mechanism by which agents use mediational means to connect external social activity to the internal course of their actions, constituting in this way the emergence of the higher psychological functions (Wertsch, 1985).

This interpretation implies that, although psychological processes have a social nature, internal mechanisms do not simply reproduce social phenomena. The idea of the voluntary use of mediational means and their mastery by agents, brings about a transformative activity that could not be classified under binary labels such as external or internal. This notion rather refers to a continuous activity that constantly changes individuals' psychological functioning and vice versa. In this regard, Tappan (1997) highlighted that an agent uses mediational means to control and transform not only their environment, but also themselves, their cultural tools, and the process through which they experience their action.

For that reason, Tappan (2006b) suggested the term appropriation instead of internalization. With this term, he tried to avoid a misinterpretation of the mechanism by which agents actively participate in the acquisition of mediational means informed by the culture. Tappan (2006b) clarified three aspects related to the concept of appropriation: 1) this process should be understood as a process of learning mediational means provided by the culture; 2) since mediational means are taken from the sociocultural context where they first belonged, appropriation also implies owning, controlling and transforming them, and; 3) the appropriation of mediational means is always related to power dynamics. That is, appropriating mediational means that came from social power relationships entails privilege and authority in their use. In this sense, controlling and becoming skilled at using mediational means could transform power

dynamics informed by the sociocultural context (Tappan, 2006b). An explanation about the mechanism through which individuals appropriate mediational means is presented next.

### *2.2.2 Dialogue and speech*

The relationship between sociocultural contexts and individual's human development is the core aspect of the sociocultural approach considered in this study. Central for this relationship is Vygotsky's concept of inner speech. Related to the concept of internalization, inner speech is social speech that has become a psychological function. With this argument, Tappan (1997) highlighted two aspects that, from his position, are important to better understand the concept of mediated action and its application to moral functioning, namely: "the 'peculiar' syntactical and semantic characteristics of inner speech, and the impact of the 'historical-cultural process' on the development of 'verbal thought'" (p. 82).

The former aspect refers to the particular syntactic manifestation of inner speech, which is characterized by its incomplete structure, or the omission of the subject from the sentences and the words related to it (Tappan, 1997). The predication of sentences, Tappan (1997) argued, is what characterizes the process of transformation that goes from social to inner speech. Regarding its semantic nature, inner speech shows three peculiarities that for Tappan (1997) deserve attention. First, in inner speech the sense of the word is more significant than its meaning. Sense here is understood as the potential of the words to evoke different psychological states that are defined by the context of their appropriation. Meaning, in contrast, is seen as an abstract and generalizable idea about what is expressed through the word. Second, inner speech tends to agglutinate or combine words or phrases into one word, blending in this way the sense of several words. Third, through inner speech individuals tend to construct idioms or phrases that are

strongly contextualized, and their meaning and sense are only understood by the agents who create them (Tappan, 1997).

With respect to cultural-historical processes in the development of inner speech, Tappan (1997) noticed that there is a turning point when thought and speech encounter each other in an individual's ontogenetic development, fostered by the interaction between social and individual mechanisms. Tappan (1997) argued that, at the beginning, infant's speech and thoughts are not connected, but as they become immersed in the historical-cultural dynamics, the two paths come across, and verbal thought raises, allowing the appearance of inner speech as a structure of thinking. It is precisely over the course of the emergence of verbal thought as a structure of thinking, when mediation takes place (Tappan, 1997).

To delve deeper into the way mediation changes by using language, Wertsch (1991) suggested that Bakhtin's legacy should be also considered. Wertsch's (1991) sociocultural approach, therefore, examined the way specific cultural, historical and institutional backgrounds are related to different forms of mediated action. Vygotsky's work, from Wertsch's (1991) viewpoint, was mainly focused on understanding the development of higher psychological functions by exploring interactions within small groups; he paid less attention to the way mediated actions are culturally, historically and institutionally situated.

In view of that, Wertsch (1991) built on Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) insights about communication and its role in shaping different forms of mediated action. Specifically, he drew on Bakhtin's concepts of utterance, voice, dialogicality, speech genre and social languages to examine how mediated actions are informed by the sociocultural context. According to Wertsch (1991), Bakhtin (1981) defined utterance as the unit of the process of communication; speech units that are embedded in the process of mediated action.

Far from being identified as the product of a process, an utterance, from this perspective, is seen as part of an activity of communicating something or, in Bakhtin's view, voicing something (Wertsch, 1991). Although individuals could utter the same words, it is the specific voice that really reveals the meaning of what is said. Utterances are always expressed from a viewpoint, and it is their way of being uttered and the context where they are articulated that provides their meaning. Since the process of voicing an utterance is understood as an action, Wertsch (1991) inferred that this action is connected to the concept of mediated action.

An utterance is conceived part of the action of voicing, rather than a product, because it is part of the continuous activity that characterizes the process of mediated action. With this argument in mind, Wertsch (1991) claimed that in Bakhtin's (1981) work, the process of communication is always perceived as a dialogic action. That is, for Bakhtin, "meaning can come into existence only when two or more voices come into contact: when the voice of a listener responds to the voice of a speaker" (Wertsch, 1991, p. 52). Since every utterance is seen as a response to a previous one, voicing utterances entails connecting them through speech chains, and this action involves several voices when it is performed.

Understood as a dialogue, the action of voicing is connected to Bakhtin's concept of dialogicality (Wertsch, 1991). This interaction amongst different voices should not be constrained merely to concrete situations between people. Although according to Wertsch (1991) this concept implies that some kind of dialogues involve face-to-face interactions, Bakhtin was particularly concerned with different ways through which individuals come into contact with other's utterances beyond concrete contexts. One example of a dialogical interaction that does not involve concrete contact among people, might be the dialogue established through what has been defined as inner and social speech (Tappan, 1997; Wertsch, 1991).

As highlighted above, inner speech's is shaped by specific sociocultural contexts; its manifestation entails a process by which social speech is appropriated and becomes private verbal thought. This process is what is seen as a form of constant dialogue between individuals' inner speech and specific cultural, historical and institutional voices and discourses. In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that verbal thought arises through concrete interactions between infants and caregivers. Later, this dialogue might be established without the presence of concrete people, and it is here when it becomes dialogical inner speech. Regardless the involvement of concrete participants or not, this communication and the language used through it, is understood as a process that is socioculturally situated (Wertsch, 1991).

This situatedness is what locates unique speech events —such as an inner conversation between a child and her mother's voice— into forms of social languages (Wertsch, 1991). By social languages, Bakhtin (1981) meant “types of utterances produced by types of voices” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 56). With this insight, Bakhtin defined the notion of dialogicality beyond the face-to-face or concrete level of analysis, and highlighted the action of voicing utterances considering the types of social language used to address a particular dialogue, where interactions amongst different types of social speech also take place (Wertsch, 1991).

For example, a child could have a private dialogue that entails rules voiced by her immigrant parents that came from a specific culture and norms uttered by her teacher in the host culture. In this case, the child is doing what Wertsch (1991), considering Bakhtin's insights, defined as ventriloquating different types of social languages: uttering parents' and teachers' different voices. This means that the words she is uttering are not completely hers. According to Wertsch (1991), these languages can be owned only when the process of appropriation allows the

mastery of their usage; when individuals are able to adapt such words to their own semantic structure and intentions and populate them with meaning.

Related to the idea of social language in terms of its generalization beyond concrete speech situations, Wertsch (1991) elaborated another concept that is useful to understand higher psychological functioning in general, and moral functioning in particular. The concept of speech genre, from this perspective, is not seen as a type of language, but as specific forms of utterances, which are more related to the context or situation where they are voiced, than to the group of people that voice them (social language). For Bakhtin, speech genres might entail typical ways of expressing something according to specific circumstances, like specific organizational commands, ways of greetings, or verbal exchanges.

In this regard, utterances resulting from the use of the UN human rights' discourse, for instance, are part of a social language and a speech genre that might be playing a role in the moral functioning of people that have grown in a globalized context. Discourse is understood as ways of expressing utterances, which may include the interplay between what Wertsch (1991) defined as social languages and speech genres. As the Western human rights discourse has been expanded throughout the course of the history of the Western domination over other cultures, its legitimacy to justify moral actions might be socially privileged. However, it is precisely the dialogue between culturally and contextually diverse speech genres and social languages what is significant for this study. That is, it is relevant to understand how and to what extend participants use their mediational means, such as this globalized discourse in dialogue with other speech genres and social languages to establish their moral dialogues.



### *2.2.3 The role of imaginative play and conceptual thinking in fostering imagination and creativity*

I have provided a sociocultural a sociocultural approach to higher psychological functioning, and the way mediated and dialogical actions transform into verbal thought. However, I would like to expand Tappan's model (1991, 1997, 2006a, 2006b) and pose a question regarding how agents are able to transform their sociocultural context through the process of mediated actions. This question has led me to explore Vygotsky's concepts of imagination and creativity, which are widely discussed by Vadeboncoeur (2017) and Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016).

From this perspective "play, imagination, and creativity are described as social practices that draw upon psychological functions that are themselves pathways for both the engagement with and the renewal of culture in response to changing conditions" (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016, p. 4). Building upon this argument, Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) claimed that the ability to imagine different possible scenarios allows individuals to create new practices and transform their contexts. These authors emphasized the constant relationship between persons' higher psychological functioning and their role in transforming and controlling their sociocultural context and tools.

According to Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016), the ability to think beyond concrete contexts, and imagine and create new ideas is fostered by many factors. However, in this segment I focus just on two aspects that, according to these authors, promote imagination and creativity over the life course. The first one is related to the emergence of imaginative play as a result of children's desire to participate in activities that they are not able to do in their concrete contexts. The second aspect highlighted by Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) is the development of individuals' conceptual thinking.

Regarding the former, Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) argued that everyday life expressions of imagination and creativity are observed from early childhood when children imaginatively play as if they were engaged in social practices beyond their level of development; when they pretend to be others by acting according to specific social roles. As children are not able to be part of certain social practices, they, moved by their desire to participate, may use their imagination to act as if they were part of these social interactions (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1967). Hence, such imaginative social engagement entails processes of communication within the participants involved in the play situation. There are roles and rules that are constantly negotiated and renegotiated that serve as means to guide children's actions and interactions. This communicative interaction, Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) argued, facilitates the appearance of imagination and creation of new ideas; when children are able to separate meanings from concrete objects and actions, they are also fostering their ability to think beyond their concrete contexts.

Similarly, Göncü (1993) claimed that, through dialogue, social pretend play allows children to expand their knowledge towards new ways of seeing the world. Moreover, the possibility to create new shared meanings through imaginative situations should not be understood as if it applies only to young children and their play situations, but to older individuals as well (Perone & Göncü, 2014). By making an effort to understand each other within shared imaginary activities, play partners regardless of age, understand and articulate new systems of communication and different ways of uttering words. In so doing, intersubjective spaces are dynamically constructed and transformed according to the social practices with which people engage (Perone & Göncü, 2014).

Connecting these ideas with what has been discussed about the development of higher psychological functioning, imaginative play and playful imagining might be defined as special forms of mediated action, through which persons appropriate and transform sociocultural mediational means. When people play, and imagine they also establish a dialogue between themselves and their social or intersubjective world. In general, imaginative play seems to facilitate the dialogical speech chain between inner speech and different social languages and genres present in the sociocultural context.

Further, Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) also explored the development of conceptual thinking as another important factor that transforms individuals' imagining and creating. From their view, over the course of children's lives, their ability to separate meanings from concrete contexts enables imagination and creativity toward new ways of expression (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1967). As they separate meaning from objects, they become able to perform symbolic actions, which might promote the emergence of what Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) defined as "narrative understanding and expression" (p. 7). Symbolic play, furthermore, seems to have a role in children's ability to read and write. Given that they begin to recognize symbols and signs through their shared imaginary activities, they also gain competence in articulating more abstract ideas or concepts (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1967).

Duncan-Crawford (2010) argued that the Vygotskian account of concept formation reveals that, since early ages, the faculty to play with the relationship between meanings and objects pushes forward the capacity to conceptualize. Through imaginative play, children impose meanings on objects that are in their concrete context. This action, according to Duncan-Crawford (2010), allows the development of what Vygotsky distinguished as thinking in

complexes, which might be understood as the ability to group concrete objects not only on the basis of children's subjective senses, but in terms of their existing shared features.

This kind of thinking is considered close to the emergence of conceptual thinking, because when children are able to think in complexes they gradually begin to work with word meanings and their relationship to objects (Duncan-Crawford, 2010). At early ages, pre-schoolers are able to choose physical objects through their imaginative play based on the connections between what they want to represent and the objects' features. Later, they also select objects to play with, by considering the link between the meanings of what they want to represent and words. In this moment, they are almost reaching the ability to conceptualize, since they are ready to generalize and abstract ideas from their concrete context (Duncan-Crawford, 2010).

Once children abstract ideas from objects and actions, they may use, transform and create concepts to guide their activity and regulate their relationships with their social context. For instance, now they are able to tell a story about a house without using physical objects, but building on the concept they have about what they mean by "house." Then, during adolescence, the ability to think in concepts becomes stronger, fostering new forms of creative and imaginative expressions by using concepts (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016).

The understanding and use of words and their meanings results in the development of more complex concepts. Both formal educational contexts and life experiences contribute to expanding conceptual thinking (Vadeboncoeur, 2017, p. 85). While personal experiences foster the development of everyday concepts, formal instruction pushes academic concepts forward. Everyday concepts are internalized via individuals' particular experiences in their concrete contexts. Academic concepts, according to Vadeboncoeur (2017), are the outcome of

accumulated knowledge resulting from cultural and historical development; they are abstracted and appropriated through formal education.

While academic concepts are learned through formal instruction, everyday concepts become abstract through the appropriation of mediational means that led individuals to generalize and categorize different kind of objects, actions and phenomena. It is only through their everyday practices that children become able to conceptualize. The development of concepts, therefore, involves both formal instruction (academic concepts) and experience (everyday concepts) for individuals to go beyond categorization and be able to develop conceptual systems that can “be used to describe and explain a particular phenomena” (Vadeboncoeur, 2017, p. 85). As children use, transform and create concepts embedded in social practices that go beyond concrete contexts, they also engage in the process of playing with and creating new meanings (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016). Yet, it is crucial to consider that conceptual development is strongly influenced by individuals’ life experiences and the mediational means provided by their context.

Individuals’ imagination and creativity, therefore, may follow different trajectories according to the circumstances of their sociocultural contexts (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016). Limited experiences may constrain the emergence of conceptual thinking and, consequently, the possibility to imagine new social practices through concepts and the ability to differentiate and create new meanings (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016). In a similar line of thought, Wertsch (1991) argued that as inner speech develops by using mediational means, their appropriation enables individuals to master and transform them according to their intentions. If the sociocultural environment is limited, individuals may have more obstacles during the process of appropriation, and a limited range of mediational means with which to play.

## **2.3 A Sociocultural interpretation of moral functioning**

Considering a sociocultural approach, Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b) and Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) provided an interpretation of moral functioning that takes into account how individuals use, imagine, transform and create mediational means to interpret what is socially just or unjust. Thus, in this section, I first discuss Tappan's (1997, 2006a, 2006b) insight regarding moral functioning as a form of mediated and dialogical action. Next, I draw on the concept of moral imagination posed by Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016), in order to elucidate how, by using mediational means through dialogue, humans are able to create new moral actions.

### *2.3.1 Moral functioning as dialogical mediated action*

Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b) argued that moral functioning is a form of mediated action that constitutes a specific kind of higher psychological function. For an action to be interpreted as moral, it must be first associated with a specific meaning embedded in the relationship between the sociocultural context and individual's higher psychological functioning. An action is defined as just or unjust through the dialogue between social speech that took place in a specific cultural, historical and institutional context, and the individuals' inner speech. Carrying on this argument, Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b) defined moral functioning as the process through which individuals appropriate mediational means, such as words or discourses, that serve to interpret their actions in terms of what should be the just way to act.

Thus, by using mediational means, agents perform mediated actions in order to respond to conflicts from their sociocultural contexts (Tappan, 2006a). When applied to the interpretation of moral functioning, the concept of mediational means is understood as words, languages and forms of discourse that serve as the basis for moral dialogues (Tappan 1997, 2006a, 2006b). Although moral mediational means and their meanings initially emerge from the sociocultural

context, by performing actions to address conflicts, they are appropriated, and it is through this action when they are owned and transformed by the agents (Tappan, 2006a). At the same time, through the use of mediational means, moral functioning is in constant transformation.

The appropriation of moral mediational means allows individuals to control them, but it does not mean that there is an end point to developmental, when the maturity of moral functioning comes to an end. Moral functioning is in constant movement; as agents come into contact with new mediational means that are socioculturally situated, those means are transformed once the agents begin to appropriate them. But this mediated action does not stop here; by appropriating mediational means, agents are able to use them according to their own intentions and new situations that may entail a change in their use.

The link between moral functioning and language is key to understand this process; moral functioning implies appropriating mediational means by performing dialogical mediated actions. As an action is performed in a concrete context, Tappan (1997) claimed that moral functioning might be understood as actions mediated by moral discourses shared by people immersed in similar social practices. Tappan (1997) suggested that these shared actions allow individuals to understand particular ways of communicating within their community and themselves. In this way, persons are able to engage in dialogues through moral discourses that are gradually appropriated by the agents performing actions mediated by their shared mediational means.

Moral discourses exist not only in concrete interpersonal communication, but in the media, books or normative frameworks. What was initially a concrete conversation with others regarding rules, values or norms, gradually becomes a moral dialogue between oneself and the spectrum of social languages, voices, and speech genres accessible for the agent. As a result of these communicative interactions, inner speech emerges and over the course of its ongoing

dialogical movement, it constitutes a process of communication between agents and their sociocultural context. Thus, moral functioning is defined by Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b) as psychological functioning constituted by dialogical actions that guides people in their decisions and answers regarding the way they should or should not act.

### *2.3.2 Moral imagination*

Elaborating Vygotsky's notions of imagination and creativity, Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) advanced the concept of moral imagination in order to explore the process through which cultural norms, values, social roles and expectations interact with individuals' moral actions and cultural creation. As discussed above, through imaginative play, children are able to act as if meanings are not immersed in objects. In doing so, they engage in everyday social practices from their sociocultural context and foster their abilities to think in concepts and create new meanings as answers to their concrete contexts. It is in these continuous processes that Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) visualizes the development of moral imagination.

Children learn everyday social interactions that are common within their community, which might include simple actions such as how to use typical objects at home, how adults relate to each other, or what actions are associated with different roles in their society (Vadeboncoeur et al. 2016). Thus, imaginative play, from this standpoint, entails performing actions related to preschoolers' aspirations of participating in a sociocultural context, organized by specific norms, values, roles, expectations and, hence, moral mediational means. That is, by following specific rules, they play as if they were part of certain social practices, and the rules may be interpreted as mediational means shaping their moral actions.

Over time, when children are able to create new meanings and thinking and act beyond their concrete context, they achieve the capacity to creatively modify actions, roles and rules



through their imaginative play. Playing becomes an opportunity to appropriate mediational means taken from their sociocultural context (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016), and it is then that the ability to narrate emerges. At the same time, they are also more capable of using mediational means according to their specific conditions. These abilities let school children consider a wider spectrum of actions, roles and rules, and hence, establish different moral dialogues with different discourses (Tappan, 2006a; Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016).

During adolescence and adulthood, imagination is shaped by individuals' conceptual development (Vygotsky, 1967). Imagination is influenced by the use of mediational means beyond their concrete contexts, which allow them to imagine different social roles and rules by using, transforming and creating concepts to make decisions and guide their actions regarding what is socially just and unjust. This process that emerges from childhood and keeps going over the course of individuals' lives is what Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) defined as moral imagination, understood as "the creative capacity to generate useful ideas, to form ideas about what is good and right, and to act on the best ideas to grow with others" (p.17). Since moral imagination is related to specific sociocultural contexts, it will be in constant change, even during adulthood. In this regard, imagining and creating new ideas about more socially justice futures may be interpreted as forms of responses to specific sociocultural context dynamics.

By being engaged in creative, expressive and artistic social practices that involve deliberation, individuals regardless of their age, could foster their moral imagination (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016). This argument is consistent with the idea that, in order to appropriate mediational means, social practices must provide rich and diverse experiences, as well as opportunities for individuals to answer to their specific contextual demands and establish moral dialogues between their inner speech and different discourses. In this way, individuals use,

transform and create mediational means in order to build social futures.

## **2.4 Narratives as mediational means**

In this section, I describe the way I draw on narratives to engage the participants in moral dialogues. The following paragraphs provide an overview regarding the potential of narratives to make sense of human experiences and, therefore, about their possibility to transform sociocultural contexts and psychological functioning. To elaborate on this argument, I begin with a brief description of the use of narratives in qualitative research, from the perspective of Bruner (1991) and Labov (2003, 2006), and some of their followers. Subsequently, I come back to the work of Tappan (1991) and his colleagues in order to explore how they define narratives as mediated action, and how narratives are used in this study.

### *2.4.1 Narratives*

An interest in narratives surfaced in the last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when psychologists, anthropologists and philosophers borrowed ideas from literary theory and applied them to human development, language and cultural studies (Bruner, 1987, 1991). Before the 1970s, the analysis of text-based stories was more related to arts and literature than to social research. Currently, as in arts and literature, narrative research designs usually intend to describe individuals' and groups' experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Specifically, narrative methodologies consist of telling, recording, constructing and reconstructing participants' experiences in order to understand their culture and their lives as individuals immersed in specific social contexts (Holmes, 2005).

Although there are distinctive research traditions that differently define narratives, from the perspective adopted in this study they are understood as a way to construct, reconstruct and transform participants' moral actions. According to Bruner (1987, 1991), social researchers,

inspired by literary studies have been interested in narratives as a means not only to represent experiences, but also to construct them. As Bruner (1987, 1991) noted, the complicated domain of human interaction and experience is organized by the principles of narratives structures; human experience, he stated, is built through social interactions and time sequences, which are elements that have been considered fundamental for narrative structures. Similarly, Ochs (1997) and Holmes (2005) have shown that people's everyday interactions, such as those between family members and coworkers, are built on a narrative structure. These interactions are organized as events related by time and types of activities, as well as by individuals' actions that immersed in specific everyday practices.

Building on a related line of thought, Labov (2003, 2006) argued that narratives are particular ways of reconstructing chains of events, and therefore, ways to redefine them. From his view, to create a narrative, what is told should have a structure, through which a chain of actions is articulated. This sequence should connect the events according to the characters' actions and the time when they occurred. This way of describing experiences must be defined as a plot which, for Labov (2006), represents the skeletal structure of narratives.

Although from Labov's (2003, 2006) perspective everyday life is structured as narratives, it is only when individuals articulate such chains of events in a narrative plot, that they are able to make sense about those incidents and, consequently, to create new meanings from past events. Only then, they would be able to transform their experiences by narrating their meaningful interactions (Labov, 2006). Such reconstruction of the past must be ordered in a set of clauses that, in a certain way, corresponds to the original events (Labov, 2003, 2006; Toolan, 2001).

Another related aspect widely discussed by Bruner (1987) and Labov (2003) is the idea that what is told in narratives is something that the narrator considers worth telling. For these

authors, narrators always have their particular way to construct their narratives; they select the events and how they are related to each other, considering relevance, time and actions. In view of that, Bruner (1991) has claimed that the process of reconstructing past meaningful events has the potential to redefine and generate new meanings for the tellers and their audience. In doing so, participants and the audience, the researcher or the people who have access to the narrative, including the author, make sense of their stories. The process of narrating might enable the construction or co-construction of new interpretations about the same events.

It is precisely those reconstructions that provide some understanding about the narrators' lived experiences, as well as the mediational means that guide them in connecting the incidents in a particular way (Tappan & Packer, 1991). For example, what is an experience worth telling in certain sociocultural contexts could be irrelevant in others. Furthermore, by altering the sequence of the original events, the narrator could craft different stories and, hence, the audience would formulate distinct interpretations about them. In short, these different interpretations of the same events constitute what Bruner (1987, 1991) defined as the possibility of narratives to transform reality and create new meanings. In this sense, narratives not only provide an understanding about narrators' sociocultural context and lives, they also create an intertextual web of meanings (Ochs, 1997). Once a narrative is told, the audience becomes the author of new chains of events to tell.

In this regard, Bruner (1991) argued that "narrative constructions can only achieve verisimilitude" (p. 4). Instead of providing an exact representation of the original incidents, researchers might use narratives to explore participants' interpretations about what was experienced and told. From this theoretical framework, there is no such thing as an exact and straightforward correspondence between what the narrator recounts, and the events that she

decided to recount (Labov, 2003). Considering that what originally happened cannot be represented exactly as it occurred, researchers should pay attention to the way the storyteller and the audience transform the meaning of their life experiences.

#### *2.4.2 Authoring moral narratives*

From a sociocultural approach, moral functioning is understood as actions mediated by words, utterances and discourses. Tappan and Packer (1991) also argued that narratives are mediational means that individuals use and create to make sense of their moral actions. From their perspective, the connection between culture and narratives lies in the idea that every culture or community has its set of narratives and its particular ways to structure and interpret everyday events (Tappan, 1991). Narratives, therefore, are mediational means that shape and organize individuals' moral functioning, in such a way that specific forms of constructing narratives enable, guide, and constrain the way they articulate their moral dialogical actions.

Tappan and Packer (1991) shared the idea supported by some of the main proponents of narrative research (see Bruner, 1987, 1991; Holmes, 2005; Labov, 2003; Ochs, 1997), which states that human life in general and moral functioning in particular, is structured as narratives informed by culture. Similar to Bruner (1987, 1991), Tappan and Packer (1991) considered that human experience occurs in time, space and social interaction, and that individuals continually face moral conflicts in their everyday life, as if they were part their own narratives. Thus, moral narratives here are understood as sequences of events or actions structured through the dynamics between mediational means that are socioculturally situated and psychological functioning, and as plots that involve people's everyday moral dialogues (Tappan, 1991).

In his analysis of narratives and moral functioning, Tappan (1991) highlighted the concept of moral authority. Rather than the Piagetian perspective that moral development moves

to an end that involves thinking, feeling and acting autonomously, a sociocultural approach claims a different developmental telos toward moral authority, which might be enhanced by individuals' ability to narrate and, therefore, create and make sense of their contextualized moral actions (Tappan, 1991). For Tappan (1991), a claim to moral authority involves having the opportunity to be aware, recognize, and express one's moral dialogues. It also implies intentionally answering moral conflicts arising from a sociocultural context. Even when facing disagreement, Tappan (1991) argued, individuals are able to respond to moral conflicts by authorizing themselves to act in specific ways to cope with the conflict. From his standpoint, deliberately answering moral conflicts means "to assume responsibility and accountability for one's moral actions, and for acting on behalf of one's perspective" (Tappan, 1991, p. 7).

In this definition, Tappan (1991) connected the notion of moral authority to a speaking self; an agent immersed in a dialogue chain between her inner and social speech. Informed by Bakhtin's (1981) work, he explored ways through which people recount their moral narratives by using words, utterances and forms of discourse. For him, the activity of authoring actions constitutes engaging in moral dialogue with our sociocultural context, as a way to respond to our everyday experiences and conflicts.

In this argument, Tappan (1991) paralleled the concept of responsibility with Bakhtin's (1981) notion of answerability, and recalled that answerability not only assumes our actions, but also provides a conscious response to answer for our everyday moral actions (Tappan, 1991). By doing so, individuals are able to interpret, transform and recreate their moral actions. In this way, agents become authors of their narratives and can claim moral authority. Since agents are seen as authors of their life experiences, from this perspective, exploring individuals' narratives constitutes a way to understand their actions regarding what is socially just and unjust.

The idea that authoring implies a dialogue, poses a question regarding what Tappan (1991) defined as the authorship of moral narratives: who is the author of our narratives, if we build them through dialogue with others? Drawing on Bakhtin, Tappan (1991) provided an answer to this question by arguing that the concepts of appropriation and ventriloquation are key to understand how individuals own and master mediational means, and, consequently, become the authors of their own life experiences. As discussed, mediational means are first provided by the sociocultural context within which agents are developing. Over time, they become able to not only use these means, but also to appropriate, control and transform them through their mediated actions. It is precisely at this moment when others' words, utterances and discourses are owned by agents, and when they assume the authorship, responsibility and authority of their moral actions (Tappan, 1991). According to Wertsch (1991), appropriation allows agents to first utter or ventriloquate others' voices. Later, the constant usage of mediational means in different sociocultural contexts requires adjustments, shaping individuals' moral dialogical actions.

When a person faces a moral conflict, for example, she might be establishing a dialogue between two or more contrasting discourses; she may be confused about her position regarding abortion, because she is voicing a religious discourse in dialogue with human rights and scientific discourses. Then, by articulating her moral dialogue, she appropriates those discourses by selecting, from the options she has, the specific utterances and words to articulate her thinking according to her circumstances. In this way she may say that, for God, life is precious, and that according to a scientific discourse, life starts around the third month of pregnancy. In this moment, she could shape her own answer by saying that abortion should be allowed before the third month of pregnancy, but not after. As she authored her narrative she assumed responsibility

for her position: she may claim moral authority over her position towards this particular issue; a position that may change as she engages in new dialogues.

At this point it is important to clarify that some people may have more trouble appropriating social discourses than others. People could live their entire lives only ventriloquating what Tappan (1991) defined as external authoritative discourse; a discourse that “cannot be changed or altered, it cannot be doubted and, hence, there can be no true dialogue and no play with the context that frames it” (p. 16). This could happen if individuals’ contexts and experiences limit their possibilities to engage with different discourses and social practices that let them push their moral functioning towards their own moral authority. Having an opportunity to build and make sense of our moral actions through narratives is considered not only a way to understand and interpret our moral functioning, but also a social practice to create it.

## **2.5 Summary**

In this chapter, I provided a review of the conceptual framework. By identifying some gaps in the literature on moral development, I described a current debate in the field. Bearing in mind this discussion, a sociocultural approach is considered relevant to examine moral functioning as inseparable from culture. Moral functioning, here, has been defined as a psychological function mediated by mediational means that can be transformed through individuals’ action, imagination and creativity. Following Tappan and Packer (1991), in this study narrating is understood as a mediated action and narratives as mediational means.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Considering Tappan's (1991, 1997, 2006a, 2006b) insight about the role of the dialogical relationship between social and inner speech in moral functioning, this study examined the participants' definitions of social justice through interviews that engaged them in moral narratives to answer the research questions: 1) How do participants define social justice? and 2) How do they perceive their definitions of social justice are informed by their cultural background? This chapter provides a description the methodology. In the first section, I begin with my research position, through which I highlight specific aspects that led me to be interested in the topic of moral functioning and its relation to education and learning experiences. Then, in section two, I describe the criteria participants' selection, including ethical considerations. In section three, I focus on the procedures to collect data, and interviewing techniques. Finally, section four provides a brief description of the forms of analysis, specifically, the procedures to organize and interpret the data.

### **3.1 Researcher's position**

Coming from an artist and socialist family from Central America, I started to study art in an alternative school when I was four years old, when my parents decided to enroll me in a conservatory. The Conservatorio de Castella is a public institution in my country, Costa Rica, where children have to pass different tests to be accepted. In this school, I had the opportunity to learn about music, drama, dance, poetry, visual arts, and hence, different ways of expressing myself. This valuable experience was significant for my life, because it taught me how to love what I was learning, while discovering my own voice.

I obtained a minor degree in Arts when I was 17 years old. Then, I continued working with and studying art for a long period of time. I danced until I was in my 20s, and I also worked

as a costume and make-up artist in the advertisement industry. This job gave me the opportunity to pay for my higher studies and it complemented my salary during my first years as a research assistant. I had to take multiple jobs, not only because I loved them, but also because, by then, the Costa Rican art and social sciences fields became poorly paid.

Although I always valued my opportunity of being in contact with arts, it was when I started to be interested in human development that I really understood the importance of fostering creativity through life. At this moment, I discovered how lucky I was, since I had such valuable learning environments that allowed me to create my own voice. By comparing my own learning experiences with the majority of Costa Ricans, it was evident to me that our public educational system had significant limitations. That is, I realized that Costa Rican public education does not provide tools to foster children's creative and critical thinking (Castillo & Mora, 2010; Monestel, 2014). Therefore, fascinated by the relationship between human development and alternative learning contexts, I decided to study psychology at the University of Costa Rica.

By that time, I was also part of several activist and socialist groups, some of them led by my father in the same university. Hence, I believed that combining psychology, education and politics, could launch me on a project that my father taught me, in his translated words:

“transform the world by fostering social conscious awareness and creating our own ideology.”

Form those combined experiences, I realized that good quality learning experiences should be a human right; an ideal that is still lacking recognition in my region (IIDH, 2010). As has been highlighted by the Interamerican Institute of Human Rights (IIDH, 2010), due to the decline of public education, only those with high socioeconomic status have access to suitable instruction in

Latin America. This insight about the situation of the educational systems in my region drove me to my subsequent research goals.

During my time as a young activist, I wondered why figures with powerful discourses often act in contradiction to their arguments. In other words, why many politicians, and even activists, send messages about what is socially just and unjust, and then act in ways they seem to consider wrong. I was disappointed by some of the political organizations and figures that I was involved with, including my father's party. I realized that I was idealizing the Latin American socialist movement I grew up with because such promises never came true. Furthermore, I never really understood why my mother and other socialist women were silenced from that project, or why my lovely grandmother's spirituality was undermined by these movements. Thus, my own political and spiritual dialogue began. I came to the conclusion that power and hierarchy were present in all human conditions, and at the same time, I felt the need to struggle and voice my condition as a Central American woman in the middle of this capitalist order.

I held long and difficult discussions with my father, who still believes in socialism (Trotskyism) and revolution as the only way to change. After those encounters, I knew that he reinterpreted his ideals about how to live a socialist life, because he decided to leave the city and the university in order to work with exploited agroindustry workers in the countryside. That moment represented the beginning of my own project, and the differentiation from my father's endeavor.

Interested in the contradiction between discourse and action, my first thesis addressed the relations between moral development and attachment styles. Specifically, I explored the influence of attachment styles on moral dimensions (emotion, cognition and behavior) by working with two different populations from my country: adolescents from urban and rural

contexts. I think that this specific question came from my professional and personal background, which led me to hypothesize that context and socio-emotional experiences have a huge influence on the development of morality or on what Bakhtin defined as the *ideological self* (Tappan, 1991).

This research also endorsed my own dialogue and contradictions. Although it expanded my engagement with youth in Costa Rica, I noticed that its theoretical and methodological frameworks were not voicing the participants' moral dialogues. Specifically, during my field visits I had long conversations with wonderful young people who had ideals, wishes, angers and anxieties, but specially, a strong desire to express themselves. Having these conversations was crucial to see that although I could say something about their moral functioning, my quantitative research design was silencing them. This became completely clear when I returned to a poor Costa Rican rural zone in order to discuss some of the results with the participants, and a boy approached me to ask: "So, am I just a number for you?" After this simple question and without a clear answer, I was devastated, but this feeling pushed me to explore ways to bring youths' perspectives into my research.

Parallel to my university studies, my experience also allowed me to work in the educational field with several International Organizations, such as UNICEF and the Interamerican Institute of Human Rights. Specifically, I was involved in the research team of the Inter-American Report on Human Rights Education. Through this job, I worked on my knowledge about moral development and its relationships with human rights education in Latin America. Also, I explored topics such as school violence, gender discrimination, child abuse and exploitation, racial discrimination, and peer relations. Later, this knowledge led to a Masters in Human Rights. My second thesis contributed to expand my interest in education, morality and

politics in Central America's rural areas. In this work, I explored the question of how the public education system reproduces social differences and power dynamics through its hidden and explicit curricula.

This brief account of my position as a researcher is included to help the reader to make sense of my current inquiry. My experiences in alternative schooling, and exploring human development, morality, activism and human rights, have impacted my academic interest in these particular topics. Therefore, this research builds upon my previous research, to examine a sociocultural approach to moral functioning. My personal and professional goals have been always related to my contribution to reducing injustice and oppression. Up to now, I cannot say that I resolved my moral conflicts, but I know that I'm looking forward to continue exploring my moral dialogues with others.

### **3.2 Participants and ethical considerations**

According to Tappan (1991, 1997, 2006a, 2006b) and Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016), the appropriation of mediational mean and the ability to think in concepts changes over the course of human development. During adolescence, individuals have been engaged in sociocultural practices that have fostered the development of concepts. Working with university students, therefore, implies that the participants have had diverse life experiences through which they have developed their conceptual thinking.

In this study, six university students, older than 18 but younger than 35, were recruited using flyers that described the characteristics of the study (see Appendix A). During the initial meeting with the participants, I asked them if they knew people who might be interested in participating, and if they could share the study's information with them; a form of snowball or cluster sampling. The flyers showed my contact information. In this way, people interested in

participating could contact me via email or telephone. A more detailed explanation of the research's purpose, methods, benefits and risks was provided in this first interaction. Specifically, if one person asked to participate, I provided the information given in the informed consent via email or phone call. Then, I contacted those still interested in participating a week a later via email or phone call. In this way, the participants had time to think about their participation once they were informed. During this second interaction, I arranged the interview session, suggesting meeting in a public place in Vancouver.

The participants signed an informed consent form that clarified the study's procedures again and how their privacy was going to be protected. Also, I emphasized that they could end the study at any time without giving a reason, and that they had the right to refrain from responding whenever they did not want to reveal their ideas. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identities. Proper names for locations, such as schools or towns were not used during the interviews to avoid participants' identification.

Four of the participants identified themselves as males and two of them as females. All of them were university students studying and residing in Vancouver. Among the six research participants, four described themselves as Canadian immigrants with backgrounds from: Turkey, Iran, Kenya and Japan. One of the participants described himself as a North American with a Jewish background, studying in Canada since 2012. One other portrayed herself as a Caucasian Canadian with European immigrant parents. Table 3.1 describes the research participants' demographic information.

Table 3.1. *Demographic information of the research participants*

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Participants' description of their cultural backgrounds</b>	<b>Educational background</b>	<b>Number of years living in Vancouver</b>
<b>Julio</b>	Male	Jewish born in the United States of America.	Bachelor's in Forestry.	5
<b>Suna</b>	Female	Canadian immigrant born in Turkish.	Bachelor's in microbiology and immunology.	8
<b>Rupert</b>	Male	Canadian immigrant born in Iran.	Bachelor's in Health Sciences.	20
<b>Teo</b>	Male	Canadian immigrant born in Kenya.	Masters of Arts in Education.	3
<b>Ken</b>	Male	Canadian immigrant born in Japan.	Masters of Arts in Education.	2
<b>Alex</b>	Female	Canadian with European parents.	Masters of Education.	More than 15 years.

### 3.3 Methods

Following Patton (2002), semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants. This interview elicited their definitions of social justice, as well as their perceptions about the influence of their cultural background on their definitions by telling moral narratives. This section is divided into three subsections. I first provide a description of the parameters to conduct semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002). Then, I describe the main aspects to be considered when constructing a narrative. Finally, I briefly describe the steps to complete the data collection.

#### 3.3.1 *Semi-structured interview*

It is well known that in qualitative research, interviews are used to explore unobservable features of people's lifeworld (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Patton, 2002). Interviews also help to make explicit participants' thinking, experiences and narratives, which are considered

meaningful and valuable to be disclosed. According to Patton (2002), for researchers to accomplish these goals, they may apply techniques that may help them to better deal with this kind of data collection.

An semi-structured interview is defined as a method that highlights a set of topics that the interviewer wants to explore. Hence, the researcher guides the conversation by following questions regarding relevant issues to be discussed. For Patton (2002), preparing a guided protocol with some questions and theoretical ideas before meeting the respondents is helpful to elicit similar lines of inquiry with all the participants. However, it is important to highlight that during the discussion, the interviewer is free to inquire into some of the subject areas, to pose questions that have not been predetermined, or even to build new topics to improve the quality of the collected information (Patton, 2002). Taking these considerations into account, the interviews were conducted following a guide framing the discussions (see Appendix B).

### *3.3.2 Crafting moral narratives*

Utilizing Ochs et al. (1992) conceptualization of narratives, the interviews framed the conversations with the participants, and asked them to draw upon moral narratives to elicit their definitions of social justice. For Ochs et al. (1992), narratives are a kind of activity that have specific characteristics. There might be infinite ways of narrating events, but in order to consider what is told as a narrative activity, it should show three main features: a temporal dimension, a configurational dimension, and a problem-solving dimension (Ochs et al., 1992). The temporal dimension that characterizes narrative activity can apply to a reporter presenting the news, a person organising her agenda or a researcher structuring an experimental report. What is important here is that “all narratives depict a temporal transition from one state of affairs to another” (Ochs, 1997, p. 189). The configurational dimension refers to the structure of the



narrative, which must be constructed by a sequence of interrelated events or plot. Regarding the problem-solving dimension, Ochs et al. (1992) noted that although not all narrative structures show a problem to solve, stories are characterized by this particular feature.

In this study, the interviews were designed and conducted considering these three aspects. The interview questions guided the participants in telling their social justice narratives, operationalized as the narration of sequences of interrelated events that expose participants' ideas about socially just and unjust situations (Tappan, 1991). For example, the questions asked for past and present sequences of events structured around a socially unjust issue.

### *3.3.3 Procedures to collect data*

The interview protocol was piloted with the purpose of testing the interview guide, and verifying if the participant understood the questions. This session lasted one hour and 30 minutes, and it was audio recorded and transcribed. After conducting the pilot interview, few changes to the protocol were applied. Two questions of the original protocol were discarded because they were considered redundant. The data from this interview was considered for the analysis. Then, the data were collected over a period of six weeks; one interview per week. To begin to identify patterns, the audio recordings were reviewed after each interview several times. Listening to the audio-recording before meeting subsequent participants provided meaningful insights to consider during the upcoming interviews.

The interviews were conducted in a public space chosen at the participants' convenience. I first suggested to meet in a room at a university; three of them agreed, one suggested a public library, and two decided to meet in a coffee shop. To protect the participants' confidentiality in these places, we decided to sit down away from crowded areas. There were no technical issues that interfered with the quality of the audio recording in any of these public locations. Although

it was expected that the interviews would last one hour, their duration varied from 71 to 119 minutes. Most of them lasted approximately 90 minutes, for a total of nine hours and 30 minutes of audio recording. The six interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Before conducting the interviews, I described the guide to the participants. In this way, they had a general idea about the interview's goals. The data collection procedures during the interviews was organized in six phases that are described in what follows:

**Phase 1. Participant's background:** The participants talked about themselves: their studies, their interests and their cultural background. It was important, at this point, that they described their current social group or social relationships. In this way, they could differentiate between the sociocultural background that they grew up with and their current social context.

**Phase 2. Participant's definition of social justice:** The participants provided an example that, according to them, reflected social injustice. They also described different ways to solve this socially unjust situation. After that, the participants defined their concepts of social justice and injustice.

**Phase 3. Narratives of social justice that the participants grew up with:** Once their definitions of social justice/injustice were defined, the participants build on their concepts to talk about a narrative with which they grew up. The objective of this set of questions was to explore if there were narratives from their sociocultural backgrounds that had an influence in their definitions of social justice.

**Phase 4. Experienced narratives about social justice:** Through this set of questions the participants narrated experiences in which they, or people they know, faced an unjust situation. These narratives helped to elucidate how the participants' social context influenced their definitions of social justice, and how they drew on their definition to interact with their contexts.

**Phase 5. A moral conflict regarding social justice:** The participants were given a fictitious narrative regarding social justice that was created to explore how the participants might imagine their actions to solve an unjust situation related to poverty in a Canadian province. They also explained why they came up with their final solutions and if they considered it was a social justice issue.

**Phase 6. Closure:** At the end, I asked them if they wanted to add a comment or a question to expand the discussion. I also expressed my gratitude for their participation and gave them a gift card to let them know that I appreciated their participation.

### **3.4 Data organization and analysis**

The data were organized and interpreted using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002). The themes were created by considering the participants' responses, the research questions and the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2. This analysis focused on both what the participants expressed and theoretical assumptions informed by a sociocultural approach. Through the themes, I described how the participants defined social justice, and how they considered their definitions were informed by their sociocultural background. The identified themes provided theoretical insights that contribute to expanding a sociocultural discussion on moral functioning.

#### *3.4.1 Research journal*

According to Patton (2002), ideas for making sense of the data surface during collection. I first started by taking notes in a research journal during the interviews, after listening to the audio recordings, and during the process of transcription. The research journal, therefore, consisted of preliminary interpretations and data descriptors. These insights allowed me to have an idea of the data as whole and to create preliminary codes to later identify patterns or themes.

Codes are defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as aspects from the data that appear interesting to the researcher, generally in relation to the research questions. According to these authors, they are the most basic elements taken from the raw data that can be evaluated to make sense of the information provided.

In this stage of the data analysis, I organized all the analytical insights that emerged in my research journal as follows: 1) participant's background, 2) definitions of social justice, 3) narratives regarding social justice that the participants grew up with, 4) personal social justice narratives, 5) a moral conflict regarding social justice, 6) steps towards social justice, and 7) factors that led to social injustice. Some of the codes identified during this stage are summarized in Appendix C. My research journal also documented strengths and limitations of the data collection process, and the way the interviews were conducted. For instance, after the pilot interview, I noticed that some of the questions of the first version of the interview protocol were redundant. I took this into account to conduct the subsequent interviews.

#### *3.4.2 Transcripts*

For the analysis, I developed transcript conventions. I followed Schiffrin's (1987) transcript conventions, cited in Schiffrin (1994) to describe the way the participants expressed themselves (see Appendix D). This process is considered by Ochs (1979) to be an essential step of the analysis procedures that reflects theoretical assumptions. The transcript conventions, according to Ochs (1979), shape the data based on the researcher's theoretical framework; as such, the creation of the transcripts is the preliminary analysis.

In this regard, the most relevant theoretical assumptions informed by a sociocultural approach is that utterances are communicative units that are socioculturally situated and embedded in the dialogical process between inner and social speech (Wertsch, 1991). The

context of these utterances, as well as the way they were uttered were then represented by using the transcript conventions. Such representations are considered a researcher's interpretation of the way the participants established a dialogue between their inner and social speech. Once the transcript conventions were defined after the pilot interview, the transcription took place over a period of four months.

### *3.4.3 Coding the data*

After the interviews were transcribed, I read them while listening to the audio files in order to identify typos and misunderstandings. Afterwards, I read the transcripts again, but this time more codes and possible themes were identified by using the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti. This process allowed me to get more immersed into the data and it facilitated the data segmentation and organization (Patton, 2002). Once all the data were coded, preliminary themes were defined. These themes were reviewed by contrasting them with their respective excerpts or quotes. Then, I confirmed that the themes were consistent with the data, and a final version of the theme map was created (see Table 3.2).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), when identifying, selecting and reporting themes, the researcher is also providing her interpretation, which in this case means that theoretical assumptions were part of the process. The themes reported in this study were first identified at the semantic level; the codes and themes were constructed considering the explicit meanings recognized within the data. However, this analysis went beyond the semantic level and identified underlying ideas that theoretically informed the semantic content. Table 3.2 shows the final thematic matrix built to better visualize how the participants defined social justice and how their cultural background informed this process.

Table 3.2. *Themes and subthemes across the data*

Level of thematic analysis				
Semantic		Latent		
Themes				
		<b>Equality and non-discrimination as core aspects defining social justice</b>	<b>Pathways from social injustice toward social justice</b>	<b>Authoring themselves through moral dialogues</b>
Social injustice	Subthemes	Inequality and discrimination	Discrimination as historically grounded	Self-identification within a diverse community
			Political power dynamics	
School environments as social injustice reproducers				
Education for social justice				
Working together toward social justice				
Social justice		Equality and non-discrimination	Recognising each other through dialogue	

This table also shows the level of analysis (semantic/descriptive or latent/interpretative) through which the themes were identified and reported. Additionally, the first column refers to the way the participants defined social justice and injustice as a continuum with different expressions across the subthemes. These themes and subthemes are discussed in the following chapter.

### 3.5 Summary

This chapter described the methodology. It first provided an overview of the researcher's position, through which I stated how my personal, professional and academic background informed my current research interests. Then I presented a description of the procedures to recruit the participants, and clarified the criteria that I considered to ethically conduct this research. As qualitative research, I specified the kind of interviews through which I collected the data. The procedures for the analysis also were described, explaining the way I organized and examined the data to answer my research questions.

## **Chapter 4: Social justice as a conceptual system: A thematic analysis**

This chapter presents the thematic analysis, informed by the participants' responses and a sociocultural approach. Three main themes and their respective subthemes are described, namely: 1) Equality and non-discrimination as core aspects defining social justice, 2) pathways from social injustice toward social justice, and 3) authoring themselves through moral dialogues. The last section of this chapter summarizes the discussion around these three main themes.

### **4.1 Equality and non-discrimination as core aspects defining social justice**

Although all the participants provided different definitions of what social justice meant for them, a pattern that relates this concept to the notion of *equality and non-discrimination* in terms of access to material and cultural resources was identified. This theme is defined as the main pattern because all the interviewees defined social injustice as a continuum that moves toward social justice. In their words, social injustice moved from “the exclusion of the certain group of people from... resources” (Ken, May 2017, p. 6), to “something that is just when we have equal distribution of resources” (Teo, April 2017, p. 23). Thus, their definitions of social injustice were grounded on the idea that certain groups of people have unequal access to material and cultural recourses, opportunities and rights, and social injustice moves towards social justice when these barriers are lifted. Table 4.1 illustrates this movement by showing brief excerpts from each participant's transcript.

Table 4.1. *Participants' definitions of social justice and injustice*

	Social injustice definition	Social justice definition
<i>Julio</i>	It's kind of, the most blatant way of looking at and saying, "This is what it looks like, when there is injustice," when there is something, that is clearly unequal. (March 2017, p. 7)	That is, in my opinion, the way that we go forward. It's giving everybody an equal opportunity. (March 2017, p. 12)
<i>Suna</i>	Already the fact that the poor, the fact that poor people exist and rich people exist and not everybody is at equal level, to me is already a social injustice issue. (April 2017, p. 10)	To me social injustice in some shape or form, either based upon politicizing identity differences, or just social class or whatever. It's always gonna exist until you can achieve that classless society. (April 2017, p. 11)
<i>Rupert</i>	So that's social in-unjust... That's a type of if they've discriminated because of their, background or because they're different than you... So, they should be treated equally. (April 2017, p.10)	Social justice will be the opposite of that. Would be: try to eliminate differences or barriers. And-and helping-helping them to achieve balance with the mainstream population. Make sure they mentally and physically they feel belonging and if they have access to resources just like me and you. Just like everybody. (April 2017, p. 11)
<i>Teo</i>	Those are injustices when people cannot, they are within their own country, they cannot eat, they cannot even dress up, they cannot even pay bills, they cannot do anything. Not that they are disabled, but the mechanism that are put in place cannot enable them. They cannot capacity- they cannot give them the capacity to do those things. (April 2017, p. 20)	Okay, I think social justice is to me is like when people have... some sort of knowledge about what belongs to them. That is, they can be able to differentiate what is a right and what is a privilege. And they can be able to speak for themselves or maybe in a represented kind of genuine democracy. Not the other fake one. Uh, that is social justice. (April 2017, p. 23)
<i>Ken</i>	So, social injustice is where a certain group of people are excluded from, accessing to, um, certain material conditions that, dominant group, experience, enjoy, and the access to the: the dialogue meaning making process of what certain society or either group should look like. (May 2017, p. 13).	But in general, social justice I'd say is to have... more... equal or... equitable access to... the: those things, uh, material and dialogue. (May 2017, p. 13)
<i>Alex</i>	Injustice, is when... people are disrespected and their rights are not recognized and valued, uh... when there's inequality. (May 2017, p. 7)	I think social justice is standing up for the rights of all people, for equality... dignity, and respect. (May 2017, p. 7)

As seen in this table, the participants defined social justice/injustice as processes with different expressions within a continuum with two opposite sides, rather than different states categorically defined and mutually exclusive. This way of conceptualizing social justice/injustice



as a continuum from inequality to equality, is consistent with Vygotsky's perspective grounded in the principle of the unity of opposites. This principle "refers to the presence of internal tendencies in all phenomena that are inconsistent or contradictory, but that simultaneously presuppose one another" (Vadeboncoeur, 2017, p. 13). Social justice and social injustice, hence, are not articulated by the participants as isolated concepts, but as what Vadeboncoeur (2017, p. 85) defined as conceptual systems with specific relationships that explain particular social circumstances.

This is especially clear in Julio's, Suna's, Rupert's, Teo's and Alex's definitions, in which social justice is defined as ongoing actions towards equality: "going forward," "achieving a classless society," "trying to eliminate differences or barriers," "being able to speak" or 'standing up for the rights of all people.' Although Ken's definition is not necessarily expressed as an ongoing action towards socially just circumstances (see Table 4.1), it drew upon the idea that to conserve social justice, people must engage in dialogue to express their demands and contribute to the process of cultural meaning making and, therefore, cultural production.

In their definitions, the participants used words such as discrimination, disrespect or exclusion to refer to certain people's barriers or limitations to access resources and opportunities, as marginalized or considered less valued than the dominant group or groups in society. It is evident, here, how the idea of equality suggested that, within human diversity, there should be equal access to fulfil all community members' needs; including material basics and the possibility to engage in the processes of what Vadeboncoeur (2017) defined as "the ongoing creation of and transformation of culture" (p. 261).

It is having the opportunity to engage in dialogue that fosters imagination and creativity, and it is through them that individuals are able “to think through, deliberate, and take action” (p. 261) to change social circumstances. As Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) noted,

It is engagement in nurturing, thoughtful, and just classrooms—like the air we breathe— and engagement in dialogues across differences that draws upon intersubjectivity, that stirs wide-awakeness for attachment and affective attunement, that opens opportunities for moral imagination: thinking and feeling toward the creation of ideas that are useful, that contribute to what is good and right, and that shape actions with and for others. (p. 23)

Connecting with others to deliberate about what is socially just and unjust, or engaging in what Ken (May 2017) defined as the “dialogue meaning making process” (p. 7), is something that, according to him, is not equally accessible to all society members. Therefore, when he referred to inequality, he meant not only the lack of access to material resources, but the limitations that certain groups of people have, to participate in, transform and create their sociocultural contexts.

Common aspects referring to equality and non-discrimination present in all the participants’ definitions of social justice might be interpreted as shared mediational means informing their moral actions. For Tappan (2006b), the use, transformation and creation of mediational means “are always associated with power, privilege and authority” (p.7); appropriating specific mediational means implies legitimizing moral actions in the light of the most powerful discourses present in a specific sociocultural context. While appropriating legitimized mediational means, individuals act according to social expectations. Having access to these means also entails access to the opportunities resulting from their appropriation.

Tappan's (2006b) insights regarding the use of a legitimized and dominant discourse of justice in North America is relevant to understand this finding. He examined how his research participants tend to use a discourse that fosters the "ideal of equality, reciprocity, and fairness between persons" (p. 6), through the application of norms, rules, rights and general principles. Building on Gilligan (1982), he argued that this discourse has been widely legitimized in the contemporary US culture. Although Tappan's (2006) findings referred to a North American sociocultural context, this research result might be interpreted as the participants using a globalized Western discourse expanded by the UN through international legal documents and regulations (de Sousa Santos, 2003); a globalized discourse that might be silencing less powerful discourses and practices in local contexts (Monestel & Vadeboncoeur, 2017).

The idea of equality and non-discrimination is defined as a principle by the UN's Population Fund (UNFPA) (2005) as follows:

All individuals are equal as human beings and by virtue of the inherent dignity of each human person. No one, therefore, should suffer discrimination on the basis of race, colour, ethnicity, gender, age, language, sexual orientation, religion, political or other opinion, national, social or geographical origin, disability, property, birth or other status as established by human rights standards. (para. 5)

The UNFPA (2005) clarified that within the diverse nature of all humans, they are equal in terms of their inherent dignity. According to the UNFPA (2005)'s human rights standards, discrimination should not be allowed in any form or circumstance.

Similarly, according to the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (2006), the use of the term *equality* in the UN's legal documents and reports (e.g., Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenants on Human Rights) usually refers to:

Equality of rights, primarily implying the elimination of all forms of discrimination and respect for the fundamental freedoms and civil and political rights of all individuals.... [and] Equality of opportunities, which requires stable social, economic, cultural and political conditions that enable all individuals to fulfil their potential and contribute to the economy and to society. (p. 15)

Here, the UNDESA (2006) highlighted that equality of rights is always connected to the idea of non-discrimination, and it requires that all individuals should have equal opportunities.

Moreover, the UNDESA (2006) clarified that there has been a shift from the use of the concept of equality of opportunities to *equity* in recent UN documents (e.g., The United Nations Millennium Declaration), which extended this term as follows: “equity in living conditions for all individuals and households.... [referring to] the most logical reference point in determining what is just and what is unjust with regard to living conditions and related matters within society” (p. 16). However, the use of this concept, according to the UNDESA (2006), remains vague, controversial and more debate is needed to openly support this shift.

It is evident the parallelism between the UNFPA’s (2005) and the UNDESA’s (2006) interpretations of equality/equity, and the participant’s definitions of social justice. This finding might be interpreted by arguing that the participants may appropriate a dominant discourse present in their sociocultural contexts; a discourse mediating and shaping their moral actions. However, it does not mean that their definitions lack particular aspects that might be related to their specific experiences.

The interplay between individuals' specific experiences coming into their inner dialogues with abstract and generalized mediational means might be better understood considering what Vadeboncoeur (2017) defined as the development of everyday and abstract concepts: "both everyday concepts and academic concepts should be seen as growing into and informing each other" (p. 85). Following Vygotsky's theory, Vadeboncoeur (2017) argued that the difference between these two kinds of concepts is their origin and their history of development. Everyday concepts are developed through personal and contextualized social practices, resulting in accumulated experiential knowledge. Academic concepts are the result of historically and collectively shared knowledge acquired through systematic learning and instruction.

To some extent, it seems that all the participants' definitions of social justice and injustice were informed by a globalized discourse consistent with the UN concept of equality. At the same time, there are remarkable differences in the kind of mediational means that they used to define social justice. These differences in the way they configured their definitions might be seen as the outcome of their accumulated experiences and knowledge regarding what is socially just and unjust.

For example, Rupert's and Ken's past narratives make visible relationships between their social justice/injustice conceptual definitions and the experiences narrated. First, Rupert referred to equality by saying that there are barriers that should be eliminated to allow a particular group of people access to resources and make them "feel belonging" (April 2017, p.11). Earlier in the interview, he talked about his experience as an immigrant in Canada:

And even as a child, when I moved here, I still remember Grade 1, 2 in the elementary school. I didn't know English, so some people, they were picking on me and I was very upset and so I know it can be very tough....

So the first few years, that was tough for me. I remember it's hard to make friends. (April 2017, p. 22)

In this way, Rupert described his experience in a school where he felt discriminated against; he was in a community that he did not feel part of. This experience in the school, therefore, led him to declare that to move towards social justice, governmental authorities and Canadian citizens should help immigrants feel a sense of belonging.

Second, Ken suggested that the lack of access to material resources is related to the barriers to engaging “the dialogue meaning making process of what certain society or either group should look like” (April 2017, p. 13). Later, Rupert, earlier in the interview Ken talked about how he has felt excluded from the dialogue in his university classes:

In classroom, I still have the linguistic barrier difficulty, you know. I can't speak like native speakers... still... but if there are moments where people understand that and have-give me more time to say things or, you know... or ask, if I have any opinions, about certain things, you know, then I can contribute. But without that, assuming that I can participate in the debate as native speakers do, I'm... kind of excluded from the dialogue and debate. (May 2017, p. 12)

Through this example, Ken made clear how his language barrier limited his engagement in classroom dialogue. Later, he talked about his definition of social justice, considering his own experiences to make clear how certain people need extra support to access to social dialogue and cultural resources:

And, I said-I said equitable, because the access, for example, there are certain, as the example I talked about, a certain group of people need

extra support to participate in the dialogue... For example, linguistically and culturally, you know. (May 2017, p. 13)

Here, Ken explained what he meant by equitable, referring to his previous example about his feelings of exclusion in his classroom. It is evident how these different definitions of social justice/injustice are embedded on their personal experiences and contexts. It is also evident that their concepts of social justice/injustice had certain similitudes when they expressed that equal access to resources, opportunities and rights is what defines social justice. In this sense, the UN concept of social justice, shared by the community in which they are immersed, might be playing a role informing the participants' definitions.

#### **4.2 Pathways from social injustice towards social justice**

This theme illustrates how the participants expressed pathways from social injustice towards social justice as possible actions that may help to improve socially unjust conditions. As seen in Table 3.2, for them, discrimination was historically grounded, and political power dynamics and school contexts reproduced social injustice. In contrast, the participants expressed that through education, working together and recognizing each other through dialogue, they could stand up for social justice. By authoring their narratives, the participants represented and imagined what social justice might look like. In what follows, I discuss the subthemes that account for what the participants expressed are socially unjust circumstances, and the different forms that they imagined could be pathways toward social justice.

#### *4.2.1 Discrimination as historically grounded*

Although all the participants talked about current discrimination against different groups (e.g., women, LGBTQ, Indigenous groups, Black people and immigrants), the majority described this phenomenon as historically grounded. For instance, talking about racism in the United States, Julio stated:

Well, I think that in this specific situation, you have to, you have to look back on the history of the area.... So: in Louisiana, you're looking at primary descendants of slaves. You're looking at an area that's been mired in racism... even today you've voting rights issues, disenfranchised communities, lack of... access to health care, lack of access to food, lack of access to all sorts of other, issues. (March 2017. p. 7)

In this passage, Julio related Louisiana's socioeconomic disparities to his country's history of slavery and argued that, even nowadays, people are facing historical disadvantages.

Similarly, Suna identified how discrimination in the school has its roots in society's broader historical conditions:

So, for me, that's why the bullying of a White kid and a Black kid in a White predominantly White school aren't the same thing. Because historically, Black people in White dominant societies have been oppressed, you know. Slavery in North America. (April 2017, p. 8)

Here, Suna expressed her thoughts about historical exclusion impacting school environments in North America. Her main argument is that a phenomenon perceived as unrelated to historical conditions must be understood as embedded in society's historical power dynamics.



Rupert, for his part, described the Iranian revolution, and how, after this historical event, the Government issued norms and regulations discriminating women:

It divided the men and women, and there's no restriction on the men, but there's-they're putting restrictions on the women. So it's more the: gender of, gender bias too. Uh, the sex bias. 'Women can't do this, men-men can do that. They can, they cannot.' So, uh, yeah, it's, again, comes back to... it's not equal. (April 2017, p. 15)

For Rupert, after his country became “a Muslim, dominant country” (April 2017, p. 13), men and women started to be differently treated by the Government. In so doing, women, according to him, were restricted and, therefore, discriminated against.

Like Rupert, Teo expressed how his meaning of social injustice/justice is represented by what he called “historical injustices” (April 2017, p. 18). According to him, the people from his home country in Africa “were displaced from their places of life-living, say, like their homes and their property and their families” (April 2017, p.18). He attributed the roots of his country’s current injustices to the British colonization and, later, to the lack of response from the Government:

The colonialists, they did whatever they did, and then the Government that took over, needed to like take care of all these people, and their property... but nobody cared about that.... So, I think there was some sort of like hidden agenda that wasn't so good and, that's why my social-historical, social injustices as I see them today. (April 2017, p. 19)

In this example, Teo also explained how after colonial times, his country’s Government did not respond properly to the unjust social circumstances. Through this reflection, he defined what he

considered socially just and unjust, contrasting what he knew about his sociocultural context with what he expected from his Government. Thus, Teo, as well as Julio, Suna and Rupert, established a dialogue with their social context; a dialogue that was visible during the interview, and that Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b) and Wertsch (1991) conceptualized as inner dialogue located in a specific cultural, historical and institutional context.

In the case of Suna and Julio, they contextualized discrimination against Black people as embedded in the history of North America's slavery. This narrative of slavery was a form of mediational means to interpret and explain current social conditions. Likewise, by using a narrative of his country's history, Rupert explained contemporary women's discrimination in Iran.

In Teo's case, he interpreted current injustices as embedded in the history of his sociocultural context, and he also judged his Government's actions. With certain expectations of the moral answerability of his political representatives, Teo considered a set of norms and rules uttering the governmental authority's obligations. From a sociocultural perspective, this normative narrative, as well as the historical narrative of his country, might be understood as mediational means shaping and being shaped by his moral actions. Teo, therefore, considered these means to contrast his Government's lack of response to social injustice with his expectations about it, and in this way, he authored his moral dialogue.

#### *4.2.2 Political power dynamics*

In another example, Alex questioned her context's historical and political power dynamics through a narrative about Germany's dominance after WWI. Like most the participants, she attributed the Nazi oppression and genocide to historical events leading to their rise to power:

If you look into some political analysis a lot of people will say: what happened after World War I kind of set them up, in a way. So, I know the economy and the Germans were really struggling after World War I and Hitler came in as offering a solution to their economic problems.... Then I think he: brought a lot of racism and hatred and, a lot of horrible things along with that, that maybe people at first didn't realize. Then, because of his dictatorship and the power and violence that he used, I think people, you know, weren't able to speak. (May 2017, p. 9)

In this extract, Alex highlighted three aspects to define how it is possible to reproduce social injustice through political power dynamics: first, she stated how certain sociohistorical conditions allowed Hitler's manipulation for his rise to power. Second, she described how, through this manipulation, the political authorities at the time discriminated against certain groups of people. Third, she explained how the Nazis used their power to oppress people that eventually could stand up for changing the system.

Likewise, Julio narrated historical events that led to political conditions causing harm and injustice. He referred to the conflict between Israel and Palestine as follows:

That was how: Israel was founded. They made a deal with the British and, eventually became known as Israel... in the process of that, there was the displacement of a lot of, homes and people who had been living on that land, who had come and settled. And that was years after, whatever BC or AD, that the Jews originally were kicked out of Israel. And now they came back and caused the whole thing. (March 2017, p. 14)

In this case, Julio highlighted how, through political arrangements, people were displaced from their homes by force, causing what he called “the: conflict between Israel and Palestine” (March 2017, p. 12). He also mentioned that, throughout his life, this narrative has changed depending on political circumstances and the actors narrating the story: “As Government changes, as people change. Ahm, when I was growing up, I remember being a very different narrative from what it was today” (March 2017, p. 13). Later during the interview, he continued: “It's all depending because it's such a political situation. It's all depending on who is dealing with who” (March 2017, p. 13). Then, he clarified that the narrative is different depending on who is talking:

There's hundreds of different opinions. It always depends on who talk to.

There're people who say, ‘You can't fix it, there's gonna be one State, there's gonna be a war and eventually whoever comes out on top, that's the end. That's it.’ There're people who say, ‘You know what? that you can have two States, you’re gonna need to do this.’ (March 2017, p. 13)

Here, Julio narrated different perspectives providing arguments on what would be the end of this conflict. According to Wertsch (1991), when individuals articulate their utterances, they also express their point of view. This is what he meant by voicing utterances, which depends not only on who talks but on the audience. That is, the meanings and interpretations of utterances are embedded in the dialogical process defined by Wertsch (1991) as the chain of speech communication, in which several voices come together through both social and individual’s dialogue.

Like Julio, Suna built on a narrative from her cultural background to articulate her meaning of social justice/injustice. She also highlighted how historical events and political power

dynamics ended up in a specific form of Government that reproduced injustice. In this way, Suna drew upon the narrative of her home country's national history:

Because in our narrative, what happened is we fought imperialists, we were the good guys, who were being oppressed, and then we won, and then we had a just Republic, right? But, in reality, what happened is we were another imperialist power.... That was our problem, and then when we fought the other imperialists off, to keep the land, we made, it was a dictatorship. Like, there is no point in a Republic, a democratic Republic, if nobody else is running against that one guy. And if he's making sure nobody else is running against him. (April 2017, p. 16)

Based on this narrative, Suna represented her country's political power dynamics and the narrative's arguments justifying its Government's actions. As Tappan (1991) stated, every social context produces narratives that may have an important role in the culture where they are embedded. In other words, they function as mediational means shaping and being shaped by human action. Here again, Suna questioned what she considered should be her country's history, and established a dialogical relationship with this cultural narrative (Wertsch, 1991). Thus, she revealed her voice through the narrative, and brought into question this story's accuracy through her inner dialogue.

#### *4.2.3 School environments as social injustice reproducers*

Building upon personal narratives, most of the participants recounted narratives of injustices experienced at school. Suna, Rupert, Teo and Ken reconstructed personal experiences that allowed them to articulate their meanings of social justice/injustice. Ken, for instance, evoked a memory about two kids discriminated against by his elementary school classmates:

“They're... I mean, both of them are same similar situation, were immigrants. My classmates, who were children, who were children of immigrant parents, were kind of bullied... because of their, kind of marked foreignness... appearance” (May 2017, p. 17). For Ken, “diversity is often invisible” in his home country’s culture, and the two kids that he talked about “didn't fit into this monolithic image” (May 2017, pp. 15-16). What he considered was a problem of the Japanese society at a broader level was evident in his elementary school’s context.

Similarly, Suna and Rupert talked about what apparently is a problem for the Canadian society. During the last decades, Canada’s immigration patterns increased significantly, transforming its intercultural relationships (Hou & Bourne, 2006). Although Canada has been recognized for its cultural diversity, discriminatory practices and attitudes against non-Western communities are still evident (Mackey, 2002). These practices and attitudes segregating immigrants at the school were perceived by the participants.

For instance, Suna described her school as place where “if you were an immigrant you either got streamed to ESL, which completely blocked your options for college, or you got streamlined into IB” (April 2017, p. 26). Rupert’s experience also showed how discriminatory practices made him feel excluded in his elementary school: “They don't like you because you're from different, or why you don't speak English... or you know, or you move different” (April 2017, p. 26). In this regard, Hiebert and Ley (2003) argued that cultural groups different from Anglo-Europeans, have been forced to assimilate mainstream values and practices to be recognized as part of the Canadian society.

Considering Vygotsky’s theory, Vadeboncoeur (2017) argued that, historically, schools have had “responsibility for enculturation, or teaching the practices and products of human cultures from one generation to the next” (p. 17). Thus, one of the roles of schooling has been to

teach children and youth the values, practices and interest of the dominant culture, more than those of the non-dominant cultural groups. Schools have usually functioned as generators of mediational means that encourage individuals to engage in practices that typically reproduce the dominant values and social dynamics.

Another example illustrating these insights is evident in Teo's narrative. He drew upon a story about his elementary school's teachers hitting him because he did not want to speak English:

Corporal punishment. I remember, we would be told to kneel down on gravel.... Some would even start bleeding. And then they would tell us to put our hands and they would start caning us... It was very painful because you would find maybe a group of 20 teachers lined up and every student has to get like say, five strokes from each teacher. (April 2017, p. 24)

According to Teo, his teachers punished him that way because, following their colonizers, it was the method they learned:

But during that time, most of the people that were there, I think they were trying to copy what was happening during the colonial time. So, they were carrying that idea of the colonialistic way of doing, because there was no colonialist who was good to any African. They kept hitting them right/left whatever. And I think even the teachers were trying to borrow that kind of an idea, where they needed to control excessive powers and over the students. (April 2017, pp. 26-27)

In this excerpt, Teo expressed how his teachers' disciplinary methods were embedded in the oppressive practices of colonial practices. According to Vadeboncoeur (2017), historically, teachers have been focused on transmitting information to a passive student that must be controlled, in order to preserve the interests and values of the dominant group. The disciplinary methods highlighted by Teo, corresponded what Vadeboncoeur (2017) defined as factory model schooling structure that had "an emphasis on efficiently transmitting information and controlling behaviour, the structure of schooling was purpose built for assimilation (pp. 271-272).

Hence, it is important to identify "how and which cultures are reflected in the curriculum" (Vadeboncoeur, 2017, p. 17). These are key issues that deserve attention to define the role of schooling, not only as culture reproducer, but as means to create and transform culture. For Teo, as much as school has reproduced injustice in his experience, through education, people can be empowered to recognize "what is going on around, and what are their rights" (April 2017, p. 17). Teo's arguments, therefore, revealed the dialectical relationship between schooling for cultural continuity and schooling for cultural transformation.

#### *4.2.4 Education for social justice*

Through his personal narratives, Teo challenged the political power dynamics of his community and recognized education as a pathway towards social justice. Thus, talking about corruption, he said:

And they have got so many, you know, so many, privileges to enjoy, which common citizens don't have. But again, they also do not give, or they do not put in place, mechanisms or systems that can, educate people about their rights. (April 2017, p. 21)



In this example, he imagined a response to confront inequalities in his cultural context. A response that, according to him, is different from what he narrated about his Government's actions. He imagined what should be an alternative answer to confront injustice in his country:

They do not put mechanism in place like the way the, you know, this could only need somebody who has got a willing idea, a heart to bring up the idea of, 'We are going to push a bill in parliament that is going to give money for civic education in primary schools or in high schools. So, we shall be having some sort of, a system, a syllabus, a curriculum that is going to teach them about their rights'.... But nobody-nobody thinks about that.... They only need to say that, 'No. We need to bring a more standardized kind of an examination.' So, everybody is fooled to know that the only way to be a-a bright person is by passing a standardized examination and nothing else. (April 2017, p. 21)

The dialogical process highlighted by Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b) between social and inner speech is evident in Teo's utterances: the educational authorities' voicing standardized examinations and Teo imagining "a bill to give money for civic education" (April 2017, p. 21). This is consistent with his idea of providing "some sort of knowledge" to allow people "to speak for themselves" (April 2017, p.23). Through his narrative, Teo could speak by himself, defining his concept of social justice/injustice and, by answering to his social context, he imagined possible alternatives to take action to improve injustices.

Similarly, Suna imagined that:

If that Black kid is forced to be aware of his minority status at some level, why shouldn't the White kid realize, 'This is what I'm treating my

Black peer badly, I need to stop that, this is wrong.’ Like, you gotta start basically teaching this, teaching kids that the world is not equal, and we made it that way, but we can change it, you gotta teach it to them early, you can’t just say, ‘Don’t bully each other, bullying is wrong.’ (April 2017, p. 9)

Suna brought together several voices to construct her argument about how education can contribute to fostering children’s conscious awareness to let them reflect on their context, and the multiple ways they could change it. She uttered the teachers’ voices demanding kids not to bully each other, without providing any reasonable explanation, and the imagined voice of a child understanding why she is bullying and, hence, asking herself to stop doing it.

This inner dialogue, showed that Suna imagined school as a social institution that grows through relationships; considering not only the teachers’ duty, but also understanding school as a space to develop one’s actions, always interconnected to others. This process is defined as a task of moral imagining, which implies “establishing and/or reestablishing interconnectedness, social responsibility, and answerability to others for our actions” (Vadeboncoeur, 2017, p. 274).

Julio, Alex and Ken also built on their narratives to imagine education as a way to confront inequalities. Julio expressed, “if you give everybody an opportunity, for a good education... and then allow them to decide how they wanna live their lives, that to me is social justice” (March 2017, p. 12). Alex, in the same line of thought, imagined that a way to avoid the Nazis’ rise to power, “better education, the ability to speak up, I think, would have been huge” (May 2017, p. 9). For Ken “there are three things that are necessary. Education, uh, social connections, and time. Uh, for... both... immigrants group and then... dominant group, majority, mainstream group to reach mutual understanding” (May 2017, p. 11). Later, when he answered

to a fictitious moral conflict about how to reduce poverty if he were the Premier of his province he stated: “I’d try to:... create a space where, those who are financially challenged to get sufficient education and training... so that they will be able to use that skills to sustain themselves” (May 2017, p. 23). As revealed through these examples, most of the participants imagined the role of education as means to develop one’s voice in relationship to other voices and actions, and as means to act toward social justice.

Education is not only enculturation: “enculturation must sit, however uncomfortably, alongside the transformation, renewal, and creation of culture” (Vadeboncoeur, 2017, p. 272). Thus, school is also a place to provide students with opportunities to engage in social practices that generate new ideas for the creation and transformation of culture. Nurturing learning environments that offer chances to engage in dialogue, through speech and written language, is central not only to foster creativity and imagination, but also to transform social conditions through them.

Educational practices that nurture and are nurtured by imagination and creativity are, for instance, “hearing, reading, and imagining through the accounts of others (Vadeboncoeur, 2017, p. 260). In these contexts, both nonfictional and fictional narratives function as mediational means that foster individuals’ inner dialogue and let them imagine beyond their concrete conditions through others’ experiences. In this process, students may examine other’s actions in relation to theirs, and reinterpret these relationships throughout their conceptual development. At the same time, the ability to think in concepts might be expanded by considering others’ perspectives, which usually is possible by telling, reading and hearing narratives. Like this, students could reflect on their moral actions toward a more socially just world. This is when Schools have the potential to become as space for cultural creation and transformation.

#### *4.2.5 Working together toward social justice*

The participants also imagined working together in social organizations as a pathway toward social justice. Through their narratives, most of them concluded that education is a means to develop social conscious awareness and, hence, develop their own voices. However, to be heard and collectively speak and stand up for their rights, people should work together and be organized as a movement. For example, Julio expressed that “working together for social justice... is, the way that I think that we can go forward” (March 2017, p. 20).

Likewise, Alex highlighted how, through social media, Indigenous people from North America have organized a movement to have a collective voice:

I know some things that were happening as they were: having... their own like versions of journalism. I think what was happening is the media was portraying them as being violent... you know, and all the wrong reasons. So what they did is, they actually... founded an independent news agency to come in and report it and um to show really their side of the story. So I think that is important. (May 2017, p. 7)

According to Alex, for Indigenous people to stand up for social justice, it was important to inform the public sphere about what their demands were, and collectively create new ways to voice their needs from their perspective, instead of letting the traditional or mainstream media be the only means informing about what was happening in their lands. This reasoning is consistent with Tappan’s (2006b) arguments about how the creation of new mediational means, in this case the foundation of an independent news agency, may transform power and authority.

It is interesting in this example to notice that, for Alex, social justice/injustice might be fostered depending on who was voicing the story. That is, if the story was told by traditional

media, Indigenous people might be portrayed as violent, fostering injustice; if the story was narrated through the new mediational means or the Indigenous groups' news agency, then the story completely changed, letting them speak for themselves. The possibility to collectively voice their concerns might be interpreted as a kind of empowerment, through which they were able to move toward social justice.

In a different example, Suna also recounted why she considered that working together through social organization is a pathway toward social justice. Although for her, the narrative about her country's conception has its flaws, and contrasts with what she perceived from her experience in this context, when she talked about this narrative, she said:

I'm absolutely fascinated by the idea of revolution right, like... And this was kind of my, as a kindergartner, basically this was my introduction to a real revolution. Is what happened in our country. We used to have an empire. And then the empire was weak, and everybody was dividing us up, and the Turkish people worked together, fought off the imperialists, and then we formed our country, that was a Republic.... It's very, it's a, false as hell narrative, but it's very nice to think about. (April 2017, p. 15)

It could be said that Suna is “fascinated” by this narrative's plot, and at the same time, disappointed by the historical events contrasting it. For Tappan (1991), “the different voices that an individual hears growing up, composed of words, utterances, forms of discourse, and language are all internalized via the process of listening” (p. 12). These voices, Tappan (1991) argued, engage in constant dialogue with each other, informing individuals' inner dialogue.

Further, Suna clarified that, after immigrated to Canada, her interpretation of this narrative changed:

And it's, very heroic, you know, like the: big bad Westerners....The idea is, it's socially unjust because this is our land, the Westerners are just taking it, the colonial imperialist powers. And we fight back against them and we win. Now, in reality, later on, I moved here, I kind of stopped getting indoctrinated by that. I looked out from my own resources and I learnt that wasn't exactly the case but, that's just how it's always framed. So that's kind of, almost a cultural narrative. It's kind of a national one.

(April 2017, p. 12)

This passage shows how Suna's meaning of social justice is related to this narrative; later, she reinterpreted the story by considering cultural resources from her new environment. This dialogical process is also highlighted by Tappan (1991) who argued that, through narratives, individuals engage in dialogue with other's perspectives. Through this dialogue, people can imagine other's experiences and, hence, generate new ideas that serve to possibly take action on the creation and transformation of culture. By telling her narrative, therefore, Suna imagined her idea of a pathway towards social justice. For her, working together to fight against political powers oppressing people is one way to confront injustices and look for equality.

For his part, Rupert, like Suna, declared that the way to confront injustice is through social organization:

If while away, the women and also the men, everybody they together stand up and they say, 'We're not gonna accept this. This is not, this is not fair,' then, yeah, they have a good chance to challenge that government. (April 2017, p. 13)

Through his narrative, Rupert reflected on the historical and political factors that led to women's discrimination in Iran, and finally imagined how it would be if people would stand up against these conditions. He also imagined that if he were the Premier of his Canadian province, he would work with Federal Government's funds as follows:

To poverty reduction, they can... first you can work with, different organization in the community, maybe: non-profit organizations or, certain connections you have. You have a lot of power a-as a Premier, so you can use that and influence, maybe with the... direct the funds to organizations, or universities, or other groups (April 2017, p. 29)

In this excerpt, Rupert answered to a fictitious moral conflict between breaking a contract to attract investment to his province or using the same amount of money negotiated in the contract to work toward poverty reduction with the support of the Federal Government. He expressed that if he were the Premier, he would probably break the contract and use the funds to support organizations or groups of people already working toward this end.

This example, as well as all the participants' insights about how to act toward social justice by collectively creating new means and changing social contexts, illustrated that narrating promote a creative expression of imagination for culture creation and transformation (Vadeboncoeur, 2017, p. 260). Telling narratives about how other people stood up for their and others' rights, allowed the participants to learn and imagine actions for moving toward social justice.

#### *4.2.6 Recognizing each other through dialogue*

Although most of the participants agreed that one pathway toward social justice is through working together and social organization, they also noted that recognizing each other through dialogue is crucial for moving forward. Talking about the activist groups that he had been part of, Julio emphasized that a lack of dialogue between political organizations usually obstructs their work:

Everybody ends like fighting with each other and then, we're sitting here and it's like 'Wow, have we, have we got anything done?' And nobody's got anything done. There's been no... like, there's not been discussion, there's no, there's no real power, there's no real point to it. It's just like, we're here and it looks, it just looks like 'Oh you're just complaining' .... there's no dialogue, there's no sitting down and talking, it's just... It's this idea of it's all or nothing, 'If you don't agree with me on everything, if you are not for every single point in my list, we cannot sit down and agree.' (March 2017, pp. 9-10)

In this excerpt, Julio made clear that being politically organized is not enough to reach common goals toward social justice. Later in this conversation, Julio explained that “if you're working toward equality, you have to recognize that everybody is different” (March 2017, p. 15). Thus, for Julio, as much as for Teo, Rupert, Alex and Ken, recognizing each other through dialogue is key to working together and imagining a more socially just world. Understanding each other, seeing “beyond our own worlds to the experience of others” (Vadeboncoeur, 2017, p. 275) is possible by engaging in dialogical, imaginative and creative practices, such as telling, reading and hearing narratives. These practices allow people to see themselves as individuals in



relationship; in this endeavour, they could see themselves collectively taking action towards social justice.

For Teo, for example, to better engage in political activities from his current activist group, they opted to speak the same language: “Anybody would come there and speak their own language, but they opt not to, because we want to respect each other and get everybody, to engage in the discussion ... and take care of each other” (April 2017, p. 17). In this passage, Teo expressed that to be able to respect and take care of each other, it is crucial to speak the same language and understand each other. Later in the interview, he reaffirmed his argument by expressing that if he were the Premier of his province and had to make a difficult decision, such as breaking a contract to attract private investment or taking the money negotiated in the contract to work toward poverty reduction, he would open a dialogue with the citizens:

Even if the discussion becomes very difficult, we cannot agree on anything, that is when we see, we agree. Let us now involve the public, and that we shall have now the public hearing, and we shall have the public say. Same, when I’m talking about public, I’m talking about now the common citizen.... But if after we cannot agree on anything, but even if you agree or not agree, it is important to have dialogue with the common citizens, because the decisions that you’re going to make there affects them. (April 2017, p. 36)

It is interesting in this passage that Teo imagined a dialogue that could be established with a collective of citizens that may have different voices. This example illustrated how Teo considered a dialogue that goes beyond face to face encounters and may include what Wertsch

(1991) defined as social languages. Therefore, he recognized that such a dialogue may result in conflicting positions and that, even facing conflict, the dialogue was the goal.

Similarly, when Rupert talked about immigrants' discrimination in Canada, he stated that "social justice would work that if, people are allowed, if they listen to them. Or if they understand the situation.... But, um, yeah, we would just be listening to them and... being more available" (April 2017, p. 10). Also, Alex mentioned that to recognize the "horrors and atrocities that happened" during WWII and not repeat the same mistakes, "empathy was huge, compassion, understanding, education, awareness, and reparations" (May 2017, p. 10). Ken, in the same line of thought, argued that to work against the discrimination of immigrants, Canadians should promote "dialogue, a specific dialogue... I don't know, 'Let's talk about, you know, the experience,' how one might feel about his or her situation. 'Let's imagine'" (May 2017, p. 17).

In these examples, it is evident that, for the participants, working toward social justice implied recognizing each other's backgrounds and experiences. It was not only a matter of individuals voicing their demands, or the possibility to speak and be heard. For them, it was key to listen to and understand each other. The idea of being interconnected and to answer to others for our actions, therefore, is not possible without "empathy as feeling with another, and sympathizing as feeling for another in order to take action to change the conditions faced" (Vadeboncoeur, p. 275). Feeling with and for another is possible through the dialogical process that entails imagining others' circumstances in relation to ours.

The participants expressed the need to recognize each other in order to take action toward social change. This insight posed a question about how to reach this understanding. Through their narratives, the participants built upon theirs and others' experiences, and identified themselves as working to make sense of their actions. Thus, telling, hearing, reading and creating

narratives might be considered social practices that nurture self and others' understanding through dialogue; a dialogue that, according to the participants, is needed to make sense of their individual and collective actions toward social justice.

### **4.3 Authoring themselves through moral dialogues**

The last identified theme informs how, to some degree, all the participants recognized themselves as individuals committed to social justice. Alex, for example, talked about her current social group, and she described it as “a group of people that I tend to resonate more with, I would say maybe liberal, educated, um... healthy, health conscious” (p.5). Also, when Suna commented on her involvement in certain activist groups she said:

For among my friends, we're all very social justice minded people... This is not necessarily something I like, but it's just I found that's happening. So: just the fact that I'm an immigrant... already gains me some social capital, which is very strange, I've never said that before. (p. 6)

By reconstructing theirs and others' experiences, Alex and Suna identified themselves; Alex declared her political orientation, while Suna described herself as a person engaged in social practices toward social justice. Suna also valued her contribution as an immigrant, which allowed her to expand her social context in Canada and bring a different perspective to her group.

The opportunity to engage in these social practices, therefore, led Alex and Suna to share their experiences, and based on them, to establish a dialogue with diverse voices. Following Tappan (1991), it could be said that through this dialogical process, Alex and Suna transformed their moral authority. They identified their voices within the diverse sociocultural context in which they were immersed, authoring their utterances, and authorizing their own perspectives

regarding social justice. This personal transformation is exemplified by Suna, who recounted what she learned from the narrative of her country's revolution:

As a child, I learned to be nationalistic. Like, that's the whole point, right?... They start teaching you your history from kindergarten age, and it's indoctrination. I don't like it. But like, it may be that way and, funny enough, right now I'm like this, right now I'm very critical of my Government, and I'm very critical of the history of my States... But, I know it took me a while to kind of, uninternalized that. Like, in high school, I was still very much thinking, I was very much still believing this idea that we'd fought off imperialists.... And then at the last year I decided to write that essay because, I just needed to find out from myself, right? (p. 23)

In this example, Suna expressed how she found her current arguments about her country's history and her own political orientation. She stated that, to find her own ideas, she needed to write an essay. This is consistent with Tappan's (1991) assumption regarding how individuals can recognize themselves and their moral actions through their dialogue between inner and social speech. For Tappan (1991), this dialogue might be expanded through narratives, which provide people with different experiences and perspectives. In this sense, individuals can learn and develop through theirs and others' experiences, and foster their moral authority, or the ability to make others' words theirs, and speak for themselves. It also contributes to imagine and consider different perspectives.

In a different example, Ken expressed that by having expanded his experiences as an immigrant, and narrating his personal history, he generated a critical perspective regarding the Japanese society:

They may say, ‘you know, you can question those things because you're out, you've lived outside of Japan.’ So in a way, I'm excluded from... the group, you know. I often feel that... it's a reasoning system. The-the very reason you can question these things is you're already outside of the system.... Uh, but at the same time, I, as I talk, I realized how complex it is, you know. (May 2017, pp. 18-19)

For Ken, the “power of the norm in Japan is quite strong that if you act out of place, you get kind of stares or strong reaction from people” (May 2017, p. 3). Therefore, living outside of Japan, has led him to question Japan’s normative society.

Likewise, Teo talked about how he was intensely punished when he refused to speak English in his elementary school, because his home country’s society had very strict rules that must be followed. Sharing his father’s experience, he said:

He knew that teachers were doing the right thing, you know. Because he was also, again, exposed to a system of the colonialist. My dad was a student of the colonizers. So, there was no way he would have gone against. Because that is what he kept knowing that was the right thing. And I knew that was the right thing. I knew it was my right to be punished in however manner they wanted, no matter whether I... because some people even died. (April 2017, p.13)

In this excerpt, Teo explained how in Africa, punishment and violence in the school were “the right thing.” Even if children died because of these disciplinary practices, they were accepted by most of his community members. Later in the interview, he remembered that “without speaking English, you get no job.... As like, the issue is like, the unjust is like, I was not, at that time, nobody gave me a chance to become who I wanted to be” (April 2017, p. 28). Hence, by telling his personal narrative, he expressed that his community’s strict rules and punishment constrained his possibilities to express, and identify himself as an individual immersed in his culture.

Teo, as well as Ken and Suna, realized how their moral authority have transformed since they were younger. All three were raised under circumstances that rejected diversity or individual expression. These examples revealed how individuals could overcome authoritative discourses and claim moral authority (Tappan, 1991). According to Tappan (1991), in the dialogical process of appropriation mediational means Bakhtin (1981) distinguished two kinds of discourse: authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. The degree to which individuals claim authority for their utterances is what distinguishes these two types of mediational means.

An authoritative discourse is closed to dialogue, it is positioned as a discourse that cannot be changed or even questioned. When Suna, Ken and Teo talked about their childhood contexts, they described them as closed to dialogue and transformation. Then, they talked about their own transformation throughout the course of their life experiences, putting in perspective their home country’s social practices and values. Through this dialogical process, they identified themselves as individuals committed to social justice. This self and other’s identification is evident when the participants declared that they were looking for their own perspectives. It is in this moment when their internally persuasive discourse emerged, opening the ongoing dialogue between their inner and social speech, and allowing them to author their own arguments (Tappan, 1991).

An internally persuasive discourse is also evident in Rupert's words, who identified himself as a person committed to social justice, by saying that his sense of community and connectedness allowed him "giving back to the less fortunate people too... Yeah. So that's also: And me-for me, especially, it's kinda who I am" (April 2017, p. 4). Far from expressing his actions as unquestionable social obligations, he identified himself as an active agent that values solidarity with less fortunate people. By identifying themselves and others through dialogue, Rupert and the rest of the participants, articulated their responses to socially unjust circumstances. That is, they are developing moral responsibility every time they define themselves as agents acting toward social justice in relation to others in a specific sociocultural context (Tappan, 1991). This is very clear when Julio talked about his values and the way he was raised:

The way that I've been told, the way that my parents raised me was, you can't never, truly say that you fixed it until everybody can sit down and say, 'Wow...you know, I did this and that was really stupid of me.' And the other side said, 'Yeah, you know what, but I did this, and that was really stupid of me.' And take responsibility for the fact that everybody's done things that are regrettable, everybody's done things that maybe... not the most okay. (March 2017, p. 18)

In this excerpt, Julio declared that through dialogue, people should claim responsibility and recognize their mistakes. For Tappan (1991), acknowledging answerability implies a movement toward moral authority. It also implies intentionally answering conflicts raised from sociocultural dynamics. Even when facing disagreement, people can respond to moral conflicts by authorizing themselves to act in specific ways to cope with the conflict. This is consistent with

Vadeboncoeur's (2017) idea that, through moral imagination, individuals answer to "experiences marred by oppression, discrimination, and injustice" (p. 275). Therefore, by claiming responsibility for their actions, people also imagine themselves as active actors transforming their contexts.

Through these examples, it is evident how the process of authoring themselves as active agents working toward social justice is tied to a dialogue between different voices and discourses, and to the faculty to express what is socially just or unjust, to make sense of one's actions (Tappan, 1991). In this regard, Tappan (1991) argued that narratives "help us to understand and interpret human actions, both the actions of self and the actions of others" (p. 9). By doing so, agents should assume responsibility for their actions, which might be enhanced by individuals' ability to narrate and, therefore, imagine, create and make sense of their contextualized moral actions (Tappan, 1991; Vadeboncoeur, 2017).

#### **4.4 Summary**

This chapter presented the three themes emerging from the thematic analysis conducted. The first theme described how the participants outlined equality and non-discrimination as core aspects defining social justice. They defined social justice/injustice as a conceptual system that goes from inequality and discrimination toward equality and non-discrimination in terms of access to material and cultural resources. The second theme reported how the participants defined pathways from social injustice toward social justice. Most of them agreed that inequality occurs when certain groups of people are historically discriminated against, leading to political conditions that foster oppression. They also mentioned how school environments reproduce social injustice, and how at the same time, education is crucial to stand up for social justice. Working together to collectively voice oppressed people's demands was also identified as a



pathway towards social justice. However, the participants mentioned that to be able to work together through social organization, recognizing each other through dialogue is key. The third theme highlighted how, through their narratives, the participant's authored themselves as individuals committed to social justice. This theme, therefore, is focused on the dialogical process through which the participants reconstructed theirs and others' experiences to imagine how social justice/injustice looks and how they could transform unjust circumstances.

The mechanisms through which the participants crafted their meanings were explained considering a sociocultural approach. By telling narratives they made visible their inner dialogue, which was informed by their moral voices and discourses. These mediational means informed the participants inner moral dialogues and were informed by their sociocultural contexts. Together, their experiences and sociocultural contexts shape their particular ways to define social justice. In the following chapter, I expand on a sociocultural approach to participants' moral functioning, as a way to address a gap in the traditional moral psychology literature and answer to the research questions.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion: Defining social justice to imagine social change**

In this study, six university students living in Vancouver defined social justice and injustice through narratives from their cultural backgrounds. Building on their experiences, they expressed what they considered socially unjust to later imagine how these circumstances could move toward more socially just human relationships. Two research questions guided this process: 1) How do participants define social justice? and 2) How do they perceive their definitions of social justice are informed by their cultural background? I organized the participants' responses into three main themes that reflected patterns across the data: 1) equality and non-discrimination as core aspects defining social justice, 2) pathways from social injustice towards social justice, and 3) authoring themselves through moral dialogues.

In what follows, I discuss how the participants drew upon their mediational means (e.g., voices, narratives and forms of discourse) to define, explain, and imagine what social injustice and justice look like. By doing so, I offer an alternative to the structural-developmental paradigm on moral development that has been criticized due to its lack of sensitivity to the role of language and culture in moral functioning. In the second section, I discuss results and theory to respond to my research questions; I examine how the participants built on their definitions of social justice, as mediational means, to justify their moral actions given their social context and experiences. The third section includes research limitations, strengths, and implications for educational practice and social organization, as well as future research on moral functioning and moral education.

### **5.1 A sociocultural approach to moral functioning**

One of the goals of this study was to examine a sociocultural approach to moral functioning, as a way to address a gap in the traditional moral psychology literature. For Tappan (2006a), while Kohlberg's (1963, 1969, 1976, 1981, 1984) legacy has brought the "study of moral development into the mainstream of developmental and educational psychology" (p. 351), his theory has been challenged. Among critiques of Kohlberg's scholarship, Tappan (2006a, 2006b) recognized Gilligan's (1982) work, through which she casts doubt over Kohlberg's universal assumptions regarding the six structurally defined cognitive stages of moral development. Even though Gilligan (1982) was focused mainly on gender differences in moral development, Tappan (2006a, 2006b) argued that her work has been relevant to challenge the structural-developmental paradigm and interpret moral development as a psychological function mediated by mediational means shaped by gender expectations.

More recently, Kohlberg's theoretical and methodological limitations have been addressed by other authors (e.g., Lapsley, 2006; Thoma, 2006; Turiel, 2006). However, universal assumptions about cognitive structures of moral development are still dominant within the moral psychology literature. For Tappan (2006a, 2006b), the multivocal or dialogical nature of moral development makes it a cultural phenomenon. As such, Tappan (2006a) considered Gilligan's work to be meaningful to understand what he defined as moral functioning, which moves away:

from a paradigm of cognitive representations and internally held principles, wherein the self is assumed to be a disembodied, transcendental, epistemic subject (see Kohlberg, 1984), toward a paradigm of social construction and intersubjectively possible forms of

discourse, wherein the self is assumed to be a shared and/or distributed product of social relations and communicative practices. (p. 351)

Although Gilligan (1982) is not considered a Vygotskian theorist, Tappan (2006a) highlighted that her theory has contributed to understanding moral functioning as dialogical, semiotically mediated and socioculturally situated.

By extending the work of Wertsch (1985, 1991), Tappan (2006a, 2006b) addressed what he identified as Kohlberg's and his followers' (e.g., Lapsley, 2006; Thoma, 2006; Turiel, 2006) lack of sensitivity to the role of language and culture in moral functioning. According to Tappan (2006a), it is important to recognize that there are authors more aligned to the structural-developmental paradigm (e.g., Lapsley, 2006; Thoma, 2006; Turiel, 2006) that have addressed Kohlberg's empirical limitations. However, for Tappan (2006a, 2006b), even contemporary structural-developmental models do not build on a sociocultural understanding of individuals' moral actions to the role of language and culture mediating moral functioning (Tappan, 2006a, 2006b).

Building upon this line of thought, this study was designed to identify how the participants defined social justice, and how they perceived their sociocultural background informed their definitions of social justice. The use of narratives to elicit their definitions was key to understanding how they articulated their definitions and how their experiences were constructed and reconstructed through their moral dialogue. Narrating their experience made visible their voices, and the voices of others, as well as the socioculturally situated discourses used to interpret their moral actions. For example, although all the participants drew upon the concepts of equality and non-discrimination to define social justice, their particular experiences

were reflected in their moral dialogue. For instance, Teo articulated his definition social justice as follows:

I think social justice is to me is like when people have... some sort of knowledge about what belongs to them. That is, they can be able to differentiate what is a right and what is a privilege. And they can be able to speak for themselves or maybe in a represented kind of genuine democracy. Not the other fake one. That is social justice. (April 2017, p. 23)

For Teo, to move toward social justice, individuals should be able to make their own decisions; having some sort of social awareness that allows them to voice their ideas. Later, during the interview, he told a personal narrative to exemplify what social justice looks like for him. In this narrative, he talked about his difficulties speaking English as a child, and how he was punished and silenced because of it:

So, the teacher, when the teacher is trying to, you know, then they are doing the right thing. But that is not, to me, that is the most and the worst thing that ever happened. So, I dropped school, and I said, 'I don't want. I don't want. I don't even want to speaking that English. I don't know. I don't even know how it's supposed to be spoken.' (April, 2017, p. 25)

As a child, he was not allowed to speak in his mother tongue. However, he found his way to protest, and shared his concerns with his family:

My dad, I think could not see the seriousness, because he could not realize. And he talked to me and he transferred me now from that school

to another school. And in that school at least I found some teachers were somehow nice and, they somehow understood. (April, 2017, p. 25)

The possibility of being heard by his father allowed him to attend a different school, and changed his social context. It was evident how Teo's experience was reflected in his definition of social justice. For him, people should "be able to speak for themselves" (p. 5) to move toward social justice. In this study, Teo's concept of social justice, as well as the way his experiences and actions were represented and created through language, were crucial to account for his moral functioning.

Further, Suna's definition of social justice made visible how her sociocultural context informed her moral dialogue. According to Suna, "social injustice in some shape or form, either based upon politicizing identity differences, or just social class or whatever, it's always gonna exist until you can achieve that classless society" (April 2017, p. 11). In this definition, Suna used the terms class and classless, well known and used within the Marxist philosophy and political project (see Marx & Engels, 1987). It is interesting to note, furthermore, that she defined herself as a Marxist and one of the narratives that informed her notion of social justice was regarding a revolution in Turkey, which she described as follows:

And then the empire was weak, and everybody was dividing us up, and the Turkish people worked together, fought off the imperialists, and then we formed our country, that was a Republic. The president just gave the women the right to vote etc., etc., and suddenly everybody is going to school. It's very, it's a, false as hell narrative, but it's very nice to think about. And then, like, I find, so: ok, I'm a Marxist. (April, 2017, p. 15)

The kind of language that Suna used here seemed to come from what she identified as a Marxist discourse; understanding discourse as the interplay between what Wertsch (1991) defined as voice, social languages and speech genre. For Wertsch (1991), when people voice utterances, they are also revealing their perspectives. Utterances expressed by a particular type of voices are what he defined as social language, and speech genre is the concept he used to account for specific forms of utterances elicited according to the context or the situation.

In Suna's definition and example of social justice, she was drawing from her idea of what a Marxist voice should be, which informed her moral dialogue and provided her with arguments to justify her moral actions. The sociocultural context and the kind of social practices she has been engaged with, provided her with this specific Marxist discourse and vice versa: from a narrative of a revolution learned in her home country as a kindergartener, to her current participation in activist groups focused on social organization toward social justice.

Through these examples, I illustrate how voices and forms of discourse mediate moral functioning. The participants' definitions of social justice/injustice both informed and were informed by their sociocultural context dynamics and personal experiences. Following Tappan's (1991) insights regarding narratives to elicit moral dialogues, this research attended to the role that language played in defining, justifying, and imagining what social justice meant for the participants. In the following section, I describe a sociocultural approach to the participant's moral dialogues.

## **5.2 Defining social justice and injustice: A conceptual system mediating the participants' moral actions**

This study inquired into the way six university students defined social justice. To address this question, the participants told moral narratives, through which they articulated their definitions, and revealed how they perceived their cultural backgrounds informed their

definitions. Through narratives, they articulated their moral dialogues. In so doing, all of the participants expressed that social injustice exists when certain groups of society are excluded from cultural and material resources. For the participants, these conditions could be improved following particular pathways towards social justice.

They declared that injustice is produced by historically grounded discrimination leading to political power dynamics. These historical and political conditions, according to the participants, created political oppression, and impacted school contexts. These contexts are also seen as a means to foster social awareness, and stand up for social justice. The participants also imagined that people should understand each other, and work together for collectively voicing their concerns, as well as the concerns of others.

To better understand the sociocultural and dialogical nature of moral functioning I built upon four principles defined by Tappan (1991, 1997, 2006a, 2006b):

1. Moral functioning (like all “higher psychological functioning”) is necessarily mediated by words, language, and forms of discourse;
2. Such mediation occurs primarily in private or inner speech, in the form of inner moral dialogue;
3. Processes of social communication and social relations necessarily give rise to moral functioning; and
4. Moral development is always shaped by the particular social, cultural, and historical context in which it occurs. (Tappan, 1997, p. 83)

In the following subsections, I describe the principles and interpret the data through them. This theoretical discussion addresses this study’s research questions.



### *5.2.1 Moral functioning mediated by words, language and forms of discourse defining social justice*

With the first principle, Tappan (2006a) highlighted the role that mediational means, as specific forms of cultural tools, play in the mediation of moral functioning. Building on Wertsch (1985), Tappan (2006a, 2006b) defined mediational means as words, and forms of discourse, including narratives, that serve as mediational means through which individuals appropriate and transform them to master and author their physical and psychological actions. The process of mastering and regulating their actions by using mediational means, necessarily occurs through language, in context and in relationship. From this perspective, this is what accounts for higher psychological functions, such as mathematical thinking, voluntary activity, and according to Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b), moral functioning.

From a sociocultural approach, higher psychological functions are not defined as “series of incremental quantitative changes, but rather as a series of fundamental qualitative transformations or ‘revolutions’ associated with changes in the psychological tools to which the person has access” (Tappan, 2006a, p. 351). Given that, Tappan (1991, 1997, 2006a, 2006b) favoured the term moral functioning, instead of moral development, to refer to the actions mediated by mediational means. When Tappan (1991, 1997, 2006a, 2006b) referred to moral actions, he did not conceive moral feelings, thoughts and behaviours separately. Instead, he defined moral action as that moment when people act using mediational means appropriated through their social, cultural and institutional contexts. Moral action, therefore, involves thoughts, feelings and behaviour elicited through language and speech that are socioculturally situated.

Transformation of moral functioning entails change regarding how individuals appropriate mediational means, such as concepts or discourses, that allow them to interpret their

moral conflicts, and respond to them. Through this process, mediational means are also transformed, promoting simultaneous changes in individuals' actions. According to Tappan (2006a), the process of appropriating mediational means moves forward as the ability to think in concepts develops; this implies first mastering mediational means through their use, and later, owning them to be able to transform them (Tappan, 2006b). However, Tappan's (1991, 1997, 2006a, 2006b) model did not expand on the mechanisms through which agents generate new meanings and, hence, create new cultural conditions.

As such the insights regarding the role of concept formation in the development of moral imagination are relevant to understand not only how individuals appropriate mediational means, but also how they can generate new cultural conditions (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016; Vadeboncoeur, 2017). As children develop, Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) argued, they are more able to separate meaning from objects and action in their contexts, allowing them to free their imagination and creativity:

When a person's behaviour depends on the concrete situation, it is the object, or action, or role that directs behaviour. A person who possesses an ability to think conceptually, to imagine and create possibilities, actions or responses different from the concrete situation, frees herself from situational dependency, ... and becomes self-directed. (p. 13)

The process of concept formation, therefore, further fosters going beyond concrete circumstances and hence, expands imagination and creativity. For Vadeboncoeur (2017), this is an ongoing process that involves the development of both academic and everyday concepts, and their interaction in a conceptual system.

Everyday concepts are grounded in experience, while academic concepts emerge from formal instruction. The unification of these processes developmental histories allows “a developing concept to move beyond categorization toward a conceptual system: a system of related concepts that can be used to describe and explain a particular phenomena” (p. 85). The dynamic relationship between everyday experiences and formal instruction, allows to appropriate, first, and later own their moral mediational means (Tappan, 2006a). The possibility to act beyond concrete cultural norms and expectations, therefore, depends on the kind of social and educational practices with which individuals engage. Limited educational and everyday experiences could constrain concept development, while “rich experiences lay the foundation for further development of conceptual thinking” (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016, p. 12).

Academic concepts are defined as an “invaluable warehouse of accumulated human knowledge” (Vadeboncoeur, 2017, p. 84), they are concepts that emerge through instruction, and refer to things that we usually have not concretely experienced. Hence, making sense of them is more difficult, and their learning depends on the quality of the instruction. Moral imagination and creativity, the possibility to imagine and create culture considering what is socially just and unjust for the community and its members, requires learning environments where both everyday experiences and formal instruction merge to enable individuals to articulate their moral dialogues.

According to Tappan (1991) and Vadeboncoeur (2017, p. 261), merging every day experiences and formal instruction is possible through narratives, deliberation, imaginative play and performative expressions, among other activities within which imagination emerges. Imagination, Vygotsky (2004) argued,

becomes the means by which a person's experience is broadened, because he can imagine what he has not seen, can conceptualize something from another person's narration and description of what he himself has never directly experienced. (p. 17)

By expanding imagination, therefore, concept development transforms, and this process facilitates the expression of new forms of imaginative and creative activity. Having the possibility of not only receiving new information, but emotionally and actively experiencing what we cannot see through imaginative play, performance, and narration is crucial to acknowledge and support moral functioning toward cultural creation and transformation.

In this study, the participants' definitions of social justice were understood as mediational means shaping their moral actions; mediational means crafted as conceptual systems used by the participants to explain, interpret, guide and imagine their interaction with their sociocultural contexts. Through their narratives, the participants showed that far from defining social justice as a single conceptual category with particular features, they constructed complex conceptual systems to articulate their definitions. All of them referred to social justice/injustice as a continuum that goes from inequality and discrimination to equality and non-discrimination, to explain what they mean by social justice/injustice in their different narratives (see Table 4.1).

Although the participants articulated different conceptual systems referring to social justice/injustice (see Table 3.2), their definitions voiced words and concepts that, to some extent, parallel with the UN idea of equality and non-discrimination (see UNDESA, 2006; UNFPA, 2005). As highlighted in the first chapter, after WWII, most countries had signed and adopted UN regulations, which means that a globalized legal framework has been interacting with local practices, national laws, institutions and public policies (Wells, 2015). A globalized discourse

promoted by the UN, therefore, might become one of the mediational means informing the participants' definitions of social justice.

To interpret this finding, Tappan's (2006b) empirical evidence is relevant. He identified common forms of moral mediational means when they worked with North American groups of adolescents and adults. Building on Gilligan's model (1982), Tappan (2006b) described two types of moral discourses: "the justice voice reflecting an ideal of equality, reciprocity, and fairness between persons; the care voice reflecting an ideal of attachment, loving and being loved, listening and being listened to, and responding and being responded to" (p. 6). Although these results showed that common moral discourses informed their participants' moral functioning, he did not suggest that these patterns reflect universal cognitive structures.

Instead, Tappan (2006a, 2006b) argued that the participants used socially shared moral discourses to justify their actions. Considering these scholars' insights, it could be concluded that a common moral discourse on justice, fostered by the UN legal documents and agreements, might be informing the participants' similar utterances regarding equality and non-discrimination. In other words, the reference to these notions in all the participants' definitions might be related to the concept of equality and non-discrimination provided by the UNFPA (2005) and UNDESA (2006) (see chapter 4). In this study, these UN academic concepts are understood as being part of a globalized discourse expanded through the UN legal documents and regulations that might be impacting local sociocultural contexts, such as Vancouver.

### *5.2.2 Inner moral dialogue: A means to craft social justice definitions*

Understanding moral functioning as actions mediated by mediational means implies assuming its dialogical nature. As highlighted above, the participants' definitions of social justice consisted of conceptual systems mediating their moral actions. Considering this insight, a step

forward in explaining the means through which the participants defined social justice entails expanding on how they used their mediational means to craft their narratives. For Tappan (2006a, 2006b), by voicing discourses to guide their actions, persons are also immersed in an ongoing dialogue connecting their private and social worlds.

Tappan (2006a) drew upon Vygotsky's (1934/1987, 1978) theory to explain how people learn to speak in private through the process of appropriating mediational mean. The process through which inner speech emerges, Tappan (2006a) argued, can be illustrated with the example of children learning "to count first by using fingers, blocks, or other objects before being able to count in their heads" (p. 357). That is, before speaking to themselves, people learn to speak to others first. It is then when verbal thought emerges, changing the nature of development "from being biologically determined to being socioculturally shaped, and there is a radical shift in the richness and complexity of consciousness (p. 357). Talking to themselves and thinking, therefore, become part of the same mechanisms, which for Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b) can be defined as dialogical inner speech.

To expand this argument, Tappan (2006a, 2006b) recognized the work of Bakhtin (1981), and concluded that, in private, individuals establish a dialogue between the variety of voices and social speeches present in their sociocultural contexts. Applying this line of thought to moral functioning, Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b) clarified that inner moral dialogues emerge when people are faced with conflicts; when several voices come together in our inner dialogue. Through their narratives, the participants voiced their ongoing inner dialogue regarding their moral conflicts, and narrated actions to change social injustice. For instance, when Suna answered the question about Turkish people's opinions regarding her Marxist political orientation, she brought her father's voice to express what seemed to be a conflict for her:

So: I know, just from my dad's reaction, a lot of them [referring to Turkish people] would make fun of me, they'd say 'Oh! come on! that's ridiculous.' And then, when you persist, they're gonna be like, 'Oh! of course you're a communist, you're just like every other rich kid, who want, rich privileged kid who wants to be a communist.' Like, is, my dad has pulled this line on me a lot. He said, 'You know? I grew up actually working class, like, start speaking once you get a clue about that experience.' And: it's like, ok fine. But it's like I don't know a single communist that grew up like that. Like, a lot of the ones I know, in fact, a lot of, my friends who share my political alignments do so, because they haven't had fun experiences. And like, again, if I had money I wouldn't be a leftist. (April 2017, p. 21)

In this passage, Suna agreed to some extent with her father's speaking position by saying that if she had money she would not be a leftist. At the same time, she acknowledged that she does not know any communists that have grown up working class. However, she also recognized that her friends who shared her political orientation did not have "fun experiences" in their past. Here, Suna's voice was in dialogue with her father's voice, and more generally, with her community's discourse. Her experiences in different sociocultural contexts connected her with different perspectives about what it means to be a Marxist.

In a different example, Julio brought his community's discourse in dialogue with his voice. He expressed his perspective, articulated after having been in the area of conflict between Israel and Palestine:

And so, it was very much a narrative of, 'Israel needs to do this for, the safety and security of my friends, my family, of everybody.' It's like, 'This is for their safety.' It was very much a narrative of, 'These people want to kill you, they don't care, this is for the sake of us.' And it, it was less of, it was not like, 'Oh, here is the reason, that this issue occurred.' It's like, they don't care what the problem was. They just, 'They hate Jews, and they just wanna kill you because you're a Jew.' Now... it's a COMPLETELY different story. I've seen that, I've been there, I've been to West Bank, I've been to Israel, I've seen the differences, I've seen what people are saying. And I can see the difference, I can see what people are doing, what causes, and more sort of, pushing people to one side or another. (March 2017, p. 13)

Julio drew on his community's narrative to clarify how his opinion about this conflict has changed over time. He established a dialogue with a voice representing the Israeli side, and confronted it with his experience. In other words, Julio voiced his community's discourse which seemed to have influenced his perspective. Voicing others' speaking positions through our utterances is what Tappan (1991) meant by ventriloquation. Julio, therefore, ventriloquated his community's discourse about this conflict.

Then, he declared that, for him, this was a discourse in which he did not find a convincing explanation. Thus, he confronted this perspective with his experience in the West Bank. For Tappan (1991) when another's voice is recited, it mediates an individual's psychological functioning in the form of authoritative discourse that "is distanced, it cannot be changed or altered, it cannot be doubted, and hence, there can be no true dialogue" (p. 16). According to



Julio, the narrative of Israel and Palestine that he learned as a child did not give him convincing arguments for him to establish a dialogue and articulate his perspective. In this sense, this discourse appeared to represent what Tappan (1991) defined as an authoritative discourse. Julio's voice, therefore, emerged after he concretely approached the site and learned different perspectives on the conflict.

Thus, what Julio expressed in this example seemed to be related to the process by which Julio authored his own words, and hence authored himself (Tappan, 1991). At the end of this narrative Julio was able to express his voice:

Okay, So I mean, as it stands, I:: My personal belief is that everybody is wrong... I, I don't believe that there's a right side. My, my personal belief is that, I believe very strongly with the yes in some instances, in defense of, yourself, other's lives would need to be taken...But, I believe that anytime people are dying, there's no moral high ground... If one side is killing another... nobody:: nobody gets to say, "Oh, I'm right you're wrong"... Every, you don't win, you just killed someone, you've, you've taken a life. (March 2017, p. 16)

Here, Julio recounted his "personal belief" by saying that he is not taking a position in favor of any of the sides of the conflict. Instead, he voiced what appeared to be more precious to him, when he expressed that there is almost nothing that justifies taking the life of others. In doing so, he authored his perspective and, hence, he claimed moral authority and answerability for his position. At this moment, Julio's perspective about this conflict became what Tappan (1991) defined as an internally persuasive discourse; one that is "more open, flexible and dynamic than is [an externally] authoritative discourse" (p. 17).

These examples provide an illustration of how the participants established a dialogue by bringing several voices together in their inner speech. They articulated their definitions of social justice and expanded their moral authority and responsibility for their actions. Considering Bakhtin's (1981) work, Tappan (1991) argued that this is a "crucial task for an individual person, as she lives and tells—as she authors—her life story and thus internalizes the words, voices and language that shape and mediate her psychological (and moral) functioning" (p. 14). An individual's voice emerges when she appropriates mediational means, and by using them she is able to own and transform them in voicing their own speaking position (Tappan, 2006a, 2006b). In so doing, individuals engage in their ongoing inner dialogue where other's voices converge.

Through this dialogue, they are also formulating their own responses to these voices, assuming answerability for their moral actions (Tappan, 1991). By telling their social justice narratives, therefore, the participants challenged others' voices through their inner dialogue and authored their social justice definitions. Rather than looking for a universalized way to articulate responses to moral conflicts, a sociocultural approach to moral functioning attends to how diverse voices and conflicting perspectives establish moral dialogues, as a way to overcome authoritative discourses.

### *5.2.3 Social communications informing social justice meanings*

Tappan (1997, 2006a) argued that higher mental functioning has its origins in communicative processes and social practices. Identifying the mediational means that agents use in their actions is crucial to defining "the kinds of communication, collaboration, and interaction that characterize social processes, social activity, and social interchange" (Tappan, 1997, p. 89). By using mediational means, social practices "internalized as intermental activities become intramental activities" (p. 89). For Tappan (1997), when Vygotsky (1978) referred to the process

of internalization, he did not mean that individuals generate a copy of their external social activity. He understood internalization as a transformative process through which social interaction mediated by mediational means is reformulated internally, in private, and through inner dialogue and thinking (Tappan, 1997).

Elaborating Vygotsky's work, Tappan (1997, 2006a, 2006b) suggested using the term "appropriation" instead of internalization to focus the attention on persons acting when using mediational means. The term appropriation implies that there is a learning process that allows persons to master their activity by using mediational means borrowed from their sociocultural context. This term also accounts for individuals shaping their actions by using mediational means, and through this process, transforming them.

Considering this rationale to interpret moral functioning, Tappan (1997) clarified that the process of learning or appropriating moral mediational means occurs through conversation first:

as adults and children begin to talk with each other about "right" and "wrong," "good" and "bad," "should" and "shouldn't" (Snow, 1987). As a result of these communicative interactions over the course of a number of years, therefore, what is initially communication-for-others regarding rules, standards, and the consequences of their transgression gradually becomes communication-with-oneself regarding what one should and should not do in a given situation. (p. 90)

Thus, what once was a communicative processes face to face in concrete contexts, becomes inner dialogue accounting for the appropriation of mediational means justifying individuals' actions and crafting their moral dialogues.

Since the appropriation of mediational means occurs in context and conversation, individuals' activity reflects what Tappan (1997) defined as "institutional, cultural, and historical forces" (p. 90). In this study, the research participants' narratives about what they considered socially just and unjust were interpreted as mediational means shaping their moral actions, which following Tappan's (1997) line of thought, reflect how their sociocultural context informed their definitions of social justice. For example, when I asked Suna what did she learned from the narrative of her country's conception, she answered:

As a child, I learned to be nationalistic. Like, that's the whole point, right? That's why they don't do that here, but in Turkey, and pretty much everywhere else around the world, they start teaching you your history from kindergarten age and it's indoctrination. I don't like it. (April, 2017, p. 23)

Suna considered that when she learned about the history of her country, she also learned to be a nationalist, which she disapproved later when she brought other voices and discourses into dialogue with her country's narrative:

But, I know it took me a while to kind of, uninternatilze that. Like, in high school, I was still very much thinking, oh, I was very much still believing this idea that we'd fought off imperialists.... And then at the last year I decided to write that essay because I just needed to find out from myself, right? (April 2017, p. 23)

Through her inner dialogue (including writing an essay), Suna appropriated this narrative, and used it to build her own argument. Once in contact with different perspectives and experiences, she provided a response to what she described as an authoritative discourse. When individuals

are able to transform their means and, consequently, their actions, Tappan (1991, 2006a) argued, they also own such means, and this is when they become authors of their moral dialogues.

Another example regarding the way the participants' mediational means informed their definitions of social justice can be illustrated by drawing on Rupert's narratives. When he described his family's cultural values, he highlighted that: "Persian people they're, we're very, very family oriented. So we like, I guess... very family oriented culture.... But for us we're very collective, I guess. I guess north American culture they're very more much more independent than us" (April 2017, p. 3). Later during the interview, he drew upon this moral discourse to explain his current actions:

But for the most part, I still retain a lot of my own heritage too. For example, I still, am, living at home... I just taking care of family. So it's getting too, time for that. But, yeah, I still, of course, for example, the Canadian culture... there's lots of sports. Being more independent. Yes, it influences me. But there's a balance. (April 2017, p. 3)

Here, Rupert highlighted that he kept his family's Persian values, and combined them with his Canadian lifestyle. He appropriated his family's moral discourse, and put it in dialogue with Canadian values and his experiences, to the point that, for him, the way to move toward social justice for immigrants is by creating regulations and attitudes that help them "feel belonging" (p. 11); that allow them to feel part of a collective.

In these examples, it is clear that the participants used their mediational means to inform their moral dialogues, and thus their definitions of social justice. Moral voices, narratives and discourses that the participants had learned through concrete social and communicative experiences when they were children, were later appropriated and became part of their inner

speech. Through the process, these mediational means came into contact with new experiences, and means taken from the participants' different sociocultural contexts, changing this way their moral actions.

Given that mediational means construct and are constructed by particular sociocultural contexts, the way the participants used them represented how they perceived that their backgrounds informed their meanings of social justice. Through their inner dialogue, they articulated the kind of social communication they learned in context. This rationale not only responds to the first research question regarding how the participants defined social justice, it partially answered the second one, about how their cultural backgrounds informed their definitions.

#### *5.2.4 Social, cultural and historical contexts shaping social justice meanings*

For Tappan (2006a) and Wertsch (1991), Vygotsky did not fully clarified how mediated actions interact with particular cultural, historical, and institutional contexts. For this reason, these authors considered that the work of Bakhtin (1981) is critical to formulating a more comprehensive theoretical and empirical framework, and to understanding how the dialogical nature of inner speech is informed by historical, cultural and institutional practices that go beyond concrete contexts (Wertsch, 1991). The concepts of voice, social language, and speech genre are key to recognize how mediated actions are socioculturally situated, and how mastering these actions “leads to particular forms of mediated action on the intramental plane” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 49).

As voice refers to utterances expressed from a particular speaking perspective, this concept represents a step forward to go beyond concrete social contexts, and understand how particular forms of discourse, formulated from a specific point of view, inform individuals'

actions. Both the notions of social languages and speech genre, help account for the sociocultural context that informs people's mediated actions, as the former represents specific types of situated, and the latter refers to typical ways of articulating utterances according to the context. It is such sociocultural situatedness of mediated actions and their mediational means that, Wertsch (1991) argued, "provides the essential link between the cultural, historical, and institutional setting on the one hand and the mental functioning of the individual on the other. (p. 49).

The sociocultural situatedness of moral functioning, therefore, can be identified by defining the kind of discourses, including the interplay between voices, social languages and speech genres, mediating individuals' moral actions. According to Tappan (1997), these particular forms of communicative processes shape moral functioning. For example, the concepts of equality and non-discrimination, present in all the participants' definitions of social justice (see Table 4.1), illustrated how their moral mediated actions are informed by a particular form of discourse that resembles what Tappan (2006a) defined as a "discourse of justice, fairness and individual rights" (p. 363). This discourse has been:

The predominant moral language in the United States—our 'first language.' It is the language in which our most important historical moral documents are written (e.g., the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights), and it is the language that constitutes our modern-day legal system. As such, it is the language that frames the bulk of our public discussions about morality and moral decision making. (p. 363)

Although for Tappan (2006a) this moral discourse comes from a sociocultural context in the United States, I would argue that it is a globalized discourse that represents a particular history of

domination of the most powerful nations over the less advantaged countries (Monestel & Vadeboncoeur, 2017).

As the findings have showed, the notion of equality and non-discrimination in the participants' definitions parallels the definition in the UN legal documents and regulations. According to de Sousa Santos (2003), the UN agreements were created in a context that represents the triumph of the Western-European and capitalist domination, after having colonized the world, and oppressing other cultures and systems of thought. The nation-state endeavor consolidated this oppression, and with the creation of the UN, the Western-European and capitalist mediational means continue mediating power relationships globally. It is from this position that the UN's human rights discourse may continue to promote the domination of the West, over other discourses, practices and systems of thought (Mignolo & Escobar, 2013).

The sociocultural situatedness of the participants' definitions of social justice, therefore, can be partially recognized by identifying this specific globalized discourse of justice, fairness and individual rights. That is, their definitions are in part informed by a global discourse mediating their moral actions; at the same time, each interviewees' definition consists of mediational means, through which they voiced their utterances, narratives and discourses by establishing their ongoing inner moral dialogues. The situatedness of such specific mediational means depends on each participants' experiences and cultural backgrounds.

As has been discussed and exemplified throughout this thesis, there are common aspects in the participants' definition of social justice. However, their concepts are more complex, reflecting their particular experiences and sociocultural contexts. What from the structural-developmental paradigm is usually interpreted as universal cognitive reasoning on justice,



fairness and rights (Tappan, 1997, 2006a), from this thesis may simply be understood as one of the many moral discourses informing the participants' definitions of social justice.

### **5.3 This study's scope and future research**

In this section, I discuss the scope of this study. I begin by describing its theoretical and methodological contributions and limitations. Then, I discuss the implications of the thesis findings. I mainly focus on the need to promote learning spaces for moral dialogue, deliberation and imagination, and fostering creativity and cultural change. In the third subsection, I suggest developing learning spaces that foster social justice awareness and potentially social organization, which requires engagement in social practices (e.g., narratives, performative activities, and deliberation) may lead to critical thinking, moral imagination, and creativity.

#### *5.3.1 Strengths*

This research addressed a gap in the moral development literature, and contributed to the ongoing debate about the universal or sociocultural nature of moral functioning. Far from looking for theoretical generalizations regarding the participants' definitions of social justice, this study paid attention to the way they used their language, as mediational means, to articulate their moral dialogues. The theoretical approach, methodology, results, and discussion, therefore, were sensitive to the role of language and culture informing the participants' definitions of social justice. Common patterns identified across the interviews were interpreted as common moral discourses mediating the participants' moral functioning, rather than innate cognitive moral schema governed by universal principles.

Addressing this gap in the moral psychology literature implies working from methodological approaches to understand the participants' moral actions, rather than looking for generalizations. This study's qualitative design built on the participants' narratives to elicit their

definitions of social justice, enabling them to express their voices, fostering their moral imagination, and identifying themselves as active persons working toward social justice. This methodological approach is considered transformative because it contributed not only to put into perspective the participants' definitions of social justice, but to allowed them to imagine their role as active agents of social change and cultural creation.

The procedures for analysis were conducted by carefully following Braun and Clarke (2006) criteria for what they considered a good thematic analysis. In this study, most of these criteria were accomplished. First, I transcribed the interviews, and then all the transcripts were checked against the audio files. This meticulous process allowed me not only to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts but also begin with a very detailed coding process. Subsequently, the themes were generated as a result of this coding process, instead of adopting an anecdotal approach in which the researcher considers examples by following the interview protocol. Also, data were not only paraphrased; they were also theoretically interpreted and analyzed, recognizing my active role in the research process. In Chapter four, the three themes were reported, trying to keep a good balance between illustrative extracts and analysis to help the reader to make sense of the data and the topic.

Previous studies utilizing a sociocultural approach examined young adults' moral functioning by identifying specific discourses previously defined through Gilligan's' (1982) work (Tappan, 1997, 2006b). However, a sociocultural approach to university students' definitions of social justice has not been utilized. The means through which they defined social justice were evident, providing insights for the design of theoretical, empirical and educational research projects to expand a sociocultural approach to moral functioning. More importantly, this research made visible the participants' voices to possibly consider them in future research and

political projects. In that way, it contributed to making evident the need to generate dialogue and learning spaces for social change and cultural creation, considering the participant's voices, and experiences.

### *5.3.2 Limitations*

I would like to begin by recognizing my limitations as a researcher. Through close analysis of the data collection process, for example, I have noted that I could have probed further to expand some of the participants' answers. As an English learner, I was less confident when continued probing would complete a response. Moreover, as I used the timer to help me monitor the pace of the interview, probing could be limited by my concerns about the time.

Potential methodological limitations include the number of participants and means to generate data. Conducting interviews as the single method, limited the possibility of validating the data through triangulation or contrasting different data from resources. Observation while performing creative activities, or focus group interviews to establish a dialogue between the participants, may have helped to identify how they define social justice through different means. In this way, this research may have had a clearer understanding of the role of narratives, and other means to promote moral imagination. Similarly, although it was not the intention to generalize the findings, working with only six participants restricted the scope and insights.

By addressing the gap in the literature, a limitation from Tappan's (1991, 1997, 2006a, 2006b) model explaining moral functioning was identified. He drew upon Vygotsky and Bakhtin's legacy to understand moral functioning. From his theoretical and empirical elaboration, the role of mediational means, shaping and being shaped by individuals' moral and dialogical actions was clear. Nonetheless, he did not expand enough on the way persons transform and create new mediational means and cultural conditions. In this regard, the work of

Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) and Vadeboncoeur (2017) was relevant to expand the role of concept development in fostering moral imagining and creativity toward a more socially just futures. This insight allowed better understanding of the mechanism through which individuals use concepts, as mediational means, to generate new forms of discourse and actions, impacting sociocultural contexts. However, more research is needed to go further in this respect.

### *5.3.3 Implications for education and social organization towards social justice*

The first implication derived from this study refers to the use of narratives and deliberation to foster moral dialogues, imagination, and creativity. Through narratives, the participants were able to craft their definitions of social justice. By engaging in imaginative social practices, like narratives, we can foster social, and self-understanding, including “self-consciousness and self-direction” (Vadeboncoeur, 2017, p. 258). For educational practices, and for social and political organization, this insight is important because it serves as an inspiration for future research, and for designing educational and activist methodologies; engaging in this way, young people in public discussion and in what Vadeboncoeur (2017) defined as “the renewal of culture” (p. 259).

The participants identified problems extending from social injustice, and possible pathways towards social justice that deserve to be addressed, not only through future research projects but also through educational programs, community engagement, and public policy development. For instance, it was evident that immigrants’ discrimination in Canada is a problem concerning its whole population, which also seems to be specifically affecting school environments. The participants suggested to work on educational programs and social organization to confront these injustices. Once again, from this study’s results, the need to create

spaces for dialogue and imaginative practices in school contexts or political organizations was evident.

It was interesting to note that there is a globalized moral discourse informing the participants' definition of social justice. This insight opened the question regarding the extent through which such a discourse is fostering specific political power relationships and legitimizing particular social practices over others. This is an important finding because it opens the discussion about how a globalized discourse is informing and interacting with public policies, legal documents, and social practices, and how social actors perceive the extent to which this discourse is committed to social change.

#### *5.3.4 Future research in moral psychology and moral education*

Building forward, it was evident that more research is needed from a Vygotskian perspective (e.g., Tappan, 1997, 2006; Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016; Wertsch, 1998, 2008) to continue exploring how people from all ages author themselves through inner moral dialogue, group deliberation, narratives, or imaginative activities (e.g., performance, play, drawing, visual arts, among others). Moreover, it is important to expand our understanding about how this kind of social practices could be extended to design educational practices, public policies, and political projects to foster prosocial and transformative actions.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A Study's flyer



**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR A UBC STUDY ENTITLED:  
EXPLORING DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: A QUALITATIVE  
STUDY OF MORAL DIALOGUES WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

**ARE YOU A CURRENT STUDENT IN A COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY  
AND MORE THAN 18 AND LESS THAN 35 YEARS OF AGE?**

Come and talk about your experiences, stories and ideas about social justice and injustice

**YOUR VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION WOULD INVOLVE:**

- a 60-minute interview with the researcher, a graduate student from UBC.

Snacks and gift cards will be provided as a way to thank you for your participation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR VOLUNTEERING FOR THIS STUDY,  
PLEASE CONTACT:

NATACHA MONESTEL MORA

Graduate student

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jennifer Vadeboncoeur

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## **Appendix B Interview protocol**

### **Exploring Definitions of Social Justice: A Qualitative Study of Moral Dialogues with University Students Interview Protocol**

Interviewer:	Interviewee pseudonym:
Location:	Age:
Date:	Educational level:
Length/minutes:	Interview number:

#### **Part 1. Participant's background**

To begin, before talking about narratives and social justice, please tell me a bit about yourself, about who you are, something that let me know you a little bit more.

1. What is your age?
2. What are you studying?
3. How long have you been studying at the university?
4. Please tell me more about your interests. What kind of activities are you interested in?
5. How much of your time do you spend doing these activities?

Now, I would like to learn about your background, where you come from.

6. Where did you grow up?
7. Does your family have roots here?
8. How long have you been living in Vancouver?
9. How would you describe your cultural background?
  - a. For example, if you or your family came from China or if they are from a specific part of Canada, you can provide details about Chinese, Canadian or both cultures.
10. What cultural practices describe your family's background?
11. Please tell me a memory that exemplifies your engagement in these cultural practices.
12. Please tell me a narrative that you grew up with.
  - a. It might be story for children or adults.

Ok, you have provided information about your cultural background in general. Now let's talk a bit about your participation in your current social group. It might be a group of friends, or people that you feel you have something in common with.

13. What kind of practices exemplify your engagement in this social group?

14. What practices of your cultural background shape your identity in this social group?

## **Part 2. Participant's definition of social justice**

We have been talking about your cultural background. Now, I would like to learn about your definition of social justice.

1. Please give me one example of a situation that reflects social injustice.
  - a. It might be, for example, a situation of child that is experiencing an unfair situation at school, or a group of people that are suffering an unfair situation in our society.
2. How does social injustice look in this situation?
3. What steps could these people take to reach social justice in this situation?
4. What would social justice look like in this situation?
5. How would the participants know that social justice had been achieved?
6. From your perspective, how do you define social injustice?
7. How would you define social justice?

## **Part 3. Past narratives of social justice**

Now, through this next set of questions, I would like to learn about a narrative or a story regarding social justice that you grew up with.

1. Please, tell me a narrative that you grew up with, in which the people involved faced a socially unjust situation.
  - a. For example, you can tell me a cultural narrative that your parents or caregivers told you when you were young.
2. Please, tell me more details about the moment when this situation started to affect the people involved in the narrative.
3. Please, provide more details about the location where this situation took place?



4. What do you think were the factors that led to this situation?
  - a. What happened before these people experienced the unfair situation?
5. Why do you think it was a socially unjust situation?
6. Was the socially unjust situation improved in this narrative?
  - a. Is the socially unjust situation still affecting the people that experienced it?
  - b. If it was improved, tell me how.
  - c. If not, what would be the steps to improve this situation?
  - d. How should these people act to reach social justice?
7. What were, or might be, the consequences of these people's actions?
8. What are other ways to work toward social justice?
9. What would be your family's opinion about these people's actions?
10. What would be the opinion of the people from your cultural group about these actions?
11. What would be the opinion of the people from your current social group about these actions?
12. What, if anything, did you learn from this narrative as a child?

To close this set of questions, please, show how this narrative shapes your actions now.

13. For example, how does this narrative you grew up with influence you now?
14. In what way, does this narrative influence your current decisions about what is socially just and unjust?
15. In what ways does it shape your actions?
16. In what ways does this narrative shape how you define social justice?

#### **Part 4. Experienced narratives about social justice**

We have been talking about a narrative that you grew up with and that shapes your current decisions and actions regarding social justice. Now, I would like to know about a narrative regarding social justice that you or someone you know experienced.

1. Please, tell me a narrative that you or someone close to you experienced in the past, in which the people involved faced a socially unjust situation.
2. Please, tell me more details about the moment when this situation started to affect the people involved in the narrative.

3. Please, provide more details about the location where this situation took place?
4. What do you think were the factors that led to this situation?
  - a. What happened before these people experienced the unfair situation?
5. Why do you think it was a socially unjust situation?
6. Was the socially unjust situation improved in this narrative?
  - a. Is the socially unjust situation still affecting the people that experienced it?
  - b. If it was improved, tell me how.
  - c. If not, what would be the steps to improve this situation?
  - d. How should these people act to reach social justice?
7. What were, or might be, the consequences of these people's actions?
8. What are other ways to work toward social justice?
9. What would be your family's opinion about these people's actions?
10. What would be the opinion of the people from your cultural group about these actions?
11. What would be the opinion of the people from your current social group about these actions?
12. What, if anything, have you learnt from this narrative?

To close this set of questions, please, show how this narrative shapes your actions now.

13. For example, how does this narrative that you or a person you know personally experienced influence you now?
14. In what ways, does this narrative influence your current decisions about what is just and unjust?
15. In what ways does it shape your actions?
16. In what ways, does this narrative shape how you define social justice?

### **Part 5. A moral conflict regrading social justice**

This last set of questions will be focused on a moral conflict that reflects social justice in the present.

*Moral conflict:*

Imagine that you are the Premier. You have 1 million dollars set aside to be used to attract investments to BC and in that way improve our economy.

You have already signed a contract with a corporation and are driving to hand deliver a cheque and participate in a photo opportunity, when you receive a call from an administrative team member.

This team member tells you that the federal government has just agreed to match the funds invested at the provincial level for poverty reduction if the funds value at least 1 million dollars. This would mean that the funds you can use toward poverty reduction value 2 million dollars.

1. Do you honour the contract with the corporation and pay them 1 million or break the contract with the corporation and use the money toward poverty reduction?

2. Why?

3. Is this an issue of social justice? Why or why not?

4. What steps should you take as the premier, once this decision is made?

5. Would your answer change if the federal government only offered an additional 100,000 for 1 million dollars invested in poverty reduction?

6. Why or why not?

7. Is this an issue of social justice? Why or why not?

8. What steps should you take as the premier, once this decision is made?

9. Would your answer change if the federal government did not offer any financial incentives, but instead urged that all previous contracts be broken in light of the prime minister's concern regarding the "significant issue of poverty in Canada"?

10. Why or why not?

11. Is this an issue of social justice? Why or why not?

12. What steps should you take as the premier, once this decision is made?

## **Part 6. Closure**

All the information that you gave me has been very valuable for me and for this study.

1. Is there anything else that you would like add to this interview?
2. Is there anything that you would like to ask me related to this interview?

### Appendix C Preliminary codes and ideas for analysis

Participant's background	Definitions of social justice	Narratives that the participants grew up with	Personal social justice narratives	A moral conflict about social justice	Steps towards social justice
<b>Cultural practices:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holydays</li> <li>• Family Celebrations</li> <li>• Everyday activities</li> <li>• Norms or rules</li> </ul>	<b>Situations that exemplifies social injustice:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination from the Government</li> <li>• Discrimination at school</li> <li>• Immigrants' discrimination</li> <li>• Colonialism</li> <li>• Racism</li> </ul>	<b>Kind of narrative:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A narrative experienced in the school</li> <li>• A narrative told by family members</li> </ul>	<b>Kind of narrative:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A narrative experienced at the elementary or high school</li> <li>• A narrative about a current conflict with peers</li> <li>• A narrative experienced by a close friend</li> </ul>	<b>Participants resolution to the dilemma:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brake the contract</li> <li>• Not to brake the contract</li> <li>• Actions after the decision is made</li> <li>• Social justice issues around the dilemma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dialogue</li> <li>• Organization</li> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Reliable information</li> <li>• Protesting</li> <li>• Having clear goals</li> <li>• Recognize the history or memory</li> <li>• Recognition of individual differences</li> <li>• Recognition of cultural differences</li> <li>• Recognition of ideological differences</li> <li>• Social awareness</li> <li>• System clash</li> </ul>
<b>Current social group:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holydays</li> <li>• Family celebrations</li> <li>• Everyday activities</li> <li>• Norms or rules</li> </ul>	<b>How social justice looks like</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality</li> <li>• Fairness</li> </ul>	<b>Topics:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratic process</li> <li>• Dictatorships</li> <li>• Wars</li> <li>• Revolutions</li> <li>• Genocide</li> <li>• Discrimination at school</li> </ul>	<b>Topics:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination at school</li> <li>• Power dynamics between teachers and students</li> <li>• Homophobia</li> <li>• Discrimination based on cultural differences</li> <li>• Conflicts regarding ideological differences</li> </ul>		

Participant's background	Definitions of social justice	Narratives that the participants grew up with	Personal social justice narratives	A moral conflict about social justice	Steps towards social justice
	<b>How social injustice looks like:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of empathy</li> <li>• Selfishness</li> <li>• Lack of recognition of individuals' lives</li> <li>• Lack of recognition of individuals' rights</li> <li>• Inequality</li> </ul>	<b>Factors that led to social injustice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intolerance to differences</li> <li>• Socio political circumstances</li> <li>• Manipulation</li> <li>• Repression</li> <li>• Power dynamics</li> <li>• Unbalanced access to material resources</li> <li>• Unbalanced access to symbolic resources</li> </ul>	<b>Factors that led to social injustice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I Intolerance to differences</li> <li>• Corruption</li> <li>• Lack of understanding of the others' circumstances</li> <li>• Sociohistorical circumstances</li> </ul>		

**Appendix D Transcripts conventions  
Schiffrin (1987a)**

Convention	Description	Example.
•	Falling intonation and pause.	Great. Now, I would like to go deeper in your background
?	Rising intonation and pause.	Like, where did you, where did you grow up?
,	Continuing intonation and short pause.	Although, I really mainly identify as Canadian.
!	Animated tone.	That was. that was like... wow!
...	Noticeable pause.	Assuming no consequences... probably no.
-	Self interruption with glottal stop.	And, uh, I, um, I'd-I-I like it since high school and, uh, I have played it...
:	Lengthened syllable.	Okay. What does this narrative influence? So: I guess because of these examples that I gave you, umm...
<b>CAPS</b>	Very emphatic stress.	Yeah, EXACTLY, I loved it, I wanna go back, I really do.
[ ]	Overlap.	<b>Natacha:</b> Okay, and what were the consequences, [of, this situation? <b>Julio:</b> I lost that friend], I lost that part of my friend group.
=	Continues speech	<b>Teo:</b> Yeah. What I would say is, uh, like, as an international student= <b>Natacha:</b> Mm-hmm. <b>Teo:</b> =in this place, Canada, somet-I thought it would be so easy for me to maneuver and go and become, you know, have so much time for myself.
<b>Z</b>	When speech from B follows speech from A without a pause.	<b>Natacha:</b> Wow, hmmm <b>Z</b> <b>Julio:</b> Ah: during the school year, it's a little bit less. Maybe like ten hours a week if I'm lucky, but.
<b>Space in the same line</b>	When speech from B occurs during a brief silence from A.	<b>Natacha:</b> And you told me about the New Year Persian eve. <b>Rupert:</b> Yeah.