



## *Maitreyee*

Newsletter of the Human Development and Capability Association  
Number 3, October 2005

Dear HDCA Members,

Greetings! Many of you attended the fifth international conference on the capability approach, and the first international conference under the umbrella of the Human Development and Capability Association, in Paris last month. We are very heartened to report the growing participation from a long list of countries and institutions from across the world. A glance at the numbers from the conference indicates this exciting expansion of HDCA and its areas of research. Over 242 people from 43 countries were in attendance. In four days, 122 papers and 15 poster presentations were made in 28 parallel sessions. By way of nationalities, 13 countries from Africa, nine from America, nine from the Asia-Pacific and 13 from Europe were represented. And very interestingly, the ratio of Ph.D. students to senior scholars was close to a sprightly yet wise, 50%!

This Maitreyee is devoted to conference's topic on 'Knowledge and Public Action' and follows the pattern in earlier issues.

Melanie Walker begins the 'Insights' section by exploring what the language of the capability approach brings to the question of quality and equality in education. A second contribution by Pedro Flores-Crespo and Mathias Nebel gives a new interpretation of the causal relationship between education and development by assessing education from three perspectives: philosophical, pedagogical and institutional. There is no development without education, and no development without a commitment to democracy. Mitja Sardoc critically examines the importance of liberal education for forming future citizens in the context of cultural fragmentation and civic disengagement.

'In the Practice' section, Shirin Gul narrates the experience of a Pakistani NGO which seeks to improve the educational system on the basis of local cultures. She focuses on a particular project which engages the community through the traditional institution for collective decision-making. Women are often left out of education in many cultures. The section then describes the project 'Beyond Access'. It is a UK-based project which seeks to generate knowledge and practice regarding gender equality and education worldwide by linking together teachers, civil society organisations and government departments.

We would like to draw particular attention to Maitreyee's third section 'Announcements'. A lot of new initiatives have emerged during the conference. Thank you very much to you all to make the Association so dynamic. It is up to each one of us to sustain it. All comments are more than welcome! The next Maitreyee will come out in January/February 2006 and will be centred on the issue of public debate.

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## ***Insights***

### **The Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education**

***Melanie Walker, University of Sheffield, UK (e: m.j.walker@sheffield.ac.uk)***

In recent years there has been growing international interest from people working in diverse sectors and fields of formal, informal and NGO education in the potential of the capability approach to shape ideas, policies and practices for social justice in education. Although the capability approach is a normative framework for assessing poverty reduction and human development, it has much to offer policy and practice specifically in education. Sen himself identifies education as one of a relatively small number of centrally important beings and doings that are crucial to well being. Education is in itself also a basic capability; it is the foundation which affects the development and expansion of other capabilities, such as having good health.

But Sen's approach also does not allow that education as provided in schools, colleges and universities might not always operate as an unqualified good. A deep sense of failure or experiences of harassment at school can seriously reduce the chances of future educational agency and freedom. A generally poor quality education can be a serious disadvantage, which can persist throughout a lifetime. The point is that capabilities can be diminished as well as enhanced.

At the same time, a focus on capabilities for evaluating equality and quality in educational arrangements prises open how education works in practice, and its effects for learners' lives now and in the future. It requires us to ask and answer how education is constitutive of the capabilities and functionings that learners value. It goes beyond a rights discourse, such as the right to equal opportunity in learning for girls and boys, by arguing that education falls short of equality goals unless the capabilities necessary for such rights have been effectively achieved. Whether one should specify a list or lists of education capabilities is contested, with Sen preferring to leave the matter open to public discussion and dialogue.

#### *Capability and functioning in education*

There are two fundamental concepts in the approach, that of capability and that of functioning, which need to be understood in educational terms. Capability involves the real freedoms a learner has to make informed choices in order to achieve a life and actions she has reason to value. Functionings are beings and doings that learners value – for example, being literate and numerate, being knowledgeable about history, being able to take part in a discussion with other learners, and being respected by your teachers and peers in school. Capabilities are then the real opportunities learners have actually to achieve such valued functionings. Moreover, this freedom to make valued life choices is understood as directly conducive to each learners' well-being. When we evaluate how well we are doing in achieving equality and justice in educational arrangements, it is to learners' capabilities that we turn. What matters is their own valued achievements, rather than performance as measured by policy-makers or institutions, or input-output measures. Furthermore, the capability approach offers a sophisticated approach to educational development and change because it is multi-dimensional, requiring us to take into account a range of capabilities, how they intersect, and how one capability is important for the development of another.

This is an attractive approach for education, which should be concerned with opportunities, processes and outcomes of learning, and how through education we might contribute to more just social arrangements. It leads us to ask questions such as: are valued capabilities distributed fairly in and through education? Do some people get more opportunities to convert their resources into capabilities than others? Which capabilities

matter most in education for developing agency and autonomy for educational opportunities and life choices? The emphasis on learner agency chimes with progressive pedagogies which emphasise learner participation, empowerment and activity, while the concern with well-being foregrounds that education should be a positive and life enhancing experience for all learners.

The distinction between capability and functioning is important. For example, take two learners who both achieve a D-grade on the same mathematics test. If we are evaluating only functioning, their achievement looks the same. But one student, in a good school with good teachers, achieved a D-grade choosing not work very hard but to spend time in her drama club as the more valued activity. The second student worked very hard, wanting to do well enough to get into university, but attended a poor rural school with an unqualified teacher, and studied in a small family room without electric light. The first student has freedom and rationality; the second student has rationality (choosing to study hard for her future) but not accompanied by conditions of freedom. The crucial point is that our evaluation of equality must take account of freedom in opportunities as much as observed choices. It is individual capabilities to undertake valued activities that constitute the informational base to evaluate educational advantage and disadvantage.

#### *Functioning as well as capability*

Now, Sen emphasises capability, rather than functioning, that is learners having the freedom to make choices rather than the actual choices they make. For example, a learner might value the freedom to become an autonomous agent, but then choose a religious life which is non-autonomous after she finishes school. But during her time in education we can also argue that her functioning does matter, as much as her capability. For example, what if we are focusing on the capability of confidence in learning? We might plausibly assume that no one freely chooses to be an unconfident learner in school. If a learner is then functioning as an unconfident learner, this is a sign that their capability has not developed as they and we might wish.

We might argue that teachers need to know if and how capability is being developed, by whom, and under what conditions. To take another example, the acquisition of knowledge is central to education. We would probably all say that we want learners to be knowledgeable, for example about history, or literature, or technology. But how will we know if we are succeeding without some evidence or information for their functioning as knowledgeable learners in these fields? How do we adjust our own teaching if we have no understanding or information on what students are learning or becoming? This is an important point for education. At issue is how do we know that our learners have valuable capabilities unless they are given opportunities to function and use these capabilities in educational situations. Capabilities are counter-factual - we cannot see a potential - we must then resort to functioning as a proxy for our assumptions about which valued capabilities are being fostered or diminished, if we are to improve education.

#### *Conversion factors and diversity*

An enduring concern in educational studies is with the relationship between educational and social inequalities, and with how this can be explained by attention to differences between and among learners. The capability approach foregrounds the basic heterogeneity of human beings as a fundamental aspect of educational equality, and connects individual biographies and social arrangements through the concept of conversion. Sen argues that each individual counts but he also argues for the relationship and interconnections of the individual, the institutional and the social in enabling opportunities and valued choices. A learners' opportunities may be significantly helped by the choices of others – good teachers,

family support, equity policies, and so on. The issue is that capabilities do not develop in isolation but relationally. We need suitable external conditions, including suitably designed educational institutions, to enable the exercise of valued beings and doings. For example, a learner might value the capability for voice, but finds herself silenced in a classroom through particular social arrangements of power and privilege.

Learners also differ along intersecting dimensions of difference: personal (e.g. gender, race, class), environmental (wealth, climate, etc.), and inter-individual. These dimensions crucially shape when a difference becomes an inequality. The key point for education is that resources are very important, but what then matters is the opportunities each person has to convert their bundle of resources into valued doings and beings. Conversion factors link diverse individual biographies to social arrangements and thus further acknowledge the difficulties with learners' subjective wants which might be adapted in ways which do not necessarily serve the best interests of the chooser. For example girls might adapt their educational ambitions in a culture where maleness has more prestige and cultural power. In such a case, difference (gender) becomes inequality. The capability approach therefore foregrounds identity formation in learning and education both laterally (conversion factors) and temporally (educational development is dynamic and changing over time). What and who students are learning to be and how they are learning to be good choosers matters for equality in education.

### *An alternative language to human capital approaches*

Finally, the capability approach offers a robust counter language and way of thinking about education to that of human capital approaches, which measure the value of education in terms of its national economic returns and impact on GDP. In this latter approach learning and education is entirely instrumental, and persons are the means to an end of economic growth. By contrast, the capability approach emphasises that human beings are ends not means. Education does have an instrumental role for each learner in helping her to take up economic opportunities; education is for some other good. But in contrast to human capital approaches in the capability approach improving a human life does not have to be justified by showing that a person with a better life is also a better producer. Education is of intrinsic importance in that being educated is a valuable achievement in itself, for its own sake.

### **Further reading**

To read more about education and the capability approach see the comprehensive bibliography available online at <http://www.hd-ca.org> (thematic group 'capability and education').



## **Education and Development: Renovated Interpretations**

***Pedro Flores-Crespo and Mathias Nebel (Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico)***

*'Los agentes del destino son los hombres y los hombres conquistan la libertad cuando tienen conciencia de su destino'*  
Octavio Paz

The idea of "education and development" refers to a close relationship between the elements of the learning process and the progress of economies. For 40 years, education has been regarded as an economic factor capable of changing socio-economic inequalities in developed and developing countries. This belief, together with other evidence observed in the

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<sup>1</sup> "The agents of destiny are men and women. They conquer freedom when they are aware of their destiny".

East Asian countries, for instance, has motivated some scholars - principally economists - to study the direct connection between economy and schooling.

Contrary to this view, there are also some sceptical authors - most of them educators - who have argued that "the faith" in education, as an engine of economic progress, began to decline as a result of increasing rates of unemployment among educated people, bigger disparities in income distribution and low economic growth. So, the direct and causal relationship between education and development has been questioned and broader understandings of such connection are required.

From our point of view, the capability approach can be very illuminating to explain how education is interconnected to the freedom-based perspective for three reasons:

- ❖ It considers monetary benefits as means of development and not as ends; thus it allows deeper understanding between schooling and economy. Under this rationale, "just pedagogies" can be tested and adjusted empirically, as Melanie Walker notes.
- ❖ It raises the "complementarity" between individual agency and social arrangements to reach development. This helps explain why academically trained people may face social and economic disadvantages.
- ❖ It does not exclude the concept of human capital, rather, the capability approach complements the latter perspective. In this sense, it is remarkable that the freedom-centred perspective can be integrated with other disciplines or used by considering other theoretical approaches

Although Sen's capability approach has had a considerable impact on empirical social-science literature, in the field of education there are still several questions that remain unanswered. For instance, is education still related to freedom as classical thinkers remarked? In which way has the enlargement of capabilities been analysed from an educational perspective? Is it sufficient to claim that, by receiving formal or informal education, a person expands automatically her or his "freedoms"? Which other factors could intervene in the expansion of capabilities of an academically trained individual?

It seems that there are several elements that need to be discussed more broadly in order to understand the role of education within the capability-based approach. In order to contribute to this debate, three dimensions are proposed: philosophical, pedagogical and institutional.

### *Searching for a philosophy of education*

Speaking of liberal education awakes an old debate: Is this type of education totally incompatible with vocational-oriented training? Are the aims of liberal and vocational education completely irreconcilable? As the capability approach is increasingly studied and applied in the field of education, will there be a revival of the liberal education?

Martha Nussbaum, unlike Amartya Sen, has given some normative pedagogical guidelines on how to promote freedoms by means of education (specifically, higher education). According to Nussbaum, three *capacities* are essential to the "cultivation of humanity" in today's world. First is the capacity for critical examination of oneself. The second capacity refers to the necessity of conceiving of ourselves as citizens of the world. That is, to adopt, as educators and as students, an attitude of mutual respect, "we must educate people who can operate as world citizens with sensitivity and understanding," says Nussbaum. Lastly, the third capacity proposed by Nussbaum, which is closely related to the first two, is narrative imagination. "This means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have".

### *The pedagogical side*

*'Mala es una educación en la que no cabe la compasión; mala la que, llevada por el culto a la racionalidad, pretende que la existencia humana sea cabalmente inteligible e ignora sus contradicciones.'*<sup>2</sup>  
*Pablo Latapi Sarre*

Nussbaum's normative ideas on higher education, as well as her list of central capabilities, represent a step forward in the design of "just pedagogies which can be tested and adjusted empirically". Unlike utilitarian "key skills conceptions of team work", Nussbaum's capabilities offer a comprehensive idea of a pedagogy of inclusion. Highlighting the possibility of the capability approach in pedagogical terms requires us to look at others aspects, such as how knowledge is provided. In this sense, educational contents of both written and visual materials commonly used in the classroom can present images or assertions that are far from Nussbaum's idea of cultivating humanity.

Apart from the necessity of designing appropriate material to encourage pupils to learn in an environment of mutual respect, it is clear that further work needs to be done to understand the process of capabilities expansion from a pedagogical perspective. With the aim of contributing to this debate, we will raise the following questions:

- Do learning aims say something useful for the design of valuable functionings? If so, could a curriculum be based on functionings rather than on educational objectives? Will there be an innovative approach in doing so?
- "Should we generate a core curriculum in education in order to enhance the capabilities in children?"
- Are skills, competence and professional functionings meaning the same? Can learning outcomes be deemed as a capability?
- Is it illogical to think that the results of academic assessment processes could help us evaluate functionings?
- How can we put into practice "narrative imagination"?

### *The institutional side. Schools as capabilities-oriented institutions?*

To complete the three-dimension framework that may help us to situate education in the capability approach, we suggest looking at schools from an institutional side. Schools in particular and education systems in general constitute social settings where changing patterns of behaviours, customs and values take form and are reproduced. Some of these habits, irrespective of the educational supply, could affect both pupils' development of reason and their acquisition of skills.

Revising institutional settings could allow us to take measures in order to counteract the reaching effects of perverse cultural manifestations and regressive social mores. Renewed perspectives are required to enable educational institutions to operate with the aim of pursuing human development.

As we can see, there are many issues awaiting to be investigated to make education a *real* driving force behind the expansion of human freedoms.

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<sup>2</sup> 'A bad education is one in which compassion does not enter; a bad education is one which lets oneself be carried away by the cult of rationality, and pretends that human existence can be completely intelligible, ignoring all the contradictions inherent to human life.' (Latapi). Pablo Latapi is professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and, currently, Ambassador of Mexico to UNESCO.

## ***On Liberal Civic Education***

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The rise of public and scholarly interest in citizenship and citizenship education is a recent phenomenon that goes back not more than two decades. During this period, the theory of citizenship and citizenship education evolved from a marginal issue in political philosophy and philosophy of education to one of the major topics about the civic purposes of public schooling in a culturally diverse society, in terms of theory, research, policy and practice. On the one hand, there has been little dissent on the integrative function of citizenship and the importance of citizenship education for the preparation of children for their future role as citizens. As Walter Feinberg has rightly emphasized, schools in contemporary liberal democratic societies perform two critical functions:

First, in complex societies they advance public safety and development by socializing children into the general rules of the society, by establishing in them a commitment to the safety and well-being of their fellow members, and by providing them with the skills to advance both their individual and the social interest. Second, schools are critical instruments for reproducing the basic values of liberal society itself and of assuring its continuation across different generations. (Feinberg, 1998, p. 9).

On the other hand, despite the apparent convergence on the importance of citizenship education in public schooling, there continues to be persisting disagreement on a number of basic philosophical, conceptual and normative issues associated with the civic aims of a publicly mandated system of education in contemporary pluralist democratic societies. Within liberal political philosophy, a number of questions spring from the persisting disagreement over some basic questions related to the civic aims of public education and the limits of citizenship education in a publicly mandated system of education, e.g. how should public schools in a liberal democracy treat the cultural identities of its students? What are the basic educational requirements of educating young people for citizenship? Should the civic agenda of public education take into account the various forms of diversity in order to bridge the tension between cultivating the basic civic virtues and paying respect to the cultural diversity of its students? Is tolerance a sufficient condition for accommodating cultural diversity or liberal civic education requires a more substantial approach to diversity, e.g. mutual respect?

At the heart of this dissent lie a number of philosophical and normative problems determining citizenship as a shared political status and a normative ideal. Resolving the tension between the need for stability and social unity of a pluralist and diverse liberal democratic society and the claims for respect and recognition of diversity remains a central problem of liberal civic education. Not surprisingly, as Stephen Macedo notes, “[p]ublic schooling has been and remains a source of some of the deepest moral conflicts that our polity has witnessed.” (Macedo, 2000, p. 229)

Three basic arguments are usually advanced in discussions about civic education and its importance in contemporary pluralist democratic societies. First, the social unity of contemporary democratic societies has been seriously challenged due to an increasing level of diversity and deep value pluralism which both have corrosive effects on traditional communities and its shared set of beliefs and values. Second, the stability of contemporary pluralist democracies has been considerably undermined by increasing voting apathy and low turn-out at elections, decreasing level of civic participation and social capital (low level of trust in democratic institutions, the media, etc.) and a general carelessness for community involvement including the widespread tendency toward passive reliance on the state and its institutions. Finally, an increasing level of violence and intolerance towards racial, ethnic,

religious and cultural minorities seriously undermined the basis for civic co-operation and solidarity necessary to sustain our pluralist liberal democratic societies.

Despite a *prima facie* attractiveness of these arguments for turning to civic education in order to overcome the cultural fragmentation of a political community and the civic disengagement as the most evident threats to the stability and cohesion of contemporary complex societies, all three arguments are vulnerable to a number of objections since they fail to take into account the impact of social factors such as social norms and traditions on the understanding of diversity, tolerance and the political virtue of public reasonableness as well as examine the conception of institutional guarantees for personal liberty.

It is no accident, then, that a number of recent debates on the civic purposes of public schooling examines the limits on the rationale that can be employed to justify state policy on the means available to the state in pursuit of its aims and on a commitment to the moral ideal of equal individual opportunity to realise the personal potential of every student – regardless of gender, colour or ability etc. – by all available educational means. The project of developing an egalitarian theory of civic education that will grapple with the substantial inequalities that continue to exist in our pluralist democratic societies requires therefore the mutual consistency of shaping diversity for civic purposes as legitimate means for the requirement of stability and social unity and the accommodation of diversity on terms that secure the freedom and equality of all students in a pluralist liberal democratic society.

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## ***In the Practice***

### **An experience of the 'Democratized Education Management and Ownership' project in Pakistan<sup>3</sup>**

***Shirin Gul and Sabrina Saeed Khan (LEAD Pakistan, Islamabad)***

This contribution examines the experiences of an educational improvement project, Democratized Education Management and Ownership (DEMO), currently being implemented in two districts of the Sindh province in Pakistan. Designed as a community based project, DEMO aims to involve communities in the running of their neighbourhood schools. Furthermore, it hopes to unleash a process of sensitization for the community to internalize the importance of their involvement in their children's education.

DEMO project has two overriding objectives: 1) to nurture a culture of dialogue and negotiations on education management by the community; and 2) to enhance the communities' ability and competencies to rationally identify issues, articulate vision and challenges, and plan their human, institutional and financial resources for continual improvement of educational system in general and community schools in particular. Within DEMO, the challenge is hence to promote change on the basis of local cultures and traditions.

The answer DEMO choose in Pakistan was to adopt '*Goth Katchery*' (village assembly), a traditional forum for collective decision making as a means of communication and dissemination. Traditionally, however, such '*Kaths*' and '*Katcheries*' have been the realm of influence of the local landlord. DEMO realized that to effectuate this traditional avenue for collective decision-making would have to be transformed into a more democratic forum that could respond to the emerging societal needs of socio-economic uplift. More specifically the project envisioned the Village Assembly (VA) as a civic forum dealing with issues concerning schools and education in a particular area. In espousing the model of Village Assembly as a changed form of the *Goth Katchery*, DEMO acknowledged that democratic forum had to function within already established structures, meanings and relationships. It hence introduced the Village Assembly as the venue for a wide based participation from all different societal segments: men, women, children including opinion leaders, decision makers, religious representatives as well as the landless, the less endowed, etc. The Village Assembly initiated an exchange of ideas among community members on issues related to education. It especially sensitized them on the importance of education, provided a platform for viewing opinions and gave 'voice' to the marginalized. The following case study illustrates the work of DEMO.

Mustafa Abad is an illegal squatter settlement encroaching on the land belonging to the Government Irrigation Department. The residents of Mustafa Abad, by and large, belong to the lower socio economic groups; most of them are daily labourers, small time shopkeepers and the like. Most of the inhabitants of Mustafa Abad are migrants, flocking in to the city to escape poverty, insecurity and other adverse conditions in their native villages. Most of the population is transitory in either intending to go back to their native homes or stopping en route to a bigger city and a different future.

"I came here 11 months back from Dadu. See my land was invaded by salinity. My family needed to eat, so I came here. When things get better, I hope to go back."(Man of around 45 during a focused group discussion)

Around eight years back, a child from Mustafa Abad had a narrow escape from an attempted kidnapping as he was coming back from school. This was a time when there was no

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<sup>3</sup> This contribution is a shortened version of a paper presented at the conference by Shirin Gul on 'Rules of Engagement: Culture, Social Choice and Public Action'. The paper has been shortened and edited by Séverine Deneulin.

school in the locality and the children had to travel about 10 km to go to school. However, this incident alerted the community to the potential risk their children faced every day, as they travelled to and from the school. However, to this date, there has been no building assigned to the school. The dilapidated state of the school also failed to attract and/or retain teachers, for a sustained period of time.

When in February 2005, the school was visited (a total of eight times) by the DEMO team, there was no teacher to be found to initiate the community mobilization process with. An informal meeting was set up with community members. During this meeting the various problems facing the school were discussed. It was also disclosed that the school was non-functional for some time because of the lack of a teacher. The community explained that their efforts for arranging a teacher had been futile. The social mobilizers from DEMO explained the gathering about the importance of the active role of the community, in the form of self-help, in the improvement of their local school. The community had some discussion about their role amongst themselves, facilitated by the social mobilizers. The DEMO team left after confirming a date for holding a first Village Assembly. However, within a few days of the meeting with the DEMO team, the community was faced with a dilemma. In the absence of a teacher to intellectually engage or discipline the children, some of them got in a fight. The fight ultimately culminated in a few bruises, cuts and bleeding noses. A large group of people from the community then went to the DEMO office with these demands:

“Since our locality is of poor people, no one listens to us. The DEMO team came to us, heard us and even helped us by showing us the way. Thus, it was natural that we thought of the DEMO office as our first port of call. Once at the DEMO office and discussing the issue we realized that we can as a group go further. After all it was the very safety of our children at stake.”

What followed was a phenomenal display of civic engagement and the response to such community involvement by the authorities. The group marched on, in the form of a procession, to the Education Department of the region. The community had decided that as parents, they had the right to demand for things to change and demanded the reinstatement of a teacher. Community action, especially on issues such as school reopening in rural Sindh were unheard of and took the Department by surprise. A decision of reinstatement of two school teachers promptly followed.

It is interesting to note that public action emerged from the commonality of the values of the group. For a poor community, the most valuable objects they have are their children. Therefore, there was action when the valuable objects namely children were under threat. The community as a whole valued a school with a teacher for it ensured the safety of their children. This experience also gives shape to the notion of agency and the facilitative role that development projects, such as DEMO, can fulfil in encouraging its realization among underserved communities.



## ***Going Beyond Access***

2005 is a critical year for gender equality in education, as the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target – gender parity in primary and secondary school – will be comprehensively missed in as many as 94 countries (Global Monitoring Report 2005). As a result, 60 million girls around the world continue to be denied their right to an education. The failure to meet this first target should act as a wake up call, catalysing urgent reflection on why progress on getting more girls into school has been so slow and on what must be done to eliminate gender disparities in education.

However, there is also a need to go further still. Eliminating gender disparity is generally understood simple to refer to overcoming barriers to equal access to school, and thus getting equal numbers of girls and boys into school. Achieving gender equality in and beyond education, and thus making progress towards MDG 3 – gender equality and the empowerment of women – requires looking not only at the numbers of girls in school but also at the experiences that girls and boys have in school and a result of school. It entails ensuring that girls and boys are able to receive a quality and gender equitable schooling in a safe learning environment that allows them to complete a period of study, enjoy this and flourish as a result of their education.

The Beyond Access Project (BA) is a joint project between the Institute of Education (IOE), University of London, Oxfam and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). Launched in 2003, it seeks to contribute to achieving MDG 3 by generating and critically examining knowledge and practice regarding gender equality and education worldwide and by disseminating the lessons learned in order to influence the policies of government departments, national and international NGOs, and international institutions. Co-ordinated by Elaine Unterhalter (Institute of Education, University of London) and Sheila Aikman (Oxfam GB), the project has drawn on academic and policy work that both have carried out on the capability approach and education.

A central component of the project has been bringing together and enhancing dialogue and exchange between different actors from the range of sectors working in gender and education worldwide. These include academics, NGO practitioners, policy makers and teachers. A series of international seminars has enabled all of these groups to come together and discuss issues such as curriculum and pedagogy, the value of partnerships in promoting gender equality in education, and resources for gender equality in education. A thread across the all the seminars has looked at themes of rights and capabilities.

The presentation and discussion of especially commissioned new research papers at the seminars has resulted in the generation of a wealth of new learning, which the project has been able to distil and disseminate in a variety of ways. These include policy papers, Action for Learning Notes, which present key project learning in an easily accessible format, and a book *Beyond Access: transforming policy and practice for gender equality in education*. A newsletter *Equals* published bi-monthly is circulated to 1500 policy makers, academics and practitioners and the project has been supporting civil society groups to develop their capacity to carry out media-advocacy work around gender equality in education. Project papers on gender equality rights and capabilities will appear in the journal *Theory and Research in Education* in 2006.

Learning from the project has shown that while there is no “silver bullet” for achieving gender equality in education, and policy and practices that work in one context, may not be suitable in others, a holistic approach that takes account of the interventions needed both inside and outside the classroom is essential. Achieving gender equality in education requires promoting wide-ranging societal change, as well as addressing issues such as safety and sanitation, teaching and curriculum, and education budgeting and resources. It

also requires ensuring that traditionally groups – such as illiterate adult women and nomadic and pastoralist groups – have access to quality, relevant and appropriate education and are included in decision-making concerning education.

Initiatives that are crucial to promoting gender equitable education include abolishing school fees and guaranteeing free basic formal education; taking decisive action to stamp out sexual harassment against girls and female teachers; and ensuring that teachers are given the training and support they need to be able to make schools transformatory places which challenge, rather than reproduce, gender stereotypes and inequalities. Forming partnerships for gender equality in education, working multi-sectorally and involving girls, women and local communities in educational planning processes, can all be essential to ensuring long-term success, and to holding governments accountable.

In response to the need for a publicly accountable criterion for assessing progress towards gender equality in education, based a holistic understanding of gender equality in education that looks beyond numbers of girls in school, the project has developed the Gender Equality in Education Index (GEEI) building on the UNDP work inspired by the capability approach. Instead of relying on enrolment statistics, the GEEI uses a weighted measure comprising net attendance rates, girls' ability to stay in school and progress through their education and, through the Gender Development Index an assessment of education quality and equality by looking at the effect of education on women's ability to flourish as adults.

Tracking changes in GEEI between 1993 and 2003 show that although a few countries are making significant gains, there are dramatic falls in GEEI, in some others. The project has also looked in how far countries need to go to achieve a GEEI of 95% which it suggests is a measure equivalent to meeting the MDG. This highlights the dramatic allocation of human, financial and political resources needed to make MDG 3 a reality by 2015.

The Beyond Access Project has been an attempt to put some of the insights of the capability approach into practice, and to facilitate public discussion about issues of global justice, enrich the conceptualisations of gender equality, rights and capabilities and consider questions of how to distribute resources fairly in order to achieve gender equality in education.

## References

- Aikman, S. and E. Unterhalter *Beyond Access: Transforming Policy and Practice for Gender Equality in Education* Oxfam 2005
- UNESCO *Education for All: The Quality Imperative. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005*. UNESCO 2004
- Unterhalter, E et al *Scaling Up: Developing an Approach to Measuring Progress on Girls' Education in Commonwealth Countries in Africa* Commonwealth Secretariat 2005
- The *Equals* (the Beyond Access Project newsletter), papers from the Beyond Access seminars and further information about the Gender Equality in Education Index are available on the Beyond Access website: [www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/beyondaccess](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/efps/beyondaccess)



## ***ANNOUNCEMENTS***

### ***New thematic groups:***

#### **‘Capability Approach and Sustainability’**

The new working group will address the Capability Approach (CA), Sustainable Development (SD) and the manifold connections between the two. We would like to foster the exchange and further work on the two areas by building up a network of people in both academics and practical politics. We suggest that the general purpose of this group would be to add to a clearer ‘big picture’ of how these ideas (CA/SD) are linked to each other as well as to other fields, how they contribute to each other, what would follow from this in terms of both theory and policies, etc. (Please note that the notion of sustainability is not confined to ecological issues - we include other issues as well, be they ‘social’, ‘economic’ or the like).

If you are interested in this thematic group, please email: [fabian.scholtes@uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:fabian.scholtes@uni-tuebingen.de)

#### **‘Participatory Methods and the Capability Approach’**

This group hopes to create a space where ideas and experiences can be exchanged when using Participatory Methods to apply the Capability Approach. Members of the group come from different backgrounds but with similar questions: How can the use of participatory methods contribute to a better understanding of people’s capabilities? Can we identify functionings and capabilities through participation? What kind of participatory activities can be used to capture the changes in capabilities? Should participatory methods be aimed at expanding people’s capabilities? How do participatory methods impact on people’s capabilities? Some of our initial objectives are: to identify and clarify some of the operational challenges of using Participatory Methods in a Capability Approach framework; to illustrate how the real-life experiences of the poor - as depicted through participatory methods - could enrich our understanding of the actual dynamics of human capabilities and functionings; and to understand how participatory methods can contribute to the on going discussion of the relation between capabilities and structural conditions. New members from all backgrounds are welcome, from students to practitioners.

**E-mail:** [hdca-participation@ml.junetz.de](mailto:hdca-participation@ml.junetz.de)

**To join web list:** <https://ml.junetz.de/list/listinfo/hdca-participation>

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### ***If you haven’t received the Journal of Human Development...***

Some of our members did not receive the March and June issues of the Journal of Human Development. We are working with the publisher to arrange a re-send. Therefore, please kindly inform us via email at [info@hd-ca.org](mailto:info@hd-ca.org) if you have not received any of the past two issues or if your address has been changed. We apologize for any inconvenience caused and will work to ensure that future journals reach you.

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### ***2006 International Conference of HDCA ‘Freedom and Justice’***

**Groningen, The Netherlands  
29 August- 1 September**

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