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Date: August 25, 2023

# **The Capability Approach as a Normative Framework of Educational Measurement**

A dissertation presented by

Ka Ya Lee

to

the Committee on Higher Degrees in Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

Education

Harvard University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Cambridge, Massachusetts

August 25, 2023



## Abstract

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Dissertation Advisor: Catherine Elgin

### The Capability Approach as a Normative Framework of Educational Measurement

Both educational scholars and the public have long criticized using students' subject-based learning outcomes as a proxy for the success of educational institutions and systems. Such criticisms, however, rarely yielded fruitful discussions on what alternative metrics ought to be used. In this project, I first motivate utilizing the Capability Approach, a normative framework of measurement initially conceived in development economics, and illustrate that test scores, much like GDP and GNP, serve as insufficient proxies for the success of education since they rely on an overly narrow and simplistic notion of what we mean by "educational success." Second, I address the concern, raised by some prominent political philosophers, that the very notion of capabilities, which assumes individual agency and autonomy, is not suitable to discuss issues pertaining to children by examining the case of children's autonomy regarding their choice of gender pronoun. Third, borrowing insights from contemporary debates on the aims of education among philosophers of education, I argue that the aim(s) of education — either flourishing or autonomy — ought to foreground a more holistic notion of educational success and measurement.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Section 1. Outline**

The present project centers around the question regarding the metrics of educational success: If one is to measure the success of educational institutions and systems as a whole, what should be measured, and why? As I will explain in the later chapters, I attempt to address this question with Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (hereafter 'the CA'), a conceptual framework invented in the field of development economics that facilitates the systematic consideration of what ought to be measured and why. Before delving into the main part of this project, however, I will first introduce the motivations behind it as well as provide short notes on why I see the CA to be a promising framework for addressing the question of the metrics of educational success.

The present project is motivated by three empirical observations. First, both in the United States and internationally, test scores, used as proxies for learning outcomes, currently serve as the sole or primary metrics of educational success. That is, scholars of education, policymakers, and the public use test scores – often in reading and math and sometimes in civics, social studies, and science – to ascertain whether or to what extent educational institutions are successful in educating children (hereafter 'the Standardized Testing Paradigm' or 'the STP'). The Standardized Testing Paradigm treats test scores as proxies for the success of education.

Second, the current Standardized Testing Paradigm creates perverse educational policy and practice incentives (Koretz, 2017), which results in systemic inattention to other dimensions of educational endeavor that are unrelated to subject-based learning outcomes but are still integral to the success of education. This, then, motivates the original question of this



dissertation project: what ought to be measured to understand the success of educational institutions and system? In the next section, I will consider each of these three empirical observations in detail.

## **Section 2. Three Empirical Observations**

When the public, academics, and policymakers talk about how well a nation, state, district, or school is faring in educating children, they often refer to students' subject-based learning outcomes, as represented by test scores. Oftentimes, these evaluations of the education system as a whole or educational institutions (schools, districts, and states) are based on reading and math scores, but subject-based testing is not limited to these two subjects. In the United States, for instance, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) measures students' proficiencies in reading and math, as well as their competence in science, writing, the arts, civics, U.S. history, and technology and engineering literacy. Subject areas outside of reading and math, however, are measured less frequently, compared to reading and math. (The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, n.d.)

The United States' tendency to treat students' learning outcomes as the barometer of educational success has long been prevalent. Perhaps, the most prominent historical relic is the infamous "Coleman Report" published in 1966, in which sociologist James Coleman and his co-investigators examined the reading and math competencies of American youth. The legacy of the Coleman Report is two-fold. First, it was *the* first systemic, large-scale study of public education in the United States as well as racial inequalities in education (Dickinson, 2016). Second, and related to the present project, it was one of the first attempts to tie students' test scores to the

notion of the success of the education system as a whole. Coleman et al. (1966) described, “[Learning] achievement shows the accomplishments of the school to date.”

The impulse to equate test scores with the success of educational institutions and systems at large is also shared in other historically influential works such as the National Commission on Excellence in Education’s 1983 report titled “A Nation at Risk,” which alarmed the United States Department of Education for “lagging behind” in educating its children insofar as American children did not fare as well as their peers in other countries on standardized tests. Again, the success of educational institutions was boiled down to the idea of students doing well or scoring high on achievement tests.

Given this long-standing history of using test scores as the (sole) metric of the success of educational institutions, it is not surprising that the present academic and public discourse also relies heavily and exclusively on students’ academic achievements. For instance, when the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) released “the nation’s report card,” news organizations as well as academics themselves reported the extent to which education was successful during the Covid-19 pandemic exclusively based on children’s proficiency on reading and math (e.g., Mervosh & Wu, 2022). The widespread tendency to equate test scores with the success of educational institutions during the pandemic can be summarized by this urgent and earnest statement by the current secretary of education, Miguel Cardona: “The results in today’s nation’s report card are appalling and unacceptable ... This is a moment of truth for education.” (Mervosh & Wu, 2022)

The intuitive urge to evaluate the educational institutions and system solely on the basis of students’ subject-based learning outcomes is prevalent not only in the United States but also in international education policymaking. In the same way that NAEP functions as the “report card”

on the education system as a whole in the United States, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), administered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), provides global indices for the success of educational institutions in many countries.

Political philosopher and former Minister of Education in Israel, Yael Yuli Tamir (2022), for instance, describes the crux of the PISA tests by writing that PISA “marketed itself not only as a universal indicator for the level of education but also for growth. Its strength lies in the simplicity and universality of its model.” In sum, both inside and outside the United States, and in the past and the present, test scores have served and continue to serve as the primary metric for the success of educational institutions and systems. That is, the Standardized Testing Paradigm has dominated education practitioners, policymakers, and researchers’ conceptualization of the success of educational institutions and systems.

The second and related observation is that this STP creates a culture of fixating on the test scores, thereby diverting resources and attention from other dimensions of education that are unrelated to students’ subject-based learning outcomes but are integral to the success of education. Perhaps, the most revealing aspect of this tendency is the culture of “teaching-to-the-test” or what American educational assessment and policy expert Daniel Koretz (2017) calls “the testing charade,” which he summarizes as follows:

If you ask, “What dominates everyday life in schools?,” the answer is much simpler: tests. Walk into almost any school, and you will enter a world that revolves around testing and test scores, day after day and month after month... many districts add their own “benchmark” or “interim” assessments during the year to gauge how well students are progressing toward the main event. Kids spend a lot of time taking these tests. And in many schools they spend vastly more time yet—often a substantial share of the entire school year—preparing for them. The work life of educators also focuses on test scores. Schools, and in many places individual

teachers, are judged on the basis of their students' scores. Administrators and teachers worry greatly about scores, and they shape their behavior—and not just their instruction—to raise them.

This culture of the “testing charade” is also observable in international education as Tamir (2022) writes:

PISA results are anxiously awaited by governments, education ministers, and the editorial boards of newspapers, and are cited authoritatively in countless policy reports. They have begun to deeply influence educational practices in many countries. As a result of PISA, countries are overhauling their education systems in the hopes of improving their rankings. Lack of progress on PISA has led to declarations of crisis and ‘PISA shock’ in many countries, followed by calls for resignations, and far-reaching reforms according to PISA precepts.

Since the purpose of this chapter is simply to motivate the present project, I will not exhaustively survey all the existing empirical studies surrounding the various consequences of the STP. I shall simply note that using test scores as the sole or primary metrics of the success of educational institutions has been well-documented to create a culture of concentrating the resources and attention of policymakers, educational practitioners, and educational scholars on raising students' test scores or helping more students meet designated proficiency levels.

This culture of the testing charade, in turn, creates a systemic inattention to those dimensions of education that are not related to students' subject-based learning achievements and are nevertheless crucial to the success of educational institutions and system. Before delving into a few examples to illustrate my point, let me briefly explain what I mean by "the dimensions of education unrelated to test scores but are crucial to the success of educational institutions."

What I mean by these “dimensions” is, namely, educational goods, which Harry Brighouse et al. (2018; 2016) broadly define as “the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions

that children develop” out of their educational process “both for their own benefit and for the benefit of others.” Although the word “goods” usually connotes material or concrete products or commodities, the notion of “educational goods” need not be so. The term “goods” here is used to demonstrate what is valuable or good or the opposite of what is bad. They write as follows:

The use of the term *goods* in the phrase “educational goods” may suggest concrete or material commodities, but we are using it just in the sense in which they are opposite to *bads*. They are positive in that they contribute to valuable outcomes for the individual possessing them or for others in either the present or the future. (Brighouse et al., 2018)

On this ground, then, educational goods include both cognitive skills as well as non-cognitive or social emotional skills. These educational goods, according to Brighouse and his colleagues, include knowledge, skills, dispositions, attitudes, and capacities for economic productivity, personal autonomy, democratic competence, healthy personal relationships, treating others as equals, and personal fulfillment.

It should be noted that Brighouse and others’ rather broad notion of educational goods need not be taken as final or definitive. It is also equally important to bear in mind that they arrived at this wide range of educational goods because, for them, the aim of education is to give students opportunities for a flourishing life (Brighouse et al., 2016; Brighouse et al., 2018). They write, “The fundamental value that underlies our discussion of educational goods is human flourishing.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, Brighouse and his co-authors start their project by asserting that the aim of education is to give students opportunity to live a flourishing life but they do that without critically examining their own premises or considering other alternatives.

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<sup>1</sup> As Aristotle himself as well as many other Aristotelian scholars acknowledge, one’s chances of living a flourishing life are admittedly influenced by luck. Thus, scholars such as Brighouse note that it is not education system’s job to deliver or guarantee a flourishing life to students; schooling or the education system’s job is merely to give students opportunities to live a life of flourishing.

In other words, if the aim of education is something other than flourishing or something less demanding than flourishing, such as equipping students with skills for exercising autonomy – the ability to deeply and critically reflect on one's conception of the good (e.g., Schouten, 2018) – what counts as educational goods would presumably differ. If, for instance, the aim of education is to cultivate the capacities for, and dispositions associated with, critical thinking (e.g., Siegel, 1980), the notion of “educational goods” may not necessarily include items such the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions needed to realize healthy personal relationships but would at least include those needed for critical or rational thinking.

Although what exactly should or should not count as educational goods partially hinges on what the aim of education is, it might be *minimally* fair to say that civic competence and certain elements of mental or social-emotional wellbeing such as healthy sense of self-esteem or self-efficacy would fall within the range of educational goods, i.e., goods that ought to be realized through children's educational process.

The idea that civic competence – one's ability to be an effective citizen of their community – is an educational good may simply rest on the claim that cultivating such capacities is *the* core demand of liberal democracy (e.g., Levinson, 1999). It could also rest on the mere empirical reality that civic competence is a skill essential for a successful communal life because the majority of children already do live in some sort of community and are likely to continue to live in a community of some sort, regardless of whether that community is the one of their origin or not. Thus, living well or, more minimally, being a functioning member of a civic community in this context simply *cannot* be disentangled from living well in a community.

The testing charade – organizing educational endeavors around the goal of improving students' subject-based learning outcomes – leads to a systemic neglect of cultivating the

valuable educational goods such as civic competence. In *No Citizen Left Behind*, political philosopher Meira Levinson (2012), for instance, notes:

To the extent that they define a whole rather than just part of schooling, therefore, SAA (standards, assessment, and accountability) mechanisms threaten to neglect the authentic range of educational needs and desires among the diverse array of communities and young people within contemporary democratic states.

Levinson (1999) argues that, although dynamic and competent civic education is one of the central demands of liberal democratic society, the STP, which results in perpetuating the testing charade, creates system-wide disincentives to deliver competent civic education to children because of its narrow definition of what the “success of educational institutions” means. Even if a given school succeeds in helping students do well on subject-based standardized tests but without inculcating in them basic civic dispositions, skills, and knowledge, it would be challenging to claim that such a school is successful in educating children since the idea of “educating children” includes passing on civic competence.

One may object by saying that the issue that I am raising here is resolvable by simply adding standardized tests on civics to the arsenal of frequently tested subjects. Thus, PISA should develop regular civic exams that allow international comparisons, and NAEP should test students for their civic knowledge as regularly as reading and math. It should be noted, however, that civic competence is much more than merely possessing civic knowledge or testing well on a civics exam.

Knowledge is merely a subset of educational goods and is distinct from skills and dispositions. One may, for instance, possess the knowledge regarding the *historical* significance of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s civil rights advocacy without being motivated to act in accordance

with the *civic* importance of continuing to advocate for their own civil rights. Dispositions usually entail motivational components, which knowledge alone does not necessarily generate. Thus, merely adding civic exams to the international or national testing initiatives does not help us understand whether or not educational institutions and systems are actually successful in delivering educational goods regarding civics.

In a similar vein to delivering civic competence, it may be reasonable to claim that a sense of self-efficacy is an educational good. This is because one's sense of self-efficacy is indispensable for any kind of life that one may aspire to live – a low sense of self-efficacy is often an impediment to various aspects of adult functioning such as one's health-related behaviors (e.g., self-management of chronic disease, smoking cessation, alcohol use, eating, pain control, exercise; Carey & Forsyth, 2009).<sup>2</sup> According to the self-determination theory proposed by Ryan and Deci (2017), self-efficacy is defined as individuals' "beliefs about their capabilities to produce effects," and it determines how they "feel, think, motivate themselves and behave (Bandura, 1994)." In the field of educational psychology, there is a plethora of research that suggest that students' sense of self-efficacy serves as the foundation for student learning and academic persistence (e.g., Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991).

In addition to self-efficacy, it would be also fair to say that one's sense of belonging or sense of connectedness with the school community is also a crucial educational good to impart to students. While self-efficacy is connected with one's sense of belonging in school (Battistich et al., 1995; Roeser et al., 1996) and academic outcomes such as higher academic motivation, less absenteeism, better school completion, less truancy and less school misconduct (Connell et al.

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<sup>2</sup> Here, I exclude discussions of self-esteem since some systemic review articles argue that self-esteem may be a product of academic or occupational success rather than a *cause* of academic or vocational success. (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2003)



1995; Lee & Croninger, 2001; Demanet & Van Houtte 2012; Neel & Fuligni, 2013; Hallinan 2008), research suggests that one's sense of belonging is importantly associated with a variety of *non-academic* outcomes.

These non-academic or psychosocial outcomes include higher levels of happiness, psychological functioning, adjustment, self-esteem and self-identity (e.g., Jose et al. 2012; Law et al. 2013; Nutbrown and Clough 2009; O'Rourke and Cooper 2010) and fewer incidents of fighting, bullying and vandalism, disruptive behavior and emotional distress, risk-taking actions such as substance and tobacco use, and early sexualization (e.g., Goodenow 1993; Lonczak et al. 2002; Samdal et al. 1998). These empirical findings surrounding students' sense of belonging and its relationship to various academic and social-emotional outcomes warrant the view that a sense of belonging is, in fact, an educational good that benefits not just students themselves but also their present and future healthy interpersonal relationships with others.

In sum, the three minimal items listed thus far – students' civic competence, sense of belonging, and self-efficacy – all have the following characteristics. First, they are all educational goods. Civic readiness, a sense of belonging (which allows students to relate to others and to the self in a healthy way), and a sense of self-efficacy are the goods that students acquire through education (civic readiness is cultivated through social studies classes while a sense of belonging and self-efficacy are developed both within and outside the classroom) and that allow them to live as a minimally functional adult citizen in a contemporary democratic society.

The second common feature that these goods share is that their educational importance cannot be explained solely by their contributions to, or associations with, students' improved academic outcomes. It may be the case that these educational goods happen to improve students'

learning outcomes. When it comes to students' sense of belonging and self-efficacy, for instance, that is certainly the case as suggested by the empirical studies cited above.

However, their connection to improved academic outcomes is not where these educational goods' importance lies. That is, these are essential educational goods, independent of their relation to students' subject-based learning outcomes – they ought to be imparted to students *even if* these educational goods have nothing to do with improved test scores because civic competence, belonging, and self-efficacy are all crucial dispositions for being a minimally functional civic adult in a contemporary democratic society. If that is the case, then, what it means for educational institutions and systems to successfully educate children entails not only helping them achieve desirable or minimum academic outcomes but also to cultivate civic competencies, a sense of belonging, and self-efficacy, at the very least. Thus, one may argue that an educational process or system that fails to inculcate these dispositions in students cannot be said to be successful in fulfilling its mission.

The STP, however, creates a culture that neglects the cultivation of these essential educational goods in children. As Koretz argues, it creates a culture of orienting virtually all educational resources to improving test scores. I argue that this is a natural consequence of using only students' subject-based learning outcomes as the metrics of educational success. That is, as the saying goes: "What gets measured gets done." The metrics that educational policymakers, practitioners, and researchers use in understanding the success of educational institutions directly shape what information they use in evaluating the state of educational institutions, and more importantly, what they construe as the "success of educational institutions and systems."

If, for instance, a district-level leader has only the information on students' math and reading test scores and nothing else, the judgement regarding each school would be purely based

on students' test scores, and more crucially, the notion of successful educational institutions is reduced to yielding certain learning outcomes. However, as I illustrated with the case of civic readiness, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging, the success of educational institutions is more than just helping students acquire academic achievements. It is to impart a broad range of educational goods to students, and educational goods cannot be just constrained to academic learning outcomes.

These considerations raise two crucial questions: what should we mean when we use the phrase, “the success of educational institutions and system?” Relatedly, what are the metrics that adequately reflect such notions of the success of educational institutions and systems? These are the central questions that motivate my overall inquiry, and this dissertation project is an attempt to *start* addressing these questions. In doing so, I look to the field of development economics, which has a deep-seated history of basing the evaluation of economic system and institutions only on GDP (gross domestic product) and GNP (gross national product). In particular, I borrow insights and frameworks from economist and philosopher Amartya Sen’s CA, an organizing framework that helped economic policymakers and researchers fundamentally reconsider what ought to be measured to understand the success of development economics.

As I will present in the upcoming chapter, Amartya Sen made exactly the same kind of observations that I presented in this chapter but in the realm of development economics. As Sen was formulating the basic mechanics of the CA, for which he won a Nobel Prize in economics, he made the following observations: first, economists, policymakers, and virtually all relevant international organizations trumpeted GDP (gross domestic product) and GNP (gross national product) as the sole metrics of economic success or of development effort, and thus the economic system overall. Second, in spite of their dominance in the field of international development and

economic decision-making, GDP or GNP, Sen argued, were fundamentally *limited* and *limiting* metrics.

They were limited because they reflected only parts of what mattered in development economics, i.e., how much monetary growth each country achieved. According to Sen, these metrics cannot capture other crucial aspects of development effort such as increasing average life expectancy and famine prevention. GDP and GNP were also *limiting* because focusing on improving or maximizing them created a nefarious pattern of perpetually ignoring other relevant aspects of development such as protecting women's rights, preventing premature death, and sustaining basic literacy and numeracy in all citizens. In conceptualizing the CA, Sen had to “go back to basics,” so to speak, and ask what the "success of development economics" should mean.

I argue that there is a parallel to be made between the role that GNP and GDP played in the field of development economics and the role that the Standardized Testing Paradigm continues to play in the field of education. Both metrics (GDP and GNP in development economics on one hand, and subject-based learning outcomes in education on the other hand) are limited in what they can represent. Furthermore, they are *limiting* in terms of improving their respect fields.

The importance of tying the success of education to its measurement is further echoed by Gert Biesta's notion of normative validity, the idea that a measurement of X should be based on the purpose of X (Biesta, 2008), or to articulate in more Sentian language, what the success of X should mean. I will elaborate more on this notion of normative validity in Chapter 4.

The present project aims to capitalize on this potential parallel and to extend the CA's insights to the issue of educational measurement. In the next chapter, I will introduce the historical background, theoretical underpinnings, and technical mechanics of the CA.

## **Chapter 2: The Capability Approach**

The goal of this chapter is to motivate the two central questions of this dissertation project. The first question concerns the alignment between the aim(s) of education and the Capability Approach (hereafter ‘the CA’). The second question centers around children’s moral status and its potential incompatibility with the CA. In order to illuminate the significance of these two inquiries, I will first introduce the CA and its two central concepts: *functionings* and *capabilities*. Second, I will introduce the ways in which the CA has been extended into the field of education and point out how utilizing the CA as a normative framework of educational measurement is promising yet lacking in the current literature, in spite of the fact that it was developed in part as a normative framework of measurement. Third, I will introduce two issues that such reconstruing would highlight and talk about the importance of addressing the above-mentioned questions.

### **Section 1. The Basics**

#### ***Section 1.1. What is the End of Development?***

For philosopher and economist Amartya Sen, the central question of development economics was not “How can a country increase its wealth?” but “What is the end of economic development?” Furthermore, none of the existing answers and conceptual resources satisfied him. In this section, I will introduce a brief history of the CA and Sen’s central thinking in development economics. In particular, I will focus on what the existing available answers were, why they were insufficient for Sen, and how Sen developed the CA to counter the issues raised by the existing frameworks.

The answer regarding the end of the economic development depended on what philosophical camp one subscribed to. Standardly, there were mainly three camps. The first two groups were inspired by the long tradition of utilitarian thinking, which pervaded development economics, as well as the discipline of economics at large, while the third school of thought represented resource-based thinking.

The first group, which I shall name “standard economists,” assumed increasing income or wealth to be the end goal of economic development, which is consistent with the standard view that economists generally hold: increasing income or wealth leads to increasing one’s sense of happiness. One notable characteristics of this position is that it takes a non-paternalistic view on how best to achieve happiness or increase one’s utility – it does not prescribe how one achieve happiness and holds the view that individuals should be left to their own devices to use their income however they like.

And because they do not subscribe to a particular standpoint as to what happiness is or how to achieve it, the central metric of consideration when it comes to evaluating the success of economic policies was an individual’s income or a country’s GNP (gross national product) or GDP (gross domestic product). Thus, the end of economic development for the standard economists was purely maximizing the GNP (gross national product) or GDP (gross domestic product). Thus, for them, the more money a country had, the more developed it was.

Another group that borrowed a lot of inspiration from utilitarian thinking emphasized an increased sense of subjective or objective well-being. Inspired by utilitarian philosophy, welfare economists were primarily concerned with maximizing one’s sense of happiness or wellbeing, regardless of one’s income or wealth. Thus, the proxy of success of development economists was individuals’ scores on measures of subjective or objective well-being.

The final group – the “resourcists” – were those who viewed the purpose of economic development as increasing resources for individuals. In contrast to the first group, which took a non-paternalistic view of what is required to achieve happiness, resourcists tended to spend more effort on thinking about what resources a country or individuals need in order to live a good life. They tended to justify a slightly more paternalistic view that, regardless of the diverse views as to what happiness is and how to achieve it, there are certain resources that everyone reasonably needs to live a good life. The prototypical examples of these essential resources are education and health care. With their resource-based thinking, they see the end of economic development as increasing resources such that the individuals in a given context have resources to pursue the life that they want (Sen, 1999).

None of these existing paradigms, however, satisfied Sen. First, when it comes to using income and wealth as the proxy for the success of economic development, Sen claims that income and wealth themselves cannot be the end in themselves; rather, they are merely means to achieve something else, something more *final* (in the Aristotelian sense) — i.e., live a life one has reason to value (Sen, 1999).

Second, for Sen, the resourcist framework is also inadequate. In *Inequality Reexamined*, for instance, Sen points that each individual is differentially equipped to convert resources into the means with which to achieve a good life. Perhaps, the clearest example would be bicycles as a means of transportation. While able-bodied individuals can adequately turn a bicycle into a tool with which to freely move around, bicycles as a resource for moving around do not comport the same for those who are physically disabled. In fact, for the physically disabled, bicycles will not be a useful resource at all. Sen calls individuals’ diverse abilities to convert resources into the means for a good life “conversion factors”.

Heterogeneity in one's ability to convert resources stems from factors that are external or internal to the individual. As the bicycle example shows, some conversion factors – such as one's physical abilities, genetic makeup, and so forth – are internal to the individuals. On the other hand, some conversion factors originate from what is external to the individual, and such external conversion factors can be further divided into two categories: social and non-social factors. Socially originated external conversion factors, for instance, affect how or whether a marginalized minority can convert the available resources for their purposes. In a country that does not allow women to be employed, for instance, women cannot convert an opening for a position at a factory (resource and opportunity) into useful means (employment). Non-socially originated external factors, on the other hand, are the product of natural external circumstances such as the epidemiological risk of a certain region (Sen, 1992).

Third, and more importantly, none of the existing ways of thinking about the end of development saw development holistically. That is, for Sen, neither utilitarians nor resourcists adequately acknowledged that the development of a country entails not just facilitating the economic growth of the country but also fostering the social and political development of the society. In *Development as Freedom*, Sen (1999) notes the ways in which political freedom deeply intersects with the economic growth or wellbeing of a country :

In the light of the more foundational view of development as freedom, the way of posing the question tends to miss the important understanding that these substantive freedoms (that is, the liberty of political participation or the opportunity to receive basic education or health care) are among the *constituent components* of development.

Sen uses the phrase “development as freedom” – thus, the title of the book – to summarize this idea that, when it comes to the development of a country, one should not restrict its focus to



economic development but rather expand the areas of consideration to the broader development of individual freedoms, including political and social freedoms.

What then should be the end of development? Taking into consideration the issues of conversion factors, Sen argues that it is the expansion of substantive freedoms that should be the end goal of economic and social development. In other words, what development economists should be asking in regard to developing countries is not how to increase income or wealth, or individual wellbeing, or expand the set of resources that individuals differentially are able to utilize. Rather, what policymakers and economists should be asking in assessing the end of development economics is to what extent individuals are able to utilize substantive freedoms with which to live a life that they “have reason to value,” as Sen (1999) writes, “First, in the normative approach used here, substantive individual freedoms are taken to be critical. The success of a society is to be evaluated, in this view, primarily by the substantive freedoms that the members of that society enjoy.” In the next section, I will delve into the conceptual frameworks that Sen developed as a result of reconfiguring the end of development in this way.

### ***Section 1.2. Two Key Concepts: Functionings and Capabilities***

Upon finding none of the existing conceptual resources satisfactory in framing the ends of economic, social, and political development, Sen developed his own conceptual arsenal: *functionings* and *capabilities*. In this section, I will explain these terms, as well as illustrate how these concepts countered the limitations of utilitarian and resourcist thinking.

Before I begin to explain the technical definitions of these two concepts, a few points should be noted. Colloquially, one can use the word “capability” as a synonym for other words such as ability and capacity. In this project, however, since the notion of *capabilities* carries a

specific technical meaning, I will follow Manfred Liebel (2014) and use the italicized word *capabilities* to denote a concept that is unique to the CA. I will use the words “ability” and “capacity” in a colloquial sense to mean skills, talents, and proficiency. Similarly, the word *functionings* – treated here as a noun – will also be italicized throughout this dissertation.

*Functionings*, in short, are what one is able to do and be (Sen, 1999). The concept of *functionings* is, perhaps, where Aristotle’s inspiration in Sen’s thinking is most palpable. In Aristotelian philosophy, everything — including humans — has a function. The function of a knife, for instance, is to cut things while carpenters’ function is to build furniture and houses (Ross & Brown, 2009).

Standardly, for Aristotle the function of a thing or being is two-fold: what it is 1) capable of doing and 2) designed to achieve (Nagel, 1972). Take, for instance, a hammer that is large enough for one to sit on. One can technically sit on it and use it as a chair, but that is not what that particular object *qua* hammer is originally designed to achieve. What a hammer is meant to achieve is breaking things up or driving nails in because that is what it is capable of AND intended to accomplish. Thus, *the* function of something is intricately related to what it is capable of doing and what it is designed to fulfill.

In Sen’s notion of *functionings*, however, the intertwined nature of capacity and its intended use dissolves, and only the notion of capacity remains, which allows one to have multiple *functionings* as long as they are capable. Moreover, in contrast to Aristotle who viewed the notion of function as applicable to animate and inanimate objects, Sen’s notion of *functionings* applies only to humans.<sup>3</sup> In the context of development, one prototypical example of a *functioning* is literacy. Being literate means being able to read or being a reader, and literacy

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<sup>3</sup> Martha Nussbaum, another contributor of the CA whose works this dissertation project will not touch upon recently started applying the CA to animal affairs (e.g., Nussbaum, 2011).

is something that does not define one's existential role. Moreover, one can have a *functioning* of literacy while having other *functionings* in their arsenal.

Importantly, *functionings* serve as an important tool for pursuing a life that one reflectively endorses. In other words, what one is capable of doing and being foregrounds what life options one is able to entertain and pursue. Without acquiring a functioning of *literacy*, for instance, it would certainly be implausible for one to seek a variety of career choices such as teaching and nursing, as well as other non-career-related ways of living such as being civically engaged as a citizen of a contemporary democratic society by reading news articles, opinion pieces, and so forth.

The second concept central to Sen's formulation of the CA is *capabilities*. A *capability*, in short, is a "set of such *functionings* n tuples, representing the various alternative combinations of functionings from which the person can choose one combination (Sen, 1992, p. 50)." Furthermore, it "reflects a person's freedom to choose between alternative lives (*functioning* combination). (Sen, 1992, p. 83)." One way to illustrate the connection between these two points is to understand the analogy Sen draws from the real-income analysis in *Inequality Reexamined*.

Imagine Person A and B who each receive a gift card worth 20 US dollars. If one considers only the dollar amount of their gift cards, Person A is as well-off as Person B. The real-income analysis, on the other hand, offers two alternative methods of income comparison: the selection view and the option view. The selection view evaluates whether Person A or B is better off based on the nature of the bundles or goods that they buy with their respective gift card. Thus, for instance, let us say that Person A buys 20 US dollars' worth of silver while Person B purchases gold with the equivalent gift card. If the price of gold increases while that of

silver remains the same or decreases, Person A would be considered better off, compared to Person B.

The option view, on the other hand, posits that Person A is better off compared to Person B if what Person A can obtain entails what Person B can purchase with their gift card. With the current example, then, imagine a completely different scenario in which Person B's gift card is usable in only a few select stores while Person A's gift card can be used in any store. With this further constraint, Person A's gift card can help Person A acquire not only the items from the store of their choice but also what Person B can obtain in their limited options of stores. According to the option view, then, Person A is better off than Person B on the ground that a bundle given to Person A gives more choice than Person B's bundle.<sup>4</sup>

The notion of *capabilities* functions in an analogous way. That is, *capabilities* reflect the freedom to choose among the alternative combinations of the bundle of *functionings*. In the context of education, let us say, for instance, that Student A has the following bundle of *functionings*:

Student A's bundle of *functionings* = (being able to solve logic problems, having time to study, being able to read, being able to do advanced calculus)

By combining the *functionings* of 1) being able to solve logic problems; 2) having time to study; and 3) being able to read, it can be said that Student A can have the *capability* to apply for law schools. Student A can also bundle up the *functionings* of a) having time to study; 2) being able to read; and 3) being able to do advanced calculus and have the *capability* to apply for engineering programs. In the context of development economics, the relevant *functionings* are

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<sup>4</sup> This gift card example is mine, not Sen's.

being well-nourished, having housing, having access to healthcare, and so forth, which allow one to exercise the *capability* to escape premature death. Sen (1999) notes:

A person's "capability" refers to the alternative combinations of *functionings* that are feasible for her to achieve. *Capability* is thus a kind of freedom: the substantive freedom to achieve alternative *functionings* combinations (or, less formally put, the freedom to achieve various lifestyles). [emphasis is mine]

A few key points must be noted. First, one of the central foci of the CA is the notion of agency. As the above definition of *capabilities* implies, *capabilities* are something that an agent can *choose* to utilize, and thus, the role of one's agency is integral to the concept of *capabilities*. The fact that the CA centralizes individual agency, perhaps, represents Sen's dissatisfaction with, and response to, prior development thinking, which tends to view the citizens in developing countries as passive recipients of resource provision or "fine-tuned targeting" (Sen, 1999, p. 19). In contrast, the CA sees enhancing "the ability of people to help themselves and also to influence the world" (Sen, 1999, p. 18) as a central matter of development.

Thus, the notion of *capabilities* assumes individual choice or agency and presents an individual as someone who "acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives." (Sen, 1999, p. 19) As the later section of this chapter will reveal, the CA's emphasis on agency presents a problem when one tries to apply it to educational matters, in particular, to issues pertaining to educating children.

The second point to note is that Sen saw the CA as a tool to resolve the issue of the conversion factor. In the resourcist thinking, in particular, equality often meant equality of resources. However, as discussed above with the example of allocating bicycles to two differently abled individuals, the provision of equal resources does not yield equal *functionings* because of the above-mentioned conversion factors issues.

The primary benefit of concepts such as *functionings* and *capabilities* is that they avoid the issue of conversion factors. The CA's primary question is whether individuals with diverse abilities to utilize various resources are given the same set of *capabilities* — opportunities and freedom to achieve valuable combinations of *functionings* that help them to achieve a life that they have reason to value. In the bicycle example above, then, the CA-informed policymaker or economist would ask whether both the able-bodied and physically disabled have the tools and conditions with which to achieve the *functioning* of being able to move from Point A to B fast, even if the means to achieve such *functionings* may look different for each one of them.

The last and, perhaps, the most crucial point to be noted about the CA is that it not only reconfigures the ends of development but also provides a normative framework to consider *what ought to be measured* in evaluating the success of development effort. Note that different ends motivate the use of different evaluative metrics. Sen notes:

Each evaluative effort can, to a great extent, be characterized by its informational basis: the information that is needed for making judgments using that approach and — no less important — the information that is 'excluded' from a direct evaluative role in that approach. (Sen, 1999, p. 56)

To wit, setting X as the end of development shapes a normative consideration as to what information to include and exclude in its evaluative judgment.

Take, for instance, utilitarianism, whose primary concern is to maximize the total sum of utilities, which could be defined as subjective or objective well-being, or one's score on the happiness index. Under the utilitarian framework, the success of the development endeavor requires calculating and estimating whether such an endeavor yields the largest sum of total utilities. Thus, the informational basis with which to assess the success of such an approach concerns utilities to the exclusion of other potentially relevant information, such as whether

one's basic human rights are secured in a given country. Similarly, the evaluation of the resourcist approach would focus on the metrics related to resource provision, not on the information related to subjective well-being, for instance.

The CA, which envisions the ends of development as the expansion of substantive freedom, promotes measuring the provision of *capabilities*, that is, the extent to which people are given various valuable *functionings*, and thus, the freedom to pursue a life that they have reason to value. In other words, the relevant informational basis in the CA is *capabilities* and *functionings*.

The fact that the CA *is* a normative framework of evaluative measurement is perhaps most evident in the Human Development Index (HDI) developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Contrary to the previous paradigm, which construed GNP or GDP to be the primary proxy for the success of development effort, HDI included Sen's normatively motivated way to understand the extent to which a development effort has been successful in developing countries. In the current version, the HDI consist of three dimensions – long and healthy life, education, and a decent standard of living – which together represent a composite of valuable *functionings* that development endeavor should deliver to the citizens of developing countries (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.).

One should note, however, that the CA itself does not specify what exact metrics to include in its evaluative measurement. That is, it merely provides a framework for *what kind of things to consider relevant* and argues only that certain important *capabilities* should be included in the assessment metrics. Sen's iteration of the CA, in particular, avoids identifying a complete set of *capabilities* relevant for the success or failure of development economics. Sen only leaves a vague note by writing:

The substantive freedoms include elementary *capabilities* like being able to avoid such deprivations as starvation, undernourishment, escapable morbidity and premature mortality, as well as the freedoms that are associated with being literate and numerate, enjoying political participation and uncensored speech **and so on** [emphasis is mine]. (Sen, 1999, p. 36)

As one can see in this quote, Sen provides an outline of what sort of things to measure but does not delve into specifying the list. In other words, the CA is not a theory of measurement per se. Rather, it is merely a normative framework of measurement in development economics.

One may note that Martha Nussbaum, a political philosopher who brought Sen's CA into the arena of political philosophy and especially a theory of justice, enumerates ten Basic *Capabilities*, which consist of life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination, and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one's environment (Nussbaum, 2007; Nussbaum, 2011). It should be noted, however, that this list is more or less a product of Nussbaum's derivative work inspired by the CA and thus, does not imply that the CA itself provides an exact specification as to what ought to be measured.

While it is possible that Nussbaum's contributions may lay a promising ground for answering the ultimate question, "What ought to be measured in assessing the success of the development effort?," it would be premature to conclude that the discussion is over or that the CA indeed offers a normative *theory* of measurement in development economics. As far as Sen's original formulation is concerned, the CA merely offers a normative framework as to *what sort of things should be measured* when it comes to assessing the fruitfulness of the development endeavor.

One final point to be noted in this project is that I am *not* using the CA as a framework for interpersonal comparison or as theory of justice. It is indeed noteworthy that Sen himself wrote extensively on using the CA, and in particular, the notion of *functionings* and *capabilities*



as a means to theorize on what informational basis is needed to assess the degree to which justice is realized within a given society (e.g., Sen, 1992; Sen, 2008; Sen, 2010). To borrow Elizabeth Anderson’s framing, the CA articulates what ought to be the metric of distributive justice (Anderson, 2010). However, it should also be acknowledged that the CA was, and has been, a normative framework of measurement in development economics, and more broadly, public policy, especially in the earlier iterations of Sen’s works. That is, the CA offered insights as to what kind of things ought to be measured if one is to understand the success or failure of public policies. These two divergent ways to utilize the CA are not entirely separate, as the success of development effort or public policies may be related to the considerations of distributive justice.

That being said, however, in this dissertation project, I will focus primarily on the CA as a normative framework for educational measurement. The end goal of this dissertation is *not* to think through what information needs to be collected to understand the state of educational justice. Rather, it is to utilize the CA to inquire and understand what kind of information is needed if one is to evaluate the success or failure of the education system and institutions, as discussed in the introductory chapter. For this reason, the project will not touch upon using the CA as a tool for interpersonal comparison or for assessing the state of educational justice.

## **Section 2. Extending the Capability Approach to the Arena of Education**

Sen’s CA was a welcome innovation not only in the field of development economics but also in the area of education studies, which is perhaps attributable to the fact that access to education has been an important facet of the development effort. Education studies scholar Caroline Hart notes, “The capability approach offers an alternative paradigm for thinking beyond

access to education and for considering the potential for individual freedoms both *in* and *through* education (Hart, 2012).”

In this section, I will provide a brief overview of the scholarships in education studies that Sen’s CA gave rise to. The purpose of laying out such a review is two-fold: the first goal is to introduce the existing scholarly endeavor to apply the CA to education. The second and more pertinent goal is to highlight what has been crucially missing in current scholarly discourse: recognizing the CA as a normative framework of measurement and extending it to educational measurement.

Before introducing the ways in which scholars of education have used the CA to talk about the issues pertaining to education, I shall first note that Sen’s own reflections on education is quite limited. In his major works such as *Development as Freedom* and *Inequality Reexamined*, education is mentioned only as a feature of the substantive freedoms (introduced in the previous section), which development efforts should aim to provide or expand for those in developing countries. Sen himself does not provide any further commentaries on education.

In Madoka Saito’s interview with Sen, for example, when probed to comment on the relationship between education and the CA, Sen merely remarked, “The child when it grows up must have more freedom. So, when you are considering a child, you have to consider not only the child’s freedom now, but also the child’s freedom in the future.” He further reiterated, “I think the main argument for compulsory education is that it will give the child when grown up much more freedom and, therefore, the educational argument is a very future-oriented argument (Saito, 2003)” For Sen, it is clear that education is an important mechanism through which individuals acquire *functionings* and substantive freedoms to achieve a life that they endorse, but he does not offer any further insights beyond making this point.

Thus, the view that Sen provides with respect to the relationship between the CA and education is limited to the idea that access to education is an important determinant of the child's future freedom. One might be tempted to turn to Nussbaum, who has written relatively more on education and the CA, but her engagement with education is also narrow in the sense that her discussion on educational matters — in particular, women's (literacy) education — does not go beyond the issue of access to education.

However, more can and should be inquired and discussed. For instance, what *functionings* should education provide aside from literacy and numeracy? What exactly should education as a basic *capability* entail? The absence of Sen and Nussbaum's in-depth effort to talk about educational issues provides an apt opportunity for education scholars to focus on extending the CA to the field of educational studies.

The ways in which scholars of education studies grappled with applying the CA to education can be broadly categorized into three groups: the first group replaces development economics in the original theory with education and asks, "How does education enhance freedom?" An exemplary work of this kind can be found in Pedro Flores-Crespo's work in which he carefully unpacks how exactly knowledge acquisition expands one's freedom (Flores-Crespo 2007, 45-65).

The second group of education scholarship that the CA gave rise to is concerned with situating education as a basic *capability*, i.e., conceptualizing "the *capability* to be educated." This is a rather straightforward application, given that Sen himself also saw education as a basic *capability*. A number of questions remain, however. One area of inquiry that seems under-explored by other education scholars deals with identifying the scope of education as a basic *capability*. It seems, for instance, reasonable to construe basic literacy education as a basic

*capability*, given that elementary literacy serves as a *functioning* that helps one achieve other pertinent *capabilities* such as the *capability* to participate in democracy (assuming that civic participation involves reading things such as newspaper, history books, and so forth). On the other hand, however, a doctoral education in English literature does not seem to fit into the definition of basic *capability*: it would be a stretch if one made such an argument. Thus, the question arises: what constitutes education *qua* a basic *capability*?

The third group consists of scholars who utilizes the CA as a means to think through the issues of social or educational justice. Scholars such as Mary Walker and Elaine Unterhalter write on such issues as gender disparity within education and attempt to articulate these issues of social justice, using the framework provided by the CA. In particular, Walker and Unterhalter argue that the CA is particularly suited to talk about the issues of education because its sensitivity to conversion factors can be translated into the sensitivity to learner diversity and the subsequent inequalities that the diversity of students produces:

Learners differ in intersecting dimensions. These include personal differences such as enthusiasm for academic study or artistic ability; environmental differences, such as wealth or whether children live in a society with a history of education inequalities such as the UK or greater equalities such as Sweden; and social differences, for example, the extent to which race, ethnic, or gender differences are salient with regard to the experience of education. There is nothing inherently unequal about difference or the intersection of differences, but differences can become inequalities. (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007)

Perhaps, one prototypical example of inequalities produced by learner diversity would be education for students with disabilities. In the absence of disability-adjusted teaching, no matter how equal the resources given to individual students may be, students with visual impairment, auditory difficulties, and so forth would never be on an equal playing field with their non-disabled peers. Scholars such as Walker and Unterhalter see these issues as a matter of

conversion factors and envision the CA to be an effective tool to address the various issues of social justice within education.

One perspective that is often neglected by these existing scholarly endeavors to apply the CA to education is recognizing it as a normative framework for measurement. As discussed in the earlier section, the CA in its inception was both a normative tool to re-conceptualize the ends of development — which gave rise to new conceptual resources such as *functionings* and *capabilities* — and to reconfigure the existing approach to measurement.

The heretofore scholarships on the CA and education, however, entirely lacks an appreciation of this second aspect of the CA. That is, the discourse thus far has focused exclusively on the former side of the CA without adequately attending to the latter yet still crucial aspect of the CA. Thus, one viable and under-explored way to apply the CA to education is to utilize it as a normative framework to reflect on what should be measured to assess the success of education.

This direction, I believe, opens up a fruitful line of inquiry for those who work at the intersection of the CA and education. What does an educational measurement normatively motivated by the CA look like? What would be the informational basis or metrics of such measurement, and why? How would it differ from the current paradigm of educational measurement? These are just some examples of the questions that one can ask in seeing the CA as the normative framework of educational measurement.

Pursing this line of inquiry is especially pertinent given the long-standing frustration over the Standardized Testing Paradigm shared by the public and education scholars. The public and scholars of education have long criticized standardized testing for reducing the idea of educational success to scoring high or meeting the minimum proficiency level on standardized

tests. Notably, the legitimacy of standardized testing as an educational measurement is often called into question because it is a commonly held belief, at least in the Western world, that yielding high scores on standardized tests does not equate to educational success.

This widely held criticism of using standardized tests as a proxy for educational success, in fact, raises the very question as to *what we mean by “educational success” to begin with*. Just in the same way that Sen redefined the success of development economics as the expansion of substantive freedom, it might be a productive endeavor to see how the CA’s perspectives can help us reconsider 1) what we mean by the phrase “the success of educational systems and institutions”; and 2) what should be measured when it comes to education *in light of such reconsideration*.

This poses an exciting new direction. However, before pursuing this promising line of inquiry, much needs to be clarified. In fact, there are, I would argue, two primary concerns that establishing the CA as a normative framework of educational measurement would raise. The first problem is what I call the “normative validity issue,” which calls for an alignment between the aim of education and the CA. The second difficulty that I attempt to resolve in this dissertation concerns children’s moral status as non-autonomous agents and points to the potential incompatibility between the CA, children, and K-12 education.

In addition to setting up the CA as a normative framework for educational measurement, the two issues addressed in this work question the fundamental assumption underlying the effort to extend the CA to education, namely that the CA is an adequate tool to talk about education. In the next section, I will unpack both problems in an attempt to present the motivation behind this project.

### **Section 3. The Two Problems**

The two problems that I attempt to address in this dissertation are similar in nature in that, without resolving them, it would be implausible to lay the foundation for using the CA as a normative framework for educational measurement. Furthermore, these two issues are also pertinent to other ways of applying the CA to education such that leaving them unresolved would call into question the foundations of the existing attempts made by other scholars in extending the CA to education. This section will be dedicated to illustrating these points. I begin by introducing the concept of normative validity and demonstrating how it relates to establishing the CA as a normative framework for educational measurement.

#### ***Section 3.1. The Normative Validity Issue***

What makes a measure such as the subjective well-being scale valid or invalid? In the field of psychometrics, validating a measure entails looking at the following aspects of the measure: 1) the content or purpose of the measure; 2) cognition (whether the respondent understands the survey questions as intended); 3) coherence (whether the survey or test is internally coherent, which indicates whether different items on the survey or test are measuring the same underlying construct)<sup>5</sup>; 4) correlation (whether the survey or test scores correlate with other relevant variables)<sup>6</sup>; and 5) consequence (whether there is any evidence that shows that

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<sup>5</sup> Imagine, for instance, a well-being measure that is obtained by administering a survey. One way to define internal coherence in this context would be to rely on Classical Test Theory and see whether each item on this survey correlates with the others as well as with the outcome score. If an item negatively correlates with one or more items, the survey is not internally coherent, raising the possibility that different items on the measure may be measuring different underlying constructs.

<sup>6</sup> With the example of a well-being measure, one's score on this measure should correlate with their scores on other closely related measure such as, say, a happiness measure.

test or survey response correlate with the desired consequences or outcomes).<sup>7</sup> In this section, I will delve into the first aspect, the content or purpose validity of a measure.

The content or purpose validity simply asks: do the contents or items in the measure align with what the measure is trying to measure? Imagine, for instance, that Paulina tries to lose weight by running every day. Every time she goes for a run, she weighs herself to track her weight and wears a smart watch to collect various kinds of information such as her heart rate, VO2 max, the duration of her run, and so on.

The amount of information that she gathers is indeed massive, but if Paulina is to come up with a measure to track her progress in losing weight, only certain items would qualify for inclusion in this measure, and those are the ones that pertain to her weight. That is, a measure that includes the items irrelevant to weight, such as her heart rate, would be *invalid* because of the misalignment between the items in the measure and what the measure is trying to measure: the progress of her weight loss journey. Conversely, a measure whose items all pertain to her weight such as her BMI and weight would answer to the requirement of content validity since there is a clear association between what the items in the measure are about and what the measure is trying to achieve.

As this example illustrates, content validity is closely aligned with the *purpose* of the activity that motivates the measure. If the purpose of Paulina's daily exercise is to improve her cardiovascular fitness, items such as her heart rate recovery and VO2 max, would certainly be relevant and render her weight an irrelevant item that makes her measure *invalid*.

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<sup>7</sup> The most straightforward example to illustrate this point is a driving license examination. Imagine that there are various items on the driving test. If passing the exam and obtaining the license would mean causing few or no car accidents, the consequent validity of the driving license exam is met because the outcome correlates with the relevant consequences; if, however, there is no correlation between those who pass the exam and those who cause accidents, then, the driving license exam is said to not meet the consequence validity.



In the article titled “Good education in an age of measurement,” education scholar Gert Biesta further explains the need to align the purpose of the activity and what is being measured. According to Biesta, in short, what makes a measure normatively valid — that is, what normatively motivates or justifies the measure — is the alignment between the purpose of the activity and the items in the measure. When it comes to educational measurement, Biesta argues, one needs to first identify what the purpose of education is in order to evaluate the validity of any proposed form of educational measurement.

What, then, is the purpose of education, and how does it align with the CA, if we are to use the CA as a framework for educational measurement as an alternative to the existing Standardized Testing Paradigm? In other words, what is the normative validity of the CA-inspired measure of education, if one is to apply it to educational measurement? If one is to see the CA as a normative framework for educational measurement, answering this question regarding the normative validity of the CA would be imperative.

Furthermore, even if one’s agenda lies somewhere else than using the CA as a framework for educational measurement, examining the relationship between the aim of education and the CA would still be necessary in extending it to education. Remember that, in order to develop the CA itself, Sen had to reconfigure or clarify the ends of economic development first. That is, the CA came to have conceptual resources such as *capabilities* and *functionings* only because Sen first identified the ends of development as the expansion of individual substantive freedoms.

If one is, then, to extend a conceptual toolkit that was developed only in the context of development economics to other arenas such as education, it would be reasonable to ask how and why such conceptual resources are fit to talk about education to begin with. That is, any attempt to apply the CA to education would more or less require clarifying the aim of education and how

such an aim accommodates the conceptual framework offered by the CA. Surprisingly, the existing scholarship on the CA and education lacks this line of investigation, and thus, one contribution that this dissertation makes would be to fill in such a lacuna.

### ***Section 3.2. The Issue of Children's Moral Status***

The other issue that comes with construing the CA as a framework for educational measurement concerns children's moral status as non-autonomous agents and whether or not the very notion of *capabilities* is suitable for talking about children. To recapitulate, *capabilities* are a combination of *functionings* that one chooses to utilize and represent the extent of freedom one has in utilizing alternative combinations of *functionings* and living a life that they reflectively endorse. As noted before, the notion of individual agency as one's expression of choice is crucial for the CA as Sen emphasizes:

The use of the term “agency” calls for a little clarification. The expression “agent” is sometimes employed in the literature of economics and game theory to denote a person who is acting on someone's behalf ... I am using the term “agent” not in this sense, but in its older – and “grandier” – sense as someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well. (Sen, 1999, 19)

Thus, in order for the concept of *capabilities* to be applicable, the agent in question has to be a person who is capable of autonomous choice-making. Children, however, are standardly thought of as non-autonomous agents, which potentially makes them an inappropriate target of the consideration of the CA.

This concern is shared by at least two political philosophers. In talking about the appropriateness of utilizing the CA as a means of discussing justice for children, political philosopher Collin MacLeod writes:

Trying to think about justice-salient advantage in terms of the sets of choices children have to achieve functionings is clearly inadequate if children lack the moral capacities to negotiate choice sets effectively and meaningfully. For instance, interpersonal comparisons should not focus on whether children can choose to have a secure and loving family. (Or more clumsily whether a secure and loving family is a member of the capability set they have freedom to access.) They should focus on whether children *have* a secure and loving family. Similarly, what matters for children is not the opportunity to achieve health or being able to have emotional attachments but *being* healthy and *having* emotional attachments. (MacLeod, 2010, 185)

As McLeod argues, when it comes to the provision of certain goods to children, the pertinent issue is not whether or not children have opportunity to utilize something, but rather, whether or not they *have* or *are given* that goods. Elizabeth Anderson, a prominent political philosopher, echoes this view as she writes:

First, with respect to children, the relevant standard of justice is in terms of functionings, not capabilities. Children lack the autonomy to choose for themselves. Bare opportunities are of no value to children unless adults in their lives place them in those opportunities. (Anderson, 2010, 84)

Anderson and McLeod's thinking can be summarized as follow: 1) children are not exercisers of mature autonomy or agency; and 2) the notion of *capabilities* requires one's exercise of agency and autonomy; and therefore, 3) *capabilities* are not an appropriate concept to apply to children.

In the literature on the CA and education, on the other hand, the issue of children's agency or the lack thereof has not been investigated as a serious concern. Mary Walker and Elaine Unterhalter (2007), for instance, only briefly notes, "In education we are the agents of our own learning, the agents or instruments of the learning (or failure to learn) of others, and the recipients of others' agency." Walker and Unterhalter's idea that children are the agents of their own learning experiences and their subsequent implication that the CA is, therefore, an adequate framework to examine educational issues requires more investigation.

To be fair, I believe that it is not wrong to say that children are the agents of their own learning experiences. If I was a child who hates math and is tasked to do math homework, I can certainly choose to put my minimum effort, be as lazy as I wish to be, and write in all the wrong answers. This way of exercising agency, however, would be a superficial one for the following reasons. First, as long as I am a child and the government requires every child to clear a minimum proficiency in math, my resistance (i.e., my exercise of agency as a learner) would not matter – I would still be required to take required math courses. Thus, I cannot choose to not learn math in the first place. Math education is simply not an optional opportunity like a literacy education for illiterate adult women. As MacLeod said, math education in this context is not something a child can choose to utilize or not; it is simply something that a child has or not. This consideration gives a *prima facie* legitimacy to McLeod and Anderson’s skepticism that the very notion of *capabilities* might be an inadequate conceptual toolkit to think through the issues surrounding children and their education.

There are, however, two issues with these political philosophers’ contention. First, their assertion that children standardly lack autonomy seems to lack nuance. In particular, their view of children as non-autonomous agents lacks careful consideration. The consensus thus far in political philosophy that children lack autonomy and agency stands partly because no philosopher has systematically called into question the distinction between adults as autonomous beings and children as non-autonomous beings. On what grounds can one say that children, including those with advanced decision-making abilities, cannot exercise agency?

Notice how this is an issue relevant not only for the current project of reformulating the CA as a framework of educational measurement but also for the overall endeavor to render the CA into a tool for discussing children and educational issues. The heretofore scholarship on the

CA and education has completely missed this step of ensuring that the CA is an appropriate tool to articulate the issues of education. Thus, the second contribution made by this dissertation is to investigate the relationship between CA and children's moral status.

In the chapters that follow, I will address these two buckets of questions, starting with children's moral status.

## Chapter 3: The Capability Approach and Children's Moral Status

### Introduction

Scholars of the Capability Approach (hereafter 'the CA') and education often use the CA and, in particular, the notion of *capabilities* as a conceptual toolkit to think through the educational issues surrounding children. Such utilization, however, was recently called into question by two prominent political philosophers, Elizabeth Anderson and Colin Macleod. To recapitulate, their arguments are as follows: First, one's exercise of agency and autonomy is ingrained in the notion of *capabilities*. Second, children are not autonomous beings by virtue of being children, and it is reasonable not to assign full agency to children. Third, therefore, the idea of *capabilities* should not be used when it comes to children. If one is to use the CA to discuss children's education, such discussion should be limited to children's *functionings*.

In contrast to Anderson and Macleod, some philosophers of education argue that the CA can still be used to talk about social justice issues surrounding children so long as it pertains to children's *evolving capacities*. Scholars such as Jérôme Ballet, Mario Biggeri, and Flavio Comim (2011) claim that the discussion of *capabilities* is relevant to children as long as the *capability* in question corresponds to children's capacity. Thus, for instance, when a child already possesses the capacity to understand what kind of outfits they like and to choose which clothes to wear, the *capability* to select outfits of their choice would certainly be a relevant topic of discussion for the CA.

Following this line of thinking, Ballet, Biggeri, and Comin suggest the idea of *evolving capabilities* — the idea that the *capabilities* pertinent to children would expand as their related *capacities* evolve. Although Ballet, Biggeri, and Comin call their idea "the evolving

Capabilities Approach,” I will focus on their point about the correspondence between the child’s capacity and *capabilities* and call their idea “the *capability*-capacity correspondence thesis.”

The thesis of this chapter is two-fold. First, both views are misguided in different ways. On the one hand, Anderson and Macleod’s claim fails to account for cases in which children legitimately deserve to make autonomous decisions. On the other hand, Ballet, Biggeri, and Comin’s *capability*-capacity correspondence thesis fails to consider the cases in which the *capabilities* provision ought to take place *even when the development of the relevant capacity has not caught up with the capability in question*. I will spend the first half of the present chapter closely examining each of these theses. For the second half of the chapter, I present children’s choice of gender pronouns in a gender-affirming environment as an example that challenges both views. Finally, I will propose domain-based normative theorizing on children’s agency. The conclusion I aim to draw for the purposes of this dissertation project is to argue that the CA is partially compatible with children’s moral status, and therefore, that it can be used as a framework to normatively consider the issues of measurement in education.

### **Section 1. The Capability Approach and Agency for Self-Determination**

The first point that I shall introduce for the purpose of this chapter is the CA’s emphasis on individual agency and self-determination. As previously introduced, Sen himself was deeply critical of the development economists’ tendency to view those in developing countries as passive recipients of government or international aid. In *Development as Freedom*, Sen (1999) clarifies, “I am using the term ‘agent’ ... in its older — and ‘grander’ — sense as someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives...” As introduced above, the technical definition of *capabilities* is “that which allows one to exercise their agency or choice and develop functionings relevant to one’s

reflectively endorsed life.” In other words, a *capability* is something that one *chooses* to utilize or exercise in order to live a life that one has reason to value.

The CA’s focus on individual agency and self-determination is most evident in Martha Nussbaum’s works, such as *Women and Human Development*. Nussbaum’s focus on adult women’s self-determination makes sense. As both Sen and Nussbaum acknowledge, women in developing countries are those whose agency for self-determination has been neglected and undermined across the board, despite their moral status as autonomous adults capable of making considered judgments. In this way, one’s agency for self-determination is integral to the concept of *capabilities* and the CA itself.

Given the centrality of agency for self-determination in the CA, Anderson and Macleod’s contention that the notion of *capabilities* does not apply to children might make sense, especially given that philosophers and other adults do not standardly think of children as beings who can exercise autonomous decision-making on the grounds that they lack a full capacity to exercise considered and responsible judgments. When children receive medical care, for instance, they do not ordinarily assume responsibilities for important decision-making – the critical decisions are often made by caretaking adults *on behalf of children*.

In fact, Anderson and Macleod seem to be operating under what David Archard (2015) calls the “basic view,” which states: “children and adults enjoy a different moral and political status... Adults can and should be permitted to make choices as to how they lead their lives. By contrast, children cannot and should not be permitted to make such choices.” For Anderson and Macleod, children cannot and should not be granted the rights or choices for self-determination, and they make the following two-fold arguments. First, the notion of *capabilities* does not apply



to children. Second, regarding children, the only relevant concept that the CA can offer is *functionings*.

Anderson and Macleod's view is not entirely without merit. First, it is somewhat unreasonable to say that children should have a choice about whether or not to pursue a basic education. As argued by moral and political philosophers who write about children's rights, all children should *have* some basic education such that they can fully enjoy, for instance, an open future (Feinberg, 1980). This consideration renders phrases such as "children's *capability* to be educated" (e.g., Terzi, 2007) inappropriate and oxymoronic. As Macleod (2010) argues, what is important is not that children have the choice to be educated but that they *are* educated.

Second, Sen himself seems to agree with Anderson and Macleod. When discussing the relevance of the notion of human rights to the social justice issues pertaining to children, Sen (2007) writes:

And yet there is a special problem in the case of children, since they do not, frequently enough, take their own decisions. If rights are interpreted in terms of freedoms that the rightsholders should have, their usefulness must depend on how those freedoms are exercised. But can children take their own decisions? If the application of human rights to children must involve the children themselves taking well-considered decisions on the exercise of those freedoms then we would seem to be on the threshold of a manifest contradiction. Can children really take these decisions?

Liebel (2014) characterizes Sen's stance as a perspective that focuses on children's lack of internal capacity for decision-making. Sen's view of children as those who lack decision-making capacities and, therefore, autonomy is, in fact, future-oriented. That is, both Sen and Nussbaum hold the view that children should be granted certain decision-making rights in so far as doing so facilitates their capacity to exercise autonomy *in the future* (Saito, 2003; Dixon & Nussbaum, 2012).

Some scholars of the CA beg to disagree. Specifically, Liebel, Ballet, Biggeri, and Comin argue that children should be given the *capability* or the right to make decisions in accordance with their capacity and maturity. The basis of their claim rests on the Article 5 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter ‘UNCRC’), which states:

States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights, and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, **in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child**, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention. [emphasis added] (The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1990)

Article 5 of UNCRC articulates two entitlements. The first is that children should be afforded *some degree of agency*, and the second is that the degree of agency assigned to children shall be determined in accordance with their evolving capacities.

Borrowing inspirations from UNCRC’s Article 5, Liebel, Ballet, Biggeri, and Comin propose the notion of evolving *capabilities* for children, the idea that children ought to be granted certain *capabilities*, and, thus, agency for self-determination, in so far as the *capability* in question matches the child’s capacity. According to their views, a child, should not be given the *capability* to marry their elementary school sweetheart because they lack the capacity to think through the various consequences and responsibilities of marriage. On the other hand, they should, for instance, have the *capability* to dress however they like on the basis that they possess the ability to figure out the colors and styles they prefer. Ballet, Biggeri, and Comin (2011), in particular, call their stance the “weak self-determination principle.” In this way, the idea proposed by Liebel, Ballet, Biggeri, and Comin is grounded in the correspondence between the child’s capacity and *capabilities*.

The central claims of this chapter are two-fold. First, both the first and second groups of philosophers' arguments are limiting for different reasons. Second, instead of the weak, self-determination principle accompanying the abovementioned *capability*-capacity correspondence thesis, I endorse a version of the weak self-determination principle, which rests its claim on the domains, not the capacity, of children's decision-making. Specifically, I take inspiration from Sen's distinction between welfare and agency rights (Sen, 1982; Brighouse, 2003) and argue the following. First, children's agency for self-determination serves as the basis for certain welfare domains (self-determination welfare domains). Second, children should be afforded *capabilities* and be treated as authoritative in their decisions, at least for these self-determination welfare domains. For other domains concerning children, I propose utilizing Feinberg's concept of the "child's right to an open future" to delineate the areas in which children legitimately deserve agency. For issues that do not significantly affect children's access to an open future, I suggest that children should be afforded *capabilities* and, thus, agency for self-determination.

## **Section 2. The Basic View and The Capability-Capacity Correspondence Thesis**

One way to clarify the abovementioned "basic view" that Anderson and Macleod seem to hold is to understand the distinction between treating children's voices as authoritative or consultative. This is the distinction introduced in a paper, "How Should Children Be Heard?" by Harry Brighouse (2003). In the article, Brighouse defines authoritative treatment of people as follows: "Someone's view is regarded as authoritative when it is regarded as the view that must be taken as defining the person's interests for the purpose of decision-making." Thus, treating a child's voice over which cereal to have for breakfast as authoritative would mean respecting their voice as the definitive vote for the decision-making over which cereal to serve for breakfast.

In contrast, according to Brighouse, treating one's inputs as consultative would mean acknowledging their right to express their opinions while not treating them as the sole determinant of the decision-making at issue. Thus, with the example of which cereal to have for breakfast, treating the child's voice as consultative would mean allowing the child to express their preference while the caregiver takes into consideration their preference as well as other factors such as the nutritional profile of available options and makes the decision as the authority.

In general, Brighouse, as well as those who hold the basic view, seem to agree with one another that it is not children themselves but their guardians who bear the obligation to consider the child's best interests, take on the role of the authority, and make decisions over the matters that affect their children. As was the case for Sen, the basis of their contention is that children are non-autonomous beings who are not yet capable of responsibly making the decisions over issues that affect them. Brighouse (2003), in particular, takes the stance that "children can appropriately be viewed as having welfare rights, but not as having agency rights." For the issues concerning children's welfare, he writes, "...children's voices should be at most consultative."

With this distinction, then, it becomes clear that Anderson and Macleod seem to endorse not treating children as authoritative, and perhaps, treating them as consultative *at best*. Hence, as Macleod (2010) argues, what matters is not that children should have the choice or *capability* to receive a sufficient education but that they *have* it. The underlying idea here is that, while the child may be allowed to express whether or not they want to learn basic arithmetic, for instance, such preference shall not be treated as authoritative but consultative *at best*. Hence, they are still required to go to school and finish a basic math education. Children are agents in their own learning experiences in so far as they determine how hard they want to work

on their homework or for their upcoming final exam. However, they do not get to decide whether they receive the basic education in the first place.

One thing that is not clearly explained by philosophers like Anderson and Mcleod is whether they hold their views across *all* matters concerning children, including benign cases such as allowing children to pick which outfits to wear, or whether their views are limited to high-risk cases such as whether children receive basic education or life-saving medical treatment. What makes such an inference difficult is that discussion of their views is limited to providing children with essential *functionings*, such as giving them education and housing. That is, their considerations do not involve non-essential, choice-related issues, such as which snack to eat for the day. If one applies their basic view to *all* cases affecting children, then the implication is that children should be treated as consultative even when it comes to clothing, but such judgment seems unjustifiably paternalistic. As will be discussed in the conclusion, this is one of the reasons that I propose domain-based thinking when it comes to children's decision-making – that is, it could be the case that the basic view holds only for certain issues pertaining to children.

The *capability*-capacity correspondence thesis, on the other hand, asserts that the child should be given agency over matters for which the child possesses the relevant *capacities*. Thus, it takes the stance that children's voices should be treated as authoritative when it comes to issues for which the child has developed the relevant capacity. With the example of whether to receive a baseline education, it would be fair to say that children are not yet capable of thoroughly comprehending the ramifications of not receiving basic education. Thus, it would be reasonable to presume that even the proponents of the *capability*-capacity correspondence thesis

would not endorse letting a child choose whether or not to undertake a minimally sufficient level of education.

Such proponents, however, may support allowing children to express agency on matters that affect them and for which they already have the relevant capacities, such as choosing which outfits to wear to a school that does not require school uniforms. Choosing clothes requires one only to have the ability to decide what one likes to wear. Thus, treating a child's preference merely as consultative would make little sense. For matters with which the child's relevant capacity has caught up, the advocates of the *capability*-capacity correspondence thesis would endorse treating children's voices and agency as authoritative, not consultative.

### **Section 3. The Problems with the Basic View and the *Capability*-Capacity Correspondence**

#### **Thesis**

I contend that both schools of thought are limited in different ways, and the considerations regarding their respective limitations motivate revising these existing frameworks to consider to what extent children's agency ought to be respected. First, as Archard (2015) argues, the basic view suffers from what he calls the "gradation problem" as well as the "threshold problem." In short, assigning adults and children to distinct moral categories may not be justifiable for the following reasons. First, the threshold between who qualifies as adults and who counts as children, which often depends on age, is arbitrary and not based on well-grounded consideration of the actual characteristic difference between adults and children (threshold problem).

Second, both among children and adults, there is a variation in maturity, the ability to think through the consequences of their actions, and in the overall capacity to exercise autonomy.

Given the in-group variation in maturity, it is hardly justifiable to assign autonomy and freedom to an adult who sits on the lower end of the spectrum for autonomy-related capacities while withholding such agency from a child highly capable of autonomous decision-making, solely on the ground that one is an adult and the other is a child (gradation problem).

More importantly, however, I argue that there is a counterexample that challenges the basic view, i.e., the idea that children's voices should be taken as consultative at most for children's welfare and agency interests. Namely, there are domains in which realizing welfare for children requires taking them as authoritative – taking them as merely consultative defeats the purpose of securing their welfare interests. One example of such welfare cases is children's choice of pronouns in a gender-affirming environment.

Before delving into this case, let me provide a few clarifications. First, the case is limited to giving children a choice to choose their own gender pronouns *in a gender-friendly environment*, in which there will be no negative repercussions for deviating from the traditional gender norms. I limit my case to this type of environment since the consideration regarding how much autonomy to assign to children regarding their pronoun choice would fundamentally differ in a situation that is hostile to anyone choosing a pronoun that does not match their sex assigned at birth.

In such a hostile climate, going against the existing gender norms – choosing a “they/them” pronoun, for instance – may result in varying degrees of harm such as social exclusion, bullying, and harassment, which, I believe, adults need to take into consideration to preserve the child's welfare interests such as their mental and physical health. In contrast, in a gender-affirming environment, consideration of such tradeoffs will not be necessary since departing from the traditional norms is not accompanied by any negative consequences.

Next, let me first explain the fundamental assumptions that underlie this challenge that I am about to present. First, consistent with the latest consensus on theories and scholarship on gender identity, I reject what is so-called the essentialist thinking (Harris, 2022), i.e., the idea that one’s biologically assigned features determine their gender identity.

The second assumption is that an individual’s gender identity cannot be decided based on the individual’s exterior characteristics, such as physique, voice, or how those surrounding the individual perceive them. Rather, gender identity is one’s “deeply felt, internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the person’s physiology or designated sex at birth” (World Health Organization, n.d.).

Empirical evidence supports these two assumptions. The latest metaanalysis by Gülgöz et al. (2019) on children’s gender-identity development demonstrates that, regardless of the length of gender socialization, transgender children overall show gender-identity development that mirrors that of their cisgender peers. In other words, they exhibit their gender identity through choosing toys, clothes, and hairstyles of their preferred gender, regardless of how long they have been socialized to conform to the gendered expectations of their assigned sex. Based on these studies, Harris (2022) concludes:

Indeed, they (children) sometimes distinguish explicitly between their own preferences and emotions and those of other people... it is possible that some children discover, especially in the context of playing and interacting with their peers, that they feel more ‘themselves’ when engaging in the activities associated with girls rather than boys, or vice versa... In sum, the proposal is that young children have the ability to recognize their own gender orientation by taking due note of what they like and dislike.

Third, having one’s choice of pronoun respected by others is an integral part of one’s welfare. A study conducted by Johnson et al. (2020), for instance, concludes, “Overall,



participants reported that rejecting and mixed parental behaviors contributed to a range of psychosocial problems such as depression and suicidal ideation, while supportive behaviors increased positive wellbeing.” Rejecting or mixed parental behaviors in this context include refusing to use a child’s preferred pronouns. On the other hand, supportive behaviors denote a range of gender-affirming actions, such as respecting and using the child’s choice of pronouns, as well as proactively educating oneself on trans issues. Finally, there is a near consensus among researchers and experts on LGBTQ youth that using a child’s chosen pronoun is one of the crucial ways to facilitate their wellbeing (e.g., Mallon, 2021).

Respecting a child’s chosen pronoun means treating their voice as the sole determinant of which gender pronouns to use when one refers to the child in the third person. Thus, it is treating their pronoun choice as authoritative, not consultative.

There is, therefore, at least one domain of welfare interest in which children should not be treated as consultative for a good reason. Treating their preferred pronoun as consultative would mean taking their voice and agency merely as one factor to consider, which amounts neither to being supportive of their gender identity nor to securing their welfare. The evidence suggests that treating them as authoritative, that is, treating their choice of gender pronouns as authoritative, is a crucial pillar in supporting gender-variant children’s welfare. Thus, Brighthouse and his proponents’ claim that securing children’s welfare requires only that their guardians and other related professionals, such as medical staff and social workers, treat the child’s voices as consultative cannot be entirely true. For at least one area of welfare issues, ensuring a child’s welfare necessitates treating their agency and voice as *authoritative*.

The case of children’s choice of pronouns in a gender-affirming environment also poses an interesting and compelling challenge to the *capability*-capacity correspondence thesis. In the

case of treating children’s choice of pronouns as authoritative, the *capability-capacity* correspondence thesis would require that the child at issue is capable of the actions related to choosing one’s pronouns such as articulating their internal gender-related experiences or, at the very least, explicitly requesting a pronoun change. Is this the right way to treat gender-variant children’s voices? The following consideration demonstrates that respecting a child’s pronouns need not require the child to have such capacities.

Consider, for instance, an 8-year-old child whose assigned sex at birth is female but exhibits behaviors that are congruent with those of transgender children. The child prefers, for instance, toys, clothing, hairstyles that are typically associated with boys, and most importantly, when asked if they are a boy, girl, or something else, the child’s answer is “boy” (Gülgöz et al., 2019). In general, the child under consideration rejects all appearances and behaviors traditionally associated with girls and demonstrates an overall preference for *being a boy*. At this stage of their maturity, however, the child is unable to articulate well where these deeply felt preferences are coming from. The child is also unable to explicitly express a preference for being referred to as a boy or “he/him.”

Translated into the conceptual landscape of the CA, the child at issue seems to already possess certain functionings as Harris (2022) and other scholars suggest. That is, the child in question already has some *functionings* such as those of knowing their deeply felt sense of gender identity, feeling more or less ‘at home’ with their preferred gender group, and so forth. The child, however, does not yet have other *functionings* such as those of knowing what social transition means, knowing that they can live a life as a boy, and so on.

In light of this hypothetical yet plausible situation, there are, perhaps, two responses that parents – especially those who take to heart their child’s welfare interests – can take. The first is

to follow the *capability-capacity* correspondence thesis and keep using the female pronoun when referring to the child until the child explicitly requests to use a different pronoun. The second is to offer the child two things. The first is the functionings that they are currently missing – i.e., knowing what social transition means and knowing that it is possible and respected. The second is the *capability* to live a life as a boy, i.e., the freedom to combine the existing *functionings* – 1) being aware of their deeply felt gender identity; and 2) knowing that socially transitioning is possible, safe, and respected – to live a *chosen* life as a boy as a result of exercising their own agency and self-determination.

There is a sense in which the latter response promotes or protects the child’s welfare while the former may not. Given the current state of affairs in which the majority of the population, including children, equates one’s biological features with their gender identity, it would be reasonable to assume that the child would not be aware that such a choice exists without an explicit education on the matter. In this situation, waiting until the child develops the capacity to request a pronoun change explicitly would mean implicitly embracing the cis-dominant culture and maintaining a gender-non-affirming structure. Doing so would then keep gender-variant children silent, confused, and excluded and would not lead to securing their welfare interests. The latter response, on the other hand, is consistent with the notion of informed consent — the child is informed first that they are allowed to change their pronoun and that they are being treated as authoritative in their choice, which is consistent with the abovementioned supportive parenting behaviors that empirical evidence demonstrates to procure children's welfare interests.

The case of children’s gender pronouns, I believe, illustrates a deep-seated issue with the *capability-capacity* correspondence thesis. Namely, one way in which children develop or

practice developing autonomy is by exercising agency on matters for which they have not developed the relevant capacity, making mistakes, reflecting on such mistakes, and learning from them. Granting children a *capability* — that is, the freedom to achieve their valued life path by combining available *functionings* — only for things for which the child possesses the relevant capacity is like telling a child that they cannot get a bicycle to ride until they are capable of riding a bicycle. Assuming that there is no one else to give a bicycle to the child, how can the child develop the ability to ride one without ever practicing riding a bicycle to begin with? We all learn how to ride a bicycle by first having the bicycle itself, practicing riding it, and repeating many rounds of trial and error.

With this consideration, it may not make much sense to claim that children should be afforded *capabilities* in accordance with their evolving capacities. As illustrated in the case of pronoun choice, there are certain cases in which children legitimately deserve agency for self-determination and, thus, *capabilities* even when they have not fully developed the relevant capacity for the issue at hand. The counterexample of gender pronouns for children demonstrates that neither the basic view nor the *capability*-capacity correspondence thesis sufficiently accounts for the issues related to the scope of children's agency and, thus, calls for revision.

Does this mean that children should be afforded agency on *all* matters? As Macleod's concern introduced earlier in this chapter demonstrates, it is clear that certain cases, such as basic education, do call for parents' or guardians' paternalistic decision-making. In this regard, I agree with Macleod's view that children should not get to choose whether to receive a basic education. Moreover, there are, in fact, many areas outside of education in which it is inappropriate to entrust agency to children at all, such as life-saving medical procedures (Archard, 2015). Considering cases such as children's gender pronouns and Macleod's arguments, perhaps, gives

rise to thinking about children's agency as *domain-specific* issues. That is, it might make more sense to distinguish the domains of concerns that require children's voices to be treated as authoritative from the domains in which children's preferences ought to be considered as consultative at best. So, what marks the difference between receiving a basic education and children's pronoun choice?

One possible direction to take is to use Feinberg's concept of children's rights to an open future to demarcate the domains (Feinberg, 2015). Notice that all the issues raised so far by Macleod and others that require paternalistic decision-making (e.g., *having* an education and a loving home or family and going through a life-saving medical procedure) are all related to securing children's open future. Without having a basic education, the child will likely not enjoy a future with a variety of career options. Having a loving home or family often forms the foundation for the child's ability to regulate their own emotions and relate to others in a healthy way. Thus, it is possible to argue that having a loving family opens the future for competent and healthy explorations of interpersonal connectedness while not having a caring family may not. Life-saving medical procedures determine whether or not the child has a life and thus a future to live.

Although Feinberg himself does not clearly define what he means by an "open future," we can broadly define it as the future in which the child functions as an autonomous and healthy adult. Without a basic education, for instance, it would become extremely challenging to navigate the modern world as an autonomous being, as Feinberg himself argued (1980). Similarly, the literature on children's attachment security and later life outcomes suggests that children generally suffer from various mental health problems, emotion regulation issues, and interpersonal difficulties without having a loving family and establishing healthy emotional

attachments (e.g., Nelson, Fox, & Zeanah, 2013; The Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, n.d.).

With this working definition of children's rights to an open future, it would make sense to claim that children do not get to choose to have a primary education, a loving home, and in the case of severe sickness, medical procedures. Rather, they must *have* these goods to secure their rights to live an open future in which they function as an autonomous and healthy adult.

Arguably, these considerations justify the basic view, the idea that children's opinions should be treated as consultative but not authoritative, only in so far as the issues at hand may significantly hinder the child from accessing their open future, depending on what kind of decisions are made. On the other hand, the case of children's pronoun choice in gender-affirming climates and other cases, such as choosing which extracurricular activities to pursue, do not significantly hinder the child's open future. These are the domains in which children should be afforded agency for self-determination such that they develop autonomy-related capacities for their open future.

However, whether or not children deserve agency on all non-open-future-related matters needs further consideration. When it comes to gender pronouns in gender-friendly environments, it is the case that children's voices ought to be treated as authoritative, and, by implication, the framework of the CA seems appropriate to use. However, there may be other cases that are not related to the child's open future and require paternalistic decision-making and, therefore, the consultative treatment of the child. Refining these areas of children's agency would be, perhaps, one area of inquiry that those who study children, and the CA can collectively pursue for further inquiries.

#### **Section 4. Summary**

In this chapter, I first introduced how the notion of agency because self-determination is integral to the concept of *capabilities*. Second, I introduced Anderson and Macleod's contention that, because the assumption of agency is inherent in the notion of *capabilities*, we should limit our discussion to *functionings* when it comes to children. I translated their claims to what Archard calls the "basic view" and further clarified what it entails, using Brighouse's distinction between the authoritative and consultative treatment of children. Namely, their view holds that children's voices on matters that affect them shall be treated as consultative at best because of their moral status as non-autonomous beings who are not yet capable of autonomous decision-making. Third, I presented an existing alternative idea, namely the *capability-capacity* correspondence thesis, the idea that children should be given *capabilities* for the areas for which they have developed the relevant capacities.

With this groundwork laid out, I demonstrated that neither thesis accounts for certain domains of agency that affect children, using the case of children's choice of gender pronouns in gender-affirming environments. In the final part of the chapter, I propose domain-based normative theorizing regarding how much agency to give to children on what issues. For the problems that impact the child's access to an open future, it may be appropriate to treat their voices as merely consultative on the grounds that paternalistic decision-making best protects the child's right to an open future. Thus, notions such as "the *capability* to receive education" would not be compatible with children's moral status as those whose open future needs to be protected. When it comes to non-open-future-related issues, however, the treatment of children as authoritative may be more reasonable, and thus, the notion of *capabilities* certainly applies to children on these matters.

## Section 5. What Does This All Mean?

The arguments presented in this chapter help articulate clarifications necessary for using the CA as a normative framework for educational measurement and, more broadly, using the CA to talk about K-12 education in general. The first is that open-future related issues are not an appropriate target of consideration for the CA. Thus, if one is to use the CA as a normative framework of measurement in education, it should not count things such as “the *capability* to be educated” and “the *capability* to be housed.” For open-future related matters, as Mcleod rightly points out, the main concern should be *functionings* rather than *capabilities*.

Second, when it comes to outlining the CA-inspired measure of education, one needs to pay close attention to the issue of agency and be clear as to whether an item being proposed to be included in such a measure is a *capability* – that is, the question regarding whether or not children are assigned agency – or a *functioning* that children ought to *have*, such as nutritious meals and education. If, for instance, an item in the CA-inspired measure of education asks whether or not a student has the freedom to choose the gender pronoun they go by in their school, that is a *capability* item. If, however, an item in such a measure is about whether or not children have a nutritious lunch in their school environment, the item is a *functioning* item. In this way, if one is to conceptualize a measure of education inspired by the CA, such a project would inevitably have to make clear which items in the measure belong to the *capability* category and which ones are *functioning* items.

The argument presented in this chapter addresses the skepticism posed by Anderson and Macleod with respect to the compatibility of the CA and children’s moral status, which sets the stage for the next inquiry of this dissertation project: the normative validity issue of the CA.



## Chapter 4: The aim of education and the Capability Approach

### Section 1. Introduction

The literature and debates surrounding the aim or aims of education are, in fact, vast and rife with controversy, and identifying *the* aim of education — whether it is autonomy, socialization, or flourishing — would be beyond the scope of this project.<sup>8</sup> Hence, instead of undertaking the daunting task of establishing a specific view regarding the aim of education, this chapter will tap into the two predominant schools of thought on this matter. The first group includes scholars who argue that flourishing is the aim of education (hereafter “the flourishing thesis” and “the flourishing scholars”). The second includes philosophers – particularly political philosophers who write about education – who claim that autonomy is the aim of education (hereafter “the autonomy thesis” and “the autonomy scholars”).

The purpose of this chapter is not to defend or justify one view over the other. Rather, I attempt to resolve the issue of normative validity and establish the alignment between the Capability Approach and the aim of education by demonstrating that both schools of thought are compatible with the frameworks offered by the Capability Approach.

Finally, the purpose of showing the intimate link between the purpose of education and the Capability Approach is two-fold. First, it should be noted that the Capability Approach was originally developed as a tool to think deeply about the purpose and measurement in *development economics*, a field that hardly overlaps with education. If one is to extend the theories, insights, and frameworks of the Capability Approach into the arena of education, one would have to defend such an extension in one way or another by clarifying how the Capability Approach, a tool of development economics, is compatible with the field of education at all. The

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<sup>8</sup> Defending a particular view of the aim of education itself would be a dissertation project on its own.

existing scholarship in philosophy of education that utilizes the insights of the Capability Approach to think about educational issues takes it for granted that the Capability Approach is compatible with education. One way to substantiate such an unexamined assumption is to show that the Capability Approach is useful for education because its aim is compatible with the Capability Approach.

The second reason that I am embarking on this inquiry pertains to the requirements for a valid measure. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the requirement of normative validity demands that a measure of X is aligned with the purpose of X. If, say, one is to design a measure inspired by the Capability Approach that helps us understand the “success of educational institutions and systems,” such a Capability-Approach-inspired measure ought to be shown to be compatible with the aim of education. This consideration, in turn, raises the question: in what way is the Capability Approach aligned with the aim of education? In what follows, I will first share a brief summary of the flourishing and autonomy theses, followed by an account on how each of the aims of education is compatible with the theoretical underpinnings of the Capability Approach.

## **Section 2. Two Possible Aims of Education: Background and Brief Summary**

In the past few decades, several contemporary philosophers of education have started arguing that flourishing is the aim of education. A scholar of flourishing, Kristján Kristjánsson (2017), calls this trend “the flourishing bandwagon.” As Brighouse (2006) notes, one central debate in this recent trend is on how to define flourishing. Scholars such as Kristjánsson, Randall Curren, and Danielle Allen take much of their inspirations from Aristotle in developing their conception of flourishing as the aim of education. Philosophers such as Brighouse and John

White, on the other hand, present definitions of flourishing that are divorced from the neo-Aristotelian literature: Brighouse, for instance, bases his arguments on education for flourishing around the concept of happiness while shrewdly avoiding presenting a clear definition of flourishing and noting the difficulty of doing so. John White (2011) seems to equate flourishing with the notion of well-being.

Although scholars disagree on: 1) what flourishing means; 2) how much of the conceptualization of flourishing to base on the Aristotelian notion of eudaimonia; and 3) what vision of education to promote, the advocates of the flourishing thesis commonly contend that flourishing is the aim of education. It should be noted here that, with the claim that flourishing is the aim of education, they do not usually mean that the purpose of education is to realize a flourishing life for students. Such a claim would indeed be implausible, given that one's chance of living a flourishing life is partly contingent upon external circumstances such as good or bad luck (Brighouse, 2016). Rather, what they usually mean by the flourishing thesis is that the aim of education is to give students the foundational skills, dispositions, experiences, and so forth to live a flourishing life.

Compared to the flourishing thesis, which is a relatively recent trend in the contemporary philosophy of education, the idea that cultivating autonomy is the primary goal of education has been a near consensus among the political philosophers of education for at least a few decades. However, just like the flourishing scholars, the autonomy scholars also present differing arguments with respect to what they mean by autonomy and different justifications as to why autonomy is the aim of education. In what follows, I will briefly describe how the autonomy scholars conceptualize and justify autonomy as the aim of education.

The diversity within the autonomy thesis can be explained in terms of how widely or narrowly the scope of the notion of autonomy is defined. The obvious strawman argument that the autonomy scholars wish to avoid advocating is what Gina Schouten (2018) calls “the thin autonomy thesis,” the idea that equates autonomy with merely choosing a way of living from the “menu” of life. In contrast to this “thin” notion of autonomy, several scholars propose what Schouten (2018) calls the “robust autonomy thesis.” The claim of the robust autonomy thesis is two-fold: first, autonomy means critically and deeply reflecting on one’s own values and ways of living by engaging with diverse viewpoints; second, the aim of education is to cultivate in children such capacities for reflection and well-considered choice.

The difference between the thin autonomy thesis and the robust autonomy thesis lies in their demandingness. While the first merely endorses offering options without necessarily requiring students to engage in deep reflections, the latter invokes a rather demanding requirement, namely to inculcate in students the internal capacity for deep and critical reflections. Daniel Weinstock (2021), a proponent of the autonomy thesis, describes the robust autonomy thesis as demanding because it requires children to achieve a certain mental state. That is, merely performing in a certain way (e.g., saying out loud “I deeply reflected on my value commitment”) is not sufficient in the eyes of the robust autonomy proponent. Assessing the success of education in achieving its goal requires investigating students’ minds and confirming they have indeed successfully engaged in deep reflections. One prototypical example of the robust autonomy thesis can be seen in the arguments made by Amy Gutmann (1995), who calls for a model of education that has students “living one’s life according to one’s own best lights because one judges this a good way to live.”

For political theorists such as Gutmann, the justificatory grounds of their vision of autonomy education lies in the demands of liberal democracy. To wit, for these political philosophers, a democratic society requires citizens to meaningfully exercise autonomy such that they reflectively engage with their own life and the rest of the world. Thus, for them, the primary task and aim of education is to cultivate autonomous citizens who live a civic and personal life that they reflectively endorse.

While political philosophers such as Gutmann support an autonomy education on the basis of the requirements of liberal democracy, scholars such as Schouten, Eamonn Callan, and Harvey Siegel argue for an autonomy education because autonomy itself is intrinsically valuable for students themselves. Schouten calls this idea a “student-centered” argument for the robust autonomy thesis. Callon (1988), for instance, presents a two-step argument. The first part of his claim is:

Liberty is not only (sometimes) an instrumental value; it is also an intrinsic value, something we rightly prize for its own sake. That is to say, there is a value which all liberties have irrespective of any other facts about them, a value they bear just because they are liberties.

The second part is: “freedom is a constituent of a life in which autonomy can *flourish* because autonomy cannot be exercised in the absence of freedom.” Thus, for Callan, freedom or liberty being an intrinsically valuable and constitutive part of an autonomous life renders autonomy intrinsically valuable.

Another important claim of the autonomy scholars is that some philosophers – especially those who make the citizenship-based argument – propose an autonomy education that entails cultivating civic virtues or civic competence *in addition to* the capacity to reflect on one’s own ends, which I shall call the “civic autonomy thesis.” Like Gutmann, the proponents of this thesis

such as Meira Levinson (1999) seem to focus on the demands of liberal democracy and present a perspective on education that is normatively motivated by considering what role a liberal democratic society requires education to fulfill. Thus, in addition to cultivating the capacity for critical reflections on one's values and ends, the advocates of the civic autonomy thesis argue for a robust civic education such that, once the students become adults, they are well-equipped to exercise their capacity as a citizen of a democratic society.

In sum, although different philosophers provide a different argument as to 1) how best to define the scope of autonomy education and 2) how to justify advocating for such a vision of education, one can summarize the autonomy thesis as follows: the central aim of education is a) to give children the capacity to engage in critical and deep reflection on their own goals and b) to provide them with the foundation for functioning as an autonomous agent or citizen in the society they inhabit. And the reason for conceptualizing the aim of education this way is either because c) it is what liberal democracy demands or because d) autonomy is an intrinsically valuable good.

### **Section 3. The Normative Validity of the Capability Approach**

As mentioned above, the philosophers of education who set flourishing as the aim of education can be broadly classified into two groups: 1) the neo-Aristotelian scholars; and 2) those whose conception of flourishing departs significantly from Aristotle's notion of eudaemonia. The notable scholars who belong to the first category would be Danielle Allen and Kristján Kristjánsson. Scholars exemplifying the latter group would be John White and Harry Brighouse. This section will first illustrate how Aristotle's philosophy undergirds the Capability Approach, rendering the Capability Approach compatible with the neo-Aristotelian way to set

flourishing as the aim of education. Second, I will delve into Brighthouse's happiness-centered arguments and demonstrate how even the non-Aristotelian conception of flourishing can still provide normative validity for the Capability Approach as an educational measurement as long as such a view of the aim of education centers around inculcating autonomy in students.

A number of scholars note the Capability Approach's roots in Aristotle (e.g., Robeyns, 2007; Giovanola, 2007), but few scholars seem to have clearly articulated *how* Aristotle's philosophy forms the foundation of the Capability Approach. For instance, in "Nature, Functioning and Capability: Aristotle on Political Distribution," Nussbaum (1988) establishes the notion of the Aristotelian social democracy and defends the view that justice requires the state to provide the basic *capabilities* to its citizens. In none of her argumentation, however, does Nussbaum indicate how the concept of *capabilities* pertains to Aristotelian ethics or how and why the Capability Approach is a particularly suitable tool for discussing the demands of Aristotelian social democracy. Similarly, a prominent scholar of the Capability Approach, Ingrid Robeyns (2007) also writes, "Some aspects of the capability approach can be traced back to, among others, Aristotle, Adam Smith, and Karl Marx" without explaining what part of the Capability Approach itself is Aristotelian and how.

Perhaps, this lacuna in the theoretical literature of the Capability Approach exists because the connection between the Capability Approach and Aristotelian philosophy is somewhat self-evident. This might be the case, especially for those who are already deeply familiar with both the Capability Approach and Nussbaum's extensive body of neo-Aristotelian scholarship. However, the fact that Aristotle's influence is heavily involved in the theoretical underpinning of the Capability Approach — at least for those who study the Capability Approach — does not mean that a clear explication is not needed. In the context of the current paper, which aims to

elucidate the alignment between the aim of education and the Capability Approach, I shall first undertake the task of making these implicit connections clear.

To recapitulate, the Capability Approach asks, “To what extent do people have the substantive freedom to live the life that they have reason to value?” In an Aristotelian reading, the central question that lies at the heart of the Capability Approach can be stated as follows: to what extent are people given the opportunity, freedom, and resources to pursue a flourishing life? But how is having the freedom to pursue a life that one reflectively endorses the same or equivalent to having the opportunity to live a flourishing life? That is, what is so Aristotelian or eudemonic about “having the freedom to live the life that they have reason to value”? In order to understand how and why this translation is possible, it is helpful to review why Sen criticized using resources, income, or wealth as a proxy for economic development in the first place.

In the very beginning of *Development as Freedom*, Sen (1999) notes:

As Aristotle noted at the very beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* ... “wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else.” ... In fact, we generally have excellent reasons for wanting more income or wealth. This is not because income and wealth are desirable for their own sake, but because, typically, they are admirable general-purpose means for having more freedom to lead the kind of lives we have reasons to value.

Here, Sen echoes Aristotle’s well-known argument about why wealth cannot be the final end that one pursues to live a flourishing life. Monetary gains cannot be the ends in themselves since their value lies in something external to themselves. Thus, Sen (1999) continues, “Without ignoring the importance of economic growth, we must look well beyond it.” So, what is this “something” that is “beyond” economic growth and which money or wealth is “for the sake of”? For both Aristotle and Sen, the final good of one’s life is the “good life,” that is, eudaemonia or flourishing.



For Aristotle, however, a flourishing life, first and foremost, centers around one's exercise of virtues, but in the landscape of the Capability Approach, the emphasis on personal virtues is entirely missing, at least on a cursory glance. However, the Capability Approach does touch upon virtues implicitly by emphasizing one's agency and freedom. This is most evident in the definition of *capabilities*: *capabilities*, in its simplest term, are that which individual human beings choose to access in order to live their reflectively valued life. Aristotle's ethics – in particular, as represented in its popular interpretation (e.g., Sandel, 2009) — is often understood as a moral philosophy about individual responsibility. The scholars of Aristotle's work, however, clearly acknowledge that it is not only an individual's actions and virtues that determine whether that individual lives a flourishing life or not; luck or the external circumstances that surround the individual also critically impact their chances of living a flourishing life (Curzer, 2012; Curren 2013).

The Capability Approach's shift of focus from individual virtues to agency and freedom helps acknowledge this fact. That is, by shifting the focus from what internal characteristics need to be developed to live a flourishing life to what external conditions must be fulfilled to allow people to exercise their agency for self-determination, the Capability Approach retains the importance of personal agency while recognizing that external conditions, such as the provision of educational opportunities, also contextualize one's exercise of virtue, agency, and freedom.

This acknowledgement that external conditions shape the extent to which one gets to practice one's agency and freedom is, perhaps, most evident in Sen's discussions of unfreedom such as premature mortality. While Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* primarily focused on the dispositions and traits internal to the individual required for the individual's flourishing, Sen's emphasis was on the bi-directional nature of the external conditions and internal development.

For instance, if one does not have access to education (hence, lacks a basic *capability*, an external condition), it would become challenging to develop the internal characteristics (i.e., *functionings*) such as a capacity for well-considered judgment necessarily for a flourishing life. Conversely, without certain internal characteristics – i.e., *functionings* – such as numeracy, one may not be able to utilize an existing *capability* such as finance education for adults. While Aristotle only vaguely notes that external conditions matter for a flourishing life (Curzer, 2012), for Sen, the focus is on what external conditions (i.e., *capabilities*) ought to be provided for one to exercise agency and freedom.

The missing link that ultimately connects the Capability Approach with Aristotle’s notion of flourishing is that exerting virtues requires one to have a sense of agency as well as the freedom to choose one’s course of actions. By shifting the focus from virtue to agency and freedom, the Capability Approach rendered itself a contemporary approach that one can appropriately use to talk about whether or not people are given the *capabilities* to employ their agency and live a flourishing life. This is why, in the realm of the Capability Approach, asking “do people have the freedom to live a life they value?” directly translates to asking whether people are well-positioned to pursue a flourishing life. In this way, the Capability Approach runs parallel to Aristotelian ethics.

In a similar fashion, some Aristotelian scholars view the aim of education as giving students the foundation for a flourishing life. Two notable scholars that hold this view and take much of their inspiration from Aristotle are Allen and Kristjánsson. Kristjánsson’s explication of flourishing as the aim of education, in particular, offers the most straightforward answer as to how and why the Capability Approach as a normative theory of educational measurement aligns with the aim of education.

In *Flourishing as the Aim of Education*, Kristjánsson (2019) presents a simple, clear relationship between education and one's life as he writes, "I consider good education to be part of the good life, rather than just a preparation for it." In this statement, one can ascertain that Kristjánsson, along with other scholars who see flourishing as the aim of education, does not see education as a mere instrument for a good or flourishing life; rather, education is a *constitutive* part of one's flourishing. Thus, if the end of education as a constitutive element of one's life, is flourishing, then, there is an alignment between the Capability Approach as a framework for educational measurement and the aim of education, which helps clarify the issue of normative validity raised above.

This line of argument, however, is highly contingent upon whether one endorses a neo-Aristotelian account of flourishing as the aim of education. Thus, one may wonder if the normative validity issue still remains for those who do not particularly agree with this Aristotelian way of conceptualizing the aim of education. In the next section, I will explore this possibility using Harry Brighouse's account of flourishing as the aim of education as a case study.

#### **Section 4. The Normative Validity for the Autonomy Thesis**

Although Brighouse claims that flourishing is the aim of education in several different publications (e.g., Brighouse, 2008; Brighouse, 2018), *On Education* encapsulates his most cohesive and in-depth account of the aim of education. The synopsis of his overall arguments is as follows: for Brighouse, flourishing is the aim of education, and such considerations generate the following four crucial educational task: the cultivation of 1) autonomy and the preparation for 2) the labor market; 3) a flourishing life; and 4) civic participation. Perhaps, the vaguest

among these four educational missions is what he means by the preparation for a flourishing life. Thus, I will first elaborate on what Brighouse means by the education that prepares one for a flourishing life.

Brighouse avoids presenting a clear definition of flourishing. Perhaps, this is a smart and somewhat reasonable move. Unlike Kristjánsson, who devotes a sizable portion of his work to explaining or defending a particular definition of flourishing, Brighouse (2006) circumvents such a laborious task altogether by cleverly shifting the focus from flourishing to happiness. While acknowledging that happiness and flourishing are not interchangeable, he notes, “We have a good deal of evidence about what makes people happy, and what does not make them happy.” He goes on to mention Richard Layard’s “Big Seven” and delves into family life, interpersonal wellbeing, increased power of consumer media culture, and leisure time as the major determinants of living a flourishing or happy life. Finally, he discusses how both the formal and the informal curriculum of schooling can help students address these modern-day issues such as consumerism that diminishes one’s authentic happiness. He concludes his discussion with some notes on school ethos – i.e., that schools should carefully consider what messages they are sending to students through implicit and explicit structures of the schooling experience such as the length of lunch time, what sports activities to celebrate and promote as a school and so on.

On first examination, Brighouse’s happiness-centered account of flourishing as the aim of education may pose a problem for the Capability Approach, given that Sen and Nussbaum themselves were highly critical of centering personal or subjective happiness as a relevant moral consideration. This is understandable because the inception of the Capability Approach was

partly inspired by Sen's criticism and rejection of utilitarianism, which centers preference satisfaction or individual happiness as the metrics for the consideration of justice.

One should note, however, that the notion of happiness that Sen and Nussbaum adamantly rejected was happiness *as a mental state* (Robeyns, 2005), and not happiness as represented by Brighouse. Hence, the question remains: is Brighouse' happiness-oriented view of flourishing as the aim of education compatible with the Capability Approach? One way to answer this question is to look beyond his presentation of Layard's "Big Seven," to depart from the interpretation that Brighouse' notion of happiness is about subjective well-being (e.g., Warnick, 2009), and to see how autonomy is deeply ingrained in his conception of flourishing in much the same way that the notions of agency and freedom play a constitutive role in the conception of the Capability Approach.

In the chapter on autonomy, Brighouse (2006) defines autonomy as living one's life "from the inside." What Brighouse means by this phrase is that, living an autonomous life entails thinking reflectively and critically about one's own values and ends of life and choosing a life that one identifies oneself with. By framing autonomy this way, Brighouse seems to replicate what Schouten (2018) calls "the robust autonomy thesis," the idea that autonomy is not merely choosing one option out of a "menu of life" but that which requires critical, deep reflections on one's own ends.

Note the similarity of the languages employed in the way that Sen's Capability Approach phrases one's ends of life (e.g., "choosing a life that one has reasons to value") and the manner in which Brighouse frames the notion of robust autonomy in articulating what a flourishing life looks like (e.g., "living a life 'from the inside'"). Both views center the exercise of agency, choice, and reflective endorsements in their theories. It is clear that, even for non-Aristotelians

like Brighthouse, flourishing or happiness is not about subjective feelings about one's own happiness. Rather, the exercise of autonomy, a deep reflection about what one values, must serve as the precondition for a flourishing life, thus rendering his notion of flourishing autonomy-centric.

The centrality that autonomy plays in Brighthouse' conception of flourishing as the aim of education renders it compatible with the Capability Approach. The primary reason for this claim is that one's exercise of autonomy comes with one's exercise of agency and freedom. In *Autonomy and Schooling*, Eamonn Callan (1988), for instance, argues that freedom or liberty is not an instrumental but a *constitutive* element of personal autonomy such that exercising autonomy without freedom does not make such practice truly autonomous as he writes:

Something may be valuable not for its own sake nor for the sake of what it causes but because it is partly constitutive of a larger complex which is valuable for its own sake. I shall call this a constitutive value... freedom is a constituent of a life in which autonomy can flourish because autonomy cannot be exercised in the absence of freedom.

As Callan's arguments illustrate, one's agency and freedom constitute an autonomous life. By implications, then, one's agency and freedom would underlie or constitute an autonomy-centric view of the aim of education, and this intimate link between autonomy, agency, and freedom renders the Capability Approach compatible with the autonomy-centered aim of education. Thus, even when one's conception of flourishing is not particularly Aristotelian, as in the case of Brighthouse, the Capability Approach still clears the requirement of normative validity, which justifies motivating it as a normative framework well-suited to think about educational measurement.

One clarification that needs to be stressed as a potential limitation of this case study is that not all garden variety flourishing theories resolve the Capability Approach's normative validity

issues. As is apparent in the case of Brighouse' autonomy-centric view, in order for the Capability Approach to be a viable candidate for a normative framework of educational measurement, the conception of the aim of education one holds has to have autonomy as an integral part of it. Thus, not all existing accounts of flourishing as the aim of education may use the Capability Approach as a promising framework for educational measurement, and exhaustively examining every single available version of such accounts is beyond the scope of this paper.

This worry, however, is a rather minor one. This is primarily because the majority of the scholars who sees flourishing as the aim of education often does factor autonomy into their conception of flourishing (e.g., Curren, 2013; White, 2011; de Ruyter, 2004). Although, as Brighouse (2006) says, scholars disagree on what exactly constitutes flourishing, it would indeed be controversial to claim that autonomy *does not* figure into a flourishing life.

Furthermore, unpacking the intimate alignment between the Capability Approach and the autonomy-centric view of the aim of education confirms the viability of the Capability Approach as a framework for educational measurement even if *one does not endorse flourishing as the aim of education*. As the case study of Brighouse's claims illustrate, the minimal requirement for a conception regarding the aim of education in making the Capability Approach normatively valid is having autonomy as a central element of such view.

Furthermore, this requirement is met even by those who see autonomy itself as the aim of education and oppose endorsing flourishing as the aim of education. One such example would be Harvey Siegel, who criticizes flourishing as an overly paternalistic concept that potentially undermines student autonomy and instead proposes the development of autonomy as the central aim of education (Siegel, 2014). Along with the majority of the political philosophers of

education such as Callan and Schouten, Siegel views the cultivation of autonomy as the aim of education, and as long as there is an intimate link between agency, freedom, and autonomy, the Capability Approach's normative validity issue is clarified.

## **Section 5. Conclusion**

The obvious major task in using the Capability Approach as a normative framework for education is to identify what *capabilities* and *functionings* to measure to understand the success of educational institutions and systems. However, doing so would be a hasty move. In order to justify using the Capability Approach as a framework to reconfigure educational measurement, it has first to satisfy the requirement of normative validity, i.e., demonstrating the alignment between the aim of education and the concept of the Capability Approach itself.

Thus, the main task of this chapter was to examine this alignment, utilizing the existing Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian scholarship on flourishing as the aim of education. As for the compatibility between the Aristotelian way of viewing flourishing as the aim of education and the Capability Approach, I approached the task by elucidating the imprints Aristotle had on the theoretical underpinnings of the Capability Approach itself. Regarding the non-Aristotelian, autonomy-centric view as represented by Brighouse, I demonstrated the alignment by paying attention to its emphasis on autonomy and explaining how such a focus renders the Capability Approach compatible with the aim of education.

Justifying the Capability Approach as a framework of educational measurement, however, requires much more than explaining its normative validity. Demonstrating how the Capability Approach as a normative framework of educational measurement clarifies the normative validity



issue merely lets us move one step towards actually applying it as a framework of measurement in education.

## Chapter 5: Towards a New Measure of Education

The goal of this section is to provide a brief sketch of a normatively valid measure of educational success informed by the Capability Approach (hereafter the “CA”). Inspired by the literature on autonomy as the aim of education, the first kind of educational measurement that I propose would measure the extent to which educational systems and institutions grant children *the capability to be autonomous*. When it comes to the flourishing-focused measure of education, I suggest creating a measure that helps us understand the degree to which educational systems and institutions provide students with the *capability to live a flourishing life*.

As will be presented below, the substantive content of both measures focuses rather on student *functionings* instead of *capabilities*. I will first explain how the conceptual toolkits from the CA such as *functionings* and *capabilities* figure into the aims of education, which shall guide the subsequent discussions regarding what the autonomy-focused and flourishing-focused measures of education ought to look like.

### Section 1. The Aim of Education Restated According to the Capability Approach

One strength of the CA is that it helps substantively clarify both the autonomy thesis – i.e., the claim that the aim of education is to cultivate a robust sense of autonomy in students – and the flourishing thesis – the claim that the goal of education is flourishing. Even on cursory inspection, both ideas are unclear: What does it mean to say, substantively, that flourishing or autonomy is the goal of education? Does it mean giving students only the skills, dispositions, and capacities foundational for an autonomous or flourishing life? Or does it mean something more demanding, such as enabling or helping students to actually live an autonomous or flourishing life? When it comes to the flourishing thesis, in particular, there seems to be some disagreements

even among the experts (e.g., Brighouse et al., 2016; Brighouse et al., 2018; Kristjánsson, 2019), and thus, it would be necessary to first clarify the substantive demands of education that each thesis posits.

What does it mean, substantively, to say that autonomy is the purpose of education? As discussed in the previous chapter, exercising autonomy in this context means reflecting on what kind of life one wants to live both critically and deeply and choosing a well-considered life, not just unreflectively choosing one life option out of a “menu of life (Schouten, 2018).” Another point to note is that the autonomy thesis does not mean that education ought to ensure that one lives an autonomous life. As will be discussed for the flourishing thesis, whether or not one gets to live an autonomous life hinges partly on luck: a person’s life circumstance may be so drastically altered by external factors such as regional armed conflicts that it may not be realistic to live a life of considered judgment without it being the fault of the education system.<sup>9</sup>

These considerations raise the point that the autonomy thesis is a rather non-consequentialist idea in the sense that the success or failure of education is, in part, determined not by whether or not students *actually* live an autonomous life, that is, a life of deep and reflective consideration and endorsement. Rather, it is evaluated by whether education equip students with the *capability to be autonomous* – having various autonomy-related *functionings* (e.g., being able to reflect carefully), as well as other kinds of *functionings* (e.g., having basic literacy) such that students can combine these *functionings* to live a life that they reflectively endorse – regardless of whether they actually get to live an autonomous life after completing their secondary education.

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<sup>9</sup> I thank and credit Professor Catherine Elgin for this point.

Thus, an autonomous life can take a variety of forms, including life as a teen mom or a college dropout, both of which are often associated with negative connotations. What matters, in the context of the autonomy thesis, however, is whether these life paths were a product of one's careful and well-informed considerations. This point closely mirrors Sen's distinction between starving because of food insecurity on one hand and fasting on the other hand: The former represents an absence of the *capabilities* associated with eating and having nutrition intakes while fasting presents the presence of a *capability* – it is an active choice to experience hunger for religious or political reasons (Sen, 1992).

Given these considerations, then, one CA-informed interpretation of the autonomy thesis would reframe the goal of education as giving students the *capability* to live an autonomous life. The autonomy thesis asserts that the aim of education should strive for the following goals: grant students autonomy-related *functionings* (e.g., critical thinking skills) as well as other kinds of *functionings* (e.g., knowing about reproduction enough to make an informed choice about pregnancy) such that, once they become an adult, they can combine these *functionings* to realize an autonomous life, whatever form that may take.

Similarly, when it comes to flourishing as the aim of education, whether students actually live a life of flourishing would not be a relevant consideration as to whether the educational systems or institutions succeeded in their mission. This is because, while possessing skills and dispositions necessary for flourishing, one can still end up living a miserable life purely because of luck or external factors that are beyond the control of education system. As Brighouse et al. (2016; 2018) claim, whether or not one achieves a flourishing life is susceptible to luck or factors that are beyond the control of education such as whether one lives under a just government (Hand, forthcoming).

These considerations imply that, if flourishing is the aim of education, its goal is not to enable students to *actually* live a flourishing life. Rather, it is to provide *functionings foundational for a flourishing life* such that, by the time they complete their compulsory education, they are equipped with *the capability to flourish*. That is, the substantive content of the flourishing thesis is that education's aim is to grant students flourishing-promoting *functionings* such that they can combine such *functionings* to realize a flourishing life, whatever such life may look like.

In sum, the CA-inspired perspective would break down the autonomy and flourishing theses in the following manners: if autonomy is the goal of education, substantively, education's primary mission is to give students autonomy-related *functionings* (e.g., the capacity to think critically), as well as other *functionings* (e.g., basic literacy skills) such that, at the point of completing secondary education, they can combine these *functionings* to live a life that they reflectively endorse. The goal of education, thus, is to give students the *capability* to be autonomous.

If flourishing is the purpose of education, on the other hand, such flourishing-aiming education would have to provide children not only with autonomy-related *functionings* but also with flourishing-promoting *functionings* such that students as adults possess the *capability* to *flourish*, i.e., being able to combine a bundle of *functionings* of their choice so as to live a life of their choosing. Unlike the autonomy thesis, the flourishing thesis would not require that students actually live a flourishing life. It demands only that education provides children with flourishing-promoting *functionings*.

As will be discussed in the next section, the CA is also useful in articulating what needs to be measured. This is primarily because the notion of *functionings* encompasses not only

students' capacities or abilities but also students' "having" and "being" – i.e., what resources, environments, and experiences students actually have. For instance, being able to study in an emotionally and physically safe environment is a *functioning* that does not pertain to students' individual capacities or abilities. Such *functioning* would reflect more of a school feature but in a way that centers on students' actual doing and being. The concept of *functioning* cuts across other narrower, non-student-centered concepts such as "opportunities" and "resources" and allows us to home in on the facilitation of students' actual doings and beings.

## **Section 2. Autonomy-Focused Measure of Education**

I will first begin this segment by reviewing the arguments laid out by those who see autonomy facilitation as the primary aim of education. In short, their central claims are as follows: although autonomy development can be intrinsically valuable for students (Callan, 1988; Schouten, 2018), liberal democratic societies require adult citizens to be capable of deeply and critically reflecting on the ends of their life (e.g., Levinson, 1999) and of choosing a life that they can live "from the inside" (Brighouse, 2006). And thus, the central aim of education is to cultivate autonomous, critical, and reflective future adult *citizens*, and their normative prescriptions for education can be categorized into two groups: 1) civic education or development; and 2) facilitation of autonomy – i.e., the ability to deeply and carefully reflect on one's ends in life.

Unlike the flourishing camp, those who see autonomy development as the primary aim of education share a fair level of agreement among one another and argue for a set of commitments educational institutions and systems should make. First, when it comes to civic education, philosophers who understand civic development to be in service of autonomy facilitation

(Levinson, 2012) would be concerned with understanding the extent to which students have or have not developed civic knowledge and dispositions. To this end, there may be a motivation to measure students' civic competence; for example, the state of Massachusetts is currently developing a civics test (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, 2023).

However, merely measuring students' civic competencies may be a misguided practice. As Levinson (2012) notes, students of differing socioeconomic and racial backgrounds experience varying degrees of civic empowerment, partly because of the larger socio-political climate that surrounds the school community. Ben-Porath (2013) also argues that civic development is not just limited to the cultivation of civic knowledge but pertains to the facilitation of psychological and relational dimensions. The psychological dimensions include "self-perception or the sense of efficacy required for action as an equal member of society," which translates to "a sense of oneself as capable of participating (self-efficacy) as well as having the skills to develop a perspective, reflect on it and communicate it (Ben-Porath, 2013)." A relational dimension, on the other hand, includes "communicative skills of expression and of listening, respect and tolerance and other related forms of treating other members of society with dignity (Ben-Porath, 2013)." Importantly, Ben-Porath (2013) goes onto arguing that different school climates and disciplinary practices affect the development of these non-cognitive aspects of civic development. In particular, totalizing schools such as the Knowledge is Power Programs (KIPP) schools that are known for imposing strict behavioral codes hinder students from developing these psychological and relational aspects of civic dispositions.

Taking these points together, if one is invested in understanding the extent to which the education systems and institutions are fulfilling the civic mission of autonomy facilitation, such an endeavor should not limit itself to merely measuring students' civic knowledge. Rather, it

should understand the facilitation of comprehensive civics-related student *functionings*, which is not confined to students' capacities such as civic knowledge and sense of civic empowerment or self-efficacy but includes *what students are able to do and be* in their school community. Such beings and doings – i.e., *functionings* – may include such things as being able to have a “voice” in one's school community without fear of retaliation, being able to relate to peers as equals, and so forth, which marks a stark departure from a measure that solely focuses on students' competence, capacities, or abilities or on surface-level school features such as having a student government. Such a measure would seek to understand the “civic climate” of a school such that it comprehensively captures what students are able to do and be – i.e., students' civic *functionings* – within their school community.

Aside from these civic concerns, philosophers of education who see autonomy facilitation as the aim of education – or at the very least, as a constitutive part of a successful education – also argue for successful school integration. Their claims concern exposing students to peers and teachers from diverse backgrounds, values, and worldviews. Presumably, they argue, such exposure would aid students in critically reflecting on their previously held beliefs – or the beliefs that they came to hold because of the family influences – and in forming more informed convictions that they can truly identify themselves with, which is a foundational requirement of personal autonomy in a liberal democracy.

One historical incident that gave rise to this way of thinking about the primary role of education as robust autonomy facilitation is the United States Supreme Court case titled *Wisconsin v. Yoder* and the subsequent debates regarding who gets to hold decisional authority over children's education. In short, the 1972 *Wisconsin v. Yoder* case was prompted by Amish families that wished to pull their children out of public and private schooling beyond eighth



grade for religious reasons and argued that the state requirement to keep children in schools was a violation of their religious freedoms. These parents claimed that schooling would necessarily expose their children to belief systems and worldviews that are inconsistent with their religious views, thereby making it nearly impossible to pass their religious views onto their children (Feinberg, 1980)

In subsequent years, both political philosophers and philosophers of education made their case against these Amish families. Amy Gutmann (1980), for instance, argues that both parents and the state hold a paternalistic duty to protect children's rights to an education, which is "a necessary precondition for the development of capacities to choose a conception of the good life and to employ the political freedoms of democratic citizenship."

Following along the liberal democratic defense of children's rights to an education and characterization of educational institutions as a space for autonomy development, philosophers such as Harry Brighouse (2006) and Daniel Weinstock (2021) emphasize the importance of securing diversity across socioeconomic, racial, and religious lines within schools and see such integration as one of the primary means to help facilitate autonomy in students.

An autonomy-facilitating school will be composed of both children and adults who come from a diversity of backgrounds, and who have differing outlooks on the world and how to live their lives... Autonomy facilitation requires a modicum of discontinuity between the child's home experience and her school experience, so that the opportunities provided by the home (and the public culture) are supplemented, rather than replicated, in the school.

Granted these considerations, philosophers such as Brighouse (2006) and Weinstock (2021) call for school integration and creating schools with students, teachers, and administrators from diverse socioeconomic, racial, and religious backgrounds.<sup>10</sup> Given their recommendations,

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, these philosophers often do not include one's (dis)ability as a facet of consideration for integration. Based on their writing, it is not clear to me whether or not they would advocate for ability-based integration.

then, if one is to understand the extent to which autonomy facilitation is realized within school, metrics such as student demographic compositions may play a central role in evaluating the school's "success."

Such metrics, however, would not be fruitful. I argue that, just in the same way that having a school government is a feature of a school that says nothing about what students are actually able to do and be, the degree of school integration is also a limited metric of students' autonomy facilitation, and it tells us nothing about whether students are actually or seriously engaging with diverse perspectives. Consider the following three schools: School A, B, and C. Both School A and B are diverse in the composition of students, instructors, and staff, but only students in School A are able to grapple with worldviews outside of their immediate community while those in School B experience fair level of segregation within the school community through mechanisms such as tracking.

School C, on the other hand, is in a geographically segregated community, comprising only a fairly homogeneous population. Nevertheless, students in School C engage with value systems and perspectives outside of their family and local community by going on excursions outside their state, learning about those who are unlike them through robust and civically inspiring social studies curricula, participating in student exchange programs with schools in different regions of the world, and so forth.

If one looks only at a feature of each of these schools such as student and teacher demographics, on the surface level, both School A and B would be outperforming School C, but in terms of students' autonomy-facilitating *functionings* – such as whether students engage in lively discussions with those that come from drastically different backgrounds – School A and C might fare better than School B. Thus, in addition to the civic climate measure proposed earlier, I

would propose a measure that helps us understand students' autonomy-cultivating *functionings* if one is to evaluate the degree to which educational systems and institutions are successful in cultivating students' autonomy .

It should be noted that I am merely outlining an autonomy-focused measure that does not solely rely on students' test scores. As is the case for the flourishing-focused measure of education discussed below, the exact contents of these normatively motivated measures, of course, ought to be determined by both empirical researchers and philosophers.

### **Section 3. Flourishing-Focused Measure of Education**

Those who see flourishing as the aim of education diverge from one another on what they mean by flourishing. As a result, clearly presenting – or, even suggesting – what a flourishing-focused measure of education should include inevitably becomes a difficult task. Nonetheless, there are some points of agreement among them that one can draw from the existing literature and that, I believe, are important to keep in mind when outlining a flourishing-focused measure of education.

First, as explained above, when philosophers say that “flourishing is the aim of education,” they do not mean that it is the educational institutions' duty to guarantee or give students a flourishing life. There is, in fact, a certain degree of ambiguity in the statement, “flourishing is the aim of education” or the phrase “flourishing as the aim of education.” When philosophers who are in favor of seeing the purpose of education this way use these statements and phrases, their claim is not that the primary purpose of educational institutions is to ensure that students live a flourishing life.

Instead, their claims usually tend to entail two sub-claims: 1) the aim of education is to give students the foundation for a flourishing life as an adult (presumably after they complete secondary school); and 2) in service of the first sub-claim, educational activities also ought to be oriented toward promoting student flourishing *within* their current educational experiences. While the first sub-claim is future-oriented, the latter sub-claim is present-focused.

The first sub-claim is rather straightforward: Aristotle himself acknowledges in his writings that one's chance of living a flourishing life is, to a certain extent, determined by one's external circumstances, especially luck (Curzer, 2012), and this is a widely shared stance among the philosophers of education who see the aim of education as a matter of giving students foundational skills, knowledge, dispositions for a flourishing life. Brighthouse (2016), for instance, clearly shares this sentiment:

We focus on opportunities for flourishing rather than flourishing itself because the most that educational goods can do is equip people with what they need for their lives to go well, including the capacity to make good choices. Whether people do in fact choose well is a further question. Luck—serious injury or illness, for example—is also bound to play a role in determining the extent of people's flourishing however well equipped they are and however well they choose.

One clear implication of this claim is that, when constructing a measure of educational success, such measure should focus on what flourishing-promoting *functionings* that schools and districts provide to their students.

Second, it should be noted that what is included in the autonomy-focused measure would also be a relevant concern for a flourishing-focused measure of education. This is primarily because the majority of the philosophers who see the aim of education to be about giving students the foundation for a flourishing life also sees autonomy as a constitutive part of a

flourishing life. One good example of such an account comes from Kristján Kristjánsson, who defines flourishing as follows:

Human flourishing is the (relatively) unencumbered, freely chosen and developmentally progressive activity of a meaningful (subjectively purposeful and objectively valuable) life that actualises satisfactorily an individual human being's natural capacities in areas of species-specific existential tasks at which human beings (as rational, social, moral and emotional agents) can most successfully excel.

The “unencumbered” and “freely chosen” activity here does not mean merely choosing a course of actions out of a menu of life, as a shallow interpretation of what it means to exercise autonomy may suggest (Schouten, 2018). Rather, it is about exercising one's agency and autonomy, as Kristjánsson (2019) clarifies by writing, “I am simply reiterating the well-known Aristotelian claim that a non-autonomously chosen life path does not have moral value.”

As introduced in the previous chapter, Harry Brighouse (2006; 2016), another prominent proponent that sees the aim of education as giving students “knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions” for a flourishing life, has a conception of flourishing that does not rely on Aristotle's ethics. However, even his notion of flourishing or happiness conceptualizes autonomy – or, in his language, living a life ‘from the inside’ (as in living a life that one reflectively endorses) – as a necessary part of what it means to live well. He writes, “For somebody actually to flourish, they have to identify with the life they are leading. They have to live it from the inside, as it were.”<sup>11</sup> (Brighouse, 2006)

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<sup>11</sup> He continues, “Some ways of life are not good, and children whose parents pass them down cannot live them well even if they endorse them: those children have no opportunity to live well unless they are able to find good ways of life. Other ways of life are, of course, good. But some whose parents try to pass those ways of life down cannot endorse them from the inside: although the ways of life are good, these people cannot flourish within them.”

Therefore, even if one's conception of the aim of education is primarily about flourishing, the measure of education constructed with flourishing in mind would still incorporate what I suggested above in regard to an autonomy-focused measure of education. To recapitulate, the items to measure in assessing how successful educational institutions are in cultivating robust autonomy in students include civic knowledge, dispositions, and empowerment as well as school diversity or integration and whether children have the curricular and non-curricular exposure to the value systems that they do not ordinarily encounter. Because the notion of flourishing often entails the cultivation of autonomy, those motivated to create a flourishing-focused measure of education would also be interested in including these items in the measure.

Third, although well-being and flourishing are considered to be intricately linked with one another in the popular media and applied social sciences, I take the stance that measuring students' subjective wellbeing is not pertinent to the flourishing-focused measure of education. Sen himself opposed the idea of using individual subjective wellbeing as a proxy for the success of economic development on the grounds such measure cannot accurately capture how "free" one truly is if they grew up being mistreated and came to have a limited understanding as to what a good life can look like. Those who are accustomed to the experiences of pervasive gender discriminations, for instance, may not see it as wrong that they cannot take up certain roles in the society on the basis of their gender (Sen, 1999). In a similar manner, subjective wellbeing measures would only tell us how satisfied or happy students are about their schooling experiences without substantively saying anything about what they are able to do and be within their school. For this reason, I rule out the possibility of including students' subjective wellbeing as a proxy for the success of flourishing-aiming education.

Fourth, the second sub-claim of the flourishing thesis – the idea that, in service of giving students the foundation for a flourishing life in the future, educational activities also ought to promote student flourishing *within* their current educational experiences – is not an entirely separate claim from the first, future-oriented sub-claim since there is an intimate link between future and present flourishing.

The close relationship between one's present and future flourishing can be understood through the lens of how one develops interpersonal competence in the following two ways: the absence of one's current flourishing can lead to the absence of future flourishing, and conversely, the presence of current flourishing can lead to the higher likelihood of future flourishing. The lifelong consequences of school bullying, for instance, are well-researched areas. When it comes to suffering from school bullying, in their literature review, Wolke and Lereya (2015) report that being victimized by school bullies puts one at a higher likelihood not only of anxiety disorder, depression, suicidal ideation, attempts, and completed suicides in adulthood but also of having difficulty making or keeping friends, living with a partner, and having adequate social support in adulthood. Conversely, [insert some empirical research examples that demonstrate that children who feel connected with their peers in school tend to fare better in interpersonal relationships than those who did not].

Having a challenging time (and thus, temporarily struggling instead of flourishing), of course, is a part of a flourishing life. Some may even say that grappling with various kinds of challenges – academic (e.g., reflecting on and learning from one's academic failures) or non-academic (e.g., navigating conflicts with school peers) – is a fact of life, for which students ought to prepare by experiencing some tough moments in the present. That may be true, but contexts

seem to matter. Specifically, whether students are given the opportunity to face challenging moments in a developmentally appropriate and supportive environment does seem to play a role in shaping students' future ability to face and overcome obstacles in their life.

For instance, a 2012 review article on corporal punishment – a disciplinary method that is both physically and emotionally challenging for children – demonstrates that it has negative impacts on children's later outcomes such as child aggression and antisocial behaviors (Durrant & Ensom, 2012). Theories and research in developmental psychology, on the other hand, suggests that facing challenges in a developmentally appropriate manner that nurtures students' sense of self-efficacy facilitates children's motivation and growth. Developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky's theory on Zone of Proximal Development (1978), for instance, suggests that the optimal development or growth takes place at a "developmentally sweet spot," so to speak. That is, the most favorable kind of conditions for facing challenges for children is when the challenge lies somewhere between the child's current level and the level that is beyond the reach of the child. Thus, for example, an appropriate and perhaps best kind of challenge for a child who just learned the concept of multiplication may be some basic or slightly complicated multiplication problems but not any more advanced questions such as divisions and fractions. Psychologist Albert Bandura's Self-Determination Theory (1997) also suggests that one necessary component of motivating students – aside from having a sense of autonomy and connectedness – is to nurture a sense of competence in them.

Given these considerations, then, I propose a flourishing-focused measure of education to have two major dimensions: 1) future-oriented and 2) present-focused flourishing-centered measure of education, and I base these sketches on the widely celebrated and shared vision of a flourishing-centric education proposed by Brighthouse and his co-authors.



There are two reasons that I selected Brighouse and his colleagues' view on flourishing-centered education as a framework for the flourishing-focused measure of education. The first is that it appropriately accommodates for the future and present flourishing of students. To recapitulate, Brighouse and his collaborators propose six distinct categories of items as central educational goods – the skills, knowledge, dispositions, and attitudes that educational institutions ought to inculcate in students. These are the capacities for 1) economic productivity; 2) personal autonomy; 3) democratic competence; 4) healthy personal relationships; 5) treating others as equals; and 6) personal fulfillment (Brighouse, et al., 2016).”

Among these items, the capacities for economic productivity and democratic competence are rather future-oriented. In most countries, children under the age of 18 cannot vote, and yet, they are expected to be civically engaged usually after completing their secondary education. Thus, imparting students the capacity for democratic competence concerns an important aspect of their future life – life as a civic member of their own society. In other words, facilitating democratic competence in students while they are in school is more or less a future-oriented activity.

Students' ability regarding economic participation is a more complicated issue since *some* children such as child actors in developed nations and child factory workers in developing countries do engage in child labor, and thus, for these students, gaining skills for economic productivity may be a present concern for these children. Elaine Unterhalter, Judith Suissa, Carl Emery, and Arathi Sriprakash (2021), for instance, argue that, in many developing countries, the “compulsion-and-ban policies” – a policy that aims to achieve the dual goal of banning child labor altogether and making it mandatory for children to attend schools (Brando, 2023) – often create new economic and educational difficulties or dilemma for child workers: because the

“compulsion-and-ban policies” inevitably reduce household income, which used to be supplemented by child labor, such a policy makes it even more difficult for these families to feed children with nutritious food, thereby affecting their learning and overall educational attainment.

That being said, however, even for these children who currently work, acquiring *functionings* related to economic participation is a topic of future-preparation: except for a few rare child stars who earn their life’s fortune through their child acting work, it is not controversial to say that virtually every adult before retirement is expected to work and contribute to the economy. For this reason, I would argue that the cultivation of capacities for economic participation is also a future concern.

In contrast to these two mostly future-related items, the rest of the four categories – the capacities for personal autonomy, healthy personal relationships, treating others as equals, and personal fulfillment – seems to be both future and present-focused. That is, they represent arenas in which students’ current practice of the relevant skills is directly useful or relevant to their future exercise of these abilities.

For instance, as demonstrated by research on school bullying mentioned above, failing to or not being able to form healthy interpersonal relationships when students are young either by becoming bullies or being victimized often leads to having difficulties with making or maintaining secure relationship in the future. Similarly, exercising personal autonomy – i.e., deeply evaluating one’s preexisting beliefs in light of the diverse perspectives and ways of life one is exposed to and making well-thought-out and informed choices – also requires continued practice in the present moment, and perhaps, learning from mistakes when necessary. For these reasons, it would be fair to characterize Brighthouse and his co-authors’ framework of flourishing-

aiming education as that which contains both future-oriented and present-focused perspectives, which makes it a suitable framework for thinking about and designing measurement.

Second, Brighthouse and his colleagues' vision is holistic and comprehensive enough to accommodate for or to be compatible with other prominent philosophers' proposal for a flourishing-aiming education. Aristotelian scholar and political philosopher, Danielle Allen, who also sees flourishing as the aim of education, proposes the following:

... we can identify four basic human potentialities that should be activated by education. Through education, we need to do the following:

1. Prepare ourselves for breadwinning work (labor, part 1)
2. Prepare ourselves for civic and political engagement (action)
3. Prepare ourselves for creative self-expression and world making (work)
4. Prepare ourselves for rewarding relationships in spaces of intimacy and leisure (labor, part 2, overlapping with work)

The first two components (preparation for breadwinning work and for civic and political engagement) overlap with Brighthouse's idea of cultivating the capacity for economic participation and democratic competence, respectively. The latter two items (preparing students for creative self-expression and world making on one hand, and for rewarding relationships in spaces of intimacy and leisure on the other) fit into developing the capacities for healthy personal relationships and personal fulfillment, at the very least.

Brighthouse and his colleagues' ideas are also compatible with the conception of education for "living well" proposed by Randall Curren, one of the leading scholars in education for flourishing. Curren bases his vision of the flourishing-centric education on Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's Self-Determination Theory. Curren (2013) summarizes Self-Determination Theory as follows:

Developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan ... it [the Self-Determination theory] posits three innate, *universal psychological needs* closely associated with the satisfaction of human potentials: the need for competence or efficacy; the need for autonomy or the experience of self-directedness congruent with the person's values, needs, and sense of self; and the need for relatedness or mutually affirming interpersonal relationships.

Based on Self-Determination Theory, Curren argues that educational institutions' duty is to impart to students the sense of competence or efficacy, autonomy, and connectedness, which are all covered by Brighouse' framework.

The obligation of education to satisfy students' need for connectedness and autonomy runs parallel to Brighouse and his co-authors' claim about facilitating the capacity in students for healthy interpersonal relationships and personal autonomy. As for competence, I would argue that it still fits into Brighouse and his colleagues' description of what it means for education to help students find personal fulfillment since developing a sense of fulfillment, for Brighouse and his co-authors, seems to involve cultivating a sense of competence as they write:

School is a place in which children's horizons can be broadened. They can be exposed to—and can develop enthusiasms for and *competence* [emphasis is mine] in—activities that they would never have encountered through familial and communal networks and that sometimes suit them better than any they would have encountered in those ways. The capacity to find joy and fulfillment from experiences and activities is at the heart of a flourishing life.

Given that Brighouse and his collaborators' framework includes items that Curren does not, such as an explicit mention of vocational preparation, it can be said that Brighouse and his colleagues' ideas are more expansive than Curren's. The fact that Curren does not include vocational preparation, democratic competence and other items may demonstrate a potential area of disagreement between them that yet needs to be resolved through further inquiry. However, that

is not the point of this chapter. The point that I wish to demonstrate is that Curren's items can be compatible with and merged with Brighthouse's.

Thus far, I have made the following points. First, the flourishing thesis – the claim that the aim of education is to give students the foundation for a flourishing life – contains two sub-claims: the first is that education's duty is to help students prepare to flourish as an adult (future-focused claim). The second is that educational institutions are also obligated to create an environment that realizes students' current flourishing, at least in the schooling context, such that the skills, dispositions, experiences, and orientations born out of students' current flourishing are carried into their adulthood (present-focused claim). I then identified Brighthouse and his colleagues' framework of flourishing-aiming education as an appropriate conceptualization for creating a flourishing-focused measure of education on two grounds. First, it appropriately includes both future-oriented and present-focused perspectives. Second, it is consistent with other prominent views on flourishing-oriented education, specifically, the ones proposed by Danielle Allen and Randall Curren.

What would Brighthouse and his co-authors' notion of flourishing-centric education propose to measure? My proposal would differ from Brighthouse and his co-authors' ideas in important ways. In particular, while Brighthouse and his colleagues focus on facilitating students' flourishing-related *capacities*, in a way that is similar to my critique of measuring school features, I suggest that the measure be focused on students' overall *functionings* – what they are able to do and be in schools, which include but are not limited to students' abilities.

Creating a measure to understand students' capacities for autonomy and democratic competence would have to take into considerations my discussions of the autonomy-focused measure of education. That is, merely measuring students' autonomy-related and democratic

*capacities* or *abilities* would not suffice: There needs to be a comprehensive measure of student *functionings* – what students are able to do and be – since the development of such capacities hinges on non-capacity student *functionings* such as being able to have a voice in school community without fear of retaliation. Since I have already laid out the suggested measure regarding facilitating children’s autonomy and democratic competence, I will focus on what a flourishing-focused measure can include to understand whether students are cultivating the rest of the four capacities – capacity for economic productivity, healthy personal relationships, treating others as equals, and personal fulfillment.

Unlike the autonomy-focused measure of education, Brighthouse and his colleagues’ vision would propose creating an even more comprehensive measure of education. As for economic productivity, one relevant *functioning* would concern whether students are familiarizing themselves with various career pathways. Given that not all students take on full-time jobs right after their secondary school education, students may not have to feel prepared or possess various content knowledge about various vocations, but, at the very least, a flourishing-aiming education should provide students with the *functioning* of learning about different vocational pathways that they may be able to take as an adult.

As for cultivating the abilities related to healthy personal relationships, measuring *functionings* such as students’ sense of connectedness to their peers, teachers, and school community as well as other related student *functionings* such as being free from interpersonal violence in school may be of interest. That is, I would argue against merely measuring students’ actual *ability* to form healthy interpersonal relationships since such *functionings* would inevitably be a product of out-of-school contexts such as students’ family life. What educational institutions can do, however, is to create an environment that fosters students’ and community’s

social-emotional well-being. Thus, *functionings* such as students' sense of connectedness to peers and school, as well as being protected from interpersonal violence would be of relevance.

In regard to fostering students' capacity to treat others as equals, measuring student *functionings* related to all kinds of discrimination would be relevant. Specifically, whether students experience the absence of discrimination on the basis of race, gender, students' sexual orientation, their socioeconomic status, and religious status may be of importance. Finally, when it comes to fostering students' sense of personal fulfillment, measuring *functionings* such as students' sense of competence, engagement, and whether students are able to enjoy a variety of extracurricular opportunities would become significant.

## **Summary**

This chapter began with using the CA to clarify what kinds of demands the autonomy and flourishing theses each place on education: both the autonomy and flourishing theses would state that the aim of education is to give students the *capability* to live either an autonomous or flourishing life, i.e., various types of *functionings* that students can combine as an adult with agency to achieve one's valued life.

Given these clarifications, I then further clarified that the autonomy thesis would place two broad demands on education: the cultivation of civics-related *functionings*, as well as autonomy-related *functionings*. If one is to measure the extent to which schools, districts, state, or a country as a whole is successful in granting students the civics-related *functionings*, I argued that one should measure not only students' civic competencies but also students' non-ability-related *functionings* such as actually having a 'voice' in their school community and being free from authoritarian school disciplines. As for autonomy-related *functionings*, I argued against

measuring school features such as the diversity of student and staff demographics, and instead, advocated for measuring the “civic climate” of their schools, i.e., what students are able to do and be in cultivating their own autonomy, such as whether they actually are exploring and seriously entertaining life paths and worldviews that are different from those available in their immediate surroundings. Overall, the suggested measure includes a variety of items that drastically differ from the traditional measure of the success of education that relies solely on students’ subject-based learning outcomes.

The flourishing-focused measure of education is even more expansive, compared to their autonomy counterpart. Specifically, it would include not only the autonomy-focused measures but also other items that help us assess the extent to which the education systems and institutions are aiding students in developing the capacities for 1) economic participation, 2) healthy interpersonal relationships; 3) treating others as equals; and 4) personal fulfillment.

As is the case for the autonomy-focused measure of education, I made a claim for measuring not only students’ abilities or competencies in these areas but also non-ability *functionings* such as whether students actually *have* a condition, an environment, opportunities, and resources to cultivate them. These items include 1) learning about a variety of vocational options; 2) students’ sense of connectedness to peers and school community and being free from violence in school; 3) being free from any and all kinds of discriminations; and 4) have a variety of extracurricular opportunities available.



## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation project was motivated by the question, “What should be measured if one is to understand the success of education?” In the introductory chapter, I introduced the various problems associated with the Standardized Testing Paradigm, which treats students’ subject-based learning outcomes as the proxy for the success of education systems and institutions. Although the scholarship concerning the various problems of the Standardized Testing Paradigm is rich and widely acknowledged, few scholars have tried to articulate what the alternative measure should look like.

Specifically, two questions need to be addressed: what does “the success of educational institutions and system” mean? Relatedly, what are the metrics that adequately reflect such notions of the success of educational institutions and systems? The overall inquiry of this dissertation is motivated by these two central questions, and the present project is an attempt to *start* addressing them.

After laying out the motivations behind the dissertation research, I introduced and motivated using Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach, a normative framework of measurement initially conceived in development economics, to tackle these two questions. First, I argued that, much like GDP and GNP, test scores are insufficient proxies for the success of education since they rely on a narrow notion of “educational success.” Second, borrowing insights from philosophical debates on the aims of education and Biesta’s concept of normative validity, I contended that the aim(s) of education — either flourishing or autonomy — ought to ground a more holistic notion of educational success and measurement. Such an argument, however, requires one to further establish two points: 1) the CA is inherently compatible with the aim(s) of education; and 2) the CA is an appropriate tool to discuss K-12 students’ matters.

In Chapter 3, I address the latter question regarding the compatibility between children's moral status and the CA, introducing two possible ways to think about the problem: 1) Anderson and Mcleod's "basic view," which states that the notion of *capabilities* is fundamentally inappropriate for children because they lack autonomy and agency; and 2) the *capability-capacity* correspondence thesis, the idea that children should be given *capabilities*, for which they have the relevant capacities or abilities. With the example of children's gender pronoun choice, I challenged both camps and proposed the alternative, domain-based views: when it comes to matters related to children's open future, the relevant discussions should be limited to children's *functionings* while there are certain issues, especially outside of the open-future-domains, for which children should be afforded *capabilities*.

In Chapter 4, I walked through the literature on the autonomy and flourishing theses and showed how both views are compatible or aligned with the theoretical underpinnings of the CA. In short, the autonomy thesis works well for the CA because of the CA's emphasis on agency and self-determination while the CA is also well-suited for the flourishing thesis because of its Aristotelian roots.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I further clarified what kind of demands the autonomy and flourishing theses would each pose for education, and subsequently, how much each view would shape the measure of educational success. The considerations for both theses resulted in proposing alternative measures of education that are grounded in student *functionings*, which carry information not only about students' capacities but also about non-ability *functionings*, i.e., what students are able to do and be in their school environment. As summarized above, the autonomy thesis would motivate measuring both civics and autonomy-related functionings while the flourishing thesis would call for measuring even more diverse student functionings pertaining

to their development of capacities for 1) autonomy; 2) civic participation; 3) economic participation; 4) healthy interpersonal relationships; 5) treating others as equals; and 6) personal fulfillment.

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