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SOCIAL JUSTICE, CAPABILITIES AND THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN LOW INCOME COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

The paper sets out a theoretical approach for understanding the quality of education in low income countries from a social justice perspective. The paper outlines and critiques the two dominant approaches that currently frame the debate about education quality, namely, the human capital and human rights approaches. Drawing principally on the ideas of Nancy Fraser and Amartya Sen the paper then sets out an alternative approach based on a theory of social justice and of capabilities. The paper develops an overall understanding of how education quality can be understood in relation to the extent to which it fosters key capabilities that individuals, communities and society in general have reason to value. It then analyses three aspects of social justice in more detail and seeks to relate these to EdQual and related research and debates. Here the focus is on an understanding of the distribution of inputs that facilitate the development of key capabilities; the extent to which the needs and rights of different groups are recognised in education; and, how decisions about education quality are governed and the nature of participation in debates at the local, national and global levels. It is argued that a social justice framework can provide an alternative rationale for a policy emphasis on quality that encompasses but goes beyond that provided by human capital and rights approaches; that through emphasising the importance of context and through providing a normative basis for thinking about quality in relation to development, it provides a useful starting point for reconceptualising education quality and how it can be evaluated; and, that it draws attention to the central importance of public dialogue and debate at the local, national and global levels about the nature of a quality education and what quality frameworks might look like at these levels.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out a critical framework for conceptualising the relationship between the quality of education experienced by disadvantaged learners in low income countries and the concept of social justice. In elaborating the framework, the paper will draw upon key findings from a five year research programme on education quality, EdQual, as well as evidence from the wider literature. Although the principle focus is on the African context, reference is also made where relevant to the more global literature. The paper will commence by setting out our approach based on Nancy Fraser's three dimensions of social justice, namely redistribution, recognition and participation, along with Amartya Sen's understanding of capabilities as it has been applied to educational settings. This will be done in relation to a critical discussion of the two dominant approaches in the field of education quality, namely the human capital and human rights approaches. Having established a theoretical approach, it will be applied to considering in more detail each of Fraser's three dimensions of social justice in relation to the empirical evidence from Africa and elsewhere.

Whilst existing approaches provide important insights, they are insufficient for addressing key aspects of the debate. Through emphasising the role of education in promoting a range of basic freedoms, a social justice approach can provide a fuller rationale for a policy focus on education quality than that provided by a human capital approach with its emphasis on economic growth or by the existing human rights approach with its emphasis on the role of the state in guaranteeing basic rights. Through emphasising a range of important potential outcomes from a quality education and the importance of context in understanding what these might be, a social justice perspective can help to refocus attention on the nature of a quality education and of the importance of public debate at all levels in defining a quality education and how it can be evaluated. It should be pointed out at the outset, however, that whilst the social justice approach presented here can provide an important starting point for reconceptualising education quality, it cannot provide a blueprint for policy and practice. Rather, the aim is to signal key themes that debates about quality should engage with at a local, national and global level from a social justice perspective.

1. TOWARDS A THEORY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN RELATION TO EDUCATION QUALITY

In this section we set out our approach to understanding education quality, drawing in particular on the work of Nancy Fraser on the changing nature of social justice in the global era and Amartya Sen's view of capabilities and of freedom as the goal of development. Space does not allow for a full discussion of the complex philosophical underpinnings of debates surrounding the concepts of social justice and of human capabilities. These have in any case been considered in some depth and rigour by a range of feminist scholars working in the field of education scholarship (see, for example, Unterhalter, 2007; Walker and Unterhalter, 2007; Walker, 2006; Robeyns, 2003; 2006). Here we will confine ourselves to discussion of that literature, which has been particularly influential in shaping our own approach.

The paper will commence with a review of the two dominant existing approaches to understanding education quality and then present an alternative approach, developed from Fraser's social justice framework (2008). The two dominant approaches are identified as a heuristic devise and it is possible to trace dialectical interaction between them, enabled by overlapping views of human development and agency. It is also the case that some of the more well known quality frameworks including that contained in the GMR 2005 report (UNESCO, 2004) actually bring together aspects of both approaches. Nonetheless, it is useful to separate them out for analytical purposes in terms of the underlying view of development, how education quality is perceived and measured in relation to development.

1.1 Human Capital Approaches

Several authors have provided a summary of the shifting nature of human capital discourses since the 1970s (see for example, Robertson et al, 2007; Unterhalter, 2007; Tikly, 2004; Ilon, 1994). The central rationale for investing in education (including, more recently, education quality) lies in the contribution that education quality can make to economic growth. Here, GDP is understood as the most significant indicator of development. The role of education in relation to economic growth, however, has shifted over the years. An initial focus on manpower planning gave way in the 1970s to understanding better investment choices at different levels of education through rates of return analysis. In the context of the shift from the Washington to the Post-Washington consensus (see Robertson et al, 2007), human capital theory has begun to complement a continued interest in rates of return with an interest in education's role in alleviating poverty and promoting social welfare, including women's welfare, as a basis for promoting growth and human security. This has prompted a shift in political commitment from cost-sharing to free primary education (Jones 2007). However, priorities are currently widening to include secondary and post-basic levels of education and training in order to equip populations of low income countries with skills for participation in the 'global knowledge economy'.

At a general level, human capital approaches have provided policy makers with important economic rationale for a focus on education quality. Vegas and Petrow (2008:xxii), for example, writing about Latin America, argue that 'expansion of educational opportunities has not markedly reduced income inequality, underdevelopment, and poverty, possibly because of the poor quality of education'. Hanushek and Wößmann (2007) conclude that there is a statistically and economically positive effect of the quality of education on economic growth that is far larger than the association between quantity of education and growth. They suggest that quality, as measured by student achievement on standardised tests, correlates more strongly with economic growth than simply years spent in school. However, they also argue that for education quality to lead to increased wages, a strong macroeconomic environment and labour market environment seems to be necessary. This is significant for Africa, which is increasingly being left behind in economic terms by the globalisation process with growing inequalities between Africa and other regions of the world as well as within and between African countries themselves (Scholte, 2006; Robertson et al, 2007). It is argued from a human capital perspective that countries which have the highest levels of inequality in the education sector (of any kind) also have the slowest national growth rates (Wils, Carol and Barrow, 2007). The human capital literature points to three significant sources of inequality. The first is gender, the second is urban/rural inequality and the third is inequality by region. All of these sources of inequality are significant as the paper by Smith and Barrett in this special edition underline. The authors go on to argue, however, that an important characteristic of inequality in education is the way that different determinants of inequality such as, for example, gender, rurality, socio-economic background and mother tongue, interact in different contexts to reproduce disadvantage and that the nature and effects of these interactions requires a more contextualised understanding of inequality than that typically provided for by human capital theorists working at a macro level. From a capabilities perspective, which we outline below, a focus on wealth and earnings as the criteria for measuring development fails to adequately capture the extent to which education systems provide individuals and communities with the capabilities to convert resources into a broader set of functionings that they have reason to value (see below).

Human capital theory does not in itself provide a framework for understanding education quality. Influential texts on education quality published by the Bank have therefore often adopted school effectiveness approaches (Heneveld and Craig 1996, Lockheed and Verspoor 1991). The preferred school effectiveness frameworks are based around what we call a process model. Inputs, in the form of financial and material resources, teachers and pupil characteristics are acted on by educational processes producing outcomes. Whilst these fit well with the Bank's concern for economic efficiency in the public sector, they can accommodate multiple dimensions of quality, including the social and affective domains, as Heneveld and Craig (1996) demonstrate.

There is little doubt, therefore, that school effectiveness and improvement frameworks within their own terms have and continue to be useful conceptual tools for educators seeking to improve the quality of schools that may be described as already basically functioning (see for example Heneveld's account of their application in East Africa, 2007). Basic school functioning in this sense, means staff and students are able to be physically present in a school building with classrooms and minimum of furniture and they are physically, emotionally and mentally well enough to apply themselves to teaching and learning (i.e. they are not hungry and are in good health). However, when these conditions are not met, as is the case amongst nomadic populations, where chronic poverty is prevalent or children's labour is in high demand, the school effectiveness/improvement framework does not have the flexibility to radically re-imagine the form that schooling can take (Farrell 2002).

The over-reliance on standardised assessments of cognitive learning as a measure of quality within the human capital approach can also be problematic (see Barrett, 2009 for a fuller critique of this). Readily measurable cognitive outcomes shift from being privileged indicators of quality to defining quality. When this happens, qualitative indicators and scrutiny of processes can be overlooked (Alexander, 2008). For example, the sixth Education For All goal of the *Dakar Framework for Action* summarises signatories commitment to quality does itself focus on outcomes whilst making no explicit reference to processes:

> Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence for all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. (UNESCO 2007:66)

What the above quote demonstrates is the influence of the human capital approach on development thinking as it has become institutionalised in the Dakar framework of action. With its assumption of the role of the state in ensuring excellence for all, the framework also represents something of a *rapprochement*, however between human capital and human rights concerns, as we discuss below.

1.2 Human Rights Approaches

By contrast to the human capital approach, the human rights approach is interested in rights to education, rights in education and rights through education (Subrahmanian, 2005; Unterhalter, 2007). Human rights discourses have implications for education quality that have been advocated by UN agencies, International NGOs and civil society organisations at the international, national and local level (Mundy & Murphy, 2001). These include the enactment of negative rights such as protection from abuse, as well as positive rights, for example, celebration and nurturing of learner creativity, use of local languages in schools, pupil participation in democratic structures and debate. Hence, teaching approaches that are broadly identified as learner-centred and democratic school structures are promoted within the human rights approach. The human rights discourse has become pervasive. Whilst researchers still judge much teaching practice to fall short of learner-centred ideas, pupil participation and praise have become widely recognised by educators in Sub-Saharan Africa as characteristics of good teaching (Barrett 2007, Vavrus 2009). Longstanding practices of corporal punishment are being challenged (see for example, HakiElimu 2000, Naker 2007). The human rights discourse has also contributed towards sustained initiatives to transform schooling. For example, in India, a longstanding tradition of learner-centred multigrade teaching in a minority of schools (Blum 2009, Little 2006) has blossomed into the implementation of activity-based learning in state schools in Chennai and in rural areas (Sriprakash 2008).

Two rights-based quality frameworks have been developed, which have been promoted by UN agencies. The framework that was first published in a Global Campaign for Education (GCE) document (Global Campaign for Education (GCE) 2002) still enjoys the support of UNICEF, who use it to define quality with respect to girls basic education. Pigozzi (2008) has continued to develop the framework that first emerged whilst she was director of the quality division at UNESCO (Inter-Agency Task Team (IATT) on Education 2006). Both of these frameworks are explicitly directed at analysing the enactment of children's rights within education institutions

and systems alongside a concern for learning outcomes. They place the individual learner centre-stage and prioritize meeting the learners' needs. Hence, the GCE/UNICEF framework is organised around the five dimensions of what students bring to learning; environments (are they healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive?); content (are curricula and materials relevant?); processes; and outcomes. GCE (2002:4) included a sixth dimension of responsiveness explained as being responsive to individual learning needs of learners, being responsive to local needs of communities and being accountable to parents, communities and taxpayers for education outcomes. UNICEF has realised the implementation of the framework through assisting schools around the world to become 'child-friendly' schools, which are then used as exemplars in policy advocacy. Pigozzi's framework is based on the first five of these dimensions. At the level of the learner it asks that an education system: seek out learners; acknowledge what the learner brings; provide a conducive environment; consider the content and enhance learning processes. At the system level, it asks questions of policies, legislation, resources, outcomes, management and administration. From this starting point, she has suggested a set of indicators and measures for assessing quality at both the level of learner and the system (Pigozzi 2008), and hence turn her framework into a workable scheme for measuring quality.

The human rights approach to access to education has been critiqued by Robeyns (2006) as vulnerable to being reduced to legal rights only, which are formulated and implemented in a high level international and state-led manner, whilst moral rights are overlooked. We argue below that within the context of the MDGs and Dakar Framework, and though the actions of rights-driven multilateral agencies such as UNESCO, it is this understanding of a rights-based approach that has predominated. However, the rights-based frameworks for quality, are also often concerned with moral rights[1], i.e. with an understanding of rights that goes beyond the confines of international and national agreements, laws and policies to consider the underlying moral and ethnical dimensions of education. We discuss below how a social justice approach, drawing on capability theory, can be used as a basis for supporting and extending this aspect of a rights-based approach.

Although there is much that is positive from a social justice perspective, in relation to existing rights based approaches, there are also difficulties. For example, in constructing the frameworks, decisions have been made about which rights should be realised through education and how. In this respect, the humanist tradition within education, which can be traced by such thinkers as Froebel and Pestalozzi, is an unacknowledged influence on the GCE/UNICEF model with its emphasis on safe and nurturing learning environments. Both the economic-utilitarian and the rights-based approach do hold an atomistic or "ontologically individualistic" (Robeyns 2003:65) view of learners. Hence, whilst recognising that children enter education systems with different characteristics or bring prior knowledge and gendered experiences into the classroom, neither framework provides a basis for analysing the social and economic forces that influence these.

Neither are the dominant perspectives concerned with the historical and contemporary political forces that define education quality and determine who has access to a quality education. An analysis of the influence of colonial histories, modernization, globalisation and current neo-liberal policies can help us to understand how each has shaped our understanding both of education quality and human rights (Hickling-Hudson 2007). The rights-based approach constructs schools as set apart from the local context. Schools are ascribed an insulating role for providing safe, gender-sensitive learning environments. Whilst we would fully endorse the assertion that children in all schools should be able to take for granted the support and freedom that facilitates learning, we also recognise that schools exist in specific socio-cultural contexts and a quality education must be responsive to the lived realities of learners and educators in those contexts.

Both school effectiveness and frameworks generated within human rights approaches have proved durable as powerful conceptual tools for considering quality of education from two very

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[1] In fact, none of them refer, as a starting point, to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and related legal documents.

different angles that are accessible to multiple users. As with any conceptual framework, they are both, in different, ways partial and neither fully address the political dimension. Education quality is a political issue, and as such, participation in deciding what are the valued outcomes of education and valued processes should be a matter of debate. Recent developments in theorising social justice have stressed the fundamental role of this dimension, and so in the next section we consider how they can inform our understanding of education quality.

1.3 The Social Justice Approach

The underlying view of social justice here is based on Nancy Fraser's work. Fraser defines justice as 'parity of participation' (Fraser, 2008:16). She explains that:

> According to this radical-democratic interpretation of the principle of equal moral worth, justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life. Overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others as full partners in social interaction (Fraser, 2008: 16).

By institutionalised obstacles, Fraser is here referring to economic structures that deny access to resources that they need in order to interact with others as peers; institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value that may deny them the requisite standing; and, exclusion from the community that is entitled to make justice claims on one another and the procedures that structure public processes of contestation. Important to add here, however, is that a narrow focus on institutional arrangements can blind us to some of the other barriers that may prevent equal participation in social life. For example, besides institutions, discourses can have their own constitutive effects on what can and can't be said, who can speak and with what authority, how our understanding of concepts such as education and development are shaped and how individual and group identities are defined. Unterhalter (2007) also draws attention to the more informal, interactive networks and associations at the local, national and global level that criss-cross institutional structures and processes but yet are often important in determining justice claims.

Fraser draws attention to three dimensions of social justice each related to one of the institutional barriers identified above that we need to take account of, namely, 'redistribution', 'recognition' and 'participation'. We flesh out the implications of each in the sections that follow. Briefly, the first, redistribution, relates to access to resources, which in our case equates with access to a quality education and the potential outcomes that arise from this. Here we find Sen's (1999; 2009) concept of capabilities to be useful in terms of understanding the range of cognitive and affective outcomes that contribute to a person's well being, i.e. that enable learners to become economically productive, healthy, secure and active citizens (see below). Recognition means first identifying and then acknowledging the claims of historically marginalised groups in the African context, including, for example, women, rural dwellers, victims of HIV/AIDS orphans and vulnerable children refugees, cultural, linguistic, religious, racial and sexual minorities and indigenous groups. Participatory justice includes the rights of individuals and groups to have their voices heard in debates about social justice and injustice and to actively participate in decision making. Importantly, for Fraser, this is a prerequisite for realising issues of redistribution and recognition.

In relation to participatory justice, Fraser identifies two forms of misrepresentation. The first form is related to issues of what Fraser (2008:19) calls 'ordinary-political representation'. It is concerned with the nature of political rules and processes within nation states that deny some citizens the chance to participate fully in decision-making. Although Fraser is here referring to the wider political system, this form of misrepresentation can also be understood in relation to debates around good governance in education and can embrace issues of participation, voice, accountability and decision making at different levels of the education system. This form is significant for our purposes because education remains first and foremost a national concern. The second form of misrepresentation is related to globalization and has increasing significance for education in low income countries because of the influence over national policy of global and regional agendas and frameworks. Fraser describes this as 'reframing'. Here, the injustice

arises when the community's boundaries are drawn in such a way as to wrongly exclude some people from the chance to participate at all in its authorised contests over justice. The analysis has profound implications for education because of the increasing importance of global and regional agendas on influencing national policy, including that relating to education quality (see, for example, Robertson et al, 2007). The upshot is that many communities in Africa are multiply disadvantaged in terms of being able to influence the form and content of education relevant for their children and in mechanisms for holding schools and the education system accountable for performance. They are disadvantaged through poor systems of national governance and again through the imposition of top down global and regional agendas that are significant in defining education policy.

Although Fraser's analysis is useful, there are potential difficulties for those interested in social justice in applying the concept to the African context (See Tikly and Dachi, 2009). The first of these relates to the origins of the western conception of 'justice' in the European enlightenment and in the development of western humanism[2]. Whilst it is important to recognise and understand this aspect of the concept's history, it is equally important to acknowledge how ideas of justice have been an aspect of non-Western thinking[3]. We argue, however, that the task for those who are interested in social justice in Africa must be to develop a conceptual basis that is sensitive to historical context and that is firmly rooted in the current realities on the continent. A second potential difficulty facing exponents of social justice in Africa, as elsewhere in the low income world, relates to the dominance of economic and material issues in debates about poverty and inequality. In Fraser's terms, this equates to an emphasis on the redistributive aspects of the concept. Given Africa's position in the global world and the depths of poverty and the extent of inequality, a strong focus on redistribution is undoubtedly necessary. Nonetheless, we suggest that issues relating to the representation and recognition of different groups in educational terms are intimately bound up with the access that these groups have to the redistributive benefits that can potentially flow from education.

2. CAPABILITIES AND EDUCATION QUALITY

The second component of the social justice framework presented here develops ongoing work in the area of capabilities and education (the work of Brighouse, 2000; Unterhalter, 2005; 2007; Walker, 2006; Walker and Unterhalter, 2007; Robeyns, 2003; 2006 has been particularly pivotal in the development of our own understanding). The concept of capabilities is taken from the seminal work of Sen (for example, 1999; 2009) and Nussbaum (for example, 2000; 2006). Capabilities and associated concepts of well-being have become increasingly influential in mainstream development thinking. Although Fraser and Sen's work in important ways complement each other, for example, with respect to the importance of public debate about the nature and form of justice, there are also some differences and it is worth indicating these, albeit briefly. Sen, for example, focuses almost exclusively on the nation state as the locus for discussion and debate, whilst Fraser, as we have seen, draws attention to the importance of recognising the interaction between different levels and scales of justice in the global era. Further, whereas Fraser usefully delineates between redistributive and recognitional aspects of justice, Sen, through the notion of capabilities, rather emphasises the interaction between the two (see also Robeyns, 2003; Walker, 2006). A useful way of thinking about the relationship between Fraser and Sen's work is that whereas Fraser's work draws attention to the broader economic, cultural and social forces and structures that delimit or promote justice, Sen's work provides a way into understanding the deeper ethical basis of justice and freedom in relation to development.

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[2] Specifically, the origins of social justice lie in the thinking of writers such as John Rawls who himself drew on a longer tradition going back to the Jesuits and encompassing the liberalism of John Locke, the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, and the moral philosophy of Emanual Kant.
[3] See for example Sen's, (2009) recent discussion of the Sanskrit literature and Budhist traditions on ethics and jurisprudence. Ideas of justice have also been prevelant on the Africa continent itself since pre-colonial times albeit in different forms (Tikly and Dachi, 2009) and have often lain at the heart of struggles against colonialism and slavery.

Capabilities have been posited by Sen as an alternative to a focus on economic wealth as a measure of development and described by Nussbaum as, "a species of a human rights approach" (Nussbaum, 2006:78) and thus have the potential to bridge and extend the two strands of thinking on education quality mentioned above. Simply put, capabilities are the opportunities that individuals have to realise different 'functionings' that they may have reason to value (Sen, 1999; 2009). Expanding this understanding, Walker argues that:

> A capability is a potential functioning; the list of functionings is endless. It might include doings and beings such as being well nourished, having shelter and access to clean water, being mobile, being well-educated, having paid work, being safe, being respected, taking part in discussions with your peers, and so on. The difference between a capability and functioning is like one between an opportunity to achieve and the actual achievement, between potential and outcome (2006: 165).

Walker goes on to give some useful examples that assist in distinguishing capabilities from functionings. Thus, she distinguishes mobility (a capability) from actually being able to move around (a functioning). Similarly, she separates the capability of literacy from the function of actually reading and the capability of being well educated from acting and being a well educated person. Central to Sen's understanding of capabilities, then is the idea of agency freedom, i.e. that individuals can act to bring about changes that they value. Capabilities thus imply more than simply skills in a narrow sense. They also imply the freedom and opportunity for an individual to convert whatever resources she may have at her disposal into achievements or outcomes of different kinds. It should be pointed out, however, that a capability approach does not mean subscribing to the view that a child's freedom to choose what to study, how to study, or indeed whether or not to attend school at all, is necessarily in the best interests of the child as she has not reached maturity. A child may not have the abilities or knowledge basis on which to make a reasoned judgement about which capabilities to develop. A focus on an individual child's freedom relates more to the development of appropriate capabilities relevant for adulthood, although this entails providing learners with the opportunity to learn how to make choices in a supportive environment free of threat and danger (See Saito, 2003).

This has implications for the way that education is understood and evaluated, because a key role for a quality education becomes one of supporting the development of autonomy and the ability to make choices in later life, rather than simply providing individuals with the necessary resources to learn. Thus, according to Unterhalter:

> …the capability approach urges that when making evaluations in education we should look not just at inputs like teachers, hours in class, or learning materials or outputs, earning from a particular level of education – be these earnings, that is a form of resources – or preference satisfaction – doing what is best for the family as assumed in human capital theory. Evaluations should look at the condition of being educated, the negative and positive freedoms that sustain this condition and the ways in which being educated supports what each and every person has reason to value (2007: 75).

Capabilities, understood in this way, become a basis for assessing equality (rather than simply access to resources or equality of outcomes). They constitute basic freedoms in themselves, and can be seen as the ethical basis of rights in education (Brighouse, 2000) – providing form and substance beyond what is written in international law and frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals and Dakar Framework for Action (see Unterhalter, 2007; Robeyns, 2006 for a fuller discussion of this point). Importantly, they encompass positive as well as negative freedoms. That is, they are concerned with the role of education in promoting positive freedoms in the form of real opportunities rather than in simply guaranteeing a basic entitlement. Here, they provide support but also develop and extend the rights based approach to education quality as we discuss below.

As is the case with human capital approaches, Sen identifies education as having an instrumental value in terms of supporting livelihoods, generating income and reducing human insecurity. Departing from human capital concerns, however, Sen and Nussbaum also identify education as having a great deal of intrinsic worth as a capability in its own right. Thus, one of

Nussbaum's ten core capabilities includes that of 'senses, imagination and thought' – 'being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a truly 'human' way, in a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training' (2000: 78-9). Thus, whilst capabilities in education may indeed include outcomes such as literacy and numeracy and basic scientific knowledge, they are not reducible to these. For Sen, education also potentially has a redistributive effect (for example in relation to the role of girls' education in closing the gender gap in employment and income) and an empowering effect through contributing to the realisation of democratic freedoms. 'In short, education in the capability approach is an unqualified good for human development freedom' (Walker, 2006: 168). Whilst recognising the potential benefits that can flow from education in terms of promoting the freedoms and capabilities of individuals and groups, we are also deeply mindful of the role of the processes of schooling in reproducing inequalities and denying basic freedoms, for example, in relation to gender inequality (see also Unterhalter, 2007).

Extending Nussbaum's earlier efforts to identify ten core capabilities, Walker (2006) has usefully identified a range of eight capabilities linked to education that she has developed through her reading of Sen, Robeyns and Nussbaum and through her own engagement and research in the South African context from a gender perspective. They are worth listing here as they give an indication of the scope of possible core capabilities that a quality education would seek to facilitate in a sub-Saharan African context. They include autonomy (being able to have choices); knowledge (that is both intrinsically interesting and has an instrumental value); social relations (being able to operate socially); respect and recognition (self-confidence and self-esteem, respect from others); aspiration (motivation to learn and succeed); voice (for participation in learning); bodily integrity and bodily health; and emotional integrity and emotions. Although this list provides a useful point of reference, care must be taken in interpreting it for our purposes. Firstly, although Nussbaum and other exponents of the capabilities approach have argued the importance of identifying universal, core, basic capabilities against which inequalities can be evaluated and governments held to account, Sen has steered clear of such an approach, preferring instead to emphasise the diversity of capabilities linked to individual differences and differences in context.

For example, he is careful to emphasise (in a manner that echoes Fraser's work above) how different economic, cultural and political barriers can prevent disadvantaged groups (such as disabled or girl learners) from converting whatever resources they may have at their disposal into capabilities and useful functionings (Sen, 2009). This is also to acknowledge that an individual's capability set (the sum of the opportunities that a learner will require to achieve whatever he or she chooses to value in later life) will differ depending on forms of disadvantage including rurality, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc. and the wider social relations of power and inequality that give rise to disadvantage become deeply implicated into the very notion of capability. Thus, a learner with a disability may require a different or slightly modified capability set from an able bodied learner. Similarly, a girl learner's capability set may be influenced by sexist norms and practices that deny her access to certain curriculum areas or prevent her from going out alone, or protect her from sexualised violence (see also Walker, 2006). Evaluating equality in terms of capabilities requires a prior recognition of different types of disadvantage and of how they interact in different settings if misrecognition of a learners' capabilities and rights in education is to be avoided.

Whilst a focus on capabilities uses as its starting point an emphasis on individual freedoms and rights, it is important for our purposes to emphasise that individuals are also members of groups, whether these be defined in terms of socio-economic status (class), gender, ethnicity etc. In this respect, Sen (2009) has recently provided a robust defence of his work against the charge of 'methodological individualism' arguing, following Marx and in Gramsci, that individuals are part of wider social groups which are themselves products of wider social relations and acknowledging the possibility of defining group capabilities. He also cogently makes the point that it is wrong, and in fact a denial of freedom in itself, to artificially define individuals in relation to one specific group; that we are all members of multiple groups (related for example to gender, class, language group, profession, nationality, community, religion etc.) with multiple forms of advantage and disadvantage and must be free to define our own identities. In this

sense Robeyns (2003) and Walker (2006) distinguish between the ontological individualism implicit in human capital theory and the ethical individualism implied by the use of individual freedom in the capability approach.

Capabilities are also embedded in broader processes of development. Thus, in relation to the countries covered by the EdQual programme, for example, it is clear that each has a different development history dating form pre-colonial times and has pursued differing developmental paths with implications for the kind of capabilities that will be required at an individual or aggregate level to achieve a state of well being. In a recent comparative study of Tanzania and Rwanda, for example, we identified a range of skills that are required to support quite different proposed development pathways (Tikly et al, 2003). Capabilities are, in this sense, relative. They are also contested with different interests defining capabilities in different ways and potential conflicts between individually and collectively identified capabilities and between aggregative and distributive considerations (Sen, 2009).

Understanding the social embeddedness and contextualised nature of individual capabilities is important in the debate about education quality where it is often appropriate to understand educational needs in terms of groups of learners as a basis for targeting interventions. This is also to acknowledge that capabilities inevitably need to be defined at different scales and levels of abstraction from the individual, including the level of global, regional and national policy frameworks, but then how these are mediated and implemented locally in relation to the needs of individuals and the communities in which they are located. The critical point, from our perspective, is to use a list such as that provided by Nussbaum and Walker as a point of departure for debate and discussion, rather than to see it as a point of closure in any discussion of capabilities. In this respect, it is the process of arriving at appropriate capability sets in any context that is critical[4].

This brings us squarely to one of the key difficulties with the capability approach as it has developed so far. Unlike the human capital and human rights approaches, the capability approach is still in its infancy. It also has a limited currency outside of academia. Sen and other scholars working with a capability approach have advanced thinking of how indicators relevant to measuring the development of capabilities might be developed (Sen was instrumental in developing the UN's Human Development Index, for example, which included a range of indicators linked to capabilities and well being). They are evident in UNESCO's Education Development Index (EDI) which uses indicators related to access (enrolments), quality (survival rates to grade five), outcomes (literacy rates) and gender parity. Nonetheless, Unterhalter (2007) has drawn attention to the difficulties associated with the EDI and existing Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) related to the unreliability of data and of data collection processes. Whilst traditional data collection techniques have an important role, she has drawn attention to the potentially significant role of more participative approaches to collecting relevant data, such as those used by NGOs, where the process, as well as the data itself, can be used to evaluate capabilities. Robeyns (2006) and Walker (2006) have both also drawn attention to the use of interdisciplinary research and mixed methods to capture the range of capabilities in a field such as education. For example, participative research methodologies, including action research, can play an important role in identifying capabilities either on their own terms or when considered in relation to different sources of information (see also Walker, 2005).

This brings us to a consideration of capabilities in relation to policy and research, which provides a basis for the remainder of the article. Extending Subrahmanian's (2002), distinction between rights to education, rights in education and rights through education, it is rights in education that principally concern us here, i.e. the opportunities to develop the greater

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[4] Here Robeyns (2003) has usefully identified five criteria for the process of selecting capabilities (i) that it should be explicit, discussed and defended; (ii) that the method should be clear; (iii) that the level of abstraction of the list should be appropriate; (iv) that the list comprises two stages, an ideal list and pragmatic or non-ideal list; and (v) the listed capabilities should not be reducible to each other.

capability set that are afforded to different individuals and groups through the processes of teaching and learning that are to a large degree synonymous with education quality. This involves consideration of the extent to which schools develop the capabilities associated with education, such as those identified by Walker that include access to knowledge, critical thinking, problem solving and autonomy, that besides their utility in relation to the broader capability set have an intrinsic value of their own. To some extent this relates to the provision of basic resources such as food to meet nutritional needs, suitably prepared and motivated teachers, appropriate learning materials, a relevant curriculum and an accessible built environment. It is the identification of these factors that has to a large extent been the focus for existing input/output models of education quality. Critically, however, it involves placing at the heart of the debate about education quality Sen's notion of *conversion*, i.e. to evaluate the extent to which schools as institutions and the communities within which they are embedded facilitate or place limits upon the opportunities for learners to convert whatever resources they have at their disposal into the necessary capabilities and functionings required for later life. In relation to a rights based approach, this means not only paying attention to the negative freedoms such as the rights of learners not to be subject to corporal punishment or for girls to be educated without fear of sexual harassment, but to the promotion of positive freedoms such as being able to learn in one's mother tongue and a language of wider communications.

An important caveat is necessary at this point, however, in that the research we will be principally drawing upon, including the work of the EdQual research programme, focuses for the most part on a rather narrow set of capabilities and functionnings including literacy and numeracy. This is due in part to the dominance of donor priorities, influenced by human capital concerns that emphasise the more instrumental aspects of capabilities. It is also related, however, to the limited informational base available. Thus, the SACMEQ data set for instance, uses reading and mathematics scores at Grade six as its measure of outcomes[5]. Some of the EdQual projects have, however, also focused on critical thinking, argumentation and problem solving as outcomes in themselves, skills associated with the capability of autonomous learning. In the context of EdQual, we have developed our own understanding of education quality through a juxtaposition of analysis of the SACMEQ data set with a more contextualised understanding of how opportunities for learners to learn and for practitioners to develop their own capabilities are supported and constrained in different institutional and country settings. Nonetheless, the current article should be seen as a way of critiquing but also developing the existing research agenda including the work of EdQual.

Finally, whereas critics have drawn attention to the often top down, state-led nature of a rights based approach with its focus on legal and policy frameworks, a capabilities approach draws attention to the importance of the wider moral imperative for providing a quality education, and the importance of communities, as well as the state, in developing and realising this imperative through their own commitments and actions (see Robeyns, 2006). In our terms, this implies a focus on community support for state education but also a potential alternative of non-state forms of provision including private and not-for profit forms of provision. In the sections that follow, attention will turn to fleshing out the implications of the social justice framework presented above through an engagement with the research coming out of the EdQual research programme and the wider literature. In this way, the paper will seek to add to the existing informational base relevant to debates about capabilities.

3. A CAPABILITIES APPROACH TO SOCIALLY JUST QUALITY OF EDUCATION

This section discusses how a capabilities approach extends the insights into social justice in and through education quality beyond those highlighted by human capital and human rights approaches. Each of Fraser's three dimensions is taken in turn. The treatment of redistributive social justice focuses on the instrumentalist aspects of capabilities. The discussion shares some similar concerns, and indeed draws on insights from the human capital tradition, but also seeks

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[5] Although SACMEQ III, which at the time of writing is unavailable, is to include a more affective dimension in the form of HIV/AIDS awareness.

to problematise and extend these from a social justice perspective. Recognition concerns cultural needs and identities of different groups of marginalised learners. It will show how a capabilities approach can integrate the concerns of rights-based approaches for meeting learners' needs, satisfying linguistic and cultural rights and ensuring girl friendly schooling with the redistributive concerns that are the subject of analysis in school effectiveness studies. Finally, a consideration of the implications of representation for education quality draws attention to the processes by which the capabilities that are valued as constituting a quality education, both within processes and through outcomes are decided.

3.1 Redistributive Justice and Access to a Quality Education

As Nancy Fraser and others have pointed out, redistributive concerns have often been at the heart of class based struggles in the arena of social policy. Fraser, in her analysis, relates this to the distribution of wealth understood principally in economic terms. In relation to Sen and Nussbaum's ideas, the issues relate to the distribution of what Robeyns (2006) has described as capability inputs – those resources that can be converted into capabilities. Redistributive justice also draws attention to the more instrumentalist aspects of education in producing those capabilities linked to sustainable livelihoods and economic growth and access to material and human resources. The discussion will consider how human capital and human rights approaches deal with issues of distribution before considering the potential for a social justice perspective to build on to and extend existing understandings.

We have seen in previous sections that a concern with quality, albeit in rather narrow terms, is evident in the Dakar Framework for Action. Quality is also mentioned in the MDG dealing with access although here it is undefined. A key overarching issue in relation to redistribution therefore, is the absence of a clearly worked out idea of education quality within these major instruments of global redistribution. This has had implications for the prioritisation afforded to issues of quality in global and national debates. Firstly, in the absence of any major policy levers prompting governments to improve the quality of education, quality has until relatively recently often taken a back seat on national agendas. In many parts of Africa the quality of education has in fact declined as governments have become increasingly successful at increasing enrolments ahead of limited initiatives to improve quality (UNESCO, 2004; 2008; Barrett et al, 2007). Secondly, where improving the quality of education has been taken seriously at the policy level the rationale for investing in quality has, until recently, often been made simply as a means to increase retention or outcomes. This has in turn reinforced a tendency, particularly within human capital theory, to treat the education system as a 'black box', i.e. to neglect the processes of teaching and learning and the question of how resources get distributed *within* schools. As we discuss below, these internal processes are often complicit in perpetuating the marginalisation and exclusion of some groups of disadvantaged learners including girls and children with special educational needs. They also have a cultural dimension which we discuss in the next section.

Turning first to the question of quality inputs, writers and organisations, such as the World Bank and UNESCO, draw on similar research findings. There is an increasing awareness, for example, that improved access to pre-school education can enhance both education outcomes and equity. Pre-school interventions show most significant effects relative to later interventions on children born into families below the poverty line (UNESCO, 2008). There is also mounting evidence that provision of breakfast and of school feeding and nutrition programmes can lead to improved scores in academic tests, especially for more socio-economically disadvantaged learners (see for example Oduku, 2009; Ryan & Meng, 2004; UNESCO, 2005) as can de-worming (see Kremer et al, 2007). School effectiveness studies have consistently highlighted the importance of textbooks and other pedagogical and learning materials for raising student performance (Yu, 2007; Barrett et al, 2007). More recent research has provided nuance to this debate through pointing out that materials provided need to be appropriate to the environment and to the cognitive level and the language of the learner and accompanied by teacher training in their use (see for example, Rubagumya and Clegg, 2009). Resources need to be used efficiently by teachers and by schools (Hanushek and Wößmann, 2007; 2008).

Teacher quality is perceived to lie at the heart of the quality debate. Analysis of the PASEC standard tests for Mathematics and French in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal and Madagascar (Michaelowa, 2001) showed that teachers' initial education and training, and experience, had a significant impact on results. Evaluation of existing teacher in-service programmes and the challenge of training new and existing teachers for EFA has led to calls for more school-based teacher education and professional development (see O'Sullivan, 2001; Dladla and Moon, 2002; Lewin and Stuart, 2003, for example)[6]. A key issue in relation to teachers is to improve teacher recruitment, deployment and motivation. The recent Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2008) has identified a large shortage of qualified teachers in sub-Saharan Africa and large disparities within and between countries in the pupil teacher ratio with most African countries, recording ratios above the target of 40:1 which is considered the approximate ceiling for a primary school education of good quality. Evidence suggests many countries face a crisis in teacher morale that is mostly related to poor salaries, working conditions and limited opportunities for professional development (Bennell and Akyeampong, 2007; DFID and VSO, 2008). Within a human capital framework, the issue of poor teacher motivation is addressed through the introduction of incentives and accountability mechanisms to improve learning and enhance equity; and strengthen the use of regional, national and school-level assessments to support policy design aimed at these same ends (Hanushek and Wößmann, 2008; see also Muralidharan & Sundraraman, 2006). Within a human rights framework the emphasis lies more on supporting teacher professionalism and development as well as issues relating to pay and conditions of service (see UNESCO, 2008, for example). We return to this issue in the final section of the paper.

Pedagogy has increasingly been seen to lie at the heart of the debate about quality (Barrett et al, 2007). Work on multi-grade teaching (Little, 2006 for example) including evaluations of the most well-known multigrade environment – the *Escuela Nueva* schools in Colombia – show positive effects on student achievement. Many successful initiatives in low income contexts share characteristics of 'structured pedagogy' i.e. they promote careful planning of lessons, with a clear introduction that links to the previous lesson and sets out learning objectives as well as use of formative assessment (Barrett et al, 2007). They often encourage teachers to make use of a range of strategies including talking to the whole class from the front, question and answer with the whole class, individual exercises or reading, group discussion and practical activities depending on their context, learners' needs and subject matter. There has been a growth of interventions emphasising reading, e.g. within the context of the World Bank led Fast Track Initiative (FTI, 2008). There has been a growing consensus about the potential benefits of ICT use in supporting student centred, problem based and collaborative approaches to teaching and learning and to assessment (Haddad and Draxler, 2002). However, to achieve these benefits and to transform learning, ICT use has to be integrated into national policy and into practice in schools. In this respect, according to UNESCO, most low income countries are still at the 'emerging' stage of development (Farrell and Wachholz, 2003) and the upshot is that many learners continue to be denied access to even basic ICT skills (see Were et al, 2009).

The relevance of curricula is considered to be a key dimension of the quality debate by both exponents of human capital and human rights approaches. Both the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All (World Conference on Education for All, 1990) and the Dakar Framework for Action (World Education Forum, 2000) define quality basic education as enabling learners to acquire literacy, numeracy and essential Life Skills. Life Skills encompasses social attitudes, basic knowledge and practical skills. It includes, but is considerably broader than, vocational skills, practical skills and knowledge that lay the foundation for children to be economically productive when they enter the world of work encompassing domains such as HIV/AIDS awareness and peace education. Hanushek & Wößmann (2008), writing for the World Bank argue that analysis of international tests shows that broad-based cognitive skills are key for economic growth, income distribution and returns to investment in education. This does not only apply to basic skills of literacy and numeracy. They demonstrate that the development of a more advanced skill set is also important to promote growth.

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[6] There are signs that this is beginning to happen with ministries of education in Zambia, Kenya, Malawi and Ghana strengthening decentralised networks for supporting school-based teacher training (Mattson, 2006).

Although there is a growing overlap in the identification of quality inputs, there are divergences with respect to the broader policy implications of the above. In this respect it is useful to contrast two recent documents produced by the World Bank (Hanushek and Wößmann, 2007, 2008) with the 2008 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) (UNESCO, 2008). Hanushek and Wößmann (2008), writing from a human capital approach, emphasise three key areas that reform initiatives will have to address to raise quality. These are creating greater choice and competition between schools, which will encourage schools to improve outcomes; greater school autonomy including local decision making, fiscal decentralization, and parental involvement; and greater accountability through the publication of school performance data, the use of external examinations and benchmarking including participation of countries in international tests. UNESCO's Global Monitoring Team, whilst giving implicit, qualified support to some of the suggestions made within a human capital approach, such as those proposed by Hanushek and Wößmann, have also been overtly critical of some of the underlying assumptions. Thus, there is agreement for the need for greater accountability and efficiency to drive up quality. However, the GMR team have also urged governments to pay attention to issues of equity in relation to governance and quality issues. In relation to decentralisation, for example, they point out how devolution has often exacerbated, rather than reduced, the gap in education quality and achievements between rich and poor. They cite examples of countries such as Vietnam, Uganda, South Africa, Colombia and Chile in which the central government has been more proactive in developing frameworks and indices specifying basic entitlements to quality and targeting funding through the use of grants and funding formulae to more disadvantaged regions and localities. These have enjoyed some success in reducing inequalities, although success has varied.

The GMR report is also critical of the choice agenda implicit in the human capital approach. They argue that there has been limited evidence of greater choice leading to improved outcomes for disadvantaged groups, pointing to the limited 'choice' that most parents have in low income settings and the contradictory nature of evidence suggesting that vouchers are linked to increases in educational outcomes where they have been introduced. They also point to the tenuous nature of some of the claims made that increased privatisation, in the form of low-fee private schooling and public private partnerships, which have proliferated as demand for schooling has increased, also leads to improved outcomes. Rather, they argue that the proliferation of private schooling reflects the inability of the state to provide sufficient access to quality education for the population. As such, whilst low-fee private schooling is likely to continue to fill a void in state provision for the foreseeable future, the argues for greater regulation. In terms of political philosophy, whilst exponents of human capital often stress the importance of negative freedoms with respect to the role of the state, (in terms of constraining or even rolling back the responsibilities of the state), exponents of the human rights agenda rather point to the positive freedoms that the state needs to exercise to ensure a quality education for all:

> All this points to a strong case for governments to focus their energies and resources on public provision of quality basic education for everyone. Private finance and private providers have a role to play, and governments need to ensure that they are integrated into properly managed national strategies. However, transferring responsibility to schools, parents, communities and private providers will not address the underlying problems faced by education systems in providing equitable opportunities for quality education. These will only be revealed through governance systems that combine strong institutional arrangements with a commitment to equity (UNESCO, 2008: 170).

Initiatives to shift the focus of education leadership and management to the school level, both in high and low income countries, are increasingly common. There is, however, little evidence to show that the introduction of school-based leadership and management has any effects on student outcomes including those with disadvantages (UNESCO, 2008). One reason for this might be the poor linkages between school-based management initiatives and classroom practice (Riddell, 2007). Where leadership is focused on improving teaching and learning it can have a significant impact, including on disadvantaged learners (see Bosu et al., 2009). A more profound reason may be that school-based management has also often been associated with

forms of privatisation and a choice agenda that have often served to exacerbate, rather than to reduce inequality (UNESCO, 2008).

Similarly, putting in place systems to effectively monitor quality is a key concern within human capital and rights approaches as the capacity to monitor quality within the framework of existing Education Management Information Systems is extremely variable. Regional initiatives such as the Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) and the Program of Analysis of Education Systems Assessments in Francophone Africa (PASEC) are examples of capacity building in this area, although they are often top down and driven by government agendas rather than responding to the demands of communities and grass roots organisations for greater accountability. There is a growing consensus around greater participation in low income countries in international assessment such as TIMMS (see for example, UNESCO, 2008 FTI, 2008) although there is limited evidence to date that this will have a positive effect on raising quality. Researchers in the World Bank have also been suggesting the introduction of a millennium learning goal (Filmer et al, 2006), although we have argued above that this is also based on problematic assumptions.

Much of the research evidence reviewed above relates to the distribution of opportunities for a quality education from the point of view of socio-economic disadvantage and poverty reduction. We have argued in earlier sections, however, for the need to take account of multiple forms of inequality and of how they interact with respect to accessing a quality education. It is worth considering how issues of distribution in relation to different forms of disadvantage are dealt with within the human capital and rights approaches. Firstly, in relation to gender, the emphasis within both approaches has largely been with issues of access to education. The focus of the MDGs on the access of girls and women to education can be seen as part of an effort to recognise their equal rights. It is also perceived, however, from a human capital perspective to contribute to their alleviation from poverty (Dollar and Gatti, 1999) and a positive effect on overall labour supply (UNESCO, 2003) as well as having wider benefits to health and welfare including the fight against HIV/AIDS and greater control by women over their own fertility (see also DFID, 2000; (Hannum and Buchmann 2005). As feminist critics have rightly pointed out however, whilst addressing important concerns, the focus on access has been at the expense of a focus on the quality of education received by girls and women (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2005). It has neglected the issue of how resources get distributed within and between schools and how this may assume a gender dimension. For example, the often inadequate provision of sanitary faculties impacts on issues of quality and access for girls, especially in secondary schools, and girls are often not given equal access to different areas of the curriculum (UNESCO, 2003). Many of the issues, including the impact of sexist norms and values, take on a cultural dimension and are beyond the orbit of human capital approaches, although as we see in the next section they are addressed to some extent through a human rights lens.

Similar critiques can be advanced with respect to the way that human capital theory deals with issues of disability and inclusion. A rationale for engaging with issues of disability from a human capital approach is made in terms of the links between disability and poverty in later life (see for example, Filmer, 2008) with a focus primarily on ensuring access for learners with disabilities to basic education. However, initiatives such as the FTI that have been led by the World Bank have also been criticised for not being sufficiently inclusive of children with special needs, HIV/AIDS orphans and vulnerable children. Rather, inclusion has been more often supported by organisations committed to a human rights agenda (see Polat, 2009). There is a similar blind spot within the literature, written from a human capital approach regarding issues of ethnicity and disadvantage including the education of speakers of minority languages. Where this issue is addressed in mainstream policy is also usually through a rights perspective and at the margins of dominant policy discourse and practice (see below).

Other distributional issues relating to the impact of the broader socio-economic context are hardly recognised by human capital theorists, although they are to some extent dealt with within a rights based approach. One illustrative example concerns the role of education in relation to conflict. Bush and Saltarelli (2000) describe how education has two faces, and its negative side can promote, rather than reduce, the chances of violent conflict. The authors argue that the negative face shows itself in the uneven distribution of education to create or

preserve privilege, the use of education as a weapon of cultural repression, and the production or doctoring of textbooks to promote intolerance (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000: vii). Davies (2004) discusses the multiple ways that school systems might reproduce social inequalities, increase tension and be a catalyst for war. One example of this relationship is pointed out by the UNDP who highlight how school exclusion as a result of poverty contributed in Sierra Leone to young people joining the rebel armies (see for example, UNDP, 2005).

There is much to commend the human rights approach as it has developed in relation to distributional issues both in its qualified take up of aspects of the human capital approach and its critique of some of its underlying assumptions. There are, however, weaknesses. For example, we will argue in the next section that the rights approach, with its main emphasis on the legal and regulatory aspects of rights, does not delve sufficiently in its analysis into the role of cultural hierarchies in perpetuating disadvantage and in limiting basic freedoms.

3.2 Recognition of Diverse Needs and Identities in Education

Recognition within social justice has as its goal a "difference-friendly world, where assimilation to majority of dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect" (Fraser, 1996:3). This includes recognition of the distinctive perspectives of groups that are marginalised by dint of their ethnicity, sexuality or religion, among other characteristics. As, Walker (2006) points out, learning is a process of 'becoming' and similarly some capabilities are not just 'beings' and doing' but are also 'becomings'. Schools are both institutions through which recognition claims are made and which actively create status inequalities. Recognition claims make particular demands of educational processes and are sensitive to how education actively shapes identities. The recognition claims of girls and of minority or marginalised ethnic groups are considered here to illustrate the nature of these demands. Recognition of other forms of identity including faith-based identities, racial identities (see Hickling-Hudson, 2007), teenagers' emerging sexual identities as well as the identities of those with disabilities are all equally important and deserve a more in-depth analysis with respect to implications for educational processes than it is possible to attempt here.

Turning first to gender, reference was made in the previous section to the limits of a human capital perspective on gender and education quality. More recent work, written from a human rights perspective, has sought to provide a more holistic view of what is entailed in recognising gendered rights in education than that afforded by human capital perspectives. These demand attention to the cultural dimensions of schooling, including the impact of gendered norms and values that can constitute barriers to girls accessing resources and converting them into capabilities and functionings. For example, schools need to pay attention to preventing gendered abuse in African schools (Leach, Fiscian, Kadzamira, Lemani and Machakanja 2003) and to measures to prevent teenage girls from exposing themselves to sexual risk in order to fund their education (Vavrus 2003, Vavrus 2005). Attention needs to be paid to initiatives that enable girls to overcome the barriers in some contexts that prevent them from accessing some areas of the curriculum, such as science and mathematics and technology education (Swainson, 1998) (see also Halai, 2009). From a capability perspective, recognising these rights is critical if girls are to realise their opportunities to turn the various resources afforded by education into capabilities and functionings. At an institutional level, this would involve ensuring that the legal and policy framework governing education guaranteed these rights. A capability approach, however, is more ambitious. It demands recognising the fundamental freedoms at stake for girls and women to access a quality education that underpin, at a basic level, these rights. It also recognises the fundamental importance of the *process* dimension of rights (Unterhalter, 2007) in that the cultural norms and values, which present barriers to girls access to quality education and that are part of the wider context of the school, need to be engaged with at an ethical and political level. This has profound implications for the democratic governance of education as we discuss in the next section.

Turning to questions of ethnicity, minority or marginalised ethnic groups require curricula and teaching and learning processes that recognise and value their particular histories, lifestyles and pedagogic texts. Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist (2004) describe examples of schools in Australia and the USA designing and implementing curricula in collaboration with members of the local aboriginal and native American community that celebrate their hybrid culture and history.

Isolated initiatives have re-conceptualised schools as institutions to accommodate the lifestyles of nomadic-pastoralist groups (Balwanz et al., 2006). For example, the Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja (ABEK) schools serving nomadic pastoralists in North East Uganda have a flexible daily schedule, beginning in the early morning or late at night so that children do not miss household chores. Pedagogy concerns the discourse and techniques that are used in teaching and learning, including regulative texts that control behaviour. Most especially in early years and the lower primary, regulative texts need to be close enough to those used in local communities to be accessible to pupils. On the other hand, where local regulative texts are not affirmative of children's emerging identities, the regulative texts of school should challenge and be in contrast to these. This extends to the use of the local language as the language of instruction, as is increasingly practiced throughout Africa (more on this below). Sadly, examples of misrecognition in educational processes are also widespread. Tshireletso (1997) describes how the authoritarian culture, use of corporal punishment and verbal insults in Botswanan schools is at odds with child-rearing amongst remote area dwellers. The effect that this can have on children's identities is epitomised by the phrase "they are the government's children", used by a parent to describe pupils. Drop-out is high and Pansiri (2008) directly relates the effective exclusion of Remote Area Dweller children to the cultural alienation experienced in schools and, even more severely, in hostels. Language of instruction is also a major 'push-out factor' that led some to drop out of school (Pansiri, 2008). The remote area dwellers' own language was not used in schools, so learners are expected to learn in Setswana and English. This is similar to the situation in Tanzania which Rubagumya and Clegg (2009) address from a human rights basis.

Claims such as these are recognised by human rights approaches as entitlements related to cultural rights and require that a quality education meets learner's needs, including those stemming from their various cultural identities. Within the GCE/UNICEF framework (see above), using children's mother tongue and designing curricula that draw upon and celebrate the ethnic identities of pupils, and for that matter being inclusive in terms of gender and disability, is part of recognising what learners bring. The framework has been developed more recently by UNICEF in the form of the concept of child friendly schools, i.e. schools that:

> …not only must help children realize their right to a basic education of good quality. They are also needed to do many other things — help children learn what they need to learn to face the challenges of the new century; enhance their health and well-being; guarantee them safe and protective spaces for learning, free from violence and abuse; raise teacher morale and motivation; and mobilize community support for education. (UNICEF, 2009)

Clearly the concept has much in common with a capabilities approach in that curricula develop capabilities within and through education that individuals, communities and nations choose to value, and this includes capabilities that are valued as a consequence of socio-cultural identities. Or, to reverse this, determining the curricula content is one way by which a society decides the capabilities which it values.

Pedagogic texts enable learners to convert resources or capability inputs into a valued capability set. In capability terms, pedagogic texts need to enable the learner to acquire the communicative capabilities that will enable her to pursue valued doings and beings in later life. This involves both adapting pedagogic texts to take into account the communicative norms of their local societies and developing in learners the communicative skills they need within their capability set to thrive within national and international societies. This principle is equally applicable to language of instruction. Using a language in which learners are proficient enables them to access the curriculum, i.e. convert resources into outcomes. There is significant evidence that learning in the mother tongue at least in the early years is critical for cognitive development. At the same time, language proficiency is itself a valued capability. A society may decide to value proficiency in a language which is not spoken widely as well as in a national or international language. Realising recognition justice in education therefore depends on *who* determines curricula, pedagogy and language policies and *how*. A capabilities perspective renders recognition as subject to representation, supporting Fraser's (2007) construction of representation as the more fundamental dimension or 'grammar' of social justice.

3.3 Education Quality, Participation and the Politics of Reframing

In this final section we discuss the role of participatory social justice in relation to education quality. In relation to Fraser's ideas, issues of participation and voice are a *sin qua non* for the other dimensions of social justice. Indeed, as we have seen, the ideas of public dialogue and debate is also central to Sen and Nussbaum's notion of capabilities. It is through paying attention to this aspect that the social justice approach most obviously goes beyond existing human capital and human rights approaches through drawing attention to the fundamentally political nature of the debate about education quality.

As we have seen, in outlining her conception of representation, Fraser introduces the concept of misframing by which she refers to the double exclusion faced by parents, communities in debates about a quality education – the often profoundly dysfunctional form of the Westphalian state that denies participation in local or national decision – making; and, the increasing significance of regional and global agendas and initiatives in education that often lie outside of the influence of indigenous leaders and grass roots organisations. Fraser goes on to outline what she means by the 'politics of framing', which she suggests can take two main forms, both of which have relevance for our discussion and both of which are inter-related. The first approach, which she refers to as the affirmative politics of framing, contests the boundaries of participation and voice but within a Westphalian grammar of frame-setting. In more familiar parlance it can be equated with the 'good governance agenda' advocated by exponents of both human capital and human rights approaches. As we have seen, whilst the human capital approach largely defines good governance in terms of accountability, decentralisation and greater efficiency, the human rights approach understands its broader implications in societies marked by inequality. Thus the 2008 GMR defines good governance in the following terms:

> Governance describes the institutions, rules and norms through which policies are developed and implemented – and through which accountability is enforced. Governance reform in its broadest sense is concerned with changing the rules of the game – that is, changing the processes through which decisions are made and implemented on behalf of members of an organization or a society …. However, governance is not just about abstract institutional processes or formal rules. It is also about power relationships in society. At its most basic level, governance systems define who decides on policies, how resources are distributed across society and how governments are held accountable (UNESCO, 2008: 128-9).

The above quote is used to argue the case for greater parental and community voice in education, particularly at the local level. In this sense it wishes to go beyond the emphasis simply on accountability and to extend the concept of 'voice' in local decision making to disadvantaged communities. The difficulty is that the underlying assumption of a Westphalian frame is contrary to the reality in many low income, postcolonial African countries where forms of a neo-patrimonial and authoritarian state characterised by the rule of postcolonial elites that are backed up by competing global interests have more often than not been the norm (see Tikly and Dachi, 2009 for a fuller discussion here). Here we run up against the limitations from a social justice perspective of an organisation like UNESCO which derives its legitimacy and resource from the support of national governments and which makes it difficult to go beyond a top down, government led understanding of rights. In this respect, what has proved increasingly effective, although often frowned upon by governments, is the role of advocacy groups with their roots in civil society, including grass roots campaigns for educational change, local NGOs, religious and community organisation, advocating for change. There are increasing numbers of prominent examples of such organisations including the Federation of African Women in Education, which has a regional as well as national presence across Africa; *HakiElimu* in Tanzania; and the increasing numbers of parent's organisations in India and Pakistan that have been set up to hold the national governments accountable for school performance. The role of these organisations, and of civil society more broadly, might not be universally popular with national governments but is critical for a healthy democracy.

From a capabilities perspective there are further implications too. For example, there are implications for extending the scope of many forms of Life Skills to include forms of citizenship education and for challenging undemocratic processes in the classroom where this stifles the

development of basic freedoms and opportunities to develop such skills including, for example, the use of corporal punishment or the propagation of sexist or racist norms and values. Here, however, we are once again taken beyond the scope of a traditional human rights perspective with its focus on the state and its regulatory apparatus because what is at stake is a wider debate about the value basis of education – a debate that is often reduced to a technical or top down element of policy making but which, by its nature needs to be extended to all sections of society. Values are of course contested. Some 'traditional' norms and values, relating for example to gender, may be deeply undesirable in relation to education. Debate over values within the education sector is surely a necessary and healthy indicator of a broader social democratic capability, the touchstone being the realisation of individual freedoms including those of girls, cultural and other minorities as well as of the majority.

Such a debate about the ethical basis of education is more than simply an ideal. What is increasingly clear from a study of effective reform efforts to raise the quality of education in countries such as Cuba, Finland and in some of the Confucian heritage countries is the central importance of the values/ moral dimension. What research reveals is the extent to which the reform process in these countries has involved the articulation of a clear values basis (of whatever hue) embedded over successive generations that stresses the importance of education and contains at its heart a vision of what it means to be educated (see Carnoy et al, 2007; UNESCO, 2005). A related element of successful reform in these countries is the central importance attached to developing the professional status and respect accorded to teachers as educators of the next generation.

We have seen from a human rights perspective how teachers are motivated not only through the use of different forms of incentives and greater accountability but through the development of their professional autonomy – in other words their capabilities as teachers. Part of this must be the capability to exercise voice in relation to educational matters including debates about education quality. A major finding of the EdQual projects is that where teachers and headteachers have been empowered to identify and act on issues of quality through forms of professional development they have been motivated to do so. It should be noted that this is not to suggest that attention should not be given to the question of the efficient use of resources or even incentives. Rather, it is to extend the debate beyond the narrow, behaviourist and stultifying confines of rational choice theory that underpins human capital approaches, to acknowledge the broader range of motivations and positive freedoms that enable headteachers and teachers as professionals to function and to exercise the necessary autonomy to realise whatever aspects of a quality education society, local communities and teachers themselves have reason to value.

Realising the broader social capability for change has implications for leadership at all levels of the education system. A central component of existing discourses about education reform centres on the capacity of the state and of leaders at different levels to initiate, implement and embed change. Here, however, the term 'capacity' is used again in a rather narrow sense to denote a conjunction of necessary resources and skills. What a capability approach suggests is the need to develop a wider capability set related to the role of elected leaders, government officials and bureaucrats that includes not just access to the means of development - resources and skills - but also the freedom to function as initiators and leaders of change. In the context of top down, hierarchical and sometimes corrupt state apparatuses that exist in many parts of Africa, to exercise effective leadership takes on a cultural and moral dimension (see Tikly and Ncgobo, forthcoming, for example). Critically, it involves embracing but also going beyond the need to make leaders more accountable, to understand the positive freedoms entailed in being a leader. It also involves going beyond a narrow, technicist mindset – so often the hallmark of human capital inspired reform drives with a focus on efficiency – and to develop what the social theorist, Antonio Gramsci, describes as 'intellectual and moral leadership' (Gramsci, 1971:57). Here there is a long tradition of intellectually and morally inspired leadership on which to draw on the continent. It is also suggestive of a research agenda which might focus on (but not necessarily be restricted to) a study of successful, state initiated reform. (An example that springs to mind here is that of SSA in India – see above).

This brings us to the second element of the politics of reframing, what Fraser describes as the 'transformative approach'. According to Fraser:

> for proponents of this approach, the state-territorial principle no longer affords an adequate basis for determining the 'who' of justice in every case…supporters of transformation do not propose to eliminate state-territoriality entirely. But they concede that its grammar is out of sync with the structural causes of many injustices in a globalising world. (2008: 23)

Drawing on a wide literature on globalisation and new forms of governmentality, Tikly (2004) has described the 'new imperialsim' in education. By this is meant the increasing hegemony of global interests and development agendas driven by human capital and neo-liberal reform on national reform efforts and the forms – economic, political and cultural/discursive that this takes. Tikly (2003) and Tikly and Dachi (2009) have extended this to an analysis of the 'new regionalism' in Africa, which encompasses the reinvention of regional and of sub-regional bodies and the development of pan-African programmes of reform such as the African renaissance and NEPAD. It is argued by the authors that in the context of top down globalisation, these bodies and the programmes they generate are contested. Whilst on the one hand they often incorporate donor and multilateral driven agendas in education and other areas of social policy, they also provide a space for indigenous leaders to exert a vision of Africa onto the global stage and for what Mittleman (2003) describes as 'transformative regionalism', i.e. an opportunity for bottom, grass roots movement on the continent to influence regional and global agendas. Some of these, such as Federation of African Women in Education, are explicitly focused on social justice issues relating to gender in education.

Finally, as Robertson et al (2007) and others have pointed out, a key aspect of the privatisation debate – and one that is ignored by the GMR with its focus exclusively on the national level - is the increasing scope in the context of the WTO for global private interests to buy into, and indeed to take over, the provision of education and training in Africa. At present, this is most evident in higher education with the increasing internationalisation and privatisation of the sector in a context where indigenous universities have been systematically underdeveloped through years of under investment. The danger implicit in such forms of privatisation is that it does not accord with nationally determined values or priorities or with indigenous notions of educational justice.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this article has been to open up for scrutiny the potential of a social justice approach for understanding education quality. The approach is necessarily tentative and exploratory, although we have drawn on a wide body of research evidence to illustrate this potential. The main argument advanced is that a social justice approach can provide a new way of thinking about education quality. It can provide an alternative rationale for education rooted in individual freedoms and education's role in fostering capabilities that encompasses, but also stretches and challenges, human capital and rights approaches. A focus on capabilities can also assist in helping us think through what it might mean to be educated in the global era and how this relates to notions of 'development'. It redefines a quality education as one that develops whatever capabilities society and individuals have reason to value. It encourages and feeds into a broader debate about education quality in terms of a focus on the necessary capability inputs and the positive and negative freedoms that are required in order to enable learners to convert these into capabilities for later life. This means paying attention not only to the means for realising a quality education but to the cultural norms and values that either enable or stifle the development of these capabilities for different groups of disadvantaged learners. It has also highlighted the central importance of public debate – at the local, national and global level – in defining the *what*, the *who* and the *how* of education quality. In seeking to extend the bounds of the existing debate, a key conclusion is the need to develop the informational basis on which education quality is conceived. Here the challenge is not only to define at different levels of the system what different capabilities might look like but also how they can be measured and how the success of education systems in developing these capabilities can be evaluated. Central to

this endeavour is the need to develop the capabilities of African researchers and practitioners as well as parents and learners to undertake such a task.

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