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Agency and Participation in Childhood and Youth began with discussions at the Human Development and Capability Association (HDCA) conference in 2010. The HDCA is a global interdisciplinary organization that is centered on human development and the capability approach and seeks to apply these approaches to policy. Accordingly, this book brings together contributors from educational science, economics, philosophy, sociology, and other fields. The authors primarily write from a European perspective, although a few chapters examine case studies in the Middle East and Africa. The first five chapters of the book develop the capability approach as it relates to children and education more thoroughly. The last seven chapters of the book examine case studies in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Rather than focusing on education as an experience that happens only in school, the book takes a holistic view on the well-being of the child and the importance of that well-being to education, within or outside of the institutional context. The chapters present a compelling look at the need to focus on the capabilities of children, not only for education, but also for social justice.

Agency and Participation in Childhood and Youth

International Applications of the Capability Approach in Schools and Beyond

Edited by Caroline Sarojini Hart,
Mario Biggeri and Bernhard Babic

BLOOMSBURY

The book's introduction by Caroline Sarojini Hart provides an excellent primer to the capability approach with a helpful bibliography for readers unfamiliar with the concept. Although the capability approach was originally formulated by Amartya Sen in the field of welfare economics, it is beginning to be applied outside of economics and development studies. The capability approach emphasizes that children are not only granted rights, but are also social actors; the relationship between education and participation in democratic processes is prized from this perspective. In a Deweyian fashion, education, whether in school or not, is seen as a process central to developing citizens prepared for participation in democratic deliberation. The following chapters build on Hart's introduction and walk readers through helpful concepts in operationalizing the capability approach. In chapter 1, Hart discusses how the capability approach could apply to an educational context, with children as co-researchers. This allows children to have an active involvement in the educational process and develop critical thinking skills through research design and execution. Later, in chapter 9, Hart investigates positive and negative "conversion factors" that bridge the divide between resources, aspirations, capabilities, and acts through focus groups, interviews and surveys in the UK. Mario Biggeri's chapter builds off Hart's work. Biggeri argues for a "learning-centered approach" to education that encourages children to think critically and reflect on their educational experience; in addition, there need to be spaces for children to engage in dialogue within the educational system and be given agency to shape their educational experience. This is a welcome perspective for educational practitioners looking to empower children who feel disempowered through debates about testing; one may be reminded of children who have advocated against the Chicago school closures for example (see Lipman, 2011). Daniel Stoecklin and Jean-Michel Bonvin's chapter is particularly useful for researchers new to the capability approach. They elucidate the difference between "rights" and "capabilities." The chapter focuses in particular on the rights given under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. While children are entitled legal rights under the CRC in countries where it has been ratified, they may not be able to act upon them because of social or

individual constraints. In chapter 4, Zoë Clark demonstrates how structural equation modeling can be used to evaluate the welfare of teenagers using capabilities through a German case study. In chapter 5, Ortrud Leßmann discusses how the capability approach could be translated into an alternative measure of childhood poverty, potentially an alternative for American researchers relying on free and reduced lunch.

A few chapters offer useful examples for practitioners working in school systems. Chapter 6 is useful for both education practitioners and education researchers. Marina Santi and Diego Di Masi examine philosophy for children (P4C) as an emancipatory pedagogy that empowers children to deliberate and think critically; thus, practitioners could use this as fuel for programs in their own schools and communities, while researchers will find the application of concepts useful. Likewise, in Chapter 7, Cristina Devecchi, Richard Rose, and Michael Shevlin discuss the capabilities of children with special needs, using interviews with children in the England and Ireland; they offer advice for teachers looking to support the agency of children with special needs. These studies are a welcome alternative to studies that focus on child-care professionals, rather than the experiences and opinions of children (Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2005).

For social justice oriented readers, some chapters offer a glimpse into how the capability. Foundation StandTall (CFST) in New Zealand that teaches life skills to low-income students; Schischka demonstrates how the capability approach can be used as an alternative measure to evaluate the success of programs using focus group discussions. This could certainly be applied to other national contexts. In chapter 10, Zina Nimeh and Robert Bauchmüller examine child labor in Jordan using the capability approach because it allows researchers to assess not only “their well-being today but also their ‘well-becoming’ in the future.” Using survey data, they conclude that the capability approach adds nuanced understanding to the study of child labor. In chapter 11, Jérôme Ballet, Claudine Dumbi, and Benoît Lallau investigate the multifaceted conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo through the complicated relationship between children’s agency

and victimization using qualitative surveys. In chapter 12, Vittorio Iervese and Luisa Tuttolomondo apply the capability approach in their analysis of data collected in the Occupied Palestinian Territories from 2008 to 2010. They used a multifaceted approach including semi-structured questionnaires, video observations of activities, and focus groups. Analysis of the data enabled Iervese and Tuttolomondo to determine which modes of communication were most effective in promoting adolescent agency and participation. Indeed, as other researchers have found, when working with reluctant populations, one must often negotiate social boundaries (Rodríguez & Brown, 2009).

This work presents an approachable way for theorists new to the capability approach to familiarize themselves with the theory and literature, while also offering a variety of methodologies and case studies that present a useful model for studies in other national contexts. However, there were some approaches that were overlooked that might be useful in applying the capability approach to other contexts. Judith Wilks and Julie Rudner found in that establishing youth leadership groups helped to empower children and youth to participate in urban planning. Although they did not use the capability approach as a framework, their method and the urban context demonstrates another way for researchers to empower children in an urban-setting and encourage them to participate in civic life (Wilks & Rudner, 2013). In addition, despite its obvious relevance to the capability approach, participatory action research was not used by any of the contributors. Participatory action research attempts to engage people as participants in the research project, not just subjects of research; thus, it is particularly relevant for those looking to empower youth through the capability approach. In education research, Louie F. Rodriguez and Tara M. Brown applied participatory action research to marginalized youth in order to bring them power and agency in the school system (2009). They provide useful tenets of participatory action research for those interested in applying it to educational contexts. Additionally, the notions of publics or public sphere theory were noticeably absent (Fraser, 1994; Habermas, 1991). Despite the capability approach's emphasis on agency and participation, none of the authors theorized about its relationship

with publics or the public sphere. Tom Cockburn's work in the U.K. suggests a theoretical approach to thinking about the relationship between publics, public schools, democracy, and youth empowerment (2007). In the age of social media, educators interested in media literacy may find this a useful resource for discussing the potential of the Internet for democratic deliberation. However, the book missed the opportunity to incorporate critical media literacy; researchers would be wise to consider how the capability approach could be useful in further developing critical media literacy. Jeff Share offers a good introduction to critical media literacy for those interested in this approach (2009). Despite these theoretical blind spots, *Agency and Participation in Childhood and Youth* provides a welcome approach to educational research and practice in an era of increased testing and value-added measures.

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