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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Conceptualizing Higher Education for Sustainable Human Development

Seddik Ouboulahcen
Department of English Language and Culture, Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco
Corresponding Author: Seddik Ouboulahcen, **E-mail**: souboulahcen@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT
This paper explores how higher education can be pursued for and as a sustainable human development process. It emphasizes the rationale behind opting for the capability approach as a framework of analysis of educational equality, social justice, and policies and pedagogies conducive to sustained agency and flourishing. The paper contributes to the construction of an argumentation line, within the education policy discourse for a capability approach to the formulation of the aims and evaluation of higher education policy. The prism of sustainable human development and social justice outlining why and how the capability approach offers a solid framework for evaluating social justice and education policies through the lenses of human development. The substation of the framework for the approaching of higher education as for sustainable human development goes through the consideration of the roles of education, the consideration of educational equality, consideration of the nature of higher education capabilities and the dimensions of sustainable human development in higher education, and finally through the consideration of the methodological and conceptual foundations that affirm the capability approach as a superior framework.

| KEYWORDS

Capabilities, education for sustainable human development, educational equality, sustained agency.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Postsecondary education has come to be a site rife with controversy. Taylor (2003) argues that universal participation in education has an important bearing on how the tertiary education sector will be managed:

> *governments need to decide how far they can and should influence the scale and the shape of tertiary participation. The questions to be asked and answered are not about growth or stability but about what types of courses and qualifications will best satisfy social demand, facilitate economic development, and minimize the* 'risk to social structure and cohesion . . . if a significant proportion of the population is excluded or discouraged from participation in a stage of education which clearly confers benefits' (OECD1997: 8)" *(Taylor, 2003:12).*

Presently, there is a vast literature extolling the benefits of education for economic development both for individuals and nations. The achievements made in the expansion and broadening of access to basic, secondary and tertiary education are also largely celebrated. However, education is an irreducibly capricious and complex multidimensional "process" and "good". Broadening access is only one side of its story. Indeed, gross enrollment ratios emphasize the advances made in reaching large portions of the world population. But by implication, they also pin down the persistent disparities in access to and quality of education along the lines of gender and socio-economic stratification both at the global and national scales.

1.1 Arguments for Investing in Education as a Development Determinant

Not all education systems, institutions, or programs are equal. The distribution of quality education is differential (globally, regionally, nationally, by educational level, by gender or program specialties etc…). As Walker (2003:169) writes: "*nowhere is education an uncomplicated 'good'; it produces justice and injustice, equity and inequity and the issue is to understand why, when and how"*. Unequivocally, the story of education is one of complexity and contestation. Kliebard (1986) argued in his seminal book documenting the history of curriculum debates that educational issues are the terrain of *"major conflicts and compromises among groups with competing visions of 'legitimate' knowledge, what counts as* 'good' *teaching and learning, and what is a 'just' society" (Apple,2001:410).* A complete and or a satisfactory account of education as/for development, then, has to adequately account for what knowledge and what policies, processes and pedagogies lead to development without eroding social justice and human freedom. From this vantage point, the field of education is still dominated by many rhetorics of crisis that find their persuasion in the persisting large-scale injustice and erosion of quality, justice and meaning.

In social policy today, four major arguments override ideologies and justifications for devoting social resources to education. The first argument is that education is a fundamental human right, while the second rests on the assumption that "*education improves the productivity and economic well-being of individuals, and it promotes technological and institutional innovation and the economic performance of societies"* (Bloom, 2006:88). The third argument we shall consider is that in a globalized industrial world, education is key. "*Education deficits can hinder a society in isolation, but in a globalized world these deficits can be even more detrimental to a country's economy and development*" (Bloom, 2006:88).

To be sure, our world today has become one of daunting super-complexity. The exponential advances in information and communication technologies have increasingly made humanity, what has come to be known as "an information, a network or *a knowledge society*" (*cf.* Arimoto, Huang, & Yokoyama, 2005; Beerkens, 2004; Castells, 2000; David and Foray, 2001), are enriching and expanding multiple dimensions of our lives while at the same time adding to its incommensurability. Knowledge production and mediation has gained greater commodity value. Today, our societies are characterized by an unprecedented *"speed at which knowledge is created, accumulated and, most probably, depreciates in terms of economic relevance and value"* (David and Foray, 2001). Economic development is essentially influenced by the ability of countries to "*produce, select, adapt, commercialize, and use knowledge … critical for sustained economic growth and improved living standards" (World Bank, 2002:7).* OECD and World Bank research indicates that long-term economic growth causally correlates with the expansion of the knowledge-base. In this context, education institutions are called upon to prepare citizens to navigate this super-complex global world effectively and sustainably. Moreover, tertiary education institutions play a central role in supporting knowledge-driven economic growth strategies and poverty reduction. This role consists in (a) the training of a qualified and adaptable labor force, (b) the production of new knowledge; and (c) the facilitation of access to *"existing stores of global knowledge and adapt[ing] this knowledge to local use*" (World Bank, 2002:5-6).

Some sociologists (Castells, 1996; Guiddens, 1990 inter alia.) have labeled the comprehensive, fast-paced and far-reaching changes and transformations in our life conditions today as globalization. For Guiddens (1990), globalization *''is a shift in our very life circumstances; it is the way we now live'*. In this interesting moment of post-modernity where the global and the local interact constantly, the way we live is nowhere uncomplicated. To use Barnett and Hallam's (1999: 138) phrasing, the super-complexity of our present world *"is that state of affairs where one is faced with alternative frameworks of interpretation through which to make sense of one's world and to act purposively in it"*. This spans all walks of life and it is certainly true for the practice of education, broadly defined. The question that urgently poses itself here is how does education prepare individuals for this reality?

Indeed, in all its dimensions, education is affected by globalizing forces; however, tertiary and university education are the most affected by the resulting epistemological and ideological contestation undercutting its practice as well as policy formulation and evaluation. Of all the discourses that override tertiary education policy-making and evaluation, the rhetorics of neoliberalism and human capital theory in particular seem to be in the ascendant as frameworks of social and economic policy. The claim adduced by this model is that marketization of education supposedly results, on the supply side, in the creation of diversity and choice and enhancement of the information and purchasing power available for consumers on the demand side (Bridges and Jonathan, 2003). This project has generally been accompanied by the convergence of *managerialism* and subscription to a *market and consumerist ethos (Hussey and Smith,2010)* in many countries. The latter legitimate adherence to rhetorics of business foregrounding performance management, standards and quality assurance, cost effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis (Apple, 2001), which generally foreground the pragmatic and instrumental dimension of education. The human capital model, in this vein, has particularly focused on extolling the instrumental role of education in the creation of economic, social and cultural capital that leads to economic growth and development. A narrow interpretation of human capital theory in education policy has led many countries to favor the fields of science and technology at the expense of the humanities and the social sciences (see particularly Nussbaum, 1996, 2010).

Today, this view of education is challenged by another increasingly influential normative view in policy circles, one that emphasizes both the intrinsic and instrumental value of education as an experience that expands each and every individual's capabilities and freedoms (Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 1999) playing a central role in what Dewey considered the ideal of "*achieving of a life of rich significance" (Dewey, 2001:244)*. This fourth argument brings together the concepts of human rights, social justice and human development in a coherent multidimensional framework potentially of great relevance for education analyses.

Re-framing education as/for sustainable human development involves expanding opportunities for access to education for all. But it also moves beyond access to expanding opportunities for a quality education that ultimately results in greater self-reliance, resilience, agency and an enriched life in all dimensions of wellbeing. This project does not overrule economic growth as a development ideal rather it integrates it within a broader vision that views education as central for individual flourishing, economic participation, social justice, political deliberation and participation, all fitting in an integrated and constructively aligned social project. One might argue that many projects in educational theory are doing exactly the same thing, and they are indeed. However, it is argued in this study, along with a fledgling scholarship in the education field, that the human development paradigm or the capabilities approach offers a powerful framework for conceptualizing and evaluating education "policy". In many respects, CA is a framework that embraces what has been termed in the UK as "joined-up thinking" (Riddel and Tett, 2001) in addressing the interrelatedness of the economic, the social and the political in education. It is to further exploration of the potential of the capability approach in informing the practice of education policy formulation, implementation and evaluation that we will turn to immediately.

1.2 Why the Capabilities Approach in "Higher" Education?

By foregrounding education as a fundamental human right and a *sine qua non* condition for flourishing and wellbeing, the capability approach (CA) is by no means implanting a new idea in scholarship about education. So, what is the significance of the capability approach for education and vice versa? The upcoming sections attempt to debunk why the capability approach is of significance, particularly in the context of higher education.

In this vein, if all the contestation generated by the competing views about what constitutes legitimate knowledge, good teaching and learning as well as the roles of education in society is put aside provisionally for the sake of the argument, we can -based on the available evidence accumulated to date- establish some premises about the characteristics of the world we currently live in, the roles played by education in economy, in social and societal dynamics, in politics, in the growth and development of human beings. Arguably, an integrative approach that can take us closer to a world of sustainable human development is one that, to a certain extent, addresses the multidimensional and interconnectedness of the educational, the social, the political and the economic.

In this respect, the discussion of the relevance of CA to "higher" education invites several vital questions. What type of society do we want to work and live in? What implications do the world and society we currently work and live in have for the practice of education? If we are to create a world with social justice, what kind of educational equality should we aim for? How can we enable each and every individual to flourish in and through education that is framed as/for human development and social justice? What is the university and higher education for? How should the university curriculum influence individuals' and societies' future? What role does education play in human flourishing and wellbeing? What key capabilities are associated with education? How does CA conceptualize or frame social justice evaluations in educational contexts? What kind of account of social justice is needed to ensure educational equality within and beyond educational institutions? How does the approach deal with the indexing problem in education? What kind of education capabilities are needed to achieve sustainable human development? What and how are education capabilities selected for the evaluation of social justice and wellbeing in "higher" education? Should we focus on the promotion of individual human flourishing or the cementing of collective solidarities (i.e. the public good)? To discuss the import of CA in addressing these fundamental questions about education, two important dimensions are worth exploring. First the education policy process is worthy of a brief exploration. Second, there is a need for establishing essential premises, around which there is relatively enough overlapping consensus, concerning the roles of education.

1.3 The Roles of Education

In the wider social, cultural, economic and political context, education fulfills many essential roles. Drèze and Sen (2002: 38-40), concur that education can be pursued for both its intrinsic or instrumental roles and benefits. Robeyns (2005), in an adaptation of the typology presented by Drèze and Sen, identifies the following ways we can classify the roles of education. First, it can be sought for its intrinsic value and importance. On this view, the process and act of knowledge and skills acquisition can be intrinsically motivated, hence directly related to the internal satisfaction and fulfillment of non-instrumental self-actualization. In addition to its intrinsic roles, education has several instrumental roles. One useful way of exploring this dimension is to distinguish between the collective and personal, on the one hand, and economic and non-economic roles on the other (Robeyns,

2005). Examples of *instrumental personal economic benefits* of education would be finding a job, increasing one's income or being able to make smart investments in the stock market for instance. Education is also sought by states and communities for benefits that transcend the personal level to the collective one. In this view, examples of *instrumental collective economic roles or benefits* of education would be the boosting of economic growth or the creation of a qualified human capital and workforce. There is a substantial body of scholarship on the different roles played by education, but the major concern here is the exploration of its relationship with social justice and human development understood in their multidimensionality. If having access to equal and quality educational opportunities is considered as a matter of justice and human development, the framing of higher education as/for sustainable human development and social justice would require an adequate account of what education capabilities lead to wellbeing and social justice. To further substantiate this argument, the investigation of the contents and processes of education policies as *"aims or goals, or statements of what ought to happen*" (Blakemore, 2003:10) as well as their impacts (i.e. benefits and harms) seems of the highest importance.

To be sure, higher education is both a public and a private good. It is crucial in processes of social and economic development as well as in processes of personal development and wellbeing. What is more, it plays an important function in the process of social reproduction (Walker, 2003), however, it also serves as a source of social transformation when it is designed to build in learner's values, attitudes and skills of critical and reflective consciousness and understanding that facilitate participation in the creation of an improved social order (Walker, 2003). In many respects, education is formative in all dimensions of human life. As Walker cogently frames it, "*education in formal settings of schools and universities shapes lives. Our experiences in education build over time into inter-subjective patterns and shape what kind of girls and boys, men and women we recognize ourselves to be and what we believe ourselves able to do" (Walker,*2003:169).

The framing of "higher" education as/for sustainable human development and social justice needs to be based on a solid account of which education policies, processes and higher education capabilities lead to equally distributed and morally acceptable levels of human development and justice as corollaries of higher education. For that matter, we need a robust account of social justice in and related to education. Second, we need to pin down the "higher" education dimensions that are constitutive of both human development and social justice. The direction this second discussion takes has an immediate bearing on 1) statements of intent of policies formulated as educational aims and ideals, 2) the process of policy formulation and implementation (whether it is subject to public deliberation and quality assurance and accountability mechanisms), and 3) how the indexing problem (what is it that we distribute and how we do the distribution) is addressed and therefore the specification of the areas of assessment in evaluations of human development and justice in "higher" education. So, how can we build a robust conception of education equality?

1.4 Educational Equality

In the Western egalitarian tradition, the value of educational equality is based on the fundamental ideal of equal respect due to persons (Brighouse, 2000; Terzi, 2008). Nonetheless, if there has been very little consensus about what constitutes social justice, the concept of educational equality which is one of its fundamental components remains also "*rather unspecified or vaguely theorized, and there is a lack of consensus on its implications for policy-making*" (Terzi, 2008:1). Educational equality has generally been conceptualized either as having *equal entitlements to education*, or *entitlements to an equal education* (Terzi, 2008).The first view of *equal entitlements to education* is more or less concerned with the space where educational equality should be achieved. In this sense, the emphasis is put on the equalization of either the inputs or the outcomes of education, for instance, the resources devoted to each student, or the opportunities and chances individuals have to develop and fulfill their personal talents and interests. However, *entitlement to an equal education* rather points to the pursuit of same quality education (Terzi, 2008) for all, as a political ideal.

In general, research on educational equality has focused on the equalization of prospects of access to and participation within different levels of formal education for different social groups (Lynch, 2000). Equal access and participation are important. However, a robust and holistic conception is called for to edify truly egalitarian educational systems. In this vein, two competing categories of metrics of educational equality influence education policies: equality of resources and equality of opportunity or condition.

No matter what conception is endorsed, the ideal of equality has serious normative implications for "*two interconnected levels in education: the theoretical level, concerned with values and aims, and the level of provision, relating to the enactment of these ideals into policy and practice*" (Terzi, 2008:1). Nevertheless, in addition to the difficulties inherent in settling disputes about what conceptions and metrics of equality is morally justifiable, exploring education equality from the prism of distributive justice is made additionally strenuous because of the nature of education itself as "a good". Educational equality cannot be robustly measured and conceptualized without an adequate account of the instrumental and intrinsic functions it plays in the lives of individuals (Brighouse, 2000). Indeed, the intrinsic and instrumental roles of education in the wider social, cultural, economic and

political context have an important bearing on what ought to be distributed. Education makes individuals competitive in economies that confer burdens and benefits unequally. Receiving an education is essential in expanding the chances and opportunities of individuals to have better life conditions and to enjoy the intrinsically fulfilling experiences made possible through education (Brighouse, 2000). Additionally, the fact that the quality of the education an individual gets is dependent on her social, economic and natural endowments (intelligence, talent, motivation etc…) brings to the fore extremely important notions such as a desert (deservingness), luck, responsibility and benefiting the least advantaged that need to be factored in the design of distributive schemes.

Furthermore, one important way of considering how educational systems and institutions contribute to social justice is to ask about how they help citizens be competitive to secure adequate and equal shares of the rewards of economic and social cooperation. In this view, the provision of the requirements of fair competition is of the utmost importance. In an increasingly super-complex, globalized, knowledge driven and industrial world, having the right knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for fair competition is intuitively (rightly) considered a matter of justice. In many contexts, the public discourse about social justice is embedded in the rhetoric of fair competition. Indeed, as Brighouse argues "*the intuitive case for educational quality is fairness-based"* (Brighouse, 2010:27). One such dominant understanding of educational equality is the meritocratic conception. This view is intimately linked to the controversial notion of personal desert. Nevertheless, the view that a person ought to receive what she deserves because of some property or virtue she possesses (Pike, 2007) is nowhere uncomplicated from the educational as well as the social justice distributive perspective. Indeed, arguing that it *"is desirable that each person should gain good fortune corresponding to her virtue (deservingness)"(Arneson, 2002: 1)* leads us to ask the important questions about what virtues should determine economic, social and political entitlements and *deservingness*; and to what extent it is ethical to let the luck of individuals in terms of social, economic and natural talent endowments influence their share of the distribution of the benefits and burdens of social and economic cooperation.?

In education, the meritocratic conception of equality entails that *"an individual's prospects for educational achievement may be a function of that individual's talent and effort, but it should not be influenced by her social class background*" (Brighouse, 2010:28). Despite the fact that this position neutralizes the impact of social class on the distributive scheme, it might still be deemed insufficiently egalitarian, mainly because it attaches desert (*deservingness*) to talent and effort. The moral issue here is to what extent individuals deserve their natural endowments of talent and aptitude for deploying higher levels of effort. Rawls, for instance, argued that the distribution of natural talents under the natural lottery is arbitrary from a moral view (Pike, 2007). What is more, there is a large body of literature in the field of socio-cognitive psychology that suggests that effort, self-efficacy and motivation are at least partially influenced by familial factors and thus socially determined (see for instance Ainsworth and Bell, 1974; Bandura, 1997; Ruddy and Bornstein, 1982; Yarrow et al. 1975). A recent study by Ainsworth (2002) found a causality relationship between individuals' (children's) aspirations to educational achievement and the type of neighborhoods they live in.
This serious flaw notwithstanding, with its insistence on neutralizing social class as a determinant of educational achievement, the meritocratic conception of education equality remains very demanding from the perspective of public policy. The available data about the pervasive impact of social class on multiple dimensions of educational achievement implies that considerable resources need to be devoted to educating individuals with lower socio-economic backgrounds (Brighouse, 2010), in order to have a distributive scheme where social class does not impinge on the equality of educational opportunities. This position has a number of problematic implications: first, it involves a high risk of inequality of both educational resources and educational achievement. Second, the meritocratic conception allows the spending of considerable resources on individuals with very low levels of talent and motivation in order to equalize achievement levels across the board (Brighouse, 2010). While, this conception recognizes only one source of inequality, namely social class, it does not articulate or specify how resources ought to be distributed within this scope.

Two important objections to the competition argument entailed by the meritocratic conception have been identified by Brighouse (2010). While fair competition is not rejected when entered voluntarily, an argument built on the assumption that all competitions are fair has to be put in perspective. In our increasingly globalized, industrialized and deregulated world, entering the labor market is not a voluntary competition. We are obliged to participate or we face the prospect of poverty and social exclusion. Second, from a moral perspective, society should not be conceived as "*a race"*. It is inadmissible to structure society so that *"the distribution of social cooperation is structured to reward those who do well and penalize those who do badly in competitions they have no feasible alternative to participating in" (Brighouse, 2010 :).* What is more, the meritocratic conception does not support equal educational resources; it simply stipulates the compensation for inequality of educational resources provided by families, neighborhoods and districts.

The radical conception of educational equality, on the other hand, demands as Brighouse puts it that *"an individual's prospects for educational achievement should be a function neither of that individual's level of talent or social class background but only of the effort she applies to education" (Brighouse, 2010:29).*The meritocratic and radical conceptions of educational equality differ

diametrically on the morally permissible inequality sources they allow to impinge on the distribution of educational resources. While the meritocratic notion allows "*educational inequality to result from differences in talent and effort but not from social class background" (Howe, 2010: 74),* the radical conception is more demanding in its specification of the inequalities allowed. Natural talent as well as the dimensions of effort that are socially determined and attributed to or influenced by social class is considered with social class background to be morally an impermissible source of educational inequality (Howe, 2010). In a sense, educational inequality as the result of differences in effort is allowed in both conceptions as long as these differences are not socially determined. If the challenges and barriers to achieving education equality are colossal under the meritocratic conception, they are even higher under the radical conception. The amount of financial resources needed to achieve a comprehensive application of the moral imperatives of either conceptions of equality is beyond the pale of even the most prosperous countries today. From the perspective of public policy, this does not imply the abandonment of the educational equality ideal, rather it suggests that policy choices should be informed by a nuanced process where conflicting moral imperatives are traded-off based on sound moral as well as cost-benefit analysis.

Lynch and Baker (2005) have advanced another relatively recent and interesting, take on what should constitute educational equality. Instead of advocating equality in terms of resources, access and participation alone, this view puts forward a more holistic conception. For Lynch and Baker (2005), a robust conception of educational equality should be framed in terms of equality of condition in *"what might be called people's 'real options', which involves the equal enabling and empowerment of individuals"*(Lynch and Baker,2005:132). This conception broadens the understanding of the ideal of equality in a remarkable way by acknowledging the multidimensionality of what makes the "good life" possible in and through education. On this view, educational equality should be evaluated along the dimensions of 1) resources, 2) respect and recognition, 3) love, care and solidarity, 4) power and 5) working and learning. The analysis of each of the five dimensions in isolation is of relevance in evaluations of educational equality, but they are also deeply intertwined (Lynch and Baker, 2005).

Resources, according to Lynch and Baker (2005), can take economic forms of capital such as income and assets as well as non-economic resources in the form of social capital (affiliations, family and social networks) and cultural capital. However, there is more to having equal chances to be enabled and empowered to pursue the good life one wants for oneself. In this vein, four other important dimensions are considered substantive spaces where education equality needs to be measured.

Equality in respect and recognition is not limited to the erection of the liberal ideal that citizens of the world are entitled to equal rights and privileges protected by the countries they live in and the international community. It is mainly about institutionally recognizing diversity and appreciating differences rather than tolerating them only (Lynch and Baker, 2005). In many contexts, status-related inequalities along the lines of age, sexuality, religious beliefs, disability, language, gender, class, race or ethnicity are entrenched in the symbolic patterns of interpretation, definition and communication, institutional failures to accommodate diversity and differences along those lines results in practices of denial and depreciation (Fraser, 2000). Such failures can also generate inequalities in resources (Connell, 1993). Educationally mediated social inclusion or exclusion is, in this respect, largely influenced by how individuals are respected and recognized by education institutions.

The third dimension along which Lynch and Baker demand educational equality is love, care and solidarity. "*Being cared for is a fundamental prerequisite for mental and emotional well-being and for human development generally*" (Lynch and Baker, 2005 :). Along this view, it is part of the states' mandates to enable people to provide for and benefit from care and love, and to educate them equally about the centrality of this dimension for wellbeing. What is more, educating individuals about love, care and solidarity results in social arrangements (schools, universities, transportation systems, neighborhoods etc) that are attuned to the protections for the care needs of vulnerable groups especially those recognized institutionally (Lynch and Baker, 2005).

Attaining educational equality is also centrally about reducing power inequalities mediated in and through education and in society at large. It entails the unwavering defense of political and civil rights within a robustly designed egalitarian society: one, where the rights of everyone, including minority groups, to political representation and an education respectful of diversity are preserved. Indeed, "*equality of power is about a more egalitarian, participatory politics and about the extension of democratic principles to all areas of society, particularly the economy and the family*" (Lynch and Baker, 2005 :).

Work is an important dimension in overall wellbeing. It facilitates access to resources, be they economic or non-economic. Furthermore, it shapes relations of status, power, love, care and solidarity (Lynch and Baker, 2005). People engage in different forms of work. It is important to know whether one is engaged in paid or unpaid forms of employment. In this case, the motivations and the circumstances behind one's choice are of high analytical value. Indeed, in addition to its deeply essential instrumental role, work can be intrinsically valued. In many respects, it is a potential source of personal development. Unfortunately, despite work being an important dimension of wellbeing and source of personal development, it is very tricky as well. In fact, the work one does, or is forced to do, can impose undesired burdens. Equality in this dimension entails the

protection of individuals' equal rights to "*some form of satisfying work*" and providing guarantees that set the ethical limits of work burdens. Achieving equality of work entails an analysis and restructuring of the division of labor (Lynch and Baker, 2005). As it happens, learning is valued and important for both its instrumental and intrinsic roles. Defining educational equality along this dimension has to ensure fairness of distribution both the instrumental as well as the intrinsic benefits of education in all sites of learning formal and informal (Lynch and Baker, 2005).

By and large, research on educational equality has been conducted along two major axes. The first axis of research focused on how education institutions reproduce inequality and social injustice through poorly designed or harmful processes of distribution and silencing (Aikman, 1999; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1997; Bowles and Gintis, 19976, 2002; Ball, 2004; Kwesiga, 2002). This stream of research also focuses on the documentation of how larger structures of race, class and gender shape conditions of justice and injustice in society. The emphasis is on the process dimensions of justice, which CA addresses as well, and *"the transformative aspect of schooling even if it is imperfectly realized" (Walker and Unterhalter, 2007)*. The second, axis of research on educational equality, on the other hand, focuses on the role played by education in availing individuals with resources and optimum conditions through which they can contest and change inequalities (Stromquist,1995 & 1998; Lynch and Baker, 2005; Brighouse, 2002). This line of research broadly recognizes that education as a space of human action is a site where structures of society are contested, challenged and where inequalities take place (Walker and Unterhalter, 2007). On this view, the social justice project is about the evaluation, analysis and documentation of those processes and what enlarges or constrains prospects of social justice as mediated by education.

Addressing social justice in education through the lenses of the capability approach is adduced as a competing alternative conception of education equality. As Walker (2003) argues, "without *'big' accounts of social justice we are left stranded without the conceptual tools to decide which of our actions takes us closer to social justice*" (Walker, 2003:169). In many respects, the capability approach provides a very powerful framework for the analysis of inequalities in the distribution of both the public and private as well as the economic and non-economic benefits of education. CA, especially Nussbaum's central human capabilities as a theory of a threshold of justice, addresses the indexing problem, specifies what needs to be distributed and provides important guidance in terms of what is worthy of assessment in evaluations of educational equality. It also addresses the process aspects of justice and pays attention to how issues of power and oppression in its analysis of empowerment and disempowerment. Indeed, as argued earlier, the emphasis on the analysis of capabilities rather than functioning and increasing attention to the dimensions of agency, identity and empowerment are significant contributions to discussions of social justice in general. This has important implications for analyses of educational equality and here two particular dimensions arise as very essential: first, the emphasis of the capability-functioning relationship and second, the ability of the approach to conceptualize and address the issue of human diversity and variability in a robust way. Finally, the fact that the capability approach addresses issues of educational equality within a broader framework of social justice evaluation makes it able to account in a robust way for the interrelationships between the social, cultural, economic and political dimensions of education. In addition, the criticisms leveled by the approach at other theories of justice (see chapter 3) still hold ground in the case of their applications in education: here particular reference is to the resources and purely economic approaches to evaluating justice.

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