Chapter 10
Integrating the Perspective of the Capability Approach

Abstract In this chapter, the capability approach is discussed more in depth. Different studies are referred to, to be able to contextualise the meaning of the capability approach in relation with the presented research. The meaning of different cultures is elaborated in detail. Last but not least, education is related to the capability approach as a capability itself.

In describing the results of the interviews with the children, parents and teachers, I chose the capability approach as a contextualizing perspective and the idea of inclusive education as a basis; the focus was placed on educational equity and social justice. However, this does not seem to illustrate sufficiently how the different parts are interlinked. I want to give a clearer idea of the reality which I explored and also open the discussion on how the insights which I have offered for the specific case of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, could be useful for other countries.

“[...] [T]he kind of education that best articulates the concept of Sen’s capability approach seems to be the one that makes people autonomous and, at the same time, develops people’s judgement about capabilities and their exercise” (Saito 2003, 29). In the context of this book, autonomy would finally lead towards possibilities of supporting one’s family.

The capability approach looks at capabilities which exist in human beings and which can lead to certain functionings, provided that the circumstances, the environment, society, etc. enable individual persons (or a group) to use those capabilities and turn them into functionings. “In contrasting capabilities with functionings, we should bear in mind that capability means opportunity to select. The notion of freedom to choose is thus built into the notion of capability” (Nussbaum 2011, 25).

Biggeri’s (2007) studies identified education as a capability of the children of his sample. This seems to be equally true for what I found in Ethiopia. What does this mean?

In the capability approach, one of the most important goals is to reach well-being and quality of life as well as equity and equal opportunities for all people. The quality of life and the values are identified and specified by the people themselves.

[...] [W]hen dealing with children, it is the freedom they will have in the future rather than the present that should be considered. Therefore, as long as we consider a person’s
In the context of my research, education seemed to be a valued capability, in the lives of almost all the interviewees. In order for the children to reach this capability, it must be directed and insisted upon in order to become a functioning. If implemented successfully, education can thus contribute to reaching well-being and quality of life. However, this can only happen if the environment can offer the necessary framework conditions (conversion factors), which are educational equity, equality of possibilities, and social justice amongst others.

Once the necessary framework conditions are granted, it is necessary to locate and position inclusion and inclusive education within this process, which is strongly dependent on transformation (and development): society has to become inclusive. Schools have to develop to become inclusive. Systems will have to change in order to be able to become inclusive.

**Inclusive** means that diversity is seen as something given and something which benefits us all. It is about change: a change in attitudes and a change away from capitalistically guided focusses of economic growth through achievement. My approach to inclusion is thus broadened from (dis-)ability to all kinds of diversity that lie within the human race.

Looking at other countries from this angle, the research at hand teaches us that it is very valuable to look at the deeper structures of a society. The insights we gain can be of great help for introducing equity in education, for working towards inclusion and inclusive education. As there is no global concept for how to introduce inclusive education, it is necessary to focus on the values in diverse societies, the logic of their living together and the functioning of communities, as this is important for the success of such an endeavour. Without including these aspects in the process of transforming societies to become more inclusive, it will not be possible.

To make it even clearer why cultural issues are of major importance when speaking about inclusive societies (not only inclusive education), I want to refer briefly to the example of rural Kenya:

“Because rural parents did not conceptualize their children’s worth as predicated on their ability to compete in a [W]esternized educational system, their children were included in age-appropriate culturally normative activities. The contributions those children made to their families and communities’ well-being were valued” (Mutua and Swadener 2011, 215). This also included children with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities. The authors of the Kenyan study emphasise that there is a “colonial impulse to minimize and devalue the inclusive activities of rural

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1 This quotation continues: “The fact that children need to have support from parents, society or others in terms of choosing which capabilities to exercise will lead us to consider what role education can play in the capability approach” (Saito 2003, 26). This is a very interesting way of approaching the capability approach and education. Two further interesting questions to discuss would be to what extent children can choose for themselves and when they need support and if education could or should support or guide these choices. Unfortunately, it would go too far at this point to discuss the topic from this angle.
Community conceptions of disabilities do not always align with Western formulations of disability or inclusiveness. Pursuing equity in access and participation in the future may require starting with a sound understanding of ways in which local communities understand and make available inclusive spaces for all, including persons with disabilities. (Mutua and Swadener 2011, 220)

In the case of the study at hand, one of the most important aspects in working towards educational equity and inclusive education in Ethiopia was undoubtedly the involvement of the families and surrounding communities. This approach clearly supports children with disabilities in using the capability of education for achieving the functioning of being a valued and contributing member of their society—not least by being able to support their own family. In other words, experiencing educational equity and being granted the opportunity to participate equally in social life leads to more quality of life. This is a goal which was valued by all the children in the research.

Simplified view on turning the children’s capability of education into functioning (Fig. 10.1):

This explains how from the perspective of the capability approach children can be empowered through inclusive education and educational equity to lead the lives they have reason to value.

If we look at the functionings, we can see that some of them lie in the future, as argued by Saito (see quotation earlier in this chapter). In other words, the freedoms which children gain through the capability of education are partly only realised in their future. When speaking about freedoms, it is also necessary to speak about the term “values”. “Feeling like a family” is the core category and exhibits certain
values. “The exercise of freedom is mediated by values, but the values in turn are influenced by public discussions and social interactions, which are themselves influenced by participatory freedoms” (Sen 1999, 9). Hence, the value that family has in Ethiopia (or parts of it) determines some of the freedoms which are granted through education (e.g. supporting the family). In other words, education can lead to the possibility of doing justice to the value of family by being able to support the latter. The last part of Sen’s quotation clearly shows the importance of aiming at an inclusive society, as only inclusion can ensure participatory freedoms for people with disabilities. These freedoms lead to the possibility to participate in the mentioned discussions and interactions which influence values in a society. Consequently, it is of great importance not only to have the possibility to participate in society and to enjoy or live with the given values but also to participate in discussions and thus in shaping the values of this society and finally the society itself by really being part of it.

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