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Lessons from the ‘New’ Sociology of Childhood: How might listening to children improve the planning of education for development?

Introduction

Education, and particularly ‘basic’ or primary provision, is at the forefront of international development policy agendas. Since the UN Declaration of Human Rights [UNDHR] pronounced that primary education must be free and compulsory in 1948 (UN, 1948), numerous commitments have been made to the provision of universal schooling, including in recent decades the international Education for All goals (UNESCO, 1990; 2000) and the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs]. If we look to the MDGs as a widely accepted ‘blueprint’ for development in the twenty first century, we can see the ultimate importance that has been placed on education. The second Goal set the target of achieving universal primary education [UPE] by 2015, whilst equality in the education system was identified as a key indicator of the third MDG to ‘promote gender equality and empower women’ (UN, 2000). Going forward into the Post-2015 era, education remains high on the development agenda (Save the Children, 2012; UNESCO, 2012).

However, although UPE is for the most part agreed upon as a worthwhile goal, there is significantly less consensus regarding what the purposes of that education should be. This paper reviews the competing arguments for education that are routinely drawn upon in policy and development planning in and for the global South, and in particular the understandings of education that are relied upon in Ethiopian education strategies. It then demonstrates the potential contribution that lessons learnt from the field of childhood studies can make to these discussions. This contribution is the idea that *children’s* priorities must be included – and given prominence – in these conversations about the purposes and value of education.

As an illustration of how listening to children can improve education policy and planning, the paper reviews evidence from research with children's attending four primary schools in one Ethiopian city. It demonstrates that children's motivations for going to school largely overlapped with, but also went beyond, the arguments for education currently relied on in mainstream development discourse. These findings highlight the importance of the non-economic, individual and collective capabilities that are often absent from development and policy planning, and yet are highly valued by the children that education is supposed to benefit, and demonstrate the importance of 'listening' to children about the potential functions of education. However, the paper concludes with the critical realist recognition that people's understandings of the world are fallible. It challenges the exaggerated ideas of authenticity and 'truthfulness' that have been attributed to children's narratives in the 'new' sociology of childhood, and asserts that social research must also consider the factors shaping children's motivation to go to school.

Why should children go to school? The accepted role(s) of education in personal and national progress

For some, education is intrinsically valuable. The human rights approach to education contends that children around the world should go to school because having access to education is a fundamental and universal human right, as asserted in the UNDHR (Spring, 2000; UN 1948; Wringe 1986). In this approach children are not understood as the means to achieving some ultimate goal, but 'as the ultimate ends of moral and political concerns' themselves (Robeyns, 2006: 75).

Nevertheless, education is predominantly appreciated for its instrumental value. That is, education is expected to cultivate progress and 'development', be it personal, national or global. Consequently, the role and functions that people attribute to education vary according to the form of development or progress that they aspire towards. Since

'development' has traditionally been taken to mean national economic progress, the role of education in development has typically been understood as to produce the educated labour force needed to create that economic growth. Since the 1960s, mainstream development thought has been shaped by the human capital model of education, which understands human beings as economic production factors. This theory proposes that children in the global South should go to school in order for their nations to be endowed with the human capital and diversified export profile needed to escape by attracting international investment, avoiding brain drain and promoting economic growth (Hanushek and Wößmann, 2007; Schultz, 1961).

Human capital theorists anticipate that, as well as producing educated workers, education will boost the productivity of the population by producing healthy workers (Schultz, 1961; UNMP, 2005). It is expected that education will improve the health of a population by endowing individuals with knowledge about health requirements, basic hygiene and disease prevention, and with the skills that they need in order to make use of modern health care provision. Educating women has in particular been identified as key in reducing maternal, infant and child mortality rates (World Bank 2001; Lay and Robilliard 2009; Wigley and Akkoyunlu-Wigley 2006).

Since the 1970s, critics of the human capital approach have sought to refocus the education-for-development debate. Most notably, the 'basic needs' approach, launched at the 1976 ILO World Employment Conference, conceptualises poverty as the failure to meet basic needs, and defines 'development' as the pursuit of the eradication of this poverty (ILO, 1976). Proponents of this approach highlight the benefits that education can have for individuals rather than national economies, and assert that children should go to school in order to develop the knowledge, skills and earning capacity needed to meet their own basic

needs; including their material requirements for food, water, shelter, clothing and so on, but also their psychological, emotional and relative human needs (Streeten, 1977; ODI, 1978).

The basic needs paradigm revolves around significantly different priorities to the human capital approach, and yet coexists with and does not directly challenge that dominant economic agenda, with regard to both the conceptualisation of development and the accepted role of education as an aid to market-led economic growth (Tikly and Barrett, 2011: 4). It maintains that children should go to school in order to become educated and healthy workers, albeit to benefit themselves and their households rather than their national economies (Hanushek and Wößmann 2007; Robeyns 2006). More radically, the work of Amartya Sen and others in relation to 'human capabilities' identifies human beings as 'the ends of economic activity rather than merely its means', and defines development in terms of what people are able and free to be and do (Biggeri *et al.* 2006: 63, see also UNDP, 1990). This approach moves beyond the narrow instrumentalism of the human capital approach firstly in declaring that children should go to school because being knowledgeable and having access to education are intrinsically valuable universal or 'basic' capabilities in themselves (Biggeri, 2007: 197; Robeyns, 2006: 78; Sen, 1992: 4), and secondly in citing the ability to get a job as just one of the many valued capabilities that schooling has the potential to expand. Human capabilities theorists assert that many non-economic capabilities can be fostered by education, including for instance the ability to access useful information, to communicate with people around the world, to think critically, to aspire beyond one's circumstances and to participate in politics (Nussbaum, 2000; Walker, 2006).

The human capabilities approach is radical in its assertion that development is a matter of expanding the choices available to people. However, although the rhetoric of capabilities and freedom has been incorporated into contemporary development discourse, particular by UN agencies, the development agendas of both governments in the South and of

international agencies and donors continue to focus largely on growth and income, albeit with the 'add-ons' of public services and redistribution, which are to differing degrees rhetorical. Furthermore, the emphasis on individual choice and autonomy in Sen's human development approach is highly compatible with the individualism that underpins human capital and basic needs approaches (Carpenter, 2009; Morrow, 2013). On the other hand, some capabilities theorists *have* moved beyond this neoliberal individualism, highlighting the importance of collective as well as individual capabilities. 'Collective' capabilities include both the functionings made available to individuals by virtue of their membership of and engagement in a group, and the expanded functionings and wellbeing transferred to collectivities as a whole (Evans, 2002; Ibrahim, 2006; Stewart, 2005). With regard to education, theorists have argued that education can cultivate public debate, and that children living in disadvantaged circumstances should go to school in order to gain the skills needed to organise politically and to obtain the collective resources necessary for debating the social structures that lead to their disadvantage (Tamene, 2007; Walker, 2006).

Mainstream discussions about the role of education in national development and progress have been critiqued on a number of counts. There has been much debate about whether the proposed positive externalities of education really are guaranteed in the global South, for example (Clemens 2004; James 2006), as well as discussions about the problems that are being brought about by national and international pushes towards UPE (Ackers *et al.*, 2001; Kadzamira and Rose, 2003, Roschanski, 2007). Education has also been critiqued as a tool of social control (Bourdieu, 1976; Harber, 2002; Johnson, 1970). Of interest here, however, is the fact that public dialogues about why children should go to school – in both the global North and South – have almost entirely excluded the opinions and experiences of young people themselves (Grover, 2004; Hill *et al.*, 2004). Children are the principal users and supposed beneficiaries of education, but are rarely included in decision-making about education or wider development policy. The exclusion of children from these debates

reflects a fundamental marginalisation of children in public discourse that rests upon dominant notions of childhood as a universal, biologically determined life-stage that is characterised by physical, cognitive and emotional immaturity, and of children as distinct from and subordinate to adults and particular in their need for protection, provision and guidance. Such assumptions have been challenged and condemned in recent decades by a 'new' sociology of childhood, which asserts that children are able and entitled to produce valid knowledge about the worlds in which they live (James and James, 2004; James *et al.*, 1998; Wyness, 2000).

Lessons from the 'new' sociology of childhood: Why listen to children?

The 'new' sociology of childhood poses a significant challenge to existing discussions about why children should go to school by stressing the importance of *children's* priorities being included – and given prominence – in these conversations. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that children are capable of participating in such debates, addressing complex issues such as poverty, inequality and well-being, and discussing the ways in which these processes affect their own lives (for examples from Ethiopia see Camfield, 2010; Crivello *et al.*, 2009).

Children are entitled to contribute to education policy dialogues, as well as being capable of doing so. Children's right to participate in decision-making that affects their lives is emphasised in the Convention on the Rights of the Child alongside their right to protection and provision (UN, 1989). Moreover, from a human rights perspective, research must enable and encourage young people's participation if it is to improve their social position (Campbell, 2008: 75). Social research - and education policies themselves - contribute to the construction of 'childhood' and thus there is a democratic impetus to allow children 'to define themselves' rather than subjecting them to the assumptions and prescriptions of adults (Grover, 2004: 83).

It also makes sense from an epistemological perspective to include children in discussions about why they should and do go to school. Adult researchers and policy makers cannot assume the reality experienced by children by simply observing them, and the meanings and understandings that adults bestow on children's lives are not necessarily the meanings that children themselves would ascribe to their experiences (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2000: 61). Although these adults' principles may well be well-intentioned and indeed fit with children's priorities, they are based upon preconceptions about the nature of a 'good childhood', rather than children's own experiences (Reynolds *et al.*, 2006: 292). As a consequence, education policy creation and agenda-setting that does not allow for children's participation will inevitably be incomplete and misinformed.

Following this evidence of children's capacity for and entitlement to participation in knowledge production, and recognising that children are the key stakeholders and supposed beneficiaries of education policy, it is important that research explores what children want and expect to gain from their schooling. The remainder of this paper discusses findings from PhD research exploring the motivations for going to school expressed by children participating in primary education in one Ethiopian city. It examines the valued outcomes that children in this context expected and desired to be expanded through their educational participation, and compares these narratives to the arguments for education that are currently relied on in development and policy planning.

Education in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa, with a reported population of 92 million in 2012 (World Bank, 2013). Ethiopia is officially a 'less-developed country', with a 2012 GDP of US\$41.61 billion, and ranking 173rd out of 187 countries in the 2014 Human Development Index (UNDP, 2014), and is predominantly dependent on agriculture for income and subsistence. Ethiopia is in many ways exceptional within sub-Saharan Africa,

having its own calendar and unique method of telling the time, being one of Africa's fastest growing economies (Zerihun *et al.*, 2014), and never having been colonised by European imperialists. The country is governed by a three-tiered system of federalism, led by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front [EPRDF] since they overthrew the communist Derg in 1991.

Ethiopia exemplifies both investment and belief in education and its promised outcomes, and the problems and challenges that arise with expanded educational provision. Since officially coming to power in 1994, the EPRDF government has implemented a policy framework that seeks to make it ideologically 'normal' and practically more likely for children to go to school. Although much responsibility for planning and delivery is notionally devolved to regional governments, children around the country study a national curriculum that prepares them for nationally standardised exams, and regional and local education departments are guided by the national government's priorities through a series of national education strategies (TGE, 1994; MOE, 1997; 2002; 2005; 2010). These strategies have been shaped by the EPRDF government's subscription to a pro-market, neoliberal model of development. The party has repeatedly asserted that education is fundamental to the country's 'development', and – in contrast to the Derg's inward-looking approach – largely depicts that development in terms of the furthering of Ethiopia's competitiveness in the global market. The 2005 Education Sector Development Program made clear the EPRDF's focus on education as an investment in human capital, with the government asserting the 'main goals' of the education sector to be

To see all school-age children get access to quality primary education by the year 2015 and realize the creation of trained and skilled *human power* at all levels who will be *driving forces in the promotion of [...]* *development in the country.*

(MOE, 2005: 5, emphasis added).

Human capital ideas are also highly apparent in the government's particular investment in science and technology education as preparation for children's lives as workers in the increasingly 'knowledge based economy' (MOE, 2010: 11). As well as conceptualising education as an investment in human capital, however, the EPRDF also draw on other ideas about the purpose of education in development, including ideas of basic needs, capabilities and children's right to education (MOE, 2005; 2010).

The EPRDF government's approach to education has often been held up as 'success story' and an example for other administrations in the global South, on the basis of party's substantial fiscal investment in the schooling system as well as the dramatic increases in primary school enrolment that have occurred during the party's rule, and are assumed to result directly from the above policies (Green, 2010; IRIN, 2010). When the EPRDF came to power, less than one in five Ethiopian children of primary school age were enrolled in education and the 'normal' place for the child was in the home or at work. By 2012/13, the academic year during which the fieldwork for this research took place, almost nine in ten (86 per cent) were enrolled (MOE, 2013). Gender parity in enrolment also improved during this period. At the same time, however, these unprecedented rises in participation have led to new problems in schools, including a lack of qualified teachers, poor quality provision and high levels of drop-out and non-completion. As with elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa [SSA] and across the majority world, there has been much criticism regarding the inappropriateness of existing curricula and forms of educational delivery (Pereznieto and Jones, 2006; Roschanski, 2007; Woodhead, 2009). Questions about why children should go to school, and the purposes of education, are therefore highly relevant in the Ethiopian context.

Methods

The research took place in Hawassa, the capital city of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region [SNNPR] of Ethiopia. Hawassa lies a six hour drive south of the capital city of Addis Ababa, and is the sixth largest city in Ethiopia. The research focus was thus on an urban context. Much research about education in Ethiopia has been conducted in rural areas, and has particularly focused on the material and cultural barriers to education specific to such contexts (for example Abebe, 2008; Admassie, 2003; Leavy and Hossain, 2014). It was anticipated that many of these barriers might be different or absent in towns and cities. Moreover, Ethiopia, like other countries in sub-Saharan Africa and across the global South, is urbanising (UNICEF, 2012), and many children migrate to towns and cities in order to go to school. As a consequence, increasing numbers of Ethiopian children are growing up and going to school in urban areas, and thus this is an important topic for research.

The research was conducted between June 2012 and May 2013, and involved children attending two government and two private primary schools in Hawassa. These schools were chosen in order to include children who were experiencing a range of educational provision in Hawassa and who were living in different areas of the city. Two grades were selected from each school, so that one grade from the first cycle of primary schooling (grades 1-4) and one from the second cycle (grades 5-8) was selected from each school, and all eight grades were accounted for. However, one head teacher denied access to grade one pupils on the basis that it was too early in their school careers for this disruption to their routine, and so participants were only selected from grades two to eight. Ten children were sampled randomly from each grade, using class registers. Given that the schools could not all provide detailed information about students, participants were not sampled on the basis of gender, ethnicity or any other social characteristic. The final sample was 53 per cent female, 47 per cent male (see *Table 1*). Children were aged 6-16, and despite four children deciding against

participating, the initial sample of 70 grew to a final sample of 75, after eight children self-selected by accompanying friends to focus group sessions, and one student was put forward to participate by a head teacher. It is important to note that not every participant attended every research session. However, the attrition figures only include the four students who did not partake in any research activities, as even those children who attended only one research session made valuable contributions to the research.

INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE

Participants attended a series of four focus groups, where they partook in a range of research activities including group discussions, child-led tours, poster-making, diaries and child-to-child interviews. The topics addressed included the reasons that children did and did not go to school, the differences between children who did and did not go to school, the things that participants liked and disliked about their own schooling, the outcomes that they expected and wanted to arise from their education, who made decisions about children's schooling, and what participants' 'perfect school' would look like. Towards the end of the fieldwork, participants attended two 'child-conferences', where they were able to respond to and add or amend the initial analysis of focus group findings. These sessions included activities included discussions and debates, poster-making and dramatisations. Such 'participatory' research tools were employed in order to address some of the imbalances of power that are typical of relations between adult and child and researcher (Clark and Moss, 2011; Morrow and Richards, 1996; Punch, 2002). However, this was not a participatory research project. Although the research questions evolved over time and were shaped by children's priorities, the research agenda did not arise out of the concerns of children themselves, but was initiated from adult, academic interests (Arnstein, 1969; Beazley and Ennew, 2006; Kirby, 1999).

In addition to the group activities, 67 of the children were interviewed individually. These interviews addressed the same topics questions as covered in the focus groups, in order to give more attention to individual experiences and to give those children who were not keen to voice their opinion in the group a chance to express themselves. These interviews addressed children's family and household circumstances, how they themselves had come to attend to school, any factors that made it hard for them to attend school, and if and how going to school made their life 'better'.

A significant literature has developed addressing the ethical implications of doing qualitative research with children (Christensen and Prout, 2002; Morrow and Richards, 1996; Nieuwenhuys, 2008; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998), and there is not space to attend to all of the ethical considerations that arose in this research here. However, a number of important steps were taken to ensure ethicality. As well as using the 'participatory' research tools described above in attempt to address generational imbalances of power, informed consent was ongoing and reflexive, rather than an initial formality. Children were invited to decide if and how they wanted to partake in the research, and some did choose to terminate their participation, indicating that they felt able to be in control of their consent and dissent. By abstaining from certain activities others limited their participation to a level that they were comfortable with. However, children were not the only decision-makers in determining their participation. Head teachers, who held social power over children in their educational lives, also acted as gatekeepers in the research and so had power over children's participation (Campbell, 2008; Powell and Smith, 2009). On the other hand, parental consent was not mandated. Many children in Ethiopia are not living with literate caregivers, and it was anticipated that obtaining written parental consent would not always be feasible. Furthermore, the schools involved did not expect or demand parents' permission for their children to take part. Despite this, parental consent will have had some informal influence on children's attendance, as some children will have been disallowed from attending

sessions that took place outside of school hours and parents may also have discouraged children's participation at home. On the other hand, it would have been possible for some children to have attended sessions without telling their parents, illustrating the independence and autonomy that – along with wider evidence of children's competence in consenting to participation in research – made it appropriate to take young participants' capacity for giving informed consent, in the first instance, 'on trust' (Alderson, 2007: 2278).

The majority of participants – including those quoted in this paper – wished to be acknowledged in the dissemination of my research, and wanted their names and photos to be included in the 'book' that would be produced. They understood that the reports that I wrote could be read by people in England, Ethiopia and elsewhere, and it was important to most children that their participation was documented and recognised. Accordingly, the first names of the individual children quoted in this paper have been given. However, the schools in Hawassa have not been named, in order to protect the anonymity of the adults and children working at these schools at the time and two years on.

The data were analysed thematically, firstly identifying the key capabilities that children expected and wished to be expanded by their education, drawing on ideas of both individual and collective capabilities from the work of Sen and others on capabilities and education (above). Later, the analysis examined the moral concerns and external 'generative mechanisms' that were shaping children's motivations for going to school (Alderson, 2013; Archer, 2000; Sayer, 2011). Children's narratives about their education were analysed in order to explore their motivations for going to school and where these motivations came from, and to identify potential functions for education in this context. They were not taken as 'truth' in terms of what education was and would actually achieve for these children, and in many instances children's high expectations, for instance for prestigious and professional employment outcomes, were likely to remain unfulfilled (Camfield, 2011; Tafere, 2014).

Findings and discussion

In line with other research with children and young people in Ethiopia, this research found children in Hawassa children to value education as essential to their current and future well-being (Boyden, 2013; Camfield, 2011). Participants had clear ideas about why they wanted go to school, and about how education was and would help them in the present and in the future.

Some of the functions that participants wanted and expected their schooling to fulfill confirmed the current 'knowledge' about why children in sub-Saharan Africa go to school. In particular, children's narratives echoed the economic accounts of school attendance being promoted by the Ethiopian government. Children understood their schooling as preparation for their lives as future workers, and getting a good job in the future was the primary motivation encouraging most participants to go to school. Participants asserted the idea of schooling as an investment in their human capital in their everyday language, describing how the skills, knowledge and 'attitudes' that they were gaining at school would enable them to be effective workers in the future. Many also echoed the human capital approach by reporting that they wanted to get a good job in order to contribute to the future of their nation. Children believed that their education – through their improved employment prospects – would enable them to bring in money that would 'change the economy' and make Ethiopia independent from other countries.

In linking their individual advancement with national economic progress, children could be said to be embodying human capital theory in daily life. At the same time, however, children's motivation for improving their employment prospects also arose from their desire to avoid poverty at the household level. For example, Tigist, aged 13 and in grade six at one of the private schools, said that going to school made her life better because 'when I group up, I don't need to be poor'. In focus group discussions at Tigist's school students reported

that an imagined child who did not go to school would be poor in the future, whilst a child who did go to school would become 'rich'. At the child-conferences children likewise asserted that children went to school 'to avoid poverty'. Girls at the first conference and boys at the second also talking about the importance of being able to afford enough food, and to meet the 'basic needs' of themselves and their families. In this way the reasons that they gave for going to school were in line with the basic needs model of development as well as human capital approaches.

Although children did understand schooling as a means to achieving something else, rather than asserting education as an intrinsically valuable right or entitlement in itself, for example, this instrumentality was not limited to the narrow, economic instrumentalism of the human capital approach to education. Nor was it limited to the material outcomes that are predominantly – albeit not exclusively – focused on in the basic needs model of development. As well as wanting to get jobs and to be able to provide for themselves, their families and their nation, participants expected their education to expand many valued, non-economic capabilities. For instance, children wanted to their schooling – through their improved job prospects – to enable them to gain independence from their parents and to plan their own lives. At the child conferences, a mixed-gender group wrote on a poster about the importance of 'going to school to get a job' that gaining employment was important because 'when we get a good job we will be independent from our parents' (mixed-gender group). Other groups wrote that they went to school in order 'to be self-sufficient and independent' (male group), 'to be self-reliant' (male and female groups), 'to avoid dependence' (male group), to 'be independent from our parents' (mixed gender group) and 'to be independent from our family' (female group).

Children's desire for self-reliance stemmed partly from the importance that they placed on gaining agency and autonomy, seen in the following comments made at the second child

conference, where many students expressed a strong desire to make their own decisions about their future careers:

I wish I decide instead of my parents [what I will] do in my life.

I don't want to go to school because I want to be a footballer and I don't need knowledge, but my parents force me to go.

I want to be an athlete but my parents want me to be an engineer.

My family decide I should go to school but I think I would be more successful if I work.

Also linked to notions of autonomy and independence was children's desire to be able to get married and start their own families. Some children also asserted that going to school would mean that a child was able to have a 'good' marriage. Although this was a contested argument, with some participants strongly asserting that there was 'no connection' between school and marriage, the notions of morality and respectability afforded to those individuals who participated in formal education led both boys and girls to speak about being able to find suitable spouses at school, as well as having the financial resources to leave home and start a family. One female participant also spoke about women being able to enjoy more equal status within marriage as a result of their education. Mekdela, who was 15 and in grade eight at private school, predicted that although education could be a source of disagreement between husband and wife, women would be better off as a result of knowledge they gained at school. She explained that in the past women had been 'suppressed' but now they learnt about their rights at school, and so could avoid maltreatment. Tigist, aged 13 and studying at the other private school, talked about gender equality more generally, asserting that girls getting jobs as a result of their education would lead to 'equal rights' in Ethiopia. Such reasons for going to school reflect the arguments

made by capabilities theorists with regards to schooling empowering women and girls to 'contest and alter the conditions of their own welfare' (Walker, 2006: 172), and 'to lead the lives they truly value, rather than follow uncritically some (unspoken) scripts that are dominant in their communities' (Robeyns, 2006: 71). They also echo other research specific to Ethiopia, which has highlighted the impact of civic education in particular in empowering girls to protect themselves from harmful gender norms and practices including early marriage, abusive relationships and rape (Tamene, 2007; Alemayehu 2007).

As well enabling them to protect themselves from abuse, many children reported that their education enabled them to have command over their own bodily integrity more generally. Children talked about learning about personal hygiene and family planning at school. Boys at the second child conference also talked about learning to prepare food at school properly, and so to avoid disease. Some boys talked about schooling protecting them from drug addiction, both by posing a distraction from such deviant behaviour and by exposing them to teachers and friends who would teach them about the dangers of drugs. Again, this point was not unanimously agreed upon. Besides alcohol and tobacco, the only 'drug' that children named specifically was *khat*, a chewable stimulant. Although chewed by many adults as a social activity and widely understood as harmless, *khat* can be addictive, and excessive use is often associated with men living on the streets. The use of *khat* is widely discouraged in schools and in many households in Hawassa, and the young participants in this research all spoke of drug use as deviant and dishonourable. However, many recognised that there were 'addicted' children at their schools, and whilst some felt that peer pressure and teachers' advice did help to 'protect' them from such delinquency, others suggested that avoiding drug use would result from an individual child's personal resolve and disposition. Nevertheless, this was another example of a valued capability that some children expected to be expanded by their education.

At the same time as desiring personal autonomy, many children wanted and expected their schooling to expand their capacity to help those around them. In line with other research in Africa that has found social responsibility to be a highly valued capability (Serpell, 2011; Twum-Danso, 2009), children's desire for 'independence' stemmed in part from not wanting to remain a burden to their families, and wanting to be able to repay the care and provision that their parents were affording them as well as achieving autonomy from their parental household. Tellingly, children often spoke about 'avoiding dependence' rather than being independent, and at child conferences the importance of being able to help one's parents was a key theme:

Everybody has to have education, and if they don't they won't help parents. They will be dependent and be beggars.

If [children] don't learn they will never get anything but if they learn they will help their parents.

(anonymous comments added to a report about 'going to school to get a job')

As well as wanting to help their parents financially, many children talked about using their new knowledge and skills to improve the lives of their families, both in the present and the future. Participants discussed how they would 'use and share' what they had learnt at school with others, for example teaching others about personal hygiene, or about how to get a job. Others talked about their education enabling them to 'lead' or 'manage' their future families, and to provide an 'example for other [people]' in their local communities. Some also talked about going to school enabling children to 'lead' their country:

The educated ones, they become the president of the country. Through this, they can help their country.

(Ammanuel; male, 12, Union Academy private school)

[Children go to school] to get knowledge, and also to be [a] good leader of the country.

(Asna, 11, Gebeye Dar government school)

Tigist, who spoke about gender equality above, asserted that she herself wanted to become Prime Minister in the future, and reported that at school she had learnt to communicate with others, meaning that she would be confident and unafraid when talking to other politicians and presidents. Yonatan (10), aged 10 and in grade four at the other private school, similarly asserted that that going to school instilled him with knowledge that he could use to 'lead' his country. Many more participants asserted their belief that education expanded their political capabilities more broadly. Mirinda, aged 14 and at private school, declared that children who go to school would be creative and have 'new' knowledge that enabled them 'to know and make decisions about politics'. Mirinda's classmate Alamudin (male, 14) likewise said that children who went to school could 'develop' Ethiopia by acting in the nation's interest, and reported that going to school instilled students with an awareness of how 'to solve the country's problems'. These reasons for going to school are in line with human capabilities theorists' assertion that education can cultivate public debate, enable people to organise politically, empower the marginalised and provide individuals with the resources needed to debate the false discourses and social structures that lead to their disadvantage (Robeyns, 2006; Walker 2006; Wigley and Akkoyunlu-Wigley 2006).

The commitment that many of the children who took part in this research expressed to the development of their country, beyond the benefits it offered them as individuals, highlight the importance of collective as well as individual capabilities and well-being (Carpenter 2009; Evans 2002; Ibrahim 2006). The reasons that children gave for going to school thus reveal the limits of Sen's original capabilities approach, in its focus on individual capabilities

and freedoms. Their narratives suggest that formal schooling can and should seek to expand collective as well as individual capabilities and freedoms, and that this type of human development is an important reason that children in urban Ethiopia and other contexts should go to school.

Conclusions and points for further investigation

Children in Hawassa's intimation that they went to school in order to be transformed into good people and good citizens as well as good workers demonstrates the inadequacy of human capital accounts of education that only consider the economic impact of children's schooling, and do not consider the other valued capabilities that education has the potential to expand. The reasons that children in this context gave for going to school are more comprehensively accounted by the human capabilities approach to education, which has asserted that the role of education should be to expand people's valued capabilities, including their ability to gain employment and thus to meet their material needs, but also their capacity to conduct human relationships, to care for and share their knowledge with others, to engage with politics, and to participate fully in society.

This research has thus confirmed that children as young as six years old are capable of contributing to policy discussions that directly relate to and affect their lives. It reaffirms the importance of the lessons learnt from the 'new' sociology of childhood with regards to the ethical and epistemological reasons for including children in public discourse and decision-making. As intimated in the review of existing understandings of the role of education in development, such inclusion of children's voices is both radical and rare. However, children's voices are beginning to make it onto the policy and development stage. For example, the African Movement of Working Children and Youth [AMWCY], a collective representing over 270,000 children and young people in 27 countries across the continent including Ethiopia, has worked in collaboration with various UN agencies and NGOs, has partaken in UN

debates about children's rights, and has been granted observer status on the African Committee on the Rights and the Well Being of the Children of the African Union (see AMWCY, 2014). Children in Hawassa's accounts of their schooling highlight the importance of including individual and collective capabilities and freedoms, as well as household incomes and national economic growth, in our understandings of development and the role of formal education within that progress. If their opinions were included in the planning of the education strategies that have huge impact on their lives as children growing up and going to school in urban Ethiopia, this could lead to real and positive change for themselves and others like them. However, this is not to say that that children's narratives should be over-privileged as somehow innately authentic or laudable. Children may well be mistaken about what their education can and will achieve, and the phenomenon of adaptive preferences means that the functions that they attribute to their education might not always be in their best interests (Sen, 2002; Sayer, 2011). It is therefore important that research also examines the structures and mechanisms shaping children's motivations for going to school, and evaluates their claims (see Marshall, forthcoming).

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