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Quality teaching in rural Sub-Saharan Africa: Different perspectives, values and capabilities

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Quality teaching in rural Sub-Saharan Africa: different perspectives, values and capabilities

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Introduction

Gadanan school, in a village in northern Nigeria, is typical in terms of infrastructure (dilapidated), resources (insufficient) and results (poor). There are not enough classrooms and pupils sit four or five to a desk designed for two, or on the floor. Local education officials are concerned about the quality of education at Gadanan, and the quality of teaching. The teachers at Gadanan, however, while frustrated by the circumstances in which they work, see themselves as motivated and good at their job. This paper explores this difference in opinion.

It is increasingly acknowledged across academic and policy literature that what teachers do matters, and matters more in low income countries (Dembélé and Lafoka, 2007; UNESCO, 2014). Yet what teachers do is under-recognised in existing education quality metrics which primarily assess pupil achievement (UNESCO, 2005). Teacher quality tends to be conceptualised through teacher qualification, length of service and vaguely defined attributions of wide-spread demotivation (Bennell and Akyeampong, 2007; UNESCO, 2009; VSO, 2002). This paper, which focuses on women teachers in rural Sub-Saharan Africa presents alternative ways of thinking about education quality and good teaching. It uses contemporary ideas around Amartya Sen's capability approach (1999) to draw out what is valued and what is possible in teachers' work. Developed as an alternative to utility-focused evaluations of human development, the capability approach is rooted in ideas around social justice and seeks to understand not what people have, but what they are able to achieve. A person's capability refers to the extent to which they can pursue objectives (or capabilities) that they have reason to value. At its heart, the capability approach begins with the question 'what are people able to do and be?' (Nussbaum, 2011:x). This study began with the question 'what are *women teachers* able to do and be in some of the most under-served schools in the world?'

This paper proposes an exploratory definition of quality teaching: teachers' achievement of valued professional capabilities. The wider study (Author, 2012; forthcoming) analysed the professional capabilities of seven teachers in five countries, but this paper focuses on just two, Habibah and Agnes who teach at Gadanan school in Nigeria. First the paper explores what is valued in teachers' work, from a policy perspective as well as a teacher perspective. It then evaluates Habibah

and Agnes' professional capability – i.e. the extent to which they are able to pursue and achieve what is valued in their work. Finally, it addresses a criticism of the linear nature of existing capability models and shows how the teachers' experiences point towards a new, cyclical model of professional capability and teacher quality.

Quality: conceptualisations and capabilities

In the first phase of Education for All (EFA), international organisations and national governments focused primarily on provision (for example building schools) and access (the removal or subsidisation of school-fees). Primary enrolment in Sub-Saharan Africa increased five times faster between 1990-2005 than between 1975-1990 (UNESCO, 2010). Concerns about the quality of education (and the quality of teachers and teaching) began to emerge as a decline in pupil achievement in Literacy, Numeracy and Science was reported in expanding education systems. In 2000, participants at the World Education Forum in Senegal adopted the Dakar Framework for Action, reaffirming their commitment to achieving EFA by 2015. The framework drew attention to the role of teachers and described them as '…essential players in promoting quality education' (UNESCO, 2000: paragraph 69).

Throughout the 2000s, the focus on education quality and teaching gained momentum, galvanised by UNESCO's 2005 EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR): 'The Quality Imperative'. In the same year UNESCO launched TTISSA (Teacher Training Initiative for Sub-Saharan Africa) and reoriented the focus of UNESCO-IICBA (International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa) towards capacity building in teacher education. Nationally, governments have raised minimum qualifications for teaching, expanded provision for in-service teacher education, redesigned curricula and shifted expectations of pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning.

But attempts to define and measure quality are ongoing. Alexander (2008) criticises 'quality indicators' from a range of high-profile, international education organisations and finds that at best they leave 'important methodological questions unanswered' (p.vii) and, at worst, are so vague they 'lose all remnants of credibility' (p.5). The 2005 GMR emphasised that quality must be seen in the light of how societies define and understand the purpose of education. Yet it also both explicitly and implicitly highlights improved pupil attainment on standardised tests as the goal of improving teacher quality.

An ambiguous conceptualisation of quality teaching was also found to be evident in a study of policy documents and official education literature from five Sub-Saharan African countries (Author, 2012). Nigeria's National Education Report (2008), for example, cites the findings of a national sector analysis in which teacher quality was given a score of 1 out of 5, but does not explain how quality was interpreted or measured. This analysis found that quality teaching in this literature was most often defined as the inverse of 'poor teacher quality' – which was conceptualised around issues of qualification, absenteeism, status and motivation. Here too, what teachers do in classrooms – how they interact with and teach their pupils – is missing from the quality debate (see also Alexander, 2014).

This article proposes an exploratory reconceptualisation of quality teaching through a move away from the imprecise language of quality and towards the language of values. First, because it is difficult to pursue the goal (or goals) of quality teaching when policy and practitioner literature alike offer inconsistent interpretations of what this is. Secondly, because while it is implied that an outcome of good quality teaching is increased pupil attainment, policy, practitioner and academic literature – as well as common sense - suggest that pupil attainment is not all that is valued. It is clear that

teachers are expected to pursue and facilitate other valued goals, to occupy a range of roles and embody specific types of behaviour. The pursuit of valued goals is at the heart of the capability approach. The next section briefly introduces this approach and explores its potential to offer new insights into the quality teaching debate.

The capability approach

The capability approach was conceived by the economist and philosopher Amartya Sen as an alternative method of measuring poverty. It focuses on the freedom – or capability – people have to achieve specific 'functionings', which are defined as 'the various things a person may value doing or being' (Sen, 1999:75). Resources are important, but as 'detached objects of convenience' (Sen, 2009:233) – they are not the 'end' of human development, rather they are a means to this end and can be used in different ways to achieve various functionings. The ways in which resources can be used depends on a person's agency which Sen defines as 'the ability to pursue goals that one values and has reason to value' (Sen, 1999:19) (see fig 1).
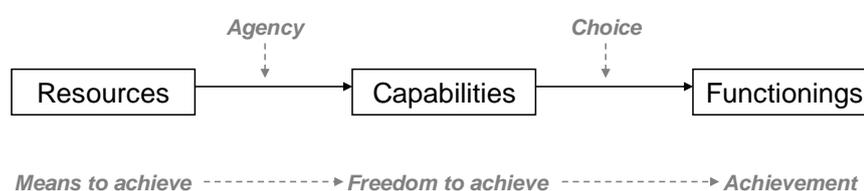

Figure 1 Simplified model of the capability approach (adapted from Robeyns, 2005a)

A person's capability can be evaluated in four distinct but related 'concepts of advantage': well-being freedom (the opportunity to achieve well-being); well-being achievement (the extent that well-being has been achieved); agency freedom (the opportunity to pursue and bring about the goals one values) and; agency achievement (the extent to which these goals have been achieved). Concepts of advantage can be selected to structure an evaluation of capability, depending on the type of valued goals under scrutiny (Sen, 2009:287).

Articulating what is valued, however, can be challenging: people's subjective choices are shaped and informed by the society they live in (Nussbaum, 2000). In capability literature this subjectivity is referred to as 'adaptive preferences' (Sen, 1985; 1992) and is primarily discussed in relation to people living in adverse situations, or contexts with strictly enforced gender norms, who may adjust their values in the direction of realistic possibilities. Once they have adjusted these values their agency and well-being may be diminished even if they do not realise it (Walker and Unterhalter, 2007; Qizilbash, 1997).This has obvious implications for empirical evaluations of capability, and a process of 'self-reflection and open debate' (Unterhalter, 2007:100) is encouraged to critically engage with factors that shape people's values and influence the choices that are made from available freedoms.

The capability approach has traditionally been used to frame issues of human welfare (focusing on the pursuit of functionings that are valued for personal well-being). Over the past decade it has increasingly been used in education studies in both high- and low-income countries (Smith and Barrett, 2011; Unterhalter, 2003; Walker, 2006; Watts and Bridges, 2006), although primarily to evaluate the extent to which education expands or restricts the capabilities of students. Others, for (example, Cin and Walker, 2013; Tao, 2009; 2012) have used the capability

approach to develop the insights from studies of teacher identity and teacher welfare in impoverished school environments (e.g. Akyeampong and Stephens, 2000; Barrett, 2008; Jessop and Penny, 1998) to show how these environments undermine teachers' well-being. By contrast this study is rooted in the 'agency freedom' and 'agency achievement' concepts of advantage and it uses capabilities as a framework for evaluating teachers' agency to pursue and achieve valued professional goals. The next section explains how these valued goals were determined.

Valued professional goals for teachers: two perspectives

The methodological approach of this study is presented and discussed in detail in Author (2012; forthcoming), but summarised here. The five focus countries, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa and Sudan, were selected to represent the geographical and cultural breadth of the Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (TESSA) programme which funded the research. The purpose was to understand what is valued in teachers' work from two perspectives.

The 'official perspective' comes from an analysis of 52 policy documents around teachers' work in the five countries, published since 2000. The intention was to present a regional view of what is valued in the 'policy field' of teachers' work (Potter and Subrahmanian, 2007). Documentary evidence was supplemented by semi-structured interviews with ten education officials across the five countries at different levels of policy formulation and enactment (from school supervisors to Education Ministers).

The 'teacher perspective' was drawn from ethnographic fieldwork in five rural schools. Data was collected across multiple visits to the five countries between 2007 and 2011. Schools were selected by TESSA contacts and it was requested that they were rural and, average with respect to catchment area and achievement. In each school a focus teacher was selected through consultation with the head teacher. Focus teachers were female and proficient in English (the language in which the data was collected and analysed). The primary activity involved shadowing the focus teachers and as much time as was possible and appropriate was spent with each teacher inside and outside of the classroom. Shadowing data was complemented by structured interviews with the focus teachers at key points in each visit, and questionnaires and focus groups carried out with the wider teacher communities in each school. The teacher perspective was intended to provide a very personal and in-depth view of teachers' experiences of working within this official context. Pseudonyms have been given to all schools and teachers involved in the study.

The data consisted, then, of a corpus of policy documents, interview transcripts with education officials and teachers, extensive field-notes, focus group transcripts and questionnaire data. A narrative analysis approach was adopted, with all of the data – whether text or transcript - treated as narrative. Within the official and teacher data-sets, themes were determined that focused on values, agency and choices. From these themes, two lists of draft functionings were constructed and the lists created from the teacher-data were debated and verified with teachers at subsequent focus groups. A valued aspect was counted as a functioning if at least one person identified it and if it was considered important by the majority (Walker, 2006). This iterative process resulted in two lists of list of valued functionings which were clustered into capabilities. These capabilities represent the professional freedoms which underpin quality teaching from official and teacher perspectives (see table 1).

Data source	List of professional capabilities
National and international	A list of capabilities representing the officially valued

	functionings for teachers
documents and interviews with education officials	*(referred to as official capabilities and functionings)*
Teacher data (shadowing, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and field-notes)	A list of capabilities representing the combined valued functionings of the focus teachers and their colleagues *(referred to as teacher-generated capabilities and functionings)*

Table 1 Capabilities and functionings extrapolated from the data

Professional capabilities for the official and teacher-generated perspectives are outlined in the tables below. The study identified 14 professional capabilities (made up of 84 functionings) for teachers from the official perspective, and 16 professional capabilities (made up of 58 functionings) from the teacher perspective. One example of a functioning within each capability is given in tables 2 and 3 below, for the full lists see Author (2012).

Official Capabilities	Example Functioning
Recognition	*Achieve the minimum qualification for teaching*
Loyalty	*Promote the national constitution as good and right*
Respect	*Be treated as a dignified professional and feel valued and respected (by pupils, colleagues, the local community, education officials and the media)*
Vocation	*Feel that teaching is a calling*
Reflection and professional development	*Take charge of professional development by identifying additional learning needs*
Expertise	*Have a good knowledge of all subjects*
Communication	*Be fluent in the language of instruction*
Personal management	*Ensure personal activities do not interfere with school work*
Pedagogic and resource innovation	*Create and develop learning resources where necessary*
Constructive appraisal	*Keep accurate records of pupil learning and achievement*
Positive pupil relationships	*Understand individual learning needs and adapt teaching to meet individual needs*
Pastoral care	*Counsel students against early marriage or dropping out and encourage them to continue their education*
Positive professional relationships	*Meet with parents regularly to discuss pupils' work and provide regular feedback on pupil progress*
Good conduct	*Dress modestly and appropriately*

Table 2 Official professional capabilities and example functionings

Teacher-generated capabilities	Example functioning
Professional development	*Receive promotions as appropriate*
Being a role model	*Share rural childhood experiences with the pupils*
Having a role model	*Seek out examples of good professional practice*
Inspiration	*Suggest to pupils a wide range of future possibilities (academic or otherwise)*
Love and nurturing	*Show pupils you care about their life*

Practical parenting	Provide food for pupils when they are hungry
Planning	Cover the curriculum in the designated time
Pedagogic and resource innovation	Ensure you have enough pencils
Assessment	Keep up to date with marking in exercise books
Support and encouragement	Have regular contact and a respectful relationship with education officials
Social work	Seek out financial support for poorer families
Communication	Understand the language levels of the pupils and teach to ensure maximum understanding
Discipline	Maintain order
Religious guidance	Demonstrate your religious beliefs through your work
Fundraising	Raise money for school funds
Work/life balance	Identify areas for personal space at school

Table 3 Teacher-generated professional capabilities and example functionings

Evaluating and understanding teachers' professional capability

While, more commonly, lists of capabilities drawn from various sources are collated to create one definitive list (Robeyns, 2005b), here, the lists were kept deliberately separate. The purpose was not to create one 'ideal list' of professional capabilities for teachers but to use the capability approach to provide a framework for understanding different perspectives on what is valued in teachers' work and for understanding what teachers are able to do and choose to do in their work.

What teachers are able to do and what they choose to do was the focus of the second stage of analysis. The teacher data was revisited and a quantitative mapping method was developed (see Author, 2012; forthcoming) to determine teachers' agency (could they pursue the functioning?) and achievement (did they pursue it?) of each functioning. For each teacher, for every 'yes' answer evident in the data, a point was recorded. Therefore, for each focus teacher, scores of agency and achievement were determined for the official capabilities (with a maximum possible score of 14 capabilities and 84 functionings) and for the teacher-generated capabilities (with a maximum possible score of 16 capabilities and 58 functionings). The scores were designed to serve as a preliminary way of making visible each teacher's professional capability, or in other words, making visible the quality of their work as determined by official and teacher perspectives. The scores were then contextualised through the qualitative data to determine what facilitates the pursuit of professional capabilities as well as the obstacles that prevent teachers from achieving them (Sen, 1993).

The remainder of this section introduces Habibah and Agnes from Gadanan School in Northern Nigeria and considers their professional capability scores. It highlights the extent to which they are able to pursue and achieve valued professional capabilities and, in doing so, provides a framing for the quality of the professional lives that 'they manage – or do not manage – to live' (Sen, 2009:18).

Teachers' professional lives and values

Habibah

Habibah started teaching in 2003 after a twenty year career break to raise her nine children. After secondary school she trained as a social worker but gave this up when she married and moved across the country to live in Gadanan, her husband's village. When her youngest child started school Habibah approached the district education office for a job. They placed her in the village school with the condition that she enrolled on an in-service NCE (National Certificate of Education) programme. In 2009, Habibah enrolled on a part-time Bachelor of Education degree (BEd) in Early Childhood Studies.

The most prevalent theme in Habibah's narratives relates to the nurturing and affective aspects of teaching. She has fond memories of the love shown to her by her own teachers and uses these as role-models. She draws on her earlier career as a social worker and the skills she developed relating to children with behavioural difficulties:

> 'The first thing you have to do is give children affection. Show them that it's not something to be a show-off, it's something to be loved. You have to draw yourself close to children so they love you and respect you.'

She believes 'if they are not afraid of you they can come to you with any of their problems – academic or personal'. She repeatedly emphasises the importance of knowing each child personally before you can teach them and claims the 'best thing' about working at Gadanan is the relationship she has with the pupils. She regularly refers to her role as 'bringing up' her pupils and feels that she is 'teaching them and guiding them outside of school too'. She draws loose boundaries between her relationship with her pupils and her own children:

> 'A mother is always a teacher! So the experiences I have had with children in the past, and now the children I have in my house, children are part and parcel of my life now, everywhere I go I deal with children!'

The high value Habibah places on the emotional aspect of her role has led her to specialise in early years teaching, but the pursuit of a BEd links to another highly valued aspect of her role.

> 'Well, you cannot just drop into a class because you speak English or because you have children! I'm doing it for knowledge, not for the financial aspect… Because you can't keep teaching the same thing, you have to learn before passing the knowledge to the little ones [laughs] so I keep learning too!'

Agnes

Agnes is in her fifties and lives with an aunt in a village two miles south of Gadanan. Agnes has two children and is separated from her husband. Agnes went to teacher training college after school and graduated with a teaching certificate. Like Habibah she moved across the country to marry and was posted to Gadanan but wasn't allocated teaching duties for several weeks because she didn't speak Hausa. Eventually she was asked to teach grade 6 Science because by grade 6 the pupils' English was strong enough not to need an accompanying Hausa translation. Twenty years later Agnes is still teaching grade 6 Science, has limited communication with her colleagues and almost no contact with the local community. Agnes wants to upgrade her qualifications but cannot afford to.

Punctuality is the strongest value identified in Agnes' narratives and observations of her professional practice. Every morning during the fieldwork she was the first teacher on site and the teachers' attendance log verified that this was normal behaviour. Her main reason for requesting a school near to her village was so that she would be able to get to work on time, and get home again without wasting time travelling:

> 'They asked, "madam where are you living?" They asked "would you like to teach in the bush?" I said "no, I want to be in a village where it is motor-able". Some bush schools you cannot get to, like I know people teaching in the bush and they are always standing by the side of the road waiting… they will always be late.'

The value Agnes places on punctuality can be attributed to three things. First she gets a sense of personal satisfaction about being 'first':

> 'I don't like to be late in anything I'm doing, even church I will always be early, I always want to be first in everything. Even when my kids were little I would wake them early, bathe them, dress them and then they would be first at school! You see me, I don't like late.'

Secondly she strives to be on time to impress the head teacher: 'My role is this, I try to please the head mistress, I come early… so she will be very happy with me and say oh malama Agnes is really helping me'. Thirdly she believes that teachers have a duty to lead by example: 'Everything you do as a teacher the pupils will follow'.

Agnes' second most valued aspect of teaching is neatness – both in terms of her appearance and that of the school grounds:

> '…normally in schools they do the best teacher. They will put a photograph up of the best teacher of the month and I see from these pictures that every month this teacher is looking neat. Here they are not doing it… but even though we don't have the competition we know that neatness is important because the other schools do it.'

Agnes also values her role as a disciplinarian and is proud to be considered the strictest teacher in the school:

Teachers' pursuit and achievement of valued goals

Despite being female teachers of a similar age, with comparative levels of education and qualification, and working at the same school, the analysis highlighted considerable difference in the professional capability of Habibah and Agnes. Their agency freedom and achievement of the functionings that make up the capabilities in each list are illustrated in figure 2a and 2b below.
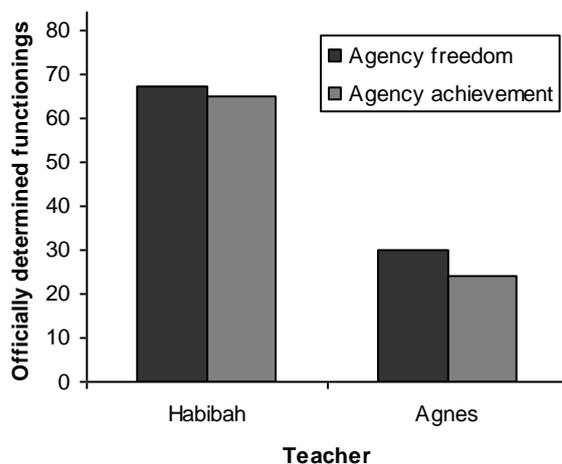
Figure 2a Teachers' agency freedom and agency achievement of officially valued professional functionings

Habibah has agency freedom to pursue 67 of the 84 functionings that make up the list of officially determined professional capabilities, and of these, chooses to pursue 65. This means that she is achieving around 80 per cent of the 'beings and doings' that are expected of her as a teacher. Agnes only has agency freedom to pursue 30 of the 84 possible functionings: she is only able to achieve just over a third of what is expected of her as a teacher. Of these, she chooses to pursue 24.
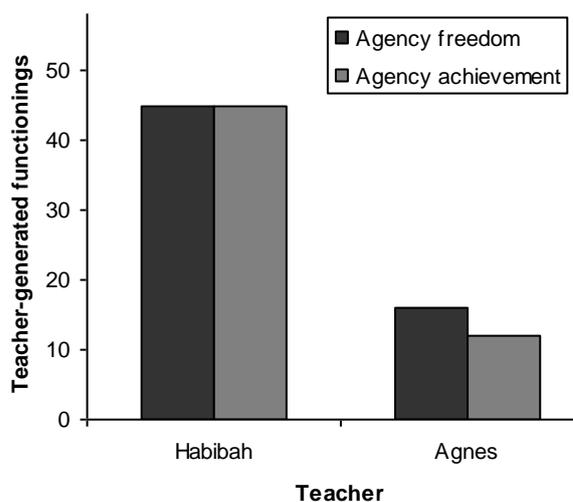

Figure 2b Teachers' agency freedom and agency achievement of professional functionings valued by teachers

Habibah can pursue two thirds of the teacher-generated functionings (45 out of 58) and chooses to pursue all of these. Agnes has agency to pursue just over a quarter of the teacher-generated functionings (16 out of 58) and chooses to pursue 12 of these.

Teachers' professional capability in context

Official professional capabilities

9

Overall Habibah has agency freedom to pursue six of the fourteen official capabilities. She chooses to achieve five of these: 'recognition', 'vocation', 'reflection and professional development', 'expertise' and 'communication'.

Habibah's husband is wealthy, and supportive: Habibah attends a range of self-funded professional development programmes that enhance her agency freedom and agency achievement in a range of capabilities. She chooses programmes that focus on early childhood education which enhance her agency to pursue capabilities of 'expertise', 'pedagogic and resource innovation' and 'constructive appraisal', but also fuel her commitment to young people's learning and encourage her to make choices that lead to the achievement of functionings within other capabilities such as 'vocation', 'loyalty' and 'good conduct'. She chooses not to fully pursue the capability of 'good conduct', however: there are no repercussions for lateness at Gadanan and despite living a short walk from the school, Habibah regularly arrives after the bell, failing, therefore, to achieve the functioning of punctuality.

Overall Agnes has the agency freedom to pursue just one official capability: 'recognition'. She has received little training or professional development since her training thirty years ago and is unable to pursue functionings that contribute to capabilities such as 'expertise', 'pedagogic and resource innovation' and 'constructive appraisal'. Agnes' lack of agency within these official expectations of her stems largely from a lack of awareness about what is expected of her as a teacher; if a teacher is not aware of certain functionings she is unlikely to act on any agency freedom to pursue them.

A further limit on Agnes' agency relates to her lack of communication with other teachers in the school, who frequently adapt the timetable by putting whole year groups in the same classroom so they can skip lessons. Agnes often walks into a classroom expecting to teach 50 pupils but is faced with over 100. This has serious implications on her agency freedom to pursue functionings within the official capabilities of 'constructive appraisal' or 'positive professional relationships' (keeping records of pupil progress and communicating these to parents, for example, is near impossible) or 'positive pupil relationships' (it is clearly hard, in this situation, to tailor teaching to pupils' individual needs).

Teacher-generated professional capabilities

Habibah has agency freedom to achieve 11 out of the 16 teacher-generated capabilities including 'being a role model', 'love and nurturing', 'social work' and 'religious guidance'. Habibah feels that 'inspiration' is an especially important capability for teachers and it frustrates her that she does not have the agency to pursue the corresponding functioning of organising extra-curricular trips: these have been banned at Gadanan after pupils travelling to a museum were involved in a road accident. The head teacher refuses to let the pupils travel on public transport, and the teachers cannot afford to hire a bus.

Agnes only has agency freedom to achieve one of the teacher-generated capabilities: 'assessment' (which is similar to, but contains fewer and less complex functionings than, the official capability of 'constructive appraisal'). She sees her role more as a disciplinarian than a parental-figure to the pupils and chooses not to pursue any of the functionings that make up the teacher-generated capability of 'love and nurturing'. She does score fairly highly in the teacher-generated capability of 'being a role model', as the teacher-generated functionings for this capability tended to align with Agnes' key values of punctuality and neatness. Agnes' lowest score in the analysis of her data against the teacher-generated capabilities was within the

capability of 'support and encouragement' – of a possible nine functionings that include 'work in a structured school environment', 'air grievances through effective channels' and 'access professional support', Agnes scored zero for agency freedom. The obstacles to agency in this capability have a knock-on effect on her choices not to pursue functionings within the capability of 'social work': she feels less inclined than Habibah to 'give something back' to the school community she feels excluded from and unsupported by.

Discussion

Habibah and Agnes' scores of professional capability point towards two important considerations in the debate around quality of teachers' work. First, the analysis shows that the teachers are far more likely to lack agency than they are to choose not to act on this agency – in most areas of their work (from whichever list professional capability is evaluated) Habibah and Agnes are doing their best.

Secondly, Habibah's data, which indicated higher levels of capability in the teacher-generated list of professional capability than in the officially generated list, reflected the pattern of data from all of the seven teachers in the wider study except Agnes: the teachers tend to have more agency freedom to achieve teacher-generated professional capabilities than those that are officially determined. If you consider this finding in terms of the exploratory definition of teacher quality used in this paper, it suggests that teachers think that they are better quality than their employers do. This has important implications for governments trying to enhance teachers' work because teachers and governments appear to be working to agendas made up of different values.

More interesting insights into quality teaching emerge when the teachers' capabilities are considered over time and within the context of 'adaptive preferences'.
The data from the teachers was collected over a period of five years, and the 'scores' of professional capability were calculated from the agency they exhibited and achievements they had demonstrated at the end of this period. However, where the teachers – like Habibah – studied for professional development programmes during this time, increasing alignment (or adaptation) of their values with what was officially valued was evident. Habibah placed a much higher value on the use of teaching and learning resources after enrolling on her B.Ed programme: there was a clear adjustment of her valued functionings in the direction of (what she perceived to be) realistic possibilities in her work (Qizilbash, 1997). Agnes – who received no professional development during the fieldwork period – presented a more consistent set of valued functionings.

However, while professional development programmes helped to adapt Habibah's professional values, it appeared to have less of an impact on her agency freedom and agency achievement with respect to these values. Evidence of designing and using teaching resources, for example, was far more prevalent in Habibah's narratives than in her practice. A cupboard full of resources that she had collected was locked most of the time. If there were too many pupils she worried there wouldn't be enough to go round or that they would be broken, on days with high levels of absenteeism, she worried that using them wasn't fair on the pupils who would miss out.

Therefore, even if teachers value something and even if they have the necessary physical resources, if they do not have the confidence to pursue it then they may not be able to achieve the corresponding capability (Sen, 1993). Having the skills, but not

feeling able to put the skill into practice has the same end result (a deprived professional capability) as not having the skill in the first place: despite valuing 'pedagogic and resource innovation' more than Agnes, Habibah has the same capability as Agnes in this area. Professional development programmes may adapt teachers' preferences in the direction of officially valued capabilities, but the challenges of working in a rural classroom appear to counter some of the influence they could have on teachers' agency freedom to pursue and achieve related functionings. In terms of developing teachers' skills and abilities in line with official agendas, therefore, a consideration of adaptive agency as it relates to adaptive preferences may be important empirically and theoretically.

This complex relationship between values, agency and choice is important in other ways too. We saw above how enhanced agency in one official capability ('reflection and professional development') led to Habibah having increased agency in other capabilities (such as 'constructive appraisal') as well as influencing the choices she made to pursue and achieve functionings within other capabilities (for example 'loyalty'). All of the teachers in the study had to choose between prioritising 'getting through' the curriculum (a functioning within the teacher-generated capability of 'planning') at the expense of the understanding of the less able pupils (a functioning within the teacher-generated capability of 'pedagogy and resource innovation'): for all of the teachers choosing one of these options limited their agency to pursue the other. We also saw how Agnes' limitations within the teacher-generated capability of 'support and encouragement' affected the decisions she made around whether or not to pursue functionings within other capabilities. These examples show how the teachers' values, agency and choices are fluid and that this fluidity is in part due to constantly changing social opportunities and norms, even in traditional and rural communities.

It has been said that the capability approach 'allows us to think of human beings in a dynamic frame in which they are constantly involved in the process of becoming themselves and realising themselves' (Giovanola, 2005:251). However, existing diagrammatic representations of the capability approach do not represent a dynamic frame: they are predominantly reproductions or adaptations of Robeyns' (2005a) model – which is linear - and, therefore implies a one-directional relationship between values, agency and choice, and achieved functionings. Habibah and Agnes' experiences have pointed towards the possibility that capabilities develop in cycles and that achieved functionings are not static, nor are they necessarily the final outcome. This is demonstrated by the model in figure 3.
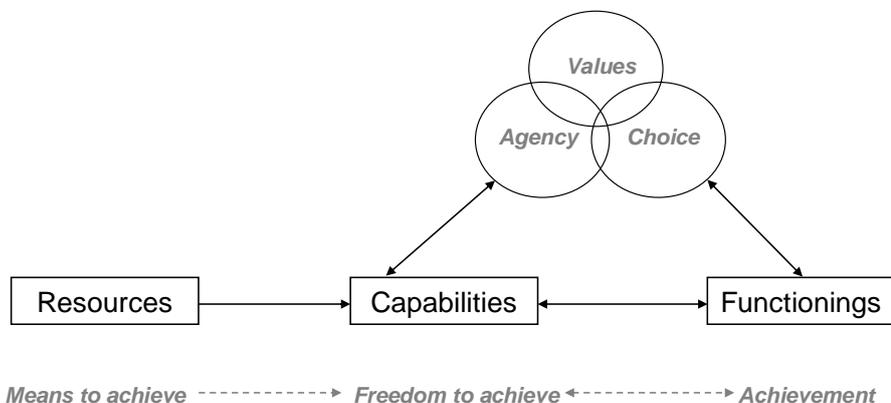

Figure 3 A model of teachers' professional capability

In particular, achievement of some functionings may enhance or limit an individual's pursuit of other functionings and, therefore, impact on their pursuit and achievement of other capabilities (illustrated by the two-way arrow between capabilities and functionings). This fluidity reflects the 'vexing problem' (Binder and Coad, 2011:328) of the way the key concepts in the capability approach are related to one another. Their focus is on the tangled relationship between functionings and resources, but it appears that the complex relationship between values, agency and choice is also integral to the balance between capabilities and functionings.

Conclusion

If quality teaching is understood as 'achieving the goals which [teachers] set for themselves or which they have set for them by others' (Anderson, 2004:22) then this article has offered two different pictures of teacher quality. The quality of teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa, or in other low income regions, however, is rarely measured against the goals teachers set for themselves. By exploring the capability of teachers to achieve the goals they set for themselves as well as those set by governments, this article has revealed that teachers may think they are better quality than governments do. Using the capability approach to explore teacher quality, and in particular the concepts of advantage of agency freedom and agency achievement, also revealed that where teachers aren't working as is expected of them by their employers, this may reflect a lack of freedom to work in this way, rather than a choice not to.

More commonly, teacher quality is conceptualised through the attainment of their students; the focus is on the outcome of teachers' work. Pupil grades are clearly important, but they cannot be separated from the processes that enable them to achieve them. The process of quality teaching – as opposed to the outcome – is under-acknowledged in the wider debate around education quality, and the capability approach can provide an insight into this process.

Neither the capability approach more generally, or the model outlined above, propose a 'specific formula for policy decisions' in the educational governance of teachers (Sen, 2009:232), rather they show how the approach can enable a handle on different perspectives on quality teaching. They demonstrate how policies for teachers should be about eliminating or decreasing obstacles that prevent them from achieving professional capabilities that more equally represent ideas about teaching that both they, and the governments they work for, have reason to value. This is important both in the pursuit of, and the pursuit of a clearer definition of, quality teaching.

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