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# **CAPABILITY TO BE EDUCATED – INSPIRING AND INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGICAL ARRANGEMENTS FROM FINNISH CLASSROOMS**

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# Capability to be Educated –Inspiring and Inclusive Pedagogical Arrangements from Finnish Schools

## Abstract

The idea and concept of inclusive education have been debated, and different interpretations of *what* inclusion means and to *whom* it concerns have been presented. In this paper, we bring together notions of inclusive quality education, pedagogy, learning and teachers, and illustrate how the principle(s) of inclusion(s) has been enacted and translated into classroom practices in Finnish context. Drawing from Finnish teachers' narratives, we highlight successful, small-scale and creative pedagogical arrangements and teachers' sensitivity to recognise and commit to responding to the needs of diverse learners. Our argumentation is rooted in the capabilities approach. We carry out an evaluative exercise and examine how the classroom practices and teachers' understandings of their students look like through the capabilities conceptualisations.

Keywords: capabilities approach, inclusion, pedagogy, classroom, teachers, ontology, epistemology

Total number of words: 9567

## 1. Introduction

Global educational community is committed to Sustainable Development Goal 4 to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (UN, 2015). However, what inclusive and equitable quality education mean, have been widely debated. For example, in relation to discussion on quality of education, Alexander (2015) criticises the neglect of pedagogy, despite its definitive role in the process of generating educational quality. Schweisfurth (2015) demands greater attention to classroom practices and learner-centred forms of pedagogy in understanding learning and quality in education. Similar concerns are at the heart of the World Development Report (WB, 2018), devoted entirely to education, the main message being: schooling is not the same as learning. Yet, another important message is that there is nothing inevitable about low learning but the global learning crisis can be addressed (ibid.).

Teachers’ role in learning and efforts to reach the global goals have been highlighted by international and regional development agencies and national education stakeholders for a long time, and persistently addressed in academia. However, we acknowledge the concern raised by Sayed and Ahmed (2015) that there is a real risk of overstating the potential of schools and teachers to impact broad social transformation. Nevertheless, teachers *are* in a salient position to advance public good and social development (Walker and McLean, 2013), and the overall well-being of students (cognitive skills, emotional development and identity formation). Teaching has also been described as for moral and intellectual practice where of importance is the ways teachers conduct their work in the classroom and engage in critical reflection on values, humanity and aspirations (Alvunger et al., 2017; Unterhalter, 2017).

According to the analysis of the EFA and SDGs frameworks by Sayed ad Ahmed (2015), inclusive quality education appears to be an attempt to emphasise quality as social justice. However, the use of the term is ambiguous and contested, reflecting both a narrow (disability) and broader (all forms of exclusion) focus of inclusion. Therefore, it is not surprising, that the countries who have committed themselves to the Incheon Declaration and 2030 Agenda acknowledge inclusive education as a general goal for developing their educational systems, still interpret of *what* inclusive education means and to *whom* it concerns in practice differently (WEF, 2015). Therefore, it makes sense to talk about inclusions in the plural.

The above presented viewpoints have been at the core of our study on teachers' inclusive classroom practices and pedagogical arrangements. In this paper, our aim is to bring together the notions of inclusive quality education, pedagogy, learning and teachers, and to illustrate how the principle(s) of inclusion(s) has been enacted and translated into classroom practices in Finnish context. We present four stories in which teachers reflect upon their day-to-day work and highlight teachers' creative, small-scale pedagogical arrangements – seemingly trivial, but from the inclusive education point of view of significance, we claim. We draw on such epistemological and methodological engagements in educational debates that place emphasis on people's subjective experiences (see Lehtomäki et al., 2014; McGrath, 2014; cf. Tikly, 2015; Wilson-Strydom & Okkolin, 2016), in this case, on teachers' understandings of their work and students (e.g., Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Florian & Spratt, 2013; see also McGrath, 2013).

Conceptually, our argumentation is rooted in the capabilities approach (CA). The approach promotes normative conception of social justice and concerns *human capabilities*, understood as an *opportunity* concept of freedom, which are to be

equalised in pursuing equality and equity in education (Sen, 1985b, 2002) – and inclusion, for that matter. This implies that educational systems and arrangements from macro- to micro-levels should warrant and advance the ‘capability to be educated’ for every person. Three core assumptions of the approach are of specific importance for our analysis: (a) treating each person as an *end*; (b) understanding resources as *means* for (not metric of) human well-being; and (c) acknowledging *pluralism* with respect to values, capabilities *and* different combination of corresponding functionings (e.g. Robeyns, 2005, 2016).

To begin with, we present some emerging aspects of inclusion and education, both internationally and in the Finnish context. We then provide an overview of the CA in relation to the broader inclusive quality education discussion. After introducing our empirical study, we move to the two core sections of our paper: in the section 5, we represent the stories of Sam, Michael, ‘girls’ recess’ and Roary; section 6 extends the stories but is more about conceptualising inclusive education, pedagogy and learning through the lenses of the CA. Our purpose is not to provide capabilitarian account of inclusion but instead, we examine how the classroom practices and teachers’ understandings of their students look like through the capabilities informed evaluative space of human life: well-being and agency; achievements and freedoms. We conclude by pinpointing some emerging aspect within Finnish educational environment and speculate how our situated and context specific findings might resonate with broader international inclusive quality education debates by elevating some ontological and epistemological questions. In doing so, we contribute, on the one hand, to the more pragmatic pedagogical debates on inclusive education, on the other hand, we provide our modality for the cartwheel view of the capability approach (Robeyns, 2016).

## 2. Understanding(s) and Discourse(s) of Inclusion(s)

There are so many interpretations and discourses on inclusion that it makes more sense to talk about inclusions in the plural. The narrowest understanding views inclusion as concerning only students with special educational needs or disabilities, while the widest understanding regards inclusion as a philosophical principle for developing the educational system and society as a whole (e.g., Ainscow et al., 2006; Dyson, 1999). The human capabilities-informed understanding of inclusion and inclusive education can be employed in both narrower and broader ways, as will be presented in more detailed in the following section.

Kiuppis and Hausstätter (2014) identify three main discourses and agendas of inclusive education. The *first* discourse is categorically concerned with people with disabilities, either in the sense of ‘schools for all’ or in the sense of education in integrated settings, as an alternative to education in segregated settings. The *second* discourse sees inclusive education as the objective to widen the focus of special (needs) education in terms of the target groups and by understanding inclusive education as an approach to address issues of access to as well as participation and achievement in education. By definition, inclusive education is directed to all; but in practice, it focuses on certain populations considered the most vulnerable or marginalised, including those students who have ‘special educational needs’ – that is, students with disabilities in particular. The *third* discourse emphasises the heterogeneity of learners and takes diversity as the starting point for educational theory and practice. According to this wider interpretation, inclusive education is understood as a non-categorical, all-embracing approach in which individual differences are not classified by race, language, religion, culture, gender or (dis)ability. Depending on the view of which group is considered the intended ‘target’ or recipient of inclusive education, actions for how to

arrange education change accordingly, and differences remain between contexts (Kiuppis & Hausstätter, 2014, pp. 2-3).

How, then, are we to understand inclusive quality education and learning environments in the Finnish context? The current educational system in Finland is grounded on the idea of education for all, with an emphasis on full participation and recognition of all people's equal right to education (see e.g., Sahlberg, 2007; Simola, 2014). The comprehensive school project has been successful in addressing inequalities, on the one hand, and in improving the academic achievement of all students, on the other (Savolainen, 2009). As an example, findings of the 2014 cross-national comparison of social justice in the EU findings suggest that when measured in the opportunities for every individual to engage broad-ranging societal participation, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands score the highest. Concerning the dimension of equitable education, Finland holds the sixth place. (Schraad-Tischler & Kroll 2014; cf. Pulkkinen & Roihuvuo, 2014). Regardless of the declining trend in learning outcomes since the 2009 PISA, and especially in comparison to the 2003 results (OECD, 2013; Vettenranta, 2015; Vettenranta et al. 2016), in the European and global contexts, Finland still rank high (OECD, 2017). At the same time, educational researchers, social scientists and policy makers have paid attention to the declining trend in *learning outcomes*. Increasingly, even more concern has awakened the *rising inequalities*, induced by social class (socio-economic and family backgrounds), gender, region and/or school. Additionally, in the scholarly and public discussion, critical accounts have been presented towards the 'seemingly efficient' and short-sighted reforms in the policy agenda to tackle the deterioration of students' well-being, exhaustion of teachers, early drop-outs after compulsory basic education and rising social inequalities, and demands to advance motivation, curiosity, joy and passion for



learning, and ‘listening to’ young people instead of just ‘hearing of’ them, have been expressed.

It is important to recognise that an important vehicle for the still (relatively) high degree of social justice, well-performing school and training system, and smooth functioning of the comprehensive school has been the gradually built, extensive, special education system (Malinen, Väisänen, & Savolainen, 2012; Savolainen, 2009; cf. Bines & Lei, 2011). As part of the comprehensive school reform, part-time special education was introduced. It has proven to be an effective tool for reacting quickly to learning problems which do not qualify students for the label of ‘special’, as traditional special education does. Although part-time special education has grown continuously, so too has traditional special education, which involves an official statement and diagnosis/identification of special education needs. When carried out in fully segregated settings, this type of special education is seen as a contradictory trend to the otherwise relatively inclusive development of education.

One reaction to the continuous expansion of special education was the special education strategy (MEC, 2007) and related changes in education law (Finnish Basic Education Act, 2010). The new strategy and law comprised a deliberate attempt to increase educational inclusion in Finland, marking a clear shift in official rhetoric. Now, instead of having the abovementioned two types of special education, the comprehensive schools offer support at three levels of intensity: general, intensified and special (see Björn et al., 2016). Evidently, the new model necessitates *new ways of thinking* among teachers and *new models for organizing everyday work* in schools and classrooms; especially the emphasis on general support, whereby all teachers are responsible for all students, can be considered a new step towards inclusion.

Framed by the new governmental strategic and rhetoric interpretation, the core notions of global discourses and agendas of inclusive education and, moreover, their intersectionalities, it is evident that the broadest understanding of inclusion is needed to address diversity in Finnish educational settings and society at large. This resonates with the human capabilities-informed understanding of inclusion.

### **3 Human Capabilities Perspective on Inclusion**

The capabilities approach (CA) asserts that well-being and agency are equally important and interdependent aspects of human life. By linking the cross-cutting dimensions of achievement and freedom to the frame of analysis, Sen (1992, 1993, 1999) has defined four conceptual spheres within which human life can be evaluated. These spheres are ontologically and analytically distinct and encompass the following: well-being achievements (functionings), well-being freedoms (capabilities), agency achievements and agency freedoms (Table 1) (see Crocker & Robeyns, 2012; Okkolin, 2016; Okkolin, 2017).

Sen's notion of human capabilities derives from the distinction he draws between functionings and capabilities. When employed in an educational setting, *functionings* refer to educational 'beings and doings' learners have achieved, such as 'access to' and 'participation in' education, learning and achieving (e.g., reading and writing, mathematics grades) and completing basic education. This is the mainstream approach by which governments (including Finland's) collect and present statistical data and international organisations make comparisons. *Capabilities* are comprehended categorically as opportunities to realise educational functionings. It is presumed that although outcomes/functionings (e.g., mathematics grades) might appear equal, students' genuine opportunities to function might be very different; induced, for

example, by gender and (dis)abilities (see Okkolin, 2017; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). As pointed out by Unterhalter (2017), the link between capabilities and functionings is of significance for pedagogy (the question of *how*). She refers particularly to the work of Stewart (2000, 2009) and the notion of vertical and horizontal inequalities, and also discusses the inequality of *what* and to *whom* in relation to the changing contexts in which teachers work daily.

*Agency achievement* refers to the realisation of the goals and values a person has a reason to pursue, whether or not they are connected with his or her own well-being; whereas *agency freedom* refers to what the person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important (Sen, 1985, 1992). As emphasised by Sen, while agency ‘is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political, and economic opportunities available to us’ (Sen, 1999, pp. xi-xii), not only do people have more or less freedom, but social arrangements can also extend agency achievements and freedoms.

Table 1. Conceptual frame to evaluate human life (Crocker and Robeyns 2012; name removed for anonymity)

	WELL-BEING	AGENCY
ACHIEVEMENT	<i>Well-being Achievements</i> (= functionings) State of a person: various things one manages to do and be (may be the outcome of one’s own or other people’s decisions and actions)	<i>Agency Achievements</i>  Realisation of goals and values one has personally a reason to pursue (may be or may not be connected with one’s own well-being)
FREEDOM	<i>Well-being Freedoms</i> (= capabilities)  Genuine opportunities and alternatives to function	<i>Agency Freedoms</i>  Freedom to set goals and act accordingly; to make choices and decide

Accordingly, the approach asserts that the ultimate goal of any social and political reform, including education (from macro-policies to school-level practices), should be to enhance people's functionings *and* capabilities, *and* in support of agency.

Correspondingly, the assessment of well-being should be based on the various beings and doings that people can achieve *and* the opportunities or substantive freedoms to realise those beings and doings. The same applies to the agency aspect of human life. In other words, strategic policy priorities and practices should be assessed not only on the basis of their impact on people's functionings (e.g., grades in mathematics) but, just as importantly, on the basis of their influence on their capabilities (e.g., the set of opportunities needed to achieve a valued grade in mathematics) and their freedom to act 'in line with his or her conception of the good' (Sen, 1985a, p. 206). The CA argues that if we evaluate only the functionings and do not look at the conditions of choice for the learners, we gain an inadequate understanding of people's well-being and education initiatives are unlikely to be sufficient. This kind of a broader notion of the approach, which makes use of all four spheres of human life, is employed in our analysis. In the analysis, we examine teachers' practical doings in creating freedoms (well-being and agency) for students to achieve (well-being and agency).

As per the cartwheel idea of the CA by Robeyns (2016), one of the *core* characteristic of the approach is human diversity. The approach's explicit recognition and foregrounding of diversity is of particular importance when considering the needs of diverse learners and understandings of inclusive education (for a broader argumentation, see Terzi, 2005, 2008; see also Spratt & Florian, 2015). As pointed out by Terzi (2010), the notion of functionings alone is of importance for examining human (dis)abilities and diversity. She also highlights the conceptual gains in adopting the idea

of capability, which consists specifically of the *relational* definition of learning difficulties and (dis)abilities in terms of the limitations of capability:

Since an individual's functioning, and therefore his or her functional difficulty, depends on the interrelation of individual, social and contextual factors, the nature of the capability limitation is neither individually nor socially determined, but it is seen as a result of such interrelation of factors. (Terzi, 2015, p. 150)

Consequently, both personal characteristics and the design of social and institutional arrangements are important in determining whether an individual impairment results in functional (well-being achievement) difficulties or restrictions and, therefore, in the limitation of capabilities (well-being freedoms)<sup>i</sup>. Furthermore, the framework does not entail the use of specific categories, but instead focuses on *possible* functionings, common or atypical, as expressions of human diversity. This is of particular importance in de/valuing individuals on the basis of differences and in the exercise of human agency (achievements and freedoms), in thinking of which capabilities matter *and* in achieving (same levels of) well-being. (see Terzi, 2015; Robeyns, 2016)

The *capability to be educated* can be considered one of the basic human capabilities. For Sen (1992, p. 44, 1999), education is one of 'a relative small number of centrally important beings and doings that are crucial to well-being'. Similarly, for Nussbaum (1997, 2000), education is a basic capability. In both of their writings, the importance of education for 'human flourishing' is underlined and the benefits for people's capabilities and agency are acknowledged and attested to. Nussbaum, in particular, requires the proper functioning of government to make available the basic necessary conditions, including educational institutions and arrangements, for a fully good life (in accordance with her universal list of central capabilities, which is in

contrast to the thinking of Sen, e.g., 1993; also Robeyns 2005, 2016). Applied to inclusive education and to inclusion more broadly understood, this implies that we owe to all learners the establishment of an equal set of genuine opportunities; that is, capabilities to achieve educational functionings *and* to participate in society (Terzi, 2007, 2010). At the core of this normative, moral and political imperative is the notion of individual human dignity.

#### **4. The Study of Teachers' Understanding(s) of Inclusive Education**

The data used in this paper is drawn from a larger, international, sequential, mixed-method research project launched in 2010 between researchers from several countries (see Malinen et al. 2012; Savolainen et al., 2012; Engelbrecht, Savolainen, Nel & Malinen, 2013). The purpose of the project was to develop an understanding of teachers' roles in the implementation of inclusive education while taking into consideration their socio-cultural, political and historical backgrounds. The qualitative data and findings presented in this paper draw from the second, qualitative phase of the project conducted in Finland. The purpose of the qualitative phase was to answer the question: How do teachers make meaning of inclusive education in their classroom practices.

The data used in this paper consists of 15 Finnish teachers' thematic interviews. In 2012, 11 individual and four semi-structured group interviews were carried out at four primary schools (grades 1–6; age 7–12). The interviews were conducted in rural and urban settings typical of the Finnish context outside of the largest cities: the schools included small suburban school, middle-size urban school, large, growing urban school,

and small rural school.<sup>1</sup> There were 14 female and 8 male voluntary participants. None of the research participants were, by definition, novice teachers; rather, they were all experienced teachers, albeit the number of years each had spent in the profession varied. Some of the research participants joined both individual and group interviews.

The discussed interview themes were teachers' (a) teaching and learning support strategies and practices, (b) contextual opportunities and constraints, and (c) support they receive to enact in the profession. The topic and concept of 'inclusive education' was not explicitly addressed with the research participants. In interviews, the research participants were encouraged to reflect on their day-to-day work by responding to prompts such as, 'Please, describe your school environment; What about your classroom, how is it; *and* Could you please give us an example of your learning support practices' The focus of this paper is on the theme 'teaching and learning support strategies and practices'.

We have selected four stories by three teachers to empirically elaborate on their pedagogical arrangements and classroom practices. The stories represent larger body of the data in the sense that the mainstream tone of teachers' voice was positive and caring towards their students. Yet, the stories embody their own uniqueness and individual specificities. We acknowledge that the narratives which we represent are manifestations of 'individual professional capabilities' that some teachers may have while others may not. We also recognise the situated specificity of the stories. We will into this in the

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<sup>1</sup> School 1: rural; number of students, 57; number of teachers, 3. School 2: urban; students, 210; teachers, 15. School 3: urban; students, 142; teachers, 7. School 4: urban; students, 320; teachers, 20.

discussion after presenting the stories of Sam, Michael, 'girls' recess' and Roary, *and* capabilitarian reading and conceptualisation of the stories.

## **5. Three Teachers, Four Stories: Teaching and Learning Support Practices**

### *Story of Sam*

A female teacher from an urban school explained in a group interview that she had an unusually small class of third graders. Her colleague commented, 'Even a gerbil can fit in', while a second added, 'Yes, I have some too!' These comments indicate that gerbils are kept as pets at this particular school. Then, another female teacher, who had a class of 26 first graders, told an interesting story about the use of gerbils to support one of her student's concentration, inclusion within the group, and thereby his learning.

This boy, let us call him Sam, was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Due to his severe behavioural problems, the teacher faced various challenges in everyday school work. She explained that she tested a number of different arrangements to calm the learning environment both for the group and for Sam. She described how she collaborated closely with Sam's parents so that they knew what was happening in the school at all times as well as why and how certain practices were implemented in the classroom.

I had very close and active collaboration with the family. I did explain to his parents what kind of support systems we had and the experiments that we did. And always, if anything unusual or something that we had not agreed happened, I was in touch with them. To me the home-school connection and collaboration with parents is something that I cherish and do not want to give up. I really want to have properly time for that.

The teacher described how Sam, as an enthusiastic soccer player, knew well the meaning of yellow and red cards. She had agreed with Sam and his parents that like on



a soccer field, where certain behaviours are not acceptable or tolerated, in school and classroom settings, similar rules apply. After signalling with the cards for a while, the teacher was happy to realise that Sam barely needed them anymore. She also explained that Sam tended to be quite careless with his belongings; so, with him and his parents, the teacher decided that he would not be allowed to keep his library card until he started taking more responsibility for his personal belongings as well as those of the school. The card would remain with the teacher, and Sam would be given it only when he went to the library with the class. Once he felt he could handle the card for himself, he was welcome to say so. So far, however, Sam had decided that it would be better for the teacher to keep his card.

The teacher explained that Sam loved the gerbils kept as school pets. He constantly went to see them, and the teacher had to repeatedly go and get him back to the classroom. Time and again, the teacher in whose class the gerbils were kept brought Sam to his own classroom, telling his teacher that she had found him looking after and watching the gerbils. The teacher, Sam and his parents agreed that he would be allowed to stay with the gerbils for one recess every day, for the whole break following his first lesson. This arrangement turned out to be successful. Sam learned what time he was allowed to spend with the gerbils – no more, no less.

Sam's teacher, who had 30 years of teaching experience, admitted that she initially became extremely tired and frustrated with him and wondered, 'How on earth is he not in a small group but in the mainstream classroom? ... How is this possible?' Quite soon, however, she came to understand that Sam was intelligent and that there was no other place he should be. Due to his attention disorder, Sam had not yet learnt how to read *fluently*; but, as the teacher described, he *did* read, and he understood everything perfectly well as he was a bright, young boy. Together with the assistant

teacher, who often took responsibility for the rest of the class while the teacher focused on working with and supporting Sam, she tried numerous pedagogical arrangements, methods and means to organise their day-to-day classroom practices. According to her assessment, they had found well-functioning ways to carry out teaching and support students' learning.

You know, we have such a working environment and culture that you can go and ask from experts [like special education teachers] and colleagues who have years and years of experience of different arrangements and practices that 'please, tell me what can I do – what should I do?' And you don't have to worry about that they would think: 'oh dear, she is such a crappy for a teacher!'

Regarding learning achievements and learning *as such*, Sam's teacher said that, without a doubt, the purpose of the first grade is to teach children basic numeracy, reading and writing skills. Yet, she agreed that the *meaning* of the first grade is also, above all, to feed children's curiosity and enable them to flourish and enjoy schooling, about which she stated: 'As we are creating the critical basis for further education and schooling, it is of importance that the children are happy and come to school willingly.'

### *Story of Michael*

In addition to handling evident and diagnosed barriers to learning, such as those Sam faced, the same teacher shared an example of how she had tried to encourage all her students to participate regardless of their skills and 'fluency', or lack thereof:

You know, I have this 'mission'. I wish us Finns to grow up so that we don't have to say after every meeting that: 'Oh, I wish I had said something but I do not dare. ... What do the others think? ... Do I look stupid? ... I wish we could learn how to speak out, and I think we can start by learning from the very first grade how to bring our issues in front of the people.'

She remarked that she took advantage of the many dialogue exercises in the textbook and that her students enjoyed coming and reading in front of the class. She thought that the best feedback she received came from the father of Michael, the most ‘stammering’ reader in her class. The father had thanked her and mentioned how glad he was to notice that despite his son’s nearly non-existent reading skills, he had never complained that he had been teased or mocked. As a matter of fact, the teacher continued, this particular boy was the first to volunteer to read aloud, and the rest of the class was amazingly patient, giving him all the time he needed. ‘Such fantastic kids are my children’, she said, clearly very proud of her students.

### *Story of Girls’ Recess*

Another experienced female teacher (24 years in the profession) had 22 fourth-grade students. She recalled that the boys in her class played soccer and did things together as one group. Whereas the boys left no one alone, the girls began to form groups characterised as exclusive.

So, it is about foreseeing social problems. I’ve learned from the past years and previous classes, but also heard from my own girls, my children, that it so easily goes with the girls that they begin to form pairs and these smaller groups.

The teacher then came up with the idea of a girls’ recess. First, the teacher and the girls decided together which two girls would act as the recess tutors. The tutors would decide what the girls would do during the recess, which always took place during the 10 o’clock break. In brief, the idea was that the girls needed to be pushed to be and do things together. The girls’ recess developed nicely, and the teacher reported that the girls had taken the lead in and responsibility for the arrangement. They agreed that the girls could decide by themselves what they would do, and a space on the board was

reserved for girls' recess so they could write their plans for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and so on. According to the teacher's assessment, the system turned out to be a success:

Nowadays, no one comes to me and says that someone is doing this and that, and someone hasn't been included. [...] The other day I had my outdoor shift as a recess attendant and I went to see how they were doing – only to discover that they had made up so nice and neat arrangements

The teacher saw her role primarily as a facilitator who gave incentives to the girls. She was delighted to be able to tell the girls, who had asked for her assessment of how they were doing, that they were doing a great job. She also mentioned that when a new female student started in the class, all the girls were excited to volunteer to welcome her, show her the school, and demonstrate the 'recess for girls' to her.

Thinking aloud, the teacher stated that:

I think ... I'm certain that it is all because of their recess. [...] I'm extremely happy that this method has worked out so well with the girls. I'm really happy about it.

While Sam's teacher, the one 'with the mission', would like to encourage her students to speak up, the teacher who organised the girls' recess said that she would like to invite her students to ask for more help: 'I've always told them that I'm there to help them; that they can always ask for help. That is the reason why I'm there, and that is what I'm paid for'. However, the fourth graders told her that they would prefer first trying themselves and only afterwards, if needed, would they come and ask for assistance.

*Story of Roary*

A third experienced female teacher told a story about the innovative and imaginary use of plain paper with a little boy named Roary who had difficulties moving from one assignment to another. The teacher had been advised by a school psychologist that she might try putting something very concrete, like a sticker or some object, into the student's desk, which he could physically touch when one task was completed and it was time to move on to another task. The teacher explained how Roary was very excited about computers and, for this reason, she decided to write the word *Enter* onto the paper and place that into his desk; once the assignment was completed, he was supposed to press the 'key' and move on:

Look Roary, this just like in your computer. Once you have finished your assignment all you need to do is to press Enter. [...] And can you imagine, the funniest part of the story is that it actually did work!

This experiment turned out to be successful and well-functioning, and it provides an interesting anecdote of the use of a very simple piece of a paper as a pedagogical tool and 'resource'. Yet, the teacher of Roary did recognise the value of *de facto* resources, like the opportunity to discuss with the psychologist and to be assisted by the school's welfare officer. Evidently, it is important to possess sufficient and appropriate teaching and learning facilities, as well as human resources, to practice the teaching profession – or any profession, for that matter. Generally speaking, Finnish teachers reported that they were happy with their well-resourced school environments (e.g., facilities and human resources). Yet, going back to the CA, even more important is what is done with the resources and how teachers frame the challenges they face in their daily work.

## 6. Capability to be Educated

What is the purpose of telling the stories of Sam, Michael, the girls' recess and Roary from the *inclusive quality education* point of view and what we might learn from the teachers' stories regarding in thinking of their day-to-day classroom practices and understandings of their students when through the capabilitarian conceptualisation? Evidently, teachers' stories about *whom* is to be included and *how* to enable that, embed many aspects of the three discourses and agendas defined by Kiuppis and Hausstätter (2014). For instance, by having ADHD, Sam *is* disabled. Yet, his teacher did not take a position of 'what to do to him' (as per the deficit model of disability) but instead sought to figure out 'what *we* can do *with* him' to arrange the learning environment (well-being freedoms) so that it enabled his full inclusion (well-being achievement). This applies to the teacher of Roary as well. Categorically, this is close to what Spratt and Florian (2015, p. 94) mean by 'reframing the problem'. To continue with the argument made by Spratt and Florian, both Sam's and Roary's teachers took a positive view on their students: that they had the capability to learn once the conditions were right – as if it is only to include an *Enter* key on a piece of paper.

Let us now take a closer look at Sam through the capabilities lens.

Table 2. Conceptual frame to evaluate human life – Sam’s story

	WELL-BEING	AGENCY
ACHIEVEMENT	<p><i>Well-being Achievements</i> (= functionings)</p> <p>State of a person: various things one manages to do and be (may be the outcome of one’s own or other people’s decisions and actions)</p> <p>e.g. access to school, basic reading skills, common behavioural and courtesy manners</p>	<p><i>Agency Achievements</i></p> <p>Realisation of goals and values one has personally a reason to pursue (may be or may not be connected with one’s own well-being)</p> <p>e.g. shared responsibility with the teacher, opportunity to stay with the gerbil for one recess per day</p>
FREEDOM	<p><i>Well-being Freedoms</i> (= capabilities)</p> <p>Genuine opportunities and alternatives to function</p> <p>e.g. national education system, teacher’s and assistant teacher’s support, teacher’s perception of the meaning of schooling, use of yellow and red card</p>	<p><i>Agency Freedoms</i></p> <p>Freedom to set goals and act accordingly; to make choices and decide</p> <p>e.g. to decide whether or not be able to take responsibility for school and personal belongings, agreement with teacher and parents regarding the school-day and pet</p>

In several examples in the data, research participants acknowledged and valued their colleagues and referred to implementation strategies dependent on the availability of human resources. Specifically, participants referred to teacher assistants, special-needs education teachers and parallel-class teachers. For instance, as we learnt from Sam’s teacher, she could organise the teaching and learning support with the assistant teacher, who regularly worked in her class. Sam’s teacher explained that she could also collaborate with a resource teacher four or five hours a week. In addition, she could

consult the special-needs education teacher. The significance of the special-needs education teacher was also raised up by Roary's teacher:

This has been exceptional year! The help from the special-needs education teacher has been amazing. I think she is remarkable, you know, the way she knows the students and can support them is so... it is special! But that is what she is trained for. [...] I just hope this year has not been an exception!

To continue with Sam, clearly, his teacher had come to know him well and could thereby incorporate something from the soccer field that was familiar to him and was a major part of his life that he enjoyed doing into the school and classroom settings. By introducing the use of yellow and red cards, the teacher invented a form of learning support that made sense and was meaningful to him (that is, to create capabilities). The purpose of using the cards was basically to teach and learn school and classroom rules (that is, how to function in the school). The teacher explained that Sam started his schooling by crawling; literally, he used to crawl into the classroom. She decided that there was no reason to approve of such behaviour; so, she would stand in the door and wait until he got up and walked into the classroom, like all the other students. Sam also knew that if he did something wrong in the class, the teacher would first show him the yellow card, indicating a warning. Next, she would produce a red card, meaning 'leave the classroom', like being ejected from a soccer game. Again, as on the soccer field, any kind of violence or physical bullying automatically and immediately resulted in a red card and punitive consequences: detention and a conversation with his parents.

Although Sam was 'special' in the sense that he needed special attention and support, he was not 'special' insofar as *any* kind of personal conduct was accepted; instead, similar behavioural and courtesy manners were expected of him as they were of the rest of the



class. To add, it was of critical importance to find ways to give positive feedback to Sam:

It wasn't an easy task, I can tell, because he was just messing around so much. At first I was really struggling in trying to figure out what to say. Also, I could only acknowledge him for a reason; any kind of sweet talk would simply not work! So, even the very tiniest issue that I could think of, I tried to remember to thank and encourage him.

Let us then take an analytical look at the 'case of the gerbil'. To repeat, following one of the core assumptions of the CA, resources (in this case, those of the school) *are* important; but even more important are what is *done* with them. Having gerbils in the school makes for an interesting anecdote, but more inspiring from the perspective of inclusive education is how the teacher used the gerbils with Sam pedagogically. First of all, as stated, she clearly knew her student and saw how important the gerbils were to him. Allowing him to stay with them alone during the entire recess turned out to be a suitable arrangement to fulfil his curiosity about the animals (agency achievement). In doing so, the teacher also enabled Sam to enjoy his school days more and to make schooling more meaningful to him (agency freedoms). This turned out to be a well-functioning arrangement pedagogically as well, as it calmed the first morning lesson and the rest of the day.

In addition to the various teaching and learning support practices the teacher carried out with Sam, she also tried encouraging all her students to 'speak out'. Consequently, in addition to the first 'inclusive education agenda', which refers to people with disabilities, the pedagogical scope was broadened from *access* to education to *acceptance* and *participation*, regardless of the learners' abilities. Finally, related to the second *and* third understandings of inclusive education as suggested by Kiuppis and Hausstätter (2014), we learned from the second teacher (who invented the girls' recess)

how she aimed to shift gendered, exclusive, classroom practices into inclusive group dynamics. She could have accepted and taken for granted the gendered, exclusive practices in her classroom as ‘girls’ culture’; but instead, she saw a need to create an environment that took everyone into account. Presumably, by developing her students’ social skills and encouraging them to collaborate and participate, the teacher succeeded in nurturing their feeling of enjoyment, belonging and overall well-being in the school. Quite intentionally, another purpose of these two teachers’ classroom practices was to enhance students’ self-confidence to act in society (see Terzi, 2007, 2010). From a capabilities-informed inclusive education point of view, teachers’ day-to-day classroom practices manifest their aspirations and commitment to advance diverse learners’ *genuine opportunities* – that is, capabilities – to function.

## **5. Discussion and Concluding Remarks**

In this paper, we have presented an analysis of how four Finnish teachers enact inclusion. Our understanding was built on an analysis of four selected stories by three experienced teachers who reflected their day-to-day work and class room arrangements. At the core of our analysis was the interest to understand *whom* they perceived to be included and *how* they created opportunities for diverse learners to function and achieve what they had personal reason to value.

As pointed out earlier, the very notion of well-being achievement (functionings) alone is of importance in looking at human (dis)abilities and diversity. In addition, the relational nature of well-being freedoms (capabilities) was highlighted. This brings to the forefront both personal characteristics *and* the design of social and institutional arrangements in considering educational initiatives from macro-policies to school-level practices, which ultimately – as per the CA – should be targeted to enhance diverse

learners functionings, capabilities *and* exercise of agency. We also highlighted the importance of the principle of treating each person as an *end*, understanding resources as *means* (not ends) as well as a metric of well-being, and *pluralism* with respect to values, different combination of functionings, and in defining which capabilities matter for inclusion of all, able-bodied and/or disabled (cf. Robeyns, 2016). We elaborated on these notions particularly through Sam's story. His story is an excellent example for examining inclusive pedagogical practices and arrangements analytically through the capabilities lens; his story represents the relations between *freedom* and *achievement*, as well as *agency* and *well-being* aspects of life (see Tables 1 and 2). His story also reflects how these concepts are potentially interlinked and intersecting.

The CA endorses the means–ends analytical distinction and stresses that when valuing something, we should always be clear whether we value it as an *end* in itself, or as a *means* to a valuable end; whether, for example, participation in education is understood as an end, as a value in itself, or as a means to learn (e.g., basic reading skills) and/or participate in society (e.g., courtesy manners, shared responsibility). Consequently, this leads into a different genealogy and understanding of inclusion and its success in responding to the needs of diverse learners. Through our analysis and conceptualisation we have added our interpretation of inclusive education and modality of the capability approach to the cartwheel view of the approach.

We found the stories of Sam, Michael, 'girls' recess' and Roary interesting for presentation to an international educational audience particularly from the ontological and epistemological points of view. We need to make few remarks, however, concerning the overall research setting, methodology of the study and the substantive issues alike that we think are of importance in the analysis and in thinking of resonance of these stories with different educational contexts. First, we would like to pay attention

to the student population in these Eastern Finland schools where, by definition and from the social and sociological point of view, heterogeneity *is* a relative concept. Data collected from another context, with greater socio-economic differences and cultural diversity, for instance, likely would have produced more complex and contested findings. Secondly, to summarise our findings, the leading researchers on the Finnish PISA team articulated more than 10 years ago that

Finland's high achievement seems to be attributable to a whole network of interrelated factors, in which student's own areas of interest and leisure activities, the learning opportunities provided by schools, parental support and involvement as well as social and cultural contexts of learning and of the entire education system combine with each other. (Väljärvi et al., 2002, p. 46)

The PISA assessment is over and above about learning and learning achievements, but from the perspective of inclusive teaching and learning support, the findings of our analyses suggest the importance of similar broader and interconnected critical issues, without which it is unlikely that such an inclusive school and classroom practices, as presented, could emerge. For instance, educational systems and arrangements in Finland are based on autonomy and trust allocating most decisional power to the local level. Evidently, variations in the implementation of national policies in practice do exist. In addition to the differences between and within municipalities and schools, it is evident that variances amongst how teachers perceive *who* is to be included, *why* and *how* also exist. In this study teachers' mainstream 'voices' endorse and respond to the needs of diverse learners, but it needs to be recognised that teachers' professional autonomy also enables the misuse of power. This potential problem brings to light another critical aspect of teachers' professional competence that was identified

in our data: responsibility, which resonates with teachers' passion for their work and commitment to their learners' overall well-being.

But it is clear that without adequate macro- and micro-level resources and support, no teachers, no matter how passionate, committed and competent one might be, can enact in the profession on a productive and sustainable basis. To give some examples, in our study the teachers were satisfied with their well-resourced school environments and small classes (in 2013 average group size was 19.66 in Grades 1–6 (primary) and 16.46 in Grades 7–9 (secondary) in Finland). The teachers credited the overall school leadership and principals' role in the development of inclusive school cultures, collaboration with colleagues with specialised knowledge and active facilitation of parental involvement through different communication strategies. In Finland, teachers are qualified and highly educated (Master's degree in education); yet, they recognise the limitations of their competence and seek for multi-professional support – sometimes, possibly, unnecessarily, because of not trusting on their professional capabilities. In any case, at the core from the quality inclusive education point of view is the fact that the multi-professional expertise is there and available. Finally, regardless of good working conditions, excellent teaching and learning resources, and professional competence, teachers *also* in Finland are reported to feel exhausted, stressed and inadequate, caused by, for example, teaching arrangements that have increased diversity.

Broadening the perspective from Finland to global educational challenges, it is *a fact* that in a class room of approximately 20 students it is relatively easy to know them, and their needs and interests. For the sake of relativity, a recent study from a very different country context, Tanzania, reports a sharp rise of the teacher-pupil ratio to 1:164 for Standard One in public primary schools, as a result of the implementation of

the fee-free education policy (HakiElimu, 2017a, 2017b). The official standard in Tanzania is 1:40. From another angle, in thinking of learning in particular, when third graders in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda were asked to read a sentence such as ‘The name of the dog is Puppy’ in English or Kiswahili, three of four students did not understand what it said (WB 2018). Without saying it makes a difference study and learn in a class room of 20 or 40 students, not to mention 164. In this regards, *resources* do matter. But as stated in the World Development Report (ibid.) there is nothing inevitable about low learning in low- and middle-income countries – or in any country, we would say.

Every country has its’ own context specific, complex and multi-layered challenges in their educational systems, which need to be identified and acknowledged. But from ontological and epistemological points of view, we claim that neither the rhetoric nor the ontological understanding of education, pedagogy, learning and teachers as a(n endless) list of *lack of, under-, non-, poor etc.* takes us far. For this reason, our epistemic interest in this paper has been to highlight teachers’ simple, pragmatic and creative solutions, which did work out well in their particular and specific situations. We wanted to provide examples to be discussed and debated further, because there *are* excellent, motivated and committed teachers everywhere, who have innovated pedagogical arrangements suitable for their specific class room, school and country context. To learn from them, to be inspired by them, we could respond to the call of the WB (2018), act on evidence *and* make the schools work better for learners.

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<sup>i</sup> At the core of the approach are conversion factors (personal, social and environmental), which are of critical importance in thinking of human diversity (Robeyns, 2016). However, we have built our conceptualisation and evaluative exercise on the basis of four core spheres.