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Bridging Homes and Classrooms: Advancing Students' Capabilities

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Abstract

This paper investigates the capabilities of remote rural teachers in Indonesia's Probolinggo Regency to make meaningful pedagogic connections between students' homes and their classrooms. The term *capabilities* is derived from Sen's and Nussbaum's capabilities approach, which refers to substantive freedom or opportunities that a person holds to do and to be a certain thing that he or she considers valuable (Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 1999). Informed by the capabilities approach (CA), the study involved classroom observations, teacher interviews and examination of Indonesian curriculum documents (teachers' syllabi and lesson plans). Making connections between homes and classrooms enables students to critically engage in their learning and makes knowledge more meaningful about solving real-life issues or problems. Teachers need to accommodate 'local' knowledge that exists in homes and communities thereby strengthening relationships between communities and schools; something synonymous with social justice aspects of the CA. Data generated for the study indicate that teachers encounter significant impediments in making connections between homes (communities) and classrooms (schools). In addition, while participants demonstrate that they are in part committed to the notions of 'connections' and 'inclusivity', their classroom practices still need strengthening in their adherence to the general substance of the CA.

Keywords: connections, homes, classrooms, capabilities.

Introduction

The research forms part of a three-year doctoral study conducted from within an Australian university. The research team comprised the major student researcher and his research supervisors. Our interest in this research stems from a qualitative case study of teacher capabilities to make connections between the homes and classrooms of their students. Specifically, the paper provides an interpretive analysis of how teacher participants construct the idea of capable teachers. The term *capabilities*, in this regard, is based on the capabilities approach developed by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2006), and defined as actual opportunities or substantive freedom to lead a life that a person thinks valuable.

Epistemologically, the research is situated within a critical inquiry perspective aimed at describing “a specific manifestation of already-presumed general patterns ... and at confirmation and elucidation rather than discovery” (Patton, 2002, p. 131). In general, research informed by critical inquiry deals with issues of power and justice and how economy, class, race, gender, education and other socio-cultural institutions interact to construct a social system (see Patton, 2002). Such research is also concerned with how exclusion and marginalisation shape people’s experiences and perceptions of social phenomena (Patton, 2002). Hence, the application of a qualitative methodology within critical inquiry in this study is based on the assumption that classroom teaching practices in remote rural schools in Indonesia’s Probolinggo Regency can be characterised by the exclusion of valuable information and marginalisation of minority groups, and the characterisation of events and individuals in particular ways is done in accordance with powerful interests. In this sense, teachers may contribute to inequalities and intentionally instil a particular ideology in students rather than focusing on their learning and life chances (Cohran-Smith et al., 2008).

Eight teachers from remote rural primary schools in Indonesia's Probolinggo Regency participated in the study. They were selected on the basis of their seniority and experience and had been teaching for over five years. The Probolinggo Regency is located approximately 150 kilometres from the main provincial city (of Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia), where most people work as farmers and are relatively poor. The roads to the research sites in this region are narrow, steep, and slippery during the rainy season so that these locations can only be reached by motorbike or walking. According to some school principals in these areas, this condition has probably affected frequency of visits from school supervisors, whereas their visits are considered important to increase teachers' engagement in schools.

In addition, remote rural teachers in the regency have lower academic qualifications and limited access to professional development centres and do not receive as much formal education/training as urban teachers (Chang et al., 2014). Although revisions to the curriculum have been done to develop teachers' abilities to interpret their understanding of curriculum changes and translate it into intended teaching and learning activities, little professional effort has been invested in advancing local teachers' understanding of these changes. Consequently, their teaching style in the classroom tends to revert to the perspective of teaching which is conventional and dominated by content-based and rote learning, lecturing and assigning. Most classroom activities mainly focus on delivery of content knowledge within a limited time and include very little practice in classrooms or leave practice for students to do as homework.

Methods used to generate data for the research included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and analysis of curricular documents, namely the Indonesian national curriculum framework, teachers' syllabi and lesson plans. Interview questions centred on participants' knowledge and understandings of the phenomena under study, in particular, themes with

connections to the capabilities approach (CA): teachers' perceptions of good and just teaching, teaching for creating substantive freedoms for students to lead a life worth living, potential barriers in teaching for capabilities, and education for people who live in rural areas. The aim in the study was to engage participants in speaking openly about their engagement with socially just curriculum and teaching practices with the view to establishing potential influences that may affect teachers' capabilities to create opportunities for students to lead a life worth living (Sen, 1993).

All eight teachers involved in the study were interviewed twice; six were observed for approximately 40 minutes teaching their respective classes. Subsequent analysis produced two categories: teacher behaviours that potentially develop capabilities and teacher behaviours that restrict developed capabilities. Naturalistic observations including anecdotal records were used to monitor how teachers encourage socially just practices in a particular classroom, such as how they create classroom activities that are centred on student wellbeing, respect for diversity of students, explore links between curricular topics/themes and social practices that support life-choices. In reporting on the study's findings, pseudonyms are used for all participants to ensure their privacy and confidentiality.

A further issue relates to the various categories of employment for teachers in Indonesia, ranging from government employed and paid, to contract teachers, and those with or without official certification, or a combination of these. In the following data analysis, a series of letters appears next to each participant pseudonym to indicate the category of employment. Table 1 (below) provides definitions and descriptions of these. Teachers with the letters P, G and C, for example, denote that they are certified teachers employed in a government school on a permanent basis. Government school teachers are paid more than those at private schools, and

their certificate brings a salary premium, such that certified government school teachers are the most highly remunerated. Permanency also means teachers get a government pension. Private school teachers can also receive an incentive from the government consisting of an allowance.

Table 1: Indonesia's Teacher Employment Status

The paper is in three parts. Part one addresses the prioritisation given by teachers to the pursuit of a 'good life'. In the capabilities approach, the determinant of a good life relates to the development of students' capabilities grounded in substantive freedom or actual opportunities to do and to be certain things that they have reason to value (Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 1999). This is important as all 'good teaching' must account for student identity and life chances (Cohran-Smith, Jones, Khan, Patel and Chen, 2012., 2008; Hayes, Mills, Christie, & Lingard, 2006). Students in remote rural Indonesia have particular aspirations and, like most students, they hold views on what a 'good life' is for them. Part two considers teaching and how it prepares students for this 'good life'. Part three forms the analysis and is separated into two sub-sections. The first outlines the connections experienced between curriculum and student life experiences, highlighting how teachers often mistakenly believe that their approach to curriculum is connected to the lived experience(s) of their students, while the second considers the limitations of teachers in developing students' capabilities, including the limits of their pedagogic approaches (classroom instruction for instance) and other matters (credentials and pay).

Capabilities: pursuing a 'good life'

The most important aspect of the capabilities approach (CA) is that it focuses on the substantive freedoms and/or actual opportunities that people have to develop the capabilities and

functionings (beings and doings) they need to live lives they have reason to value. Developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, the CA prioritises considerations of human wellbeing and justice. Importantly, considerations of social justice “ought not solely focus on economic growth, GDP or other utilitarian measures of well-being, but rather on the opportunities and freedoms available to each individual to pursue what they have reason to value” (Mills & Gale, 2010, p. 33; see also Sen, 1999). In other words, and for Sen in particular, the CA is about accessibility and the prospects one has to do and be, based on what they deem valuable and worthwhile. While Sen avoids prescription, Nussbaum is deliberative, outlining ten core capabilities that she argues lead to a flourishing life (e.g. see Nussbaum, 2006; 2011). Nussbaum’s central human capabilities may be summarised thus (2006, pp. 76-78):

1. Those concerning the body: these include *life, bodily health and bodily integrity*;
2. Those concerning the mind: *senses, imagination and thought; emotions; and practical reason*;
3. Those involving the external environment: *affiliation* with other humans and other species; and *control over one’s environment* through political participation and material acquisition.

Agentic relevance is promised in the CA and its significance for human wellbeing is reflected in the “interactive apertures afforded to individuals through education” (Mills & Gale, 2010, p. 34). The first from Nussbaum’s list centres on the capabilities to reason, such that personal decision-making and preferences are enhanced. The second concentrates on the critical reflection needed to enliven change, while the third has a personal empowerment motive (see Lozano, Boni, Peris, & Aueso, 2012). Nussbaum’s approach is un-ashamedly person-centred where the emphasis on freedom is about the “... freedom to choose and develop the desired lifestyle, and therefore the values individuals consider to be desirable and appropriate” (Lozano

et al., 2012, p. 140). The self-determining aspects of the approach define its emancipatory foundations in that individuals free to do and be possess the necessary agency to choose (Nussbaum, 2011).

This is especially important in a lower middle-income nation such as Indonesia. The 1945 Constitution – the basis of government in Indonesia – sets out five principles (or *Pancasila*), which together constitute national life in Indonesia. They have been designed to unify the nation's multicultural society and diverse religious, political and ethnic aspirations, articulated within the national slogan *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity). According to *Pancasila*, all Indonesians are to act justly towards their fellow people. It advocates equal rights and obligations between individuals. This idea appears to place the life of the entire Indonesian citizenship within a perspective of social justice which protects human rights and freedoms, and provides basic opportunities for individuals to achieve their potential and contribute fully to human life in society (Wahab, 2008). *Pancasila* promotes the idea that social justice will be achieved if individuals are intrinsically valued for themselves and their culture.

According to Walker (2009), the idea of 'becoming fully human' firmly links to that of human development, which implies that individuals are 'beings of praxis' and have potential abilities to transform the world. From this perspective, local teachers in Indonesia need to have sufficient knowledge of a pedagogy that orients itself to formations of a good life, one that students themselves have had a hand in shaping through the reasoned choices that they make. When they are to teach from the perspective of 'becoming fully human' or for human development, teachers need the requisite knowledge of what a critical and humanising pedagogy based in social justice actually entails. A critical and humanising pedagogy can

potentially accommodate student diversity, and hence it enables transformation and allows for the expansion of students' capabilities (Walker, 2009).

Teaching for a 'good life'

Apart from family background, research literature (e.g. Hayes et al., 2006) suggest that it is good teachers who can make the greatest differences to student outcomes in schools. In order to achieve social justice and generate excellent outcomes for students, teachers need to share ideas and knowledge with each other, with students and communities (Egbert & Roe, 2014; Hayes et al., 2006; McRae, 1988). Teachers also need to identify and document knowledge that exists in students' homes and communities to strengthen the relationship with schools and between parents and teachers, which will enable students to be more engaged in their learning (Egbert & Roe, 2014; Gonzalez, 2005). Making connections between homes and classrooms determines the extent to which knowledge is more meaningful to students and develops students' knowledge and skills in the context of solving real-life issues or problems (Hayes et al., 2006; McLaren, 1998).

Teaching for a good life or teaching for 'a life worth living' (Sen, 1999) is derived from the CA. First and foremost, teaching practice that aligns with elements of the CA affords people the possibility to act as autonomous agents, giving them real opportunities to convert (education) resources into valuable functionings. Second, it can enhance people's abilities to reflect critically on the world so that they can make desirable changes (Lozano et al., 2012). According to Sen (1992, p. 81), the expansion of human capabilities is made possible through "the freedoms [that individuals] actually enjoy to choose the lives that they have reason to value". Adapting the CA to schooling and teaching practices is not merely a matter of what students achieve but also reflects the extent of choices available to them and the value of the best choice(s) that they (students) can make for a flourishing life (Kelly, 2012). Drawing on

Nussbaum (1997), the goal of teaching in socially just ways is referred to as the exploration of students' capabilities to critically examine their tradition and cultures and understand themselves as both citizens and human beings interrelating with and amongst others. Teaching in this way encourages students to become "practical reasoners" (Walker, 2009, p. 232) in democratic societies by which they could live compassionately in their society with people who are different from themselves.

Classroom teachers need to be aware of the significance of eliciting from students the social problems and issues which most concern them and potentially affect their lives (Wood & Deprez, 2012). They also need to create a context of learning that accommodates students' perspectives on diverse topics, respects their reasoning and reflection on different opinions and arguments, and encourages fairness in response to opposing ideas and respectful strong criticism. Capability theorists consider student agency as "a key dimension of human wellbeing" (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007, p. 6), and hence it is of paramount importance for teachers to focus not only on students' processes of learning but also on social opportunities. According to Sen (1999, p. 39), "social opportunities refer to the arrangements that society makes for education, which influence the individual [students'] substantive freedoms to live better". These perspectives should become embedded in teachers' daily practices in classrooms in order that teaching and learning is of benefit to students and society as a whole.

In framing the study within the CA, the research grapples with the opportunities and freedoms one has in Indonesia 'to do and to be' what one chooses. Education in remote rural areas in Indonesia's Probolinggo Regency that incorporates connections between homes (communities) and classrooms (schools) is problematic. While teachers' commentary and curricular documents in this study in part reflect or lead to the ideals of connections, some of them and

their practices precisely indicate the opposite. In addition, comments by teacher participants suggest a number of limits on advancing students' capabilities through connections. The next part will elaborate on this.

Research Findings

A content analysis of data was undertaken of teachers' perceptions and responses to issues of home-school connections. Findings from the study are arranged as categories based on identified themes. Two major themes emerged from the data: connecting curriculum with student life experiences and limits on developing capabilities.

Connecting Curriculum with Student Life Experiences

Connections between daily life and school is possible as both are interrelated (see Gonzáles, Andrade, Civil, & Moll, 2005). Moreover, integrating school life and student involvement with home and community potentially increases learning (Haneda, 2006; Taylor & Adelman, 2000). Teachers should respect and appreciate student backgrounds (homes and cultures) and attempt "to make students' experiences in both homes and schools coherent and mutually reinforcing" (Haneda, 2006, p. 343).

Analysis of the syllabi of teacher participants in our study indicates that these documents implicitly address the idea of connections between curriculum and student life experience(s) via teaching objectives and learning activities. For example, a number of school syllabi express aspirations that:

- Students are able to give examples of heroism and patriotism in daily lives (Year 4 Syllabus of Social Science);

- Students are able to explain the ways of preventing environmental damage (Year 4 Syllabus of Natural Science); and
- Students are able to give examples of characters that they like or dislike (Year 4 Syllabus of Indonesian Language).

Issues of heroism and patriotism, environmental damage, and characters that students like or dislike can be derived from popular media such as television, newspapers, and magazines or from people in the community who may not be represented at schools. If these issues are given space within the curriculum and in classrooms students' life experiences can be enriched.

Another potential space for teachers to make connections between classroom knowledge and real situations outside the classroom is represented in the Year 4 Syllabus of Civics, where "Students make a visit to the village or district office". In this context, students are able to explore the implications of the connections, which make abstract or theoretical concepts concrete inside the classroom (Zohir, Jamil, & Razak, 2012). Mills et al. (2009) suggest that learning abstract concepts connected to practices and students' various world-view can be a valuable strategy for the development of students' deep-understanding in worthwhile and meaningful contexts. This requires students to use higher order thinking that moves from simple recall into analysis, synthesis and production of ideas and performances (Mills et al., 2009).

Interviews with participating teachers in Indonesia's Probolinggo Regency likewise indicate the significance of encouraging connections between curriculum and students' life experiences. On this point, Fatin (PP_v), a teacher participant in the study, observes:

Teachers, in their teaching should understand the conditions of students in the classroom and apply the concept of 'learning by doing or practicing', for it will be

more useful for students rather than just explaining the materials. In my teaching, I see what's around us and provide examples that are contextual, things that my students really know (Fatin, PP_v).

She adds that to enhance student comprehension, "What I often do is adapt the standards". For instance:

When the standards recommend that students are able to write a poem, I usually use an object around like a flower, and I ask my students to think about things related to it. Then, the combination of these can become sentences of a poem (Fatin, PP_v).

Fatin's comments evoke a 'connectedness' in which she attempts to explore students' background knowledge in relation to the subject matter, something that the 'productive pedagogies' literature advocates. In productive pedagogies, 'background knowledge' constitutes one of the elements of 'connectedness'. Hayes et al. (2006) suggest that background knowledge – which includes everyday experiences, community knowledge, cultures or media – do matter in the enhancement of students' learning and the comprehension of new things.

Some of the teacher participants consider that connecting curriculum with students' lives is important, particularly the integration of social and religious values/aspects into curricular topic themes.

It's beyond the ability to make a poem. It's more about teaching them [students] respect for their parents. I'd like to teach them to pray for their parents because it's our parents who take care of us (Fatin, PP_v).

Moreover, Amir – another teacher participant in the study – is cautiously in favour of displaying everyday examples of things that transgress religious observances like a period of fasting:

...things like stealing, saying bad things about other people; I say, these can also break your fasting. So, I don't limit fasting only in terms of eating and drinking, but I relate it to social actions as well (Amir, PP_v).

Here Amir suggests that by linking the topic of fasting to social actions, he is hopeful that students will become dutiful and pious people in society, “doing what God commands and avoiding what He prohibits” (Amir, PP_v).

Fatin and Amir's comments may reflect an effort to “measure the extent to which the class has value and meaning beyond the pedagogical context” (Hayes et al., 2006, p. 55). However, their comments do not fully conform to notions of ‘connectedness’ (Hayes et al., 2006) and/or ‘funds of knowledge’ (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Instead, they are referencing what they would like to teach, not opening up spaces for students to reflect on various forms of culture. If these teachers are able to take, as their starting point to learning, the integration of social and religious values, more effective connections between lessons and social life are possible and potentially shift learning from the abstract towards an ability to respond to real-life socio-cultural issues and problems (Strehle, 1999).

Similarly, an analysis of the lesson plans of teachers in the study indicates a lack of connectedness in the curriculum with students' life experiences. For example, in the topic of “Texts of Poetry”, a typical Year 6 Lesson Plan of Indonesian Language, included the following learning activities:

- Students are given opportunities to ask questions about poetry.
- Students listen to a poetry reading.

- Students write the main ideas of a poem.
- Students are assigned to write a poem.

Methods of teaching used in this plan included “lecturing, question and answer, assigning”, while the source of learning was the “textbook of Indonesian Language and Literature”. Students were eventually assessed using “written tasks” in which they were asked to write their main ideas of poetry.

Such teaching and learning activities as the above are represented in most local teachers’ lesson plans, indicating ‘traditional’ formalist teaching strategies focusing on rudimentary task completion from textbooks rather than connections between students’ life-worlds and classrooms. Over-reliance purely on textbook content undermines connections with students’ lives outside school, limiting possibilities for broader intellectual engagement with subject matter (see Hayes et al., 2006). An education which promotes intellectual ability prioritises productive performance and higher-order thinking, core aspects of intellectual quality (see Hayes et al., 2006). In prioritising connections, such as links to background knowledge and worlds beyond classrooms, processes of learning that are deductive, experimental, historical as well as critical and reflective, often contribute to enhanced levels of student achievement (see Hayes, 2006; Lingard, 2007).

Classroom observations from the field indicated that most participating teachers did not attempt to connect curricular content with students’ real world situations. Rather than relating it to students’ background knowledge – either to students’ community knowledge or students’ personal experience – the teacher participants provided instruction that involved more lecturing and was teacher-directed. Teachers generally taught to the whole group of students in a class, showed great concern for whether students were listening and focused mostly on subject-

content matter and academic competence. Even when teachers employed group-discussion in their teaching, they maintained tight control and were didactic in their style, focusing on task completion from set texts. For instance, in the Madurese Language class, the teacher simply followed textbook content and taught students writing by making reference to the archaic Javanese letters system. The teacher did not provide details about the relevance of this subject-matter to students' life experiences.

Zohir et al. (2012) suggest that such teaching and learning activities can counter students' deep knowledge of topic themes, providing only superficial understanding of lesson content. According to Alsharif and Atweh (2012), a teacher needs to create a supportive learning environment that offers the improvement of student intellectual reasoning through connections and discussions on authentic and contextual task oriented materials. Strehle (1999, p. 213) adds:

When class time is devoted to the connections between learning and students' life experiences, discussions will not only reflect the students' knowledge and understanding of a subject but also the ability the student has to respond to issues on a personal level.

In other words, students will learn more easily when new facts or skills are connected with those that are already known. When teachers actively attempt to bridge students' homes and classrooms, the capability development of students, particularly in early schooling, can be facilitated (Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Haneda, 2006; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994).

The Limits on Developing Capabilities

Sen's approach to capabilities emphasises the importance of opportunities and choice(s) in leading a life that a person has reason to value, yet it does not ignore the importance of material

things considered necessary for a valuable life. In the context of schooling, curricular objectives are necessary for teachers to formulate clear structures of what students are required to learn, and eradicate misunderstandings leading to a higher level of communication between teacher and students (Marsh, 2005). Nonetheless, teaching for capabilities goes beyond what is covered in curricular objectives (see Connell, 1993), as other considerations include: access to schooling (Mills & Gale, 2010), quality of school buildings (Blackmore, 2011) and distribution of funding or compensation for poverty and social disadvantage (Lupton & Hempel-Jorgensen, 2012). All these are insufficient “to ensure justice in either opportunity or outcome [if] the process of school-based learning is [not] equally inspiring, enlightening, liberating and knowledge producing for students” (Lupton & Hempel-Jorgensen, 2012, p. 602). In other words, the ways that teachers pursue curricular objectives may have the potential for inhibiting or contributing to the development of students’ capabilities and more socially just outcomes.

Interviews with local teachers in remote rural areas of Indonesia’s Probolinggo Regency suggest a number of constraints that limit the possibility of teaching for a capability advancement. These include: the lack of school facilities and adequately credentialed teachers in remote rural schools, government policy and the problem of nutritional food supplies in remote rural areas.

Structures and infrastructures are required, but we lack them. For example, we need a space for students to do sports. It’s difficult here to find enough space so that we need to go outside of the school area just to find a wide space for sports. We need to take a far walk. Moreover, the roads in front here are so steep, narrow, not enough space to teach sports (Amir, PP_v).

While Amir talks about the lack of a sport facility, Rani (PG) and Anton (NP) – two other teachers in our study – are concerned with the lack of textbooks and props for teaching: “We

need such learning tools as textbooks and props for teaching” (Rani, PG). But in their absence, “I just use whatever I find”. (Nita, PG).

In some respects, such a phenomenon is opposed to the principle of *Pancasila*, which suggests equality in the distribution of education resources to the whole of the people of Indonesia. This principle advocates an endeavour in the provision of conditions necessary for all Indonesian citizens to attain a secure and prosperous life through education. Hence, in *Pancasila* perspective, lack of education facilities in remote rural areas is an injustice, for it potentially resists empowerment of remote rural schools in developing their capacities to chase or catch up with those that are already in good conditions.

Further, Anton states:

I think learning is not only inside the classroom but also outside the classroom. I use all around us as a means of teaching. We can use our surroundings, particularly in teaching natural science. When the topic is about frogs or worms, we can easily find them in the rice fields. Applying such a method here is effective (Anton, NP).

The use of authentic teaching materials that immerse students in the real world is considered appropriate by some theorists (see Alsharif & Atweh, 2012; Hayes et al., 2006; Strehle, 1999). However, the comments of participants in our study tell a different story. Teachers in our research felt they had no other choice, that they were forced to utilize their surroundings as the means of learning due to limited facilities. From a capabilities perspective, this leads to ‘unfreedom’ and the limiting of genuine choices that can have a negative impact on capability expansion (Walker, 2006). To draw an analogy from Nussbaum (2006), students in these classrooms are similar to persons who are starving rather than the ones who are fasting. While fasting persons can eat, although they choose not to, persons suffering from starvation eat only

if they can or if they have food to eat. People can refrain from an accepted and natural human functioning for good reasons if and when they have freedom to choose (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009).

Sen (1992) acknowledges that it is not the attainment of functionings that becomes the major focus of the CA but the actual opportunities or freedoms that people have to achieve the functionings. It is “acting freely and being able to choose [that] are directly conducive to [human] well-being” (Sen, 1992, p. 51). Thus, the conception of capabilities is essentially freedom to choose a particular option from the range of alternatives that people have in determining what sort of life they prefer to lead (Sen, 1999). As Anton explains: “When teaching natural science, it’s easy, but what about other subjects? We need props like cubes, cones, maps, globes. Schools [can] allocate some funds from grants to purchase props” (Anton, NP). To overcome this constraint, Anton explains:

I apply this to my students; I ask them to save 100 rupiahs out of their pocket money for the class cash. With this, we could buy dictionaries, books, rulers and other props for teaching from the money collected (Anton, NP).

Apart from this, Anton (NP) and Rani (PG) are concerned with the lack of teachers in remote rural schools. “We need more teachers here. The number of teachers are not proportional to the number of students. I mean, we lack teachers in government schools” (Rani, PG). On a similar point Anton (NP) adds:

We need more professional teachers. So, schools in remote rural areas need to be provided with professional [government] teachers. Professional [government] teachers should not only be located in urban schools but in remote rural areas as

well. ...I mean, schools in remote rural areas shouldn't be marginalized (Anton, NP).

Although the Indonesian Government provides basic grants for school funding, there is still a lack of adequate resources: "... the distribution of the resources is imbalanced between urban and remote rural schools" (Anton, NP).

This results in Anton often resorting to using props as teaching aids in class to assist his teaching. His strategy might be effective for teaching and in encouraging students to 'live a frugal life', which is one of the characteristics of remote rural society in Indonesia. However, following the notion of the CA, the lack of school facilities and appropriately qualified staff members due to an unfair distribution of resources can potentially limit the expansion of students' capabilities. As stated above, Sen (2009) is aware of the significance of resources in achieving functionings despite his view that mere availability of resources does not guarantee their capability development. With the CA, Sen (2009) creates a connection between resources and freedom (opportunities). This can be a tool for anticipating possible constraints that are embedded in 'conversion factors', namely the degree of restriction or freedom given for converting resources (personal, social and environmental) into functionings (see Nambiar, 2011; Sen, 2009).

Sen (2009) suggests three 'conversion factors' that envisage a possibility to restrict or encourage the conversion of resources into functionings: *personal characteristics* (e.g. intelligence, physical health, and mental handicap), *social characteristics* (e.g. social norms, cultures, government policy) and *environmental characteristics* (e.g. the provision of public goods and facilities) (see also Nambiar, 2011; Robeyns, 2005; Walker, 2006). Hence, comments from the participants indicate constraints that are embedded within the conversion

factor of *environmental characteristics*. If the government does not provide adequate learning facilities (curriculum and other related resources) and enough professionals in remote rural schools, there could be constraints impeding the development of students' capabilities to achieve outcomes they have reason to value.

Nevertheless, Bjork (2004) views that constraints on the development of students capabilities are generally beyond the lack of facilities and professionals; there is a "mismatch between central expectations and local realities [that] produced a state of paralysis at all levels of the education system" (Bjork, 2004, p. 251). According to Bjork, it is often seen in Indonesia that local educators tend to wait for the central government to instruct them how they should carry out their work. This indicates an inability of the central government to adapt their program to the philosophical objectives of local education, especially in remote rural areas, and a rejection of teachers' increased autonomy. This circumstance can generate a culture of teaching that values obedience rather than instructional excellence, which, further, also potentially limits the development of students' capabilities.

Moreover, constraints on developing students' capabilities are also embedded within the conversion factor of *social characteristics* as they directly arise from government policy. Commentary from local teachers indicates that these constraints are related to the implementation of national examinations and low incentives. In terms of the national examination, Budi (PGC) states:

This [national examination] is not fair. If we'd really like to implement the *KTSP* [School-based Curriculum Development Materials], schools must be given autonomy to construct their own standards (Budi, PGC).

The national examination also has implications for the ways teachers teach and the focus of their teaching. On this point, Budi and Nita are in agreement:

I don't feel free with the national standards. So, I have to do improvisations. The national standards are only a reference for me. I teach beyond the standards. [So], there should be no national exams (Budi, PGC).

It [the national examination] is for grade 6, isn't it? There's a formula for this. Previously, only students' achievements in grade 6 were considered, but now, students' achievements from grade 4 to grade 6 are considered to pass them. So, in order for them to pass, we do a mark-up to their marks from grade 4 to anticipate [for failure] in the final exams (Nita, PGC).

Budi's comments suggest that the advent of the national examination is a form of government interference in teachers' assessment of students, whereas the *KTSP* encourages the development of teachers' autonomy. Budi may choose to teach beyond the standards to avoid teaching for the national examination; that is, teaching to a test and awarding a passing grade, on which Nita seems to focus her teaching. According to Wiggins (1989), pressure to teach for a test and awarding a passing grade can narrow education and merely encourage fact memorising rather than development of students' capabilities. In addition, the national examination is administered using a multiple-choice format, and hence it may not stimulate active participation in learning as it does not assess the ability to communicate ideas and will not lead to critical thinking (Wiggins, 1989). Critical thinking and narrative imagination are crucial to the expansion of students' capabilities (see Nussbaum, 2006).

Moreover, the national examination potentially raises a particular orientation to teaching, such as direct transmission of knowledge to students. Robertson (2012) suggests that direct

transmission is a conventional approach and opposed to constructivism, an approach to teaching also recommended by the CA. While direct transmission sees teachers as instructors, providing information and demonstrating solutions, constructivism is characterised by the view of teachers as facilitators of learning, giving students more autonomy and opportunities for their own enquiry (Robertson, 2012). Teachers engaged in direct transmission are described as the all-knowing persons of curricular content, thinking that a quiet classroom is a major requisite for effective learning, whereas constructivist teachers believe that reasoning and critical thinking processes are more important than curriculum content (see Robertson, 2012).

While Budi's and Nita's commentary is concerned with the implementation of national examinations, Fatin (PP_v) appears to raise the issue of low salaries:

The government should be more just, especially for myself who hasn't received incentives. They should do things that can make us, non-permanent teachers, more motivated to teach, because incentives can influence our performance in the classroom. Non-permanent teachers in remote areas are often overlooked. So far, much of the aid is addressed to government teachers. It's natural that the government teachers actively teach as they're already well-paid. The government treats non-permanent teachers and government ones differently. I believe that incentives can influence a teachers' performance. Sometimes teachers are not present at school because they don't have enough money to purchase gasoline for their vehicles. This happens at my school, sir. Even, some teachers have to borrow money from the neighbours around the school because they don't have enough petrol to go home. It often happens here. They don't lie, they're forced to do that (Fatin, PP_v).

On this point Anton (NP) adds:

The central and local government have the same principle, when we're already in the classroom, we're all teachers, no more dichotomy between non-permanent teachers and government teachers. That's true. But in terms of the salary, it's very different... With low salaries, non-permanent teachers won't teach actively. The implication is on students. Students will be affected. This school, in particular, has a limited number of teachers. One teacher is absent, classroom teaching is not effective ... For me as a non-permanent teacher, I consider twice to work full time because after school, I have to find another job (Anton, NP).

Fatin and Anton are non-permanent teachers. Fatin teaches in a private school while Anton in a government school. Their comments are critical of government policy that pays non-permanent teachers much lower rates than permanent teachers in government schools, even though they do the same job. As Anton states: "Now [the payment] is only 325,000 rupiahs [about AUD 32.5] a month" (Anton, NP). This is a low salary by Indonesian standards. To overcome this restriction, some teachers find other work after school to support themselves because, as Fatin says: "Human beings have primary needs to be fulfilled" (Fatin, PP_v). Furthermore, "the improvement of education can be pursued when people's primary needs have been met" (Budi, PGC).

From a capability perspective, the very low remuneration received by some teachers serves as a constraint on the development of their capabilities and, further, on students' capabilities. Constraints on teachers can potentially become constraints on students. In other words, when the capabilities of teachers are under developed, the capabilities of students can hardly be expanded. Thus, if a school has more non-permanent teachers with very little monetary reward compared to their cost of living, it has the potential for diminishing capabilities. If, as a

consequence of their very low incentives, some school teachers have to find another job to get more income, their capabilities to teach might be decreased such that they cannot afford to spend all their time and energy on making thoughtful preparations for their teaching. Whereas, research confirms that being well-prepared prior to conducting teaching and learning is of great importance as it enables teachers to pursue their instructional roles in a variety of modes (see Triyanto, 2012).

Another constraint that can limit the growth of students' capabilities also revolves around the issue of nutritional food supplies in remote rural areas in Indonesia's Probolinggo Regency: "to obtain perfectly healthy food is difficult here, particularly side dishes" (Nita, PGC). Low economic growth in remote rural areas can have a marked impact on the *personal* conversion factor in terms of children's physical health. On spending long hours at school for study without adequate nutrition, students' capabilities can hardly be developed. Smith and Barrett (2011) highlight that being well-nourished is of fundamental importance for the development of students' capabilities and the achieving of good learning outcomes.

In other words, the unavailability of nutritional food potentially causes severe and long-lasting effects on students' capabilities to achieve their flourishing life that they have reason to value. Robeyns (2003) suggests that 'the capabilities approach to wellbeing and development thus evaluates policies according to their impact on people's capabilities' (p. 7). The capabilities approach will ask not only whether students are well-nourished and have sufficient food supplies, but also whether they have access to nutritional food (Muro & Burchi, 2012). Thus, the capabilities approach perceives students' wellbeing and development in a comprehensive and integrated manner and pays attention to the links between material, mental and social wellbeing or to the economic, social and cultural dimensions of life (Robeyns, 2005). In

classroom practice, considering these various dimensions of students' lives can be one of the important aspects of teaching that highlights the connections needed between aspects of what may constitute a *good* life for students.

Conclusion

Teachers' potential ability to bridge contextual influences (homes and classrooms) can be identified in this research through connections they aim to make between curriculum and students' life experiences. Connecting curriculum to students' real life experiences breaks the faulty assumption that students are passive learners. Teaching in socially just ways privileges students' reasoning abilities and encourages students to value a particular life that they choose. However, teaching is sometimes bound by things that potentially impede the pursuit of curricular objectives and the growth of students' learning. Hence, teachers need to overcome contextual impediments in order that student learning and capability development is not hindered.

In the analysis of syllabus documents, the learning objectives and activities provide potential spaces for teachers to connect homes and classrooms despite the absence of connections in some lesson plans. Likewise, in speaking to teachers, efforts were made to connect homes and classrooms despite some comments suggesting that only students' skills and basic competencies are developed as a consequence of these endeavors. In addition, local teachers also spoke about constraints that potentially limit the development of students' capabilities, which include (1) the lack of appropriate modern school facilities and professionally qualified staff members in remote rural schools, (2) government policy and (3) the issue of nutritional food supplies in remote rural areas.

Teaching for capabilities is about more than simply academic achievement or learning the ‘basics’. There are broader considerations at work and important principles of ‘inclusivity’ and ‘connectedness’ that necessitate pedagogic cultivation, particularly if “venturesome environments of learning” (Hogan, 2013, p. 237) are sought. This means that the emphasis should be on the quality of learning bounded by the basic belief that specific features are at “the heart of education when viewed as a distinct practice in its own right” (Hogan, 2013, p. 238). Important features that (1) connect curriculum with student life experiences and (2) teach for a good life, are the stuff of the CA and are representative of socially just teaching. Furthermore, in Indonesia, an emphasis on quality of learning, which only socially just teaching creates, is even more vital.

In sum, bridging homes and classrooms in remote rural areas in Indonesia’s Probolinggo Regency is problematic. Traditional didactic/instrumentalist and teacher-directed modes of delivery are mostly prevalent and only cursory affirmation is given in lesson plans to aspects such as ‘connectedness’ and/or ‘inclusivity’. For example, little or no evidence was found indicating that students were learning about culturally-oriented materials from a ‘connectedness’ or ‘inclusive’ perspective. In simple terms, despite attempts to do so, local teachers do not effectively bridge students’ homes and classrooms due to the constraints that possibly limit their actions.

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