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Conceptual paper

## The capabilities approach and values of sustainability: Towards an inclusive Pedagogy

Roberto Sanz Ponce\*, José A. Peris Cancio, Juan Escámez Sánchez Gordella

Universidad Católica de Valencia, Instituto Universitario de Teoría de la Educación Valencia, Spain

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### ABSTRACT

Different models of development have a different impact on sustainability. In this paper, we contrast the development model as growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), dominant in economic theories, with the model of human development or capabilities. The objective is to show the development of capabilities as a theoretical-practical perspective to guide education towards sustainability, a goal assigned by UNESCO. The method used is hermeneutic. The conclusions are: the capabilities approach defends the values required for sustainability and this approach convincingly argues for the political principles and good practices that should govern education.

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### Perspective and aims of the article

In a global context in which uncertainty makes itself felt, questions resurface that go to the root of things; questions such as: to what end and how must citizens be educated? Our times asks us questions about education that need to be rethought from a philosophical perspective.

Practical philosophies (García, Gozávez, Vázquez, & Escámez, 2011) follow a tradition in Western philosophy that began with Aristotle until today. For Aristotle, practical wisdom (legal, ethical, political and educational) have a common aim: not consideration or detailed knowledge of the rules, but rather to be conscious of them to apply them well. Specifically, in *Política* (book V, ch. I), he states that knowledge about education – pedagogic rationality – has the priority function of clarifying both the purposes of education and how to address them in practice.

In more recent times, this approach has been followed by philosophers of education such as Dewey who, in his work *Democracy and Education. An introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (1916) argues that the cultivation of philosophy leads ineluctably to talking of the philosophy of education, since philosophical reflection has a pragmatic and educational undercurrent for solving

social problems as they are experienced at a specific historical moment. From Dewey's perspective, philosophy that neglects education is, simply, bad philosophy, since it conceives that philosophy is the theory of education as a deliberately directed practice (Dewey, 1916).

In Nussbaum's scientific production, education is constantly present, and some of his works are specifically dedicated to it, such as: *Cultivating Humanity. A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (1997) and *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010). In this last work, she addressed a key problem in current centres of higher education: to educate for profit or to educate for democracy? As Ruth O'Brien states in the Preface to the mentioned book, inspired by the Indian thinker Tagore and also in Dewey, among others, Nussbaum creates a model of education for human development, which is presented as an indispensable element for democracy and for the cultivation of a civic global guidance. The reason behind the general aim of our article is to show that the model of development, proposed in its capabilities approach, arises from a humanist view of education that does marginalise or exclude any person, but which acts as a guide to address the transformation of the global learning landscape, one in which the role of teachers and other educators continues as central to facilitating learning for the sustainable development of all (UNESCO, 2015).

To achieve the mentioned aims, over the course of the article, we set ourselves the following aims: first, to present two models of

\* Corresponding author.  
E-mail address: [roberto.sanz@ucv.es](mailto:roberto.sanz@ucv.es) (R. Sanz Ponce).

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development: Economic Growth per Capita (GDP) and the capabilities approach, discussing their consequences for the quality of life of each person, of the various countries and for the sustainability of the planet; second, to analyse the influences from which Nussbaum incessantly constructs and reconstructs her capabilities approach; third, to interpret the philosophical-political keys of her thought about capabilities, especially her original contribution of the ten basic capabilities that must be cultivated in everybody; and fourth, to analyse the main values of the capabilities approach and to show that those values correspond to the values for which we must educate to address the sustainability of the planet, as the purpose to which learning must be dedicated in the 21st century.

### Two models of development: the Economic Growth per Capita and the capabilities approach

Modern societies have articulated four core ideas that have progressively expanded and deepened to the point that, without paying the attention to them, the important situations and events that happened are not understood. These core ideas: the economy; public opinion, the political sovereignty of citizens or democracy and direct access of individuals to national and international institutions and to other people (Taylor, 2007).

In the 18th century, Smith (2009) indicated the most prominent of those core ideas when he argued that individual prosperity affects the general welfare. In other words, human beings are immersed in an exchange of services. We call the fundamental model of that exchange *economy*. Such a conception was evident in Locke's formulation (1966) of his theory of *natural law*, in which the economy acquires primordial importance when it establishes security and prosperity as the two main aims of a well-organised society. Trades are animated by the motive of personal profit, but the good policies of governors can lead that (selfish and short-sighted) situation to the common welfare to secure life and the means of life of all the individuals in the society.

In Locke's theory of *natural law*, it is the basis of what is now called the ethics of everyday life and business ethics (Cortina, 2013), which have had a strong formative effect on current civilization and about the central place it has given to economics in our lives and in the structure of social relationships. Taylor (2007) sees the economy as a system an achievement of the theory of the 18th century with the physiocrats and Adam Smith; but to consider the purpose and the most important agenda of the society as a collaboration and an economic exchange is a tendency of our social imagination that begins in that period and continues until today.

The importance that the economy has acquired is showed in social conviction, which is generally shared, that the progress of national must be measured in terms of growth of the Gross Domestic Product. For years, most specialists in development economics worldwide use that index of national advance as a representative standard of the quality of life in a country. According to that model, the goal of any nation must be economic growth and the greatest efforts of national policies must be dedicated to it. In the same way, it must be the purpose of international relations to facilitate *Free Trade Treaties* in the belief that economic growth will result in the improvement of health, of education, to the reduction in social inequalities within a country and among countries, in the vigour of the democratic life of citizens.

Two fundamental consequences are derived from the model set out: (1) the need for an educational system that promotes national and international development conceived as economic growth; (2) the consideration of economic growth as an end in itself, undervaluing the perverse effects that it generates for the sustainability of the Planet. With respect to the first of them, it is happening in various regions of the world, as is the case of Europe,

where political leaders are reformulating the educational system, in part of Secondary education and in all of University education, investigating the contribution that each of the university qualifications, disciplines and researchers makes to the economy. A good example of that is the normalisation of higher education in the European Union, imposed by the Bologna Process and, above all, the demand to demonstrate the *impact* of research projects on the economic aims of the member countries or of the Union itself, if one wants to access the financial resources budgeted for by the Commission and approved by the Parliament.

Regarding the second consequence, economic growth and the creation of wealth have reduced global poverty rates, but vulnerability, inequality, exclusion and violence have increased within and across societies throughout the world. Unsustainable patterns of economic production and consumption contribute to global warming, environmental degradation and an upsurge in natural disasters (UNESCO, 2015). The defenders of the model neglect that only economic growth does not generate societies with more democracy, or healthier, or better educated in which people of all social classes have more opportunities to have an acceptable quality of life and in which each person lives according to worthwhile values.

In contrast to the previous development model, since the 1980s, a new approach has emerged on development that considers economic growth as an element of sensible public policy, but that is no more than a part and an instrument of it. In the final analysis, it is people who matter; profits contribute only instrumental means for human lives. The purpose of global development, like the purpose of a good policy at the national level, consists of making it possible for people to have full and creative lives, develop their potential and an existence in accordance with the equal human dignity of all individuals. In other words, the real purpose of development is the growth of human capabilities.

This capabilities approach is committed to the equal dignity of all humans; it is sensitive to the distribution of resources and it is particularly focused on the struggles and efforts to achieve them by traditionally excluded and marginalised groups; and they pay attention to the complexity and the qualitative diversity of the goals that people pursue. It also takes into account that people may need different quantities of resources to achieve the same level of capacity to choose and act, above all if they station from different social positions. The approach is presented as another defender of basic social justice within nations and among them. It is not conceived as a totally developed model, and less as a comprehensive system for the functioning of society, but rather as a theoretical and practical contribution that is subjected to rational, national and international debate, to give arguments and receive criticisms and, if it resists the test of argumentative debate against other theories or focuses, it invites to be put into practice.

The capabilities approach argues against the consideration of the growth of the Gross Domestic Product as the unique indicator of the quality of life of countries and individuals: also of their consideration as a goal to which national and international policies must be subordinated. On the contrary, it argues that just societies are those which pursue the good of its population in a broad variety of goals that include, as well as basic economic welfare, health, education, political rights and freedoms, environmental quality and other basic human capabilities for all people, understanding that each of them is an end in himself/herself and that none of them constitutes a simple means for the aims or purposes of the others, not even for the aggregate (or average) aggregate of the population in general.

### Philosophical influences on Nussbaum

Nussbaum's capabilities approach is a constant reassessment of the answer to the question: *Of what does the prosperity of a nation*

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