

# TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATIONAL ACTIONS FOR CHILDREN IN POVERTY: SEN'S CAPABILITY APPROACH INTO PRACTICE IN THE KOREAN CONTEXT

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## ABSTRACT

By adopting Sen's capability approach, this study explores transformative educational actions for children in poverty to develop their capabilities for learning for life. Sen's capability approach provides a framework for why it is important to foster the capabilities of children in poverty and what is required to help these children to improve their capabilities for life. With the use of critical communicative methodology, transformative educational actions were positioned to foster expansive capabilities for life. This study suggests that the issue of poverty and its impact on children and education equality can be better tackled from the perspective of capability enhancement.

**Keywords:** capability approach; educational equality; critical communicative methodology; transformative educational actions

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on a two-year case study. For the first year, it explored and designed a transformative approach for a community child centre (CCC) to support children in poverty. For the second year, the transformative approach was put into practice. This study is grounded in the assumption that the CCC's welfare service-based practices, embedded in a deficiency approach, cannot help poor children overcome their vulnerability.

This study, by adopting Sen's capability approach (1990, 1992, 1993, 1999, 2005), explores a transformative approach that the CCC can use to help children in poverty. As such, it rejects the "deficiency" approach. The approach that this study embraces is that support for children should help them enhance their capabilities, transform their

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vulnerability, and expand their possibilities for life. Rather than focusing on children's pre-determined deficiencies, and conserving the pre-selected service provision standpoint, this study seeks to transform the CCC into a space for community-based, transformative co-learning.

Sen's capability approach (CA) is adopted to frame why it is necessary to foster capability among Korean children in poverty and what is required to support the children to develop capabilities. This study will propose that the CCC, by adopting Sen's CA and by having a community-based, communicative, possibility-expansive learning focus, can more successfully address the impact of poverty on children and equality issues. In so doing, this study joins in the challenge that the international educational community faces – how to respond effectively to the educational needs of children in poverty. Le Fanu (2014) argues that educational support for children in poverty should adopt a person-centred, context-sensitive, capability approach. In the pursuit of transformative, effective, and practical actions to foster expansive capabilities among the children at the CCC, critical communicative methodology is used.

The first section begins by analysing the issue of poverty among Korean children in order to determine the most appropriate approaches to addressing the issue. Then, Sen's CA is explained in the context of a transformative approach to support the poor Korean children who attend the CCC. The next section elaborates which aspects of capability development are incorporated when the CA is used in the Korean context. Thereafter, the next section expounds on the use of critical communicative methodology for positioning transformative actions. The final section interprets the results of applying the transformative approach, which comprised the actual attempts to support the children to enhance their capability to learn.

## POVERTY IN KOREA

The issue of poverty, especially among children, had not been a serious social problem before Korea's economic crisis, which was triggered by International Monetary Fund (IMF) surveillance in 1997 (Kim et al. 2004). This 1997 crisis hit poor Korean families the hardest (Lombardi and Woods 2007; Nam 2011), and the global financial crisis in 2008 contributed to intensifying the vulnerability of these poor families (Bang and Kang 2012).

Recently, the issue of poverty in Korea can be characterised as a cycle it is difficult to escape (Im and No 2013). Poverty in families is likely to be chronic and to be transferred to the next generation (Jung 2015). One study reports that the probability that poor Korean families will escape from poverty is only six per cent (Kim 2004). As long as a family is thought to be trapped in this cycle, parents are likely to give up hope for their children and the children give up hope for their future, and the cycle of poverty persists (Jung et al. 2013).

Private supplementary tutoring known as "shadow education" is another critical issue that intensifies the generational transmission of poverty (Jung 2011). The top

10 per cent of Korea's upper-class families spend 10 times more on their children's education than do the bottom 10 per cent (Kim 2004). Currently, in Korea the most serious problem in education is polarisation. Education played a central role in social mobility in Korea from the country's 1945 independence from Japanese colonisation until the 1990s. Today, however, it is nearly impossible for children from poor families to enter mainstream society. As "shadow education" becomes a key mechanism in further amplifying this education polarisation, the cycle of poverty deepens (Kim and Lee 2014).

It is imperative for the Korean government to break this cycle of poverty. One crucial strategy is to deter the transmission of child poverty (Kim 2008; Rhu and Kim 2006), but researchers' approaches to the issue have focused on filling the physical, psycho-social, and education gaps that children in poverty are alleged to have. According to a number of studies in Korea, family poverty hinders children's normal physical (Sung 2003), psycho-social (Park 2008) and educational development (Kim 2010). This impeded development is perceived to expand the socio-cultural, psycho-affective, and education gaps among children and to reinforce the generational transmission of poverty (Lee et al. 2012). Reducing the gaps between poor children and their wealthier peers is considered to be a primary government task (Bang and Kang 2012).

The Korean government, in an attempt to interrupt generational poverty transmission, revised the Child Welfare Act in 2004 to include community child centres in local areas. Individuals, religious and welfare institutions, and registered NGOs under certain conditions can apply to be appointed by the municipal government to run the centres. For financial support, Korea's central and local governments offer from \$3800 to \$5200 per month to each centre, depending on the number of students each centre can hold: a centre receives \$3800 if the number of students is below 19 and \$5200 if the number is over 30 (Korea Ministry of Health and Welfare 2013). Stipulated as welfare facilities for kindergarten, primary and secondary school students in local communities, these centres offer comprehensive after-school services to the students. Among the students who use CCCs, most are primary school students (73.64%) and students from poor families (86.9%) (Korea Ministry of Health and Welfare 2013). The purpose of these centres is to protect the children from neglect in their families as well as to help them grow safely in their communities. By delivering welfare services<sup>1</sup> such as meals, hygiene coaching, help with homework and navigating school life, cultural activities such as movies and camping, and counseling, the CCCs have the function of preventing children from developing physical, psycho-social, and education problems (Lee et al. 2012). In 2004, when the Child Welfare Act was revised to support CCCs, there were only 895 centres, but by 2013, there were 4061 (Korea Ministry of Health and Welfare 2013).

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1 Welfare services for children in poverty entail interventions to support these children and their families when the children's basic needs cannot be met, when their environments are not safe and healthy, and when their families are dismantled (Kadushin and Martin 1988).

CCCs are considered to be central to deterring the generational transmission of poverty (Lee et al. 2012). Their approach, however, focuses on the means to nurture development and well-being. CCCs start with the premise that poor children have psychological, cultural, and education gaps, implicitly taking a deficiency approach, and they offer welfare services to fill these gaps. It is expected that with the centres' offerings, the children will achieve normal development. It was also assumed that CCCs, by offering the children the means to reach normal development, would play a role in halting the generational transmission of poverty. The centres' deficiency approach is, however, problematic in the following aspects.

First, CCCs expect that the services they provide will help poor children achieve normal development. According to one longitudinal study (Lee et al. 2012) that spanned 2011 and 2012, children at the CCCs in 2012 had lower average academic achievement, problem-solving skills, and socio-emotional development. This result implies that the CCCs' services do not necessarily help the children to achieve normal development. Rather, as some studies report, the children experience more welfare dependency, frustration, abandonment, and delinquency the longer they participate at the centres (Choi, Son and Kim 2008; Ju, Lee and Kwon 2009). What follows from these results is that CCCs' deficiency approach, rather than being an effective means for normal development, could contribute to furthering children's dependency.

The second aspect of the centres' deficiency approach is the assumption that the poor children at the centres show developmental deficiencies compared with children from two-parent, middle-class families. In a study that compared psycho-social and cultural development between middle-class children and the children at the CCCs, the results do not match this assumption. The children at the CCCs have fewer experiences such as going to movies, eating out with their families, visiting museums, and shopping, but they also have fewer psycho-social problems such as anxiety, unrest, and being bullied (Kim et al. 2004). This result indicates that the poor children who attend the CCCs cannot be assumed to be deficient and that the premise of their assumed deficiencies needs to be revisited.

## USING SEN'S CAPABILITY APPROACH TO HELP CHILDREN IN POVERTY

The capability approach, which is mainly adopted from Amartya Sen, offers a normative framework for assessing the notion of well-being in relation to social arrangements (Deneulin 2009; Frediani 2010; Robeyns 2005, 2006). The CA accentuates the idea that social arrangements should aim to expand people's capabilities, their real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value (Alkire 2009). What is ultimately important in assessing people's well-being, for the CA, is to ascertain whether people have the freedom to achieve well-being. The CA presents a framework for fostering this freedom by connecting it to people's capabilities (Robeyns 2011).

The concepts of functionings and capabilities are crucial components in the CA (Frediani 2010; Gasper 2002). Functionings refer to states of “beings and doings” such as being well-nourished, having shelter, travelling, and voting (Alkire 2009; Robeyns 2005). Capabilities refer to the alternative combinations of functionings that are necessary for a person to achieve (Alkire 2005). Capabilities reflect people’s real freedoms or opportunities to achieve functionings (Robeyns 2005). In terms of the difference between the two, travelling, for example, is a functioning, whereas the real opportunity to travel is a capability. Thus the distinction between functionings and capabilities is between the realised and the effectively possible (Robeyns 2011). In his book, *Inequality Re-Examined*, Sen brings up the CA as an approach to assessing social arrangements and equality: “A person’s capability to achieve functionings that he or she has reason to value provides a general approach to the evaluation of social arrangements, and this yields a particular way of viewing the assessment of equality and inequality” (1992, 5).

Where the CA is prominent, in terms of assessing well-being, is to shift the focus from income, utility, resources, and commodities to people’s actual capabilities to achieve what they value. What is critical for the well-being of children in poverty, from the CA standpoint, is not the sum total of welfare services they need but, rather, what children actually can do with these services; that is, whether the services actually contribute to helping the children to expand their possibilities for life (Glassman 2011). Sen (2012) takes a direct interest in the lives that people are actually able to lead rather than simply talking about justice.

According to Sen (2005, 153), the idea of capability allows us to understand the opportunity aspect of freedom and helps to distinguish appropriately between a) whether people actually have opportunities to do what they value and b) whether they have the means or instruments or permissions to pursue what they would like to do. By shifting attention to the former, the CA not only refutes overconcentration on means but also helps to identify the possibility “that two persons can have very different substantial opportunities even when they have exactly the same set of means” (Sen 2005, 154). From the perspective of the CA, what becomes crucial is to enhance substantial opportunities by constructing favourable conversion conditions.

Although welfare services for the children in poverty are recognised as important means for their well-being and development, Sen (1990, 1992) emphasises that it is better to focus on ends rather than means. Because children differ in their abilities to convert means into valuable opportunities or outcomes, simply focusing on the means does not necessarily lead to capability development. Thus, the CCCs’ support for the children should aim to create favourable educational opportunities that directly affect their capability improvement. Creating these opportunities entails inspiring poor children to dream about their futures and gain a sense of achievement. These children tend to focus on what they know to be attainable because they have learned not to desire and not to be ambitious and to resign themselves to under-achievement (Kelly 2012; Saito 2003). This tendency reflects the problem of adaptive preferences by which poor children’s

preferences are adapted to their deprived circumstances (Khader 2009; Sen 1984, 1999; Teschl and Comim 2005). Most children at the CCCs, when asked what they would like to do if they could choose, preferred to spend their time playing computer games (Lee et al. 2012); their preferences were adapted to their restricted options. This conveys that the poor children who attend CCCs likely have limited freedom to aspire, which makes it necessary to create the conditions under which these children can develop the capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004; Bok 2010; Hart 2013; Smith 2011).

Appadurai (2004) conceives this capacity to aspire as the capacity to navigate life and reframes the notion of aspiration as a collective cultural capacity rather than an individual motivational trait. This capacity can be better developed with concrete experiences, opportunities and resources to draw on when navigating pathways toward desired outcomes (Smith 2011). The children at CCCs might have less-developed capacities to realise their aspirations owing to their having fewer experiences and opportunities (Bok 2010). In order for the children to develop aspirations for life, their families, community members, and other persons whom they encounter in their daily lives must have experience navigating pathways toward imagined and valued outcomes (Appadurai 2004; Bok 2010).

Poor Korean children who attend CCCs, according to Sen's notions of functionings and capabilities, may have certain functionings such as having a place to go after school, being able to attend classes, and having meals provided, but their capability set, which denotes their real opportunities to achieve the valuable functionings, is quite limited (Jung and Kim 2009). Having the capability to lead lives that they value presumes that they have options or alternative functionings that they desire to achieve. Korean children who attend CCCs, however, do not have this freedom to aspire but instead passively receive welfare services (Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs 2010).

When fostering children's capability for life, it is important to address the structural and personal conditions that affect their choices and to understand what they value. For Sen (1992, 2005), these structural and personal conditions work as conversion factors that influence how children's aspirations are realised. This recognition of these factors entails attention not only to personal but also socio-structural elements in helping children to enhance their capabilities.

Agency is another important element to consider in our attempts to enhance children's capability for life. The notion of agency is associated with the "ability to pursue goals one values and has reason to value" (Alkire 2005, 2). Fostering agency among children at the CCCs depends on developing in them reflective abilities to choose valuable functionings and expanding their choices of values and goals beyond their limited adapted preferences (Sen 2012). Thus, attempts to foster agency entail both educational support to help the children develop the reflective ability to choose what they have reason to value, and local and structural construction of favourable social and institutional conditions to encourage in these children the freedom to conceive and achieve the valued choices. It is important, in our attempts to foster agency, to hold the perspective that the children who participate in CCCs have substantive aspirations,

know what is valuable to them, and are capable of pursuing aims and making choices about their aspirations, even under deprived circumstances.

## USING THE CAPABILITY APPROACH IN A KOREAN CONTEXT

In adopting the CA, this study is interested in expanding the capability space of the children who participate in the CCC, which encompasses fostering agency and activating the necessary internal and external conversion factors. This adoption goes beyond generating well-being indicators or assessing the levels of conversion factors (Frediani 2010; Zimmermann 2006). For this purpose, this study strives to develop practically effective, transformative educational actions that actually help children to improve their capabilities.

One church-run CCC was selected for this study; it was located in a rural fishing area, and it supervised 20 elementary and 13 secondary school students. Ten of the 33 students were female: nine elementary and one secondary. Most of these children were from deprived families and were being raised by grandparents, single parents, or relatives, and some lived on their own with no adults in their lives. These children were looked after at the centre until late in the evening, participating in after-school activities and learning programmes. The CA application in this study was oriented to create local community context-bounded, effective socio-educational conditions and processes that could expand capacities not only among the children who attended the centre but also at the centre itself and in the local community. This CA application embraces pragmatic, dialogic interaction-embodied methodology, by which not only agency but also personal and contextual conversion factors are activated. Conversion factors and agency can be triggered with a critical understanding of which capabilities are vital for the children not only at particular moments in their lives but in their future lives as well and understanding what actions are necessary to foster effective conversion and agency.

This study seeks to understand what is ultimately important for children in order to uncover the vital capabilities that they should develop. Most children at the CCC appeared to have no desire to improve their lives; they appeared to have very little expectation that their future lives would be better. When asked what they aspired to become and what they would like to do, they did not know how to answer. Some children were even annoyed when they were asked questions concerning their dreams about life. Children are unlikely to make an effort to learn when they perceive that their possibilities in life are limited. In many ways, aspiration for a better life is deeply connected to a commitment to learning. Inspiring children to encounter or experience this tie between learning and life, therefore, is crucial in increasing their awareness that there is more to see, feel, experience, and learn about life. This inspiration is expected to help the children understand that many possibilities are still open for them. Furthermore,

this awareness will urge children to make serious efforts to improve their capabilities to learn for life.

Effective conversion and improving capability entail developing both personal and local-contextual elements. In terms of the personal elements, two factors are emphasised: inspiring children to have aspirations for life in order to stimulate their desire and commitment to learn and facilitating the children's capacities to learn, which is related to developing their reflective abilities. Developing these personal elements concerns enhancing children's actual freedom to learn, which involves nurturing them to be able to pursue learning and facilitating their abilities to convert resources to achieve their desired ends.

With respect to the local-contextual elements, this study aims to transform the provision-based, deficiency approach of the CCC's welfare service into a community-based, dialogical interaction-oriented, collaborative one. The fact that most children at this centre are from deprived families and do not live with both parents causes centre staff and community participants to focus their efforts on helping to fill the children's perceived deficiencies. Rather than attempting to understand the children's hopes and to help them develop the capacity to aspire, the centre's efforts to help the children are focused on which welfare services to offer them. This approach is problematic for both staff and the children. The staff and community participants are often frustrated and disappointed that the children take others' help for granted. The children are often annoyed by receiving pre-determined assistance that has no direct connection to what the children feel they need. The main problem of a deficiency approach is that it is not oriented toward enhancing children's capabilities but instead contributes to perpetuating their vulnerability (Nam 2011). This approach needs to be transformed so that the children can be truly helped to overcome their vulnerability and to expand their possibilities for life successfully.

Shifting from a deficiency approach embraces cultivating community-based, communicative partnerships among all participants. It develops and organises community-based, dialogically interactive, life-enriching learning processes and activities. Fostering and facilitating children to improve their capabilities cannot be accomplished solely by the local CCC but require community-based collaboration. To collaborate successfully, all participants – not just the children, but staff, community participants including the research team members, instructors, and parents – need to expand their capacity to learn and work together as a community. Dialogic interactions among the participants are emphasised and practised to improve the capacity to work together. These community-based, dialogically-interactive, life-enriching learning efforts encompass exploring transformative actions and also involve putting these actions into practice.



## CRITICAL COMMUNICATIVE METHODOLOGY FOR TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIONS

Critical Communicative Methodology (CCM) is used to explore and devise transformative educational actions to foster capability enhancement. The choice of CCM is rooted in the orientation and commitment that this methodology espouses. CCM is oriented toward transforming unequal and unjust social situations (Flecha and Soler 2013; Gomez, Puigvert and Flecha 2011; Puigvert, Christou and Holford 2012). CCM aims to understand and analyse critically social reality for the purposes of overcoming inequality and transforming unjust societies. It assumes a critical communicative perspective on reality and is grounded “where knowledge is understood as being constructed through interaction and dialogue” (Puigvert, Christou and Holford 2012, 514). In this sense, CCM is distinguished from traditional research in which the researchers are the only ones who interpret the social realities. CCM, instead, is based on “a dual perspective which accounts for both the system (expert’s scientific knowledge) and the lifeworld (subject’s knowledge from the common sense)” (Flecha and Soler 2013, 455). This perspective of CCM embraces including actors’ reflections and interpretations and emphasises incorporating these reflections into dialogue in order to generate critical understandings and analysis about social realities. This methodology, owing to its emphasis on dialogical interpretations and reflections between the actors and the theories or the previous scientific research, helps to identify both inhibiting elements that perpetuate social inequality and transformative elements that transform social inequality (Flecha 2011; Flecha and Soler 2014; Puigvert, Christou and Holford 2012). The dialogic interactions and reflections that were employed in this study, moreover, contributed to examining the starting points to scaffold transformative actions and to identifying the necessary actions for building and extending the children’s zone of proximal development toward capabilities for life (Rusznayak and Walton 2011; Vygotsky 1978).

The total number of participants in this study was 64. Thirteen persons were from the local community: the four CCC staff, three parents, and six community volunteers. There were 10 instructors at the centre, eight persons on the research team (including lifelong education professors and graduate students), and 33 students, 20 from elementary and 13 from secondary schools. For the data collection and analysis, the study used communicative workshops and meeting materials for adults and children, communicative focus-group interviews with children and adult participants, teaching and supervising notes, audiovisual materials about the students’ learning activities, and the students’ reflection notes and worksheets.

Using CCM was beneficial not only for gathering, sharing, and comparing the participants’ reflections and interpretations with the theories and previous studies regarding children’s social realities but also to analyse and examine what actions were required to transform effectively the children’s realities. As an attempt to ensure credibility and relevance, this study organised critical communicative processes and

activities for the participants to examine our different points of view and interpretations with regard to effective practice. Four CCC staff, six community volunteers, three parents, and the research team held workshops every two weeks to share our supervising notes, which consisted of our observations and interpretations about children's learning. Ten instructors and the research team held workshops and seminars every month to share our interpretations and reflections about the effectiveness of the education activities. The children in each class, using their reflection notes and worksheets, had space for review and reflection and shared their interpretations and reflections about their learning. These communicative workshops, meetings, and seminars were transcribed and coded according to the category of participants (staff—S, instructors—I, volunteers—V, parents—P, and children—C).

The use of CCM in this study aimed to identify transformative education processes and actions that could enhance the children's capabilities. This search for transformative actions was initiated by examining what kept the children from overcoming their vulnerability and what should be done to transform these barriers. For this purpose, the participants were divided into two groups, adults and children. The two groups met separately for dialogic interactions at first, and then mixed participants met for additional dialogic interpretations.

The adult participants were involved in helping and supporting the children, and they struggled to find more effective methods to do so. The dialogic interactions among the adults were based on the following concerns: what they hoped the children could develop with their help; when they felt difficulty or joy while helping the children; what they thought were the most serious challenges to helping the children; and what they considered were better ways to help the children.

These dialogic interactions, which encompassed their experiences, reflections, and interpretations with regard to these questions, helped to give the adult participants a more critical understanding and analysis of how the current deficiency-based, service-provision practices have actually intensified the children's dependency and perpetuated their vulnerability. This critical understanding triggered the adults to have additional discussions regarding alternative approaches to helping the children. In the search for an alternative approach through dialogue, I introduced the adults to Dewey's theory, especially his concept of experience and growth, and to Sen's capability approach. Dewey's theory of experience helped the adults to understand that the children were also capable of growing and, furthermore, that their capabilities could be enhanced with their exposure to appropriate qualitative experiences. With Sen's approach, the adults could recognise that the support for the children should be oriented toward fostering capability improvement. Because of these dialogic interactions and reflections, the adults achieved critical understanding about the children's social realities.

The dialogic interactions with the children's group were focused on understanding their hopes, dreams, and expectations for themselves and their lives. This understanding was expected to help in identifying the actions necessary to support the children in

developing capabilities for life. This attempt to understand was based on the following concerns: what the children would like to become; what they liked doing; what was most important in their lives; when they felt good about themselves; how they felt about being at school and at the CCC; their expectations about their futures, etc. We had these interactions by dividing the children into two groups, elementary and secondary school pupils. To our disappointment, the children were not eager to talk about these matters; they seemed to be uninterested and absentminded. Faced with this unexpected response, the research team discussed why the children could not or did not communicate in order to determine the next course of action. We chose to have another interaction, but using a different form of dialogue through which the children could communicate with more comfort and eagerness. We divided the children into eight small groups and asked them more concrete questions, such as how they spent their time in their everyday lives, how they would like to spend their time if they could choose, what they would like to learn if they could choose, and when were moments when they enjoyed learning. Through these dialogic interactions, we found that most children did not find meaning in their learning experiences at the CCC; they did not have high expectations that their lives would be better. Moreover, with regard to what they liked doing and how they wanted to spend their time, soccer and computer games were the activities the children enjoyed the most.

We, the research team, four staff members, six instructors, two parents, and four children participants, gathered for additional dialogue to understand and analyse critically the children's findings. We gathered to identify both inhibiting elements that perpetuated vulnerability and transformative elements that could expand possibilities. In our attempt to identify inhibiting elements, we had dialogic interactions to reflect critically on how we usually interpreted the findings that the children were not particularly inspired for life or motivated to learn. Our usual interpretation was that poor children were generally deficient in the ability to choose and achieve (Bok 2010). This interpretation reflects the deficiency perspective toward children in poverty (Smith 2011). These discussions led us to identify inappropriate approaches to helping the children as an inhibiting element. If the approach is based on the deficiency perspective, this approach cannot help the children overcome their vulnerability.

The inhibiting elements of critical analysis required identifying transformative elements. By reinterpreting the findings, we attempted to understand critically the transformative approach to helping the children. We reinterpreted the children's limited desire for life and learning as indicating their limited opportunities for qualitative experiences that foster inspiration for life and learning (Appadurai 2004). The reason the children said they liked to play soccer and computer games was that these two things were usually the most available options in their lives. These preferences appeared to demonstrate that the children had adapted to their deprived circumstances and to the restricted options that were available to them (Teschl and Comim 2005). In other words, children's adapted preferences as a result of limited opportunities kept them from developing aspirations for life-enriching experiences. This interpretation suggests that the transformative approach should be connected to facilitating effective educational

actions that extend the children's zones of proximal development toward fostering aspirations and capabilities for life (Burchardt 2009; Vygotsky 1978).

## RESULTS OF APPLYING THE TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

With the use of CCM, we developed two community-based, life-enriching learning activities that aimed to enhance the children's capabilities for learning for life. The first was, "Encountering the Wide, Open World". The purpose of this programme was to prompt the children's capacities to aspire, and their commitments to learning for life. The second programme was, "Our Dreams Come True. Ready Action!". The purpose of this programme was to develop the children's abilities to achieve what they were inspired to learn.

The first programme, "Encountering the Wide, Open World", was based on the assumption that the aspiration for learning is deeply rooted in the aspiration for life. This programme was considered to be constructive in fostering children's capacity to aspire and in inspiring them to make serious commitments to learning for life. When the children had opportunities to navigate their social space and experience their real-world possibilities, we thought that their attentiveness to their worlds and their aspirations about their lives would be heightened (Appadurai 2004). Developing this capacity to aspire, it was speculated, would lead children to engage actively in learning for life. Furthermore, once they experienced the tie between learning and life – that is, once they had fulfilling and meaningful learning experiences – those experiences would likely be transferred to other areas, contributing to developing the children's capability to learn for life.

In designing specific activities for this programme, we stressed including activities and experiences that had much to do with the children's lives in terms of building and extending their zones of proximal development toward expanding their possibilities for life. In designing this programme's activities, we also strived to include the voices of the participants, including the children's, by having the space for dialogic interactions and reflections. Based on our dialogical interpretations of what should be included, we selected five areas of activity: culture and arts, cooking, city festival for lifelong learning, sports, and beauty. In creating these five community collaboration and involvement activities – the community art centre, the local cooking institute, the lifelong learning city festival, the local training centre for sports leaders, and the beauty care department in the city junior college – played crucial roles. This programme consisted of different activities each week, and each activity was organised into the following stages: questing (before each activity), experiencing and learning (during the activity), and reflecting (after the activity). By following these stages, we envisioned that the children would have effective opportunities to develop their aspirations to learn for life.

This programme was successful in exposing the children to new worlds and inspiring them to learn new things. A fifth grade boy, named Chul-Su, talking about how this programme had changed him:

I usually do not participate any activity. I used to seat in the back and watch what others are doing. I hate to do something new. At first, when I heard we will have this program, frankly, I was a little bit annoyed and really hate to participate. However, as I experience something new, I kind of like it and eager to have next activities. Now I like to experience something new and do my best to learn from it. (FCI – C5)

After this programme, we had another dialogue with the children. We found that their aspirations toward knowledge had expanded to many different areas and that their interest in learning was more focused and concrete. They even asked us to offer specific learning activities, inquiring when and how to begin activities, which demonstrated that their involuntary and unwilling attitudes toward learning had been transformed. The children appear to have developed aspirations to learn and were no longer forced to participate in learning at the CCC. The children also expressed that they could do more in their lives by having actual opportunities to, for example, use public transport alone and visit inner cities, enjoy creative cooking and beauty make-up experiences, and many other interesting things. What we found most noteworthy was that the children's aspirations for their lives were actually heightened and their eagerness and expectations about learning were greatly enhanced.

The success of this first programme indicates that the support to expanding substantially children's opportunities is appropriate and effective. Having these opportunities inspires the children to open themselves to the whole world and to become excited to experience and learn new things. Inspiring the children to learn, however, does not complete the efforts to support children in improving their capability to learn for life. Additional educational activities that could help children develop their learning abilities need to be created so that the children can achieve what they aspire to know and learn.

The research team and community participants – including staff, instructors, parents, and children – had dialogic interactions to discuss how to create such effective educational activities. We decided to develop the second life-enriching learning programme which we called “Our Dreams Come True. Ready Action!”. This second programme was composed of two main learning activities: orchestra and English-language drama. These activities differed greatly from traditional reading- and listening-based learning activities.

A large number of children expressed a strong desire to learn to play musical instruments more proficiently. The children had the option of studying some musical instruments at this church-run community child centre (CCC). However, because the children had not received professional musical instruction, their confidence in playing was relatively low. Taking advantage of the centre's music teaching, a number of children who had difficulties following the beat and rhythm or making instrumental

sounds overcame their difficulties and their competence and confidence were greatly improved.

English drama combined aspects of art, beauty, and English into a whole learning activity. After the first programme, children expressed interest in learning more about art, beauty, and English. We had dialogic interactions to communicate how to organise and develop learning activities that could embrace the children's interest in learning. We believed that English drama would encompass aspects that children might like to learn. Art is connected to stage making, beauty is connected to actors' make-up, and English is connected to the language used to write the scripts.

In the English drama sessions, the children learned to create scripts together based on their life experiences in the form of expressing, sharing and telling stories about their own lives. With the help of English instructors, the children learned to communicate in English by learning to translate their story-based scripts into English. This learning activity comprised three learning activities from three learning teams: stage directing, make-up, and actors, and the children chose in which team they wanted to participate.

With the help of an art instructor, the stage directing team learned to analyse the script in order to determine pertinent stage settings, including the painting of the stage, drama costumes and tools, music and lighting and to choose the roles of which children would like to take charge. Children had the opportunity of learning not just how to do these matters but also of learning to take charge of their chosen roles. In the make-up learning team, with the help of a beauty instructor, children learned to analyse the characters of the drama and learned to do make-up. This way, each child learned to take responsibility for the character make-up. In the learning team of actors and actresses, children learned to analyse scripts in order to understand the different roles and characters in the drama and to decide which roles they wanted to take. After the roles were selected, the children learned to do multiple forms of breathing, pronunciation, image expression, and movement.

This second life-enriching learning programme, "Our Dreams Come True. Ready Action!" was effective in developing children's learning abilities, which involved not just individual, cognitive aspects but also socio-cultural and communitarian aspects. The following comments indicate that the participants' dialogic interactions were crucial scaffolding for helping the children to develop so called navigational capacity (Appradurai 2004):

The children have learned to work together because they have seen how we are helping each other to work together as a community. While observing how teachers and adult participants are attentive to others' difficulties and saying to each other "Do you need help? Let me help you this so that we can do together", children felt, when faced with similar situations, they also should help each other to do as a team. (FCI – I2)

In facilitating this second life-enriching learning programme, we placed stress on the following principles of actions and processes, which were identified as effective in previous studies (Epstein and Sheldon 2002; Flecha and Soler 2014; Oliver et al. 2011;

Sheldon and Epstein 2002; Sheldon 2007; Valls and Kyriakides 2013). The first was promoting small-group dialogical interactions. These learning actions were considered to be effective in facilitating active and inclusive learning for all of the children at the CCC and in fostering the trust that the children and the community participants should develop in order to work and learn together. With these learning actions, the children could appreciate others' helps with more sincerity and the adult participants could overcome their bias toward the children.

The second principle related to including one or two adults in each group. This action was expected to foster effective dialogic learning for understanding contents as well as qualitative, caring, and mutual respect-oriented interactional experiences among group members. Including adults – not just those who knew the children well but also those who did not know much about the children – further contributed to securing favourable educational atmospheres that helped the children to overcome conflicts and to have better relationships.

The third principle on inclusion related to the reflective approach to learning and teaching. The children had “review and question time” before the activity and “feeling and reflection time” afterward. During the review and question time, the children had the opportunity not just to review their understandings about the previous learning but to communicate new meanings that they had found in relation to their lives. The children also had an opportunity to express their difficulties and expectations about the learning to the instructors and adult participants. During the feeling and reflection time, the children had the opportunity to share and reflect together based on the worksheets that they completed: what did they like the most and why, what new things they learned, if any, and what would they like to learn more about.

Instructors and adult participants also had dialogic interactions to reflect together after each learning activity. The reflections centred on evaluating the children's psychological, physical, and social aspects of learning, on overall assessments regarding the appropriateness and effectiveness of the learning process and actions, and on the insights or new understandings they gained by participating in the activities.

This reflective approach to learning and teaching contributed to enhancing the quality of the learning and teaching. The instructors and the adult participants, by coming to understand what and why the children had difficulties and found meaning in learning activities, could implement better ways to help the children learn. One musical instructor expressed the reflection below:

I used to assume that the children have no thinking at all. My usual way was to force them to learn. But as I found that the children do the thinking and make serious efforts to understand, I thought that my approach should be changed. Now I found myself asking the children “what do you feel about this?” and “what do you think the difference between this and the previous ones?” (FCI – I3).

The fourth inclusion principle was about fostering children to attain a sense of achievement about their learning. The children's learning, we thought, would become

more meaningful and fruitful when it was connected to visible consequences, which also provided the children with a sense of achievement. For this purpose, we decided to have the orchestra and English drama outputs presented on stage at the end of the learning activities. Permission was given to use a university auditorium that holds 500 people. The event was advertised in the local newspaper, in the local elementary and middle schools, and in other CCCs, and nearly all 500 seats were filled. The audience appreciated the participants' efforts and congratulated the participants on a successful programme. This experience clearly affected the children significantly; one eighth grade girl student expressed, "I am so happy and so proud of us. I could not think of anything else but wish the world just stop here at this moment. I feel like we have the whole world" (FCI – C8).

## CONCLUSION

This study is a practical exploration of transformative educational actions that foster capability enhancement for poor children in one CCC. It is assumed that approaches to helping children should help them overcome their vulnerability and expand their possibilities for life. Sen's CA is adopted because the capability approach, by helping children to improve their capabilities, makes it possible for the children to expand their life opportunities (Bessant 2014). The application of CA in this study embraces actual attempts to develop children's capabilities beyond generating well-being indicators or assessing the children's conversion factor levels. CCM is used to position transformative education activities that aim to activate agency and personal and contextual factors to work toward capability enhancement.

This study reveals that providing children with substantial opportunities for qualitative, fruitful learning experiences is crucial for improving their capabilities to learn for life. The children's participation in the two life-enriching learning programmes surely helped the children to develop aspiration to learn for life ("Encountering the Wide, Open World") and the ability to achieve what they aspired to learn ("Our Dreams Come True. Ready Action!"). These developments had much to do with facilitating children's agency in developing their abilities to choose and to achieve what they valued (Zimmermann 2006). With regard to the children having this freedom, the literature reveals some discussion as to whether children have good judgment (Bessant 2014) or are mature enough (Saito 2003) to freely choose and decide. This discussion prompts the question of whether CA can be applied to children (Bessant 2014; Saito 2003). This study offers a case study that shows that it is possible to facilitate children's agency and to apply CA to them. It should be noted that in this study, the children's freedom to learn was considered from a lifelong perspective rather than simply focusing on children's temporary freedom. Sen emphasises that when working with children, "you have to consider not only the child's freedom now but also the child's freedom in the future" (cited in Saito 2003, 25).

Another contribution of this study is that it clarifies the transformative educational actions that were effective in helping the children develop their capabilities to learn. The



first concerns community-based, dialogic interaction-oriented, life-enriching learning efforts among all of the participants. The research team, the children and the adult participants, as a community, made efforts to learn dialogically in order to identify the processes and actions that would be effective for enhancing capability and to put these practices into action. These actions helped us to develop trust, which was essential to our working together as a community and to enhancing our capability to learn together.

Another important action was related to how each learning activity was organised to stress adult involvement and a small group learning atmosphere. This learning action was effective in overcoming such interactional problems as conflicts, inactive participation, inattentiveness, and miscommunication among group members. Facilitating high quality learning and a sense of achievement was also significant. Giving the participants opportunities to reflect contributed to enhancing the quality of learning and teaching, and these qualitative learning experiences, by being connected to fostering consequences, were also crucial in helping the children to attain a sense of achievement.

Finally, this study suggests that the issues of child poverty and education equality can be better addressed from the perspective of capability development. Development for the children in poverty, this study proposes, is about fostering the children's capacity to aspire and improving their capability to learn for life. Giving children expansive opportunities to develop their capabilities surely helps them to expand their possibilities for life.

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