"What do I actually want to be and do?"
The diversity of 16-19 year old students and the capability for identity formation.

Abstract: The capability literature recognises that English education policy adopts a human capital model that neglects aspects of human development in students' lives. This paper explores one consequence of this neglect: the increasing under-preparedness of 16-19 year old students to live a life they value after school. Specifically, this paper frames the issue of preparedness as one of 'identity formation', where particular forms of agency can support students in reasoning about what they value 'being and doing.' It is argued that supporting identity formation as a part of school life is central to the process of 'preparedness' and, by extension, achieving wellbeing. An auxiliary aim of this paper is to respond to criticisms that the capability approach lacks an adequate theory of agency by supplying an account of emerging personhood in youth development.

As such, this paper aims to explore: (i) what forms of student agency contribute to identity formation, (ii) what resources and opportunities these require, and (iii) how they might contribute to wellbeing. Firstly, the paper presents findings from a qualitative study in England that collected narratives of 16-19 year olds as they transition into and out of post-16 education (Grades 11 and 12). Secondly, an initial analysis argues that these findings reveal how everyday school life consists in a series of identity practices. Thirdly, it frames these identity practices as a set of linked-capabilities that can enhance student wellbeing (from a social justice perspective) and improve young people's chances for achievements they value during their later life-course (from an economic perspective). In doing so, this paper highlights that the capability approach is an ever-more relevant perspective for the growing identity challenges that urban education faces in light of (a) the diversity of 'inputs', in the form of increasingly heterogeneous student communities, and (b) the diversity of 'outputs', in the form of the increasingly non-linear nature of youth development.

Words: 11,408 (excl. abstract, table and bibliography)

"What do I actually want to be and do?"
The diversity of 16-19 year old students and the capability for identity formation.

'Overlooking human beings means, among other things, not paying attention to them: looking without seeing'

Ashavi Margolit. The Decent Society.

Introduction: There is a need to better understand how identity formation takes place in post-16 education and to use this understanding to improve educational outcomes for young people.[1] This need stems from particular structural failings and inequalities that characterise the post-16 setting where many young people leave school without a clear idea of what they want to be and do in life, seen in the significant number of NEETs (Yates et al 2011),[2] an increasing university dropout rate (HESA 2016), and a shrinking youth labour market (Wolf 2011). Research suggests that issues of post-adolescence govern student identities (Maguire et al 2001) and there is a reluctance to engage with adulthood at this phase (Ball et al 1999). We might argue education policy suffers from a particular pathology: overlooking the 'under-preparedness' of students and reasons why they might enact their own social exclusion (Archer at al: 2003), struggle to accumulate identity capital (Côté 2002, 2006), or resist commitments associated with emerging adulthood (Arnett 2007).

Capability scholars highlight that education policy frameworks neglect student development (Hart 2012; Biggeri et al. 2012; Walker 2010a; Walker 2010b; Jensen et al. 2010, Chiappero-Martinetti et al. 2010; Flores Crespo 2007; Saito 2003). Melanie Walker suggests that education is 'a process of identity formation over the life course – of becoming and being this kind of person, rather than that kind of person' (2005, p.108). And yet, neoliberal values 'have come to determine discourses and practices in education rather than the idea of capability formation and democratic processes.' (Walker 2010b, p. 155). The impact of this has been the normalisation of human-capital models that focus on measurable learning outcomes and create performative environments (Perryman 2006, Ball 2003). From this policy focus, we lose a vital interest in and understanding of student development that a capability approach can offer. Amartya Sen highlights that measurable outcomes, such as GDP or employment rates, are of 'contingent and conditional importance without being the defining characteristics of development.' (Sen 1999 p. 285). In this vein, a capability approach is well positioned to ensure that we are not 'thrusting smallness on children' (Sen 2002) by neglecting the process of human development, especially where education can contribute to the formation of 'capabilities to be and do things that a person has reason to value' (Sen 1999, p. 56).

However, the connection between the capability approach and identity formation needs further exploration. As Denulin et al. (2009), Robyens (2005) and Gore (1997) have highlighted, the capability approach is partially defined by an interest in ethical individualism. This is to say, this perspective recognises the value of social analyses that capture how and why individuals make choices about the way in which they want to live their lives. Accordingly, social justice requires us to consider how people choose to view themselves and the kinds of 'beings and doings' that they value as a result of this identity. However, research has suggested that the capability approach is under-specified and under-theorised, particularly because it fails to provide an adequate conception of personhood or identity (Gasper 2002; Giri 2000; Zimmerman 2006). As Zimmerman notes, 'Sen is interested in the person's capability for taking valuable decisions, but he does not consider the required skills and social supports that are necessary to make such decisions' (2006 p.474). In this regard, Des Gaspers has highlighted that 'relatively little theory of being, of being human, seems to

---

[1] This paper focuses on the education system in England. Students enter post-16 education after sitting public exams (GCSEs), where they can choose between 2 year academic or vocational routes. Specifically, this paper focuses on the academic route (A-LEVELS) that the significant minority (approx. 45%) of students take.
[2] NEET is an acronym that stands for young people 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' and acts as a key indicator for youth policy analysis focused on social exclusion.

underlie' the capability approach (2002 p.435). Similarly, Giri has highlighted that a core difficulty with Sen's redefinition of human wellbeing is that 'it lacks a notion of critically reflective, creative, transformative self' and his account of capability does not discuss the 'quest for being, becoming, self-development and self-realization on the part of the actors' (2000 p.1004). In response, a body of capability scholars have aimed to contribute accounts of how identity might be situated in the 'capability space' (Kirman et al 2006, 2004; Livett 2006; Crocker et al 2010). These contributions demonstrate that such a conceptualisation of identity can be achieved, particularly by developing our understanding of agency. Yet, for capability scholars there remains scope to provide a fuller 'theory of being' that can account for the 'kinds of skills and social supports' necessary for 'self-development and self-realization.'

In this respect, this paper proposes to answer three questions: (i) what forms of student agency constitute 'identity formation'? (ii) what kinds of resources and opportunities are necessary for these forms of agency? (iii) how do these forms of agency contribute to individual wellbeing? To answer these questions, the paper is structured as follows. Firstly, it adopts what might be called a position of 'philosophical anthropology' to better understand student agency, drawing on findings from a recent empirical study to present three student portraits; short narratives that pay close attention to the biographies of students. Secondly, student 'spheres of agency' are identified and presented in a typology, suggesting how they might interwork. Thirdly, a capability framework is applied to this typology to help make sense of how identity formation might be better supported in schools to avoid 'overlooking' young people and assist them in determining what they really want to be and do in life.

1.   **Data: Student portraits of identity development** [3]

Methodology: This discussion draws on a qualitative study consisting of 30 semi-structured interviews with 18 sixth-form students from an English inner-city academy sixth-form.[4] These were in-depth interviews, lasting around 100 minutes, taking the form of narrative discussions that explored students' educational experience, particularly on how their everyday experiences supported or challenged why they attended this sixth form, their aspirations for the future, and their wider lives as young adults. As a researcher, I have an unusually high degree of familiarity with these students: working as a teacher and tutor at the institution for over 7 years enabled me to draw on strong working relationships with these students that developed over time. This offers of a valuable amount of pre-existing knowledge of each student and their daily lives and a particular understanding of their experiences. By acting as my own gatekeeper, drawing on my shared context with these students, I was attentive to the ethical implications of this privileged position and the potential power imbalance implicit in our relationship. In addition to anonymising data collection, this meant that participants were involved throughout the analysis process and I routinely shared this work with them, checking how it resonated with them and their listening to their reflections regarding the quality of my interpretations of their biographies.

Findings: All the participants in this study agreed that participation in post-16 education was a period of significant personal growth. Students spoke keenly about post-16 as a phase that demanded they 'grow up', 'make decisions', 'become independent', and so on. They characterised their entry into sixth-form as a rich new environment to achieve this and better define their notions of self, their goals, their aspirations, and

---

[3] This study forms the basis of a wider PhD project, funded by the ESRC
[4] Academy schools, like charter schools, are semi-autonomous state-funded schools that have been increasingly introduced in England. Sixth-form is a term used to describe the provision for students who study in the final two years of school (Grade 11 and 12). Students often apply to stay at the same school to attend their sixth-form, but many might leave to attend a sixth-form in another school or enrol in an alternative form provision, such as college. The implication for the data collected here is twofold. Firstly, this sample represents a relatively academically-able group of students, constituting the significant minority of students who study A-LEVELS (approx.. 40%). Secondly, many but not all of the participants 'stayed on' from lower-school and so were familiar with the school environment, had existing relationships with staff, and did not experience a significant alteration in their educational context.

so on.   This is supported by the ethos of post-16 education, which is largely built around the idea of freedom and independence and an expectation that students will embrace this phase as an opportunity to practice a responsible work ethic in order to become independent young adults.   These students placed great value on the opportunity to choose their courses of study, make use of new 'study periods', the freedom to come and go from the school site as they wished, being able to wear their 'own' clothes, and form increasingly individualised relationships with staff. For these students, the post-16 environment enabled them to exercise their powers of self-definition, supplying them with greater possibilities for reinvention, discovery, and exploration of the self in relation to their education than they had previously enjoyed lower down the school. However, a clear tension emerged where students' valued 'doings and beings' were often couched in broad and underspecified terms of 'go to university,' 'get good grades,' 'get out of school,' and so on. In this respect, many of the young people who contributed to this study struggled with forms of critical self-examination, finding it difficult to define who they were or hoped to become and what they hoped to do in the future. Many students reported difficulties with making use of their free time to complete homework or participate in co-curricular activities that they thought would be valuable to them. Students reported deferring important life choices and characterised their everyday school life as lacking in purpose, interest or enterprise. And so, in some sense, the forms of freedom available in post-16 life presume that students have the capability to make use of it, but the evidence suggested that this was often not the case. In such a way, the post-16 environment is a complex setting that produces tensions, contradictions, and conflict both between different agents and within them.   With this in mind, it is useful to sketch out three student portraits drawn from this data collection. These are presented as short biographies, with the aim of communicating the 'lived experience' of post-16 education and its implications for identity development. I have used direct quotations from the data where possible to support this aim.

Zara and 'reformed identity': Zara is high-achieving who found that the transition to post-16 was fraught with complexity which brought into question the self-control and self-efficacy that she aspired to embrace as a young adult. For instance, she struggled with managing her free time ('I probably spend too much time chilling, but then that's my own choice and my own fault'), adjusting to studying new subjects like Sociology ('the first lesson I felt slightly out of place'), and the workload ('in the first two months of A-levels, I probably did more work than I did in my whole year of GCSE'). The significance of this transition was a basic aspect of Zara's educational experience; the move into post-16 education felt 'rushed…even though it happened over a period of a few months' because, she said, 'it was such a drastic change' and a 'sudden transition.'

And yet by the time of our interview, four months into her first year, Zara felt that she had successfully made sense of her place in post-16 education. At the core of this success, Zara suggested, was a mantra: "I always say to myself and my mum always says it: education is what you make of it.' Indeed, Zara suggested that once she 'hit the second or third month (she) was in the whole routine of getting work done' and had 'almost become immune' to increased workload. For her, staying on top of her studies had become 'really satisfying' because, she said; 'if I can't go into a classroom feeling prepared then I know that I'm not going to *perform* as well…I won't feel confident enough to even raise my hand and answer questions.' As the demands of the classroom changed Zara recognised that she would also have to change in order to maintain the same sense of self. Importantly, Zara suggested: 'I'd let myself go through that process again. It was so good, it taught me that even if something doesn't work out the same way you want it to… you may benefit from it.' Moreover, she has learned that; 'when you want something…you put it upon yourself to try and make any route that you can to get there.' In this respect, the 'sudden and drastic' transition to post-16 was a critical and risky phase for Zara that challenged her sense of self, exposing her to the possibility of 'failing' for the first time in her educational career. However, this was also a phase of tremendous opportunity and freedom to reform her sense of self that ultimately proved formative for both her education and her wider understanding of a life worth living.

Bella and 'lapsed identity': A very different narrative was offered by Bella, who enrolled into post-16 as one of the highest achieving students in her year group, yet found the first year of the post-16 setting to be a prolonged phase of deferred decision-making that was bound up with a reluctance to adapt to her new environment, feelings of academic failure and anxiety, and a difficulty with communicating with staff to ask for support. Our interviews took place after failing Year 12 and three months into her 'repeat' year.

Bella described her application to sixth-form as almost incidental ('I just thought you don't have to wear uniform, free periods…you don't think about the difference in teaching, or the difference from college and sixth forms). Her application was late ('I didn't even fill in the form'), she preferred not to think about her subject choices ('I guess I didn't know what I would choose until I got my results') and, despite her academic abilities, she chose not to complete the summer homework ('I just thought it was a waste of time'), which meant that she 'was threatened to be kicked off every single course' and that: 'every day after school for an hour they made me sit there and do the work. And they called my parents, and I had to go on report card, which was really embarrassing.' Bella struggled with the change in academic ethos ('In Year 11 they never cared if I did the work') and resented teacher expectations: 'I didn't feel the jump in content, essays, or anything like that. It was what the teachers expect from you.' As the year went by, Bella suggested that she struggled to form a clear vision for the outcomes of her education, suggesting 'I've never had a clear goal in my head. I've never thought I want to be a doctor, I want to be a lawyer…whatever.' In addition to this lack of clear self-definition, Bella also avoided talking about her experience of failure: 'I was so lost so, I think, then I just kind of gave up. It was embarrassing.' Bella's experience is instructive because it demonstrates that the challenges to identity building during the transition into post-16 education can serve to destabilise even the most academically able students.

Aliyah and 'identity injury': During Aliyah's first year in post-16, she consciously redefined herself and transformed her approach to school life. Early in our interviews, she identified herself as an introverted character as a younger student, who 'stayed away' and had an 'irrational fear' of participating in school life outside of the classroom. However, when Aliyah transitioned to post-16 education she consciously decided to try new things and explore new opportunities, such as volunteering for a charity programme and organising a school celebration of 'diversity' that made her feel 'more open to things' and willing to take risks. As such, the first year in sixth-form proved to be a phase of significant identity building that opened Aliyah up to opportunities to make use of freedoms within post-16 education to pursue a life she found worth living.

Despite this, however, Aliyah's second year was jeopardised when she took on particular commitments. Specifically, her application to university proved to be an exceptionally trying experience, which resulted in a period of depression, anxiety, and academic disengagement. As a high-achieving student, Aliyah was encouraged by the school to apply to the University of Cambridge. However, the problem, she suggested, was that; 'I didn't stop to think "would I actually be happy studying in Cambridge?"…Everybody was like "that's a great opportunity". I felt like I didn't have the chance to say, "you know what, I actually wouldn't be happy."' She shared the story of another student who had refused to attend his interview at Cambridge, against the schools advice, saying; 'He was so right to do that. But just for himself…I think he was more secure in knowing what he wanted and just in general knowing himself.' Aliyah reported that the pressures and workload of her university application meant that she fell behind with her classwork and felt increasingly out-of-place in the classroom. She felt that her academic ability had been 'lost' and she felt 'a big part of that was the Cambridge application…I would sit in class and think "oh God, I have no idea what's going on."' Aliyah's narrative reveals the tension that exists between the school's aspirations for its students and the injury this can cause to more vulnerable students' sense of self when they do not share those aspirations or are yet to arrive at an idea of what their own aspirations are. This is to say, the tacit tension between the school's view of what young people should have reason to value and what young people may actually have reason to value.

2.   Initial Analysis: a typology of identity formation

The experience of these three students is introduced to illuminate something of the lived experience of post-16 education. These portraits bring attention to the post-16 setting as a space for tremendous diversity and individuality as a result of the freedom for agency and opportunity it offers for identity development. Compared to lower-schooling, the post-16 phase offers minimal structure for students to rely upon. This leaves them free to invest their agency in and around the school with the purpose they choose. Yet, this freedom is evidently constrained by how students' view the range of possibilities open to them and their ability to convert them into meaningful 'beings and doings' suited to their purpose. Each participant in this study presents an account of their identity development as personal, diverse, and rich as these, resulting in lively 'real-world' research that this paper must hope to 'say something sensible about' (Robson 2002, p.4. Quoted in Wright 2012, p.411).

To achieve this, a theoretical perspective was achieved via a three-step analysis. Firstly, interview data were transcribed from the cohort of participants and analysed using thematic coding. During the coding process the theme of 'self-concept' or 'self-definition' emerged where students connected their educational experience to their 'inner situation', specifically their values, aspirations, and intellection of self. These sections of text were then re-coded and a cluster of sub-themes were identified that made up these student introspections, such as 'purpose' (where students spoke about aspirations that developed out of this sense of self), 'respect' (when students felt their identity had public or social value to those around them), and 'control' (where students asserted some responsibility or independence for how they spent their time) and so on. Secondly, with these set of concepts in mind I relooked at the student narratives and 'immersed myself within the life stories, seeking a holistic overview' (Wright 2012, p.410) in order to avoid 'over-fragmenting' the data and maintain the integrity of each student's introspection. This helped organise and position the emergent themes in relation to one another, which in turn helped better understand the function of each one and how they might interwork, leading to the discovery of some sense of process that undergirded these students' agency. The final stage of analysis was to reflect on these interpretations with participants to see if they resonated as familiar or alien to them, and who offered some feedback.[5]

Identity Practices: The first stage of analysis revealed that students' lived experience of post-16 education involved a condition of 'interiority.' Students spoke about everyday practices such as sitting in class, completing homework, speaking with teachers, applying for university, always with relevance to how it might shape 'who' they were and what they were capable of. This is to say that 'identity work' (Brown 2015; Sveningsson et al 2003) was a consistent theme which students invested into their everyday life at school. Such identity work might consist of students 'rising to the challenge' and determining what they are capable of in the classroom, or might it might consist of something close to 'identity play' (Brown 2012) where they experimented with identity capital (Côté 2002, 2006) by making new friendships, participating in new activities, and generally exploring their possibilities of their power for self-definition. In this respect, the condition of interiority refers to the development of students' inner-situation through identity work and suggests that forms of student agency can be framed as 'identity practices.' This is not to say that students are solely concentrated on the process of identity formation during their education, but rather that many aspects of their agency can be viewed through the lens of identity formation.

The term 'identity practice' is used here in a quite specific way and intended to convey a particular meaning drawn from Alasdair MacIntyre's work (1985). He defines a practice as 'any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised' (p. 187). MacIntyre illustrates this with an example of a child learning to play chess, which serves

---

[5] For example, one participant emphasised that the 'linked-capability' model was more interactive and less hierarchical that I had initially supposed when analysing her interview.

as a neat analogy for a student participating in school life. When the child learns to play chess, it may be disinterested and she may only be motivated by being rewarded with sweets. On this account, the child may be happy to cheat and work around the rules of the game so as to win. Eventually, however, the child may come to appreciate the skills and qualities that come from being a good chess player. The sweets and, in fact winning, become an 'external good' in relation to the 'internal good' of being a good chess player. Cheating in order to win becomes a form of losing. In a similar fashion, we might see student participation in post-16 education as a practice; discussing and sharing ideas in the classroom, working to meet academic targets, organising one's free time, speaking in assembly, sharing resources in study rooms: are all examples of a 'coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity.' And, as we have seen, these practices can be viewed as opportunities for identity formation. Certainly, there are students who participate insofar as they can achieve external goods such as qualifications, status, a career, and so on. But many students are aware that their identity development during the course of their participation possesses 'internal goods' such as developing greater autonomy, self-purpose, a sense of belonging within the school community, cultivating a sense of moral value, and so on.[6] These internal goods are internal to the practice of participating in education because they cannot be achieved by skipping class, plagiarising homework, arguing with teachers, and so on. On this reading, therefore, post-16 education offers resources for identity practices that can give students reasons to value being and doing particular things.

Step 2: Typology of spheres of agency. With this notion of identity practices in mind, it is possible to consider how student agency in post-16 education contributes to identity formation. Specifically, the analysis sought to unpick the different aspects of student agency that were made up identity practices. In other words, it was never simply the case that students were 'doing identity work', but rather there were more subtle or nuanced forms of identity work taking place. For instance, by participating in a discussion in the classroom a student might be constructing their identity, but also expressing that identity, which in turn enabled them to view their initial construction in new light based on the recognition it received by others. This is to say, student identity formation is a process that is driven by a complex interworking of cognitive and motivational processes (Castano 2008), in a way that resonates with studies carried out by socio-cognitive theorists, most notably Bandura (1997). As such, the second stage of analysis identified five 'spheres of agency' that interwork as cognitive and motivational processes that describe identity practices in the post-16 setting (Table 1). These are not intended to offer an exhaustive or cardinal model for student agency, but rather an illustrative and explanatory model. Each sphere relates to a distinct form of functioning when students engaged in identity practices. The relationship between these spheres is intended to be processual, where the functioning of the most basic sphere (self-concept) influences the functioning of the next sphere, and so on. In this sense, there is a hierarchical nature to this typology. However, as the discussion goes on to argue, the relationship between these spheres is also interactional. Moreover, it is not argued that students strived to 'accomplish' identity formation in any sense; by definition these spheres represented an ongoing and developmental process. In this respect, identity formation is an iterative and critical process that is made up of consistent and creative attempts to redefine one's self, and put that self-definition into practice through acts of expression, control, and so on. The critical point for discussion is that the richer one's self-concept, the greater the capacity to articulate that and make it explicit through these 'higher level' practices.

Self-concept: Across the study, students' discussion of their own sense of 'who' they are was central to interpreting how and why they committed to all other forms of agency. Moreover, when exploring student narratives it became clear that a 'successful' self-concept was one that was clear and coherent. This is to say

---

[6] A further distinction that MacIntyre (1985) draws between external and internal goods concerns what may be achieved for the wider community. External goods, like money and possessions, operate under conditions of scarcity, so that when we achieve them it means that others must lose out. Internal goods, however, involve learning to value those goods that are internal to the practice, and as such are inexhaustible and achieving them produces a good for the whole community.

that a 'clear' self-concept is one that had well-defined boundaries, specific values, and particular aspirations. A 'coherent' self-concept is one that can be habituated within the school environment without tensions or contradictions, for instance sharing similar values and aspirations to those promoted by the school. This sphere of agency supports the work of identity theorists such as Erik Erikson, who argues that the central challenge of adolescence is successfully managing 'identity crisis' (1968, 1988; see also Marcia, 1980). For adolescents, he suggests, this entails forming ones identity by taking what you know about the world and what you know about yourself and deciding how to 'make all this work' together, where hopefully 'through this process of self-reflection and self-definition, adolescents arrive at an integrated, coherent sense of their identity as something that persists over time' (Buckingham 2008 p.2).

Self-expression: Secondly, the analysis revealed that students' capacity for self-expression is shaped by the clarity and coherence of their self-concept. Self-expression is defined as any form of dialogue students have with members of the school community, especially where this consisted in them affirming beliefs about who they perceive themselves to be. These affirmations, when stemming from a positive self-concept, articulated a sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem; how they viewed their own capabilities. Importantly, there is a strong relationship between self-expression and feeling 'recognised' by the community. William James, when writing on self-esteem, suggests that 'our self-feeling in this world depends entirely on what we back ourselves to be and do' (1981 p.310). And so this form of agency, this public 'backing of ourselves', can be understood as what enables members of community to achieve self-esteem and self-respect, which are vital ingredients for a sense of dignity (Margolit 1998). In other words, there is a fundamental importance behind acts of agency that support self-expression because these supply individuals with 'dignified identities' that are recognised and valued by the community. Several students in this study did not know who or what they hoped to become, or they felt their self-concept was incoherent because it jarred with the values and expectations of the school. These students reported greater difficulties with self-expression, and by extension self-esteem and self-respect, within the school environment. Thus, acts of self-expression resulting in recognition are vital for students to feel a sense of belonging, value and purpose in the school and it opened new possibilities for agency and participation in their educational life.

Self-control: The third sphere of agency concerned the capacity for students to exercise self-control. This is broadly defined as acts where students could 'enact' their self-concept by 'doing' what they value or aspire towards, bearing in mind that 'individual selfhood is a social phenomenon, but the social world is constituted through the actions of individuals' (Buckingham 2008 p.6). Implicit, here, is the suggestion that many students expressed that they valued some end, such as achieving high grades, but struggled to apply themselves to the means of achieving this end. Thus, self-control speaks to a form of commitment or responsibility to the self, to dedicate oneself independently to realising goals and aspirations that one has set out to achieve through self-expression. For Zara, achieving self-control was a turning point in the way she viewed her transition to post-16, where 'managing' her time and 'staying on top' of her studies was achieved by applying her powers of agency and freedom to pursue goals and aspirations that are central to her self-concept. By contrast, a number of students that hold high aspirations for their future suggested that they could not use their time purposefully, preferring to 'chill' or 'hang out' in the study room..

Self-purpose: The fourth sphere of agency is defined as 'self-purpose.' Building on the preceding capacities for agency, self-purpose refers to acts where students view their life as having a function, characterised by long-term objectives and reasons for doing things they value. If we consider self-control as the capacity to regulate and restrain agency, self-purpose is the capacity to commit that agency to some desired direction or telos that enables one to view their life as worth living over the long-term.

Table 1: Typology of spheres of agency for identity formation.

Sphere of agency	Definition	Examples from student data
Self-concept (or self-definition)	The act of critical self-examination, arriving at a clear, coherent, idea of one's self, values and aspirations	'I've become less narrow minded. And I've begun to accept more of stuff that I don't understand. (Arabella) 'Sociology has taken over my life! Because I think about everything from a Sociological perspective now' (Mabel) 'At the moment I am striving for paediatrics. I think working with little kids is what I do best.' (Erica) 'So for example, my headscarf – I put it on because I want to.' (Elisha)
Self-expression (or self-recognition)	The act of dialogue with those in the community, communicating one's self-concept, including their values and aspirations, and having that self-concept recognised by others.	'We would discuss political ideas a lot. And we – politically, we are all very different, but we manage.' (Mabel) 'But just trying out being open, being open to new things, I was just talking to these strangers about work and stuff.' (Aliyah) 'And I think the thing is, a lot of my teachers also say like, I always have fun.' (Zara)
Self-control (and/or self-efficacy)	The act of 'working on' one's self-concept by 'doing' what they value and aspire to be, individually, freely and independently. Taking on commitments and responsibilities to 'become' what one values.	'Because I'm in sixth form it has been more of a case of I need to be independent and find my own ways to relax.' (Elijah) 'Recently, I 've just got on with work and I've found it really fulfilling. I used to think of it as a chore, but I've just managed to make it more enjoyable.' (Arabella) 'If you've got like a free period…you just sit and chill in the atrium…And sometimes, I've done that - I'm not going to lie - but, there's sometimes when I have actually gone in there and I realise that I can't be chilling.' (Zara)
Self-purpose	The act of viewing one's life as having a function, with a sense of long-term objectives and reasons for doing things one values, making them realistic and achievable, and valuing one's actions in relation to these aspirations. Seeing one's life as worth living.	'You showing yourself that you can do that. And it's something that you probably never thought you could do. And it just shows that all the work that you've been putting in has paid off. (Arabella) - I think the purpose of my life, so far, would just be absorbing the knowledge around me, becoming or having a better understanding of life, politics, and stuff like that. (Mabel) 'I have always had this dream of maybe going outside London' (Erica) 'I got to a stage where I actually liked to study one of the specific subjects, I was l thinking even though if I'm not successful, I'll be happy to do it. Because I chose what I wanted to do.' (Sarah) 'So if I get a Chemical Engineering degree, I would like to go to Shell and work there for a few years because I quite liked the atmosphere there, the work atmosphere there is quite nice. There's no hierarchical system' (Elijah)
View of the 'good'	The act of valuing opportunities, and freedoms as valuable to your purpose in life, including sharing in a social or civic view of what is good or to be valued according to reason. Viewing one's life, on the whole, positive.	'Even if it doesn't really help me…I'm willing to work towards it…I can try and work towards those qualifications…I don't mind doing that, and I think that's best. (Zara) 'When I see different clubs going on I was like yeah, we should definitely do that… And they were always things that I wanted to do. I didn't do them for any ulterior motive. Even when I was growing butterflies with Newton, I was like yeah sure, why not, it seems like the right thing to do. (Mabel) 'It's important to me because it gives you that personality where, knowing more is good – so sometimes knowing about something that's not academic will benefit you better.' (Erica)

For instance Zara highlights that she: 'got to a stage where I actually liked to study one of the specific subjects, I was l thinking even though if I'm not successful, I'll be happy to do it. Because I chose what I wanted to do.' For her, the capacity to act with a sense of purpose implies that her education is clearly connected to what she thinks her life ought to consist in and the direction in which she is taking it. A key point here is that students' sense of purpose is firmly rooted in their own sense of intrinsic value connected to their acts of self-control, rather than forms of extrinsic motivation, such as financial gain or credentialisation. This is illustrative of what both Giddens (1994) and Csikszentmihalyi (1993, 1997, 2014) have called an 'autotelic personality.' Giddens characterises the autotelic self as one with an 'inner confidence which comes from self-respect' (1994 p.192).

View of the good: The final sphere of agency relates to the act of viewing forms of educational participation as opportunities to practice the 'good life.' The post-16 setting has been described as a context that offers freedom on the one hand and challenging expectations on the other. For many students, the lived experience of this is sometimes contradictory and challenging and freedoms are viewed as offering occasions to postpone commitments and a reprieve from responsibilities. Yet, for those students who feel a sense of purpose and agency this context is an environment rich with resources with which to pursue a life they have reason to value. This is necessarily a more abstract level of functioning but corresponds to quite concrete behaviours and attitudes in students, where they are open to taking on new commitments, responsibilities and exploring the potential of opportunities.

This form of agency is identifiable in at least two respects. Firstly, several students presented a perspective of their studies that recognised the inherent value behind learning rather than a system of credentialisation. This contrasted with a significant number of students who only viewed their education in instrumental terms. Secondly this form of agency was seen in attitudes to the educational context that were proactive, participatory, and exploratory. For example, Mabel embraced extra-curricular activities, taking on multiple commitments that she viewed as valuable despite their non-curricular nature. When discussing this, she reported 'they were always things that I wanted to do. I didn't do them for any ulterior motive. Even when I was growing butterflies with Newton, I was like yeah sure, why not, it seems like the right thing to do.' Here, Mabel saw tremendous value in living her life in what she felt were interesting ways that connected to a range of 'beings and doings' she felt reason to value.

3. **Applying a capability approach: the 'capability for identity formation'**

The discussion above supports a tremendous body of research that advances the position that youth development is no longer a linear, simple, fixed process, but rather consists of transitions into adulthood that are multi-dimensional, complex and emergent processes (see: Furlong et al, 2011; Coté et al. 2008; Wyn et al. 2012; Arnett 2007; Hodgson et al. 2013; Zarrett et al. 2006; Wyn et al. 2002). Importantly, this challenges traditional assumptions about the ways in which students engage in their education. This traditional view might preserve a narrow understanding of student agency, where a student's initial choice about where or what they study provides a basic foundation upon which they build towards future choices about university or employment. Here, student agency follows a linear, structured process where the opportunities and resources made available to students during their education can conform to an undifferentiated, one-size-fits-all provision. Yet, this discussion has shown that even for high-achieving and academically able students, who stand the most to gain from this traditional view, there are inherent risks in the transition to post-16 education and a significant inequality of outcomes for students whose sense of self can be constrained, threatened, and reduced by the challenge of coming to terms with 'what they really want to be and do.' As such, the capability that students have for identity formation is a vital aspect of their wellbeing.

Linked capabilities: The discussion above has shown how identity formation consists in a process of interworking aspects of agency. Specifically, it offers us a conceptual background upon which to overlay a

capability perspective to evaluate wellbeing. In order to accommodate the dynamics of the typology above within a capability approach framework, it is useful to draw on two notions from the capability literature that help us think about how capabilities might be 'linked'. The first is drawn from Hazel Wright's notion of a 'capability chain' (Wright 2012). For Wright, the capability approach enabled her to consider the ways in which an individual acts across their life-course as built upon the functioning of prior capabilities which generate new capabilities, where the imagery of a chain 'conveys the notion of connectedness and flexibility' (Wright 2012 p.417). Here, Wright provides a useful metaphor for what might also be considered 'fertile capabilities' (Nussbaum 2011) or 'fertile functionings' (Wolff et al; 2007). A second, associated, notion is taken from a child rights framework supporting 'evolving capacities' (The United Nations 1989. Article Five. See also: Landsdown 2005), which was used in the capability literature by Ballet et al (2011) and developed by further research (Biggeri et al, 2012; Liebel, 2014). Biggeri (et al) describe the 'dynamic core' of evolving capabilities processes as 'expressed by the feedback loops that re-shape the potential capability set of the child and enhance or reduce agency' (2012; Page 378). This moves us towards a view that a young person's functioning in one context opens up a range of possible functionings in new contexts; for instance, developing the functioning of 'confident expression' in the classroom is valued as a functioning capability in itself, but can also be valued in terms of the 'evolved capacity' it represents for 'confident expression' in the public sphere outside the classroom. In doing so, the notion of 'evolved capacities' encourages us to look for forms of agency that nourish wider capabilities. In this regard, both the notions of 'capability chains' and 'evolved capacities' serve to bring together the notions of agency, opportunity and capability in a framework that supports a theory of 'linked capabilities for identity formation' in the post-16 setting.

The capability for self-concept: Accordingly, the first capability we might consider in this 'linked-set' of capabilities concerns the development of self-concept. In the analysis, students who presented a clear and coherent self-concept were greatly advantaged both in terms of deriving greater instrumental value from their educational participation (gaining credentials and so on) and in terms of experiencing a greater sense of wellbeing within their education. Thus, the 'capability for self-concept' and its effective functioning as 'clear and coherent' can be conceptualised.

As shown across youth development literature (Zarrett et al 2006; Wyn et al 2003; Côté 1996; Dweck 1999), the capability for self-concept is part of the typical psychological capabilities that young people possess. Yet, a particular challenge surrounds the capability for students to develop a 'coherent' self-concept that could connect their experience in post-16 education with a broader view of their lives, and so their reasons for being in school or pursuing particular courses of study were often not well-examined or understood in relation to the rest of their lives.

This concern speaks to what Martha Nussbaum (1997) has highlighted as the 'central task of education' for the Stoics, which is 'to confront the passivity of the pupil, challenging the mind to take charge of its own thought' (p.28). This is because;

> All too often, people's choices and statements are not their own. Words come out of their mouths, and actions are performed by their bodies, but what those and actions express may be the voice of tradition or convention, the voice of the parent, of friends, of fashion. This is because these people have never stopped to ask themselves what they really stand for, what they are willing to defend as themselves and their own.' (Nussbaum 1997 p.28-29).

In this regard, the capability for self-concept might be framed as an exercise of critical self-examination. The transition into the post-16 setting is an opportunity for students to separate themselves from their previous schooling experiences and redefine themselves in a new context.

Where students articulated clear and coherent self-concepts during our interviews, it was clear that this was a functioning that was supported by specific resources and opportunities, notably drawing on 'trusted

experts.' Those students who had discussed their choices with a 'trusted expert' before moving into post-16 were generally able to define themselves in highly individualised terms that framed their participation in post-16 as part of a critical decision making process about what they wanted to achieve. These experts consisted of teachers with whom the students had developed strong relationships, members of the post-16 team who conducted pre-enrolment interviews, or friends and family who had knowledge of the post-16 setting. In each case, the opportunity to perform some identity work in this context was critical to assist with shaping the student's self-concept and the discovery of connections between their choices and their life-long plans. We might think of these discussions with trusted experts as moments in which students' situational awareness was raised, specifically their awareness of their inner situation. Indeed, research has adapted Van Gennep's work on 'rites of passage' (1960) to explore educational transitions (Astin 1993; Tinto 1998) which has some practical relevance here, suggesting that student persistence in their studies is closely associated with feeling personally connected to their educational setting through strong interpersonal relations.

The capability for self-expression: The second 'linked capability' is the capability for self-expression. As a functioning, this was described as an aspect of agency where students engaged in dialogue with members of the school community and expressing their inner-situation, particularly their values, goals, and aspirations. In this respect, it is a 'linked capability' connected to the capability for self-concept, where the quality of functioning in the former corresponds to the potential for functioning in the latter. Moreover, the capability for self-expression constitutes an important aspect of wellbeing related to the formation of recognition of and self-respect in the individual student.

The connection between the capability for self-expression and recognition can be found in the capability literature. The work of Paul Ricoeur (1966, 2005, 2006), for instance, has provided a conceptual framework for research (Janic 2014; Honerød Hoveid and Hoveid 2009) that has connected the notion of 'expression' to the capable human being. Indeed, Ricoeur's understanding of the '*l'homme capable*' is explored from the point of view that capable agents possess the self-recognition that they have this power to act. What this means is that capability, broadly construed, depends upon modes of expression such as '"I can" statements: "I can speak", "I can act", "I can tell", and finally "I can be responsible" (Janic 2014 p.21). Each of these modes of expression serve to express some kind of agency, representing the capability of the agent to articulate their sense of self (their 'I') with the self-recognition that makes agency truly autonomous and identity-forming.

This resonates well with the discussion above, where students celebrated freedoms and opportunities to perform these acts of self-expression. For example, a process of development for Zara during her transition involved learning to articulate her values and aspirations rather than those derived from peer-groups and were no longer relevant to her. This meant vocalising that she valued particular support and guidance from her peers, which in turn enabled her 'to act' in specific ways, expressing her 'self' through acts that personalised her approach to her studies, for instance undertaking further reading in her free periods. Thirdly, this empowered Zara 'to tell' insofar as she could express how her narrative identity, her life story as a student in post-16, was in a process of transition that connected to her interpersonal relations she maintained and her wider participation in post-16. And lastly, Zara's effective functioning here meant that she presented a 'capability for imputation' (Janic. 2014); in other words she took responsibility for her own actions, they were 'her own', as a result of the preceding forms of expression. She felt known by teachers and respected by her peers for pursuing her own educational project within the school that fitted with her individual self-concept (on the concept of educational respect, see: Stonjanov 2010). Thus, Zara's narrative offers an insight into how we might observe the capability for self-expression in an empirical sense.

Capability for self-control: So far, this section has considered the ways in which students may have a capability to develop a clear and coherent self-concept and a complimentary capability to communicate that self-concept through forms of agency. Yet, being able to view yourself in some way and express this view is one thing, actually committing to that view through self-directed action is a different thing. As such a third, distinct but linked, capability is the capability for self-control.

The capability for self-control correlates to the freedom and opportunity that students have to exercise autonomy in the post-16 setting. We have noted that the post-16 setting is characterised by high degrees of freedom for students to make choices about how they spend their time and approach their studies. Yet, most commonly, students suggested they weren't wholeheartedly focused on their studies because they found it, on the whole, either too boring or too stressful. Sofia offers a useful example that is representative of many participants' experience: she struggled to form a self-concept that cohered with her participation in post-16 ('I do it because I'm supposed to. It's easier') and a difficulty with expressing a sense of value in her education ('I don't think there's anything in particular I know a lot about'). Sofia's cynicism and detachment from her studies also seemed to underlie the ways in which she avoided, resisted, and resented questions about what she would or could do in the future; 'I hate that question', I just don't know', 'I'm hoping it just happens.' An underlying tension was revealed here, after her exams, when Sofia spoke about her desire to be academically successful on one hand and her lack of discipline to bring this about; 'ideally, I'd be like, really working towards exams, so I can do well. But yeah, I don't know. I'm just not really like that.' The way in which I understand Sofia's attitude is as one that stops short of recognising that working towards her exams is within her potential, and her resignation that she's 'not really like that' conceals a lack of possible agency on her part. Indeed, this distinguishes her from a student like Zara, who employed practical methods to revive her academic fortunes whereas Sofia felt unable to do this, suggesting; 'when it comes to thinking about exams, instead of stressing over it, I kind of just ignore it.' The adapted preference to ignore or neglect commitments that are valued is in some sense pathological, especially for young people in the throes of development, insofar as this suggests that these students are capable of frustrating their own potential for success. Indeed, this adapted preference introduces a particular tension into the 'inner situation' where you value a specific 'being or doing' but lack the sufficient self-determination, the inner-resources, to bring it about.

At the heart of this concern is perhaps a reading of students' inner situation as lacking in what Clemens Sedmak (2016a) has termed 'self-accusation.' Sedmak defines this as a 'non-comparing and non-competitive attitude' that 'seeks the truth about one's moral situation', which is necessary for 'preparing real change within one's own realm of agency' (p.3). This is useful for thinking about how many students who struggle to make sense of the contradiction between what they want and what they do are perhaps neglecting to seek the truth about their situation. This is to say that these students have a view of themselves, which they communicate and express to others, but they are incapable of developing this self-concept in reality through the power of their own actions. For many students, like Sofia, rather than admit to this incapacity they hold on to the idea that the external resources which they have to develop their self-concept (such as academic study) are too boring or stressful to make use of. A pertinent concern, that many experienced practitioners will be familiar with, is that these self-erected barriers to learning are all-too-often strategies to avoid possible failure. In this sense, these students identities are governed by 'comparing' and 'competitive' attitudes that preclude them from taking risks by exploring potential forms of agency in order to achieve what they hold valuable.

Research that has argued for 'autonomy-supporting' policies in schools (Stefanou et al. 2004) provide a useful framework for thinking about developing students' capability for self-control. Pintrich (2000), for example, has found that 'strong classroom contexts…can influence individuals to activate different goals than the ones they would normally or chronically access' (p.102). In this vein, we might consider how the

school as a whole, not only the classroom, can offer an autonomy-supporting environment that can define appropriate behaviours and motivate particular goals for students that would enable them to exercise their capability for self-control more effectively. Research by Reeve et al. (1999) has presented related findings that autonomy-supporting teachers generally act in particular ways: listening to students, giving students freedom to adapt materials and resources, asking about student wants, and responding to student-generated questions. Similarly, Assor et al (2002) have found that autonomy-supporting teachers typically foster relevance by articulating educational activity in terms of student goals, giving students freedom to express dissatisfaction, and providing students with opportunities to choose activities that are consistent with their own interests.

The capability for self-purpose: The capability of self-purpose is characterised as that sphere of agency where students might view their life across a long-term trajectory, beyond the daily churn of school life and see their actions as having a function in relation to that trajectory. When imbued with self-purpose, the everyday agency of students takes on a particular focus with the project of identity building and the formation of a life plan. Importantly, there is reason to foster students' conceptions of self-purpose as a function of their autonomous agency and critical self-examination. The findings from this study suggest that many students are able to discuss a sense of purpose in their studies but this was often limited to prosaic, generalised goals such as 'go to university', 'become' a doctor, 'be happy' and so on. What is often missing from these responses is a sense of inquiry and self-interest that could assist these students with making valued life choices. The effect of this is that these students can only view their life in the present and short-term future because the possibilities for long-term options are foreclosed. Indeed, where opportunities are withheld from students to embark in this kind of enquiry, we might frame this as a form of capability deprivation.

In thinking about how we might introduce opportunities for development of the capability for self-purpose in young people, it is useful to consider the ways in which young people form and maintain their aspirations for the future. Caroline Hart's work (2012) has outlined and analysed the ways in which 16-19 year olds might form aspirations in educational contexts. She characterises student aspiration as a 'dynamic and multi-dimensional' concept, where her study found that students 'described hundreds of different aspirations' (p.81) that connected not only to educational or career aspirations, but also to environmental, religious, community, social status, and identity goals. In this respect, Hart highlights that student aspirations are complex; they can be contradictory and changeable and student agency plays a crucial role in the formation of personal aspirations. Promoting this agency demands two connected concerns; firstly students ought to be given the freedom to change their minds and allow their aspirations to 'flux' naturally, and secondly schools ought to respect the ways in which they might impose aspirations on students that limit their agency and wellbeing. In either case, foreclosing the possibility of freedom of choice when students consider their future acts as a form of institutional coercion. Specifically, the first concern suggests that the unidirectional educational models are likely to hinder identity development for some students, especially where they are 'signed up' for courses to pursue a single trajectory such as higher education. The second concern relates to the findings of this study as several students, such as Aliyah, felt that the school imposed a particular view about what their trajectory ought to be. The difficulty with this is not purely theoretical; students were able to express in practical terms how they felt this removed autonomy, in the form of self-governing authority and decision making about their futures.

The capability to form a view of the good: The linked-capabilities presented so far describes students' views of their inner situation, views that are necessarily internal and focused on making sense and developing the 'internal good' of self-development. Their self-concept can be worked on, built up, explored and so on, but it remains an internal project. Moreover, students can exercise various forms of expression and control to manage, maintain, and enhance their self. And ultimately, as highlighted above, this might

give students a stronger, more informed sense of what will come of their self in the future, what their place in the world is, what they ought to do, and so on. The emphasis on all of this is that in exercising these linked capabilities, young people are concentrated on excavating and developing their inner situation in the post-16 setting.

The findings of this project suggest that students who journey along this process not only transform who they are but also how they view the environment around them. Those who did not realise these linked-capabilities effectively, tended to have a fixed view of the school context and viewed it as an 'external good', useful for instrumental purposes. Conversely, those who exercised these capabilities well typically had an open, flexible view of the school context and world around them that was characterised by an interest in opportunities around them, experimenting with new commitments and responsibilities, and seeking new ways to engage with and participate in the school community. In this respect, the final stage of this linked-capabilities model saw some students move from developing their 'inner situation' to exploring and ultimately shaping their 'outer' environment and community, which might be termed a 'view of the good'.

An important feature of this linked-capability model worth revisiting is that it conceptualises functioning as a dynamic process rather than a *formally* hierarchical process. Whilst the capability for self-concept sits at the centre of this process and the linked-capabilities emanate from it, they continue to interact and reciprocate with one another. For instance, for some students moments of self-control were habit-forming and made possible new opportunities of self-expression; where Zara started to spend her free-time in the study room focused on her studies, she found new opportunities for self-expression and recognition (her self-controlled work ethic gave her new experiences to express). As highlighted above, this means that these capabilities interwork and can serve to strengthen or weaken each other. A further point to this, however, is that it was overserved that there was a strong clustering effect in identity forming practices. It was observed that there were 'high performers' and 'low performers' in relation to identity development, with a great many evenly distributed around a mean. The high performers were those, like Zara, who were by no means 'high performers' in an academic sense, but those that had undergone tremendous transition and development during the post-16 phase. The effective functioning of these linked-capabilities was indicative of the wide range opportunities they had made use of, the commitments they had made during their education, the responsibilities that they had taken on, and so on. In the course of exercising these positive forms of agency, these students also enjoyed the concomitant elements of wellbeing attached to these capabilities, such as self-examination, self-respect, autonomy, and so on, that have formed a part of this analysis.

What stands out from these discussions with 'high performers' is how they view their life not only as invested with purpose, but that they also enjoyed high levels of trust and interest in the school environment. In contrast, some students might be characterised as 'low performers' who had yet to really define themselves and their place in school, and who reported much higher levels of cynicism and distrust in their educational participation. Specifically, 'high-performers' reported high levels of: trust in their relationships with staff, interest in the beings and doings of others, participation in school activities, knowledge about how they studied best and where, understanding of what their targets were for development and how to reach them, and so on. Within the post-16 setting, these students functioned with a sense of 'geborgenheit' – an almost untranslatable German concept related to wellbeing that suggests 'a sense of being nested within a sheltering space to which one can open up' (Hutta 2009 p.256). For 'high-performers', it is clear that they possess such a sense of belonging that can only be cultivated through undergoing a transformative, developmental process within a context and space to which they now felt attached, 'at home' and capable of opening up; a process in which they could have reason to value particular beings and doings and experience a 'good education.'

This notion of *geborgenheit* is useful for highlighting the moral and social value of promoting student identity development in post-16. This value, I aver, consists in encouraging students to engage in what Sedmak (2013) has called the 'deep practice' of living, which is a useful notion for thickening our concept of achieving a 'view of the good.'   Here, the depth of a practice (in the sense used by MacIntyre, above) will challenge its coherence, intensify its complexity, it will make it more difficult to have it as a socially established activity, and the goods it produces may change for individuals (Sedmak 2013). In this light, a deep practice is one that takes place under two conditions (Sedmak 2013, Coyle 2010): it is practiced under adverse conditions and, as a result, it demands wholeheartedness. We have seen throughout this discussion that many students operate within post-16 education under adverse conditions. Students struggle to make sense of the new opportunities and responsibilities of post-16 study, they experience incoherence about what they want to be and what they want to do, and many find the expectations surrounding their decision-making and participation to be too high. And we have also seen that real success in post-16 study depends upon students reaching a sense of wholeheartedness in their school life, where they are able to invest their full efforts and abilities into their education by taking on responsibilities and commitments for their identity development. As such, we can consider how to develop the capability of students to engage in the deep practice of identity formation in the post-16 setting through these two lenses.

Firstly, when approaching the capability for a view of the good from a deep practice perspective, it is vital to consider how students may cope under adverse conditions. Those coping mechanisms that enabled students to continue to develop and flourish can also be understood as strategies of resilience. Resilience can be imagined as 'the immune system of the soul' that 'fosters personal growth' (Sedmak 2009 p.25). Sedmak (2009) identifies three features resilience that connect well with the psychology of 'high performers' and can be readily promoted in the post-16. Firstly, resilience is strengthened through a social dimension, that is, the 'support of a network, a community, through fostering common interests and social competence' (p.25). Secondly, Sedmak suggests that 'resilience is strengthened by mechanisms of (self) control: it is strengthened by a sense of discipline, by control, and self-control' (p.26). And thirdly, Sedmak writes that 'those who perceive themselves in terms of growth and development are better equipped for resilience.' And so we have three features of resilience to support students' in coping under the adverse conditions of post-16 education: being a part of a community, developing self-control, and having a sense of direction. Each of these can be viewed in terms of the capability for self-expression or recognition, self-control, and self-purpose, respectively. Where these begin to function effectively, we have a model for effective resilience and coping strategies in post-16.

Secondly, when approaching the capability for a view of the good from a deep practice perspective, it is vital to consider how students might attend to their education wholeheartedly. The condition for wholeheartedness stems, in part, from the condition of adversity. When we live in conditions of adversity, appropriating the skills necessary to cope and flourish demand that we invest our actions with greater intention to bring about the result we hope for. There are perhaps two ways of thinking about wholeheartedness; one of integrity and one of intention. Firstly, the philosopher Bernard Williams (1981) has argued that once we have a clear concept of who we are, particular 'identity-conferring' commitments arise that we ought to respect. Failing to respect these creates an incoherence in our identity, what we 'are' is not in tune with what we 'do', and so injures our integrity or wholeness. Identity-conferring commitments inform the kinds of doings our life ought to consist in based on the identity we value. Where students held to a self-concept characterised by academic progress and interest, it followed for them that they ought to spend their free-time dedicated to their studies. For Williams, these commitments form the condition of our existence, 'in the sense that unless I am propelled forward by the conatus of desire, project and interest, it is unclear why I should go on at all' (Williams 1981 p.12). Fulfilling these commitments enables the individual to see their practices as invested with a particular trueness; indeed, a common scenario for students involved making detailed revision plans with the intention of preparing for assessments, but never

following through with this commitment and consequently feeling a sense of self-deception or disintegration. Thus, the capability for a view of the good requires individuals to pursue valued beings and doings, not because they brings about external goods (such as respect from peers or teachers, or for the promise of financial reward), but because doing so brings about the 'internal good' of personal integrity. Secondly, we might think of wholeheartedness in terms of intention. On this view, Harry Frankfurt (1988) has written on the inner-divisions and incoherence that can make up a person and their desires to act in particular ways: all of us have experienced the difficulty of choosing between two incommensurable goods. For instance, we might want to spend time with friends and to spend time studying. When we choose one over the other, the problem is not one of volition (that we gave in to temptation, or did something undesirable), or not that we feel a particular enthusiasm to 'wholeheartedly' do one thing over the other, as it might be with Williams' notion of integrity. For Frankfurt, wholeheartedness is rather the process of making up one's mind in light of these inner-divisions. Of coming down to a decision after deliberation, and making clear one's intentions. On this, Frankfurt writes:

> In making up his mind a person establishes preferences concerning the resolution of conflicts among his desires or beliefs. Someone who makes a decision thereby performs an action, but the performance is not of a simple act that merely implements a first-order desire. It essentially involves reflexivity, including desires and volitions of a higher order. Thus, creatures who are incapable of this volitional reflexivity necessarily lack the capacity to make up their minds. They may desire and think and act, but they cannot decide. (1988 p.44)

In this respect, Frankfurt argues for the irreducible conflict in the inner-situation of individuals and fleshes out what a higher-order capability might look like for an agent, such as a student, when forming a clear view of oneself and one's values. This higher-order capability would be a form of critical self-examination that necessarily has an awareness of this inner conflict so that individuals can recognise why building their life project necessitates self-negotiation. In this respect, identity practices and development are, at their most effective, processes of integration that depend on the form of wholeheartedness that Frankfurt advances.

The 'linked-capability' approach runs the risk of making identity formation and identity practices seem assured, straightforward, and unequivocal. Yet in reality, all individuals are made up of competing desires and attitudes towards what their life should consist in and are actively engaged in a process of negotiating these. The view that the inner-situation is in a state of irreducible conflict that students must actively and continuously negotiates is, I think, resonant with student experiences. This supports the argument that students require an environment that enables them to conduct 'identity work' that can make sense of their inner-situation in a way that can lead them towards the greatest form of wellbeing they can secure in their present and future lives. In particular, this form of identity work can be understood in terms of the linked-capabilities that have been the subject of this paper and which, when functioning effectively, give a psychological framework for students to form reasons to value particular beings and doings.

4.   **Final Remarks: Implications for Theory and Policy**

In conclusion, student diversity is an important and welcome reality in urban education that presents some challenges for policymakers and practitioners. Firstly, the post-16 setting is an increasingly multicultural environment where a diverse range of attitudes, aspirations and values coexist. This challenges policymakers and practitioners to recognise the inherent plurality within the system, and find ways of supporting students that promotes their potential for individual agency. Secondly, trends in youth development show that young people are increasingly pursuing non-linear pathways, seeking greater diversity across and within their trajectories in life after school and well into adulthood. This challenges policymakers and practitioners

to support multidimensional development, where education serves to promote diversity and avoid constraining or coercing young people through particular pathways. In part, the aim of this paper was to highlight that education is inherently about human development and yet schools are constrained by a human-capital policy focus. These challenges are ill-suited to human-capital models of policy because they overlook what is involved in the process of human development, the task to which education is in thrall to. In both these respects, I hope this discussion has provided some grounds and suggestions for further research into how this might be achieved and the promise of a capability approach in this endeavour.

The central aims of this paper were to explore (i) what forms of student agency contribute to identity formation, (ii) what resources and opportunities these require, and (iii) how they might contribute to wellbeing. In doing so, it has drawn on the capability approach as a framework for connecting (i) with (ii) and (iii). By taking student agency as a focus, the discussion has looked at how identity practices reveal something about the capabilities of students to critically explore what they have reason to value in terms of what they want to be and do. These 'identity-capabilities' have been analysed as a series of linked-capabilities that interwork in increasingly auspicious ways. Indeed, an auxiliary aim of this paper has been to illustrate how a capability approach can operate with a 'thicker' conception of agency related to personal development. The outcome of this was to investigate the ways in which students explore multiple aspects of their identity simultaneously, often contesting expectations and responsibilities, and retreating from or resisting previous choices, in favour of experimenting with new-found freedoms to make iterative decisions – at one moment committing to one form of life and later giving up on that to consider a new form of life. These identity iterations, perhaps seen as failures according to a traditional linear model, can be understood as valuable expressions of capability and functioning, of a 'life being lived' in diverse and unique ways, a process that can only be housed in a capability-friendly institution that avoids the performative and depersonalising features which are incentivised by current policy models. Importantly, the differing capabilities of the student body to thrive under these conditions raises interesting questions that are open for further research, specifically considering the inequality of outcomes for students in an entirely non-academic sense: high-achieving students can leave school with little idea about what they value, and low achieving students can leave school with a strong sense of direction and purpose.[7]

As such, there is space here for further research into how the school environment and policy frameworks could be revised with a movement away from credentialisation and towards a human and student development model. Specifically, such a revision might serve to accommodate greater forms of freedom and opportunity for students to exercise agency, implementing some of the practical guidance included in this paper, so that they might form ideas about what they want to be and do, which would have lasting impacts on their wellbeing and prospects for social inclusion and economic achievement in the future. More particularly, it would ensure that we do not 'look without seeing' our students, as Ashavi Margolit warns us: 'overlooking' them by focusing on their achievements without 'paying attention' to their potential.

---

[7] Yet, these low achieving students are almost certainly more vulnerable to 'adapting preferences' based on the narrower range of pathways open to them.

Bibliography

1. Archer, L. Yamashita, H. (2003). 'Knowing their limits?' Identities, inequalities and inner-city school leaves' post-16 aspirations. Journal of Education Policy. Volume 18. Number 1. Pages 53-69.
2. Arnett, J. (2007), Emerging Adulthood: What Is It, and What Is It Good For? Child Development Perspectives, Volume. 1. Issue 2. Page 68-73
3. Assor, A., Kaplan, H., & Roth, G. (2002). Choice is good, but relevance is excellent: Autonomy-enhancing and suppressing teacher behaviours predicting students' engagement in schoolwork. British Journal of Educational Psychology. Volume 72. Pages 261–278
4. Astin, A. W. (1993). What matters in college? San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
5. Ball, S (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. Journal of Education Policy. 18:2. Pages 215-228
6. Ball, S. Macrae, S. Maguire, M. (1999). Young lives, diverse choices and imagined futures in an education and training market. International Journal of Inclusive Education. Volume 3, Number 3. Pages 195-224.
7. Ballet, J. Biggeri, M. Comim, F. (2011). Children's agency and the capability approach: A conceptual framework. In: Biggeri, M. Ballet, J. Comim, F. (Eds). Children and the Capability Approach. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Pages 22–45.
8. Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: the exercise of control. New York: W.H. Freeman
9. Biggeri, M., Ballet, J., and Comim, F. (Eds) (2011) Children and the Capability Approach. New York. Palgrave Macmillan.
10. Biggeri, M. Santi, M. (2012). The Missing Dimensions of Children's Well-being and Well-becoming in Education Systems: Capabilities and Philosophy for Children. Journal of Human Development and Capabilities. Volume 13. Issue 3. Pages 373-395.
11. Brown, A.D. (2015). Identities and Identity Work in Organisation. International Journal of Management Reviews. Volume 17. Issue 1. Pages 20-40.
12. Buckingham, D. (2008). Introducing Identity. In: Buckingham, D (eds). (2008). Youth, Identity, and Digital Media. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, Pages 1–24.
13. Castano, E. (2008). On the Perils of Glorifying the In-group: Intergroup Violence, In-group Glorification, and Moral Disengagement. Social and Personality Psychology Compass. 2:1. Pages 154-170.
14. Chiappero-Martinetti, E. Sabadash, A. (2010). Human capital and human capabilities: towards a theoretical integration. WorkAble: Making Capabilities Work. European Research Area Seventh Framework. European Commission
15. Comim, F. Teschl, M. (2006). Introduction: Capabilities and Identity. Journal of Economic Methodology. 13:3. Pages 293-298.
16. Côté, J.E. (1996). Sociological Perspectives of Identity Formation: the culture-identity link and identity capital. Journal of Adolescence. Volume 19. Pages 5417-428.
17. Côté, J.E. (2002). The role of identity capital in the transition to adulthood: the individualization thesis examined. Journal of youth studies. Volume 5. Pages 117–134.
18. Côté , J.E. (2006). "Emerging adulthood as an institutionalized moratorium: risks and benefits to identity formation". In Emerging adults in America: coming of age in the 21st century, Edited by: Arnett , J. J. and Tanner , J. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association
19. Côté, J. Bynner, J. (2008). Changes in transition to adulthood in the UK and Canada: the role of structure and agency in emerging adulthood. Journal of Youth Studies. Volume. 11. Number. 3. Pages 251-268
20. Coyle, D. (2010). The Talent Code. Arrow Books: London.
21. Crocker, D. Robeyns, I (2010). Capability and agency. In: Morris, C (Ed.). Amartya Sen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pages 60–90.
22. Csikszentmihalyi, M., Rathunde, K., & Whalen, S. (1993). Talented teenagers: A longitudinal study of their development. New York: Cambridge University Press
23. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). Finding Flow. USA: Basic Books.
24. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014). Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology. Springer: CA.
25. Deneulin, S. Shahani (Eds). An Introduction to the Human Development and Capability Approach. (2009). London. Earthscan, Routledge.

26. Dweck, C. S. (1999). Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality and development. Philadelphia: Psychology Press.

27. Erikson, E.H. (1968). Identity: Youth and Crisis. W.W. Norton & Co. USA.

28. Erikson, E.H. (1988). Youth: Fidelity and Diversity. Daedalus. Volume 117. Number 3. Pages1-24.

29. Frankfurt, H. (1988). Identification and Wholeheartedness. In: Schoeman, F (Ed). (1988) Responsibility, Character, and the Emotions. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

30. Flores Crespo. P. (2007). Situating Education in the Human Capabilities Approach. In: Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education. (Eds: Walker, M. Unterhalter, E.) (2007). New York, USA. Palgrave Macmillan.

31. Furlong, A., Woodman, D., Wyn, J. (2011). Changing times, changing perspectives: Reconciling 'transition' and 'cultural' perspectives on youth and young adulthood. Youth: Transitions, Cultures, Identities. Journal of Sociology. Issue 47. Number 4. Pages 355-370.

32. Gasper, D. (2002). Is Sen's Capability Approach an Adequate Basis for Considering Human Development? Review of Political Economy. Volume 14. Number 4. Pages 435-461

33. Giddens, A. (1994). Beyond left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics. Cambridge. Polity Press

34. Giri, A.K. (2000). Rethinking human well-being: a dialogue with Amartya Sen. Journal of International Development. Volume 12. Number 7. Pages 1003-1018.

35. Gore, C. (1997). Irreducibly Social Goods and the Informational Basis of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach. Journal of International Development. 9:2. Pages 235-250.

36. Hart, C. (2012). Aspirations, Education and Social Justice: Applying Sen and Bourdieu. London; Bloomsbury.

37. HESA (2016). Summary of UK Performance Indicator Tables: 2015/15. Higher Education Statistics Authority. Accessed March 2016 at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/pis/summary1415

38. Honerød Hoveid, M. Hoveid, H. (2009). Educational Practice and Development of Human Capabilities. Studies in Philosophy and Education. 28. Pages 461-472.

39. Hutta, J. S. (2009). Geographies of Geborgenheit: beyond feelings of safety and the fear of crime. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space. Volume 27. Pages 251-273

40. James, W. (1981). The Principles of Psychology, Volume 1. New York; Cosmo Classics.

41. Jancic (2014) Intersubjectivity and Recognition in Serbian Primary Schools: The Contribution of Paul Ricoeur to the Capability Approach. In: New Approaches towards the 'Good Life': Applications and Transformations of the Capability Approach. (Eds. Schäferm S. Otto, H-U.). Berlin: Barabara Budrich Publishers. Pages 17-32

42. Jensen, N.R. Michel, D. Kjeldsen, C.C. (2010). Human Capital, equity and capability – perhaps basic human capabilities. WorkAble: Making Capabilities Work. European Research Area Seventh Framework. European Commission.

43. Kirman, A. Teschl, M. (2004). On the emergence of economic identity.' Revue de Philosophie Economique. Volume 9. Pages 59–86.

44. Kirman, A. Teschl, M. (2006). Searching for Identity in the Capability Space. Journal of Economic Methodology. Volume 13. Number 3. Pages 299-325.

45. Lansdown, G. (2005). The evolving capacities of the child. In: Innocenti Insight, 1–82. Florence: Save the Children–UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

46. Liebel, M. (2014). From Evolving Capacities to Evolving Capabilities: Contextualising Children's Rights. In: Stoecklin, D. Bonvin, J-M (Eds). (2014). Children's Rights and the Capability Approach: Challenges and Prospects. Springer: Netherlands. Pages 97-84.

47. Livet, P. (2006) Identities, capabilities and revisions. Journal of Economic Methodology. Volume 13. Issue 3. Pages 327-348.

48. MacIntyre, A. (1985). After Virtue: A study in moral theory. London: Duckworth

49. Maguire, M. Ball, S. Macrae, S. (2001). Post-Adolescence, Dependence and the Refusal of Adulthood. Discourses: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education. Volume 22, Number 2. Pages 197-211.

50. Marcia, J (1980). Identity in Adolescence, in Handbook of Adolescent Psychology, (Ed: Adelson, J). New York. Wiley. Pages 159–187

51. Margolit, A. (1998). The Decent Society. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

52. Nussbaum, M. (1997). Cultivating Humanity. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

53. Nussbaum, M. (2011). Creating Capabilities. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

54. Perryman, J. (2006). Panoptic Performativity and school inspections regimes: disciplinary mechanisms and life under special measures. Journal of Education Policy. Volume 21. Issue 2. Pages 147-161.

55. Peters, R. S. (1966) Ethics and Education. London: Allen & Unwin.

56. Pintrich, P. R. (2000). An achievement goal theory perspective on issues in motivation terminology, theory, and research. Contemporary Educational Psychology. Volume 25. Pages 92–104.

57. Pratt, M.G. (2012). Rethinking identity construction processes in organizations: three questions to consider. In Schultz, M. Maguire. S. Langley, A. Tsoukas, H. (eds), Constructing Identity in and around Organizations. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 21–49.

58. Reeve, J., Bolt, E., & Cai, Y. (1999). Autonomy-supportive teachers: How they teach and motivate students. Journal of Educational Psychology. Volume 91. Pages 537–548.

59. Ricoeur, P. (1966). Freedom and Nature: the voluntary and the involuntary. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

60. Ricoeur, P. (2005). The Course of Recognition. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Harvard University Press.

61. Ricoeur, P. (2006) Capabilities and Rights. In: Deneulin, Séverine/Nepal, Mathias/Sagovsky, N. (eds). Transforming Unjust Structures. Dordrecht. Springer. Pages 17-26

62. Robeyns., I. (2005). The Capability Approach: a theoretical survey. Journal of Human Development, 6:1. Pages 93-117.

63. Robson, C. (2002). Real World Research. (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Blackwell

64. Saito, M. (2003) Amartya Sen's Capability Approach to Education: a critical exploration. Journal of Philosophy of Education. Volume 37, Issue 1. Pages. 17-34.

65. Sedmak, C. (2009) Coping Strategies and Epistemic Resilience. In Hamilton, C. Neummaier, O. Schweiger, G. Sedmak, C. (Eds.) (2009). Facing Tragedies. Perspectives on Social Ethics, Volume 2. Lit Verlag/University of Salzburg. Austria. Pages 23-45.

66. Sedmak, C. (2013). The Deep Practice of Human Dignity. Annual Rev. Bernie Clark Lecture. University of Notre Dame Centre for Social Concerns. Lecture: 26/09/2013

67. Sedmak, C. (2016a). Traditional Concerns, New Language? Reflections on Laudato Si. The Heythrop Journal. Pages 1-11 (electronic early view: accessed April 2016)

68. Sedmak, C. (2016b). "My Place"? Catholic Social Teaching and the Politics of Geborgenheit. In: Justice Education and the Politics of Childhood. Philosophy and Politics – Critical Explorations, Volume 1. Pages 235-250

69. Sen, A. (1999). Development as Freedom. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

70. Sen, A. (2002). Basic Education and Human Security. Paper delivered at Kolkata 2-4 January 2002.

71. Stefanou, C. R. Perencevich, K. C. DiCintio, M. Turner, J. C. (2004) Supporting Autonomy in the Classroom: Ways Teachers Encourage Student Decision Making and Ownership. Educational Psychologist. Volume 39. Issue 2. Pages 97-110

72. Stonjanov, K. (2010). Overcoming Social Pathologies in Education: On the Concept of Respect in R.S. Peters and Axel Honneth. Jounral of the Philosophy of Education. 43:1. Page 161-172

73. Sveningsson, S. Alvesson, M. (2003). Managing managerial identities: organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. Human Relations. Volume 56. Number 10. Pages 1163–1193.

74. The United Nations. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. Treaty Series 1577. Geneva: United Nations.

75. Tinto, V. (1998) 'Colleges as communities: taking research on student persistence seriously.' The Review of Higher Education. Volume 21. Issue 2. Pages 167-177

76. Van Gennep, A. (1960) The Rites of Passage. London: Routledge.

77. Walker, M. (2005). Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Education. Educational Action Research, Volume 13, Number 1. Pages 103-110

78. Walker, M. (Ed). (2010a). Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education. London. Palgrave.

79. Walker, M. Capabilities and Social Justice in Education. In: Otto, H-W, Ziegler (Eds). (2010b) Education, Welfare and the Capabilities Approach: A European Perspective. USA, Barbara Budrich

80. Williams, B. 'Persons, Character and Morality,' in Williams, B. (1981) Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1–19.
81. Wolf, A. (2011). Review of Vocational Education: The Wolf Report. London. DfE.
82. Wolff, J. De-Shalit, A. (2007). Disadvantage. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
83. Wright, H. R. (2012) Childcare, children and capability, Cambridge Journal of Education. Volume 42. Issue 3. Pages 409-424.
84. Wyn, J. Lantz, S., Harris, A. (2012). Beyond the 'transitions' metaphor. Family Relations and Young People. Journal of Sociology. Volume 48. Issue 1. Pages 3-22.
85. Wyn, J., Dwyer, P. (2002). New Patterns Of Youth Transition In Education. International Social Science Journal. 52:64. Pages 147-159.
86. Yates, S. Harris, A. Sabates, R. Staff, J. (2011). Early Occupational Aspirations and Fractured Transitions: A Study of Entry into 'NEET' Status in the UK. Journal of Social Policy. Volume 40, Issue 3. Pages 513-534.
87. Zarrett, J., Eccles, J. (2006). The Passage to Adulthood: Challenges of Late Adolescence. New Directions for Youth Development. Issue 111. Pages 13-28.
88. Zimmerman, B. (2006). Pragmatism and the Capability Approach: Challenges in Social Theory and Empirical Research. European Journal of Social Theory. Volume 9. Number 4. Pages 467-484.