

# **Using the capabilities approach for strengthening the sense of professionalism of teachers deeming themselves surveilled through a Panopticon**

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## **ABSTRACT**

According to some teachers practising their profession in some of the most advanced and privileged schools in widely different parts of South Africa, they are not allowed by their superiors to work (optimally) as professionals. As a first step towards searching for a solution to this problem, we consider whether Jeremy Bentham's and Foucault's Panopticon metaphor might not explain the problem in greater depth. Based on our conclusion that the metaphor, having been developed initially as a solution to the problem of improving supervision and surveillance in penitentiaries, does not seem to typify fully the situation that some teachers are experiencing in their schools, we attempt to address the problem by suggesting to school managements to draw on the capabilities theory of Nussbaum, Sen and others for strengthening teachers' sense of professionalism.

**Keywords:** Bentham, J., Foucault, Panoptics, Panopticon, Nussbaum, Sen, capabilities approach

## **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Teachers are professionals, being accorded that status by law (Republic of South Africa, 2000). One of the features of a true profession is the practitioner's right to practise his or her profession independently as an appropriately trained person with the necessary subject knowledge and composure based on his or her insight into the requirements of the profession, acting in accordance with the code of conduct of the professional council (Andrew & Crowther, 2013).

In view of the above, one would have expected teachers as professionals to be allowed to work independently without the constant feeling that another party is looking over their shoulder, always supervising their work, prescribing what should or should not be done, when and how to attend refresher courses, when to attend meetings at school, how to teach and conduct assessments, what clothing to wear, and so on.

The main thrust of this article is conceptual and theoretical, not empirical. It attempts to show that professional teachers in South Africa indeed experience a 'panopticon problem' and that this problem should be addressed. To ascertain whether appropriately qualified teachers in the most progressive and historically advantaged secondary schools in South Africa are being subjected to some of the undesirable practices as outlined above, we conducted 10 semi-structured interviews. These semi-structured interviews represent, however, only a preliminary first step towards providing a rationale for our overarching conceptual-theoretical discussion in the remainder of this article:

- We identified suburbs all over South Africa known for their progressiveness and affluence.
- We made a random selection of 10 schools in those areas, and then a selection of an experienced teacher at each of the schools, based on the following selection criteria:
  - The respondents should work and live in a suburb as described above.
  - They should all be fully trained professionally (i.e. possess a degree and a teacher education certificate or diploma).
  - Race, age, gender, sexual preference, background, training institution, school where they are working (public or private, etc.) are irrelevant.
  - They should teach in well-functioning schools that tend to do well in the matriculation examinations.
  - They should see themselves as highly motivated for their teaching job.
  - They should see themselves as self-regulated and self-driven people.

- They should see themselves as capable of working / teaching independently, professionally.
- We conducted semi-structured interviews with each, based on the following interview schedule:
  - How long have you been teaching?
  - Do you see yourself as a successful teacher? Please substantiate.
  - Do you see yourself as a professional who can work independently? Please substantiate.
  - Do you see yourself as a self-regulated and self-driven person? Please substantiate.
  - Are you being allowed by your superiors and the Department of Education to work as an independent professional? Please substantiate.
  - Are there any factors in your working environment that keep you from feeling fully in charge of your teaching work? Please substantiate.

We were particularly interested in the respondents' replies to the last two questions. Analysis of the 10 interviews that we conducted revealed that the entire group felt that although they were adequately trained, registered and experienced professionals, were motivated for their profession and were highly self-regulated and self-driven, they experienced that they were not being treated as true professionals and were constantly under some form of supervision, surveillance or prescription – despite the fact that they were practising their profession in schools that are progressive, modern, well-equipped and well- staffed with appropriately trained personnel.<sup>2</sup> We chose statements made by four of them<sup>3</sup> to illustrate the problem:

*2 – Teachers such as these may be an exception to the rule in a developing country such as South Africa where the majority of the approximately 360 000 currently practising teachers find themselves operating in less fortunate circumstances, such as in deep rural areas or in townships, without the necessary training for their profession. In such cases, teachers might be convinced that they are not receiving sufficient assistance from their superiors. This article is not about them, however; it is about those teachers who feel to be professionals in the fullest sense of the word and nevertheless being hemmed in by a system designed to meet the demands and requirements of a teacher corps that is as yet without the required training, self-regulatedness, self-drivenness and sense of professionalism.*

*3 – Note that the respondents work for nine different provincial Departments of Education; their responses are nevertheless quite similar. We chose these four to illustrate the problem.*

A teacher from the far north of the country (the town of Makhado) responded as follows:

...my [immediate] superior is very supportive and encourages independent thinking and independent presentation, but the Limpopo Province Department of Education is quite prescriptive in determining the format of tests, defining the types of writing to be taught, and so on. A restrictive factor in my working environment that keeps me from feeling fully in charge of my teaching work is the prescriptive fashion in which tests and tasks are structured. I realise that it is probably done to standardise performance but it feels restrictive. For example, in my situation it is impossible to allow learners sufficient time to write an 80 marks test, and the Department is adamant that a test should not be split up into two sittings or even comprise two separate tests.

Another respondent in the far west of the country (the town of Mafikeng) said:

The Department of Education does not tolerate any deviation from its rigid procedures; in my opinion, the Department should understand that deviation from rules is sometimes necessary in order to achieve better teaching outcomes. Some of our superiors and the Department, however, do not allow any such deviation. I have had several clashes with my superiors and the Department because of their rigidity with respect to 'teaching rules'. I also served under principals with very old-fashioned ideas and who resultantly refused any innovation in teaching and learning. I have to work with the intercom system permanently switched on and with cameras recording every move and word. We also have a registration system. What gets me is the fact that we have to sign for every piece of paper in the photocopy room as if we might steal the stuff. Also the principal who shows up for classroom visits unannounced. And parents who attack you when addressing their daughters about what they are wearing to school.

A respondent from the east of the country (the town of eMalahleni) said:

My superiors recognise my professionalism and hence allow me to teach classes at two universities in the vicinity (names of universities withheld). I nevertheless feel hemmed in as a professional because of the many prescriptions that we have to follow so slavishly. I sometimes ignore the prescriptions and the learners find my innovations very stimulating. However, I must be careful not to go too far. I also have a problem with the many prescriptions of principals, heads of department and of the Department of Education.

A respondent from the far south of the country (the city of Nelson Mandela Bay) responded as follows:

I can work independently; however, within teaching one is often not given full autonomy to do what you wish to do. Syllabus, teaching methodology and resources are all areas that can be highly regulated by various stakeholders (e.g. state, school, etc.). No, [my superiors and the Department of Education do not allow me to work as an independent professional]. Teaching has never been a true profession as far as I am concerned. We do not have full autonomy due to the fact that we are answerable to so many masters (e.g. parents, children, governing body, the State, community, SACE, etc.). With the advent of 1994, more rights and privileges have been taken away from us (e.g. discipline procedures) and the 'era of legal counsel' has had an impact on all teachers. I am not allowed to make independent decisions regardless of the fact that I am in middle management and in charge of a subject. Everything is monitored and regulated to the extent of micro-managing. The school system was and still is highly hierarchical in nature. Teachers, to an extent, are little more than blue collar workers with a thin veneer of white collar 'professionalism'.

In view of these responses we thought it timeous to examine the problem from a pedagogical-philosophical point of view and to come up with a possible solution. The remainder of this article reports on our findings on both issues. In the first part, we discuss the problem that even the best qualified teachers who see themselves as highly motivated, self-regulated and self-driven and working in some of the most affluent and progressive parts of South Africa are experiencing. We do this on the basis of Benthamian-Foucaultian Panopticon theory, which – we have to concede in advance – does not fully fit the situation of the teachers in question. The second part of the article is devoted to a discussion of what we would suggest to school and education department authorities as well as to teachers as a more appropriate approach in that, instead of focusing on closely supervising and monitoring the teachers under their management, they should concentrate rather more on developing the appropriate abilities in teachers so that they are able to function independently as professionals, and can be trusted to do so.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

We aligned ourselves with subjectivist ontology, an anti-positivist epistemology, and an interpretivist, critical methodology (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2005). We also attempted to outline some theoretical arguments about the ways in which the Benthamian-Foucaultian metaphor of policy Panoptics might be employed to aid our understanding of the situation of at least some of the teachers referred to above, namely as educators expected to be compliant, orderly, obedient and well-functioning individuals. For this purpose, we reflected (particularly in our analysis of the data) from a post-postfoundationalist orientation (van der

Walt 2015), which is closely related to a poststructuralist<sup>4</sup> stance. Since our mode of reasoning is predominantly inductive, our rationale for adopting a post-postfoundationalist / poststructuralist stance in this paper is threefold. Firstly, we opted for critical discourse analysis as the data analysis method. Secondly, we regarded Michel Foucault as the most important representative of the poststructuralist movement, and thirdly, we are convinced that there is no direct experience of education policy realities possible without critical interpretation. All interpretation is in some sense co-determined by the cultural and personal prejudices or prejudgements of both the participant and the researcher as interpreters.<sup>5</sup>

### **FROM THE PANOPTICON TO POLICY PANOPTICS**

Like all laws and policies, education laws and policies gradually become ‘...the Napoleonic character... who looms over everything with a single gaze which no detail, however minute, can escape...’ (Foucault, 1977: 334). Eventually, regardless of whether or not departmental officials, district officials, local education authorities, school-based managers or even classroom-based educators are watching, everyone within a particular education community may feel as if they are constantly under surveillance. Educators cannot act freely because they feel as if they are constantly being observed. People who are being observed act predictably; they tend to act in compliance with laws, policies and regulations and the opinions of their supervisors (Foucault, 1977).

In 1975, psychoanalyst Miller (1975) published an essay entitled *Le despotisme de l’utile: la machine panoptique de Jeremy Bentham*. In the same year, Foucault also published a discussion of Bentham’s ideas about the ‘Panopticon’ in his book entitled *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison* (Foucault, 1977). In this book, Foucault uses Bentham’s notion of the panoptic space as a metaphor for the oppressive use of information in a modern disciplinary society (Bentham, 2013). In his interpretation of Bentham’s illustration of the ‘Panopticon’, he claims that oppression in the information age (which today is much more intensely present and observable than in 1977) is no longer about physical domination and control, but rather about the potential for complete knowledge and observation. He further argues that a small number of people can, through appearance of supervision (surveillance), enforce laws most efficiently.

*4 – Here, we are in agreement with Lye (1997). He maintains that Poststructuralism is marked by a rejection of totalising, essentialist, foundationalist concepts. In Poststructuralism, subjects are culturally and discursively structured, created in interaction as situated, symbolic beings. Subjects are social in their very origin. They take their meaning, value and self-image from their (cultural) identity groups, from their activities in society, from their intimate relations, from*

*the multiple pools of common meanings and symbols and practices which they share with their sub-cultural groups and with their society as a larger unit (ibid.). Subjects are created through their cultural meanings and practices and they occupy various culturally-based sites of meaning - every site evoking a different configuration of the self (ibid.).*

5 – Also see the explanation tendered by Grassie (1997) as well as Klages' (2006) account of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*.

As Bentham originally envisaged it, the Panopticon was a central tower in a gaol that provided an observation post for a guard or supervisor. This observation post would be arranged in such a manner that those being observed will not know if and when they are being observed. The prisoners or subjects would be arranged around the central tower in their own cells. One wall is open to the view of the central tower, enabling an observer to monitor closely what the cell occupant is doing at any moment in time.

Foucault (1977) makes particular mention of the backlighting, pointing out that it renders every prison inmate individualised and continuously visible to the guardian. The guardian, however, remains obscured in the central tower. Observation is invisible or - as Edwards (2003: 98) suggests - 'unverifiable'. Large numbers of subjects can be observed at any time by one person. In his book *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault (1980: 148) also refers to the surveillance afforded by the Panopticon, calling it 'surveillance which would be both global and individualizing'. Consequently, it is the threat of being observed that is effective in gaining compliant behaviour from those in the cells (Edwards, 2003).

The panoptic mechanism is a powerful tool of individualisation that utilises an invisible gaze to exact compliance or other forms of behaviour from those subjected to the gaze. In the Panopticon, the feeling of always being the object of the gaze becomes internalised to the point of becoming a type of self-supervising mechanism. Foucault (1977: 155) captures this essential feature in his discussion of the operation of this gaze:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself.

The individualisation of the subject is, however, only partly achieved through this gaze. Edwards (2003) argues that it is the field of visibility, the gaze or the panoptic view itself that constructs the circumstances whereby individuals begin the process of acting on themselves. According to her, the gaze encourages subjects to participate in processes that ultimately

affect their own 'remaking', 'self-regulation', and 'self-improvement' (Edwards, 2003: 99). These are conscious and unconscious processes, experienced by the contemporary hybrid subject as individualisation, that is, the emergence of a new set of social relations of governance and 'novel functional and scalar distributions of responsibility' (Robertson & Dale, 2011: 27, 28).

Globally, a shift seems to have occurred, as far as public sector organisations such as schools are concerned, towards a framework of new ethical possibilities, new work roles and work relationships - a new moral economy. It involves the installation of a culture of competitive performativity which in turn involves the use of a combination of devolution, targets and incentives to bring about institutional redesign (of schools, for instance) (Maistry, 2014: 66). This process of transformation draws both on recent economic theory and various industrial practices 'linking the organisation and performance of schools to their institutional environments' (Chubb & Moe, 1990: 185) through the deployment of incentives and sanctions deriving from competition and performativity.

In the Panopticon, the feeling of always being the object of the gaze becomes internalised to the point of becoming a type of self-supervising mechanism (Foucault, 1980: 155). Power is visible yet impossible to verify. It instils a consciousness of constant visibility that assures the unconscious functioning of power by breaking down the reciprocity of seeing and being seen.

In the Panopticon, Bentham has structured visibility around a dominant all-seeing gaze. However, the gaze is just one form of power. Foucault (1980: 159) stated that Bentham's thought was, even for its time, archaic in the emphasis it places on the gaze while modern in the emphasis it places on strategies of power.

The Panopticon metaphor is obviously applicable only to a limited extent to the situation of the teachers that we have interviewed (see introductory section of this article). They did not literally feel themselves to be supervised in a gaol-like situation, but they nevertheless felt being unnecessarily supervised and dictated to, to such an extent that they were experiencing a loss of a sense of professionalism (see some of the responses during the interviews which we quoted in extenso above). The surveillance in their cases comes not only in the form of literal observation and supervision through, inter alia, announced and unannounced visits, telephone calls, etc. by departmental officials, journalists, parents, community leaders but also in a more tacit form, i.e. as policy-monitoring. Our conclusions above are based on remarks such as the following made by some of our respondents during the interviews:

- I have the feeling that, as a professional, I was subjected to too many administrative duties and red tape, tasks that should rather be performed by administrative staff.
- At the moment, there are many factors that keep me from feeling that I am fully in charge: managers who are not capable of managing, and resources that are non-existent (no paper, no copy facilities, no cartridges for printers, the e-mail system not working, and so on).
- I served under very old-fashioned principals who were sceptical about innovation.
- I feel really frustrated because of the intercom system that remains switched on all the time, cameras that check every move that you make in class, the check-in system of the school and unannounced visits by the principal to my class.

We reiterate that the foregoing discussion might only be applicable to a select group of South African teachers and in all probability not to the great majority still working without the necessary training and having to practise their profession in less than optimal circumstances. It is clear, however, as far as this select group of teachers is concerned, that they are experiencing a degree of frustration with what they deem to be unnecessary supervision and surveillance.

In the next section, we examine a possible solution to this problem, one which in our opinion might prove not only to be applicable to teachers who operate in more fortunate conditions and are themselves well-trained and professional, but also those still practising in less than optimal conditions, without the necessary training for their task. The solution that we discuss in the next section might be professionally valuable particularly for school managers.

### **A POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM: THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH**

We would suggest, as Cockerill (2014) has done for education in general,<sup>6</sup> that education managers at all levels begin considering the capabilities approach as a way of allowing the teachers for whom they are responsible to exercise their independence and knowledge as professionals. As Dang (2014) has shown in his study, the capabilities approach is increasingly being used as an evaluative framework for individual welfare and social arrangements. We discuss this approach in the remainder of this section under sub-headings embodying some of the key propositions of the capabilities approach.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, we reinterpret the capabilities theory in terms of how it can be employed by school management to promote and enhance the professionalism of the teachers practising in the school.

## **ESSENCE OF THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

Management should understand the capabilities approach as a normative or evaluative framework for the evaluation and assessment of the individual well-being of all concerned in the school, the social arrangements in the school, and of the design of policies and proposals about social change in school (Robeyns, 2005; Dang, 2014). Management should realise that this approach differs from a utility-based approach (such as Jeremy Bentham's principle of the individual's happiness or pleasure) or a resource-based approach (in terms of, for instance, income or wealth) in that it is a freedom-based capabilities approach (Sen, 2010; Bessant, 2014; Cockerill, 2014). The capabilities approach calls on management to focus on what teachers and all others involved in the school are able to do and to be, in a way informed by an intuitive idea of a life that is worthy of the dignity of each of them as a human being (Nussbaum, 2000).

### **How should management see the capabilities of teachers?**

Management should see capabilities as attributes of individuals, not of collectives such as communities in the first place (Sen, 2010). According to Cloud (1992), a person's capabilities and talents are part and parcel of his or her identity; s/he is responsible for developing and practising them.

Management should furthermore see capabilities as opportunities for teachers to think, choose and do (Sen, 2010). They should attempt to conceptualise the ends of well-being, justice and development in terms of people's capabilities to function, i.e. they should ask whether teachers have effective opportunities to undertake the actions and activities that they want to engage in, and to be whom they want to be. These 'beings' and 'doings', which Sen refers to as 'functionings', together constitute what makes a life valuable (Robeyns, 2005: 95; Dang, 2014: 461).

Management should concern itself with providing the teachers with opportunities to achieve various combinations of functionings that they can compare and judge against one another in terms of what they value. Promoting justice requires management to ensure that there is freedom for every teacher to identify, choose and pursue their objectives, namely the goods that they value (Bessant, 2014).

Management should take particular cognisance of the core principle of the capabilities approach, namely as Nussbaum (2000: 5; 2011: 18) sees it, 'of each person as end'. Management should therefore distinguish between the means and ends of well-being and

development; only the ends have intrinsic importance, whereas means are the instruments for reaching the goal of well-being, justice and development (Robeyns, 2005).

*6 – As can be seen from the work of Cockerill (2014: 17), the capabilities approach can be utilised in very comprehensive terms despite its ‘incomplete and multidimensional nature’ (Dang, 2014: 460-461), even to the extent of deriving an entire philosophy of education or approach to education from its basic tenets (including discussions about the creation of social capital and efforts to ensure that social justice is done). Our focus in this article is more on how school managers can avail themselves of its key tenets in helping the teachers in their care to become and remain true professionals.*

*7 – Our purpose is not to give a detailed and systematic exposition of the capabilities approach. Such expositions are already available (see, for example, Dang, 2014: 461-466).*

Management should furthermore be cognisant of the fact that the capabilities can be distinguished in terms of 10 categories: life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play and control over one’s environment (Nussbaum, 2011; Robeyns, 2005). As far as possible, freedom and space should be provided for each and every teacher to develop optimally in terms of these categories of ability. Capabilities are non-commensurable and irreducibly diverse; the dimensions of the value that different people attach to something are irreducible to one another. All of these capabilities should be developed to help teachers be and become emphatic and thoughtful professionals (Cockerill, 2014).

### **The freedom to choose**

Management should understand that the idea of capability is oriented towards freedom and opportunities. Capability denotes the actual ability of people to choose to live different kinds of lives within their reach, rather than confining attention only to what may be described as the culmination – or aftermath – of choice (Sen, 2010), i.e. that which has been achieved through choice. Management should allow each teacher the freedom and space to explore their own talents, and teachers should not merely accept others’ (management’s) definitions of their talents and capabilities. According to Cloud (1992), trying to live a (professional) life in a school in accordance with how others have defined one’s capabilities could lead to frustration. Each person should therefore be allowed to live in accordance with his or her true self in terms of talents and capabilities. To learn and to be allowed to work according to one’s own understanding of one’s capabilities is the beginning of competency and goal-directedness. To say that each teacher’s capabilities should be respected does not mean that teachers never need any guidance. Every person needs help occasionally to learn what would be acceptable

or not, what the limits of his or her independence are and what the consequences of certain behaviour would be.

The capabilities approach can be characterised by the normative claim that freedom is morally important. Freedom is required to achieve well-being, which is needed if a person is to have opportunities / capabilities to do and be what s/he values. As such, denying freedom or capacity is morally wrong (Nussbaum, 2011; Bessant, 2014). A focus on teachers' capabilities requires management to ask about the extent to which choices are available to the teacher in question, and whether s/he has had a genuine capability to achieve a valued functioning (in the school, for example). Management also needs to ask whether the teacher's aspirations (what s/he hoped for) were constrained by his or her circumstances (in the school and in their personal lives) (Bessant, 2014).

Management should constantly ask: What is needed for this teacher to be free to choose what s/he values? Once s/he has made a choice, a second order question arises: What does it take to achieve the 'beings and doings' that s/he values? In the context of evaluating a choice, the incommensurability of capabilities would mean that, in assessing results, management would tend to evaluate alternatives with non-commensurable alternatives or aspects (Sen, 2010: 240-241).

### **The freedom to choose what one values**

Bessant (2014) is convinced that a school management committed to a capabilities approach would enable teachers to exercise comprehensive freedom by helping them make informed choices and by assisting them to achieve what they choose. Individual advantage, according to the capabilities approach, is judged by a teacher's capability to do the things that s/he has reason to value (Sen, 2010). Without an adequate level of freedom, a teacher would be unable to exercise his or her agency effectively as a professional (Dang, 2014). His or her advantage in terms of opportunities is judged to be lower than that of another if s/he has less capability – i.e. less real opportunity – to achieve those things that s/he has reason to value, such as (among others) the freedom to choose. The focus here is on the freedom that a teacher has to do this in the classroom or school, or be that – things that s/he may value doing or being.

### **The freedom to choose as the exercise of moral competence**

Applying a capabilities approach as a school manager would require that teachers be supported to make informed choices. In exercising such freedom, the teachers would learn of the available alternatives, the consequences of each and the paths to achieve them. Recognising a teacher's capacity for moral competence is to recognise their capacity as

political agents. In such an environment, teachers would be more active professionals, have some say over the work that they are doing and not just be recipients of information, guidelines and criticism that others determine they need or ought to value (Gilbert, 2013). Cockerill (2014) is quite clear about what the ethical dimension of the capabilities approach might entail: management should assist teachers to flourish as engaged actors in the school, capable of making good judgements individually and also with others. The capabilities approach embodies an explicit ethical dimension when considering human development, defined by a shared humanity with important capabilities that have to be realised. It is underpinned by the notion of a basic shared human capacity of care, affiliation and deliberation which is of intrinsic value and which forms an essential part of the moral imperative that the school as a community should work to realise. Management should therefore create and ensure space in the school for the development among teachers of important capabilities such as practical (moral) reason and affiliation (Nussbaum, 2011: 39), to engage in various forms of social interaction in the school, and to imagine and 're-cognise' the situation of others. Teachers should be afforded the opportunity to do all of this through ethical enquiry, reflective practice and social action in the school and beyond its perimeters.

Cockerill (2014) furthermore emphasises the fact that teachers (in this case) should be allowed the space to become complete members of the school community who can think for themselves. They should become contributors to quality of life in the school by fostering a healthy, caring and cohesive school community. The capabilities approach has the normative undertone – the ethos - of attaching value to the enabling of both teachers and students to become responsible, caring individuals with a critical understanding of what a shared society requires to flourish (Cockerill, 2014).

Application of the capabilities approach would lead to more democratic schools (particularly if the capabilities approach is also followed in terms of the students) that provide opportunities to learn how to make well-judged ('phronetic') decisions and help build teacher and student self-identity as active citizens who are able and willing to exercise positive freedom (Bessant, 2014).

It is paternalistic, to take an argument of Bessant (2014) a step further, to suppose that management knows best how much freedom another person, in this case, a teacher, can and should enjoy in discharging his or her duties. Such an attitude constrains teachers' opportunities (capabilities) to grow and develop. If provided with good information and well-meant guidance, teachers can make their own well-informed decisions about matters that concern them and are sensitive to their experience. Managers should accept that teachers

possess the moral competence and cognitive capabilities to make rational choices. They should treat teachers in accordance with their needs and functionings (the things they can do) (Bessant, 2014).

The capability theory is a philosophy of which the major protagonists are economist Amartya Sen and legal expert Martha Nussbaum. It is a philosophy emphasising individual emancipation in the shape of personal choice and freedom. The concept of capability in this philosophy is not the narrow understanding associated with skills such as numeracy or literacy. Capabilities are defined as the functions, opportunities and freedoms people possess to pursue goals they value and to bring about change that is meaningful to them. In an age of criticism against globalisation (at least in its present form) and neo-liberal economics and the impact of these on education, scholars often grasp at the capability approach as an alternative approach (e.g. Rizvi & Lingard, 2010: 149; Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014: 90-91).

### **The freedom to choose according to personal wisdom**

Bessant (2014) offers a new concept in connection with the capabilities concept, namely phronesis, i.e. the capacity for good judgement or practical wisdom, a capacity of which, in the present context, managers should avail themselves. Phronesis enables a manager to make assessments and decisions about how to act to achieve basic social goods in ways which enable a good life and which shape the habitus of the individual. Phronesis entails the capacity to be context-sensitive, to know the individual teacher, the interests and dispositions of each, to know how to guide the teacher in choosing between viable alternatives and in working out how to pursue the ends they value. In practice, it means helping teachers establish how and why they might act to change aspects of their lives for the best and what action is required in specific situations to achieve that.

A 'phronetic management style or procedure' would entail asking questions such as:

- What are the intentions or values of the teachers under my supervision?
- Whose interests are to be served, who gains and who loses and how is power exercised?
- Is what is happening good or desirable (what values are being promoted)?
- What action is required? (Bessant, 2014: 150)

### **The duty of management to promote a sense of agency in teachers**

The term 'agency' in the capabilities approach refers to the ability of a teacher to achieve the goals that s/he values (Dang, 2014). Management should afford real opportunities to each

teacher to live the life that s/he values and hence chooses by attending to three sets of 'conversion factors', namely personal (physical conditions, age and gender), social (institutional, cultural and social norms) and environmental (including climate, pollution and facilities). The degree to which available resources in the school can be applied for the well-being of the teacher and of the school is dependent on how these conversion factors are managed (Dang, 2014). Management should focus on helping each teacher reach 'agency achievement', i.e. to be successful as a person in the pursuit of the totality of his or her considered goals and objectives (Dang, 2014: 464).

### **The social facet**

Individual human beings with their various plural identities, multiple applications and diverse associations are quintessentially social creatures with different types of societal interactions (Sen, 2010). The concern with teachers' ability to live the kind of lives they have reason to value brings in social influences both in terms of what they value (for example, taking part in the life of the school community) and what influences operate on their values (for example, the relevance of public reasoning in individual assessment). People in society think, choose or act under a particular influence in one way or another by the nature and working of the world around them. A person undertakes certain activities on the basis of some comprehension of his or her societal relations (Sen, 2010).

There has been criticism, according to Robeyns (2005), that the capabilities approach is too individualistic; it does not satisfactorily see individuals as part of their social environment as socially embedded and

connected to others. In response to this criticism, the capabilities approach should be interpreted, according to her, as not necessarily referring to atomised individuals but as individuals that are, essentially, also social beings. The capabilities mentioned above can also unfold in groups and social structures. The emphasis that the capabilities approach places on the capabilities of the individual can be ascribed to the method of explanatory individualism, i.e. the attempt to explain social phenomena in terms of individuals and their properties (Robeyns, 2005). The capabilities approach therefore recognises the social and environmental factors in a school environment that might affect teachers in their functioning. The capabilities approach takes into account the influence of societal structures and the concomitant constraints of such structures on the choices that individuals make to function with or within their capabilities (Robeyns, 2005). The options that a person has depend greatly on relations with others and on what others do and allow (Robeyns, 2005).

The overlapping capabilities of the different teachers in a school can also be the object of a consensus – a social contract – among people who otherwise have very different conceptions of the good to be striven for in the school (also see Nussbaum, 2011).

While taking the social and societal relationships at work into account, it should be kept in mind that the capabilities of each individual teacher have to be the focus, treating each as an end and none as a mere tool or the ends of others. The social goal of all involved should be understood in terms of getting everyone above this capability threshold (Nussbaum, 2000). This, in Nussbaum's (2000) opinion, yields a form of universalism that is sensitive to pluralism as well as to cultural difference. In this way, the critique of capabilities theory being too individualistic and negating the social environment is addressed.

Employing capabilities for the well-being of the school as organisation Nussbaum (2000) agrees with Sen that instead of asking about workers' (in this case, teachers') satisfactions or the resources they are able to command, managers have to ask about what they are actually able to do and to be. She is in agreement with Sen that the capabilities that management should strive for in a school should be understood to be valuable for each and every person; it is the capability of each that they should consider when they ask – for instance – how the school as an organisation is doing. According to Robeyns (2005), all evaluations and policies should focus on the quality of their lives (in this particular case, as professionals working in a pedagogical environment), and hence on removing obstacles in their lives so that they can have more (professional) freedom to live the kind of lives, and it can be added, to do the kind of work that they have reason to value. In short, determining whether an individual is living a good life and whether a society or institution such as a school is just, is evident from the extent to which people are free to choose between viable alternatives, and the degree to which they can pursue the ends they value. What matters is the whole of a person's life and not detached objects of convenience' such as incomes or commodities (Bessant, 2014: 144).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

School managers should appreciate the dangers of a policy of exerting too much surveillance and control, if only to understand the dangers of running a school in such a way that at least some of the teachers, namely those who are able to teach professionally and independently, might feel themselves to be working in a virtual Panopticon. Schools are pedagogical institutions and should be managed without the fear of omnipresent, inescapable surveillance and its ubiquitous confidante of reprisal.

School managers should also familiarise themselves with the different aspects and facets of the capabilities theory,<sup>8</sup> and apply those insights wherever possible. Most importantly, in view of the argument outlined above, they could, for instance, practise situational leadership: avail themselves of assessment procedures that would help them discriminate between teachers who are adequately trained, fully self-regulated, self-driven, highly motivated to meet the challenges of their profession and hence do not require to be micro-managed, and those teachers working in the school who have not yet reached such levels of professionalism and hence require more and more intensive guidance. The assessment procedures should be such that they would enable managers to distinguish where a specific individual finds him- or herself on the continuum between fully professional and completely unprofessional and inexperienced. In the case of those who are found to be full professionals or strongly on their way to become such, managers should apply what Sen (as summarised by Dang, 2014: 463-464) referred to as 'the process aspect of freedom', i.e. they should ask whether the teacher in question has sufficient freedom to participate in the decision-making processes, whether s/he is accorded the necessary decision autonomy and immunity against encroachment in their decision-making by their superiors.

*8 – The discussion above touched only on aspects of the capabilities approach that were relevant for the problem under discussion.*

*The capabilities approach is 'highly information intensive' and difficult to operationalise in practice (Dang, 2014: 481).*

School management should, finally, ensure that each teacher experiences well-being achievement and well-being freedom in terms of their personal well-being, and also agency achievement and agency freedom in terms of the goals that they have set for themselves as agents. Policies should be in place to act as driving force in helping achieve this, among others by removing obstacles to the development of each teacher's capabilities.

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