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INTRODUCTION

Framing Gender, Education and Empowerment

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ABSTRACT Discourse about gender and education is dominated by policy relating to girls' education globally that seeks to improve the situation of girls in low-income countries, increase educational opportunities, and positively influence international development. This perspective, while well intended, continues to rely on several shortcomings - namely, a conflation of the notions of sex and gender, prioritizing educational access over quality of the educational experience, and relying on under-theorized concepts such as empowerment. In general, scholarship has insufficiently addressed the relationship of sociocultural, political and economic contextual dynamics as they relate to the educational experience. This special issue includes a range of contextualized case studies of gender and education with the goal of breaking through these shortcomings, to reveal the story under and beyond the statistics and deepen our theoretical understanding. This introductory article presents an overview of the articles included herein, and discusses the notion of empowerment, and a number of other issues that could help us move forward to a richer knowledge base relating to gender and education internationally.

Introduction

With increasing public attention on the urgency of educating women and girls worldwide through popular sources such as Kristof & WuDunn's *Half the Sky* (2010), Mortenson's *Three Cups of Tea* (2007) and *Stones into Schools* (2010), and Oprah's Leadership Academy (Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls [n.d.]), we in the comparative and international education world are gratified and also somewhat concerned that the public might be satisfied with the simple formula: just build schools and girls will be empowered.

Beyond these well-known initiatives, most international education and development organizations and agencies have prioritized the education of girls to stimulate development through increasing educational opportunities. Of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), two are pertinent here: Goal 2, to achieve universal primary education, has an explicit focus on girls as well as boys; and Goal 3 is about promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, including eliminating gender disparities in education (United Nations, 2010). Of the six Education for All (EFA) goals, three prioritize gender:

– Ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, those in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free, and compulsory primary education of good quality.
– Achieve a 50% improvement in adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

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> – Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality. (World Bank, 2009)

In the last couple of decades the enrollment of girls at primary school levels has increased noticeably in many countries (net enrollment rate increased from 74 percent in 1990 to 79 percent in 2000) (UNESCO, 2003), and attention is being shifted by several institutions to girls catching up in post-primary education (Miske Witt & Associates, 2007; Lewis and Lockheed, 2006). Beyond priorities of increasing enrollment of girls and achieving gender parity, however, there are calls for attention to improving quality of education and expanding support in post-primary approaches to education. Concerns about quality relate to the types of experience girls and boys have in schools, and relate, for example, to appropriate curricular content that reinforces (or doesn't) gender and social inequalities. In addition, broader policy initiatives are intertwined with social arrangements such as marriage or family responsibilities, although those relationships are often not fully explored or made explicit.

Along with a shift of attention to formal education beyond primary schooling, and to quality of education within formal schools, a parallel area of work relating to women's empowerment addresses non-formal education and training and community development initiatives. This work is more explicitly linked to scholarship in the field of gender and development than to GNP-oriented international education policy pursued by multilateral development agencies and, as such, it has long challenged simplistic notions of education, empowerment and development. Education encompasses social and cultural processes within and outside school settings. This broader contextual focus, along with interest in transformative learning processes, is essential to empowerment (cf. Monkman, 1998). Empowerment is not simply about self-esteem or other individual characteristics, it is about developing capabilities that enable engagement in social change processes. Development that does not provide opportunities to challenge inequitable social relations (e.g. gender relations) remains a tool of social reproduction, not of social change (Moser, 1993; Kabeer, 1997).

With this special issue we move the discourse on the relationships between education, gender and development forward to more fully examine the conceptual underpinnings of issues such as empowerment. To get at these more complex (less quantitatively measurable) social processes, research that is contextualized, nuanced and grounded locally is important. It can give us insight into how gendered processes are implicated in educational goals, policies, agendas and practices.

The articles in this special issue examine gender and education dynamics as they relate to children and adults, students and teachers, and policy and practice, and to empowerment through local, contextualized case studies. We aim to challenge the field to move beyond sex parity (e.g. counting girls and boys) to gender (the social construction of masculinities and femininities, and gender relations), and to pay attention not just to women and girls, but to everyone who is part of the social fabric, to see how everyone is implicated in reproduction or change processes. We agree with Baily (herein), who calls for a situated reading of the social dynamics surrounding gender and empowerment.

This introductory article will (a) introduce each of the articles in this special issue, (b) examine the various approaches to exploring empowerment processes, and (c) discuss several of the issues underpinning work in gender and education that are pertinent to studies such as those included herein.

Overview of the Case Studies

The articles in this special issue address a variety of issues and contexts relating to girls and women, using a gender lens. Geographically, the studies included here are situated in an Afghan diasporic community in Pakistan, and in Bangladesh, China, India, Morocco, Sudan, South Africa and Uganda. Some focus on particular policies as context, some are situated in projects or programs, while others examine social phenomena as contextual influences. All the studies are situated in marginalized contexts (defined materially as impoverished, and structurally as having inequitable policies or social norms), and they examine empowerment processes through a variety of theoretical lenses.

The first three articles focus most specifically on empowerment capabilities. Exploring the 'global institutionalism of education' and its reliance on and gender equality in developing countries, Holmarsdottir et al, in 'The Dialectic between Global Gender Goals and Local Empowerment: Girls' Education in Southern Sudan and South Africa', describe the construction of meaning and power in education policy and the hidden biases that continue to marginalize women and girls. Even though formal education is seen as an opportunity beyond traditional and limited lifestyles, as well as a source of hopefulness and self-improvement for girls and their communities, the authors' interviews with students, teachers and government officials describe a disconnect between educational goals and practice. The development rhetoric (of EFA, MDGs, etc.) which suggests that attending school creates new opportunities for financial independence and self-esteem for girls in Southern Sudan is shown to be in conflict with reality, given a school context where sexual abuse and exploitation persist, even if in a different guise from the 'sugar daddy trap' girls encounter outside school. South Africa, by contrast, has mostly achieved gender parity in school attendance, but students note that classroom exploration of gender issues – when there is any – is divorced from their lives outside the classroom, and provides no tools for them to work against dominant cultural roles that subjugate and separate women. The authors suggest that empowerment should not be conceptualized as a given outcome of education, but instead they advocate for a nuanced picture of empowerment beyond a simple numerical analysis.

DeJaeghere & Lee, in 'What Matters for Marginalized Girls and Boys in Bangladesh: A Capabilities Approach for Understanding Educational Well-being and Empowerment', explore the achievement of gender parity in Bangladeshi education – and the continuing inequalities that persist beneath the surface of numerical data. By asking school-aged children questions concerning material conditions (transportation, access to food and water) and social conditions (safety, beliefs about gender and education) of their daily lives, the authors found that safety, family encouragement and relevance of educational content were all crucial and often lacking in the educational experiences of both boys and girls. As currently administered, education in fact puts girls in increasingly precarious and physically vulnerable positions without providing relevant or achievable alternatives for them in their families or wider society. The authors argue that because gender inequality is entrenched in family and social life, education cannot positively affect well-being (for girls in particular) unless the social and material factors that shape its content and delivery are addressed – individual agency alone is not sufficient. As currently administered, education in fact puts girls in increasingly precarious and vulnerable positions without providing relevant or achievable alternatives for them in their families or in wider society.

Seeberg, in 'Schooling, Jobbing, Marrying, What's a Girl to Do to Make Life Better?', explores how rural girls in China conceptualize their experience of agency and well-being while living under severely constrained and gendered socio-economic and cultural arrangements. Her ethnographic case study reveals what a group of young Chinese women value related to their education, and how they value it, despite its brevity and poor quality. Their narratives show that they continued to choose education despite difficult situations, spoke up for themselves, and were making strategic life choices based on the skills gained through their education. They re-gendered their position within the family and the community. She argues that an opportunity structure is embedded in *how* and *what* the girls value in their world related to education, and that understanding and strengthening the fabric of this embedded opportunity structure can lay the foundation for an effective educational development policy.

The next four articles' theoretical basis is focused around issues of social justice and empowerment processes. Molyneaux's article, 'Uganda's Universal Secondary Education policy and its Effect on 'Empowered' Women: How Reduced Income and Moonlighting Activities Differentially Impact Male and Female Teachers', focuses on how changes in educational policy affect men and women teachers, disadvantaging both, but in different ways. Uganda's 2007 universal secondary education (USE) policy seeks to increase poor children's access to secondary schooling and is promoted as an empowerment and equity policy. Due to financially constraining policies, teachers in USE schools experience reduced incomes and so seek opportunities to supplement their salaries. Women teachers have to balance domestic responsibilities, while male teachers are more mobile and therefore available for moonlighting opportunities; women's options for supplemental income are therefore limited and less lucrative. Women teachers tend to be more

present in schools, while male teachers were noticeably absent from school. Not only are teachers' experiences within this work (and policy) context gendered in inequitable ways, children's educations are also affected. With more male teachers teaching sciences and math, but absent from school more frequently than women teachers, student are not getting the instruction they are due in these subjects. Unintended consequences of policy change, in context, are important to fully understand.

In 'Education of Hazara Girls in the Diaspora: Education as Empowerment and an Agent of Change', Changezi & Biseth explore educational opportunities available to Hazara Afghanis who have migrated to Pakistan. In an ethnographic study of students, teachers and family members in the Pakistani city of Quetta, home to a large Hazara refugee and immigrant community, open-access non-age-graded and community-run educational opportunities for girls are contrasted with the limited government-run options in their homeland in Afghanistan where this ethnic population is culturally excluded. The authors examine the social and practical roles available to educated girls in their new urban environment, as well as within the larger Hazara community. They argue that the community in the diaspora, as a new life space, has made girls' education more accessible, and can be seen as an agent of change for both the individual and the Hazaras as a group.

Shah also uses the concept of space – a residential school – to reveal how girls and women develop agency and empowerment. In 'Girls' Education and Discursive Spaces for Empowerment: Perspectives from Rural India', she looks at how empowerment is manifested at one school run through the Indian governmental project, the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyala (KGBV) Program in Gujarat. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, Shah shows how one KGBV school provides a unique space that fosters intrinsic empowerment in young female students supported by teachers who practice a caring pedagogy. Shah suggests that teachers and administrators need significant structural support and policies that foster their development and engagement as critical and empowering educators, not just in theory, but also in practice. Barriers include difficulty in striking a balance between a school micro-environment that fosters empowerment and a macro-environment steeped in patriarchal traditions.

Also situated in India, Baily's study, 'Speaking Up – Contextualizing Women's Voices and Gatekeepers' Reactions in Promoting Women's Empowerment in Rural India', focuses on the impact that a women's self-help empowerment program has had on the social environment, specifically on the men in the rural community. Her case study uses community-member narratives to decipher the perceptions of community gatekeepers and the major changes that took place during a seven-year process. Three themes emerged from women and men's testimonies. First, Baily notes that men in the community perceived the women as powerful when they are collectively organized, revealing both the men's failure to recognize women's individual power and also the women's advances in perceived power due to working together. Second, Baily found that women's ability to approach and speak to men about serious issues was significantly improved. Lastly, men and women acknowledged women's new-found ability to speak with confidence as an added value to the community. The process that Baily documents appears to be a 'cycle of change' of learning, knowledge and power which has impacted both the women and men in this rural Indian community.

The final two studies broaden our empowerment focus beyond educational programs to informal learning processes in social networks (Maslak), and institutional approaches to reform (Muskin et al). Maslak, in her article 'Education, Employment and Empowerment: The Case of a Young Woman in Northwestern China', examines the ways in which informal education shapes the life of one young Muslim woman, and its impact on her career goals. The author seeks to understand the relationships among education, work and empowerment in this case study. While the fact of having received some formal education appears to have supported this young woman in her transition into employment in the service sector, many of the skills that she needed in order to leave her rural home and find a job in the service sector were learned informally through participation in social networks. On the basis of her findings, Maslak calls for educational policies that couple both formal and informal education as complementary and necessary.

Muskin et al, in 'Empowered to Empower: A Civil Society–Government Partnership to Increase Girls' Junior Secondary School Outcomes in Morocco', explore bottom-up, 'homegrown' reform in the Moroccan Quality Girls' Dormitories (*Dar Taliba de Qualité*, or DTQ) initiative and its positive

effects on female dormitory residents' academic and social achievements. Creating quality support for rural students to receive higher-quality urban education was made possible by an iterative process that built on the DTQ experience in each individual dorm, not the through imposition of a template methodology. The authors also note that the success of the program required collaboration and redistribution of authority at multiple points, from national agency to dormitory resident advisor. They argue that programs like DTQ empower multiple actors, including students, partner organizations, and parents carefully weighing the academic options for their children.

These nine case studies have in common an acknowledgment – directly or indirectly – that dominant and often hidden structures of control and power against which empowerment is being negotiated can be challenged and reframed as assets for beneficial change. The following section examines the various notions of empowerment used in these nine studies.

Empowerment

The term *empowerment* is a contested concept, one that suffers from general usage that is often not theoretically grounded. For example, it is often used as a synonym for self-esteem or self-confidence, or is assumed to be a direct result of schooling. These superficial uses of the term undermine its ability to expose social processes that relate to gender equity and the processes of becoming empowered. The case studies herein rely on a range of theoretical frameworks relating to empowerment, gender and education. Several take up the capability approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007), while others rely on Stromquist's (1995, 2002) four-part model, or Rowland's (1995, 1997) focus on four different types of power, and a three-layered model of personal, relational and collective empowerment processes. One article uses Cattaneo & Chapman's (2010) Empowerment Process Model which proposes a lens that places efficacy, knowledge and competence at the center of analysis with their connections to goals and actions. Finally, the last article engages in an empowerment model that is more institutionally focused, Rocha's (1997) *ladder of empowerment* that reflects relations between NGOs and project participants. In the following sub-sections, I explore the ways in which these multiple approaches are used by the authors.

Stromquist's Model of Empowerment

Empowerment, as used in nearly all of the articles, acknowledges the importance of the individual and a collective or social element. Stromquist and Rowlands both explicitly state that empowerment requires both individual and collective processes. Stromquist's (1995, 2002) model of empowerment consists of four necessary components. The four dimensions are:

– the cognitive (critical understanding of one's reality)
– the psychological (feeling of self-esteem)
– the political (awareness of power inequalities and the ability to organize and mobilize), and
– the economic (capacity to generate independent income). (Stromquist, 2002, p. 23)

The cognitive dimension relates to emancipatory knowledge (e.g. sex education, legal rights) and to the development of a critical understanding of how one's life is situated in a broader sociopolitical context. The political dimension points to interactional processes regarding decision-making, and to other processes that pertain to the ability to assert oneself in engaging in collective or group processes, and can include making household decisions collectively or in partnership with one's spouse, inserting one's ideas and opinions in community governance processes, voting, and leading social initiatives or groups. The economic dimension has to do with acquiring and controlling economic resources, not only one's ability to earn money, but also the ability to control how it is distributed, invested or spent. In addition to the four-part model, Stromquist (1995, 2002), like Rowlands (1997), asserts that empowerment is a *process*.

Baily (herein) relies on Stromquist's four dimensions, uses a process orientation, and points to the importance of context. Working with women who participated in Swashakti, an Indian program that focuses on income generation and increasing activism in the community through increased knowledge, she begins with the personal dimension of women's empowerment, and

juxtaposes that with the perceptions and impressions of people with whom the women participants interact – potential gatekeepers (Connell, 2005) – in their lives, thus providing a sense of the social context within which women are engaging in empowerment processes. The importance of this social context, or 'social climate', as she refers to it (citing Sen, 1999), enables us to understand the way that environments condition possibilities.

Holmarsdottir et al's study (herein) in the Sudan and South Africa begins with examining the personal dimension of empowerment; they find that 'the stories of all the girls represent an opportunity to develop a stronger self-image not only by understanding their own situation, but also by reflecting on the plight of others'. In examining the linkages between their individual and collective processes, they link this personal empowerment process to two forms of power: *power to* and *power with* (Rowlands, 1997), by recognizing that the girls 'as individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact than each could have had alone'.

Shah (herein) also approaches her study in relation to Stromquist's framework, but also seeks to 'reassess Stromquist's ([citations omitted]) argument that transformative education is best fostered and analyzed outside of the formal schools and with adult women', due in part to the recognized social reproduction function of formal schooling. She refers to Stromquist's contention that change is more possible in adult non-formal education settings because they are not bound by the institutionalized and reproductive social conventions found in schools, because women have a lifetime of oppressive experience to draw on, and because adult women are positioned particularly well as a change agent for gender equity as they raise the next generation of children. Shah's research explores the salience of space in facilitating positive processes - namely, empowerment processes in a public residential secondary school, where she identifies 'instrumental' and 'intrinsic' forms of empowerment.

Rowlands' Model of Empowerment

Like Stromquist, Rowlands (1995, 1997) also acknowledges the dialectical and shifting relationships between the individual and the larger social context. As cited by Molyneaux (herein), 'while individual empowerment is one ingredient in achieving empowerment, at the collective and institutional levels, concentration on individuals alone is not enough. Changes are needed in the collective abilities of individuals to take charge of identifying and meeting their own needs – as households, communities, organizations, institutions, and societies' (Rowlands, 1995, p. 106).

In addition, several of the authors herein rely on Rowlands' typology of different forms of power: *power within*, *power to*, *power with*, and *power over*. *Power over* is a coercive form of power that is disempowering for those it is used against, including as it is used by many development agencies (Rowlands, 1997). *Power within*, *power to* and *power with*, however, can be seen as manifestations of a more empowering process. Holmarsdottir et al, for example, focus on the intersection of *power over*, as exerted by federal school policy, with *power with* and *power to*, as embedded in individual and collective action.

In addition to her work in articulating the four types of power as core elements related to (dis)empowerment, Rowlands (1995, 1997) suggests three dimensions of empowerment:

> – Personal: where empowerment is about developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the effects of internalised oppression.
> – Close relationships: where empowerment is about developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of the relationship and decisions made within it.
> – Collective: where individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact than each could have had alone. This includes involvement in political structures, but might also cover collective action based on cooperation rather than competition. Collective action may be locally focused – for example, at village or neighbourhood level – or institutional, such as national networks or the United Nations. (Rowlands, 1995, pp. 103; 1997, p. 14)

The personal, relational and collective dimensions focus our attention on varying kinds of spaces and actions that contribute to empowerment. Through this framework, Changezi & Biseth examine the context of a dramatically different way of life for Hazara migrants as they remember life in Afghanistan, and become integrated in their community in Pakistan. Education is seen as a catalyst for challenging traditional family and social roles, cultivating self-esteem, reorganizing

values in marriage prospects, and promoting independence, within an environment more readily accepting of these changes than their communities in Afghanistan.

In her study, Molyneaux examines the situatedness of Ugandan women teachers' work conditions and how they navigate in personal, relational and collective spaces to position themselves as best they can in light of the policy changes that constrain their economic well-being. Baily's study can also be interpreted through this framework, in that the Indian women in the study and their interactions with men and community members are represented in these three dimensions of social process. Rowlands (1997) represents the three dimensions as overlapping (see Figure 1).

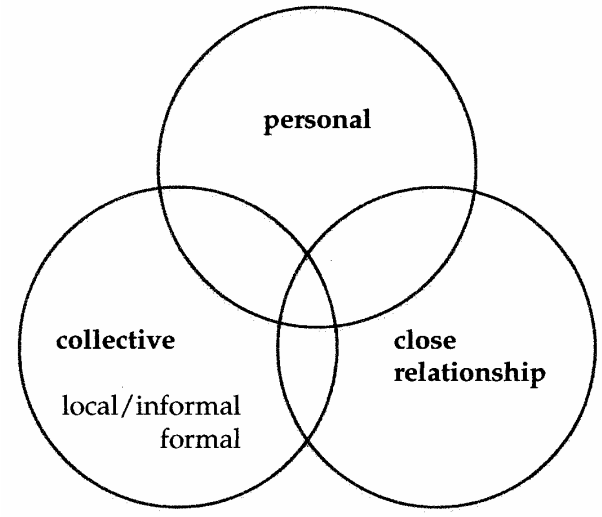

Figure 1. Rowlands' Three Dimensions of Empowerment.
Source: Rowlands, 1997, p. 14.

At the core of Rowland's work is the notion of power and how it is negotiated and exercised in these three spaces – personal, relational and collective – with a variety of types of relationships (manifested by the processes of power over, within, to and with). These notions, overlaid on Stromquist's four-part model, would suggest that these complex sets of processes and contexts are integral to economic, political, cognitive and personal empowerment. In moving now to the capability approach, and its relationship to empowerment, we see a different type of language in articulating these social processes.

The Capabilities Approach to Empowerment

Citing Sen (2009), DeJaeghere & Lee (herein) characterize the capabilities approach as one that 'emphasizes a person's capability to lead the kind of life she values not only by the culmination of alternatives that she ends up with, but by the processes of making choices involved, or one's agency freedom, to choose alternatives within her ability and context' (herein). This work blends ideas of justice and agency with poverty reduction, highlights real possibilities for quality-of-life choices, recognizes contextual influences that condition possibilities, and shifts our focus toward recognizing the ways in which people choose to do or be what they value in life, in relationship to the opportunities and constraints they may encounter. Therefore, this approach requires acknowledging the particularities in individual lives and life contexts, and not assuming that everyone has the same values, priorities or conditions within which they live.

Nussbaum (2000, 2003, 2004) has provided a gender dimension to this work and points out that the concept of capabilities is about allowing room for choice, by saying 'that there is a big difference between pushing people into functioning in ways you consider valuable and leaving the

choice up to them' (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 40, as cited by Holmarsdottir et al, herein). Unterhalter (2005a) points out that gender equality 'entails reflecting critically on the causes and consequences of these gendered forms of power ... and transforming those [causes and consequences] that do not provide women and men with lives they have reason to value' (p. 112, as cited by Baily, herein).

Unterhalter and others (see chapters in Walker & Unterhalter, 2007) have applied this work to the field of education. Using a capability approach enables the authors (herein) to articulate 'both the learning processes and the social value of education' (Unterhalter, 2009, p. 217). The approach requires looking beyond achievements and locating the real freedoms or opportunities an individual has to choose and achieve what she values. The individual's experience of the functioning or the activity, as well as the developing capabilities and individual or socio-political outcomes, is central to the framework and is employed in evaluating education for policy purposes.

DeJaeghere & Lee (herein) use the capabilities approach to understand 'what girls and boys in a rural district in Bangladesh reason to affect their educational well-being and empowerment'. They use Sen's (1995, 1999) capabilities approach to evaluate injustices or inequalities, and call on Kabeer's (1999, 2001) work which focuses on gendered inequalities. They bring in Sharma's (2008) argument that 'girls' and women's subjectivities and agency cannot be assumed as a singular and shared identity; rather there are various assemblages of empowerment revealing multiple tensions in its local manifestations' (DeJaeghere & Lee, herein). Hence, their study extends a conceptual issue in the capabilities approach that contends that supportive relations is a valued functioning, yet one circumscribed by social conditions (Sen, 1999, 2009; Unterhalter, 2005b).

Seeberg (herein) uses Sen's capabilities approach of empowerment, with particular attention to the concepts of *wellbeing, agency freedom* and *achievement of various valued lifestyles*, as defined by rural girls in China. Though it is clear that they function within a macro-context of social and cultural exclusion, the young women give evidence of their sense of agency and sense of freedom to take risks that promote social change. She sees empowerment 'as an individual process with collective consequences, so that the concept of opportunity structure is embedded within it rather than being a measurable proxy for it' (Seeberg, herein). Seeberg uses Stromquist (1995), Kabeer (1999), Nussbaum (2004) and Unterhalter (2007) to guide her analytical framework by granting further descriptive elements to Sen's model that relate specifically to educational empowerment. Like other articles herein, she argues that 'local situatedness' is integral to understanding and enabling empowerment, and must be considered in policy design if it is to be effective.

Holmarsdottir et al (herein) use the capability approach, along with other notions of power and ideas about empowerment to examine the rhetoric of a gender equity program in relationship to realities on the ground. 'The real life stories told by the students and teachers in these three case studies [one in Sudan, two in South Africa] reveal another picture [than that suggested in the policy and program rhetoric] where few resources or attention are provided in terms of changing gender insensitive practices in school or in the community' (Holmarsdottir et al, herein). Manifestations of opposing or oppressive power ('power over') at both federal policy and school levels in Sudan and South Africa conflict with girls' personal aspirations and achievements, thus challenging the emergence of 'power to' and 'power with' (Rowlands, 1995, 1997). The authors see these forms of power as related to agency, wanting a group to achieve the full extent of its 'capabilities' (cf. Sen, 1999). They argue that functional capability is linked with Rowlands' (1997) various forms of power. The path from access to education to empowerment, they demonstrate, is neither direct nor automatic, but passes through processes that are internally and externally defined and valued.

Informal and Institutional Sites for Empowerment

In addition to the models discussed above, two articles rely on other conceptualizations of empowerment. In Maslak's research (herein), education – formal and informal – is explored as a path to empowerment, which is defined by Deshmukh-Ranadive (2005) as a 'process which enhances the ability of disadvantaged individuals or groups to challenge and change existing power relationships that place them in the subordinate economic, social and political positions' (Deshmukh-Ranadive, 2005, p. 28, as cited by Maslak, herein). Maslak also uses Cattaneo & Chapman's (2010) Empowerment Process Model, which highlights an individual's attributes, and 'guides our understanding of how these attributes relate to work and economic empowerment'

(Maslak, herein). Using Sen's (1989) argument that gainful employment can dramatically improve the condition of women's lives, thereby enabling empowerment, Maslak explores the role that formal and informal education play in the working life of one young woman in rural China. While formal schooling has some value, informal learning that takes place within social networks expands and enhances a young woman's capability to work in the service industry.

Muskin et al (herein) repurpose McClelland (1975) and Woolcock (1998) to use a concept of personal empowerment that radiates from introverted to extroverted, individual to communal. They strive to draw attention not just to those who seek to acquire power, but to those who hold power – and the relationships, obligations and negotiations that cause power to be exercised or transferred. Rocha's (1997) *ladder of empowerment* is used for this purpose; it is a typology of the ways that empowerment is manifested in the development projects that she analyzed. Because her 'ladder' takes the NGO and their projects as her primary focus, she foregrounds the relationships between organizations and the participants, and the priorities for where change is expected to occur – in the individual and/or the collective (see Table 1). Rocha's first two types of empowerment – *atomistic individual* and *embedded individual* – are both focused on individuals, and are thus reflective of Rowlands' *power within* and Stromquist's *personal* dimension of empowerment. Her fifth type, *political*, is collective, as its characteristics include political action toward institutional change (e.g. legislative change), and expanding access to group resources. Rocha's *political* type is not the same as Stromquist's *political* dimension, however; the latter is less about legislative change (although it can include that), and is more about the ways that power is exercised in interactions with others (*political* with a small *p*, if you will). Rocha's third and fourth types – *mediated* and *socio-political* – reflect both individual and collective loci of change.

Type of empowerment	Locus of change	Characteristics: goals, methods and experiences of power
Atomistic individual	Individual	Personal satisfaction and coping ability are the goals, gained through methods focused on therapy, daily living skills, self-help. Being strengthened by support from a helping professional or agency is the typical power experience.
Embedded individual	Individual	Similar to the atomistic individual model, but emphasis is on developing competence in negotiating one's surrounding environment. Power experiences include better understanding of mediating systems and meaningful participation
Mediated	Individual and collective	Goal is to provide the information and knowledge to support individual or collective decision-making and action; nature of the relationship between experts and clients/consumers determines the power experience. Two types – prevention or rights – assume dependence or agency respectively.
Socio-political	Individual and collective	Transformative populism. Change through stages of collaborative grassroots political action to alter social, political or economic relations. Involves raising critical awareness of people's relationship to structures of power and collective action upon these structures.
Political	Collective	Political action directed toward institutional change such as legislative change. Involves expanded access to group resources.

Table I. Rocha's Types of Empowerment (adapted from Rocha, 1997).

Mediated empowerment projects position the NGO as a key actor in mediating the processes by which individuals and collectives gain access to knowledge and resources. Rocha differentiates two types of mediated empowerment, one which reflects dependency, and the other which assumes agency. Power, in this mediated form of social relations, is embedded in the type of relationship that development organizations have with individual participants and their communities. *Socio-political* empowerment is represented through change that takes places through collaborative grassroots political action to alter social, political, or economic relations (Rocha, 1997; also see Monkman et al, 2007). Muskin et al argue that empowerment is both a top-down and a bottom-up

process that can be described as a corkscrew operation that moves both in a circular way and vertically among individuals and between individuals and collectivities.

Taken together, the case studies in this special issue engage the concept of empowerment through one of the several models that situate 'power' as a key theme, and analyze how power is negotiated, exerted and engaged by a variety of actors in diverse settings. Others relied on the capabilities approach, which speaks less explicitly about power, and instead examines some of the more nuanced and contextualized processes, and foregrounds the experience of people in their own life contexts. Two of the several important contributions from these studies involve the recognition of the functional choices people value in determining their futures, and the ways in which power, through agency, can be engaged for positive ends.

Overall, there are several points that the studies herein agree on, regarding empowerment. They include:

- Education does not automatically or simplistically result in empowerment.
- Empowerment is a process; it is not a linear process, direct or automatic.
- Context matters; decontextualized numerical data, although useful in revealing patterns and trends, are inadequate for revealing the deeper and nuanced nature of empowerment processes.
- Individual empowerment is not enough; collective engagement is also necessary.
- Empowerment of girls and women is not just about them, but perforce involves boys and men in social change processes that implicate whole communities.
- It is important to consider education beyond formal schooling: informal interactional processes and multi-layered policy are also implicated.

Gender and Education: where we go from here

Alongside the variety of approaches to, and discourses about, empowerment, there are also a variety of divergent ways of conceptualizing other relevant concepts in the field of gender and education. For example, with respect especially to girls' education policy and practice, we can identify several issues that continue to constrain our progress:

- The terms *sex* and *gender* are often used interchangeably, and rarely imply a rich notion of gender; this confusion about social categories – sex – and social processes – gender – means that too much of the work related to girls' education (especially) remains focused on counting girls in school and does not adequately recognize the more complex gendered social processes that limit policy and practice.
- We see a continuing prioritizing of educational *access* despite more than a decade of calls to increase the amount of attention paid to educational *quality*. Although we have made some gains in this direction, we continue to struggle with incorporating a rich and useful notion of quality. (That is, *quality* sometimes gets reduced to easily measurable variables which fail to engage the more complex issues of quality.)
- *Assessment* strategies that reduce complex societal dynamics to decontextualized proxy indicators discourage recognition of the relationship of sociocultural, political and economic contextual dynamics to educational experience, and encourage the use of theoretically weak notions of empowerment, gender and education.

To attempt to counter these trends, all of the studies in this special issue are contextually grounded, and seek to understand the complexities of social phenomena that include the social construction of gender and the dynamics related to gendered social relations; by 'emphasiz[ing] a person's capability to lead the kind of life she values…' (DeJaeghere & Lee, herein, citing Sen, 2009), they acknowledge that there is diversity within groups and across contexts that challenges our ability to determine a priori what, for example, 'quality' looks like, or how best to promote gender-equitable educational experience.

I will end this introductory article with a brief critique of one additional issue that four of the articles herein mentioned, concerning western notions of development, gender, education, and empowerment. International development has long been critiqued as an agenda imposed by the West on others (Escobar, 1995; Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997), including in the field of education, where the imposition of western forms of education overpowers the ability of local communities to continue with more traditional forms of learning that convey indigenous knowledges (Rival, 1996;

Day, 1998). Gender and development, similarly, has a rich critical literature that argues that many forms of feminism which inform gender work in development (and education) assume western notions of gender, thereby imposing them on others and not recognizing other constructions of gender. Many of these assumptions rely on privileging particular social arrangements, such as the nuclear family, and applying them as social norms on others where other familial structures exist. More broadly, Mohanty (1991) argues that western feminism's discursive construction of the 'Third World woman' as a unitary concept blinds us to the diversity and experiences of oppression that are conditioned by local geographies, histories and cultures. Similarly, the notion of empowerment can also be examined in the same limited (and oppressive) manner. As Rowlands (1997, p. 25) notes, for example, Yuval-Davis (1994) argues that

> empowerment for one group of people might easily represent another group's disempowerment, particularly if categories such as 'community' or 'women' are used in a way that does not allow for the existence of power relationships within such categories as well as between them and other categories. (Rowlands, 1997, p. 25, about Yuval-Davis, 1994)

Such unitary perceptions of empowerment, development or gender deny the recognition of diversity and conflicts of interest within groups, and apply an outsider definition to others. Transnational feminism, in response, prioritizes both feminist agendas and a healthy critique of the western and colonial legacies within feminism (see Mohanty, 1991; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Fennell & Arnot, 2008, among others), while 'shifting the unit of analysis from local, regional, and national culture to relations and processes across cultures' (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997, p. xix). In the work we do relating to transnational gender and education, we should make sure we are working collaboratively across borders, contextualizing local experience, engaging in 'a way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in *different* geographical spaces, rather than as *all* women across the world' (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997, p. xix), and also fully examining the unequal relations among and across groups and in relation to larger national and global processes.

It is our intention that the articles in this special issue move us in the direction of enriching our transnational engagement in empowerment that we, individually and collectively, value.

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