REFRAMING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: 
FROM HUMAN CAPITAL TO CAPABILITIES

by

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REFRAMING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:
FROM HUMAN CAPITAL TO CAPABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes reframing the argument for individualized early childhood education programs focused on non-cognitive development by synthesizing two renowned economists’ theories both of which emphasize the role of non-cognitive capabilities in development. James Heckman (2000 Nobel Laureate in Economics) employs human capital theory to argue that the inequality experienced by disadvantaged families is due to a lower level of human capital development, specifically inequity in non-cognitive ability. Amartya Sen (1998 Nobel Laureate in Economics) developed his capability theory to emphasize the importance of human agency, or accessibility of valued resources, in equalizing opportunity and development. Heckman’s research is substantial but furthering his work through a capability framework provides a more descriptive account of factors influencing the development of children’s cognitive and non-cognitive capabilities. In effort to develop a better understanding of what specific characteristics differentiates successful programs that produce the highest return on investment, this paper explores enriching Heckman’s narrative through Sen’s capability approach. In doing so, this creates an argument for investment in quality early childhood education programs for disadvantaged children because they are educated in the most resource poor environment and therefore experience the most inequity and lowest utility from their available capability set.
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INTRODUCTION

The question is not whether we can afford to invest in every child; it is whether we can afford not to. – Marian Wright Edelman

The 2011 US Department of Health and Human Services study on Head Start revealed, though significantly effective during the time span of the program, any positive cognitive effects were lost past first grade (U.S. Health and Human Services 2012). At a cost of $8000 per child, this result fueled child development professionals in a movement toward developing and scaling quality early childhood education programs that produce significant returns overtime. Head Start aimed to provide a widespread holistic approach to health and education blanketed and duplicated across the nation. Unfortunately, unsustainable results in the initial program have led to investment dollars viewed as wasted effort. The movement toward finding cost-effective, long-run systemic solutions to deprivation occurring in early childhood development has increased public awareness with calls from President Obama, renowned economists, local and state governments, and nonprofit organizations like the National Educational Association. Economist, James Heckman, has largely fueled a push toward alternative forms of early childhood education focused on individualized, rather than standardized, attention and non-cognitive development particularly for children from “at-risk” families.

Unlike Head Start where positive effects were found to be lost just a few years after intervention, early childhood education programs using effective curricula focused on the development of social and personality skills yield a rate of return of over eight dollars for each dollar invested (Carneiro & Heckman 2003). A poll in 2014 done by the First Five Year Fund, an early childhood education advocacy group, found that over 70
percent of voters support further investment in quality programs that promise reduced future costs and high rates of return on investment (Poll 2014). More stable, emotionally self-regulating children are more receptive to an education system in which they can build socio-emotional competencies that will enable them to become more productive, happier workers.

Every child should receive adequate resources in their early development, but it is often those children facing adversity such as nontraditional family circumstances, neglect, or low socioeconomic status that have less access to adequate care (Heckman Equation). Children from disadvantaged or non-traditional families are exposed to less opportunity, more high-risk environments, and are faced with a variety of risk factors that hinder cognitive and noncognitive development well before primary school is able to intervene with a supportive environment. This unequal distribution of ‘endowments’ produces unequal outcomes such as lower wages, higher crime rates, low job security, less educational attainment, and low rates of property ownership (Currie 2001). With such overwhelming support from the public, including economist and previous Federal Reserve chairman, Ben Bernanke (2012), individualized quality early childhood education programs are being recognized for their potential to serve as an environmental equalizer for populations whose risk factors and disadvantages otherwise inhibits productive capacity and life satisfaction (Bernanke 2012).

From birth to age 5 the brain is developing at its fastest capacity, making it the most critical time to lay a strong foundation of support from which future success can stem. The brain has higher plasticity in earlier stages of its development. In other words, the brain is more adaptable and susceptible to outside influence at younger ages. This is
reflected in a multitude of studies that show later interventions, though helpful, are not as successful in leaving long-term impact on individual outcomes as those that occur at earlier stages in life. For example, by third grade testing gaps are stabilized and intervention programs are found to be significantly less effective (Heckman 2011).

The recent trend in effective investment in has been matched with an increased push for curricula emphasizing character skills or what economist, James Heckman, calls ‘non-cognitive’ skills as an essential feature of early childhood development. Noncognitive development, also referenced by Heckman and many others as personality skills, addresses those abilities such as perseverance, self-confidence, and attention that are crucial in the development of stability and character.

Though the recent trend has made strides in bringing attention towards not only the societal but the economic importance of investment in specifically individualized early childhood education programs in effort to improve low socioeconomic conditions, this paper proposes reframing the argument by combining two renowned economists’ theories both of which emphasize the role of noncognitive capabilities in development. James Heckman (2000 Nobel Laureate in Economics) employs human capital theory to argue that the inequality experienced from disadvantaged families is due to a lower level of human capital development, specifically inequity in noncognitive ability. Amartya Sen (1998 Nobel Laureate in Economics) developed his capability theory to emphasize the importance of human agency, or accessibility of valued resources, in equalizing opportunity and development. Reframing Heckman’s work through Sen’s capability framework enables us to identify and examine inhibiting factors placed in the environments that actually disallow development for both the individual and the
community. Heckman’s research is substantial and further enriching his work through a framework that provides a more descriptive account of factors influencing the development of children’s cognitive and non-cognitive capabilities has the potential to enhance our ability to understand and replicate the successes already being achieved by the Perry/HighScope Program.

In an effort to synthesize Heckman and Sen’s work, this paper proceeds in three parts. Part one explains human capital theory and its relation to early childhood education programs specifically focusing on Heckman’s argument of noncognitive development. Part two explores an overview of Sen’s capability theory and its application towards quality early childhood education programs. Part three discusses the value in reframing early childhood education from human capital to capabilities.

HECKMAN AND HUMAN CAPITAL

Human Capital Theory

Heckman characterizes returns on early childhood education programs through a human capital framework. Human capital theory casts education as an economic tool used to increase the production capacity of a society. To remain competitive in the future, each child’s education is seen as an investment in potential output. The current US public education system therefore is like technology development in that utility is a function of investment in education over time. The more investment of time spent on education, the more time children spend developing skills that will make them more productive workers. The higher the rate of return on investment, the more beneficial it is to make that investment (McCullen 1999). Because the costs and benefits of developing human capital are accumulated over time, the net present value is used to determine the benefit
of that particular investment. People generally have a time preference, meaning they would rather see results in the present than wait for the future. Therefore, the value of the present discounted benefits to be received in the future must outweigh people's present discounted costs. This being said, the longer the investment has the ability to affect earnings in the future and the larger the size of that effect, the higher the net present value is likely to be. Additionally, the lower the cost of an intervention, the more likely it is to be characterized as investable. Therefore, early childhood education programs, whose effectual length and low upfront costs relative to later interventions, provide an excellent opportunity for profitable and willing investment. In a world where increased globalization is producing more competition and higher flows of information, any profitable investment in making a more productive workforce is to the benefit of each individual as well as welfare of the society as a whole (McCullen 1999).

In general, most rate-of-return studies on education at all levels yield 10-15 percent returns (McCullen 1999). Heckman considers quality early childhood education programs a cost effective method to increase national output because of their above-average rates of return. As represented in the graph below, due to the differences in development stages or what Heckman would call the life cycle skill formation, earliest age programs stand to gain the most per dollar invested. These returns to education are
measured by later increased education achievement, reduced crime rates, less teen pregnancy, increased lifetime health, and reduced interventions later in life (Carneiro & Heckman 2003).

Heckman suggests targeting disadvantaged families where parenting resources are often poor, because these children have the most to benefit from a program that will allow them to accumulate skill at a capability impossible otherwise. Heckman uses the phrase “skill begets skill” to describe the long-run functional relationship between early development of socio-emotional skills such as emotional regulation, self-confidence, and motivation to later build and use these skills throughout the course of a lifetime. It is a deficiency in human capital in which character development takes form, which is the source of inequity in success and productivity of individuals.

Heckman and ECE

Economist James Heckman has by far been one of, if not the most, influential individual in catalyzing the trend toward tailored early childhood education programs as both a social and economic equalizer. The difference in human capital, specifically noncognitive ability, produces inequality such as lower wages, increased crime rates, employment and longevity (Leif 1994). It is what he refers to as the Heckman Equation (Invest + Develop + Sustain = Gain) that has been remarkable in providing a set of principles that focus on the development of the non-cognitive or social skills that encourages the character of a more productive, reliable society member. Heckman uses his equation to provide three steps to produce a positive solution encouraging economic prosperity for both the individual and the greater society. By investing in quality early childhood education programs targeted at disadvantaged families, resources are allocated
to those who are least likely to otherwise have adequate opportunity for development. These programs then aim to develop both cognitive and non-cognitive capabilities at a child’s most impressionable age in order to sustain long-term character development into adulthood. Society as a whole gains more competent, efficient, and reliable adults whom then join the workforce with new capability to increase overall production (Heckman Equation).

Heckman’s focus on noncognitive development challenges the current public education system’s use of achievement and cognitive tests to analyze individual or school performance. As often referenced by Heckman, GED recipients have the same cognitive ability as high school graduates but lack the motivation and persistence to see their high school education through (Heckman 2012). This lack of motivation is reflected in other life outcomes such as less job stability and property ownership. The consequential outcomes of GED recipients, since not explained by cognitive differences, suggests that personality traits have the ability to influence outcomes. It is this influence of personality in the long-run where Heckman finds his basis for investment in curriculum that focuses on the development of social skills. Differences in social skills ultimately create additional value in an individual’s job performance as well as life outcomes that create productivity and increased output (Heckman 2012).

Along with a focus on noncognitive development, Heckman argues the most influential programs work towards integrating families into their children’s educational environment. Resource availability in children’s environments significantly affects their development. Just as children need food to grow, they also need access to means such as parental support, guidance, and positive reinforcement to develop their ability.
Disadvantaged children do not necessarily suffer from a lack of money, though it may be a lack of income that influences stress factors in their environment that can result in poor quality of parenting and therefore inadequate brain and capability development (Heckman 2011). For example, an environment with little income or single-parent households may encourage increased work hours or multiple jobs, which in turn leads to less consistent supervision and decreased support. In the first few years of life, when the brain is most impressionable, an environment lacking resources depresses character capability.

Since skill development generates further skill, a lack of skill development restrains potential future cognitive and noncognitive accumulation (Heckman 2011). Heckman proposes enriched early childhood education programs as a gateway to reaching such families where supportive resources are unfulfilled. The programs provide parents access to information and resources to alleviate the inequity of developmental assets through various access points such as home visits, increased family services, and parent participation. The intervention into the home life encourages increased supportive relationships beyond the course of the program, which may account for some of the long-term results. Where before there would have been a lack of responsive relationships at home, there is now a nurturing environment at both school and home, children will develop a better ability to control stress factors and regulate emotions accordingly. The family’s role in development should not be ignored as it is found that good parenting is actually more important than high-income, though lower income often equates to decreased resource access, in a child’s character development (Heckman 2011). Therefore, these programs are used as a means to supplement and offset the inequity
found in the home structure whether as a result of a non-traditional family situation, lack of parental support, neglect or abuse, circumstance of poverty, or any other environmental influence causing discrepancy in a child’s support system.

**High Scope Perry Preschool Program**

Heckman frequently cites the Perry Preschool Program as an excellent model of what the returns of investment in individualized early childhood education programs with noncognitive emphasis have the ability to offer. The High Scope Perry Preschool Program is a longitudinal study in which a group of 58 low-income African American children received access to a high quality early childhood education program at age 3. The curriculum consisted of 2.5 hours every day of the week and one 90-minute home visit focused on developing both cognitive ability as well as an emphasis on character development. The program also encouraged family involvement and better parenting skills to help create improved longstanding stable environments (Carneiro & Heckman 2003). Since then, the participants have been followed across time to see the possible long-term effects the program has had in lifetime achievement compared to the control group.

After 10 years, Carneiro & Heckman found no significance in the effects on testing and intellectual ability (IQ) between those disadvantaged children who attended the Perry Program and those who did not, but there was long term impact on overall success in rates of higher education attendance, income level, job turnover, teenage pregnancy and others in relation to their peers with similar cultural backgrounds. The Perry program children showed a 21% increase in high school graduation rates and 21% decrease on in-grade retention compared to their equivalent peers. By age 27, the
program returned $5.70 on every dollar, and return increased to about $8.70 throughout the course of participants’ lifetimes. The majority of the return comes from savings from reduced criminal activity and incarcerations. The Perry program children averaged 2.3 arrests instead of the control group’s 4.6 arrests by age 27, and while 35% of the control group experienced more than 5 arrests only about 7% of the Perry program children did as well (Carneiro & Heckman 2003).

A CAPABILITIES PERSPECTIVE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

*Development is indeed a momentous engagement with freedom’s possibility – Amartya Sen*

Heckman’s argument is limited by human capital theory’s view on education as an economic tool used to increase productivity of the workforce while saying little about current cultural or societal influence and treating children’s agency as exogenous to his analysis rather than a central part of what his analysis aims to explain. Additionally, to limit the analysis of education effects to its ability to produce quantitative outcomes through changes in income or lower crime rates, discounts the social welfare to be gained from citizens that value skills such as perseverance, self-awareness, and emotional regulation. Sen’s capability framework aids in Heckman’s narrative as it takes into account not only noncognitive capabilities but also both the intrinsic and extrinsic importance of families and their resource access, which Heckman speaks of regularly but fails to translate into his human capital models. In these models, though Heckman is able to provide the return on investment, reframing through Sen’s capability framework allows for more to be said about the processes used to create these substantial outcomes.

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1 *Development as Freedom* pg 298
2 https://www.lenapope.org/early-learning-center/faq/
Sen’s Capability Framework

Sen’s capability framework centers on the importance of providing access to functionings or ways of life people have reason to value. The access to a combination of valued functions is what Sen refers to as a capability set. The realized or achieved functions are therefore a result of choice of those valued functions made accessible through resource structures or capabilities. In Sen’s capability approach, a social arrangement or environment has a given capability set resulting from the utilization of the limited resources in society. Environments where resources are both rich and deemed of use by the individuals in the community to function as they see fit are well developed. On the other hand, where communities lack resources or have a social structure that disallows access to functions seen as valuable to their quality of life, the members are deprived of capability. Therefore, it is the deprivation of capabilities that lead to poverty, and the expansion of capabilities where development is a result (Wells 2012).

As mentioned, the effectiveness of a capability set is defined by its ability to satisfy the functions a community has reason to value. Because the ranking of the most beneficial functions relies on the preference of those affected, it is their input that truly sets the hierarchy of functions that should be made accessible. What an individual has reason to value is a result of their self-interest, ethics, and circumstantial preferences. Therefore, in this framework, a universal list of capabilities does not result in an appropriately developed community. Though some functions despite circumstance are likely found universally, a single capability set is not valued equally across situations. Sen describes effective capabilities as effective freedom or the ability to choose the life in which one desires. In this lens it is more important to provide the capability to access
what one has reason to desire rather than to impose an agenda of what others think are important for a society. As the saying goes, “you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink”. Using the capability approach, one can provide the water for the horse so that it has access to what is vital to live, but the horse will drink it himself only if he sees it as a benefit to his well-being.

Using a capability framework allows for a more rich, developed understanding of the economic relationship between well-being or development and the way factors such as social structure, individual preference, and resources play a role in how people value their quality of life. By narrowing Sen’s human development approach to the application of early childhood education programs tailored to specific communities and sets of people, the resulting information on the effects the programs produce help in understanding, describing, and predicting those relationships between early childhood education and development in a way that is useful for policy makers. Federal dollars can be used most efficiently by investing in the most effective programs both in return on investment and ability to raise standards of living or economic success. The curriculums tailored to allocate resources in a way that produce the most highly valued capability set will result in the most valuable achieved functionings, therefore the highest social and economic development is gained.

ECE as an Expansion of Senian Capabilities

Sen’s capability perspective is strongly influenced by Adam Smith’s work. In his own *Development as Freedom*, Sen references Smith’s stress on the ability training and education has in enhancing division of labor and life outcomes. Both Smith and Sen’s arguments for public education acknowledge the importance of the increased productivity
resulted from higher education levels but also stress the more important life satisfaction reached from acquiring greater knowledge. More educated individuals bring more advanced arguments and work toward the benefit of societal improvement along with their own household advances. Therefore, education offers expansion of capabilities beyond traditional economic gains. With more educated individuals, increased informed discourse, and a growing bank of accumulated knowledge societies are pushed towards social and political change that should work toward a more cohesive, inclusive environment where individuals have increased opportunity to pursue their own interests.

Sen and Smith both argue public education as an integral provision of a given society to promote continued development beyond productive capacity. Public education provides access to knowledge otherwise unavailable to underprivileged portions of society. Because government provides access to education as a basic function, disadvantaged individuals gain the capability to make more informed life choices, increase own income, and build skill as well as general knowledge. Since this is not an opportunity made available before public education, an expansion of educational capability returns large developmental value with those most under-resourced gaining the largest expansion. Therefore, governments’ funding quality public education institutions serves as an important vehicle to equalizing opportunity for under-resourced communities. Any equalizing of capabilities brings about increased representation of diverse communities as often the more educated are those who have representation in public debate. Increased diversity and perspective results in more accurate representation of the population and more effective policy.
In Sen’s work he often mentions education not only as a functioning one may desire but also as a necessity for recognizing the most optimal decision from an extensive range of capabilities in our environment. Sen acknowledges education’s ability to increase individual productivity, move toward equalizing wealth distribution, widen capabilities with the acquired knowledge, and promote wiser life choices resulting in higher quality living (Sen 1989). Because of the extension of education’s influence beyond accumulation of skilled labor, the capability framework best accounts for education’s true expansion of human capabilities as, unlike other frameworks, the Senian capability framework takes into account:

1) *their direct relevance to the well-being of people;*
2) *their indirect role through influencing social change; and*
3) *their indirect role through influencing economic production (Sen 2000)*

Since education is a necessary stepping stone in alleviating capability deprivation and early development from birth to age 5 is the most easily influenced stage of brain development, enriched early childhood education is important in offsetting disadvantaged environmental capability deprivations with its potential expansion of access to valued functionings. Other researchers including Mario Biggeri (2011), Anne Kellock (2011), Rebecca Lawthom (2011), Melanie Walker (2012), and more have taken Sen’s work a step further and applied it to early childhood and preschool education programs. The focus of these programs must be tailored to individual needs of the child and the community in order to foster the most prosperous capability set in which children can acquire the functions most valuable to lay the foundation for their growth.

Because children, especially at an age where they are heavily dependent on others, are unable or limited to provide input on what they have reason to value in their
development, developing the appropriate focus within an educational program or curriculum must be heavily justified and researched through multiple sources in order to be effective (Biggeri 2011). Once the appropriate methods to be included in the programs are recognized, then the ECE programs must be effectually accessible to the children. Meaning in order for such programs to generate enhanced valued functionings they must be warranted, afforded, and easily maintained by the community.

Conscious Discipline, a curriculum focused on creating an environment where a child can learn discipline within through connection and empathy, is a capability-oriented curriculum in its goal to help develop social-emotional learning specific to each child. Conscious Discipline incentivizes learning by creating an atmosphere of belonging, developing inner emotional control, and promoting attention through reduced stress environments and increased care (Conscious Discipline 2011). Each child is then encouraged to use his or her own coping strategies to react appropriately and constructively in a way that works toward their valued end goal. This evidence-based approach teaches and guides children to practice a well-planned, responsible decision-making process to expand a child’s capacity to make wise decisions.

The opportunity presented to youth through education begins as early as their first day in the education system. Because education is a continuous accumulation of opportunity and choices, which have the ability to expand a capability set and also is a large portion of the social, emotional, and knowledge development of a child, the earliest stage is crucial in providing the appropriate resource combination or valued functions to ensure future success. Below is a table produced by a study using children’s perspectives to define functions in which they had reason to value (Kellock & Lawthom 2011):
As seen above, children valued literacy, physical activity, friendship, and creativity. Not included in the table, but also included in the study and noted to be important by the children was support, sufficient nourishment, access to adequate resources, personal space/privacy, choice, and family and friends (Kellock & Lawthom 2011). Though this study surveyed primary school aged children, the voiced inputs, as the capability approach suggests, should be recognized as legitimate concerns of the valued functions made available to children. Certainly there is more happiness or achieved functions to be gained through curriculums like HighScope and Abecedarian, focused on social development as well as cognitive, if they align strongly with those valued functions voiced by the effected parties – the children.

**Lena Pope’s Early Learning Center**

Like the Perry Preschool Program, Lena Pope’s Early Learning Center utilizes the HighScope curriculum that emphasizes an interactive learning model shaped by the
children, families, and teachers to tailor the program to the individual needs of each child. In addition to the HighScope curriculum, Lena Pope uses a behavioral curriculum known as Conscious Discipline, which promotes important personality skill development such as emotional regulation, responsibility, and empathy in daily interactions. As the program itself is relatively new, it does not have the longitudinal data the Perry program can boast, but it certainly serves as a great model of a conjunction of both Heckman and Sen’s work.

The Early Learning Center works to understand the needs and interests of their children to customize lessons to maximize both interest and learning outcomes. For example, if the children were to take sudden interest in puppies during their free-play time, their learning center may be transformed into a pet store to teach lessons emphasizing both cognitive skills such as reading and math accompanied with those important noncognitive abilities such as social and emotional development. The center also offers an array of services to help supplement families and increase their resource access to aide in creating that crucial supportive home environment.²

Heckman’s verbal translation notes the importance of noncognitive skills and family supplementation, but the process in which returns are capitalized seems to disappear when put into a human capital model. Using Sen’s capability framework, the value of HighScope’s emphasis on an interactive model where those affected have a role in shaping their own curriculum is seen as an essential factor in a successful intervention to promote development. An expanded capability set should focus on those resources that have the largest deficit. In Heckman’s argument, this deficit takes form in differences in noncognitive abilities that influence success in the future. Therefore, Lena Pope’s

²https://www.lenapope.org/early-learning-center/faq/
approach utilizing HighScope and Conscious Discipline curricula to promote positive personality and character skill development serves a functioning that otherwise was unavailable and disallowing growth. The expansion of the capability sets of these children by providing resources to enrich their home environment as well as developing their noncognitive capabilities allows them the ability to make more knowledgeable decisions in turn providing increased opportunity and life satisfaction.

CONCLUSION: ENRICHING THE CASE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Heckman’s work is substantial in promoting quality early childhood education programs as a cost effective solution to untapped production capacity and an equalizer in education opportunity. He uses a traditional human capital framework to justify the need for noncognitive skill development at an early age where each dollar spent yields a significant return. Though this framework reveals an important relationship between personality skill development and long-term success, reframing Heckman’s narrative to fit Sen’s capability framework allows a more enriched, detailed understanding of the components that influence the noncognitive development process. By understanding what people have reason to value and how providing access to those resources affect social outcomes, each dollar spent on a program can be carefully planned to maximize utility through allocation to those functions which are most valued.

For example, as mentioned, each low-resourced community with its differing cultural circumstances is deprived access to valued functionings. Hence, they are impoverished as a result of their capability limitations. But because the optimum capability set is specific to each community, blanketed program curricula is unlikely to produce the most beneficial outcomes across the board regardless of their attempt to
provide holistic care. When Heckman’s story of noncognitive skill development is revised or expanded through the capability framework, spaces beyond the label of low-resourced are realized to explain the existing poverty, and a more thorough background story is told. In his writing, Heckman speaks of the potential social skill development has for economic productivity and long-term satisfaction, but beyond promoting the HighScope curriculum and family supplementation, there is little to be gained about which limited capabilities are hindering development as a result. After understanding and accepting production and long-term well-being as a function of human capital - both cognitive and more largely noncognitive ability, the capability framework goes a step further in identifying the inputs that should be made available through enhanced early childhood education programs to move toward more equitable opportunities in education where learning disadvantages would otherwise result.

When using this framework, not only are programs for disadvantaged children the most appropriate investment because they stand to return the most gains and reduce social costs in the future, but these children are educated in the most resource poor environment and therefore experience the most inequity and lowest utility from their available capability set. As Heckman noted, endowments in which we are born into are inherently unequal (Heckman 2011). Those ‘traditional’ families access more resources for their children’s future at earlier stages in life and lead their children to become more successful. On the opposite end, low socioeconomic or nontraditional family structures do not have access to the resources, for whatever reason, to develop their children’s ability. This leads to low achievement, low motivation, and a poverty cycle where because a child is born into a resource poor community he or she does not develop the
same way as a more affluent peer. As both the poverty and affluent cycle continue, the gap between achievement continues to rise, inequity widens, and loss in production capacity results.

Moving forward in policy, it is important to reframe the view the US public education system uses to address the obvious inequality that has been produced among each level of schooling. If there is to be a sustaining change in the approach to early childhood education programs and curricula as an effective public investment, the capability approach provides enhanced vocabulary and a more descriptive analysis. As it not only gives the why but also how Heckman’s narrative and differentiated programs like that of the Perry Preschool Program or Lena Pope’s Early Learning Center, rather
than blanketed approaches of Head Start, can be transformed to policy to expand children’s capability to act as free, responsible beings.

Using a capability framework along with Heckman’s focus on noncognitive development goes further than saying noncognitive skills will increase productivity; it identifies those resources policy should invest in to produce the social skills that equalize opportunity, create a more productive workforce, and lead to an increase in affected individuals’ quality of lives. To do so, each value and program curriculum may be based on similar core goals but should be vehemently discussed and analyzed by all levels of the community, especially including when possible the voice of the children. As seen in Kellock and Lawthom’s results discussed earlier in the paper, children are aware of what they value in their education programs to include being a friend, family support, literacy, play, creative stimulation, and choice. As Heckman’s and Sen’s work suggests, all of these factors can be addressed through the right curriculum built around the development of a well rounded, emotionally stable child whose lack of community or family resources are supplemented through an early childhood education program that equalizes disadvantages and in turn catalyzes rather than inhibits development.
Working Sources


