

Developing the Good Life by Living It: The Influence of Attending a Norwegian
Folk High School on Well-Being

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my daughters Anja and Milla.

May we never stop learning from one another.

Abstract

This study explored the influence attending a Norwegian folk high school had on the long-term well-being of former students. The Norwegian folk high schools represent a unique form of publicly funded education with an emphasis on learning through shared experience and that by law, the schools cannot issue grades, give formal examinations, or provide a degree that certifies a competency. A qualitative design was used to explore how attending a folk high school influenced the well-being of fifteen former folk high school students. Well-being was operationalized using the capabilities approach. This study found that attending a folk high school contributed to a number of personal, social, and knowledge outcomes and shaped the values and preferences of students by strengthening their existing values and helping them ideate a view of the good life. While attending a folk high school was viewed as one of many influences on well-being later in life, it was found to have an influence via the direct application of learning outcomes, the support and influence of a social network, as an initial spark for one's career or study path, and as a model of the good life that directed their subsequent choices.

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Chapter 1

A key problem in education and development is understanding: how does an educational experience impact the well-being of individuals and societies? The way this problem is typically approached is to measure a person's educational experience, most commonly through either an achievement score or years of schooling, and measure an aspect of well-being such as utility, most commonly measured in terms of earnings, and see if there is a relationship. While a number of clear relationships have been found using this method, particularly in terms of education and economic outcomes (see Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010; Pritchett, 2006; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004), they are often limited by a narrow focus on single dimension of well-being and provide little insight into the mechanisms by which any influence occurs (Desjardins, 2008).

The relationship between education and well-being is further complicated when one begins to consider the various ways one might conceptualize well-being. Well-being might be conceptualized in terms of happiness or welfare, utility, basic goods, rights, etc. While each of these aspects provides a measure of well-being, they are often limited to only one dimension. It seems more accurate to think of well-being as an inherently multi-dimensional concept that includes many different components. This is particularly apt for education when one considers the wide variety of potential intended and unintended outcomes.

Lastly, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest there is more than one mechanism by which education results in a form of well-being. Desjardins (2008) identifies three potential mechanisms by which education influences well-being:

absolute, relative, and cumulative. The challenge is thus to understand not only the multi-dimensional nature of well-being, but also the multi-dimensional ways in which education influences well-being.

Understanding the impact that various forms of education have for an individual's well-being becomes especially significant for educational endeavors that emphasize less tangible outcomes and which are concerned with purposes difficult to measure. The Norwegian folk high schools are a prime example of just such a school. As the self-described "schools for life," the Norwegian folk high schools emphasize personal and social development in the spirit of human flourishing: the ideal of each person reaching their full potential (Alkire, 2002a). "Every student leaves with a broadened horizon, social insights, more confidence in themselves, and tools for lifelong learning" (Folkehøgskolene, 2011, para. 3). When one considers the difficulty of measuring such outcomes, along with the lack of an obvious instrumental value, the question is often asked: what does one get out of a folk high school experience? To get at the heart of this question it is essential to understand how the outcomes of the Norwegian folk high schools impact an individual's well-being.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to understand the impact the Norwegian folk high schools have on an individual's well-being. Understanding impact, as Roche (as cited in Bryant & Kappaz, 2005) states, involves "the systematic analysis of the lasting or significant changes... in people's lives brought about by a given action or series of actions" (p. 140). These effects are situated within the context of human development to distinguish

them from both the more immediate outcomes of one's education (e.g. an increase in cognitive ability) and narrow conceptions of development (e.g. development defined solely as economic growth). While there are numerous approaches to development, the concept of human development signifies a much more holistic and multi-dimensional approach. Alkire (2002) conceptualizes this well and states, "by human development, I will mean human flourishing in its fullest sense—in matters public and private, economic and social and political" (p. 182).

In order to examine the impact of the folk high schools, this study employed an exploratory qualitative design. Using a primarily purposive approach to sampling, fifteen former folk schools were selected from nine different folk high schools throughout Western and Eastern Norway. These students were purposefully selected to try and capture both the typicality of a folk high school experience and some of the diversity of experience. To gain a more complex picture of the impact attending a folk high school has on well-being, this study also included family members and folk high school teachers along with school documents. A key intent was to understand how attending a folk school impacted an individual's internal competencies *and* how in turn, these competences either enabled or constrained an individual's well-being later in life.

Conceptual framework. Impact on well-being was assessed using the Capabilities Approach as developed by Amartya Sen (1999, 2009b) and Martha Nussbaum (2011). In this approach, it is argued that the most significant measure of well-being is the substantive freedoms (i.e. capabilities) a person has as opposed to notions of utility, welfare, or primary goods (Sen, 1999, 2009b). In order to assess

impact in this manner both the internal capacities of the individual and the external social conditions must be assessed. This is particularly important as “individual freedom is quintessentially a social product” (Sen, 1999, p. 31). Thus, understanding the freedoms a person has requires an understanding of the way in which they interact with society and their social position. A more comprehensive discussion of the capabilities approach is presented in chapter two.

Research questions. In order to assess the influence attending a folk high school had on a person’s well-being, the questions listed below were developed to guide this study. These questions were based on the review of the literature and the paradigmatic assumptions that influenced the design of this study.

1. What capabilities are expanded as a result of attending a folk high school?
 - a. What learning outcomes do former students report gaining from their folk high school experience?
 - b. In what ways did attending a folk high school shapes one’s values and preferences?
 - c. What is the current capability set and functioning of former folk high school students?
 - d. In what ways do former students link their current capabilities to their folk high school experience?

Setting the Context: The Norwegian Folk High Schools

First, it should be noted that the Norwegian folk high schools are unique to Norway. While folk high schools originated in Denmark in the mid-1800s (Borish,

1991), they remain limited to Scandinavia and even then, each nation has its own variation(s) of these schools. As noted above, the schools take a decidedly different approach to education. Most notably is the absence of formal exams, grades, and degrees, all of which is mandated by law. Courses of study are typically nine months and focus on a broad range of subjects, typically chosen based on personal interest. These range from traditional academic subjects such as biology or philosophy to lines of study such as sport and outdoor life, scuba diving, and rock band. Also of note is that all folk high schools are residential schools.

As part of Norway's upper secondary education system (Statistics Norway, 2010a, see Appendix), these schools receive public funding. While not mandatory, roughly 10% of each graduating class of Norwegian students attend a folk high school every year (Folkehøgskolene, 2011) which in 2010, amounted to 7112 students attended a folk high school (Statistics Norway, 2010b).

The aims of education in Norway. The role of education in Norway serves multiple purposes. Norway's education act ("Education Act," 1998), which covers primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education, states a fairly broad range of goals for Norwegian education. There is an emphasis on economic development and preparation for entry into the workforce. There is an emphasis on understanding Norway's national cultural heritage as well as common international traditions. There is also an emphasis on respect and dignity for all people, the promotion of democracy, and environmental awareness. In terms of perspectives on development, Norway's

education act includes aspects of neoliberalism, sociocultural approaches, rights-based approaches, and notions of sustainable development (Willis, 2011).

The aims of the folk high schools fit within these broad goals, but are also codified in a specific law pertaining to the schools. The stated aims of the folk high schools are to further the goals of *allmenndanning* and *folkeopplysing* ("Lov om folkehøgskoler [Law regarding folk high schools]," 2002). These aims are loosely translated as liberal education and the people's enlightenment. More commonly, the aims of the folk high schools are stated in terms of "learning for life" and educating the "whole person" which includes personal and social development not tied to any one particular future path (Folkehøgskolene, 2011). This is particularly true for the goal of *allmendanning*. In addition to being translated as liberal education, it can also be defined in terms of general education, or universal development. *Folkeopplysning*, or the people's enlightenment, is rooted in the founder of the schools: Nikolai Frederick Severin Grundtvig, a Danish bishop, poet, and educationalist. In short, the concept of the people's enlightenment involves both "an understanding of the recent history, culture and language of the people a person is a part of along with how to interact and function within that group" (Erickson, 2008, p. 22).

Description of the research sites. As of 2011, there were 78 folk high schools in Norway. Administratively, the folk high schools are divided into two groups: *frilynte folkehøgskoler* and *kristne folkehøgskoler*. *Kristne* folk high schools represent schools with an explicit Christian affiliation. While the direct translation of *frilynte* is "spirited," this group of schools is more commonly thought of as non-Christian. In practice this

means that the pedagogy of these schools is not explicitly grounded in Christian thought. Nine different folk high schools were represented by the participants of this study. Six of these schools were affiliated with the *kristne folkehøgskoler* and three with the *frilynte folkehøgskoler*. Four of the schools were located in mid-size cities between 10,000 and 30,000 inhabitants, four were located in small cities or villages with less than 3,000 inhabitants, and one was located in a large metropolitan area.

Geographically, the schools were scattered throughout Western (*Vestlandet*) and Eastern (*Østlandet*) Norway.

At each school there are between 70 and 150 students who attend each year. In addition, a diverse line of subjects are offered for study. These include a variety of artistic endeavors including: music, dance, theatre, creative arts, vocals, band, interior design, fashion, stand-up, photography, and video. Lines of study related to sport and outdoor life are common and include variations related to: water sports, X-sports, scuba diving, hunting and fishing, high alpine sports, dog sledding, and soccer or other ball sports. In addition, a variety of other lines of study related to travel, global aid, Christianity or traditional academic subjects are offered. Some of the *kristne* affiliated schools offer lines related to biblical study and mission training. Others offer lines of study on leadership and pedagogy, China-Japan-Korea, and even data (i.e. a computer related line of study).

Rationale and Significance

For a type of school that has been around for over 150 years, there is an astonishingly small body of research conducted on these schools. Over the past 30

years, only two major studies have been conducted on the outcomes of the folk high schools: one in the mid-1980s (Hægeland, Pettersen, Holck, & Sivertsen, 1995) and the most recent in 2009 (Knutas & Solhaug, 2010). While both found evidence of personal and social development outcomes, little was done to assess the impact of these outcomes on well-being. While Knutas and Solhaug (2010) explored whether attending a folk high school influenced university time to completion rates – a slightly lower time to completion rate was found for students who attended a folk high school – this is the only study known to assess longer term impacts. Two smaller studies, including my master’s thesis, support the findings of earlier studies and point to the need for understanding more about how these outcomes influence one’s life (Erickson, 2008; Harrington, Kopp, & Schimmel, 2003). The majority of research that has been conducted on these schools has dealt far more with their history and the philosophy of these schools (Borish, 1991; Bugge, 1993; Fostervoll, 1964). Thus, there is a clear need for further research, particularly in the ways in which the outcomes of these schools translate into human well-being.

Impact on human development. An understanding of the folk high schools’ impact on human development is significant for a number of reasons. In terms of the larger relationship between education and development, if education is to be an effective lever of human well-being, a clear understanding of both its impact and the ways in which it achieves such impact are critical. Without such an understanding, one would neither have a clear sense of whether the intended effects were achieved nor would they have any meaningful information about how they might improve. In the

context of human development, the evaluative space is expanded and a more holistic assessment of both the intended and unintended effects, along with a sense of agency, of how the individual is able to act effectively within a given society are also considered. In addition, this understanding provides essential information about the relative effectiveness of education as a tool for development. This point should not be underestimated as the tendency to “educationalize” social problems may prevent the use of far more effective strategies for dealing with such problems (Labaree, 2008).

In addition, an important shift occurs when evaluating the success of education based on its impact on human development as opposed to more immediate learning outcomes or a narrow focus on instrumental outcomes. This shift accomplishes two key tasks, both of which highlight the significance of this relationship. First, an understanding of impact forces one to consider the larger purpose of education and places the locus of evaluation within that ultimate purpose, rather than with an intermediary goal. Education, after all, is rarely considered to be an end unto itself. The immediate outcomes of education – typically defined by the range of skills, knowledge, and aptitudes a student acquires as a result of their experience – are all intended to have an effect upon an individual’s life and the society in which they live; they are all intended to aid in the attainment of a larger purpose. It is worth remembering, as Cremin (1990) notes, that Aristotle argued it is impossible to think about education apart from an idea of the good life. Thus, assessing an education based on outcomes does not provide the most essential information about whether or not education has

accomplished its ultimate aims. The shift to impact provides a more valid assessment of education's effect on human development.

Second, this shift can lead to a more nuanced understanding of impact as it forces one to consider the processes by which such outcomes are converted into various forms of impact. While it is clear that education provides an array of benefits (McMahon, 1998; Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2009; Vila, 2005), the links between education and development are complex and ultimately not well understood (Desjardins, 2008). Understanding the processes by which outcomes are converted to various forms of well-being is critical for education to play an effective role in human development. This applies both to improving current practice, and to the ability to assess the relative impacts of various forms of education. Without an understanding of the mechanisms underlying impact, one is typically left to rely on aggregate measures of impact and outcomes which have difficulty in both determining causality and in distinguishing between the effectiveness of one form of education over another. With the multitude of competing forms of education, a more nuanced understanding of impact which entails the processes by which outcomes are converted into various effects is of critical importance for effective development education.

Measurement human development. There are also a number of measurement issues that must be considered in relation to examining the impact of education on human development. Neither all development goals, nor educational outcomes are easily measured (Behrman, 1997). This point is particularly highlighted in the case of the folk high schools, making it an excellent case to highlight this issue. However, even

in more traditional schools, the measures used are proxies and serious questions arise about how valid such measures are (e.g. the use of earnings for productivity or educational attainment as a measure of learning). There is also the issue of accounting for all effects, both intended *and* unintended. Any singular measure runs the risk of missing a number of potentially important effects. Thus, considerations of what is measured (and how) are just as important as considerations of what is not measured.

The role of measurement is further complicated when one considers who decides what counts as development. This issue entails far more than methodological concerns and could be argued as a key element of social justice (Nussbaum, 2011). Amidst the broad range of possible impacts that could be assessed – economic, social, political, personal, etc. – there is likely to be reasonable disagreement about what should be given priority. Unfortunately, these disagreements can have serious consequences. Emphases on aggregate measures of economic growth, for example, often have little value for large swaths of a country's population. In part, this is because GDP and other aggregate measures often neglect the issue of distribution (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2009b). The issue of distribution would likely not be neglected if a serious effort was made to account for the needs and interests of all people. Defining impact in terms of human development can provide a more holistic measure of impact, which is rooted in the actual day-to-day lives of the people in question. Thus, understanding the impact of education on *human development* helps to solve the problems of using singular measures and alleviates a number of worries about who decides.

A more holistic measure of development also points to another key reason why assessing impact is critical as there is an equally important relationship between one's ability to measure impact and the primary ways in which development is defined and prioritized. Marta Nussbaum (2011) describes a key drawback of this relationship as the "fallacy of measurement" (p. 60) or the tendency to place central importance on that which is easy to measure, whether such importance is warranted or not. Thus, the challenge of assessing impact in a more holistic way is not merely a technical issue, but an issue which plays a significant role in regards to which purposes and aims of education and development will be given priority. Practically speaking, this is also somewhat understandable. While one may recognize the limits of current assessments (e.g. the problem of accounting for distribution within aggregate measures), without a meaningful alternative, especially on a policy level, there is little reason to change course.

Education and human flourishing. The folk high schools represent an opportunity to explore an alternative form of impact assessment. As the philosophy of the school is very much aligned with notions of human flourishing, it is well suited to both a) help conceptualize the idea of human flourishing in a Norwegian context and b) due to the lack of tangible measures, an evaluation of the impact of the folk high schools demands the use and creation of alternative assessments. Thus, this helps both to further the knowledge base on the concept of human flourishing and ground the understanding of the relationship between education and development in empirical research.

Study Findings

This study found that attending a folk high school contributed to a person's well-being later in life. Study participants reported a number of personal, social, and knowledge outcomes they gained as a result of attending a folk high school. Study participants also described how attending a folk high school strengthened their existing values, provided an ideal or model of the good life, and helped give a broader sense of viable options. A view of well-being based on what was important to the participants of this study was identified and conceptualized using the capabilities approach resulting in a list of six capabilities: post-secondary education, vocation, the meaningful use of leisure, meaningful relationships, practical reason, and social engagement. Lastly, a number of links between a person's folk high school experience and their current well-being were identified. These included the application of learning outcomes, the support and influence of one's social network, the initial spark that guided career or study paths, and the way in which a model of the good life directed one's future choices. In addition to these links study participants also described how the positive experience they had while attending folk high school had a lasting and positive impact on their current well-being. It must also be noted that study participants also described the influence of attending a folk high school as one of many. Ultimately, these findings help provide an initial description of how attending a folk high school contributes to well-being.

Outline of the Dissertation

The next chapter presents a review of the literature that informs this study. In particular, the literature from human capital, civic and social engagement, and human

capabilities is reviewed in order to provide a framework for understanding the impact of the Norwegian folk high schools. In chapter three, an overview of the methodological approach utilized in this study is presented, including an overview of data collection methods and analytical approaches. Chapter four is the first of two chapters on the findings of this study. In this chapter, the findings related to the learning outcomes of attending a folk high school along with its influence on preference formation are provided. In addition, a section on the nature of the folk high school experience is provided to give the reader additional context. Chapter five presents the findings related to how participants defined well-being and the extent to which they felt they attained that view of well-being. The findings related to the ways in which the participants of this study linked their current well-being to their folk high school experience is provided. Chapter six concludes this dissertation with a discussion on the significance of these findings, directions for future research, and the implications of these findings for policy makers, educators, and researchers.

Chapter 2 – Review of the Literature

This review of the literature aims to provide a framework for understanding how education impacts human well-being. It begins by outlining a definition of impact followed by an overview of the research conducted on the Norwegian folk high schools. Due to the limited amount of research conducted on these schools, this review then explores a number of approaches to evaluating the impact of education. In the first section, a relatively brief review of the human capital and civic and social engagement literature is conducted. While these bodies of literature have their merits, their emphasis on singular metrics of well-being and large levels of aggregation was not found to be suitable for the folk high schools. The next section presents a more detailed review of the human capabilities approach as developed by Amartya Sen (1999, 2009b) and furthered by Martha Nussbaum (2011). Ultimately, the capabilities approach is found to be the most apt for an evaluation of the folk high schools. In addition, I argue that through a conceptualization of education as a means to capability expansion, a theoretical framework is provided. This framework enables an effective way to operationalize the capabilities approach for the purposes of assessing the impact of the Norwegian folk high schools.

Defining Impact

When one considers what an education actually does for someone, it is important to be clear about the language one is using to define such effects. For the purposes of this study, the term impact will be used and can be defined as “the lasting or significant changes... in people’s lives brought about by a given action or series of

actions” (Roche as cited in Bryant & Kappaz, 2005, p. 140). This usage of impact is often synonymous with the notion of outcomes. However, depending on the context outcomes may refer to either long-term changes or the short-term and more immediate results of a particular action. For example, academic outcomes are a common way to refer to the knowledge and skills an individual receives from an educational experience; this is not the same as the impact or lasting changes that result from such an experience. Similarly, Desjardins and Tuijnman (2005) distinguish between immediate and final outcomes. In this case, immediate outcomes refer to the changes in knowledge and skills whereas final outcomes “extend beyond this and refer to how the changes affect an individual’s wellbeing as well as the broader social well-being” (Desjardins & Tuijnman, 2005, p. 355). Other scholars have used the term benefits (Jamieson, Sabates, Woodley, & Feinstein, 2009; McMahon, 1998) or returns (Pritchett, 2006; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004) when referring to a more specific notion of impact (i.e. economic returns, social benefits, etc.). Thus, and because of the confusion that can result from the various uses of the term outcome, impact will be utilized to emphasize the interest in the long-term and sustained changes that result from an education.

Existing Research on the Norwegian Folk High Schools

Overview of the schools. As noted, there is a surprisingly small amount of research that has been conducted on the Norwegian folk high schools. Most of the literature on the folk high schools concerns their philosophy and methodology (see Bugge, 1993; Ohrem & Haddal, 2011) and much of this is not available in English. While a more in-depth treatment of the history and philosophical background of the

schools is outside the scope of this study (for a more detailed look, see Bugge, 1993; Erickson, 2008), the general philosophical approach of these schools is built on shared experiential learning, dialogue, and shared and sustained reflection (Erickson, 2008). Student descriptions of the nature of their folk high school experience were found to coalesce around three themes: subject learning, social engagement, and democratic participation (Knutas & Solhaug, 2010).

Outcomes of the schools. A handful of studies have been conducted on the outcomes of the schools. Of note, in the mid-1980s as part of the *realkompetanse prosjekt* – a project to document the competencies and skills gained in non-formal settings – a study was conducted that found substantial support for the personal and social development outcomes of the schools (Hægeland, et al., 1995). These findings were corroborated in a number of later studies that found similar outcomes (Erickson, 2008; Harrington, et al., 2003; Knutas & Solhaug, 2010). In all of these studies, outcomes such as increases in self-confidence, improvements in the ability to work and communicate with others, conflict management, self-awareness, personal maturation, and increases in self-worth were reported.

Harrington et al. (2003) explored the role of the folk high school more specifically in terms of the transition from high school to college/work and suggested a key outcome of attending the folk high schools was the development of “self-authorship:” the ability to use information to reflect meaningfully on one’s own beliefs and life to form judgments (Baxter-Magolda as cited in Harrington, et al., 2003, p. 132). Harrington et al. (2003) conclude, the “Folk high schools offer time off (at government

expense no less) from the so-called ‘rat race’ of compulsory schooling, to help develop the intellectual, emotional and relational capacities that will serve one best in adult life” (p. 134).

The study conducted by Knutas and Solhaug (2010) represents the only study found which explored the potential impacts of attending a folk high school beyond its immediate outcomes. The authors explored whether attending a folk high school influenced time to completion rates for university degrees. They found a small reduction in time to completion for bachelor’s degrees, a marginally lower time for two year degrees, and a marginally longer time for graduate degrees (Knutas & Solhaug, 2010). However, the authors caution that the contribution to reductions in time to completion times from attending a folk high school is modest.

Motivating factors: Why students attend. Lagerstrøm (2001) examined why students attended a folk high school and found that figuring out what one will do later in life was the most important reason given by former students for attending a folk high school. Interestingly, Lagerstrøm (2001) also found that students participated in his study primarily because they believed the folk high school experience was of social value. Other reasons for attending included an interest in doing something different before work or university and to develop as a person. It is also interesting to note that gaining competition points for university admission was not viewed as a strong motivating factor (Lagerstrøm, 2001).

While there is a fair amount of evidence to suggest that the folk high schools play an important role in an individual’s well-being, the evidence found is either

anecdotal (Harrington, et al., 2003) or focuses on the outcomes of the schools rather than their long term impacts (Erickson, 2008; Hægeland, et al., 1995). Knutas and Solhaug (2010) move towards evaluating impact by looking at university completion rates, but much more could be done. In order to evaluate the impact of the folk high schools, a way to understand the links between the personal and social outcomes and long terms impacts on well-being is needed.

Understanding the Impact(s) of Education

In order to understand the impact of the folk high schools on human development, a review of the literature was conducted in order to answer the following question: what approach to understanding the way(s) in which education contributes to human development is best able to evaluate the impact of the folk high schools?

Literature from the human capital approach was included to understand the predominant methods of assessing economic effects and arguable, the predominant paradigm in educational policy today (Lanzi, 2007; Walker, 2012). Literature on civic participation was included primary because of the important social and community aspects of a folk high school experience, but also to evaluate how non-market impacts are evaluated. The following section provides a brief overview of these two bodies of literature.

Human capital. The theory of human capital provides a way to conceptualize the value or quality of human knowledge and skill in a fashion similar to physical or other forms of capital. The idea of considering human knowledge and skills to be of economic value is nothing new, but the origins of the theory are often credited to Schultz and Becker (Sweetland, 1996). Contributing to the acceptance of the theory was

the inability of traditional economic growth models, which looked only at the inputs of physical capital, labor hours, and natural resources, to account for the substantial rise in national output. Schultz (1961) put forth the idea that the best explanation of this growth was the rise in the knowledge and skills of the workforce, i.e. that increases in human capital were responsible for this growth. This highlights two key assumptions of human capital theory: 1) that the knowledge, skills, and capacities of human beings have an economic value which can be measured and 2) that human capital can be invested in in the same manner as physical capital. Becker (1962, 1965) further contributed to the development of the theory by both modeling these investments in and by developing measurements of the value of human capital.

Of course placing a value on human beings was not without controversy or disagreement. Traditionally, human capital theorists have only considered knowledge and skills to be human capital if they enhanced economic productivity (Sweetland, 1996). Earnings for example, can be viewed as a measure of human capital so long as it is considered a reasonable proxy for productivity. Early dissenters to this view objected, not to the concept of human capital, but as to whether or not human capital could be valued as it was not subject to market exchange. Becker (1965), on the other hand, argued that all time was involved in the production of “final satisfactions” and thus argued that all knowledge and skills used in the household to improve one’s life should also be considered as human capital. In fact, he argued that considerations of how to spend time out of work were likely more important for economic welfare than time

spent at work (Becker, 1965). The emphasis on the value of time also provided another way to place a value on human capital.

Once the value of human capital and its role as a possible investment was recognized, it was logical to consider ways in which it could be improved. Schultz (1961), for example, identified five areas to improve human capital: health facilities, on the job training, formal education, adult extension programs, and migration for employment opportunities. Education is typically seen as one of the key investments in human capital and scholars thus attempt to estimate the return to that investment. However, because not all spending on education is typically a mixture of consumption and investment, this spending must be distinguished if one wishes to estimate the rate of return (Sweetland, 1996), although this distinction is not necessary to estimate the total return (Schultz, 1961).

Over time, numerous methods have been developed to estimate the value of human capital. In a prominent review of the literature, Sweetland (1996) identifies three methodological approaches to measuring human capital: 1) the production function approach, 2) the measurement of returns approach, and 3) the aggregate accounting approach. On an individual/household level, measuring the returns (for examples see: Card, 2001; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004) and the production function approach (see Grossman & Kaestner, 1997) were the most common approaches found in this review of the literature. Key to all of these approaches is the issue of determining the independent and causal effects of education. The primary methods of doing this involved; controlling for ability, family background, and other potential unobserved

factors; using an instrumental variable approach; and/or the use of siblings and twins studies. Card (2001) presents a detailed review of the methodological issues associated with this (e.g. he examines whether an ordinary least squares approach or instrumental variable approach provides a more accurate and valid measure of the economic returns to education).

Despite these challenges, there is substantial evidence of positive returns to education (Card, 1999; Hanushek, 2009; Hanushek & Kimko, 2000; Pritchett, 2006; Psacharopoulos, 1994, 2006; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004; Vila, 2000, 2005). However, and not surprisingly based on the challenges just mentioned, these returns vary based on factors such as school quality, ability, and parental education (Card, 1999). Tuijnman (1989) also provides a useful distinction between education and learning outcomes. Education outcomes would be defined largely by institutional factors (most commonly as attainment) whereas learning outcomes would be defined by changes in a student's knowledge and ability. The majority of the research on the effects of education is based on education outcomes (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004), although recent trends have emphasized the role of cognitive abilities as measured on standardized tests (Hanushek, 2009; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010). Ultimately, as Oreopoulos and Salvanes (2009) note, "despite much interest, we know very little about the impact of different curricula or about different pedagogical methods and ways of organizing and running schools" (p. 19).

While the human capital literature predominantly focuses on effects related to productivity, earnings, and employment, there are a number of scholars working with a

much broader definition of human capital. In fact, one might distinguish between “narrow” and “wide” views of human capital with the latter embracing a much more holistic view of potential benefits. The wide view of human capital has its roots in Becker’s arguments in regards to the attainment of final satisfactions and the value of time as equally important productive endeavors. A clear example of such a “wide” view is found in Healy, Côté, Helliwell, and Field’s (2001) Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report on the well-being of nations where human capital is defined as, “The knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being” (p.18).

This definition has opened the door to exploring a whole host of effects from a human capital point of view. A useful framework for considering the broad array of benefits is a fourfold categorization of 1) private market returns, 2) private non-market returns, 3) social market returns, and 4) social non-market returns (Vila, 2005). To this, one might also add the concepts of externalities and distribution. Externalities, while similar to social benefits, include the indirect effects of education that benefit (or cost) someone other than the person who helped create it (McMahon, 1997). Distribution effects include considerations of how the returns are distributed amongst a population which inherently involve questions of justice and equity (McMahon, 1997).

Similar to the literature on economic returns, there is a substantial body of knowledge that documents the non-market returns to education. For example, Oreopoulos and Salvanes (2009) highlight education’s positive relationship with non-

market benefits such as improved decision making around health outcomes, parenting, subjective well-being and job satisfaction. From a human capital perspective, a value is calculated for these benefits and Oreopoulos and Salvanes (2009) conclude that the total returns from education is around 28%, entailing a 12% return on earnings and a 16% return on the value of non-market returns.

Thus far, the discussion of the human capital literature, whether assessing market or non-market returns, is based on the assumption that education provides a direct value to the individual and that this effect can be valued and measured independently from other effects. However, this underlying assumption is rarely addressed. In fact, within the human capital literature, disagreements tend to emphasize particular methodological approaches in regards to which earnings function, statistical method, or essential controls should be used (see Card, 2001). However, the various methodological approaches tend to differ not in the direction or significance of the relationships they find, but only in their size.

The greatest strength of this approach to assessing impact is its relative precision as an array of tools are presented to assess the economic effects of education. The expansion of the concept of human capital to include a wide variety of features related to well-being also makes it more amenable to be of use in assessing human development. Of course, it is not without its limitations. In the narrow view of human capital, only economic benefits are assessed; it cannot account for any non-economic benefits (Robeyns, 2006b). An additional limitation (which some may argue adds to the precision of the approach) is the attempt to identify an independent effect of education.

While this also might be critiqued as a problematic assumption, i.e. does an independent effect of education exist, the stronger point seems to be that this is likely to cause one to neglect important mediating variables. Rather than try to control for the effects of family, class, etc., it is likely more accurate to view the effects of education as inherently intertwined with such variables.

A subset and minority of human capital literature takes a different approach to measuring the impact of education and is primarily found in scholars working in adult education and lifelong learning. These scholars begin with a view that education does not have a direct benefit, but rather a relative or cumulative effect. In other words, rather than assume education has an independent effect on economic or social outcomes, scholars in this approach assume that the effects of education are mediated by a host of other potential factors. In addition, the “wide” view of human capital is taken. For example, Desjardins (2003) models the effects of initial learning on economic and social outcomes which are mediated by additional formal, informal, and non-formal learning.

What’s particularly interesting about this approach is its ability to measure both the direct and indirect effects of various types of learning. For example, Desjardins (2003) found that initial formal learning had the greatest total effect on economic outcomes as measured by earnings, but not the greatest direct effect. In this case, informal job related training was found to have the greatest direct effect on earnings. In terms of social outcomes, as indicated by participation in volunteer and/or community organizations, informal personal interest learning had the greatest direct effect.

Interestingly enough, this type of learning also had a direct negative effect on earnings. By gaining an understanding of the various direct and indirect effects of different types of learning, not only does one gain a sense of how these forms of learning are impacting well-being, but one also gains a sense of the possible trade-offs that may exist.

In a similar study of adult learning in Swedish men, Tuijnman (1989) is able to identify the ways in which factors such as family background, initial education, and adult education all contributed to life and career outcomes. Of note, initial schooling was found to significantly impact learning later in life, suggesting that adult learning may largely be serving to widen the gap in educational attainment and opportunity. In addition, the results of Tuijnman's (1989) study suggest that the social and environmental resources of the home and the cognitive resources of the individual are primarily converted into marketable assets through formal schooling.

In both of these cases, structural equation models (particularly linear structural relations models) are used to identify the various pathways by which education leads to or is converted into various effects. Ultimately, Desjardins and Tuijnman (2005) argue for a new research model that considers a multi-dimensional view of what they term intermediary outcomes and final outcomes. They argue that a more accurate measure of knowledge and skills combined with a full appreciation of possible outcomes will help researchers see potential trade-offs and/or areas of complementarity between outcomes.

Civic and social engagement. At first glance, approaches to measuring the impact of education on civic participation are essentially the same as approaches to measuring human capital. A measure of education is identified, a measure of civic

engagement or participation is identified, and the relationship between them is assessed. A key difference is the sheer number of potential indicators and variables of interest to civic participation. Emler and Frazer (1999) provide a fairly exhaustive list of the different variables that have been explored in the study of education and civic participation. These include support for ethnocentric and anti-democratic attitudes, political engagement, political participation, political expertise, political factual knowledge and procedural knowledge, measure of core beliefs and ideology, interest in politics, political efficacy, etc. Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry (1996) synthesize the range of effects into two overarching categories: political engagement and democratic enlightenment.

Also similar to the literature on human capital, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence that supports that positive relationship between education and civic participation. Robert Putnam, as cited in Campbell (2006), states,

Education is one of the most important predictors – usually, in fact, the most important predictor – of many forms of social participation – from voting to associational membership, to chairing a local committee to hosting a dinner party to giving blood . . . Education, in short, is an extremely powerful predictor of civic engagement. (p. 26)

While there might be substantial disagreements about how civic engagement or other aspects of political participation and engagement should be defined and measured, the interest of this review is on the underlying approach taken to assess this relationship and

the various explanations used to describe the mechanisms by which education results in civic participation.

Similar to the literature on human capital, there is ultimately a limited understanding of the causal mechanisms between education and civic participation. As Hillygus (2005) states, “Although there are literally thousands of empirical analyses that demonstrate a strong, positive relationship between formal education and democratic behavior, this same literature lacks a definitive explanation as to the explicit mechanism by which education influences political behavior” (p. 26). However, compared to the human capital literature, a relative wealth of potential interpretations has been posited in regards to what these underlying mechanisms might be.

Four possible interpretations emerge from the literature on civic participation: 1) the direct or civic education hypothesis, 2) the relative or social position hypothesis, 3) the cumulative approach, and 4) the correlated variable or political meritocracy hypothesis (Campbell, 2006; Emler & Frazer, 1999; Hillygus, 2005; Nie, et al., 1996). Ultimately, empirical studies which have sought to test these approaches conclude with mixed results and support can be found for each explanation in relation to different effects and in different contexts.

Ultimately, and for the purposes of this review, these four mechanisms are of interest for the way in which they conceptualize the impact of education. In direct civic education hypothesis, the skills and knowledge gained from education have a direct influence and value. The relative or social position hypothesis posits that the effects of education are significantly mediated, typically by one’s social position. In the

cumulative approach, civic participation increases in conjunction with the average educational level of the community/household in which one lives. This is similar to the concept of an externality in the human capital literature in which there are spillover effects of education. Finally, the correlated variable mechanism suggests that the above interpretations are misleading as both educational outcomes and civic participation effects are actually caused by another variable (e.g. family background).

The various approaches to understanding the mechanisms by which education results in a particular civic participation effect represent a real strength of this body of literature. These approaches offer a conceptualization of the variety of ways in which education may impact a particular aspect of human development.

Lessons learned. When considering which approaches would be most effective for examining the impact of education on human development, the unique characteristics of the folk high schools must be kept in mind. First, the lack of explicit instrumental objectives and formal assessments demands an approach that is able to be flexible in the ways in which it assesses impact. If impact is defined too narrowly, it is likely to neglect a number of effects that result from this school. Second, the emphasis on shared experience at the school implies an approach needs to be able to account for the social relationships, structures, and culture of this school. In other words, the ways in which attending a folk high school may impact one's social networks and position may be just as important as the skills and knowledge one obtains. Lastly, the unique institutional position of the folk high school – an optional one year school typically attended between high school and university – should be taken into account. While part

of the broader educational system, this position suggests a different overall learning relationship between prior learning experiences and future potential effects.

Keeping these factors in mind, some lessons and limitations can be gleaned from both the human capital and civic participation literature. In regards to the human capital literature, the narrow view of human capital and its emphasis on identifying the independent effects of education on economic measures is limited in its ability to measure well-being, particularly in regards to the non-instrumental impacts of education. That said, “this approach is largely operative, empirically verifiable and politically consistent with the market (or quasi-market) reforms of education, because of its managerial flavor” (Lanzi, 2007, p. 425). Because human capital represents the dominant paradigm, this point needs to be taken seriously for any alternative evaluation to be considered valid (this point is taken up in the conclusion of this chapter).

On the other hand, the wide view of human capital offers some interesting insights. While not much research has been done in this capacity, the perspective offered by Desjardins and Tuijnman (2005) emphasizes the need to consider multiple dimensions of learning, multiple dimensions of knowledge and skills, and multiple dimensions of outcomes. While this assumes that effective measures could be identified for all potential outcomes (e.g. physical, psychological, economic, and social well-being), the emphasis on multiplicity is noteworthy. One additional lesson of this approach is the recognition of potential trade-offs that may exist between different impacts (e.g. between economic and social benefits). This is particularly relevant for the folk high schools as Desjardins (2003) found that personal interest-related learning was

negatively associated with economic outcomes, but positively associated with social outcomes.

The literature on civic participation offers some unique strengths in its conceptualization of the mechanisms by which an educational impact occurs. Moreover, these conceptions can be complimentary to other approaches as they do not necessarily affect the initial design of a study; they can also act as an analytical lens. Of particular interest is the social position hypothesis. Taking account of the ways in which social networks mediate the impact of an education provides a particularly interesting perspective, especially for the folk high schools. The strong emphasis on social development and shared experience will automatically influence the social standings and networks of individual students and these effects would be important to capture.

While some lessons can be gained from both of these approaches to evaluating the impact of education, neither approach seems to sufficiently capture the potential impacts of the folk high schools. In the following section, a review of the human capabilities approach is presented. This approach was found to be the most apt for an evaluation of the folk high schools for two reasons. First, because this approach does not necessarily define an *a priori* effect of interest and is inherently multidimensional, it is better able to evaluate the broad and intangible nature of the aims of the folk high schools. Second, the strengths of the both the human capital and civic participation approaches noted above are already built in to the capabilities approach. The following section begins with a theoretical overview of the capabilities approach. This is followed by a discussion of the operationalization of the approach. From there, a discussion of

the way education has been conceptualized is presented. Lastly, a framework is presented to guide an evaluation of the impact of the Norwegian folk high schools from a capabilities perspective.

The Capabilities Approach

A theoretical overview. Ingrid Robeyns (2006a) describes the capabilities approach as “a broad normative framework for the evaluation and assessment of individual well-being and social arrangements, the design of policies, and proposals about societal change” (p. 352). In order to understand just what this entails, it is useful to begin with an understanding of the normative aspect of the approach. In this case, the approach can be thought of as normative both in terms of what should be evaluated and in terms of what the goals or ends of any such evaluation are. Indeed the two are intimately related as evaluation is rarely done for its own sake. However, the distinction is an important one to consider as it helps to better understand the conceptual boundaries of the approach.

The strongest and primary aspect of the approach’s normative claim is that human freedoms should be the primary evaluative space of any social arrangement or development effort. Alkire (2009) succinctly states the normative proposition of the capabilities approach: “social arrangements *should* be primarily evaluated according to the extent of freedom people have to promote or achieve functionings they value” (p. 32). What is perhaps most interesting about this normative claim is that “the capability approach points to an *informational focus* in judging and comparing overall individual advantages, and does not, on its own, propose any specific formula about how that

information may be used” (Sen, 2009b, p. 232 emphasis in original). The informational focus is aimed at understanding the extent of freedom an individual has and this is directly related to the larger goal the approach is associated with.

The capabilities approach is clearly associated with the human development paradigm (Fukuda-Parr, 2003) and from this perspective, the goals of any evaluation – and/or development effort – are more holistic and aligned with Aristotle’s notion of human flourishing; the idea of living well and doing well. Alkire (2002a) captures the sentiment of this view well and states, “by human development, I will mean human flourishing in its fullest sense—in matters public and private, economic and social and political and spiritual” (p. 182). Again, it is important to recognize that the normative aspect of the capabilities approach does not make a particular claim as to what exactly human flourishing is or should be; it simply aligns itself with this larger goal. In short, the normative claim of the capabilities approach is that human freedoms should be the primary evaluative space as this is the best measure of human flourishing.

Shifting the evaluative space towards freedoms is important both for what it accomplishes and for what it rejects. Both Sen (1999, 2009b) and Nussbaum (2011) provide a substantial critique of the limitations of other views of development and justice (see also Robeyns, 2006b; Tikly & Barrett, 2010 for similar critiques in education). Most notable in these critiques is the distinction between *ends* and *means*. The role of income is often used as a primary example. In this case, evaluating a social arrangement based on person’s income is problematic for three key reasons. First, income has no intrinsic value. It is valuable only for its use towards some other valued

goal. This is not meant to deny the importance of income or other resources, but rather to highlight its role as a *means* of development. Second, such an evaluation tends to hide the role of other important ends and resources that may or may not be meaningfully related to one particular measure. While income may be important, so too might be access to health care, political participation, and meaningful friendships. Third, such an approach also neglects the ways in which income or any other resource is converted into what an individual has reason to do or be. The processes by which an individual is able to use a resource to achieve a certain level of well-being or flourishing are likely just as important as the resource itself. For these reasons, Sen (2009a) states, “To understand that the *means* of satisfactory human living are not themselves the *ends* of good living helps to bring about a momentous extension of the reach of the evaluative exercise” (p. 17, emphasis in original).

In order to understand how this reach is expanded, the key concept of a capability must be understood. This is not always an easy task, especially as the language of capabilities has evolved over the development of the approach and both Sen and Nussbaum use the term in slightly different ways (Robeyns, 2005a). The use of both the singular capability and the plural capabilities also adds to the challenge, although they are essentially used interchangeably. In addition, the term is often used synonymously with the concept of freedom. It is important to understand that a person’s capabilities represent an important, but only partial account of a person’s freedoms. Sen (1993) states, “a full accounting of individual freedom, must of course, go beyond the capabilities of personal living and pay attention to the person’s other objectives (e.g.

social goals not directly related to one's own life)" (p. 33). Sen discusses the role of agency in relation to these social goals and it makes sense for any approach that values freedom to inherently value a person's ability to make choices of their own accord. Thus, while capabilities and freedoms will often be used synonymously, it is important to recognize that a person's capabilities represent only one aspect of their freedom, albeit an important one.

This recognition can also be seen in the key distinction between what a person does and what a person *could* do or be. Sen (1999, 2009a, 2009b) describes these two aspects as functionings and capabilities and this distinction is essential to understanding the approach. Functionings represent the actual things a person is able to do or be; it represents a person's achieved states of beings and doings. Capabilities, on the other hand, represent the range of potential functionings a person could achieve; they represent the spectrum of opportunities that are realistically available to an individual. For Sen (1993), "the freedom to lead different types of life is reflected in the person's capability set" (p. 33). The idea of a capability set – or more generally, a person's capability – is a way to represent the range of alternative combinations of functionings that could be achieved. Ultimately, a person's capability includes an understanding of *both* functionings and capabilities. After all, a functioning by definition is a part of an individual's capability set. While the dual use of the term capabilities may cause some confusion, it also points to the important unification of a functioning and a capability. Alkire (2009) states, "Sen's significant contribution has been to unite the two concepts,

and any account of capabilities that does not include both misrepresents the approach” (p. 35).

To further illustrate how capabilities represent one aspect of an individual’s freedom, it is also important to consider how Sen (1999) further clarifies the idea of a capability by distinguishing between opportunity freedoms and process freedoms. Opportunity freedoms are “the actual *opportunities* that people have, given their personal and social circumstances” (Sen, 1999, p. 19 emphasis in original). Process freedoms represent the processes that enable one to freely act and choose between different options (Sen, 1999). They entail the structures and institutions of a society that influence a person’s ability to make meaningful choices and act on certain opportunities. These processes are viewed as having important implications for both capabilities and the role of agency. A key challenge is the difficulty in assessing process freedoms, as the capabilities approach is much more equipped to assess opportunity freedoms. Sen (2009a) states, “capabilities are characteristics of individual advantages, and they fall short of telling us enough about the fairness or equity of the processes involved, or about the freedom of citizens to invoke and utilize procedures that are equitable” (p. 27).

Nussbaum conceptualizes the idea of a capability in a slightly different, but not conceptually incompatible manner. In fact, she argues her distinctions help “to make the complexity of capabilities clear” (Nussbaum, 2011, pp. 20-21), although the differences also stem from her push towards a basic theory of justice. In any case, Nussbaum (2011) identifies three types of capabilities: basic capabilities, internal capabilities, and

combined capabilities. Basic capabilities represent “the innate faculties of the person that make later development and training possible” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 24). It is important to note that this is not meant to be a meritocratic notion, but rather a recognition that some individuals may need *additional* help if they are to achieve a similar level of functioning. Internal capabilities are “the trained or developed traits and abilities” typically gained via interaction with social institutions (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 21). Combined capabilities represent the combination of internal capabilities with external conditions that enable an individual to achieve a certain functioning.

This idea of combined capabilities is very much in line with what Sen (1999) describes as a person’s substantive freedoms. Substantive refers to *feasible* opportunities. Inherent in a substantive freedom are all the elements that make this opportunity possible: an individual’s innate and developed skills and knowledge along with favorable social conditions. In this sense, Nussbaum’s articulation of a combined capability better highlights the multiple aspects of freedom needed to achieve a particular functioning or end state. As Nussbaum (2011) states, “[capabilities] are not just abilities residing inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment” (p. 20). While Nussbaum’s work on the capabilities approach has moved towards a basic theory of justice, the underlying conception of capabilities remains congruent with Sen’s approach and helps to illustrate the primary way in which freedom is conceptualized along with its complexity.

An additional aspect of the complexity inherent in individual freedoms that needs to be explored is the role of agency. As Sen states, (1999) “An approach to justice and development that concentrates on substantive freedoms inescapably focuses on the agency and judgment of individuals; they cannot be seen merely as patients to whom benefits will be dispensed by the process of development” (p. 288). The view of an individual as an active participant has a number of important implications. Of particular note is the role of agency in relation to well-being. To understand the conceptual difference Sen gives to agency and well-being, it is helpful to start with the narrower concept of one’s standard of living. For Sen, the concept of standard of living is limited to personal well-being which is only related to one’s own life; this does not include beneficial outcomes gained from helping others (Robeyns, 2005a). Well-being is a bit broader and represents the combination of one’s standard of living plus the good feelings and satisfaction one receives from helping others. Agency, however, is broader yet. Sen (2009b) states, “agency encompasses all the goals that a person has reasons to adopt, which can *inter alia* include goals other than the advancement of his or her own well-being” (p. 287). In other words, a person’s agency may include goals that do not have any personal benefit and may be even be potentially detrimental to one’s own well-being. When this distinction is considered in light of one’s capabilities, a number of dimensions arise which contribute to our understanding of the various elements of one’s freedoms.

The differences between agency and well-being imply that a potential tension exists between the promotion of agency and the promotion of well-being. For example,

working towards political change may or may not impact one's personal well-being in a positive way and even has the potential for negative consequences for one's standard of living. This does not imply that agency and well-being are always in tension, but rather that there is a real possibility for this tension to occur. In addition, agency and well-being can also be characterized in the same manner as capabilities in terms of achievement (functioning) and freedom to achieve (capability) (Sen, 1993, 2009b). When these two tensions are kept in mind, four dimensions of agency and well-being can be evaluated: well-being achievement, agency achievement, well-being freedom, and agency-freedom. Of note, is that "each of these four types of benefit involves an evaluative exercise, but they are not the *same* evaluative exercise" (Sen, 2009b, p. 288 emphasis in original)

There are two particularly important factors that emerge from consideration of these four potential evaluations. First, considerations of agency freedom and/or agency achievement require one to take into account a person's own judgments and values. Second, a capability analysis will take different forms for well-being freedoms and agency freedoms. Because the goal of agency is broader than well-being, the evaluative space would also need to be broadened to include factors that are not directly related to personal well-being. Moreover, it is feasible that agency goals may go against well-being goals. The ways in which various goals are prioritized thus needs to be carefully considered and kept in a particular context. As Sen (2009b) states, "having more capability in terms of agency freedom is an advantage, but only in that specific perspective, and particularly not – at least not necessarily – in the perspective of well-

being” (p. 290). Thus, not only do the goals (i.e. well-being or agency) of an evaluation need to be taken into account, but so too does the context of the particular situation.

A final point to consider in this overview of the capabilities approach is the role of context. In his discussion of poverty as capability deprivation, Sen (2009b) discusses the role of contingencies on a person’s ability to convert resources into the various types of freedoms they value. In many ways this represents an additional step beyond the *means/end* discussion presented earlier as these contingencies represent the various factors that influence an individual’s ability to successfully utilize a particular *means*; these might include income, primary goods, or some other resource. Ultimately, Sen (2009b) identifies four sources of variation which can also be described as conversion factors: (1) “Personal heterogeneities” include the range of potential individual differences, such as age, gender, disability, physical maturity, etc.; (2) “Diversities in the physical environment” refer to both alterable and non-alterable aspects of the environment such as isolation, climate, pollution, disaster proneness, etc.; (3) “Variations in social climate” refer to factors such as crime, access to health care, epidemiology, social networks, education, etc.; and (4) “Differences in relational perspectives” include social norms, expectations, and other socially established practices (p. 255). Taking these factors into account provides another layer to an understanding of an individual’s freedoms.

An important methodological point underlying the capabilities approach is helpful to make at this point. Freedom – according to Sen – is not an unambiguous concept. In fact, he argues that “if an underlying idea has an essential ambiguity, a

precise formulation of that idea must try to capture that ambiguity rather than hide or eliminate it” (Sen, 1993, pp. 33-34). While this is ultimately a more general methodological point that applies beyond the capabilities approach, the concept of freedom provides a strong example of its use. The very notion of human freedom implies an immense range of actions and states of being, not to mention the intersecting roles of personal and environmental characteristics. The sheer diversity of potential beings and doings and their concomitant processes creates significant problems for any attempt to define precisely what a freedom is. In other words, such a task involves an inherent level of ambiguity. The notion of a capability is thus intended to capture this ambiguity rather than explain it away.

This point is also related to what Nussbaum (2011) has described as the “fallacy of measurement” (p. 60) or the tendency to place central importance on that which is easy to measure, however unwarranted such importance may be. Of course, the issue of measurement is a significant challenge for the capabilities approach. As Nussbaum (2011) states, “the difficulty is that the notion of capability combines internal preparedness with external opportunity in a complicated way, so that measurement is likely to be no easy task” (p. 61). However, this challenge of measurement should not be a deterrent, especially if the importance of capability is warranted and the importance of other approaches is not overstated due to the ease of measurement.

As a means of wrapping up this brief overview, it can be helpful to review some of the core principles of the approach. Alkire (2009) provides a list of ten central components which are particularly helpful for this purpose as they succinctly review

and touch on some key points which were not attended to directly. 1)

Multidimensionality: The capabilities approach demands the use of multiple metrics that inherently includes both positivistic and normative analyses. 2) Focus on human ends: There is an emphasis on valued beings and doings that are valued as ends as opposed to any particular means of development. 3) Central role of opportunity freedom: The conceptualization of freedom as functionings and capabilities highlights the need to include both, which typically means the incorporation of the role of opportunities (capabilities). 4) People as agents: The role of agency freedom highlights the role of individual values and judgments that moves the evaluative space beyond personal well-being. 5) Explicit value judgments: The lack of specification forces one to articulate and defend any judgments, lists and/or weighting of particular capabilities for evaluation. 6) Incompleteness: The approach is deliberately incomplete, both theoretically and in practice to incorporate diverse perspectives and uses and to handle the inherent ambiguity in the concept of freedom. 7) Analyses of complementarity: Capabilities are not viewed in isolation, they interact with one another. 8) Human diversity: The approach is inherently concerned with being able to adequately deal with human diversity, especially in relation to notions of human flourishing and the good life. 9) Complex homo- α economicus: The approach assumes people have a wide range of motivations; people are not solely motivated by economic factors. 10) Plural principles of evaluation: The emphasis of evaluation is not just on economic growth, but considers multiple factors such as human rights and ethics.

Ultimately, the capabilities approach presents a purposefully underdeveloped way of evaluating social arrangements. The potential benefits of this approach are seen in the expansion of the informational base put to use and its flexibility to be used meaningfully across a broad range of contexts. Of course, a key challenge remains in regards to its implementation. While methodologically – at least conceptually – it may be correct to preserve any inherent ambiguities, translating this into an actionable research strategy may prove otherwise. The next section examines the operationalization of the capabilities approach.

Operationalizing the capabilities approach. While a number of scholars have written about the operationalization of the capabilities approach (for examples see Alkire, 2002b; Comim, 2001, 2008; Deneulin, 2008), this section will focus on the work of Robeyns (2005a, 2006a). Robeyns (2006a) argues that there are three important theoretical gaps that need to be specified: 1) the choice between functionings and capabilities; 2) the selection of relevant capabilities; 3) the issue of indexing or weighting of different capabilities. While these three issues do not capture the complexity of all the issues related to the measurement of capabilities, they provide an important starting point to consider the various ways the approach has been and can be implemented.

The first theoretical point – deciding between functionings and capabilities – is a bit more complex than it may seem. First, it is worth noting that some would argue this is essentially not a choice: you must do both. For example, Alkire (2009) argues that any discussion of capability must include an evaluation of functionings *and*

capabilities, else one cannot be said to be working from the capabilities approach. However, others including Sen (Sen, 2009b), have at times argued that for some purposes an assessment of functionings is all that is needed, e.g. for well-being achievement. Ultimately, both the context and the purpose of the evaluation must be considered. Chiappero-Martinetti and Roche state (2009),

Sen pointed out that operationalization is first of all a matter of being clear about what we are looking for and then, depending on the context, why we are looking for it in that particular case. Then, based on that and on the data we have, and how we want to use that data, it will be possible to arrive in some way to some measurement. (p. 162)

Robeyns (2006a) similarly concludes that “The choice to focus exclusively on one of them[capabilities or functionings], or on both of them, will depend on the kind and context of the application, on certain normative choices, and (if applicable) on the data-availability” (p. 355).

The second theoretical issue of selecting relevant capabilities has been a bit more contentious. In essence, this involves the selection of which capabilities are considered and perhaps more important, which are not. Robeyns (2005b) outlines the range of approaches taken to select relevant capabilities. This range can be thought of as a continuum that might be simply described as having *a posteriori* methods of identification on one side and *a priori* methods on the other. The *a posteriori/a priori* distinction provides a useful heuristic, especially because approaches could also be categorized based on ideal/non-ideal, theoretical/a-theoretical distinctions as well.

The key with *a posteriori* approaches is, of course, that no particular assumptions about which capabilities are of value are made beforehand. In many ways, this is more in line with Sen's approach as he emphasizes the role of public dialogue and debate in selecting relevant capabilities. Other approaches in this vein may begin with what Comim (2008) describes as an anthropological exercise; essentially a study of the views, values, and ideas of the participants is conducted and then relevant capabilities are selected based upon that study. Similarly, Walker (2008a) suggests a grounded approach to identify capabilities for the purposes of evaluation of learning and teaching. In some quantitative cases, a statistical technique – such as factor analysis – rather than the judgment of the researcher(s) would be used to try and identify the key capabilities.

A priori approaches, on the other hand, use a variety of methods to identify a list of capabilities beforehand. This has typically entailed the creation of a list of capabilities and this has sparked some of the most rigorous debate between scholars within the approach (see Alkire (2002b) for an overview of different “lists”). The type of list created is also significantly influenced by the primary purpose of the author. Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2011) has devised a list of ten universal basic capabilities as part of a theory of basic justice. She argues that this list represents the minimum amount of capabilities that all people in a just society should have. Nussbaum also stresses that this list is provisional and open to revision. Another key aspect of the list is the idea of multiple-realizability; the idea that the capabilities identified can be realized in a wide

variety of ways dependent upon the context. This is actually fairly typical of most *a priori* defined lists as the capabilities identified represent fairly general ideas.

Alkire's (2002b) use of practical reason to identify a list further illustrates that the debate over the creation of a list may be a bit overstated. Sen's (2004) rejection of creating a list is based on concerns of overspecification, irrelevance, being overly normative, and being overly reliant on one metaphysical view. However, this does not imply that all lists are inherently problematic. In fact, Sen's larger concern with the creation of a list is based on an emphasis that multiple routes (i.e. Alkire's use of practical reason or Nussbaum's basic capabilities among others) can be taken to select relevant capabilities and the creation of a list is by no means required. As Sen (1993) states, "mostly my intransigence arises, in fact, from the consideration that the use of the capability approach as such does not require taking that route, and the deliberate incompleteness of the capability approach permits other routes to be taken which also have some plausibility" (p. 47).

Ultimately, there is a productive tension in the approach between the emphasis on the bottom up nature of the approach and the need to specify relevant capabilities to make the approach operational. It is interesting to note that Alkire (2002b) argues the use of practical reason to create a list of capabilities both alleviates Sen's concerns and greatly assists in the "heroic specification" that is eventually required if the capabilities approach is to be an effective tool for social change. However relevant capabilities are specified, a key element of this approach demands the explicit justification of any particular list. This point is in fact, inherent in the identification of capabilities as

judgments about an individual's freedom cannot be done independently from what they value or from their views of the good life. (The role of "lists" can also be seen in the following section on education and the capability approach.)

The third theoretical specification deals with aggregation. A key issue to consider in any type of aggregation is the amount of detail that is lost, typically in direct relation to the amount of aggregation that occurs. This is particularly important for the capabilities approach to carefully consider as there is an important emphasis on particular contexts and individual choices; there is a commitment to the essentiality of the particular (Comim, 2008). Comim (2008) notes that any attempt at measurement, when considered in light of this principle, "is committed to *principles of low-levels of aggregation of data and discrimination* among different circumstances" (p. 165 emphasis in original). This idea is closely related to the idea of noncommensurability; the idea that each individual value – or capability for that matter – is qualitatively distinct and these values are irreducible (Comim, 2008). This implies that each capability should be valued in its own right; an idea that makes potential trade-offs between capabilities problematic.

Any type of aggregation inevitably entails some loss of detail and often a collapsing of various elements into particular indices with associated weights. None of these issues are without challenges. In the capabilities approach, aggregation is most typically done on either an intrapersonal level or an interpersonal level (Robeyns, 2006a). Comim (2008) refers to these as either horizontal or vertical aggregation and envisions a matrix with individuals representing the rows and capabilities/functionings

represented in each column. Horizontal or intrapersonal aggregation would entail the aggregation of one individual's capabilities. Vertical or interpersonal aggregation would entail the aggregation of a particular capability or set of capabilities across individuals. While there are some who argue that trade-offs – and thus weighting or indexing – should not be made between capabilities due to noncommensurability, the reality of practical constraints often imply that some level of indexing or weighting is necessary. As Robeyns (2006a) states, “while seeing capabilities as fundamental entitlements may be a useful philosophical exercise, it is of limited help in many instances of empirical evaluation and policy making” (p. 357).

Robeyns (2006a) identifies three particular ways in which weighting tends to occur. The first approach involves simply assigning weights and justifying one's decisions. While there are some who argue this process is entirely arbitrary, others argue that this makes the assumptions underlying any weighting approach explicit and open to debate. The second approach argues that a statistical approach should be used to assign weights, typically based on the variance of the indicators used. Proponents argue such an approach is free from potential bias while detractors argue that this leaves particular assumptions, especially the normative assumptions underlying these methods unchecked. The third approach involves a social choice procedure where the participants themselves decide on the weights, typically through participatory techniques. Robeyns (2006a) notes that this third approach has only been used in small scale projects and its potential use for larger scale assessments remains to be seen.

These three theoretical specifications will provide a useful starting point for an analysis of the various ways in which the capabilities approach has been applied to education and development. It should also be noted that in addition to the distinctly different ways each of these theoretical gaps can be filled, the degree of sophistication each specification entails should also be noted. Sen (as cited in Comim 2008) states, “the capability approach can, thus, be used at various levels of sophistication. How far we can go would depend on the practical considerations regarding what data we can get and what we cannot” (p. 179). The next section presents an overview of how the capabilities approach has been utilized in education.

Education and the Capabilities Approach

There is an interesting tension surrounding the role of education in the capabilities approach. On the one hand, education is seen as vitally important and it clearly plays a central role in human development. Sen (2003) states, “the ability to exercise freedom may, to a considerable extent, be directly dependent on the education we have received, and thus the development of the educational sector may have a foundational connection with the capability-based approach” (p. 12). Similarly in Nussbaum’s (2006, 2011) view, education is of critical importance for the development of capabilities, democratic society, and human flourishing. Walker (2008a) describes Sen’s view of what education can do as “thick” because it includes both “instrumental and intrinsic value, and transformative potential” (p. 479).

On the other hand, the role of education in the capabilities approach has also been critiqued for being under-theorized. Unterhalter (2003, 2005) duly points out that

Sen's view of education can give a misleading impression that education is always capability enhancing; this is clearly not always the case. While education may serve to expand capabilities, the nature and structure of educational endeavors may also serve to inhibit or constrain capabilities. In contrast to the "thick" view of what education can do, Walker (2008b) describes Sen's view of education as "thin" because it does not adequately account for the way power and participation may impact the process(es) of education.

Conceptualizing education in the capabilities approach. The tension(s) between the "thick" and "thin" aspects of education is related to the various ways in which education is conceptualized within the capabilities approach. In Sen's writing, for example, education is viewed as both a capability itself and as a means for the development of other capabilities. Access to education is described as a potential social conversion factor in the form of social opportunities (Sen, 1999, 2009b). Sen (2003) has also described four roles which education may play in development: 1) increasing productivity, 2) influencing the distribution of income, 3) improving the conversion of resources into functionings and ways of living, and 4) helping people to make intelligent choices about the lives they can lead (p. 12). While the multiple roles education plays within the approach highlights its importance, they also cause conceptual confusion (Flores-Crespo, 2007b).

A number of scholars have sought to clarify the role of education in the capabilities approach. Flores-Crespo (2007a) conceptualizes education primarily as an instrumental freedom. Vaughan (2007) distinguishes between capabilities *to participate*

in education and capabilities *through* education. The capability to participate in education views education as a functioning and it “involves factors that enable a child to attend school; and once physically attending school, being able to participate and understand, and engage in learning confidently and successfully” (Vaughan, 2007, p. 116). Capabilities gained through education refer primarily to changes in personal conversion factors and choice formation as a result of an educational experience.

Otto and Ziegler (2006) suggest that education can be conceptualized as 1) a capability itself, 2) a capability input, and 3) as a personal conversion factor. Capability inputs, in this case, are viewed as “conditions of possibilities for individuals to both, develop and realise [sic] their capabilities” (Otto & Ziegler, 2006, p. 278). Such inputs include access to various forms of education along with the resources of the schools (i.e. textbooks, technology, teacher quality, etc.) to provide a quality and equitable educational opportunity; they represent structural and/or institutional factors and social opportunities that an individual may or may not be able to take advantage of. Personal conversion factors, in this case, relate primarily to the skills and knowledge gained through education which enables an individual to convert resources into valued capabilities.

These different conceptions are certainly not antithetical, but they do create some confusion, especially due to the dual role of education as both a capability/functioning and as a means to expanding other capabilities. Leßmann (2009) argues that there is a circularity in the relationship between achieved functionings and one’s capability set that remains unexplained. For education in particular, this begs the

question: how does an increase in educational functioning actually lead to an increase in capabilities? While Leßmann (2009) suggests a theory of learning can address this gap by providing insight into how people learn to make choices about their current functionings in relation to the expansion or contraction of their capabilities, it is evident that conceptual clarity is needed to understand the role of education in the capabilities approach.

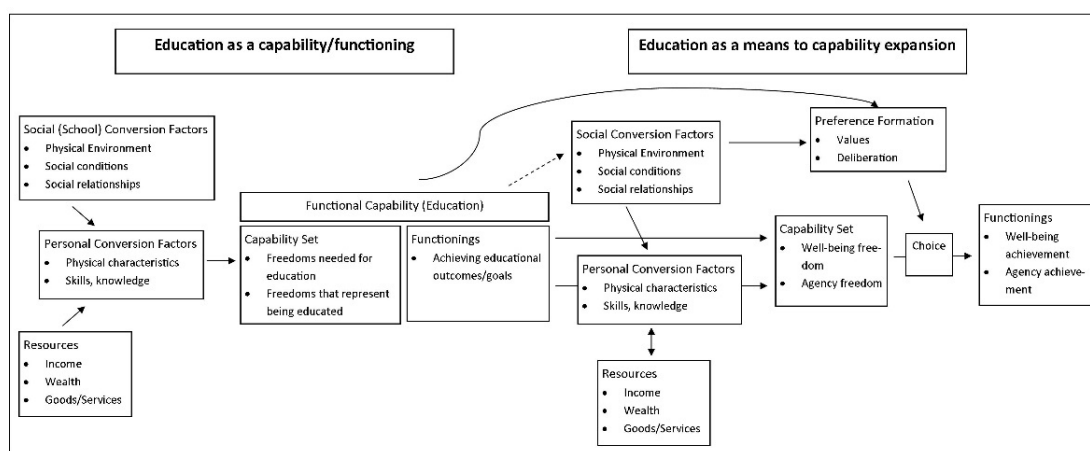


Figure 1. A model of education as a capability/functioning and as a means to capability expansion.

Ultimately, I argue that a much clearer picture of the role of education in the capabilities approach can be achieved by utilizing two basic conceptions: 1) education as a capability/functioning and 2) education as a means to capability expansion (see *Figure 1*). While this categorization is not radically different from Sen's, Vaughan's or Otto and Ziegler's, some important differences emerge. First, Vaughan's description of capabilities to participate in education does not adequately capture the interdependent relationship between the processes of education and the goals of education. An overemphasis on processes can obscure this relationship and neglect the ways in which

the roles and purposes of education may be framed in terms of capabilities. Similarly, Sen's "thin" depiction of education as a capability neglects important aspects of the process.

In regards to the conceptualization of education as a means to capability expansion, Vaughan (2007), and Otto and Ziegler (2006) emphasize education's effect on individual conversion factors. While these play an important role, this view is particularly limited as education's role is not explored in terms of the actual capabilities fostered as a result of an educational experience; such a conception only points to preconditions of potential capabilities. Conceptualizing education as a means to capability expansion both highlights this limitation and stresses the need to evaluate education beyond its impact on conversion factors, capability inputs, and choice formation. Moreover, this conceptualization also attempts to illustrate the mechanisms and/or processes by which education as capability/functioning may relate to education as a means of capability expansion later in life. In the following sections, these two conceptions of education in the capabilities approach will be explored in more detail.

Education as a capability/functioning. The bulk of research in education using the capabilities approach has conceptualized education as a capability/functioning. Both capability and functioning are included here to stress the importance of what is actually achieved and the need "to look beneath outcomes (not reading newspapers, for example) to consider what freedom a person had to choose and achieve valued functioning" (Walker, 2010, p. 902). Walker (2008a) has also used the term "functional capability" to emphasize the importance of considering both capability and functioning

in education. This dual consideration implies that both what an individual actually gains and the processes by which such gains are made must be evaluated. As such, an analytical distinction can be made between two subgroupings of literature in this general category. The first provides a definition or a measure of the goals of education; it defines what education as a capability/functioning entails or should entail. The second grouping is concerned with the processes by which education occurs or is made possible.

One of the key insights of conceptualizing education as a capability is the recognition of the multiple roles education can play. Robeyns (2006b) notes the capability approach is able to incorporate both the economic and non-economic roles of education on both personal and collective levels along with education's intrinsic role. As such, there are inherently multiple elements within the capability of education. These elements are often considered as capabilities in their own right. For example, based on work with students, theorists and other researchers, Walker (2006a) developed an ideal-theoretical list of capabilities for higher education which entailed: practical reason; educational resilience; knowledge and imagination; learning disposition; social relations and social networks; respect, dignity and recognition; emotional integrity and emotions; and bodily integrity (pp. 128-129). What is especially important to consider about such a list is that it provides a way to evaluate higher education as a whole; it provides a way to evaluate education as a capability.

Using the capabilities approach to define the goals of education has often entailed the use of a list and such lists have been created in multiple ways. In some

cases, an established list is used to evaluate education. Raynor's (2007) evaluation of education in Bangladesh using Nussbaum's universal list is a good example of such an approach. Melanie Walker has used multiple approaches to defining a list including a grounded approach (2008a, 2008c) in which she bases her list on the experiences of the students themselves, a procedural method (Walker, 2006b) based on Robeyn's (2005b) procedural approach and a mixture of approaches as in the example noted above (Walker, 2006a). DeJaeghere (2012) has examined the role of public debate and dialogue in selecting valued capabilities for education.

While not an explicit list, Unterhalter and Brighouse (2007) propose a capabilities informed conception of education based on three intersecting fields: 1) the positional value of education, 2) the intrinsic value of education, and 3) the instrumental value of education. From this perspective, education would be evaluated based on its positional impact (i.e. whether redress of gender, class, or racial inequalities occurred), instrumental impact (i.e. were skills and knowledge for employment or other instrumental ends gained), and intrinsic impact (i.e. what effect did education have on one's agency and well-being) (Unterhalter & Brighouse, 2007). Envisioned as three overlapping circles with capabilities – denoted as agency and well-being freedom – at the nexus of all three, they argue that such a conception of education provides a way to evaluate social justice in education as opposed to the limited metrics of Education for All (EFA).

In all of these cases, the use of capabilities to evaluate education has provided a more complex picture of education than approaches such as human capital, which

emphasize a single metric. While it is also worth noting that a number of aspects on these lists could be included in the conceptualization of education as a means to capability expansion, the primary purpose of these lists or frameworks is *not* to explicitly evaluate education's impact on other capabilities. Even if the instrumental values of Unterhalter and Brighouse's (2007) framework can be conceptualized and measured as a capability input or individual conversion factor, the primary intent of these lists and conceptions of education is to provide a normative framework for the evaluation of education conceptualized from a capability perspective. The primary intent is to evaluate education as a capability itself.

It is also worth noting that most dimensions of these lists and frameworks can be evaluated as both an opportunity (i.e. was the opportunity to develop these capabilities provided) and in terms of their actual attainment (Walker, 2006a). The notion of functional capability is clearly present here as such a list provides information about both capability and functioning. In addition, the interdependence of process and outcome is clearly evident in the dual roles of these frameworks. The incorporation of processes points to the second subgroup of the conceptualization of education as a capability/functioning.

The second subgrouping is concerned with the processes of education. Scholars have utilized the capabilities approach to evaluate a range of factors, inputs, and concepts related to the educational process. For example, the capabilities approach has been used to evaluate and advocate for a view of educational quality (Tikly & Barrett, 2010), to assess equality/inequality in education (Unterhalter, 2007, 2009; Unterhalter

& Brighouse, 2007), and as a framework for social justice in education (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Smith and Barrett (2011) have utilized the approach to identify capabilities deemed important for literacy development and both Saito (2003) and Hinchliffe (2009) have argued that the role of values and deliberation need to be considered in education from a capability perspective. These studies illustrate the way in which the capabilities approach is utilized when education is conceptualized as a capability/functioning.

Education as a means to capability expansion. Relatively few studies have explicitly attempted to understand the ways in which education contributes to the expansion of other capabilities. One approach to doing so has involved conceptualizing a measure of impact that is deemed more in line with the spirit of the capabilities approach and relating this to a measure of education. For example, Wigley and Akkoyunlu-Wigley (2006) evaluate the impact of education on life expectancy as a measure of impact more aligned with capabilities; they find that education has a significant effect on life expectancy that is independent of income. While this approach captures an important relationship on a macro-level, the high levels of aggregation and the use of singular dimension of well-being present a particular limited application of the capabilities approach.

Flores-Crespo's (2007a) study of technical university graduates in Mexico provides a much stronger example of the use of the capabilities approach and evaluates the ways in which education may serve a means to capability expansion. In this study, education was viewed primarily as an instrumental freedom expressed in terms of seven

different functionings. This list was identified *a priori* and assessed via questionnaires and interviews. Ultimately, Flores-Crespo (2007a) found that while attending a technical university expanded the capabilities of graduates (e.g. the ability to search for a job, the ability to require relevant knowledge, and for some to have labor opportunities), societal factors limited the potential of education. “Due to the lack of economic and social facilities that restrain the freedom to embark upon worthwhile activities, and the lack of higher education options, graduates’ capabilities are deeply constrained” (Flores-Crespo, 2007a, p. 63). In a similar vein, DeJaeghere and Baxter (DeJaeghere & Baxter, 2014) utilize the capabilities approach to analyze how the social and economic context influences a person’s ability to transform entrepreneurship education to actual capabilities and functionings.

Alkire (2002b) takes a slightly different approach, but the intent is the same: to understand education – in this case a literacy project – as a means to capability expansion. In this case, the literacy project is evaluated through a participatory impact assessment rather than through the use of a predefined list of capabilities. Alkire (2002b) also conducts a traditional cost-benefit analysis of this project to see how the two assessments compare. Ultimately, the participatory impact assessment reveals significant effects which the cost-benefit assessment completely neglects. In this case, capabilities related to empowerment, knowledge, work, life, relationships, inner peace, and religion were expanded by the literacy project (Alkire, 2002b, pp. 267-269).

While these two studies illustrate different approaches to evaluating education as a means to capability expansion, they are conceptually similar. In both cases the

emphasis is on understanding education's role in expanding other capabilities. These studies go beyond considerations of education as simply individual conversion factors, capability inputs, or influences on preferences and choice. While these factors certainly play a role in capability expansion, studies that only consider education's role as influencing such factors are essentially renaming educational outcomes as conversion factors, inputs, and preference formation; they are not exploring the links between education and additional capabilities.

While empirical assessments of education as a means to capability expansion remain limited, there are clear conceptual frameworks for how one might operationalize the approach in this regard. In fact, there are significant similarities in operationalizing the capabilities approach when education is conceptualized as either a capability/functioning or a means to capability expansion. Young (2009) posits that three factors need to be considered when evaluating education from a capabilities perspective: 1) a list of educational capabilities needs to be defined, 2) learning pathways via conversion factors and potential functionings need to be analyzed, and 3) the role of values, choices, and preference need to be identified and incorporated. Similarly, Otto and Ziegler (Otto & Ziegler, 2006) posit that one should identify a capability of interest, identify empirically assessable functionings which represent that capability, and finally one should identify the relevant capability inputs and conversion factors in order to evaluate education from a capabilities perspective.

To conclude this section, it seems clear that the capabilities approach has offered a powerful tool to offer additional insights into educational research. When education is

conceptualized as a capability/functioning, a richer picture of the aims and roles of education is obtained along with greater insights into the relevant processes and structures that either enhance or constrain the attainment of education as a capability. Despite the limited research conducted on the role of education as a means to capability expansion, the potential seems promising. However, more work is clearly needed in this area, particularly in terms of the pathways between the outcomes of education and the expansion of additional capabilities.

The Capabilities Approach and the Impact of the Norwegian Folk High Schools

Based on this review of the literature, a framework emerges from which to base a study of the impact of the Norwegian folk high schools. The primary gap in the conceptualization of education as a means to capability expansion is an understanding of the pathways and/or relationships between additional capabilities and educational outcomes. Following Young (2009) and Otto and Ziegler (2006), an approach can be taken which identifies an individual's current capabilities and assesses the social conditions, choices, and other inputs – including the outcomes of the folk high school – that enabled or constrained the achievement of one's capabilities. This provides a means to evaluate the impact of the folk high school by assessing the links between what an individual gained as a result of their folk high school experience and their current well-being.

In order to evaluate the impact of the folk high schools in this manner, three elements need to be identified. First, the present well-being of former folk high school students needs to be identified. Second, the conversion factors and capability inputs

acquired as a result of a folk high school experience need to be evaluated. Third, an individual's values, choices, and preference formation need to be evaluated, particularly in relation to one's current capabilities and to their folk high school experience. Taken together, these three factors can be evaluated to understand the relationships and pathways between the educational outcomes gained from a folk high school experience and their impact on an individual's agency and well-being.

Based on Robeyn's criteria for operationalization, this approach entails the use of both capabilities and functionings. As little research on the folk high schools has been conducted, the selection of relevant capabilities will be done using Walker's grounded approach where capabilities will be identified *a posteriori* based on the experiences of former students. To help provide a framework for the various capabilities that might emerge, the type and token distinction offered by Hinchliffe (2009) will be utilized. "Tokens then become specific instances of types so that, for example, the type functioning 'participating in the community' may be instantiated by the tokens of running for office, clearing up the local environment or setting up a nursery" (Hinchliffe, 2009, p. 406). This implies a vertical form of aggregation which attempts to both preserve the heterogeneity of individual experience but also offer an adequate basis for comparison and evaluation.

Of particular importance in this approach is the emphasis on the links between an individual's current capability/functioning and their folk high school experience. As noted above, the human capital paradigm – despite its limitations – offers an operationally robust platform for the evaluation of education's impact on well-being. If

the capability approach is to offer a more meaningful alternative, a similar robustness needs to be found, particularly in regards to the empirical verifiability of the links between educational outcomes and measures of impact. Thus far, there are few empirical evaluations of education's impact on capability expansion and in general, many studies of education and capabilities only point to education's effect on individual conversion factors and capability inputs. This reframing of educational outcomes as conversion factors does not entail an empirically verification of their role in improving well-being.

If “the notion of capabilities represents ‘the essential fulcrum between primary resources and human achievement’” (Dean et al as cited in Otto & Ziegler, 2006, p. 271), the relationship between an education experience – measured via the influence on conversion factors, preference formation, and capability inputs – must be evaluated in relation to current levels of functioning and capability. The framework presented for the evaluation of the impact of the Norwegian folk high schools offers a method to evaluate this relationship.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a review of the literature in order to identify a viable approach to evaluating the impact of the Norwegian folk high schools on well-being. Based on the limited research conducted on the Norwegian folk high schools and the limitations of identified in the literature on human capital and civic participation, the capabilities approach was selected as the most apt method of examining the folk high schools' impact. In addition, and based on current applications of the capability

approach in education, a framework for evaluating the role of folk high schools as a means of capability expansion has been put forward. The following chapter provides an overview and discussion of the research methodology utilized in this study.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

In this chapter, an outline of the research methodology is presented. As stated in chapter one, the objective of this study was to understand the impact attending a Norwegian folk high school has on an individual's well-being. In order to achieve this objective, an exploratory study that qualitatively examined the impact(s) of attending a folk high school on specific capabilities and functionings was conducted. This study involved a series of semi-structured interviews with a sample of fifteen former folk high school students, eight of their parents, and five folk high school teachers. The capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999) was used throughout the study as a conceptual framework of well-being. Because the capabilities approach is purposefully left incomplete (Alkire, 2009), the qualitative design used in this study was also used to further develop a theory of capability expansion for the Norwegian Folk High Schools. The remainder of this chapter provides additional details about the methodology utilized in this study including: the overarching methodological approach, origin of the study, study design, methods, data collection processes, analysis procedures, ethical issues, validation, and limitations.

Methodological Approach

This study was guided by a critical realist paradigm. Simply stated, a critical realist perspective combines a realist ontology with a constructivist epistemology (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). For the critical realist, reality is made up of events, experiences, structures, states, etc. that exist independently of one's knowledge or experience of that reality (Scott, 2005). One's knowledge of the world, however, is

viewed as socially constructed and thus potentially fallible; one's knowledge of the world is mediated by one's past experience, values, language, social position, etc. (Patomaki & Wight, 2000). In order to reconcile an intransitive view of social reality and a transitive view of knowledge, an explicit recognition of fallibility is made, both in regards to potential errors a researcher/knower might make, but more importantly in regards to the ways in which "social actors are contingently positioned and, therefore, always observe the world from a fixed position (geographical, cultural, and more importantly, epistemological)" (Scott, 2005, p. 636). In addition, because the social world is viewed as emergent and evolving, one's descriptions of that world are always a step behind. Thus, for the critical realist, a belief in an independent reality does not imply that an absolute understanding of that reality is possible. However, the notion of fallibility also implies that there are better and worse descriptions of reality and that by understanding the epistemic consequences of one's positionality, a more or less objective view of reality can be gained (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000).

An additional ontological assumption is made by critical realists in regards to the relationship between structure and agency. Scott (2005) argues that "every social situation available to the researcher for examination embodies assumptions about the ability or otherwise of social agents to act in the world in the context of structural or situational factors or constraints" (p. 640). This study is guided by the critical realist assumption that both agents and structures have independent causal powers on social reality; it avoids both methodological individualism and structural determinism (Scott, 2007a). Thus, this view necessitates understanding the intentional actions of individuals

as agents, the influence and/or constraints of social structures at various levels, and the relationship or interaction between the two.

It is also worth noting that the use of the term critical can be misleading as it may be conflated with the tradition of critical inquiry embodied by Marxist and Freirian scholarship (Crotty, 1998). This is not to say that critical realists are not interested in social change or critique, it is simply to emphasize that the term critical is being used differently. Scott (2005, 2007a, 2007b) states that the approach is critical because it accepts fallibility and because it argues that no single representation of the social world can be justified in an absolute way; any ordering of the world is always open to critique and alteration (Scott, 2005). The critique is primarily philosophical: “critical philosophy is therefore critical because it accepts neither the view that there are fixed philosophical first principles that guarantee epistemic certainty, nor the idea that first-order activities are self-justifying” (Cruikshank as cited in Scott, 2005, p. 635). As an emerging paradigm (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), the key tenets of critical realism are also congruent with scholars working outside this area. For example, feminist post-positivist realist scholars such as Mohanty (2000) and Moya (2000) share many of the same assumptions of critical realism.

The paradigmatic assumptions held by any researcher in conjunction with the nature of the research problem shape the methodological approach to be taken by any study. In this case, the nature of the research problem and the philosophical assumptions of a critical realist perspective support a qualitative exploratory approach. In order to understand the impact of the folk high schools, an inductive process is necessary to

explore what the impacts of the school may be and how they further develop the capabilities approach in the case of the Norwegian folk high schools. The paradigmatic assumptions of critical realism do not only point to one methodological approach, although there is a preference for qualitative methods. This preference stems from the potential of quantitative research to reify and make static either the emergent factors of social life or the intensions of an individual and thus critical realists “prioritise [sic] social actors’ descriptions of their experiences, projects and desires” (Scott, 2005, p. 644). More importantly, however, the ontological assumptions regarding agency and structure have important implications for any methodology. These assumptions, “[imply] that any investigation can only take place at the intersection or vertex of agential and structural objects, and thus indicators that researchers use have to reflect this close relationship between the two” (Scott, 2007b, p. 15).

Origin of the Study

As outlined in chapter two, very little research has been conducted on the Norwegian folk high schools. The little research that has been done is limited to the immediate outcomes of the schools or focuses on its teaching methods, philosophy, and historical roots. This study aimed to add to the literature on the folk high schools by exploring the impact these schools have on well-being. In addition – and also outlined in chapter two – this study added to the emerging literature on the capabilities approach in education, particularly in regards to education as a means of capability expansion. An understanding of the impact of education is also situated within the larger debate surrounding the role of education in development. As noted, if education is to be an

effective lever of human development, a clearer understanding of both the impacts and the processes by which a particular education experience achieves such impacts is needed.

Autobiography of the question. In any research project, it can be helpful to know the journey one has taken to arrive at their focal question. This section on the autobiography of the question aims to chart the origins and journey of this study. The objective of this study is ultimately situated within the larger question: what is the relationship between education and well-being? Trying to understand what an education actually does for someone is one that I have been grappling with ever since my experience as a student in the sport and outdoor life line at Hedmarktoppen Folkehøgskole. While I had a particularly meaningful experience, it remained incredibly difficult to articulate just what the value or impact of this experience was. Upon my return home I was constantly confronted with the question: so what did you get out of it? While I did my best to explain the array of experiences I had, most of my friends and family responded: that sounds great, but what did you get out of it? While the intrinsic value was clear to me, it was hard for me to think about what the instrumental value might have been.

For my master's thesis, I conducted a case study centered on a cohort of former folk high school students to evaluate the immediate outcomes of the school in relation to their stated aims. In this study, strong support was found for the attainment of personal and social development outcomes (*allmenndanning*) with only limited supported for outcomes related to the idea of the people's enlightenment

(*folkeopplysning*) (Erickson, 2008). While the findings of this case study has since been corroborated by Knutas and Solhaug (2010), the question still remains of how these outcomes affect students' lives? What impact did these outcomes have for students later in their lives?

After having taught for six years at an inner-city charter school in St. Paul, Minnesota, many of the same questions were continually raised for the students I was working with. I must admit that much of the academic work students were doing seemed to have both little relevance in their lives and little instrumental value beyond the significance of earning a high school diploma. This is not to suggest that earning a diploma wasn't an important accomplishment for students, but a diploma rarely seemed to live up to the empowering potential which my students tended to believe it held. Again, this left me with questions about what an education is able to do for someone and whether or not it really had the potential for social change. This also left me wondering what type of educational experience has the greatest potential to improve one's life: was it an experience like the folk high school or a more traditional format?

Study Design

This study employed an exploratory qualitative design and was designed in this fashion in order best account for the less quantifiable nature of a folk high school experience, the measurement challenges associated with human development, the limited research on the impact of these schools, and to better compliment the purposefully underdeveloped nature of the capabilities approach. Furthermore, a qualitative approach was better suited to examine the meaning(s) this experience had for

the participants as their lives unfolded and ultimately on the nature and processes of any influence the folk high school had on their well-being. Lastly, as this was the first study of its kind, a qualitative design was more appropriate for helping to develop an initial explanation or theory of how attending a Norwegian folk high school may have contributed to well-being.

Sampling. This study utilized a mixture of purposive and convenience sampling to select fifteen former students, eight parents, and five folk high school teachers. Initially, student and teacher participants were sought using an approach that combined elements of the homogeneous and maximum variation purposive sampling techniques (Maxwell, 2005). This was done to try and balance the ability of this study to capture a typical folk high school experience with some depth while still capturing some variation. Three key characteristics were considered in this approach: the administrative grouping of the school, the time that had elapsed since a person completed their folk high school experience, and the line of study. Each of these is discussed in more detail below. The approach to sampling set an initial target of nine students as this was viewed as a sufficient number to gain a mixture of breadth and depth at three purposefully selected schools.

Due to challenges related to recruiting participants, however, the sampling approach was adapted during data collection while in Norway. The initial purposive approach was adapted to include some elements of convenience sampling. This decision was largely based on practical constraints that did not allow the researcher to conduct multiple trips to Norway and thus a broader net was cast to find participants than

initially anticipated. However, this is not to suggest the approach was completely based on convenience as participants were still selected in line with finding a balance between the administrative grouping of the school, the time elapsed since completing, and the line of study. Ultimately, the depth gained from aspects of the homogeneity approach was lost as more students were included from a wider variety of schools. At the same time, this study no longer was able to capture the experiences of schools with particularly unique characteristics such as *Nansenskolen*. The final result was a still a balance between breadth and depth, but not as initially anticipated.

The administrative grouping of the school was the first factor considered in the approach to sampling taken by this study. As there is a fair amount of diversity amongst folk high schools, schools were initially selected to represent the two administrative divisions - *frilynte folkehøgskoler* (non-Christian folk high schools) and *kristne folkehøgskoler* (Christian folk high schools) – and to include a typical example of a school with some unique features. In consultation with the central folk high school office in Oslo, the following schools were initially selected. *Toten* folk high school was selected as a typical example of a *frilynte* folk high school. *Hedmarktoppen* folk high school was selected as a typical example of a *kristne* folk high school. And finally, *Nansenskolen* was selected as an example of a folk high school with some unique characteristics.

Table 1

Characteristics of folk high schools included in this study.

School	Lines of study (<i>linjer</i>)	<i>Frilynte / Kristne</i>
Fredtun	Theatre and acting; Music; Sewing and tailoring; Art and interior design; Global Connection; World; Water sports and outdoor life; Sport and outdoor life; Kickboxing.	<i>Kristne</i>
Hedmarktoppen	Danse; Creative arts; Music; Mission training; X-Sport; Sport and outdoor life	<i>Kristne</i>
Molde	Outdoor life; Sport; Scuba diving; Soccer; Snow sports; Fitness and training	<i>Kristne</i>
Nordfjord	Outdoor life: expedition, hunting and fishing, ski and surf, KRIK ski, wind and water, vertical, Norway from tip to tail; Occupational training	<i>Kristne</i>
Ringerike	Global solidarity; Art; Design and fashion; Music and theatre, Sport, Stand up	<i>Frilynte</i>
Ronningen	Vocal; Photo and video; Art and design; Dance; Band; World; Norwegian; Sport; Social; Top sport	<i>Kristne</i>
Toten	China-Korea-Japan; Show and entertainment; Nutrition and health; Creative arts; Psychology, pedagogy, and leadership	<i>Frilynte</i>
Valdres	Global village; Golf and snow; Steep outdoor life; Altitude-paragliding; Outdoor life; Sport and aid; Cuba; Dog sledding; Mutlisport; Recreation	<i>Kristne</i>
Voss	Picture art; Free sport; Sport and outdoor life; Film and photo; Music; Data	<i>Frilynte</i>

Note. All data from (Informasjonskontoret for Folkehøgskolen & Informasjonskontoret for Kristen Folkehøgskolen, 2010). Historical data about lines of study was not able to be consistently found. School offerings do change over time.

Perhaps the biggest way in which the initial sampling plan diverged was in terms of the initial schools selected. Ultimately, no participants from *Nansenskolen* were able to be recruited and a broader net was cast. While the sample of schools tended to be from the *kristne* administrative group, a mixture of *frilynte* schools were also included. Table 1 provides an overview of some of the basic characteristics of the nine schools that were represented in this study, six of which were *kristne* and three were *frilynte*. In addition, one school was located in a large metropolitan area, four were located in mid-size cities between 10,000 and 30,000 inhabitants, and four were located in small cities or villages with less than 3,000 inhabitants. Geographically, the schools were scattered throughout Western (Vestlandet) and Eastern (Østlandet) Norway. As can also be seen in Table 1, all schools offered a variety of lines of study, most of which included at least one line relating to sport and outdoor life along with one line in art.

As the intent of this study was to determine the long-term impact, identifying the right time period to have elapsed since one completed their folk high school experience was also carefully considered. When determining a time frame to evaluate impact, there is always a risk of evaluating either before or after a primary impact has occurred. The time criteria of seven to eight years was selected as an effective balance between a time when the experience was still relatively recent, but when one also had time to reflect and lessons learned had time to be used (or not) in different contexts. A timeframe of seven to eight years also provided for some time to have elapsed for those who attended university following their folk high school experience to have lived and worked in their community. The initial plan was to include only students who attended a folk high

school either seven to eight years ago. As the sampling plan had to be adapted, this target was still used and the average time since one had completed folk high school was 7.8 years. The shortest amount of time that had elapsed since completing a folk high school was five years and the maximum was eleven.

In order to capture some variation at each school, participants were also selected based on their line of study. At the folk high schools included in this study, lines of study can be grouped together into larger categories, with some exceptions. Some neat groups of lines of study include: artistic, sport, global/travel, and Christian lines of study. While the initial sampling plan sought students from each type of line of study at each school, once the sampling approach changed participants were sought that represented a range of lines of study. Ultimately, eight participants were involved in an artistic line (dance, drama, music, theatre and creative arts), five students were involved in sport and outdoor life lines of study (sport and outdoor life, outdoor life and adventure), one student was involved in a global/travel line of study, and one student was involved in in a more traditional academic subject.

The five teachers included in this study represented three different folk high schools; two of which were *frilynte* and one of which was *kristne*. The approach to sampling to identify teachers was the same as the approach to identifying students. As the focus of this study was on students, the aim of the teacher sample was more focused on the aims of the folk high schools for each administrative grouping. Attention was still paid to a mix of teachers and the sample included newer teachers (those with less than 10 years of experience) and seasoned teachers (those with more than 20 years).

The teachers also represented artistic, outdoor life and sport, and traditional academic disciplines.

The sample of parents included in this study was ultimately based on the participants. All students were asked if their parents would be interested in participating. While most students agreed to allow the researcher to contact their parents, logistical constraints and a lack of response from parents resulted in a sample of eight parents.

Potential participants were first contacted via the schools themselves and with the help of the Central Folk High School Office in Oslo. In addition, participants were recruited using a network of contacts (friends, colleagues, family members, and others) and by asking existing participants if they knew of anyone else who may be interested. Once identified, the characteristics of each student (the administrative grouping of their school, the time elapsed, and their line of study) were then considered too in light of finding the balance between breadth and depth discussed above (i.e. the balance between the homogeneous and maximum variation approaches to sampling).

Methods. A variety of data collection methods were utilized in this study in an effort to capture a rich description of the impact a folk high school had on an individual's well-being and the processes by which this occurred. In addition, it should be noted that there was a recursive relationship between data collection and data analysis. They are presented separately for clarity, but analysis began after the first data were collected and this informed the nature of subsequent data collection, particularly in the semi-structured interviews. While this study attempted a number of data collection

methods (e.g. story prompts and life-mapping exercises), only three methods were included in the final analysis: semi-structured interviews, school observations, and school documents. Efforts to get students to complete the story prompts and life-mapping exercises were unsuccessful in all but one case. As a result, these data were excluded from the final analysis and this document. The interview protocols for teachers, parents, and students are included in Appendices B-D.

In general, the methods used in the qualitative phase sought to find the right amount of structure and lack of structure to enable comparisons across individuals and schools without sacrificing a deep and contextual view of the schools' impact on well-being. Maxwell (2005) describes how structure can help to provide a framework for analysis and comparability across individuals and settings while an unstructured approach enables one to focus on a particular phenomenon of interest. The use of the capabilities approach as a framework for evaluating well-being was intended to provide this balance; a basic structure of well-being is outlined but remains purposefully underdeveloped to account for a contextual understanding for any given individual. The semi-structured interviews were developed with this balance in mind.

Data collection procedures. Semi-structured interviews with former students, teachers, and family members were conducted during a series of two short trips to Norway during the latter part of 2012 and beginning of 2013. All interviews were conducted in-person, except for three; those three were conducted via Skype (two with students, one with parents). All interviews were conducted in Norwegian (with the exception of one in English) and were recorded, translated, transcribed, and annotated

with additional notes taken during the interviews. Reflections of interviews were also kept in a research journal to capture initial reflections and insights following most interviews. Four full days of school observations were conducted and field notes were collected for analysis. Where possible, documents were collected from each school, particularly in relation to the purpose and intended outcomes of the school (most of which were also available online).

Data analysis procedures. Once transcribed, all interview data were analyzed using Dedoose, a web based qualitative analysis tool ("Dedoose Version 7.0.23," 2016). In order to help provide documentation about the processes by which I arrived at my findings, I relied heavily upon memos, particularly during the initial phase of open coding. In the later phases, I developed a number of diagrams to both document the process by which key findings were developed and as an aid to the analysis itself. Throughout the analysis, I utilized a variety of techniques which included: asking questions, constant comparisons and theoretical comparisons, drawing upon my personal experience, negative case analysis, and alternative narrative structures (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

To the extent possible, all data were first analyzed using an open coding approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This involved the breaking down of data into a variety of concepts and themes in a brain-storming like process. This approach was also utilized to mitigate the potential for the conceptual framework developed for this study to overly constrain the analysis. As the number of codes grew, I would shift gears and start to look for connections between themes and concepts or what Corbin and Strauss

(2008) describe as axial coding. In this process, codes would typically be combined into larger themes, but I was also careful to look for key distinctions and groupings that needed to be split in order to represent conceptually distinct aspects of the data collected. Ultimately, this process continued until a coherent narrative began to emerge about the nature of the folk high school experience and its impacts on well-being.

This process was also utilized to evaluate the point of saturation; the point where enough data had been collected to provide a rich description of the impact of the folk high schools. Ultimately, the concept of saturation was used in two ways. First, I used the concept of saturation to help determine when enough student interviews had been conducted. In hindsight, a point of saturation began to emerge near the tenth interview as key patterns of repetition began to emerge. For the purpose of this study, that point provided confidence that sufficient data had been collected from students after fifteen interviews. Similarly, this concept was also used in the process of data analysis. As themes began to repeat themselves across participants through both open coding and through the lens of the capabilities approach, it became evident a point of saturation had been reached. Complimentary to this was the way in which I utilized the conceptual framework to help identify gaps in the analysis and address them.

Ethical Issues

A key principle for all research is: do no harm. For this study, there was little reason to suspect that participation in this study entailed much if any risk. That said, all guidelines from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Minnesota were followed to ensure compliance with a high degree of ethical standards in research. This

process helped to ensure that all participants were aware of the purpose of the study, what they were being asked to participate in, and any potential risks they might incur. Copies of the invitation to participate and consent information letters are included in Appendices E – G.

In the context of neoliberalism and increasing demands for accountability in education, there may have been a small risk to the folk high schools as an institution if either negative or no impacts on well-being were found. While past research would suggest such a risk was minimal, it was an important reminder to consider the policy implications of any research project. More importantly, in this regard, was the potential for the results of this study to be reified; for the results of this study to be translated and reduced into a simple linear and relatively static process. To help resist this possibility and mitigate the potential for negative or misguided policy implications, care was taken to express the complexity of any impact the folk high schools had.

Lastly, there was a need to be aware of my own biases and the epistemic consequences of these biases. As I had a very positive folk high school experience, I needed to be keenly aware of the potential to overestimate the positive aspects of the school and downplay the negative. Awareness of this bias and its potential influence on my own understanding helped to mitigate this effect along with the solicitation of external feedback that specifically looked for this.

Trustworthiness of the Study

A number of steps were taken to ensure a high degree of rigor in this study. As this was a qualitative study that did not employ an experimental or quasi-experimental

design, the conventional concepts of internal and external validity, reliability, and neutrality are not particularly helpful in assessing rigor (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). Instead, steps were taken to address the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings as they were more aligned with the methodological approach and design of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this section, each of these points are addressed to help illustrate the steps that were taken and possible limitations of this study.

Credibility. One of the key aspects of credibility relates to the length and intensity of the time spent collecting data. For this study, two trips were made to Norway that amounted to a total of 21 days. This included four folk high school visits, four visits to the central folk high school office, and 21 in-person semi-structured interviews. Each interview was an average of one hour in length. This amount of time was limited due to time and resource constraints and does raise some concerns about the credibility of the findings as more time would have been beneficial. That said, a significant effort was taken to ensure a high degree of intensiveness and depth was gained. I was also able to draw upon my own background and experience in Norway and with the folk high schools to build rapport with participants and minimize reactivity, thus further enabling a more intensive data collection process. In addition, this experience enabled me to probe with greater purpose and helped build the rich descriptions needed to provide a full picture of the influence of the folk high schools.

In addition to the length and intensity of time spent collecting data, efforts were also taken to search for discrepant evidence and negative cases (Maxwell, 2005). A

more credible narrative was provided by rigorously examining data that did not fit with either my expectations or with the rest of the data. As noted in chapters four or five, potential limitations and alternate explanations are provided that demonstrate my efforts to consider negative cases. This active pursuit of alternative explanations helped to identify and engage with discrepant cases in order to develop a more complete and complex picture of the impact of the folk high schools.

The credibility of this study was further aided by the use of triangulation. As data were collected from former students, teachers, and parents, the extent to which their experiences aligned (or not) could be assessed. Cross-checking data from teachers, parents, and students helped to illustrate instances of convergence and divergence that also helped build rich descriptions of how attending a folk high school may have influenced well-being. An area for improvement would have been to use different data collection methods in this effort. While data were collected using semi-structured interviews, school documents, and observations, limited insights were gained about the influence on well-being through the school documents and observations.

The biggest weakness for the credibility of this study was the inability to conduct member checking due to practical limitations. This is a limitation of this study and something that would have helped to ensure I did not misrepresent or miss any key aspects of participants' experiences.

Transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In the following chapters, a concerted effort has been made to provide a rich, thick description of the data and findings of this study. In addition, the context provided at the beginning of chapter four

is another element of this rich description, all of which is intended to provide the reader sufficient context to determine the extent to which these findings may transfer to other settings. In regards to the dependability and confirmability of this study, an external audit has not been conducted. However, an audit trail has been created via the transcription of interviews, collection of interview and field notes, memos and notes throughout the coding process, descriptive and axial coding, and the conceptual diagrams created to analyze and interpret the data collected for this study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an outline of the methodology that was used in this study. It presented an overview of critical realism and the paradigmatic assumptions held by the researcher in connection to the exploratory qualitative design utilized in this study. A detailed discussion of the particular methods, sampling strategies, data collection and analysis procedures was then provided. Lastly, the chapter reviewed potential ethical issues and the trustworthiness of this study. In the next chapter, findings are presented on the learning outcomes of a Norwegian folk high school and its influence on a person's values and preferences.

Chapter 4 – Learning outcomes, values, and preference formation

The initial influence of any educational experience is represented by the array of skills, knowledge, and other learning outcomes that students gain. In this chapter, data and analysis are presented on the learning outcomes and ways in which attending a folk high school influenced the values and preferences of study participants. This study found that attending a folk high school contributes to a number of personal, social, and subject matter outcomes. In addition, this study found that attending a folk high school both broadened the perspectives of study participants and served to strengthen their existing values.

These findings help to substantiate one part of the conceptual framework—based on the capabilities approach—developed for this study. In *Figure 2*, the role of learning outcomes and the influence on preference formation (both in bold) are illustrated when education is viewed as a capability itself. As discussed in chapter two, this provides a basis for identifying links between a person’s educational experience and their well-being later in life. Using the lens of the capabilities approach, the learning outcomes of the folk high school become the capability inputs that in turn influence one’s ability to achieve different levels of well-being later in life. In chapter five, additional findings of this study will be presented using this conceptual framework to help answer the broader question being explored for this study: what is the impact of attending a Norwegian folk high school on well-being?

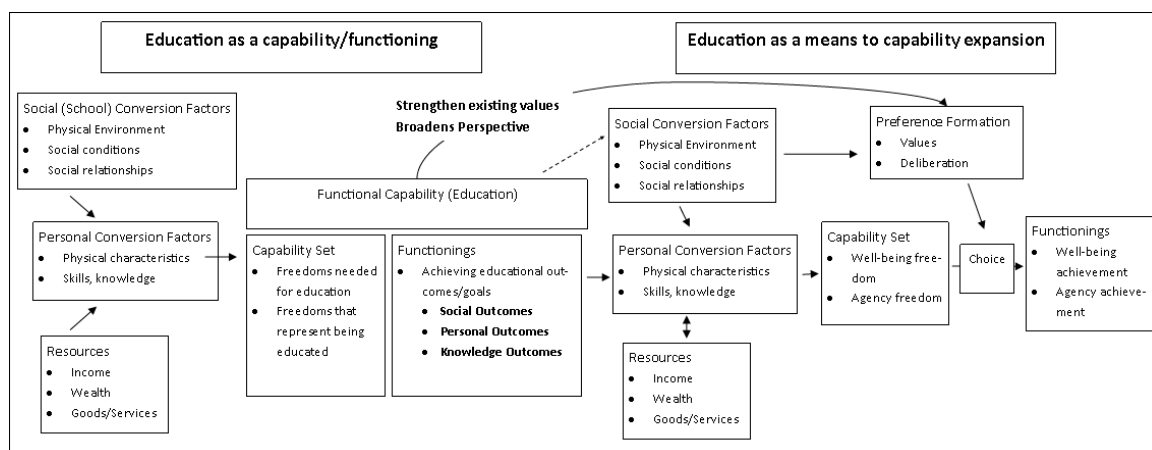


Figure 2. Conceptual model based on the Capabilities Approach. Bolded items represent the learning outcomes identified in this chapter along with the ways in which attending a folk high school influenced one's preference formation.

In this chapter, data and analysis are first presented on the nature of the folk high school experience itself. This is presented to provide the reader with some additional context about the folk high school experience, its mix of challenges and supports, and the unique way it provides its students with both freedom and responsibility. This section is followed by an overview of the data and analysis on the learning outcomes and potential influences on one's values and preference formation as a result of attending a folk high school. The chapter concludes with a summary of these findings in relation to first two research questions posed for this study: 1) What learning outcomes do former students report gaining from their folk high school experience? and 2) In what ways did attending a folk high school shapes one's values and preferences?

Attending a Norwegian Folk High School

Attending a Norwegian folk high school represents a unique type of educational experience. As noted previously, the folk high schools are often described by their lack

of grades, formal examinations, and competency certifying diplomas or certificates. Moreover, these characteristics are forbidden in Norwegian law ("Lov om folkehøyskoler [Law regarding folk high schools]," 2002). The aims of this school are conceptually broad and in line with holistic notions of human development and human flourishing. *Allmenndanning* is most commonly translated as liberal education. In practice, teachers referred to this primary as *danning*; as a broad notion of developing the "whole person." The other stated aim of *folkeopplysning* is rooted in the original philosophy of the folk high schools and is translated as the people's enlightenment. Interestingly enough, only one teacher referenced this historical-philosophical foundation. However, this aim is also about a broader notion of development, although most closely connected to a sense of cultural or group identity (for a more complete discussion on this aim, see Erickson, 2008).

While the primary aim of this study was not to describe the nature of the folk high school experience, a great deal of insights emerged from teachers, parents, and students alike. Insights from school web-sites and the main folk high school office also helped to provide insights into the nature of a folk high school experience. In general, students who attend a folk high school: 1) live on campus in a dormitory, 2) study a primary subject (or line of study), 3) a short-term international travel experience, and 4) study for a period of nine months. Students are typically 18 or 19 years old when they begin their folk high school studies and this is typically after one completes their compulsory secondary schooling. In addition to these general characteristics, the

following section presents an overview of key challenges and supports followed by the unique role that the combination of freedom and responsibility play at these schools.

Challenges and supports. One way to help understand what a folk high school experience is like is to frame it broadly in terms of challenge and support. Indeed, this two-part conception was a key way in which former students, parents, and teachers described the folk high school experience. While this conception could ultimately be used to describe most educational experiences, the unique challenges and forms of support help to illustrate some of the key ways in which attending a folk high school is unique. Three challenges stand out: the intense social experience; an array of new experiences, particularly through rigorous subject matter learning; and the challenges associated with one's first experience with independent living. Similarly, three key supports stand out: a safe and secure environment; the role of the teacher; and a school culture that is positive, supportive, and inclusive.

First time away from home. Attending a folk high school was often a student's first encounter with independent living. For many students, this was the first time they were away from home on their own. It was the first time they were responsible for many of the practical aspects of life such as washing one's own clothes, being responsible for one's living space, getting up in the morning, helping out in the kitchen regularly, etc. It was clear that the extent to which this was a challenge varied widely, but it remained a part of the experience for many. For example, one teacher reflected, "For some students when they first came here they are like, wash my own clothes? But I have never done that before, it's mama who's always done that at home." Parents also

noted this, but often as things their child gained as a result. One parent stated, “[Our child] learned to take care of practical things, washing clothes for example, kitchen tasks, such things.” Ultimately, this aspect of the school was not viewed by parent, teachers, or students as a particularly important challenge or aspect of the school, but rather as one of many. Nevertheless, the first experience with independence helps to capture part of the nature of a folk high school experience.

Life in miniature: An intense social experience. Parents, teachers, and students alike all described a folk high school experience as an intense year. As simply stated by one parent, “My perception of [my son’s] folk high school year was that it was very intense”. Intensity in this case refers to a couple of things. In the first place, it refers to the volume of unique experiences one has while attending a folk high school, often directly related to one’s line of study. However, it is the social aspect that really amplifies the intensity and it is described unlike any other social experience. In part, this is because the experiences one has while at folk high school were almost always shared experiences. In addition, the residential aspect of the schools meant that students lived, ate, worked, and experience nearly everything together. One parent described the experience as such:

You have an incredible amount of experiences in a very short period of time at folk high school. You live together in a group. You travel on trips together. You are almost living in the same sleeping bag with one another. You get to know each other by smell; you know each other through good and bad.

While other types of schools may involve residential aspects, the folk high school was described differently as one had few moments where they were not involved in some type of social context.

The social intensity of the folk high school experience was also described well by students. For students, the folk high school experience was intense because it was relentless, particularly in regards to the social context, and this brought with it the demands of being able to function in this setting at almost all times. One student stated,

you had to live so tightly that you didn't have the option to choose something else or to go away or that you can't go away.... At folk high school, it is [social] the whole time except when you are sleeping or going to the bathroom. It is almost certain that you are going to have some conflicts while at a folk high school.

Another student described this similarly, "we were so many people that lived in the dorms and went to classes and ate together. One learned about how to behave in social situations because there were so many; that's something that one isn't so used to." The sense that one was not able to avoid or find a break from the social context and how new this was for students was a big part of what made it intense.

Another way to illustrate this intensity was through some of the moments of struggle and where the demands of this experience were evident. In a particularly illustrative response, one student described their frustration as a result of the social intensity and the pressures that came with it.

It felt like so much pressure. Sometimes I wanted to say ‘fuck you’ to all of them because it was just, it just got too crowded. Even if or when I was in my room I couldn’t even scream because that would be disturbing to the others. If I decided to go outside there would be people there. There was always something happening. There was always something that was demanded from me.

This response helps to further illustrate not only the relentless nature of the social experience, but particularly through the demands this placed upon students. It wasn’t just that one was always in a social setting, but how being a part of that setting also brought responsibilities and expectations from those around you.

Teachers described the social intensity of the school in a way that captured the myriad of experiences that were compressed into a particular year. Paraphrasing a saying that was used by a few people to describe the folk high schools, one teacher stated, “life is the most important school and the most learning rich, but folk high school takes less time.” Similarly, another teacher stated,

[at folk high school] we deal with many of the thing you learn in the course of life and in a way, you try to learn as much of this as possible in one year because it is so intense. It is in a way, life in miniature.

For the teachers, the volume and variety of experiences—social, academic, personal, etc.—that are compressed into one school year is what makes this experience so intense. The social aspect of this is certainly a key part. One teacher noted, “one lives in a dorm so tightly together [and] I think this is a very important part of, actually, an important part of the education [at a folk high school].” In many ways, the residential aspect of the

folk high school is what enabled this volume and variety of experiences (this is discussed in more detail below). Ultimately, the perspective of teachers further illustrates how one of the challenges of the folk high school was coping with the social intensity of the experience.

New experiences through subject matter learning. Another aspect of the folk high school that helps illustrate the ways in which it was a challenge for students, was the role of the subject matter. However, this aspect of the school manifests itself in a very different way than in traditional schools. For one, in a school with no grades or exams, the learning of a subject becomes quite a bit different. At a folk high school, there is a lot more learning by experience. This is similar to the idea of learning by doing, but using the term experience helps to extend the ways in which students are involved in all aspects of a learning experience (e.g. the planning, execution, reflection, etc.). In a similar vein, the subject matter is also taught in a way that is connected to practice, even if its theoretical in nature. For example, a music teacher described their goals as:

[My students] shall become better in music, they should learn different sides of music both theory and practice. They should become good at blending together and playing music as a group. We play a lot as a band; we dare to stand on stage and give fantastic concerts.

At first glance this may appear relatively standard and not all that different from most music courses, but there is an important emphasis on engaging in this subject line as a means to new experiences. To dare and give a fantastic concert illustrates the ways in

which the subject matter is a vehicle to a new experience. As another teacher stated, “[the subject matter] is also a very important part of this. One can see that it is through the subject matter that things happen.” This teacher is describing how the subject matter is a type of conduit for experience; for things to happen. The emphasis, however, is on how the subject matter becomes a means for students to have new and shared experiences where they plan, execute, and reflect on each phase and the totality of the process. Moreover, students are doing so as autonomous beings where they are just as responsible for decisions about the learning as the teacher.

Parents often described the extent of the new learning experiences students had in this manner. One parent described the new learning and experiences their child had: “[He got] new challenges in relation to outdoor activities that he hadn’t had before. So he got a lot of experience, mainly with winter sport, that he was able to practice and gain competence in.” Again, at a folk high school this experience tended to be hands-on. The experiences their child had with winter sport would have included things like multi-day backcountry ski tours, building and camping in snow caves, learning about avalanche safety, etc. In each case, they would be putting their knowledge in practice through direct experience and would play multiple roles—planning, leading, organizing, etc.—in each experience.

Ultimately, the way these types of new learning experiences would have played out varied by the subject matter. The key take-away is that the subject matter was still important, rigorous, and full of new challenges. Whether due to the sheer volume of new experiences or some other factor, it is interesting to note that both parents and

students often described this in general terms. They were less likely to list all of the different experiences unless pressed to do so. It is also important to remember that students come into particular lines of study with different levels of skill and experience. The parents of the student above who attended the outdoor life line of study were surprised as their child had a keen interest in music. Similarly, another parent was a bit surprised that their child took a line of study in the arts instead of sport. Regardless, one aspect of a folk high school experience was a substantial amount of new learning experiences and this included those in one's line of study.

Secure and positive environment. In contrast to the challenges above, a number of factors emerged that were described as key supports. The first of which was described as the safe and secure environment of the folk high school. This aspect of the school was mainly described by parents and illustrated their view that the folk high school environment—with its structure, core values, etc.—was a secure and safe environment to start one's adult life. One parent stated, "Folk high school is a safe environment. You are always in close contact with others who can help care for you. You are not left alone to yourself. You have teachers who follow up." Other parents described a similar sentiment and even added a sense of the security this secure environment afforded them. For example, one parent reflected,

For me, it meant a lot that when we sent the boys to folk high school or that when they wanted to, which we thought that was great, it meant their first move away from home was to a folk high school where they had people around them;

where they had to be grown up but were safe. And we had a sense of security as well from this as we knew they were in a healthy environment.

In both of these cases, parents were describing the key supports from the milieu and teachers that provided a stronger sense of security for their first year away from home. These descriptions were also often provided in contrast to life at university or work where one would not find the same kind of sustained support from friends, classmates, or teachers.

Teacher's also described a type of security that was brought about through the lack of grades, exams, and the associated stressors that come with formal accountability measures or an emphasis on performance. One teacher reflected,

We don't have grades here, they are illegal. So, in the classes where we have dance and music we are trying to create an environment where everyone can be better, but without the negative stress or pressure. Here I have experienced that we have succeeded at saying, 'relax. In order to do better you must do this,' but not so much that your value as a person depends on how well you play.

In a similar vein, another teacher described how folk high school was a safe place to learn because, "You are not risking your economic security. Here your place at school is safe and secure; you get good feedback and you can improve. But when you're working, you lose your job." Both of these examples provide a contrast to either other forms of formal schooling or the working world. They illustrate how the folk high school environment is viewed as safer and this enables students to try, to test their own limits without any of the consequences of failure.

In conjunction with these aspects, the participants of this study also described the nature of the folk high school environment as very positive. Positive in this sense was most commonly expressed as a generally supportive and caring social milieu. In some ways, this is a summary of the previous two paragraphs and illustrate the general positive impression participants had of the folk high school milieu. For example, one teacher described one of the most important aspects of a folk high school as, “the strong social community because often the environment and community here is so good.” Similarly, another teacher reflected, “the positive community affects one and it can lift people up. That is something I have experienced here. There is very little negative subculture, it can happen, but for the most part the majority of students are supported.” Parents also described this positive aspect of the social milieu and commented on the way in which it provided positive feedback. One parent stated, “There is something that happens when you live so tight with others and received positive feedback all the time.” While not directly expressed by participants, this positive sense of milieu is connected to the aspects of the folk high school experience that enable it be safe and secure and in relation to the role of the teacher.

Role of the teacher. The role of the teacher also served as a key support for students and helps to illustrate a fair amount about the nature of the folk high school experience. While a number of aspects about teachers were described by students, particularly in regards to being supportive and providing constructive and meaningful feedback, these aspects of teaching are not unique to the folk high school. Insights from

teachers themselves, helped to draw out some clearer contrasts between how teachers at a folk high school operate compared to other schools.

First and foremost, folk high school teachers view themselves as concerned about the whole person. In one illustrative response of this idea as a teacher of the whole person, a teacher reflected,

I abandoned the idea that I was there just to teach someone how to do interval training or outdoor life. Now I am interested in the person and how they are doing in life. That is what I think doesn't happen very often at university; it's just subject matter, subject matter, subject matter. And the whole time the motivation that is used is the test day. You must be ready for the test day and people talk about if you don't do well you won't go further in life. And while this is important, at folk high school we are aware of the entire person: the subject matter, the psychological, the physical, and the spiritual.

Another teacher reflected a similar sentiment when they described how teachers provided, “[provide] feedback on who you are and not just about what you do or how well you're doing in a subject.” Other teachers reflected this sentiment in the emphasis on the primary aims of the schools and broader concept of *danning*: a holistic notion of human development. These examples help to illustrate a contrast between the teacher as a deliverer of subject matter knowledge compared to someone who is concerned with the development of the whole person.

In addition to an emphasis on teaching the whole person, two key characteristics help to illustrate the role of the folk high school teacher. The first is related to the

residential nature of the school and concomitant 24-hour school day. For the teacher, this means that they are constantly doing some form of teaching, even though more often than not the method is informal. One teacher reflected, “When we go around and speak with students in common rooms or outside, we are always seeing how students are doing and checking in on them, asking if they want to have a chat or meet up.”

Another teacher stated,

When we were on a trip we were together 24 hours a day; very tight. I observed students and maybe I saw that one isn't doing as well. I cared to find out what was wrong, what was causing you to not have it well.

In both of these examples the teaching day doesn't end. Folk high school teachers are in a type of school that affords them the opportunity and the freedom to engage in all sorts of informal learning opportunities based on the needs of the situation.

A final key characteristic that helps illustrate the role of the folk high school teacher is reflected in the ways in which teachers and students are more likely to engage in dialogue and share an equal responsibility for learning.

For most students, it is a brand-new experience to meet their [folk high school] teacher compared to their earlier school experiences and the ways they are invited to communicate with their teachers. As a teacher, I don't tell the students, “this is what we are going to do.” I meet them with, ‘Hi my name is Derek (this is a pseudonym), I will be your teacher. What do you want to do this year? Tell me what you want to do this year and we'll figure it out together?’ If they don't know, I have some stuff ready in case.

A parent also reflected on this different relationship and drew upon their own folk high school experience. They reflected, “Here we were suddenly in a dialogue with the teacher in a different way where we were perceived as adults, not as school children where we should be steered in a particular direction.” In these examples, a different role for the teacher is illustrated and is one where the teacher works with students in a wide variety of ways and often in equal standing with one’s students. Students in this case are treated as actors in their own learning who have as much to contribute to the process as teachers. As needed, the teachers still provide structure, but do so in a way that is mindful of the effects this has on a person’s ability to act as an independent young adult.

A final and brief point about the role of the teacher is the way in which these two factors may be complimentary to one another. The close connections between teachers and students who are living and studying in close proximity along with the ways that teachers work to create dialogue with students enable a very different teacher-student relationship. One teacher described this complementarity as,

[Folk high school] teachers are much closer to the students than in any other type of school. If we see anything or there is anything we need to, could be drugs or something that needs correction—and often there is such a strong connection between teacher and student that you can often go in then-and-there and have a conversation.

In this example, one can see how being able to be more fully aware of what is happening with a student, both inside and outside of “classroom” hours along with a

strong relationship between the teacher and that student can enable significant learning opportunities to occur. Similarly, this helps to illustrate how the role of the teacher supports the secure and positive environment discussed above.

Freedom with responsibility. Another key aspect of the folk high school was the unique ways in which the experience entailed a lot of student freedom while still maintaining a high degree of responsibility. Simply stated, “freedom with responsibility” was how one parent described this unique aspect of a folk high school experience. Another parent described this as they reflected,

it seemed [the teachers] took care of these youth but at the same time they gave you a lot of a lot of responsibility in a way or freedom. But this care they gave, it wasn't that they helped you and helped and helped you, instead they pushed you through.

Similarly, a teacher explained, “if we want to get a lot out of this year, then we have to dive in. And I say, I am responsible for you all [(the students)], but you must take responsibility for what you want to learn.” These examples help to illustrate the ways in which the increased amount of freedom was tied to additional responsibilities. As students gained more freedom about how and what learning occurred, they also took on the responsibility for that learning. Teacher's still played a supportive role, but not in a way that took away one's responsibility. In fact, another key aspect of freedom with responsibility was the way in which the two were more closely connected at a folk high school.

One of the key ways in which a person is held responsible for one's actions is to experience the consequence of those actions. Yet many of the conflicts we go through in life are never resolved as we move from one milieu to another. The structure of the folk high school, however, creates an environment where one is more likely to experience the consequences of one's actions and often in a much more timely and responsive manner. One student described this in contrast to high school.

The difference is that when you are at high school you are together with the people you don't get along with so well for only 4-5 hours and then you don't see them until the next day. When you go to a folk high school you see them 24 hours a day. So maybe you have to engage with this a bit more and respect this the whole time.

This inability to walk away from a potential conflict or person one doesn't like changes the nature of the way in which one is held responsible for their actions. Teachers also described this aspect of the school and one stated,

At other schools, you go home after the school day ends, but here one must solve conflicts that have come up throughout the day. We see that many of the students who start here have never had this before. They have the experience of making friends, they have the experience of standing in conflicts and find out the conflict can be resolved; that one can continue being friends even if you were angry with them. It can be very difficult to remove oneself from uncomfortable things at a folk high school. One must work with it and come through them.

The above examples are particularly illustrative of the way in which the structure of the folk high school environment forces people to confront the effects of their words and deed. As one teacher said, “In a way, you get a mirror of your reactions and your feelings and values.” In addition, the structure also makes it more likely that one works through a conflict to a resolution as one cannot avoid doing so when one lives so closely together with others.

The other aspect of freedom with responsibility that helps to illustrate the nature of the folk high school experience is the way in which this freedom changes the nature of the learning experience. One parent described this nicely and stated, “You have the freedom, you as a folk high school student, have the freedom to say I’m not going to write another thing....This positions you as essential and active actor in your personal state.” The effect of this, this parent goes on to say, is a “shift in perspective from [a task] as a requirement to an opportunity.” In other words, when one is free to act as an adult in equal standing, one is free to develop their own reasons for why a particular learning task (i.e. requirement) may benefit them. As these young adults are free to engage in tasks as an adult would, this influences their perception of these tasks and they begin to view them in a different way. As one teacher noted, “they see that this work is a normal part of life.” Without this freedom, this shift in perspective becomes much more difficult as the various tasks one must do at the school are done because one must, not because one sees them as integral parts of human life that they may benefit from.

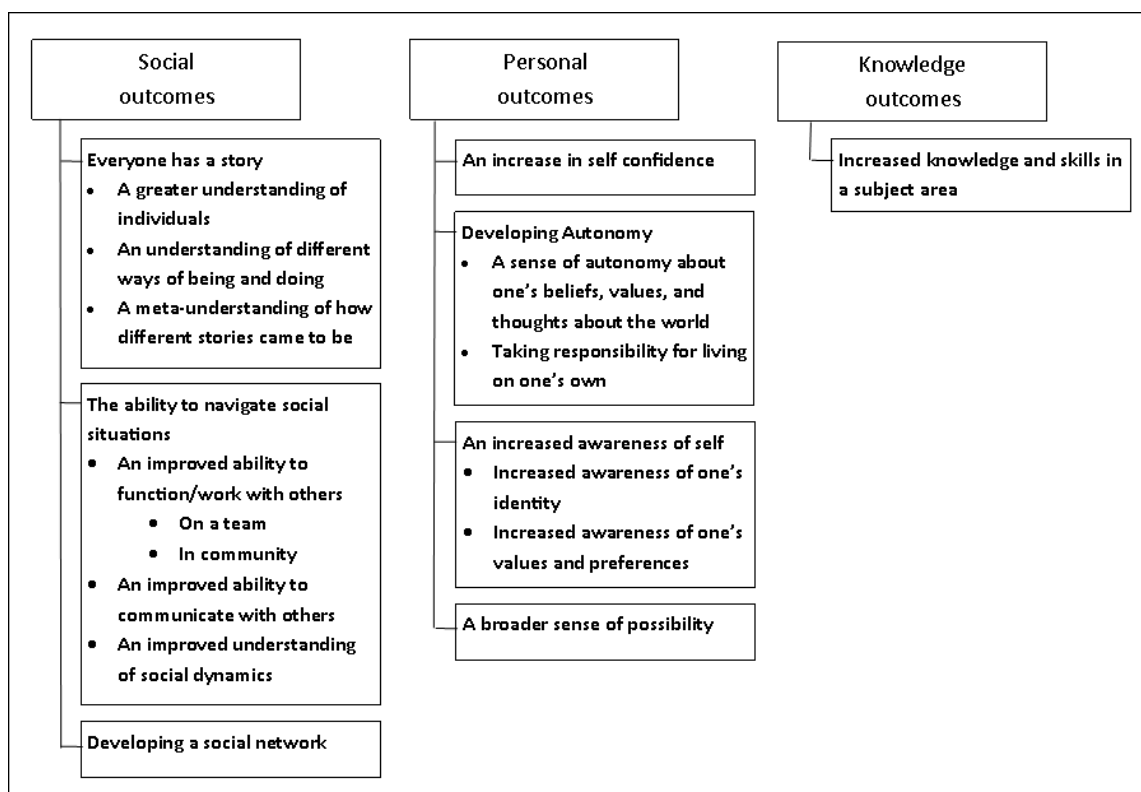


Figure 3. Overview of learning outcomes identified by study participants.

Outcomes and Influences on Preference Formation

This section presents findings on what students reported as the learning outcomes of the Norwegian folk high school and on how a folk high school helped to shape their values and preference formation. Outcomes, for the purposes of this study, are defined as the results or consequences of attending a folk high school as described by students. Simply put, an outcome is what a participant felt they learned or benefitted from as a result of attending. Study participants provided a wealth of rich description about their experiences and about what they saw as their key learnings, even if they were not easy to succinctly define. As an array of outcomes were identified, this section is organized around four domains: social outcomes, personal outcomes, knowledge

outcomes, and preference/values formation. Figure 3 provides a visual overview of the learning outcomes found in this study. While one open-ended question was asked specifically about what one learned, additional insights often emerged through other questions that explored how attending a folk high school may have impacted one's life in different ways. As such, data on outcomes were collected throughout each interview.

Social Outcomes. As mentioned in the above section on attending a Norwegian folk high school, the approach to education taken by these schools is highly social in nature and this is by design. It is thus no surprise that teachers, parents, and students all provided rich details about the unique social nature of their folk high school experiences and identified an array of social learning outcomes. While some students described these outcomes generally as social maturity or improved social skills, there were also rich descriptions of how they came to learn and appreciate the ability to understand and work with others, the ability to navigate and understand social dynamics, and the ways in which they developed social networks and friendships that have stood the test of time. To help summarize this category of outcomes, three key outcomes emerged and will be presented below: everyone has a story, the ability to navigate social situations, and developing a social network.

Everyone has a story. An important outcome of attending a folk high school was learning that “everyone has a story.” The core element of this insight is coming to a greater understanding of the people one attended folk high school with. As one former student stated, “I think I’m more aware of other people – in the big picture I mean – I’m more aware of other people and I know now that they have their story to tell.” Another

student reflected, “I thought very stereotypically in the beginning and put people in various boxes, but afterwards saw that this person was not who I thought they were.” As a result, this student noted, “it’s important to see that people are different and it’s also important to remember that everyone has their own story or has their own baggage and that these lie behind, are the background of everyone you see.” As these two examples illustrate, understanding the story of another is a recognition that there is much more to a person than how they appear or act on the surface. While this core idea was expressed by nearly all participants in the study, variation in this outcome can be captured by three expressions of it: a greater understanding of individuals, an understanding of different ways of being and doing, and a meta-understanding of how different stories come to be.

Nearly all participants expressed some degree of coming to a greater understanding of their fellow students. This was often expressed through getting to know students they otherwise would not have gotten to know. One student stated, “it hit me that I have become very good friends with people I would not have been friends with otherwise.” Another noted, “you became acquainted with people that you otherwise would not gotten to know; you got a deep understanding where you otherwise would not have.” A third stated, “I learned to get to know people who were maybe a bit different than me and those I knew from before.” In the context of the folk high schools, getting to know those one wouldn’t have otherwise or whom were different than those one knew before is about meeting people from different parts of the country and walks of life (e.g. class, ethnicity, religion, etc.). This context is important as it implies that students had to engage with differences they may not otherwise have had to and that

they actually came to a greater understanding of those differences. One student framed this explicitly in terms of overcoming those stereotypes (as quoted above). This student went on to say, “maybe I had a bit negative picture of an individual person [in the beginning] and [I] came to get a more full picture.” While not explicitly stated, students are reflecting on the ways in which they came to understand these individuals and their unique backgrounds. Part of understanding that everyone has a story is a greater understanding of individual heterogeneity and the unique characteristics of each person.

For other students, understanding the story of another went beyond the recognition of individual differences. For these students, understanding the story of another was also about understanding that there are different ways of being and doing. In a particularly illustrative response, one student stated,

In a way, at least in my group of friends, we did many things in our different ways and it was like this should be like that and this should be like that... So when you come [to folk high school] and it is just a big mix of many different people and a bit of a culture shock for many different things, in a way one learns that you find other ways to do things and other ways to think about things that differed from what I have done my whole life and what's been the standard for my family. I feel [this] was the main thing that one learned at folk high school.

The comparison to one's prior social group is important here and helps to illustrate the way in which there was a broadening of perspective from the norms and views of one's prior milieu; there was a greater understanding of different ways to act and be as opposed to one right way of doing things. This is not only about recognizing an

individual's story, but a valuation of the array of stories present in any group. Another student expressed this point more broadly, but was speaking about how interacting with other ways of being "stretched" them in regards to tolerance, other values, and a broader outlook on life. "We had around 15-20 students from other lands...so we also learned much or at least a deal from different ways of being."

A third expression of this outcome takes the understanding of others even deeper. For some students, they discussed a greater awareness and recognition of how a person's experiences shaped a person's identity, actions, and ways of thinking. For them, understanding that everyone has a story also entailed a meta-understanding of how those stories came to be. As one student stated,

I experienced that people grew up very differently from different places in [Norway]. I'm from a fairly large city and there were people from small islands in Western Norway and small villages in Northern Norway and they had different interests and [differed in] how they viewed life in general.

Similarly, another student stated, "I realized that people were also very different due to the different education they had, their family background they had, which language they used, [and] how they behaved." For these students, they not only expressed an understanding of individual differences and of different ways of being, but reflected on an increased understanding of how those differences came to be.

The three expressions of this outcome—a greater understanding of individuals, an understanding of different ways of being and doing, and a meta-understanding of how different stories come to be—are intended to richly capture the variation in which

students described how everyone has a story. They also point to different levels or degrees to which a person may understand the story of another. This same theme has also been expressed by others and in different domains. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) gave a popular TED talk entitled, “The danger of a single story.” In this talk she expressed, “I’ve always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person.” Her call to understand the multiplicity of stories that make up each individual is similar to what these students expressed when they got to know people they otherwise would not have (i.e. they had a singular view of), when they moved beyond stereotype, when they saw and understood different ways of being.

In many ways, Norway is a very homogenous country. However, its unique geography contributed to the relative isolation of small groups for centuries. As a result, Norway is home to an incredible diversity of dialects (anecdotally many Norwegians still joke about not being able to understand one another) and often substantial regional differences. Concepts related to inter-cultural competence help to shed additional insights about this outcome. Inter-cultural competency can be defined as, “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2004 as cited in Deardorff, 2006). It often deals with addressing one’s assumptions of others and helping to recognize the rich complexity of other cultures. The ways in which participants described folk high schools as having “people from all over Norway and people are

quite different depending on where they are from, so, you will have kind of cultural clashes in one way or another” illustrates similarities with this body of work.

As will be evident in the following pages, this outcome of everyone has a story was also described as having fairly substantial impacts on a number of additional outcomes. In fact, learning that everyone has a story was often described as one of the most important aspects of one’s folk high school experience. As already quoted, one student said, “[this] was the main thing that one learned at folk high school.” Other students reflected on the critical role this aspect played in their entire folk high school experience. One student illustrated this sentiment and stated,

[The impact of folk high school] had something to do with trying to understand other people’s understanding even though we come from the same land, maybe even the same city, that we come from such different starting points and to try and in a way fight or oppose these [differences] and still be able to talk with people and hear what they mean and what they like and for people to *value* being able to do this... this is what I think about the most when I think back on this year (emphasis added).

These responses illustrate the way in which this theme was valued in its own right and indicate that this was an important aspect of the folk high school experience itself.

An important caveat to this finding is that it was often described as both a process and an outcome of one’s folk high school experience. Some students explicitly discussed how they learned to understand that everyone has a story. Other students discussed how this process facilitated other types of learning and/or how it was

important for other aspects of their life. This difference highlights the ways in which disentangling educational outcomes from educational processes is often challenging, especially when this relationship is not necessarily dichotomous. One may need to go through the process in order to achieve the outcome; both are possible. Alternatively, an outcome for one person may be viewed as a precondition for a different outcome for another, depending upon the knowledge and skills each person started with. This challenge doesn't negate the evidence for this outcome, but it does qualify it; it does draw attention to the various ways this outcome/process may be experienced.

The ability to navigate social situations. Another learning outcome expressed by former students was the ability to navigate social situations. Navigating social situations is defined broadly and could also simply be considered an ability to function in social settings. The core idea of this theme is an improved ability to interact, engage, and work with others. One student reflected, “[I] learned how to behave in social situations because there were so many all the time: how you behave/present yourself amongst so many people, how you meet them; one learns to be engaged.” Another stated, “I don't know that if I can set my finger on a specific thing, but just that I got better at communication and dealing with other people, the social aspect.” A third noted, “I learned a lot about how to interact with others, to be close with others. A lot of social skills/abilities. If I didn't learn them there I learned to value them there.” All of these responses point to an improved ability to function in social settings. Precisely what this entailed was either unable to be defined, or was framed along one of three dimensions: an improved ability to function/work with others, an improved ability to

communicate with others, and an improved understanding of social dynamics. Each of these dimensions overlaps and the organization of these as such is not intended to present distinct categories, but rather to help illustrate the ways in which this theme was described by former students.

The ability to navigate social situations was often expressed in terms of an improved ability to work with others. This was expressed in two primary ways: through an improved ability to work together on a team and an improved ability to function in community. One student's reflection learning to work with others in a team was particularly illustrative:

One learns to work together with others that in a way one can accomplish more together than one can alone. Not always, but you learn to work together, you are together a whole year where you have to work together and its fairly intensive. So in regards to working together you had to do this a lot at folk high school, and relate to others no matter who they are.

Similarly, another student reflected,

If I didn't want to [do a task], then it was someone else who would have to do it. So I recognized that if felt lazy then it went on someone else's shoulders who was maybe just as tired as I was. So this [was] something I learned; this [was] teamwork.

In both of these responses, these students are expressing a sense that they were better able to work in a team and gained an improved understanding of just what that entailed. It is also important to note that these reflections were in the context of specific activities

or excursions (e.g. an outdoor excursion or putting on a musical production) and are examples of some of the new experiences students had through their lines of study. Expressions about learning to work in groups or as a team were discussed as important learning outcomes of particular group activities—such as putting on a concert, going on a ski trip, or building a scene—one was involved with during their folk high school year.

The other way in which students expressed learning to work with others had to do with an ability to function with others in community. As noted above, students were not always able to pinpoint exactly what their “social learning” entailed. They did not, in fact, explicitly express their learning in terms of functioning with others in community. However, they were very clear about learning to handle and/or respect others who were different or whom they may not have gotten along with. As one student stated, you “learn how to handle that others are different than you, that you must learn to respect others even if you feel you don’t get along with them.” Another student reflected,

There were of course people there that I didn’t get along with. There were 100 of us so naturally there will be some that you don’t like as much as others, but I learned that you can’t just ignore people because of this. You need to treat them with respect and treat them in a normal way and this is an important learning when you’re only 18 or 19 as you don’t think quite in this way when you’re that old.

In contrast to reflections on teamwork, these reflections were based on the often mundane and day-to-day activities of living with others. Whether it was learning to live with a roommate or share common spaces with others, these reflections were in the context of the intense social nature of the folk high school experience. Interestingly enough these skills were not reported as explicitly taught, but rather gained as a result of going through these experiences until a resolution was found. This is not to suggest teachers did not provide support (see below), but that students were still afforded the freedom to work through these conflicts on their own.

Teacher responses shed further insight as they viewed these day-to-day experience as anything but mundane. For them, the ways in which students had to navigate roommates, shared common spaces, and shared responsibilities critical components of the folk high school learning experience. Moreover, they illustrated how this stood in stark contrast to other forms of school (and as noted above). At a folk high school, these responsibilities last for nine months and are present 24 hours a day. One teacher reflected on how a big part of the learning experience “has to do with taking responsibility and living together with a person in a small room with everything one has with them. One simply has to adapt to the community; that is part of the community.” In this context, learning to get along with others, even those one may not like, is a simple and essential aspect of being a member of a community. In the context of day-to-day living and working through shared responsibilities, this is very much about learning to function with others one may or may not like and it is about doing so in and as a community.

The second major way in which students expressed an ability to navigate social situations was through an improved ability to communicate with others. For some, this was simply about being able to hold a conversation with others, especially if they viewed themselves as shy or introverted. One student simply stated, “you learn how to hold and keep a conversation.” Others reflected on this in the context of teamwork: “You learned you had to communicate well with those on your team.” For other students, this theme was discussed in terms of a better sense of how to communicate; of what to say and/or not say. “I got a lower threshold for speaking with people who I didn’t really know and a better awareness of what I should say, what is okay and not okay to say; there was a deepening of this.” Students didn’t elaborate much beyond this point generally, but as these three responses illustrate, part of navigating social situations included—at least for some—an improved ability to communicate with others.

The third dimension of learning to navigate social situations had to do with an improved understanding of social dynamics. In a particularly demonstrative response, one student stated,

[At folk high school] you learn about how a group functions, when one is safe in a group. This includes ensuring to give room for everyone, that it is safe for everyone to be in the group, that everyone can come with their contributions and everyone can get a response to their contributions without any danger. And this was certainly a distinctive aspect of the group I was a part of at folk high school

and that was very secure. One learns their own place in the group, but one learns also from the social interaction and to give room for the others around you.

Another student reflected on how they learned about the, “dynamics between the friendships I had. The dynamic between close friends and larger social circle and how people can slide between [being] unknown, known (e.g. acquaintances), and close friends.” In these responses students are describing an increased understanding of various aspects of the ways in which groups of people function and how those functions can shift. For one, this was more pointedly about group dynamics and what contributed to effective group mechanics, systems, and processes. The other response pointed to an understanding of a different set of group mechanics: how relationships and their concomitant roles can shift in different settings. This same student also reflected on their own role, stating “[it was one of] these typical (self) discoveries/realizations that I had where hmm maybe I function like this in a group and like this in one on one.” These responses thus illustrate another dimension of the larger theme of learning to navigate social situations.

As noted above, there is an inherent level of ambiguity to the outcome of being able to navigate social situations. The three dimensions that were identified are intended not to explain this away, but to capture the range of ways in which attending a folk high school was viewed as helping a person to function socially. In the context of the folk high school and the array of social situations one is placed in, this ability to work with others in a team or in community, to communicate, and to understand social dynamics all contribute to the sense that one learned to navigate social situations effectively. Of

course, this outcome is not limited to the folk high schools; many arenas in life foster these same skills and perhaps this was a key reason that students weren't able to define this learning more precisely. However, it was also clear that students felt the social learning that took place at a folk high school was distinct from others. In fact, while most were only able to describe what they learned in general terms, they could easily describe the unique social aspects of their folk high school experiences in great detail, often discussing the intensity of living in shared spaces with shared responsibilities as a key aspect of their year.

Developing a social network. Developing a network of key friends and relationships was the final social outcome identified by participants in this study. In many ways, this is the most straightforward of the outcomes they mentioned. By social network, students are primarily referring to key friendships they developed during their folk high school experience. For example, one student stated, "You get friends for life you know and I set a very big price on this when I think that now, 8 years later I have very good friends that I met there." Many others reflected similarly, "I got very good friends at folk high school," or "I've met friends that are some of my best friends." For some, this would also include finding their spouses. "I found my husband there" or "it was there where I met my wife." In all of these responses, students are clearly indicating the ways in which they developed an array of relationships as a result of attending a folk high school.

This was not necessarily an unexpected finding. Indeed, many of those who promote the folk high schools talk about gaining friends for life as a key reason to

attend. While only one respondent explicitly described this outcome in terms of friends for life, most described their friendships in terms of either having a big influence on their life or as a deeper type of friendship. One student stated,

I got many new friends and this has influenced me quite a bit. Suddenly, I had quite the network and [these friends] have been very important for other things: to have people around you that have a good relationship with you to support you and such.

Another student noted, “I got many close friends. And these friends who have spoken with me about deeper things.” Yet another reflected, “Through folk high school I got very many close friends who, at least I feel contributed to that I’m more secure/confident in myself.” For those who attended a folk high school, developing a social network was more than just developing relationships; it was about developing meaningful relationships that both had an impact during their year at folk high school and later in their lives.

Interactions of social outcomes. The three outcomes presented above – understanding everyone has a story, the ability to navigate social situations, and developing a social network – were identified as an attempt to describe the multiple social learning outcomes as identified by the participants of this study. If it is not self-evident, the boundaries between these three outcomes are not able to be neatly drawn; each outcome has an influence on the other. While understanding the various ways in which these social outcomes interacted with one another was not the focus of this analysis, a brief discussion is helpful to shed additional insights into the nature of these

outcomes, especially as participants did not describe these in isolation. For example, one student discussed the ways in which understanding that everyone has a story was a part of helping to build a meaningful friendship and thus helped to develop their social network. Similarly, the ability to navigate social situations was also aided by learning that everyone has a story.

Personal outcomes. Another set of outcomes that were identified by the participants of this study were related to personal development. Personal development is used broadly here to capture the range of outcomes related to different facets of personal maturation, growth, and development. Generally speaking, students expressed an increased sense of personal maturity. “I became more mature” was a common sentiment expressed by students and was echoed by teachers and parents. One parent described a year at folk high school as a “year to mature” and teachers often highlighted the role of *danning* or holistic personal development and growth as a key aim of the folk high school. However, this broad sentiment represents an array of different outcomes that were difficult to clearly define.

Indeed, students often struggled to put their finger on precisely what this personal development entailed. In part, this was because this level of depth is not something former students had typically reflected on. Many students often commented, “I hadn’t thought about that” as they tried to define what they meant by a sense of personal development or growth. Despite this difficulty, a number of outcomes still emerged from their responses that shed some insights into the different aspects of personal development fostered by attending a folk high school. A second challenge in

providing a more precise description is that many of these outcomes are intertwined with one another. Based on student responses, four key personal outcomes emerged: an increase in self-confidence, developing personal autonomy, an increased awareness of self, and a broadening of one's perspectives on life. Each is discussed below followed by an overview of how participants described the relationships between these outcomes. An increase in skills and knowledge could also be conceptualized as a personal outcome but is discussed separately.

An increase in self-confidence. One of the most common personal outcomes identified by participants was an increase in self-confidence. For example, students stated: “[Attending folk high school] gave me more self-confidence.” “I know I learned to be more confident in myself.” “It was a type of self-confidence building year for me.” “I think the experience, especially going to China, really gave me a confidence that I probably wouldn't have had.” “Through the year at folk high school I became more secure and confident in myself, more satisfied with the person I am or more comfortable with the person I am.” This sampling of student responses related to self-confidence indicate that this was a key outcome for many who attended folk high school. Self-confidence is defined here as a sense of confidence, belief, or assurance in one's self. This can be thought of generally or in relation to specific aspects of one's self (e.g. one's identity, skillset, judgement/viewpoint, body of knowledge, etc.). As evidenced by the above responses, students often simply expressed a general or overall sense of self-confidence as a result of attending a folk high school. Often, however, students expressed self-confidence in relation to other outcomes; they expressed an

increased sense of assurance or belief in their sense of autonomy, set of skills or knowledge, and their sense of self.

Evidence of the ways in which self-confidence was expressed in relation to other outcomes is included with those outcomes. In part, this is due to the challenge of disentangling a sense of confidence in a particular outcome and the outcome itself. For the most part, students were more likely to explicitly describe an increase in self-confidence only generally. However, in their descriptions of other outcomes, they often implied a greater sense of assurance in that outcome as well and sometimes linked this to their self-confidence. For the purposes of this study, these aspects of an increase in self-confidence are important to illustrate the range of ways in which students expressed this outcome.

Developing autonomy. The idea of autonomy is typically defined as the ability to be one's own person; to act and think according to one's own beliefs and thoughts, free of external control. Participants in this study described developing autonomy as one of the things they gained from attending a folk high school. For example, one student stated,

I became more independent in relation to that this was the first time I moved away from home and my family. I learned how to interact with people or different people and I learned a bit about myself about who I was and became a bit more secure about myself and my own values.

This student went on to say that an important aspect of their folk high school experience was: "my deliberate choice in relation to religion and Christianity. Before I was a

person who identified as Christian but I didn't have a sense of a choice in it, so that I got." In this response, this student is describing both how they were developing autonomy in regards to taking responsibility for living on their own along with a sense of autonomy about one's beliefs, values, and thoughts about the world. These two aspects represent the primary ways in which students discussed developing a greater sense of personal autonomy.

Developing autonomy in relation to one's beliefs and thoughts was often described as one of the more impactful aspects of attending a folk high school. One student stated,

I feel that at, least for me, it was a year that was very influential and [we] did many very fun things and got to try many new things and traveled a lot so you got to test your own boundaries. But at the same time one had to grow up a lot in a way and in a way, you had to—through that year, you started to take independent choices and stances: What do I mean? What do I believe in? What do I want? And such different things.

Similarly, another student described their year as one where,

[You had to] dare to stand up, dare to have a meaning, and not just to dare to have one but to think about this a lot more than before. It was actually at folk high school that I got a lot of these types of thoughts. It was at folk high school that I got my self-confidence.

As these two examples illustrate, students rarely described specific choices or stances they took during the year. Instead, they simply describe the importance of both having

to make these choices and becoming aware of doing so. For these students, it was about the act of making these independent choices and being conscious of doing so, even if the specific contours of those decisions were not identified.

Other students also described the ways in which attending a folk high school helped them to be more autonomous in relation to taking responsibility for living on one's own. One student simply stated, "I learned a little bit about how to live by myself; it was a sort of soft transition." Another stated,

It was, in a way, that this was the first time that I, as a grown up, should go out traveling and I had all the responsibility myself. I had to have my things, I had to check that I had all the gear, I had to do this and that, and in a way this mix of responsibility that one got blends with the knowledge, the general knowledge or life competencies and life experiences [one has]. This was what I felt that I learned the most of.

In these responses (and as alluded in those above), students are describing having to take responsibility for living on their own. These responses illustrate autonomy in the sense of taking responsibility for one's self as an independent person. This type of autonomy, however, is certainly not unique to attending a folk high school. There are many such experiences where one is confronted with taking responsibility for one's self as they move into adulthood.

What may be unique about attending a folk high school, especially compared to other forms of education, is the way in which both forms of autonomy are fostered. In the previous response, this is alluded to when the student describes the "mix of

responsibility” one gets. The context and processes that may enable this are important to consider here as they provide additional insights into how an increase in autonomy is an outcome of attending a folk high school. There are two key factors (both of which are also described above) that need to be considered: 1) the intensity of the social experience where one lives, works, and studies with their fellow students 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 2) the amount of freedom students are given, especially compared to compulsory forms of education. When students compared their folk high school experience to attending university, they noted how the school day was limited to the classroom at a University; you went to class and then you went home by yourself. At a folk high school, they noted how they lived, studied, and worked, with their fellow students 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The implications of this meant that you were constantly confronted by other viewpoints and beliefs and moreover, one had to work through those conflicts. One could not simply ignore them after class.

The second attribute is the extent of freedom one has while at a folk high school. As there are no grades or exams, the pressures of a standardized approach are removed. Teachers often commented on how the removal of these attributes freed up the learning space. “Here one is allowed to immerse themselves in things that fit with their own interests without having to be measured or tested.” When this was considered in combination to the 24 hour school day and highly social environment, this freedom also came with responsibility as one was confronted with and had to deal with the consequences of their actions. As described above, this helps illustrate how the combination of freedom and responsibility foster valued learning at a folk high school.

When the participant above described the blending of responsibility with life competencies and life experiences one had, it is this context that they are referring to. Thus, it is not surprising that the folk high school may foster a greater sense of autonomy as it is purposefully structured to do so.

An increased awareness of self. Many of those who attended a folk high school described ways in which they became more aware of who they were. For some, this was framed as learning about one's self. One response is particularly representative of this outcome:

I feel that when you go to folk high school, when you begin at folk high school you are only 18 or 19 and you are at that point in your life where you maybe don't really know who you are or what you're going to do next. So, I feel that year at folk high school contributed to finding yourself in a way, to learn a bit more about the person you really are, who you maybe don't really know yet.

For another, this was far more about becoming aware of something that may have already been there. "If I look back I don't think I changed a lot as a person because of the folk high school year, rather I have become more aware of what they are, about thoughts of who I am, who I am for others." At the core of both these responses is an increased sense of awareness about who one is. For these students, this is about one's identity: "the complex answer to the question: who am I?" (Woolfolk, 2013, p. 90).

Precisely what that answer may have been was not the focus of this study and thus not explored deeply. That isn't to say that students didn't also provide some insights into specific aspects of their identity they learned about.

In addition to a sense of learning about one's identity, students also described becoming more aware of who they are in terms of their values, interests, likes/dislikes, passions, etc. For example, one student stated,

I learned a lot about myself. The thing I learned the most about was to live in a group with people and to live so closely with people for a whole year. So, I felt I learned a lot about myself and what I liked and what I didn't like.

Another stated, "I certainly learned a lot about myself as a person. A lot about which type personality I get along with and what type of personality I don't get along with. And qualities of others that I see as important." Yet another shared, "I learned that I don't handle being hungry, really hungry very well. I learned that I was social, that I like to be around others." These responses further illustrate different ways in which students became more aware of different aspects of themselves. As an outcome of attending a folk high school, developing an increased awareness of one's self was primarily about coming to a better understanding of one's identity, but also included insights into the underlying mix of interests, likes, and values that make up that identity. Insights into the ways in which specific values and/or preferences may have been influenced by attending a folk high school is discussed in the section on preference and value formation below.

A broader sense of possibility. The final personal outcome that emerged from the data collected in this study can be described as a broader sense of possibility. This concept is meant to capture the various ways in which students learned to see a variety

of ways of doing things, often in contrast to a singular idea or sense of the right way to do something. For example, one student stated,

One other thing that I felt very much hit home because of folk high school was to be open to other modes of thinking in relation to all, or at least many decisions I've made... I was very locked into that this was the way to go, this is how one should do things; I was very locked in this way of thinking... So, when I went to folk high school and I saw that, whoa, they do things in a totally different way but it works. And in a way, this opened up very much, this opened up my head very much for reflection; that it works to see things from many ways.

Another student, when reflecting on how they managed challenges in life described how attending folk high school helped them. "It was the understanding that there are different solutions to a problem, that you don't necessarily have to go through, well, this way and that's the only way; that there are different roads to take." In both of these responses, students are describing ways in which their sense of possibilities was broadened, particularly in relation to how to solve problems or go about certain activities.

Other participants expressed this idea in regards to their future paths. One response in particular stands out:

I think I became more relaxed during the course of the folk high school year. Because I think before then I had very clear thoughts about what needed to be done. I knew that I was going to college or university because that was what you

were supposed to do. You go to high school and then you go to university and get an education and things must happen in line with this plan... But at folk high school I realized that I can wait a bit and take another year as a *stipendiat* (school social worker) and afterwards I could wait and work a bit and travel a bit. So, I think that my attitude to life became a bit more relaxed.

This participant went on to sum this up very succinctly, stating, “there were many paths and that I could take it at my own tempo.” Parents of a former student echoed this idea. For them, attending a folk high school helped to broaden one’s perspective; it helped show their children that there were many paths available to them. One parent stated, “If you go into the world with open eyes you get more; Folk high school opened [my child’s] eyes.” These ways in which students came to realize that there is more than one approach, more than one “right” way of doing things is what this outcome—a broader sense of possibility—is trying to capture.

The interaction of personal outcomes. The four personal outcomes described above—an increase in self-confidence, developing personal autonomy, an increased awareness of self, and a broader sense of possibility—often overlap with one another. While the intent of this study was not to define the contours of these relationships, understanding that the boundaries between each of these outcomes cannot necessarily be neatly defined is important as it helps one to better understand the complex and somewhat ambiguous nature of these outcomes. The above descriptions were intended to provide a rich picture of each of these outcomes and some insights into the ways each varies. At the edges of each, there is often overlap with another outcome. An increased

sense of autonomy, of being able to think and act for oneself is likely to also support one's self-confidence. A broader sense of possibility gives one more space to act autonomously and helps to make one's choices more explicitly their own (i.e. you have to choose one among many). The key implication of this overlap, especially in regards to the larger aim of this study, is that this overlap makes it more difficult to draw neat lines from a person's current well-being back to a particular outcome as those outcomes are intertwined with others.

Knowledge outcomes. The third set of outcomes that emerged from student responses was the most concrete: students reported increasing their knowledge and skill in specific subject area domains. These outcomes varied by the subject being studied. At folk high schools, students take a primary course of study. As noted above, for the participants of this study these included: sport and outdoor life; art; music; drama; dance; China; pedagogy, psychology and leadership; and sewing and handwork. In addition to one's primary line of study, most folk high schools also offer secondary courses, although the extent of these offerings can vary by quite a bit from school to school. Examples of learning outcomes in both primary and secondary lines of study were given by participants in this study, although the vast majority focused on one's primary line of study.

The responses below were selected to illustrate the ways in which students described their subject matter learning. One student noted, "I learned a bit of subject matter as well... I could go hiking/camping and I feel I have a bit of competence here."

Another stated, “I learned a deal and gained experience about outdoor life and different sports.” For some, the learning was similar to what took place at university.

In relation to the subject matter, I learned a bit of song technique for example and we had that when I took my music courses at teacher’s college and in a way, I could already do all that from before when I took song courses at folk high school.

Some responses also provided some fairly specific details, “I learned a lot about theater and how to be in a role. That you need to use your body language, your facial expressions to express your meanings when you stand on stage.” It is important to note that these responses represent a range of subject matter learning, some of which were much richer/deeper than others.

Indeed, some students reported that the subject matter learning in some domains as less advanced or very introductory. For example, one student who came to folk high school with a background in dance noted, “In terms of how advanced it was, it was lower than what I had learned in school.” When one student was asked whether they felt they learned a lot through their secondary courses, they stated,

No, I learned a little bit, [but] it was cool to be able to speak about this and have this as a subject even though it was not very academic or very strict. It was a bit easier at folk high school than at university.

These responses are included to help illustrate that one’s subject matter learning at a folk high school varied. However, they are not intended to diminish the subject learning

that did occur as many students—as evidenced above—also described a rich subject matter learning experience.

What is more interesting about these knowledge outcomes is the curious tension that students expressed about their subject matter learning. On the one hand, many students described a rich learning experience in relation to their primary line of study. In fact, one student explicitly stated, “I feel it was a very learning rich year [for] subject matter too.” On the other hand, a number of students expressed how this was not what stayed with them. In a particularly illustrative response, one student stated,

What stayed with me from folk high school were the experiences I had together with others; that you got a lot of good friendships and the things you learned about yourself. It was these things that stayed with me after this year, maybe not so much the subject matter, but it is these things I think about. It is these things that you should learn at folk high school that I think about

This is highlighted here not to diminish the role of knowledge outcomes, but to illustrate their relative importance to the personal and social outcomes described above.

Knowledge outcomes and self-confidence. As noted above, self-confidence was often expressed in relation to other outcomes. This was particular the case for knowledge and skill outcomes and typically expressed through anecdotes about the importance of teacher feedback. While these students didn’t explicitly describe these situations using the term “self-confidence,” each alluded to a sense of assurance (i.e. confidence) in a specific skill as a result. For example, one student stated,

There were some teachers that told me that I should apply [for a social worker position] and I grew a lot because of that; to have teachers who were good mentors who could give good and constructive feedback was important for me.

Another student shared,

We had a number of conversations where [the teacher] said, 'you are very good at this here'. In a way [the teacher] was very good at drawing out what I was good at and seeing my strong side and I've become more aware of this afterwards, that oi, he did actually see this in me.

Another student shared a similar sentiment, "[A teacher told me], 'I think you would be a very good actress'... that meant a lot to both [my mother] and me." In all of these examples, these students are reflecting not so much about how they improved in a certain skill domain, but about how they became aware of their skill and/or growth in these domains; they are reflecting on the teacher's role in helping them to be more secure in their skills in each of these domains.

Influence on values and preference formation. In addition to learning outcomes, participants of this study shared insights into the various ways in which attending a folk high influenced one's values and preferences. Neither values nor preferences were defined for the participants during data collection. Participants were encouraged to define these terms according to what they felt they entailed. This was done purposefully as the terms themselves can have a range of meanings and this study wanted to capture the array of possible influences attending a folk high school has on this domain. Ultimately, participants tended to use these terms in line with standard

definitions, although not necessarily consistently. Some students discussed values in terms of standards or principles of behavior, others in terms of what they felt was important, good, or of value. Preferences was defined in terms of either interests or what was seen as good or important.

Strengthening existing values. If there was one theme that was expressed by the majority of participants it was that attending a folk high school served to strengthen one's values; it was not viewed as an experience that dramatically changed one's values or preferences. In a response that illustrates this theme well, one student stated,

I don't think [folk high school] has changed what values were important, but I think maybe that year strengthened these, made me more aware of them. If I look back I don't think I changed a lot as a person because of the folk high school year, rather I have become more aware of what they are, about thoughts of who I am, who I am for others.

Another student stated, "I don't know if [these values] came from folk high school. It was more that they were strengthened." One other student simply summed up this influence: "[folk high school] strengthened the values I already had." As is evidenced by these responses, students did not feel the folk high school changed their values. Instead, they indicate the various ways in which they were strengthened.

Strengthened, in this case, was often discussed in terms of awareness, of becoming aware of something that was already there. Awareness in this context is a different type of strengthening more akin to the crystallization or clarification of something that was murky and now appears clear. This doesn't necessarily mean that a

value such as honesty was now that much more important, but rather that one was now more aware of its importance, one could now put their finger on this as a value they espoused. This type of strengthening will be further evident in the ways in which students described how attending a folk high school influenced certain values and/or preferences. Participants described four primary values as being influenced (i.e. strengthened) by attending a folk high school: the value of inclusivity, the value of fellowship, an appreciation of the here and now, and an interest in a subject area.

Inclusivity. The value of inclusivity was described in a couple of different ways, but primarily through tolerance and acceptance of those around you. One student reflected on the how attending folk high school influenced what they valued and stated:

I think that, maybe I can point to something I named earlier about acceptance, about acceptance and tolerance as maybe these are values in a way. I think I have [strengthened these], both because my life becomes easier and the lives of others become easier too. If one has a lifestyle or culture or race or such thing, it is also good for them to have an easier life because there are not sticks stuck in their spokes. If there is acceptance, then my life cannot be spokes in the wheels of someone else and likely there won't be sticks in the wheels for my life.

When another student asked how attending folk high school influenced their values, they stated, "The openness and the acceptance part is absolutely a part of that and developing courage. ... Because we were all kind of clumped together and unsure of one another and we all went through that experience." Another student described how at folk high school, "it became, in a way, cool to be inclusive." Each of these examples

describe ways in which students expressed a value for inclusivity; for the underlying tolerance and acceptance that created the type of inclusive environment they experience while at folk high school. These responses are also in line with the social outcomes describe above, particularly that of learning everyone has a story. Based on these examples, it would appear that students experienced an inclusive environment, learned skills and knowledge to be inclusive themselves, and strengthened the ways in which they valued inclusivity.

Fellowship. The value of fellowship was another example that students described as being strengthened due to attending folk high school. In one particularly illustrative response, a student stated,

I set a lot of importance on sharing great experiences with near and dear people. This is absolutely something that came from folk high school. We experienced an incredible amount in a year so I set a lot of importance on experiencing things with those who were important to me. And this is something that I value more today than I did before folk high school.

Another stated, “I feel maybe that [folk high school] has helped me to value those I have around me. To take care, to care for both friends and family.” Yet another stated, “Yes, clearly it has influenced me to the extent to which I have sought out having people around me that share the same interests as me.” The concept of fellowship can be defined as friendships based on shared interests. These examples illustrate how the value of fellowship was strengthened, both in terms of friendships and shared experiences.

An appreciation of the here and now. A number of participants described the ways in which attending a folk high school helped them to value the here and now; how it helped them to value the present moment. For example, one student described how attending folk high school helped, “to prioritize to value life as it is. That you don’t need to always strive after something else. I think this is something folk high school has been important for; that important things come right here and now.” Another student reflected,

Is time a value? ... I’m a bit uncertain if you can define this as a value, but it’s about being where you are, exactly where you are in life. And in a way, one trusts in where you are and doesn’t worry about what comes next and what might happen if all these things happen.

Similarly, another student commented on how they learned, “there are other things than theory. There are other things than reading. There are other things that maybe are important [too],” particularly in relation to experiencing and learning from day to day life. In each of these examples, students are commenting on learning to appreciate the experiences they are currently having; the things they are doing in the here and now.

Folk high school teachers also described how, in their view, students were able to appreciate the here and now. According to them, students did this in contrast to the expectations of formal school and in contrast to life in a digital and interconnected world (i.e. a Facebook or social media era). One example One teacher stated,

[At] high school you have stress to have good grades, the ideal body, you should be good socially, and ideally be on a handball or soccer team and in good shape.

You should know a lot about many things. So, there are many who are tired of – throughout one’s youth, to always try and live up to expectations. The social media means that you are connected the whole time, you can get in touch with all the information you need, you have a sea of choices, you can get exactly what you want. So, there are many who are tired of all the stress from expectations and thus who are not ready to choose. So they come here and they can relax; no grades, you are accepted and make good friends. That which happens at school is life.

Similarly, teachers emphasized the way in which they were able to attend to the immediate needs of students as opposed to the needs of a pre-defined curriculum. This idea that what happens at school is life and that one can focus on experience at hand help to further illustrate how the folk high school may influence this value.

Interest in a subject area. Interestingly enough, not many students explicitly described ways in which attending a folk high school strengthened their interest in the subject matter they studied. One student who studied traditional handiwork, however, did and described their appreciation for a form of traditional weaving. They stated, “[No one] is weaving anymore. I think this is a shame for even though there isn’t a market for it, we need it for our culture in any case.” Other students expressed the joy they experienced in their line of study. “I would have so much fun sometimes that I would literally cry from laughing so hard and all these moments with friends, rehearsals; I just want that time back.” Similarly, another student stated, “I moved here where I live now because of my interests and free time interests of which folk high school was the

starting point for.” These responses both directly and indirectly illustrate the ways in which attending a folk high school may have strengthened one’s interest in their line of study, albeit for different reasons. For one it may be a larger sense of the cultural value or an activity, for another it may be due to a sense of personal fulfillment, and for another it may be a key component of what makes life good.

Developing the good life by living it. Another particularly interesting way in which attending a folk high school may have influenced one’s values and preferences may have simply been as an example of what the good life can be. Many students explicitly described their year at folk high school as a type of ideal year, not necessarily in the sense that they wanted every year to be like this, but in the sense that this year gave them a set of experience and feelings to model in different contexts. As will be evident in chapter five, this model was found to have an influence on the choices one took later in life. For example, one student stated,

Many values and things I think are important today are things I felt in a strong way at folk high school. It’s like folk high school has in a way become a kind of ideal, not that this means I want to go back for another year, but that many of the experiences and the feelings I had are things that I see as positive and that I would like to find again in any case... Maybe not that it was *the* ideal example, but one example; a little taste.

Another student similarly stated,

I don’t remember what my view of the good life was before I started at folk high school. If it’s changed much, I can’t say. But it has, in any case affirmed; it

colored the good life with the facets—with the nature aspect, the outdoor life aspect, the good fellowship feeling...If I imagine the good life, I think about the feelings and experiences at folk high school.

These examples illustrate the ways in which participants described how they lived the good life while at folk high school and how these experiences helped them to ideate a view of the good life for themselves. They illustrate how a person's preferences and interests—one's view of the good life—were made clear or clearer while attending a folk high school.

A broader sense of viable options. A number of participant responses that were not explicitly framed in terms of values and preferences, such as two of the aforementioned learning outcomes, provided additional evidence in regards to how values and preferences may have been shaped while attending a folk high school. First and foremost, the personal outcome about gaining a broader sense of possibility is particularly relevant. Learning that there is more than one “right” way to do something or that there are many paths one can take is a different lens on the idea of preferences and/or what is of value (i.e. one view of values). In this case, this is about a broader sense of viable options, especially in relation to how one does or should do something. What may have once been viewed as unappealing, the wrong way to do something, or simply unknown came to be viewed as a possible option. In this sense, attending a folk high school shaped a person's values and preferences by broadening the viable options or routes which a value or preference may be made manifest. Similarly, understanding different ways of being and doing—one of the ways in which learning that everyone has

a story was expressed—is also about expanding one’s understanding of how others operate. By extension, this may also add to one’s own sense of different ways of doing things.

A clearer view of the good life, stronger values, and options. At first, it may seem there is a tension, even a possible contradiction, between the ways in which attending a folk high school shaped the values and preferences of the study participants. On the one hand, values and preferences did not change, but rather were strengthened. On the other hand, a person’s sense of possibility was expanded; more options of how and what one could do were perceived. However, participants did not describe this in ways that were contradictory. An expanded sense of possibility was not meant to mean a pivot or substantial change in what was important or of value, particularly in regards to a person’s core values. An expanded sense of possibility was about a sense that one had more options, that there wasn’t simply one way to live out one’s values or achieve the good life. Based on the way participants described this, attending a folk high school served to deepen (i.e. strengthen) one’s existing values and help one to ideate what the good life means to them, while also broadening one’s sense of available options to achieve that life and live out one’s values.

Conclusions

The data and analysis presented in this chapter help to shed insights into two of the research questions posed in this study:

1. What learning outcomes do former students report gaining from their folk high school experience?

2. In what ways did attending a folk high school shapes their values and preferences?

In this section, the ways in which the data and analysis help to answer these questions are presented.

What learning outcomes do former students report gaining from their folk high school experience? Former students reported gaining an array of outcomes from their folk high school experience. These outcomes were conceptualized across three domains: social, personal, and knowledge. In the social domain, three outcomes were identified: learning that everyone has a story, the ability to navigate social situations, and developing a social network. The personal outcomes included an increase in self-confidence, developing autonomy, an increased awareness of self, and a broader sense of possibility. Lastly, knowledge outcomes included an increase in knowledge and/or skill in a particular content area.

The experiences of students also illustrated that many of these outcomes were expressed in different ways. These variants were captured in an attempt to richly illustrate the ways in which these outcomes may manifest themselves and to try and capture the various dimensions of each outcome. As an exploratory study, the aim was not to develop a complete theory of each particular outcome. As such, this study can provide limited insight into the ways in which each outcome may be related or particularly intertwined with another and this is especially apt for the sub-elements of each outcome. For example, a more focused and thorough analysis on the outcome of learning everyone has a story would be needed to fully understand whether each sub-

element was needed to have fully met this outcome or whether each sub-element was simply a different manifestation of the outcome.

It should also be noted that this study did not fully explore the extent to which outcome had been achieved for each participant. In fact, these data illustrate that not all students described each outcome. A more complete exploration of this question would also benefit from understanding the extent to which each student knew or had already achieved these outcomes as the outset of their folk high school experience. For the purposes of this study, these limitations are raised to help clarify what the available data support and what they do not support. Ultimately, these data help to answer this particular research question by providing an initial, yet inherently incomplete list of the potential outcomes gained by attending a folk high school.

In what ways did attending a folk high school shape values and preferences? First and foremost, the data and analysis presented above illustrate that attending a folk high school served to strengthen one's existing values and preferences. In terms of values, this was often described as helping one to become more aware of what those values were and to be more secure in their values. Second, students also described their year at folk high school as a type of ideal year that served as a model of the "good life" or different aspects of it. In addition to these general points, students did describe specific values and preferences that were strengthened: inclusivity, fellowship, an appreciation of the here and now, and their interests/preferences in a particular subject matter. When the concept of preferences and values were defined in terms of one's options or paths in life, the data collected for this study also indicated that

attending a folk high school shaped one's values and preferences through a broader sense of viable options. It helped participants to see many paths, options, and different ways of being through which their values or view of the good life could be made manifest.

Similar to the previous question, the aim of this study was not to provide an exhaustive or complete account of the ways in which attending a folk high school may shape a person's values or preference formation. Neither an exhaustive list of all values and preferences impacted nor an account of the extent to which values and/or preferences were strengthened or broadened can be provided. For the purposes of this study, and particularly this research question, participants described how attending a folk high school shaped their values and preferences by strengthening their existing values and preferences, providing an example of the good life, and by broadening their sense of possibility.

In regards to the capabilities approach, one's values and preferences are important factor to consider, especially in contexts where social and cultural norms might influence a group of people or person to *prefer* a certain set of life choices or career options. Sometimes this preference will support the expansion of one's freedoms and sometimes this will inhibit one's freedoms by excluding a whole range of opportunities that would otherwise be available. The data and analysis presented in this chapter suggests that attending a folk high school does not serve to constrain one's set of life choices. Rather, the data and analysis presented above suggested that attending a folk high school serves to enable or broaden one's sense of possibility.

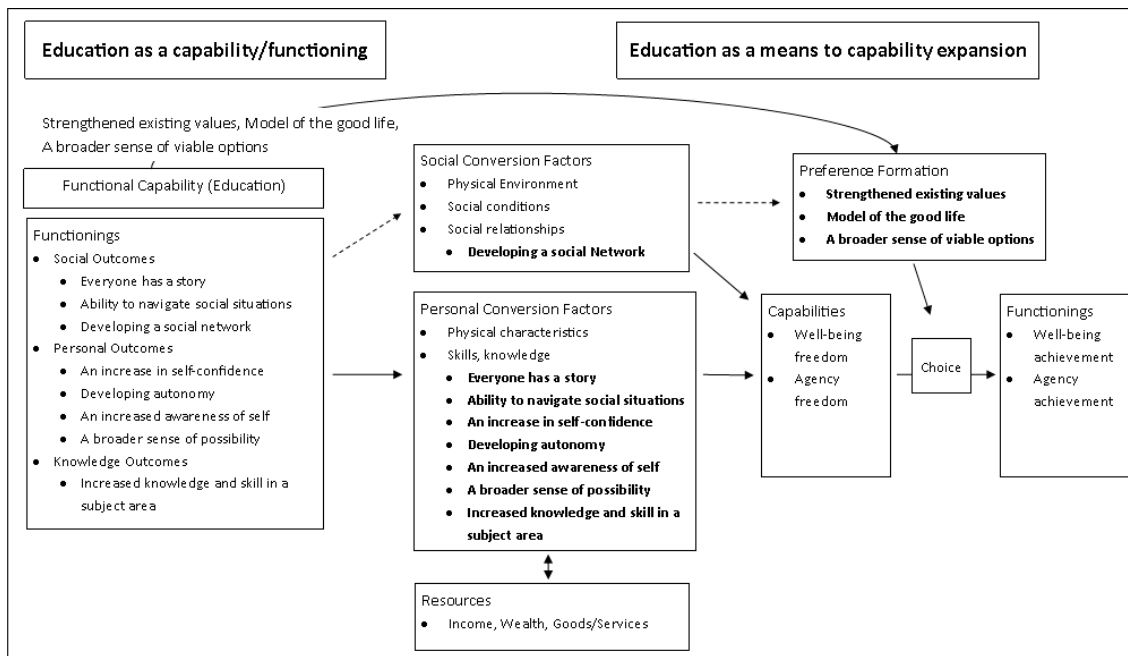


Figure 4. Learning outcomes become conversion factors as education changes from a capability to a means to capability expansion.

When these findings are analyzed through the lens of the capabilities approach, they take on a different shape. If one was only examining the outcomes of the folk high school, the analysis would essentially end or turn backwards to better understand the specific methods and processes utilized to achieve those outcomes. The aim of this study, however, is to assess the influence of attending a folk high school on well-being. As such, the learning outcomes and influence on preference formation take on a different role. When one examines the subsequent influence of the folk high school, these outcomes now become a resource for the attainment of well-being later in life. Figure 4 illustrates this shift. The bold text shows how the outcomes are now also part of one’s personal and social resources or conversion factors in the language of the capabilities approach. In the next chapter, this shift will continue as the emphasis of the

analysis is no longer just about what occurs at a folk high school, but on how attending a folk high school contributes to the expansion of well-being, on how the folk high school can be a means to capability expansion.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a brief overview of the key characteristics of a folk high school experience as expressed by the participants of this study. The findings related to the social, personal, and knowledge outcomes identified by the participants of this study was provided. This was followed by the ways in which attending a folk high school shaped one's values and preference formation. As illustrated in introduction of this chapter, these findings represent an initial step in understanding the larger impact of attending a Norwegian folk high school on well-being. When these findings are viewed through the lens of the conceptual framework being used for this study, they appear as the results or functionings of education when it is viewed as a capability itself. In the next chapter, this conceptual framework is further developed as additional findings help to illustrate the ways in which participants define well-being, the extent to which they currently are living the good life (i.e. a sense of their current well-being), and the ways in which the participants' current well-being is linked to their folk high school experience.

Chapter 5 – The Well-Being of Former Folk High School Students:

Education as a Means to Capability Expansion

The participants of this study defined well-being in a way that included meaningful work, relationships, social engagement, and the meaningful use of leisure among other aspects. One of the strengths of the capabilities approach is the way in which it enables a definition of well-being to be based on what a particular group of people have reason to value. In this study, a definition of well-being was found that was based on the participants' view of the good life, what was important to them, and what they valued. From the perspective of the capabilities approach, well-being is defined as the extent to which a person is free to do or be that which they have reason to value. Each aspect of the participants' view of well-being was thus defined as a capability (i.e. as a freedom to do or be something) and used to generate a list of capabilities as a way to capture their view of well-being. In the larger context of this study, this definition of well-being provides the basis to evaluate the extent of their current well-being and ultimately, to examine the ways in which attending a folk high school has influenced this.

In this chapter, findings are first presented on the ways in which the participants of this study defined well-being. This is followed by an assessment of the extent to which the participants of this study described their current well-being. These findings are presented first to help set the stage for the subsequent and key analysis related to the ways in which former students link their folk high school experience to their current well-being. In many ways, the learning outcomes presented in chapter four and the

current well-being of former folk high schools mark the book ends of this project. The end state of interest (i.e. well-being) can then be compared to the initial state (i.e. attending a folk high school) and any relationships between the two can be examined. This chapter concludes with findings about the ways in which students link their current well-being to their folk high school experience.

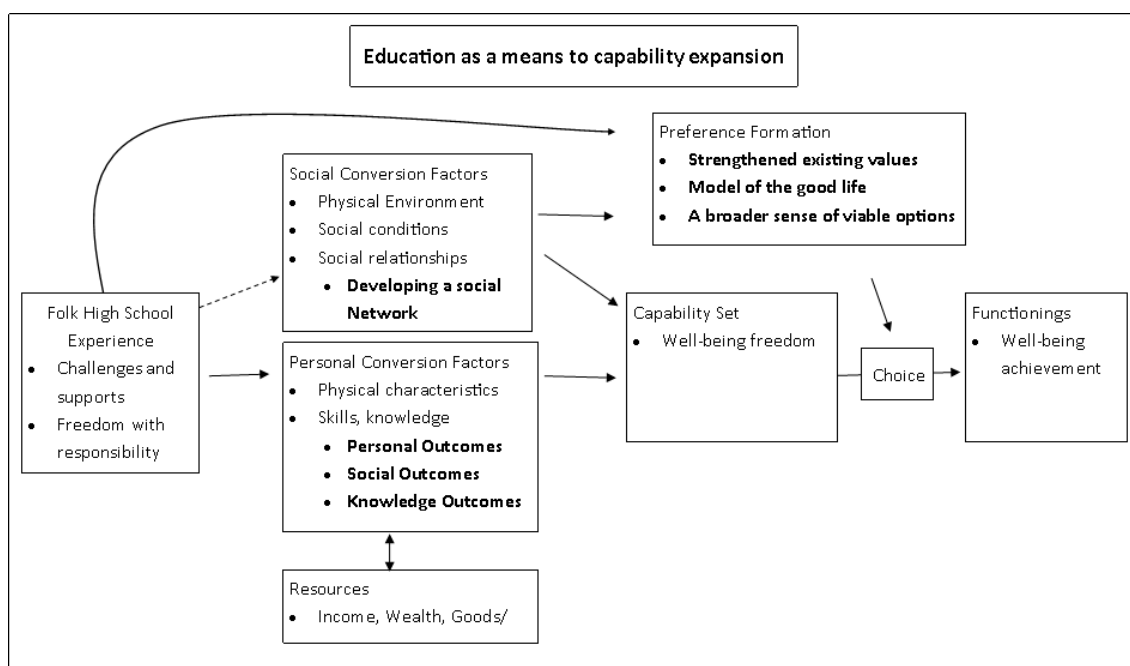


Figure 5. Education as a means to capability expansion.

The conceptual framework developed for this study helps to illustrate how each of the findings contributes to the examination of the ways in which attending a folk high impacts well-being. Figure 5 provides an illustration of this framework with a more focused view of the ways in which education contributes to well-being later in life; how education can be a means to capability expansion. The bolded items included in this figure represent the key learning outcomes and influence on the preference formation of an individual that one may have gained as a result of attending a folk high school. When

one analyzes these outcomes in relation to additional capabilities, these learning outcomes now become part one's internal resource that can be used to either enhance or constrain one's ability to attain different capabilities. In other words, the skills and knowledge one gains are subsequently put to use to improve one's well-being. These are conceptualized as conversion factors in this framework and represent the personal resources one brings to bear in the pursuit of well-being later in life.

Similarly, the values and preferences of an individual are important to take into account as they play a key role in the choices an individual makes. Choice is an important aspect of human freedom and is taken into account to ensure that the freedoms identified in this analysis are indeed those a person has reason to value. The role of values and preferences is also considered as it is possible that a person's preferences could either enable or constrain one's freedoms and this needs to be taken into account, especially as participants described their folk high school experience as playing a role in their value and preference formation. This is also illustrated in Figure 5 under preference formation.

Throughout this chapter, new findings will help to further flesh out this framework. For example, the findings on well-being will be added as the capability set and functionings. Similarly, the links between one's folk high school experience and current well-being will be added to the appropriate arrow to illustrate the potential ways this influence occurs. As these findings are added to the theoretical framework a more complete picture begins to emerge of how attending a folk high school influences well-being. Taken together, the elements of the theoretical framework can then form the

basis of an initial theory of how attending a Norwegian folk high school serves as a means to capability expansion.

The first section of this chapter provides the findings related to the well-being of former folk high school students. These findings are then discussed in relation to the research question: what is the current capability set and functioning of former folk high school students? This is then followed by the findings on the ways in which the participants of this study described the links between attending a folk high school and their current well-being. Similarly, the findings are then discussed in relation to the final research question posed by this study: in what ways do former students link their current capabilities to their folk high school experience? Lastly, this chapter concludes with a discussion on how these findings help to answer the question: what capabilities may have been expanded as a result of attending a folk high school?

The Well-Being of Former Folk High School Students

In this section, data and analysis are presented to examine the current well-being of the participants in this study. Current, in this case, means as of 2013 when all of the interviews with former students were conducted. As noted above, well-being is operationalized using the capabilities approach and thus defined in terms of various kinds of human freedoms. When well-being is defined in terms of human freedoms, the evaluative exercise is about understanding the extent to which a person's substantive capabilities (i.e. freedoms) have been expanded. However clear this informational focus of the capabilities approach may be, in order to put this approach into practice a number

of theoretical gaps need to be addressed (Robeyns, 2006a). Chief among these is the selection or identification of a particular capability or set of capabilities to be evaluated.

In order to examine well-being with any specificity, the broad notion of freedom or human flourishing must be refined into a more focused capability or set of capabilities. As this was an exploratory study, a purposeful decision was made to identify relevant capabilities based on the views and lived experiences of the participants of this study. While this helps to ensure that the capabilities being evaluated are indeed relevant to those involved, it creates the unique challenge of trying to both define and evaluate well-being simultaneously. In some ways, these two tasks are complimentary. In other ways, the identification of capabilities using this *a posteriori* approach resulted in limited insights into the extent to which some capabilities were achieved.

In addition to selecting or identifying a list of capabilities, operationalizing this approach required two additional theoretical specifications that are relevant for both the selection of capabilities and the evaluation of those capabilities: 1) the choice between capabilities and functionings; and 2) the method of aggregation and indexing or weighting. For this study, both functionings and capabilities were included in order to try and capture the extent to which a person had achieved a capability and the extent to which achieving that capability was meaningfully available. This broader evaluative space fits with the exploratory nature of the study and helps to provide a fuller picture of well-being that works to fully leverage the strengths of the capabilities approach. It is, however, important to note that not all capabilities were able to be fully evaluated in

terms of both functionings and capabilities. As this study was both defining and evaluating these capabilities simultaneously, the semi-structured interviews were not always able to probe into the all capabilities equally.

In relation to the issue of aggregation, this study utilized an approach that sought to find a balance between preserving the unique aspects of each individual's experience and providing a sufficient basis for assessing a group's experience. In both the selection and evaluation of the capability set identified for this study, a vertical form of aggregation was used that combined similar types of functionings into a single capability. This approach utilized the underlying idea in Hinchliffe's (2009) token/type distinction and Walker's (2008a) utilization of Alkire's (2002a) vague/thin dimensions of a capability and its local or thick elaborations. In other words, each capability represents a broader concept that is illustrated with specific examples from the participants of this study to illustrate the various ways each capability may manifest itself (see Figure 6 for a visual illustration of this approach).

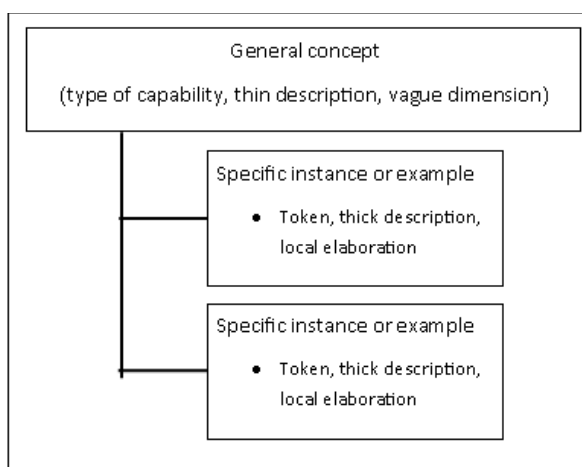


Figure 6. Visual depiction of type/token distinctions used for aggregating capabilities.

For an analysis of well-being, each capability is evaluated interpersonally and across participants as opposed to an intrapersonal analysis where each participant's unique mix of capabilities and functionings would be assessed. This form of aggregation inherently means some detail will be lost as different manifestations of each capability are lumped together. While this raises reasonable questions about the extent to which different manifestations of a capability are truly equivalent, it is also necessary as else there would be no basis for comparison across individuals.

Lastly, it is also important to state that no effort at weighting or ranking the capability set identified for this study was conducted. As this study took an *a posteriori* approach to identifying a list of capabilities, the final list did not emerge until after all interviews had been conducted. As such, it was not considered prudent to attempt to assign relative importance via a weight or rank to an impartial list of capabilities that was in various stages of development to each participant. When data and analysis are presented about the ways in which participants viewed the importance of a particular capability, this was only done to better illustrate that particular capability and not as an evaluation of its importance relative to the other capabilities identified. Thus, for this study no judgment about the relative importance of each capability was provided.

Identifying a list of relevant capabilities. The selection of capabilities for this study were identified using a method similar to Walker's (2008a) grounded approach. Data from throughout each interview were analyzed for well-being themes based on the experiences and values of the participants of this study. This included open-ended yet focused questions related to a participant's current status and/or ability across three

domains: work, education, and social engagement. It also included open-ended questions related to how participants defined the good life, key values, and important aspects of life. The list of capability types that resulted from this analysis formed the basis for the identification of a preliminary list of capabilities. As little insights were gained into the relative value of each capability, this list is presented below in no particular order.

- Capability for post-secondary education
- Capability for vocation
- Capability for the meaningful use of leisure
- Capability for meaningful relationships
- Capability for practical reason
- Capability for social engagement

In the following sections, each capability is presented following a similar structure. First, the broader idea and definition of each capability is provided followed by illustrations and examples of either the ways which students expressed this aspect of well-being or ways in which they had achieved it. This analysis serves multiple purposes: 1) it is intended to help illustrate each capability both in terms of its broad concept (i.e. thin description) and its specific manifestations (i.e. thick description), 2) provide evidence of how each capability is rooted in the experiences of the participants of this study, and 3) serve as an analysis of the extent to which each capability has been achieved. After these illustrations are provided, a summary of each capability is provided. As a vertical form of aggregation is used, it is important to note that the focus

of this evaluation is on the larger well-being of this group of participants and not for any one particular individual. As such, some detail is necessarily lost as the summary evaluation attempts to capture the general sense of the extent to which a particular capability has been achieved.

The capability for post-secondary education. This capability—for this group of former students—was primarily defined as the capability for post-secondary education. While most students identified education as an important aspect of well-being, this was typically done in rather generic terms. For the participants of this study who had already completed their post-secondary education (which was the majority), they either omitted talking about education as part of the good life or described its importance as a means to some other end. One former student described how it was important that one “have an education and a way to earn money,” particularly in regards to achieving economic security. The lack of detail provided by this group of students may have more to do with the multiple roles that education can play in one’s life and at different times in one’s life as opposed to a sense of it being unimportant.

For the few participants who were students, the importance of education was indeed more explicitly stated. One student noted, “School is of course also important” and another stated, “it’s interesting to study and it’s an important part of your life.” For those that were current post-secondary students, the opportunity to be educated took on a different weight and importance than for those who have already completed their formal studies. This was further evident in the way one student reflected, “when I look past my studies, I see in front of me the good life in one place or another. I have it very

good now, but this wouldn't pass as the good life going forward." For this student, education was a key part of the steps they were taking towards their future view of the good life.

It is interesting to note that other conceptions of education, such as lifelong learning or the importance of continuous education were only hinted at and were not described by participants as either key facets of the good life or important aspects of life. This, however, may be more a matter of the way in which these activities were conceptualized. As other capabilities will show, an appreciation or value of development was expressed in other forms. Regardless, as education was most commonly described as post-secondary education, this is how this capability will be defined for the purposes of this study.

Nearly all of the participants in this study had achieved some form of this capability. Eight of the fifteen participants had completed some form of post-secondary education. Four participants were current students. One student had partially completed their studies, but was not currently studying. This former student did feel they had the opportunity to finish, but was fine with taking a break. One student did not complete any form of post-secondary education, although they expressed a desire to do so. This student expressed the sense that the opportunity was available, but also expressed the significant challenges of gaining entry to the school of their choice.

The capability for vocation. The capability for vocation can be defined as the opportunity to engage in work. The term vocation is used to identify a broader spectrum of the ways in which work can be defined. In practice, the term vocation can refer

simply to one's profession or career, but it is more commonly associated with a sense of calling or dedication to a particular pursuit. Participants in this study described the value and role of work as having two key purposes. On a more foundational (i.e. basic needs) level, a number of students described the role of work as a means to economic security and/or stability. The importance of having "economic security" was a key part of the good life for these students. The second purpose, however, moves beyond the economic utility of work and into the realm of meaning.

Many students described the importance of having a job they found to be meaningful. Meaningful, in this case, could be defined in a number of ways. For some students, this was about enjoyment and personal development. One student stated, "I have the value that I should thrive in and enjoy my job." Another reflected that it was important "to have a job that I enjoy, that I can develop in, that I think is challenging but that I can still master it." These examples illustrate the role work can play in personal development and fulfillment and how that was viewed as an important aspect of well-being.

For others, meaningful was defined in terms of their work having a broader impact. Meaningful work, in this sense, meant that it served a larger purpose than just making money. In one particularly illustrative response, one student stated,

I have always said that I want a job where I get up in the morning and I feel and know that it means something when I leave for work. So of course, one of my values is that I know when I get up that I have a reason to get up. I have always said that I never wanted to strive after money because if this was my motivation

I think I would be so tired of myself. So, in relation to my job when I get up in the morning I want to think yes! I'm getting up and know that I'm making a difference.

While "making a difference" was not defined explicitly by this participant, the contrast to simply making money illustrates that the benefits of work extend beyond a means to personal well-being. Making a difference points to the role of work as a form of agency, as a means to achieving goals which may or may not directly impact a person's own standard of living (see Sen's 2009b discussion on agency).

Another student described more broadly how work, among other aspects of their life, needed to fit in with service to others. "I think that, it has to feel meaningful. For me, I think I have to be doing something for others. I have to be doing something both for my community and for those that are close to me." In the previous example and this one, meaningful work extended beyond personal enjoyment or development into service of others or aim related to agency.

The variation in the ways in which the capability for vocation can be evident are clearly important as the freedom to work, especially as it relates to well-being, entails more than simply access to a job. In part, this is because work can serve as both a means to an end and as an end in itself. Vocation can serve as a means to economic security, personal development, or both. It can also represent making a difference; engaging in meaningful work is meaningful and important as its own end. While these could be conceptualized as separate capabilities, keeping them under the umbrella of vocation helps to illustrate the multiple roles one's work can play in relation to both well-being

and agency. It is also important to note that these conceptions of vocation work are not inherently mutually exclusive. However, it is feasible that a person would make certain trade-offs as they choose one form of work over another. For well-being, these trade-offs will be important to capture.

For the participants of this study, all had achieved some form of functioning in this capability and/or felt they had the opportunity for vocation, albeit to different degrees. Fourteen of fifteen students were working in some capacity. The one student who was not working was studying full time and expressed that this was a choice. As illustrated in the above manifestations of this capability, not all participants expressed the same degree of meaning or vocation through work. In fact, there was a fairly even split with seven students expressing a sense of meaning or calling through their work and with seven describing their employment more in line with it simply being a job. For example, one student in the former group described their job as “their dream job,” especially as it involved work on topics such as net neutrality and an open internet; topics that were particularly important to this participant. On the other, a student in the latter group described their work as “just a temporary job” that helped make ends meet. Another student described having better opportunities in their job field in a larger city, but as they preferred to be closer to family and friends chose a job that was less meaningful to a degree.

The capability for the meaningful use of leisure. Many participants in this study describe leisure time activities as a key part of living a good life and well-being. The capability for the meaningful use of leisure represents the various ways in which

participants expressed the role of leisure in well-being. On the one hand, this capability is simply about the opportunity to engage in one's preferred leisure activities. Students often described these leisure activities as both important aspects of life and key parts of living a good life. For example, one student stated, "The good life is a life with access to opportunities to be outside, easy access to mountains, to go skiing, to go on long trips, camping, combined with a job where you have opportunities to be free." Another noted, "[The good life] is to have opportunities to have time for my hobby, for example music." Still another participant reflected that the good life is one where, "you have opportunities to travel and be out in nature." While the opportunity to engage in these activities is a core part of this capability, it only captures one part of it.

The meaningful use of leisure, in this case, is not defined simply as enjoyment, but rather in the broader sense of development or enrichment. This is about leisure as a means to the broader notion of human flourishing; it is about the ability to further develop as a person through the use of one's leisure activities. This underlying idea is what students are expressing when they describe the importance of having experiences as a key part of living a good life. For example, one student noted, "The good life is to be rich in friendships and rich in experiences." Another stated, "To have to work all day is not the good life. To be able to experience things, new things together with people that you value: [to have] shared experiences" is the good life. A third describe the good life as including, "[the ability] to experience nature, to use my creative resources, to be challenged." While it may seem like a rather subtle distinction, the emphasis on

experience (and often shared experience) is what distinguishes these descriptions as more than simply the opportunity to engage in leisure.

The emphasis on experience as evidence of leisure as an opportunity for personal development or flourishing is further illustrated when considered in the context of one's folk high school experience. Many of the participants reflected on the ways in which their folk high school experiences shaped what they viewed as important today. For example, one student stated,

[Folk high school] has influenced [my idea of the good life] in many small ways. Just these small moments where you experience this is how I want things to be, this is what I want to keep doing. When you were on a trip for a couple of weeks, on canoe trip or fishing trip without worries or telephone or anything that one was tied to; such things. This was absolutely a thing that many experiences at folk high school influenced. I have said fairly often when we were on trips at folk high school that this is how I always want life to be, in these small moments out in nature.

Another student reflected,

I set a lot of importance on sharing great experiences with near and dear people. This is absolutely something that came from folk high school. We experienced an incredible amount in a year so I set a lot of importance on experiencing things with those who were important to me. And this is something that I value more today than I did before folk high school.

These responses illustrate the importance students placed not simply on the experiences they had while at a folk high school, but in regards to the continued importance they placed on these types of experiences. Moreover, these experiences (see the section in chapter four on new experiences through the subject matter) are the primary pedagogical tool employed by the folk high schools to achieve their aims which are congruent with human flourishing and personal development. While not explicitly stated, the context of these experiences provides evidence that the the same type of meaningful and shared experiences that influenced one's personal development continue to be valued as an important part of well-being today.

As a component of well-being, the capability for the meaningful use of leisure is thus not only about having the opportunity to engage in leisure activities a person is interested in. It is also about the extent to which those leisure activities provide meaning in the sense they contribute to personal development. Nearly a century ago, John Dewey (1944) described this same idea and noted that learning how to make meaningful use of leisure was an important outcome of education. For Dewey, the emphasis on education as experience and on the need for people to make meaningful use of a newfound amount of leisure time were both key to the broader notions of human well-being. This idea was also in the context of industrialization and the influences this was having on the workforce, particularly in regards to the expansion of leisure due to mechanization; a force not unlike the role automation is playing today.

For the participants in this study, the achievement or freedom to engage in the meaningful use of leisure varied. Admittedly, the evaluation of this capability is

illustrative of the trade-offs between evaluating and identifying a capability set simultaneously. As this capability emerged following the interviews, a focused evaluation of the capability was not included as one of the semi-structured interview questions. Thus, the variation found in the ways participants expressed this capability may have related more to being asked as opposed to it being absent. With that limitation stated, all participants expressed engaging in a leisure activity of some kind. However, only six participants described their leisure activity as an especially important aspect of their well-being. Many of the sentiments expressed by this group were noted above. For the remaining students, the role of leisure activities was not discussed in any detail and was not described as an especially important aspect of the good life. Barriers to engaging in leisure activities or a sense of the opportunities (i.e. freedom) to engage in meaningful leisure activities was not able to be fully evaluated.

The capability for meaningful relationships. The value and importance of relationships was expressed in one form or another by all participants of this study as a key component of well-being. Most often, the importance of relationships was discussed in terms of either friends and/or family. For example, a number of students simply expressed the role of family and friends as being important aspects of life and a key part of the good life. “Family and friends are important” was a common sentiment. To the extent that students differed, it was typically in regards to how they provided insights into what made a relationship meaningful.

Insights about what a meaningful relationship entailed, especially as it related to well-being, typically were about a sense of mutual support. For example, one student

stated, “The good life for me includes close family relationships with, in a way, a willingness to give and do things for each other and, in a way, when they are willing to stretch for one another.” Another student stated, “It’s about having people around, people who you know you, who care about you.... people who support you when you have large or small problems.” Another described this as, “to have family and friends around that you look after and they look after you.” Meaningful in these examples suggests a reciprocal relationship of support where one has both a responsibility towards others and which others are responsible for.

Another aspect of meaningful relationships that should be highlighted was the active nature of this capability. Rather than describing this as a static or passive aspect of life, some students described the importance of being able “to build relationships, to strengthen friendships.” Others explicitly included the value of new friendships. One student described how “to be together with others, to be together with people that I enjoy to be with, both new and old friends” was an important aspect of life. Thus, the capability for meaningful relationships also includes the ways in which those relationships are maintained and strengthened, and the creation of new relationships.

The capability for meaningful relationships thus includes a number of components. First, and in its simplest form, it entails the opportunity to have relationships with friends and family (and beyond). Second, the nature of those relationships matters. In order for these relationships to be meaningful, a type of mutual support must be present. Lastly, this capability also entails the ability to foster and/or create these relationships.

For the participants of this study, all expressed they had achieved this capability. An evaluation of the degree to which each participant had achieved this capability was not fully possible. As a more complete evaluation of the extent or quantity of meaningful relationships was not attempted or included in the interview questions, a sense of the variation to which this capability was achieved was based on the extent to which friendships, family, and other relationships were discussed. This approach should not be taken as a reliable indication of the extent to which this capability is achieved. Rather, this approach was taken to better illustrate the potential variation within this capability. With that limitation in mind, nine of the fifteen participants of this study shared more detailed accounts of their relationships and described the importance of meaningful relationships to them. The remaining six participants all expressed having important friendships and the role of meaningful relationships as a part of the good life, but only in general terms and with minimal details.

The capability for practical reason.

The capability for practical reason is one of Martha Nussbaum's (2011) central capabilities. She defines it as, "being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 34). Interestingly enough, participants in this study did not explicitly mention this capability when describing what the good life mean to them or what they found to be important in life. That said, it is still included for two key reasons.

First, participants provided ample evidence that they were able to achieve this capability (albeit to various degrees). For example, simply being able to reflect upon

and define what the good life meant to them was evidence that this capability was an achieved functioning for the participants of this study. Some were succinct: “Good friends, food on the table, good health: that is a short trip to the good life.” Others provided more detail and often a more developed conception of what the good life meant. For example, one student stated, “I think of [the good life as] a picture in 3 parts. The first is the mental life; soul life; psychology. The second is activity; work. The third would be the social and [engagement with] the world.”

In addition to defining what the good life was, participants also evidenced their ability to reflect critically on how to achieve this. For some, this was expressed in terms of a recognition of the trade-offs between different aspects of life and the need for balance. One student stated, the good life “has to do with harmony between your friends, family, pursuit of money and work.” Another student reflected on the tension between acceptance and the need to strive for something better. They reflected on how one can “enjoy what one has, to accept life as it is... but I think many people will always come to want something more, and that is also good, but past a certain point it is also painful.”

Second, this aspect of well-being is directly relevant to the aims of the Norwegian folk high schools. The broader goals of *folkeopplysning* and *allmending* have much to do with forming a conception of the good and critically reflecting on how one lives (see chapter four and Erickson, 2006 for a more complete discussion). Moreover, the participants of this study described this as an important part of their folk high school experience. In one particularly illustrative response, a student reflected “I

got exposure to other's thoughts about values, I got chance to develop my own, [and] I became confident and secure enough to identify what was important for me." The personal outcomes related to developing autonomy further illustrate the way in which this capability was relevant to one's folk high school experience.

As students described what the good life meant to them and through their reflections on how attending a folk high school influenced their conception of what the good life entailed, it became evident that this capacity was in and of itself an important aspect of well-being, especially in the context of the folk high schools. The capability for practical reason is thus about the extent to which one is able to define what the good life means for them and one's ability to reflect on how the choices they make influence their ability to achieve their view of the good life.

For the participants of this study, all were able to provide a definition of the good life and thus expressed a level of achieved functioning for this capability. A similar limitation applied to the evaluation of this capability as to others as it also emerged after all interviews had been conducted. A more complete evaluation would have included more focused questions on the extent to which participants were able to critically reflect on how their definition of the good life came to be and on how they were involved in the planning of their own life. As this was not possible, variation of the achievement of this capability was based on the extent to which a participant's definition of the good life was developed and based on evidence of critical reflection of this view and the choices they made to achieve/plan their life. Four of the fifteen participants of this study expressed a more sophisticated view of the good life (relative

to the others). For these participants, a clear sense of trade-offs or clear conceptions of how key elements of the good life were balanced together was expressed as opposed to simply a list of important aspects. Similarly, these four students often reflected on how their view of the good life came to be and was influenced by various personal and environmental factors. Again, this is not meant to be a definitive evaluation of this capability, but rather simply to express that variation can be seen in the degree to which each participant expressed their achievement of it.

The capability for social engagement. The capability for social engagement can be defined broadly as the ability to be meaningfully involved with the community and/or society in which one lives. It has been included as a key part of well-being because many participants described ways in which they were involved in their community. These included volunteering with local organizations (with sports groups, youth clubs, cultural groups, music clubs, and religious groups), staying involved with the folk high school organization, being engaged in local politics, engaging in causes as self-described activists, being involved in labor unions, and simply staying informed about local issues. Involvement or engagement in each of these examples helps to illustrate the range of ways in which this capability may manifest itself. In some cases, being engaged involves the opportunity to volunteer and be a part of an aspect of one's community. For others, being engaged was more limited to simply staying informed or aware of what was happening.

Interestingly enough, only a few students described this as an important aspect of life or as a key part of their view of the good life. One student stated, "For me, I think

I have to be doing something for others. I have to be doing something both for my community and for those that are close to me.” Another stated, “I think about engagement and [a] belief that it can be better. Regardless of what it is or who it is that needs help you can always do something I think.” For this student, “it” was in reference to whatever manner in which one could help. Whether this was donating a small amount of money or committing significant time to a cause, both were ways to do something. In both of these examples, being engaged is important because it is doing something for others.

The capability for social engagement is thus also about being engaged in order to help others; it is a capability that may serve either well-being, agency, or both. In this light, it is also worth noting that the importance of doing something for others was more commonly expressed through the notion of vocation. As many of the participants in this study were engaged in forms of work that helped others (teacher, therapy, social work, etc.), the lines between social engagement and vocation may not be distinct in the minds of participants. Regardless, this overlap is not inherently problematic as it’s more illustrative of how different capabilities may serve both well-being and agency.

Ultimately, the capability for social engagement was primarily defined as the ability to be involved in one’s community or social setting. This involvement can take multiple forms in both kind and degree. The degree to which this capability achieved can be examined not only to the extent which one is engaged, but also to the extent that one is able to help others through their engagement. Similar to the capability for

vocation, the capability for social engagement may be utilized for both well-being and agency.

For the participants in this study, all expressed either the freedom or the achieved ability to be socially engaged. Thirteen of the fifteen participants described specific examples of ways in which they were socially engaged. The ways in which these students were engaged were outlined above. It's also interesting to note that three of these participants described their social engagement as minimal. One did so because they felt their social engagement was largely done through work. Another because family responsibilities did not allow much time to volunteer or be engaged in other ways, and yet another because they didn't see a connection between their personal interests and engagement opportunities. In other words, their personal interests were chosen over more explicit volunteer or engagement activities. Two participants explicitly described themselves as not engaged. In both of these cases, the participants cited multiple opportunities to do so, but that they simply had not chosen to do so.

The current well-being of former students. In each section above, a summary evaluation of the extent to which the fifteen participants of this group had attained each of these aspects of well-being. From a capabilities perspective, the attainment of well-being is framed via either the achievement (i.e. a person was actually able to do this) or freedom to achieve it (i.e. they had the opportunity to do so, but may not have chosen to). Table 2 provides a summary of each capability along with the number of students who either achieved or had the freedom to achieve each capability. Where applicable, a sense of the extent to which participants expressed their achievement or freedom is also

given. From the capabilities perspective, achievements are often described as functionings and represent what a person was able to do whereas freedoms represent what a person could do.

Table 2. The current well-being of former folk high school students: capabilities, achievements and freedoms.

Capability	Achievements and Freedoms
Post-Secondary Education	13 achieved this capability. 1 felt the freedom to achieve this capability was available. 1 neither achieved this capability nor felt it was realistically available in their field.
Vocation	7 achieved this capability in ways they described as meaningful. 7 achieved this capability. 1 expressed the freedom to achieve this capability was available.
The meaningful use of leisure	6 achieved this capability in ways they described as meaningful. 9 achieved this capability.
Meaningful relationships	9 achieved this capability in ways they described as meaningful. 6 achieved this capability.
Practical reason	4 achieved this capability in ways that were expressed with additional depth. 11 achieved this capability.
Social engagement	10 achieved this capability. 3 achieved this capability, but in self-described minor ways. 2 did not achieve, but 6 of 15 actively volunteer with local organizations.

This analysis illustrates that most participants have achieved a relatively high degree of well-being based on this list of capabilities. On the one hand, it is important to acknowledge that the *a posteriori* approach utilizing to select capabilities has an inherent amount of circularity embedded in it. As these capabilities were selected based on the experiences of these former students they are inherently more likely to have achieved them. However, the analysis does illustrate variation within each capability and is consistent with the broad self-evaluations given by the participants of this study. When these former folk high school students were asked, “do you feel you’re living the good life?” the most common response was a qualified yes. Most students expressed an overall appreciation for what they had and only noted a few things or a general sense that things could always be a bit better. For example, one student responded, “I feel I have a good life today. Of course, there are always things you try to change, but these are the small things, details that you take afterwards. I feel for the most part things are good.” Others were a bit more cautious, but expressed a similar sentiment: “To a certain extent I do [(have the good life)], but I feel that I continue to be on the path towards it.” In summary, the self-evaluations of these former students are consistent with the findings above. There is a high degree of achieved functioning, but in most cases, there is still room for improvement within each capability.

A preliminary list of capabilities. The capabilities presented above represent a preliminary list of freedoms that are key elements of well-being for the participants of this study. It is important to remember that this list is not intended to be a universal or basic conception of human well-being. Rather, the intention of this list was to identify

key and relevant aspects of well-being for this group of former folk high school students at this particular point in their lives. This also implies that this list does not represent all capabilities these students may find important. For example, there may be other capabilities (e.g. related to basic security or shelter) that students may value, but not necessarily describe as important based on their current situation. A comparison of this list to Nussbaum's or other conception of universal well-being help to further illustrate this point (e.g. freedom from bodily harm was not discussed, but is not likely to be seen as unimportant). It is for these reasons that this list of capabilities is also defined as a preliminary list. While it represents a sound starting point that is rooted in the lives of the participants of these studies, additional research and evaluation would be needed before making a more definitive claim that this list is representative of well-being for all or even most former folk high school students.

What is the current capability set and functioning of former folk high school students? The data and analysis presented above help to answer the research question related to the current capability and functioning of these former folk high school students. This has been achieved both through the identification of the list of capabilities and an analysis of the extent to which participants had achieved or had the freedom to achieve each of those capabilities. For the purposes of this study, this represents another key component needed in order to develop a theory of how attending a folk high school serves as a means to capability expansion. Figure 7 illustrates the incorporation of these findings into the conceptual framework being utilized for this study. The capability set are included under both capabilities and functionings as well-

being from the capabilities perspective is about both the opportunity to attain a certain aspect of well-being and one's actual attainment of it (i.e. functioning). In the next section, data and analysis are presented on the ways in which the former folk high school students in this study linked their current well-being to their folk high school experience.

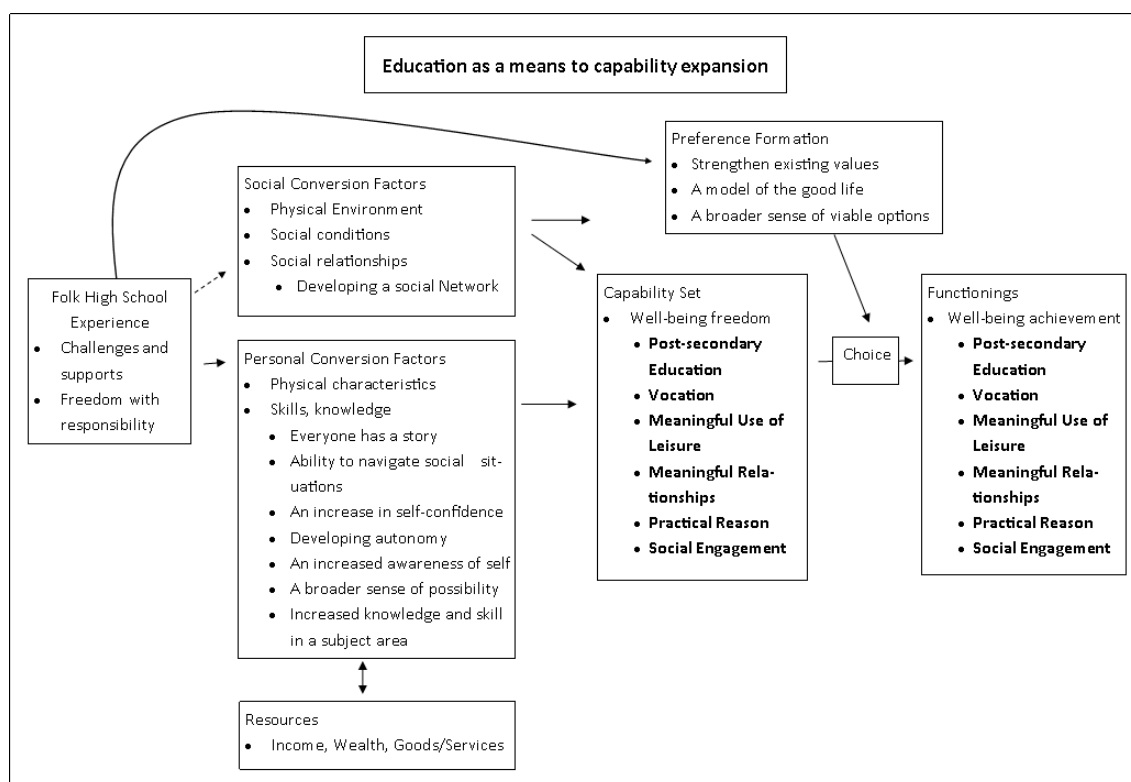


Figure 7. Education as a means to capability expansion. The well-being of former folk high school students as capabilities and functionings.

Links Between Attending a Folk High School and Well-Being

Data and analysis have now been provided that illustrate a number of key elements of the theoretical model being used for this study. At this point, the book ends of this framework have been identified. As illustrated above in Figure 7, the outcomes

of attending a folk high school have been identified on the left hand-side of the model, along with the influence on one's preference formation. On the right-hand side of the model, a list of relevant capabilities has been identified to represent the current well-being of these former folk high school students. The piece missing is the potential links between attending a folk high school and one's current well-being. In this section, data and analysis are presented to help answer the remaining research question: In what ways do former students link their current capabilities to their folk high school experience?

Throughout the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked if and how they saw any connections between their folk high school experience and their current well-being. Their responses were then analyzed for commonalities and then organized into key themes. Five themes emerged, each of which helps to explain potential links or influences attending a folk high school has on well-being. First, students reported applying the various learning outcomes they gained while attending a folk high school in their current settings. Second, a number of students described their folk high school experience as an initial step or spark that helped set a particular path in motion. This was true for their career and educational trajectory, but more so in regards to the way in which their view of the good life started to shape their future decisions. Third, students described the lasting impact or positive value their folk high school has had on their well-being. Simply put, they had a good experience at folk high school and this contributed to their life being viewed as good. Fourth, students described a link in terms

of the influence and support their social network or friend group had on their subsequent decisions.

Applying learning outcomes. A number of former students described situations in which they utilized or applied some of the knowledge and skills they gained as a result of attending folk high school as a possible link between their folk high school experience and their current well-being. As they reflected upon the ways in which their folk high school experience helped them today, this was one of the more common themes that emerged. However, it should be noted that the strength of these connections varied. In some situations, a very clear line was drawn as a student utilized a special skill or knowledge base gained from their folk high school experience. More commonly, however, the contribution was viewed as incremental or as one of many. One student described this particularly well stating, “It’s absolutely difficult to set your finger on exactly what or how [your life] would have changed without [folk high school].” Despite this challenge, the participants of this study described links between their current well-being and each grouping of outcome identified in this study: personal, social, and knowledge outcomes.

Applying personal learning outcomes. The application of personal outcomes later in life was most typically described in relation to the impact of developing autonomy, an increase in self-confidence, and a broader sense of possibility. For example, when one student was asked whether attending folk high school has helped them to live the good life today, they responded, “Yes, because a year at folk high school helped me be more sure and confident of myself and the values that I had. When

you are more sure of yourself, this helps you with the choices you make later.” In a similar vein, another participant described how attending a folk high school helped them make choices during the early part of their career.

I didn't know if occupational therapy was the best for me in the start and one thing I got from folk high school was to try things that I wasn't good at and to try things that I had never done before... This helped me to not be so scared or anxious to start or take part in something you were a little uncertain about.

In these examples, these former students are linking their increases in self-confidence and autonomy with the ability to make choices later life, whether in general or in relation to a specific aspect of their life.

Former students also described ways in which they applied personal outcomes in the relation to the capabilities of education and social engagement. In relation to social engagement, one former student stated,

That I have been a leader in children's club and such things has been influenced by [attending] folk high school. I got a mentality or an imprint, or not an imprint, but a little bit more openness for what may come. It's easier to take initiative to be a leader for such things and that's good.

When another student was asked about how their folk high school experience influenced their post-secondary education, they described how the role of “[challenging] myself to do things that were different, that I was a bit uncertain about” as very important for succeeding in their future studies. In all of these examples, the participants of this study are illustrating what they see as a link between their current

capabilities and their folk high school experience through the way(s) in which they applied the personal outcomes they gained as a result of attending a folk high school.

Applying social learning outcomes. The ability to apply social outcomes gained as a result of attending a folk high school was another link identified by former students. This was most commonly illustrated in relation to the capability for vocation. One former student who is now a teacher described the way in which understanding everyone has a story contributed to their work today.

As part of the social aspect [of folk high school], you learn how to handle that others are different than you; that you must learn to respect others even if you feel you don't get along with them. This is absolutely a goal that I can contribute to with my students. This is absolutely a challenge for the age group I work with today as they need to learn to respect difference in a way. I feel that this is something I can continue, that I can use, and work on in my class. This is a learning that I have had and is something I can continue.

Similarly, another former student related how they continue to utilize and deepen their understanding that everyone has a story in their work as a substance abuse counselor. This student described how the role of living with others, especially those they may not have otherwise chosen to live with was particularly important for seeing beyond stereotypes and learning that everyone has a story. They went on to state, "Now I work with students with substance abuse problems. I don't know if I had some of this before or if I'm more aware of it and it's just easier to see, but I can take this further." For both

of these students, they see a link (even if it didn't originate at folk high school) between these social outcomes and their current work roles.

Other former students described this link in other contexts. As a result of attending a folk high school, one participant stated that compared with most Norwegians, "I think it would be easier for me to be open and more approachable when it comes to anything with community because you are so used to being in that situation." Another student described what they saw as a very direct application to their experiences in post-secondary education.

We had many presentations [and] a lot of group work in my education. So, it can be very good, in a way, to have to think about every person as we were very different. So, if I have enough time I can find something good in someone regardless. This was a thing that was very helpful from folk high school that I used throughout my education.

In these examples, these former students described a very direct application of their social outcomes to their subsequent well-being, either in terms of the capability for education or for social engagement.

Applying knowledge outcomes. The application of knowledge outcomes was described the least frequently by the participants of this study. In part, this may have been due to the specialized nature of many of these outcomes in comparison to the more widely applicable personal and social outcomes. The few former students that did describe applying knowledge outcomes did so in very specific ways and often in relation to work. In a particularly illustrative example, one student described an array of

specific skills they learned at folk high school that they now use in their role as a teacher.

As a teacher, there are many aspects that are interesting to consider in regards to my capacities in sport and outdoor life. The first is gym; to have more knowledge about diverse sports beyond just having tried to play volleyball once is wise to have. Also, it's clear that when traveling on trips with my class – either short tours for a couple hours on long day tours—that I can start a camp fire and such small things. They mean a lot for the trip experience of the students, so to have a teacher that can do these things does something important.

This participant further illustrated how these skills are on their CV and are discussed as important parts of their expertise.

It is interesting to note that students did not make an explicit connection between their knowledge and skills and their capability for the meaningful use of leisure. This may be due to the fact that this capability emerged after the interviews were completed and thus was not specifically probed in the semi-structured interviews. Nonetheless, it is in line with the very limited extent to which the knowledge outcomes of a folk high school experience were linked with one's current capabilities.

Providing an initial spark. For some students, the link between one's folk high school experience and current well-being was described as a starting point. As these students reflected on the way in which attending a folk high school influenced their current well-being, they often described the challenge of drawing a direct line as they recognized the role that other experiences also played. However, these former students

described their folk high school experience as an important starting point for a particular career, study, or life path. In other words, former students often described their year at a folk high school as a year that helped guide their subsequent choices, but not as the definitive step in achieving their current well-being. In one interview, a student reflected on how their folk high school influenced where they were now. Unable to think of any direct connection, they instead reflect on the unique nature of their experience and how,

It was like, the way in which everyone at a folk high school was moving together, the way everyone was pushed together so that it became a spark that ignited a bush and this started a fire and the smell of the smoke from that bush fire represents your awareness of this.

For this student, the direct link was not in any particular skill or outcomes, but rather in the way this year was a catalyst or starting point for one's future path that one wasn't really aware of until much later. This metaphor provided the name of this theme and helps to illustrate a possible link between one's folk high school experience and current well-being.

Influence on career and study path. As a spark or starting point, attending a folk high school was often described as the beginning of one's career or study path. For some, this starting point represented a fairly substantial shift or change in what they had envisioned for themselves. One student reflected on how attending folk high school influenced their career path:

[Folk high school] had a very strong influence on this as I had initially thought about and wanted to study law. After folk high school I realized that I wanted to work with people. And then afterwards I found out that I wanted to work with children. This gives me good days and joy to keep going as well. So this is absolutely something my folk high school year has influenced.

Similarly, another former student reflected on the role of their folk high school experience in their choice to study art and traditional handwork; “there are certainly different factors, but I also clearly think that folk high school played a big role in this as it inspired me a great deal and it was there I learned the technique.” Another student reflected on their folk high school year as a form of discovery. “I took media and photo as an elective at folk high school and I found out that this is something I can do and I’m good at it and this has led to what I study today.” These examples illustrate a link between one’s folk high school and current well-being as an initial spark that may not yet have been entirely known.

Directing one towards the good life. A number of students described the way in which their folk high school experiences started to shape their choices in relation to what the good life entailed and how to achieve it. The clearest evidence was provided for the way in which attending a folk high school was a key part of defining the good life. For example, one participant stated,

One thing that I’ve often thought about when I think about work is that I’d like to work 80% maybe even 50%, well not 50%. I think, maybe I began to think at

folk high school that while it was very good to work, there are many other nice things too, such as going hiking.

Others reflected on their experience as a type of model for healthy living; “when I think about folk high school and the things I experienced there—I had very healthy experiences there, in both the disappointments and all the great moments.” Another student reflected, “I said fairly often when we were on trips at folk high school that this is how I always want life to be, in these small moments out in nature.” Yet another student succinctly stated, “if I imagine the good life, I think about the feelings and experiences at folk high school.” In all of these sentiments, these former students are clearly illustrated the role their folk high school experience played in defining their view of the good life.

This theme, however, is about more than just defining the good life, it is also about the choices one started to take in pursuit of that view of the good life. One participant summed up this dual role neatly, “I think, in a way, [folk high school] had both an impact on my perception of what the good life is and has directed me towards that life.” Another participant expressed the way in which their folk high school year served as a starting point in making their own choices towards the life they want to lead:

it isn't like one has to wait for someone else to do something for me or teach me something. It has something to do with yourself and how you engage in it. I think I learned a bit about that – maybe in retrospect I don't think I learned so much about this, but it was kind of a first encounter with it and maybe that's why it was so meaningful.

This combination of coming to a clearer definition of what the good life is and starting to make free choices towards that life represents the key underlying idea of this theme. It is very much in line with the idea of making the road by walking. In the case of the folk high school, it is developing the good life by living it.

Support and influence of one's social network. Another link between the current well-being of these former students and their folk high school experience was the support and influence of their social network. This link was most commonly expressed through the enduring friendships one gained as a result of attending a folk high school that were still viewed as important—often directly so—for one's well-being. When one former student was asked if they felt they felt their folk high school experience influenced their ability to live the good life today, they responded: "I think so because of the support from the friends I got from folk high school. I think this plays a central role." Another participant described the friendships they gained from folk high school as one of the most important aspects of their experience. "You get friends for life you know and I set a very big price on this when I think that now, eight years later, I have very good friends that I met there." Similarly, another participant stated, "I have very good friends that I meet weekly from folk high school so that is still a part of my life today." Each of these examples illustrates the ways in which friendships gained as a result of attending a folk high school were linked to one's current well-being.

In addition, the friendships that developed while attending a folk high school had a number of other influences on a person's choices later in life. Most commonly, this was related to where a person decided to live or study. One participant reflected,

“the year after folk high school I moved to Trondheim because many of those I went to folk high school went there.” Similarly, another student stated,

And I would not have lived in Bergen if I hadn't gone to folk high school... I choose to [study] in Bergen because there were five close friends who decided to move to Bergen together. So, the social [aspect] choose the city.

In these examples, a person's social network has an indirect effect on a range of capabilities via the choices they make. A move based on friends indirectly influenced a person's choice of university and choice of study. Interestingly enough, only one student described the role of the friendships they gained from folk high school as a type of social capital or network they now valued in their current employment. No participants described a sense of gaining access to a particular milieu or social class as a result of their relationships.

Ultimately the ways in which students described the influence of their social relationships was more in terms the choices they made to sustain and maintain these relationships as opposed to an instrumental value or sense of how knowing a person enabled one to gain access to a job or form of social influence. Parents corroborated the importance of these friendships and often articulated how these friendships influenced the well-being of their children. For example, one set of parents described the “supportive and strong network” they gained from attending a folk high school and the support this provided through a difficult illness. Another parent of a participant described the way in which their friendships, “created lots of social opportunities [because] you get a very large circle of friends.” In other words, when their child moved

to a new city, they had lots of opportunities to engage in social and leisure activities because of their folk high school friendships. The support and influence of one's social network thus manifested itself in both direct and indirect ways. The lasting friendships were valued in their own right as part of the capability for meaningful relationships and for the ways these friendships influenced other capabilities.

The lasting value of a positive experience. A number of former students described the link between attending a folk high school and their current well-being in a slightly different way. For these students, attending a folk high school wasn't viewed as causing a major change or shift in their thinking. For these students, the folk high school contributed to the good life by simply being a good experience. One participant stated, "The good life for me has not changed due to folk high school but it has contributed to that my life is good, at least it goes well on this way". In one particularly illustrative response, another former student reflected,

It was just a great experience that you shared with others. And in a way all the other, all the challenges you forgot when you stood there because the experience was so great, with the people you've become so tight with. And these are the things you definitely take with you later in life, even if you don't find a specific use for them they stay with you. I don't know to what degree they specifically influence your life later on. I have had a very good and positive experience that I can take with me later in life and I can think back on this.

Other students expressed the idea as “what stayed with me from folk high school were the experiences I had together with others,” or “I have certain experiences in the back of my head that I will always take with me.”

For these students, the link between attending a folk high school and their current well-being is reflected in the positive experience they had. They are illustrating that good experiences, even if they occurred in the past, are still an important part of well-being and contribute to living a good life. These reflections illustrate, especially when considered in conjunction with the theme above about developing the good life by living it, that a year at a folk high school was in and of itself an example of experiencing well-being and of living the good life. However, this contribution isn't limited to that year; that moment in time is still viewed as a meaningful contribution or link to one's current well-being.

Another step in the road: One influence of many. While the above links were evidenced by a number of students, one would be remiss to discount the observations of a number of other students who viewed the links between their folk high school experience and their current well-being as one factor among many. One participant summed up this sentiment neatly, “It could be that someone had a very big change from their year at folk high school, but that didn't happen for me.” In relation to choosing a future study path, another student reflected, “it is a bit difficult to think about what [folk high school] has done for me because from where I sit now I don't feel it has done so much.” For these students, their folk high school year did not represent a key starting point or meaningful change in their career, study, or life plan.

For other former students, the link between one's folk high school experience and one's current well-being was viewed as a continuation of a path they already viewed as in motion. For one former student that went into ministry, they reflected, "[folk high school] just made me more certain about the way I wanted to go. It influenced me by making me more steadfast and solid in what I already knew." Similarly, when another former student reflected on how attending a folk high school had influenced their current capabilities they replied, "Not in a very big way I think. But it, as I said earlier, it has influenced the choices I've taken along the way." These examples are provided to help illustrate that the ways in which the participants of this study linked their folk high school experience to their current capabilities varied. This variation occurred both in terms of the nature of the link (e.g. a starting point or another step along the path) and in the context (e.g. education, vocation, etc.).

In what ways do former students link their current capabilities to their folk high school experience?

The data and analysis presented above help to answer the research question about the ways in which former students link their current capabilities to their folk high school experience. It is important to note that the above analysis emphasized the links or pathways that former students described and organized the analysis around those links. This was in contrast to identifying links between specific capabilities. As is evident in the analysis above, a number of these links applied to multiple capabilities and may have been present in some contexts, but not others. For example, the application of learning outcomes was described in relation to vocation, social

engagement, and post-secondary education, but not for the meaningful use of leisure or other capabilities. In part, this was also due to a similar limitation in the identification of relevant capabilities. As a number of capabilities were identified after all data had been collected, additional probes were not asked about potential links towards each capability. While this was a limitation in regards to the depth of the analysis, the pathways identified still provide key insights into the ways in which attending a folk high school influences one's current well-being. These pathways are illustrated in the conceptual model being used for this study in Figure 8.

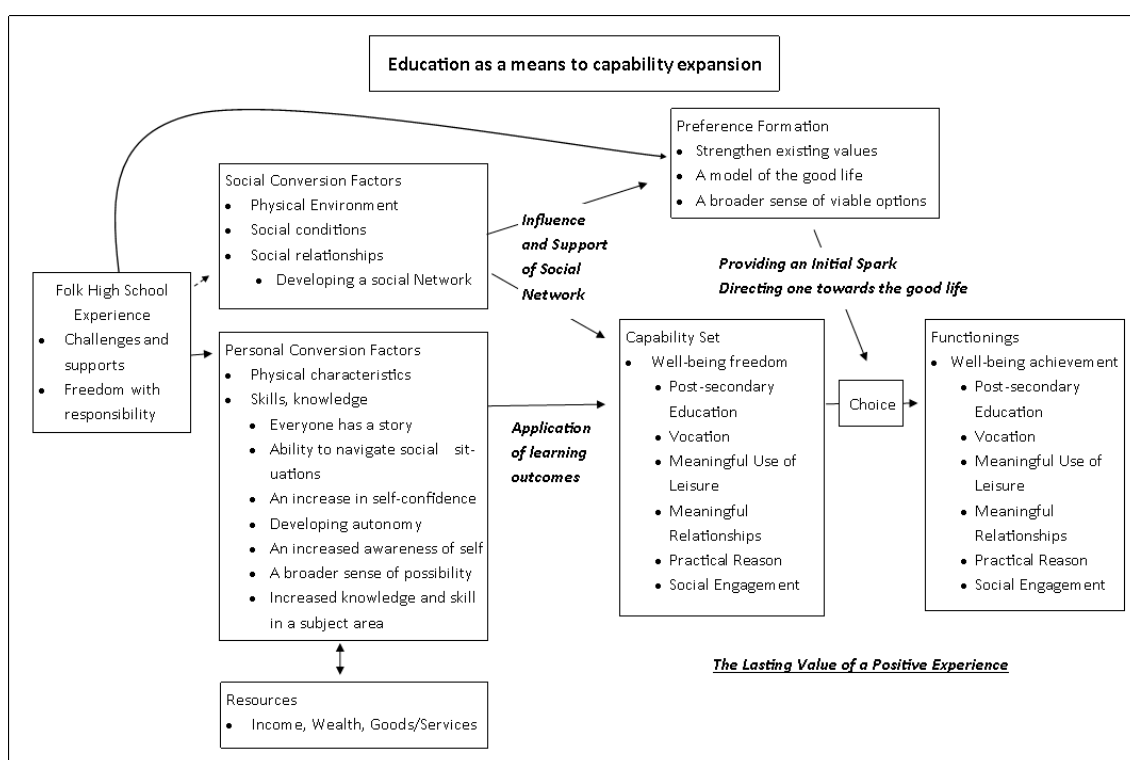


Figure 8. The links between attending a folk high school and one's current capabilities.

role in the ways attending a folk high school can serve as a means to capability expansion. Two of these links—the influence and support of one's social network and the application of learning outcomes—play a key role in the way in which personal and

social conversion factors are utilized in different contexts. They illustrate the ways in which the outcomes of the folk high school are converted into personal and social resources or conversation factors which an individual may then use to attain certain capabilities or aspects of well-being. The link of providing an initial spark represents a different pathway as this link is related to one's preferences, values, and more importantly, one's choices. This link was described as both helping students to become more aware of what their preferences were and as a way of making choices based on those values.

The final link does not fit neatly into the theoretical framework being used for this study. In many ways, this is a form of historical achievement; this represents a past state of achieved functioning where one felt they were living the good life. This link in particular represents an influence on well-being that the capabilities approach doesn't necessarily account for. On the one hand, it doesn't fit as there wasn't a clear mechanism by which this past achievement either constrained or enabled one's current freedoms. On the other hand, this past experience still contributed to one's sense of living the good life.

It is also interesting to note that each of these four links can occur in a variety of combinations. Some of the participants of this study expressed all four links while others expressed only one. Similarly, the extent to which each link was expressed varied. Some participants illustrated ways in which they were able to apply their personal, social, and knowledge outcomes to different aspects of their life. Others only expressed applying their person or social outcomes to different capabilities. Ultimately,

the exploratory nature of this study is not well-suited to identifying meaningful patterns based on the prevalence of these types of links alone. The strength of this study is in its ability to highlight these potential mechanisms and illustrate the various ways in which they are made manifest.

Before moving on to the conclusion of this chapter, there are some additional insights to be gained by the finding that attending a folk high school is another step in the road, that it is one influence of many. While the above links illustrate potential mechanisms by which a folk high school may influence well-being, this finding suggests that a complex mix of factors also plays a role and, in fact, is likely the more common scenario. Even in the cases where a link can be drawn, this should not be taken to mean that the folk high school is the only link or even that it is the primary link. This is an important limitation that must be remembered as this study has only identified possible links. The methodology utilized in this study does not provide a mechanism to tease out the relative influence of these links compared to the other factors at play. Thus, this finding suggests that there is always likely to be other intervening factors in the relationship between attending a folk high school and well-being.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented data, analysis, and findings related to the current capability set and functioning of former folk high school students and the ways in which former students link these capabilities to their folk high school experience. The capability set identified for this study was based on what the participants of this study described as important for them based on their view of the good life. It was not intended

to be either an exhaustive list of all capabilities or a foundational or basic set of capabilities. The capability set identified served to form the basis of an analysis of the well-being of participants and it was found that all participants had a relatively high degree of well-being. Four different links illustrated the various ways in which the participants of this study described how attending a folk high school influenced their current well-being and formed the basis for an initial theory of how attending a Norwegian folk high school influences well-being. In the following chapter, the conclusions and implications of this study are presented.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Implications

The findings of this study form the basis for an initial theory of capability expansion for the Norwegian folk high schools. This chapter begins with a summary of how the findings of this study shed insights on the possible ways in which attending a Norwegian folk high school contributes to a person's well-being. Next, the findings of this study are examined in relation to the existing research on the Norwegian folk high schools and other studies that have examined the impact of education on human development and well-being (see chapter two for a review of this literature). The limitations of these findings, along with key implications for educators, policy makers, and researchers are also discussed. In this chapter, the findings of this study, their significance, and key limitations are discussed in relation to the existing body of research on the Norwegian folk high schools. This is followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to the existing research on the impact of education on human development. Particular attention is paid to the insights gained in relation to the mechanisms by which education may influence well-being. Next, a reflection on the aptness of the capabilities approach will be given including key lessons learned and a discussion of key theoretical tensions that were identified in the approach. This chapter concludes with a section on recommendations for future research and key implications and lessons learned for policy makers, educators, and researchers.

Developing an Initial Theory of Capability Expansion

The overarching research question posed in this study was: What capabilities are expanded as a result of attending a folk high school? The findings of this study illustrate

how the participants identified six different capabilities or aspects of well-being: post-secondary education, vocation, the meaningful use of leisure, meaningful relationships, practical reason, and social engagement. The findings also suggest that attending a folk high school contributes to each of these capabilities, albeit through different mechanisms and in ways that are not consistent across all participants. Similarly, the findings suggest that attending a folk high school is one of many potential influences, but one that nonetheless, was described as being particularly important. When viewed as a whole, the findings of this study help to sketch out an initial description of the way in which attending a folk high school impacts well-being.

Ultimately, attending a Norwegian folk high school contributed to well-being by fostering personal, social, and knowledge outcomes that could be applied later in life. In addition, it provided an important shaping role in regards to one's preferences and values. This shaping role entailed both a strengthening of one's existing values and the ability to more clearly ideate a view of the good life. In addition, it helped participants gain a broader sense of viable options. These influences served to guide or direct subsequent choices later in life, both as an initial spark for a person's career or study path and in the way it directed a person towards the good life. Attending a Norwegian folk high school also influenced well-being through the development of meaningful lasting relationships which were valued in their own right and which provided important supports. Lastly, attending a Norwegian folk high school contributed on one's well-being by providing a valued experience that contributed to one's sense of well-being long after the day-to-day experiences of attending are finished.

Contributions to Research on the Norwegian Folk High Schools

As little research has been conducted on the Norwegian folk high schools, this study provided an important contribution to this fledgling body of research. In particular, this study made three primary contributions: 1) it added to the body of research on the learning outcomes of attending a folk high school, 2) it provided evidence for a connection between attending a folk high school and well-being later in life, and 3) it provided insights into mechanisms by which the learning outcomes of the folk high schools enabled the expansion of human freedoms (i.e. well-being) later in life.

First, the finding that attending a folk high school contributed to an array of personal, social, and knowledge outcomes is consistent with other studies that explored the learning outcomes of attending a folk high school. The personal outcomes identified in this study are corroborated by the early research on the learning outcomes of the folk high schools in the 1980s (Haegeland et al 1995) through more recent studies conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Erickson, 2008; Harrington, et al., 2003; Knutas & Solhaug, 2010). The collection of personal outcomes identified by participants in this study—an increase in self-confidence, developing autonomy, an increased self-awareness, and a broader sense of possibility—are also consistent with the component of self-authorship, a key finding of a study on the outcomes of the folk high school by Harrington et al. (2003). As will be discussed in more detail below, the ways in which participants of this study described a link between their personal outcomes and well-being later in life provides support for the theorized role that the concept of self-

authorship plays later in life. In addition to the personal outcomes, the social outcomes relating to communication and conflict management identified in previous research were also corroborated by the findings of this study. While the larger body of research on the learning outcomes of the folk high school remains relatively small, this study provides additional evidence that attending a folk high school contributes to an array of personal, social, and knowledge learning outcomes.

The finding that attending a folk high school had an influence on well-being later in life is a particularly important finding and represents a significant contribution to the literature on the Norwegian folk high schools. In large part, this is a significant contribution to the literature simply because it is the first study of its kind. No other research known to the author of this study has explored this aspect of attending a folk high school. As noted in chapter two, only one other study has examined longer term impacts of attending a folk high school and that study examined the impact on completion rates of post-secondary education. However, it is equally significant that the findings of this study illustrated multiple dimensions of well-being and the mechanisms by which attending a folk high school influenced well-being.

The multi-faceted influence on well-being is significant for two key reasons. First, it provides a contribution to better understanding a wide or more holistic conception of human development. Second, and perhaps more significant, is the way in which this finding provides insights into the trade-offs made by former folk high school students in relation to well-being. The findings of this study illustrated how people may forego the value of one aspect of well-being in exchange for another. For example, this

study found that a number of students emphasized the meaningful pursuit of leisure or meaningful relationships over more lucrative forms of employment. This did not imply that they didn't value having meaningful work, but rather that other aspects of well-being were viewed as more important. Underlying this trade-off was the finding that attending a folk high school had a number of influences on one's values and preference formation, although in complex and interesting ways. This finding is important as the role of choice and preference in studies that examine the impact of education is not always well-considered, despite its somewhat self-evident influence on the trade-offs people make throughout their lives. This study illustrated how the role of preference formation can both inform trade-offs between different aspects of well-being later in life and how it can lead students to make initial choices down particular life paths that were viewed as significant in hindsight.

In a similar vein, the finding of four potential mechanisms by which attending a folk high school may influence well-being is another initial and important contribution to the literature. Not only does the finding of these pathways add support to the conclusion that attending a folk high school influences well-being, it also provided insights into the ways in which the personal, social, and knowledge outcomes gained by attending a folk high school, along with the influence on one's choice and preference formation contributed well-being. When these mechanisms are viewed in the context of education as a means to capability expansion, they form a key component of an initial explanation or theory about how attending a Norwegian folk high school contributes to well-being later in life. As the mechanisms by which education influences human

development are poorly understood (see below), this finding not only marks an important contribution to the research on the Norwegian folk high schools, but to education broadly.

The significance of these findings, however, must be understood in the context of some key limitations. This study was, after all, an exploratory study and as such additional research will be needed to substantiate any influence on well-being that attending a folk high school has. This study represents a small but not insignificant initial step in understanding this influence. While links were found, it must also be remembered that the influence of attending a folk high school was viewed as complex, likely mediated by many other factors, and ultimately as a year that was difficult to view apart from the myriad other experiences one had had. On the one hand, the fact that the participants still saw an influence despite the intervening influences of anywhere from six to eleven years of other life experiences is a testament to the powerful and lasting experience of attending a folk high school. On the other hand, it is a caution to the potential for other influences to play a similar or more substantial role. In other words, even if attending a folk high school may be viewed as important, other life experiences may have a far greater impact on a person's current well-being. This study was not able to evaluate the strength of this influence *vis-a-vis* other educational or life experiences.

The Impact of Education on Human Development

The findings of this study provide some interesting insights into the broader body of research on evaluating the impact of education on human development. In this

section, the findings of this study are considered in relation to existing research on the mechanisms by which education has an impact on human development. This is followed by a discussion of the findings on the role of choice and preference formation. Some key limitations are discussed in relation to both the mechanisms and the role of choice. Lastly, the section concludes with a brief discussion on the complexity of understanding the pathways by which an educational experience influences human development over time.

In comparison to the existing research on the mechanisms by which education may impact human development, the findings of this study provide some interesting and meaningful contributions to this body of research. First, the findings of this study provide additional support that education can have a direct effect on different aspects of well-being. Similar to the direct or civic education hypothesis (Campbell, 2006; Emler & Frazer, 1999; Hillygus, 2005; Nie, et al., 1996), the findings of this study support an impact through the ability to directly utilize what one has learned. The findings of this study also illustrated some nuance to the ways in which education may have a relatively direct impact on well-being.

In particular, the finding that attending a folk high school contributed to well-being via a lasting positive effect is of particular interest, as are the lasting friendships that were viewed as inherently valuable. These findings illustrate that conceptions of “direct” may occur through the specific application of learning outcomes later in life and that a positive or valued experience continues to contribute to one’s sense of well-being long after the initial experience has ended. In other words, the value of a positive

experience extends beyond its present moment. This finding provides helps to broaden the way in which a direct benefit or value of education can be viewed.

It is also worth noting that a direct benefit often has a different connotation in the human capital literature. In part, this is based on the application of quantitative methods to evaluate the unique effect of education relative to other factors. It is also due in part to an assumption that education has an independent effect. Thus, direct in this sense is more about an influence that is not mediated by other characteristics of the person, their background, their experiences outside of education, or the context in which they live. The findings of this study contradict the view that education can have an independent effect. While this study found a number of potential causal mechanisms between attending a folk high school and well-being, none of these was described as independent of other factors in one's life. Many of the participants of this study described the role of their educational experience in precisely the opposite manner and as one year of many and as one influence of many. The direct influences that were found are thus not to be conflated with independent effects.

Another mechanism identified by researchers in the social and civic engagement literature is described as the social position hypothesis; the idea that the influences of education are mediated by one's social position. As noted above, the findings of this study provide support for this mechanism in terms of how the influence of education is described as mediated by an array of influences. However, the role of one's social position in terms of one's network (i.e. set of relationships), social class, or specific community was rarely described as an influential factor on one's current well-being. It

is important to note that a limitation of this study was that it did not fully explore this possibility as the focus was on the ways in which students described what they viewed as the influence of attending a folk high school well. The findings of this study thus cannot rule out such effects and it could well be that the mediating effects on one's network are difficult to evaluate or even be fully aware of.

Nonetheless, it is interesting that this study found the way in which social relationships influenced well-being was not as a means or mediating factor for other ends, but as a valued end in and of itself. This is not to say that relationships were not described as being helpful for different aspects of one's life; they were, but these were not viewed as important as the friendships themselves. This was somewhat surprising as a key aspect of the folk high school was coming into contact with people from all over Norway and from different social positions. One might have expected that the expansion of one's social network would have been viewed as having a larger effect on well-being, assuming it would have opened up new opportunities or access to different resources. Again, this cannot be fully ruled out as this study ultimately did not explore the role these relationships with enough depth to draw a meaningful conclusion. Instead, however, this study did find that relationships are of value in their own right. While one's social position may still play a mediating role of sorts, it is worth remembering that these relationships are valued as a meaningful aspect of well-being in their own right.

Another contribution of this study relates to the findings of the ways in which choice and preference formation play a key role in influencing well-being later in life.

The role of choice is not well accounted for—some might say not accounted for at all—in the human capital and civic participation literature. The findings of this study help to illustrate two key roles that choice and preferences play. First, the role of choice plays a key role along any path of development. The finding that attending a folk high school provided a spark or was the start of a series of choices or larger direction illustrates this point well. This finding should give researchers pause as they consider the assumptions behind any mechanism that assumes a linear form of development. Similarly, the role of choice plays a key role in the trade-offs one makes between different aspects of well-being. Past research that utilizes a wide view of human capital has offered some insights into these trade-offs, but in the context of teasing out the unique effects of different types of education. For example, Desjardins' (2003) work in illustrating how personal interest learning led to a decrease in earnings is congruent with the experiences of some of these students who pursued less lucrative careers for other aspects of well-being they found to be more meaningful.

From an evaluative perspective, it may be of little surprise that choice is not fully considered. As each person is free to make different choices, comparisons across individual becomes conceptually problematic as little or no aggregation is possible and practically challenging as the resources involved become prohibitive. While quantitative methods may be able to tease out the effects of different forms of education on particular aspects of well-being, they are less likely to illustrate the ways in which complex trade-offs are made. The capabilities approach provided a better mechanism to account for the ways in which preferences enabled or constrained certain aspects of

well-being, but may still prove unsatisfactory in accounting for the myriad factors that may lead individuals to make different trade-offs between different aspects of well-being. Thus, the findings of this study related to choice and preference formation are less about the ways in which these factors constrained one's well-being (e.g. by limiting one's aspirations) and more about how they set different paths in motion and influenced important trade-offs related to well-being. Furthermore, these findings highlight the deficiencies of existing models to fully capture the multiple roles choice may play.

To some degree, the extent to which this study informs the existing research on the influences of education on well-being is inherently limited. The purpose of an exploratory study is to identify unknown mechanisms and to allow a mechanism or potential causal pathway to emerge based on the experiences of the participants involved. This is not to suggest the findings cannot be informative. In the cases where enough similarities emerge (often by a happy accident of sorts), insights can be gained in relation to existing research as was presented above. However, this also implies that the specific causal or explanatory mechanisms presented in other research are unable to be thoroughly assessed. Moreover, the mechanisms found in this study may indeed be limited to the participants of this study and not apply to anyone else. Assuming additional research is able to support the mechanisms identified in this study, a stronger basis for concluding that attending a folk high school contributes to well-being will be made. In the interim, and ultimately until a randomized experiment could be conducted, one cannot rule out the possibility that some other unknown attribute is truly the causal factor. This is particularly important to remember as while participants in this study

described the folk high school as having an influence, they also noted the difficulty of teasing out specific effects and described other parts of their lives that have influenced their current well-being.

Ultimately, the findings of this study point to a highly complex relationship between an educational experience and well-being later in life. This may be self-evident, but nonetheless presents significant challenges (and opportunities) for researchers to fully understand the influence of various forms of education in relation to other life events. While qualitative methods have a lot of potential to provide in depth insights into the complex pathways that are available to an individual and the mechanisms by which their mix of skills, knowledge, values, and preferences influence them to take one route versus another, they more prove impractical or conceptually deficient as a means to evaluate well-being comparatively or to understand general causal pathways. Existing quantitative approaches tend to be far too simplistic and while they may provide a better basis for comparability, end up missing the complex mix of factors that account for well-being and oversimplify the mechanisms by which education influences well-being. In order to better understand the myriad pathways, new approaches will be needed. For example, chaos theory may be borrowed from as a mechanism to try and model the complex web of potential choices and steps between an educational experience and an outcome later in life. Ultimately, this study sought a balance and has identified a set of mechanisms that help explain the ways in which attending a folk high school have contributed to a multi-faceted conception of well-being.

The Capabilities Approach: Discussion and Lessons Learned

Based on the review of existing literature, it was posited that the capabilities approach represented the most apt approach for examining the impact attending a Norwegian folk high school had on well-being. Now that the study has concluded, one can reflect upon this choice and assess the extent to which the capabilities approach was a sound approach. This approach was initially selected due to three key reasons. First, it was felt selected because it did not require an a priori definition of well-being or human development. Second, it was selected because of its inherent multi-dimensional approach. Third, it was selected because it was still able to incorporate some of the key strengths of the human capital and civic participation approaches. In regards to the first two points, the findings of this study illustrate that it was an apt approach for identifying a multi-dimensional definitional of well-being that was based on the views of the participants of this study (a discussion of the challenges associated with this is presented below). In regards to being able to leverage the strengths of approaches to evaluating human capital and civic participation, the aptness is a bit more mixed.

Analyzing the ways in which students described the influence of attending a folk high school on well-being through the lens of one of the mechanisms described in the civic participation literature (e.g. direct civic participation, social position, etc.) proved complimentary to an extent. As an analytical lens, some commonalities could be identified (see above), but beyond this, the exploratory nature of this study did not fully allow these mechanisms to be explored in truly comparable ways. This is not to suggest that these theories are incompatible with the capabilities approach as much of the way

in which capabilities are either achieved or in which other capabilities are further expanded remains under-theorized. As such, a different approach could enable a more robust assessment of the extent to which the social position hypothesis or cumulative hypothesis is applicable to the Norwegian folk high schools through the use of the capabilities approach. This is an important reflection to the extent that some analytical lenses require a more purposeful methodological approach, else key elements of some theories (e.g. a more thorough understanding of one's social position) will have insufficient data to truly assess.

As a theory of human development, the role of education in the capabilities approach is viewed as playing a number of roles, some of which are central to the expansion of human freedom. However, and as discussed in chapter two, the role of education in the capabilities approach is also under-theorized; the ways in which it serves multiple roles creates conceptual confusion and no mechanism by which education influences the expansion of capabilities has been presented. Of course, it must be remembered that some of this is purposeful; the capabilities approach is purposefully under-theorized to enable a broad array of uses and application. That said, the findings and approach of this study provide an important contribution to the collection of research that utilizes the capabilities approach, and particularly for the application of this approach in education. This study has made an important contribution by proposing a two-fold conception of education in the capabilities approach: 1) education as a capability and 2) education as a means to capability expansion. A conceptual model was then developed that both illustrated key distinctions between the two conceptions and

most important, a potential relationship between them. This conceptual framework provided a contribution to the theoretical development of the capabilities approach and perhaps more significantly, a model that was successfully implemented in an exploratory research project. In addition, this model and the insights from this exploratory analysis could be used to guide an array of future efforts, including a larger quantitative study that could evaluate the extent to which the experiences of these students are consistent with a larger population of former folk high school students (and to the extent they are different from those who did not attend a folk high school).

In this study, particular attention was paid to the role of education as a means to capability expansion. As few other studies have examined the extent to which education influences well-being in this manner, this study served as an important contribution to this body of research. The findings of this study illustrated education's influence on multiple aspects of well-being that would not likely have been captured by traditional assessments. As the aims of the Norwegian folk high school lack a clear instrumental purpose, this was particularly valuable in this context. In contrast to other studies, the conceptual framework utilized for this study also provided a means to assess the ways in which particular outcomes and aspects of an educational experience influenced the expansion of other capabilities. While other studies illustrated the effect or influence on well-being, they did not address the pathways or mechanisms by which that influenced occurred. In addition, prior research did not account for the ways in which education may have shaped one's values and/or preference formation. As an initial contribution to

this field, this marks an important contribution to the understanding of how education serves as a means to capability expansion.

These strengths notwithstanding, a number of key lessons have also been learned that should be considered for future implementations of this approach. First, this study relied heavily upon functionings when evaluating each capability. While insights were gained into whether a person had the freedom to achieve a certain capability but opted not to (or was limited in some way), these were minimal and were only identified in the case of opting not to. In part, this is simply due to the challenge of assessing a potential to do or be something. While this is not entirely counterfactual, it presents many of the same challenges. This challenge is further complicated based on how the set of capabilities being used is defined; the broader the capability, the more possible ways someone has the potential to achieve it. As a greater level of aggregation was used for this study to aid comparability across participants, this also created additional complexity in assessing the extent to which a person had the potential to achieve a certain capability. For future studies that are interested in assessing both functionings and capabilities, this challenge needs to be taken seriously. In this regard, an *a priori* approach to identifying a capability set would have enabled a stronger initial conception of what the potential to achieve each capability may have looked like. Alternatively, if this challenge would have been anticipated it could have been planned for more effectively (see below for additional discussion about the challenges related to selecting capabilities).

Another potential weakness of this study was the limited insight gained into the social and contextual factors that may have enabled or constrained a person's well-being. These factors may have included socio-economic status, social or economic inequalities, cultural and social norms, etc. Minimal insights were gained into potential barriers and or contextual factors primarily because they were simply not addressed by participants. On the one hand, this may be evidence that Norway represents a context with few structural barriers to well-being. Country level data would support this as Norway has one of the lowest rates of inequality in the world and is consistently rated as one of top countries in the Human Development Index (UNDP). On the other hand, this could be due to the sample of those included in the study, none of whom have experienced significant or substantial structural barriers in their lives. Regardless, the limited insight into these factors are best interpreted as an unknown and thus this is a key limitation of this study. Future approaches should consider using multiple approaches to ensure sufficient insights are gained in this regard, especially if they are operating under time and resource constraints.

It is also important to recognize the limitations regarding insights gained into the role of preference formation and choice. On the one hand, the insights into the way in which one's preferences and values influenced the choices or trade-offs made between different capabilities is relatively clear. At a particular point in time the values and preferences that influenced a particular choice can be made relatively evident and their influence assessed. On the other hand, when one considers the ways in which attending a folk high school (or other form of education) had a lasting influence on one's values

and preferences over time, the picture becomes much more complicated. As preferences and values are inherently subjective, an accurate measurement of them depends entirely on the ability of each person to accurately assess those preferences and how they have changed over time. The finding that one's values were strengthened as a result of attending a folk high school also needs to be understood in this context as this was what students self-reported as opposed to a more robust assessment of change over time.

The findings of this study highlight this challenge as participants describe the influence on values as either strengthening existing values or a broadening of perspective. Neither of these cases represents a radically different set of preferences and are a recognition of the multiplicity of influences on one's preferences. As such, the finding that attending a folk high school influences one's well-being by providing an initial spark or helping to define the good life should be interpreted as a general or broad understanding of this relationships. The specific mechanisms by which this influence plays out over time is only known generally and perhaps can only be understood vaguely. As the student described via the metaphor of the spark that ignites a bush and that you eventually become conscious of as you smell the smoke; the smoke may be all one has left as evidence of that spark.

In order to ensure that the list of capabilities identified in this study was relevant to the participants, an *a posteriori* approach was utilized. In hindsight, the challenge of identifying a list of capabilities using this method was somewhat underestimated. Ultimately, the limited time and resources available for this study meant that the identification of a list of capabilities was done in conjunction with an assessment of the

extent to which participants had achieved those capabilities. As noted in chapter five, the consequence of this dual task was that for any capability that emerged later on or after data were collected, insights into the extent to which a person had either achieved this freedom or had the opportunity to achieve it were limited.

The key lesson is that identifying a list of relevant capabilities is a larger undertaking in its own right. This is not to say that it's inherently problematic to do both simultaneously as it will depend on the purpose of the study in question. As an exploratory study that aimed to identify a list of capabilities that could form the basis for future research, a detailed assessment of each person's capability set was not necessarily needed. The aim of this study was still achieved by identifying a set of capabilities that can be used in future studies as a basis to compare states of well-being across a broad number of participants. Based on the practical constraints of time and resources available, this purpose was achieved at the expense of additional depth. Thus, the lesson for future work in this area is, especially for studies that aim to gain a more in-depth evaluation of a person's capability set, is that the task of identifying relevant capabilities should not be underestimated.

Two additional insights were gained through the process of identifying a relevant set of capabilities. First, a key tension exists between identifying a list of capabilities that is congruent with the experiences of participants and identifying a list that is conceptually sound. Conceptual soundness, in this case, is a way to describe a list of capabilities that can be neatly defined; each capability is distinct and clearly delineated. This conceptual soundness greatly aids evaluation as each capability can be

independently evaluated. It also provides a clearer basis to evaluate trade-offs between these capabilities. However, when capabilities are neatly defined in this manner, they may no longer represent the reality of those involved. The ways in which people define well-being is rarely conceptually neat. Participants may describe capabilities as both ends and means. They may define meaningful work in a way that is not distinct from social engagement and so on. This is further complicated when the array of individual views are aggregated together.

While the type and token distinctions (or the thin and thick) were a useful heuristic both for creating groupings and maintaining some of the heterogeneity of participant experience, they provided little aid in balancing the need for capabilities to have fidelity with participant experience and be useful for evaluation. The experience of this study thus adds another theoretical specification that needs to be dealt with when operationalizing the capabilities approach. In addition to aggregation, one also must address abstraction: the extent and ways in which a capability should be abstracted. In other words, a capability may need to be abstracted in a way that makes it more amenable to measurement and evaluation, but also that results in a capability that is defined in a way that no longer represents the ways in which participants experience that capability. This is about balancing the conceptual clarity needed for measurement and the ability to richly capture the messiness of lived reality or the essentiality of the particular.

Ultimately, the ways in which abstraction is dealt with should be engaged with similar to the other theoretical specifications needed to operationalize this approach.

Researchers simply need to make their reasoning explicit as different purposes point to different levels of abstraction. This study can serve as an example that choose to emphasize the essentiality of the particular. As illustrated in chapter five, capabilities were defined in ways that attempted to capture the spectrum of ways each capability was expressed. While this approach helped to capture the messiness and ambiguity inherent in some of these capabilities rather than explain or define it away, it also resulted in a set of capabilities that has areas of overlap. This overlap helps to illustrate the complex ways participants define the good life. If this capability set were to be used in future research, additional abstraction—if needed—would certainly be possible based on either methodological requirements or the aim of the study.

The second insight gained through the process of identifying a list of relevant capabilities is more philosophical and illustrates the tension of abstraction in relation to some of the philosophical underpinnings of the capabilities approach. On the one hand, the capabilities approach has an inherent commitment to the essentiality of the particular. In order to understand or evaluate human well-being, the unique context and lived experience of each individual needs to be accounted for. On the other hand, applications of this approach, particularly those that have attempted to identify a list of universal or basic capabilities, have sought to identify a distinct list of non-commensurable capabilities. Philosophically this makes sense, especially if your aim is to utilize the approach to explore a basic conception of justice. However, when one compares these two approaches the tension between the more abstract and non-

commensurable list of capabilities and the essentiality of the particular is readily apparent.

The philosophical insight, however, is the extent to which an abstraction or idealization of capabilities is applicable or appropriate for this approach. In Sen's (2009b), *The Idea of Justice*, he draws a comparison between two approaches to examining justice: transcendental-institutionalism and realization-focused comparison. Transcendental-institutionalism involves identifying an ideal state (or perfectly just world) and then compares current reality to that ideal. The realization-focused comparison approach involves comparing actual realizations of what people or institutions are currently available to do; no ideal state is needed to make a conclusion as the relative comparison of two lived realities is sufficient. The capabilities approach is squarely rooted in the realization-focused approach and as such, one must question the extent to which certain levels of abstraction are still congruent—at least philosophically—with the approach. In other words, at what point does an abstract or idealized list transform this approach into a transcendental one? More importantly, the practical implication of this tension is that the more a capability set is defined in conceptually abstract and distinct boxes, the less it is able to evaluate the actual states of being and doing in people's lives as lived reality is rarely conceptually neat.

Ultimately, this philosophical tension is played out as the capabilities approach is operationalized. For any application that involves a group of people, some form of aggregation and abstraction will always be involved in the identification of any list of capabilities, regardless of whether an *a priori* or *a posteriori* approach is taken.

Identifying an ideal list of capabilities may simply be a form of abstraction that at least attempts to be rooted in the lived realities of those involved as opposed to an attempt to identify the ideal state of human well-being. On the one hand, this illustrates the flexibility of the capabilities approach and the ability for it to be applied in wide variety of both macro and micro contexts. On the other hand, it also illustrates some of the pitfalls as and the way gaining conceptual clarity obscures important aspects of lived reality, of the messy and often ambiguous ways people live their lives.

Recommendations for Future Research

As illustrated above, the findings of this study mark a number of initial contributions to understanding the ways in which attending a Norwegian folk high school impacts well-being. Based on these findings, there are a number of avenues for future research that emerge. Among the myriad possibilities, three emerge that are of particular interest. First, the exploratory findings of this study can be extended to evaluate the extent to which these findings apply to a broader population of students. Second, the mechanisms by which attending a folk high school influences well-being should be further explored. Lastly, the complex mechanisms by which education influences well-being would benefit from new approaches or models. Each of these directions is discussed below.

The findings of this study and the approach taken provide a ready-made framework for additional research with a larger group of participants. This framework could also be easily extended to include a comparison group of non-folk high schools and indicators of the mechanisms by which attending a folk high school influences

well-being. In its most basic form, an additional study should be conducted to assess whether the findings of this study are consistent with the larger population of folk high school students in Norway. Using a quantitative approach, a survey could be developed based on the list of capabilities identified to examine the extent to which former folk high school students have achieved similar levels of well-being. This could be further extended to include questions that evaluate the mechanisms by which this influence occurred. Other extensions could include a comparison group of non-folk high school students to see if there are meaningful differences between capabilities of each group. Whatever the method, the underlying contribution of this additional body of research would be to assess the extent to which the findings of this study apply to a larger group of people. This type of research is also needed to build a base of evidence in relation to whether attending a folk high school does indeed have an influence on well-being.

Similarly, the mechanisms identified in this study are sound avenues for future research. As an exploratory study, these findings represent initial possible avenues by which attending a folk high school influences well-being. On the one hand, additional qualitative studies would be able to flesh out the rough framework identified in this study to provide a better explanation of how each mechanism occurs. More detailed explanations would enable the robustness of these explanation to be evaluated even further and would provide important contributions to better understanding how education influences well-being, especially those aspects that are not easily measured. Additional research on these mechanisms could also be done using quantitative approaches and could look to methods used by Desjardins (2008) and others operating

from a wide view of human capital. While these approaches may not be able to provide the rich description of how each mechanism worked, they could provide additional support by quantitatively identifying particular pathways.

The other avenue for additional research is in relation to better understanding the complex ways in which any educational experiences influences human development. The conception of education as a means to capability expansion helps provide an initial framework of how the process of human development is often iterative; the development of one freedom often influences the development of another and so on. Similarly, and as the findings of this study also illustrate, teasing out the particular influence of one year amongst a plethora of other experiences is incredibly challenging. As studies like this one are limited to explaining a general pathway, other methods such as in-depth ethnographic, biographical, or long-term longitudinal studies would provide more detailed explanations of these mechanisms. Other approaches could also be considered. For example, chaos theory might provide a useful framework for helping to understand the myriad effects of a dynamic system. As the findings of this study also help to illustrate, each choice a person makes points them in a particular direction, but there are so many possible combinations of intervening steps that make understanding the influence of any one of them nearly impossible, especially as preferences and choices are also dynamic and change over time. Despite this difficulty, there is reason to persist as different forms of experiences –educational or otherwise—compete for time and resources from both individuals and societies. The better one is able to understand

the relative influence of any one experience on well-being, the more likely well-being can be achieved.

Conclusion and Key Implications

The findings of this study have provided insights that help to better understand the relationship between education and the well-being of individuals. In addition to finding a multi-faceted influence that occurs through a number of mechanisms, this study did so for a type of school that eschews measurement and embraces the broad and idealistic aims in the spirit of human flourishing. The unique nature of the folk high schools helps to frame a number of key implications for both educators and policy makers alike. For educators, the findings of this study provide an important reminder that non-discrete learning outcomes have value and that education is able to foster well-being in a number of ways. The folk high schools also provide a unique learning opportunity for educators to examine the methods and approaches that foster the types of learning outcomes found in this study. For policy makers, the findings of this study point to the need for broader conceptualizations of well-being that better capture what people have reason to be and do. By viewing human well-being more broadly, policy makers can also make more informed decisions about which types of learning and schools should be sought to further the well-being of individuals and society. In this section, these implications are discussed in more detail.

Many educators recognize the value of the type of learning outcomes fostered by attending a folk high school (e.g. developing autonomy, a broader sense of possibility, everyone has a story, etc.). In any educational setting, however, choices have to be

made about which outcomes to emphasize and which to leave out. While policy makers arguably have the biggest impact on which outcomes are prioritized by any particular school, teachers still play an important role in defining what this looks like in their classrooms. Ultimately, the findings of this study are an important reminder that even if these outcomes are not the focus, they still play an important role in the well-being of one's students. In this sense, educators should help to foster these outcomes in the ways they can. In some cases, this may mean making such outcomes explicit parts of their curriculum while in others it may be looking for the opportunities where discrete learning targets intersect with social and personal learning.

The findings of this study also illustrate that educators can learn a great deal from the Norwegian folk high schools. For educators who are interested in fostering the types of personal and social learning outcomes found in this study, they should look to the methods employed by the folk high schools. Key aspects of the folk high school experience such as providing freedom with responsibility, new experiences through the subject matter, or the intense social and shared experience in line with "life in miniature" could either be mimicked or reflected upon to see how they might be applied within the context of other types of schools. In particular, educators can also learn a great deal about how the role of evaluation (or absence thereof) effects different forms of learning. In many ways, the folk high school experience suggests that formal evaluations may be counter-productive and that other mechanisms to hold students accountable for learning are far more effective. The way in which the Norwegian folk high schools create a context of freedom with responsibility represents one area in

particular that could be examined further as an alternative form of accountability that may be more aligned to the way individuals are held accountable for their actions outside of a traditional school environment.

In a similar vein, educators and policy makers alike can gain insights from the ways in which attending a folk high school shaped a person's view of the good life and how this in turn shaped their subsequent choices towards that life. In many ways, this is a powerful outcome as not many schools are able to foster the type of experiences that end up representing an ideal or model of the good life that one strives toward. Perhaps too often, school systems either view such an outcome as outside of their domain or educators assume that students will leave school with a clear view of the type of life they want to lead and a sense of how to achieve that life. The findings of this study imply that there are a number of lessons to be learned from how attending a folk high school creates an environment where students are able to ideate their own view of the good life and concomitantly broaden their sense of possible or viable options to reach that life. Chief among these is that students benefit from being able to define a view of the good life as it helps to direct their choices towards that life.

There is little question that education is viewed as an important means to a variety of societal and individual goals in societies across the world. For policy makers who argue that education is a tool to improve the well-being of individual's and societies, the findings of this study first and foremost illustrate that a broader notion of well-being should be utilized. As the findings of this study indicate, a narrow view of well-being measured solely in terms of economic utility would miss a number of

aspects of well-being that were important to people. When utilized to measure the influence of education, this narrow view would not only miss some of the influences of attending a folk high school, it would also distort the evaluation by under- or over-valuing the economic aspects of well-being. For example, a narrow view of well-being measured via economic utility would under-value the well-being of an individual who pursued a less lucrative career in exchange for relationships or the meaningful pursuit of leisure, even though that person's overall well-being may have been higher as a result. As policy makers debate the educational system and structure in a particular society, the broader notion of well-being can help to foster a system that is more likely to achieve well-being for all.

Lastly, the findings of this study are a reminder to all people to heed the risks associated with the fallacy of measurement: the tendency to place central importance on that which is easy to measure, regardless of whether that importance is justified or not (Nussbaum, 2011). The findings of this study illustrate that the increases in subject matter knowledge (i.e. those easiest to measure) were deemed to be the least important in terms of their influence on well-being. The initial reaction of many when they hear about a school that eschews formal evaluation, grades, and that does not provide a diploma or certify a competency of any kind is one of skepticism. "What does one get from that?" is a question often asked and this question is based on very rational concerns about using one's time and resources wisely. The risk is that the calculus one uses to answer that question is based solely on what is easy to measure.

The findings of this study help to illustrate that attending a folk high school, even though it does not provide a diploma, grades, or formal evaluation of one's skills, had a meaningful influence on aspects of well-being that were important and valued by the participants of this study. Similarly, the findings of this study illustrate the value and influence of personal and social outcomes, particularly the outcomes of developing autonomy, an increase in self-confidence, a broader sense of possibility, and understanding everyone has a story. Neither these outcomes, nor conception of well-being are easy to measure. Ultimately, the importance of these outcomes and aspects of human well-being is a subjective and complex issue that should be rigorously debated. What the fallacy of measurement warns against is oversimplifying this debate and providing a false sense of certainty, just because something can be more easily measured. It is a reminder that measurements and metrics should not drive the focus of education or educational policy.

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Appendix A

The Norwegian education system 2011

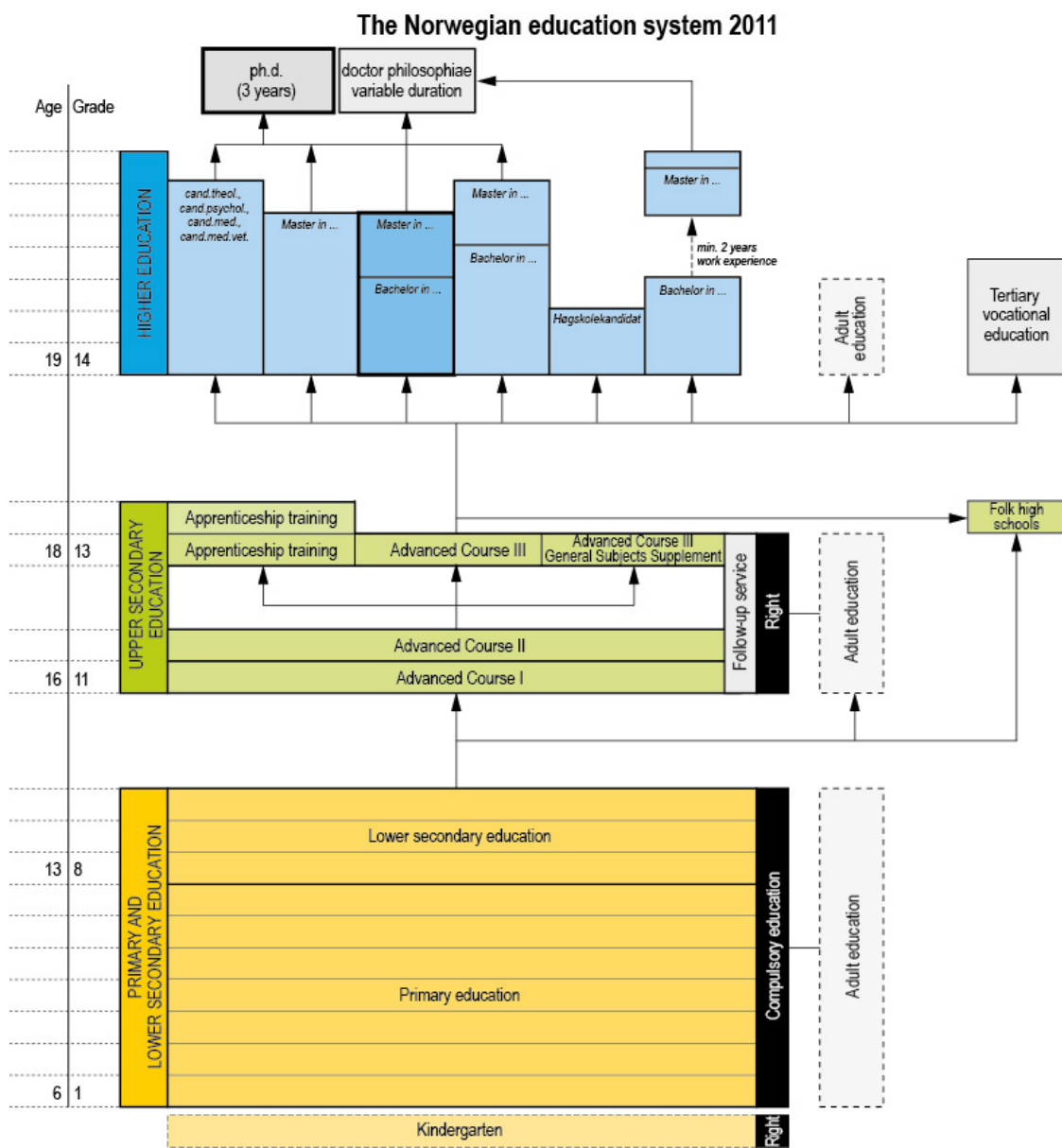


Figure 9. The Norwegian Educational System 2011(Statistics Norway, 2010a).

Appendix B

Interview Protocol: Former students

1. Think back to when you were just starting your year as a folk high school student. If someone would have asked you where you would be in seven years (at that time), what would you have said?
2. How would you define “the good life?”
 - a. To what extent do you think you’re living the good life? What challenges or obstacles stand in your way?
3. How would you describe your current job situation? What about your job prospects/opportunities?
 - a. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
4. In what ways are you involved in your community?
 - a. Do you vote? Participate in clubs? Know your neighbors?
5. How do you think your folk high school experience has contributed to where you are at in your life now (in terms of one’s job, community involvement, good life, personal, etc.)?
6. How might your life be different if you hadn’t attending a folk high school?
7. As you reflect back on your folk high school experience, what do you think you learned from attending a folk high school?
 - a. Prompts: subject matter, self/personal, social/relationships
8. What would you describe as your most important values?
9. What would you describe as the most important aspects of your life?
10. In what ways did attending a folk high school shape your values? In what ways did it shape what is important to you?

Appendix C

Interview Protocol: Family member of former student

1. How would you describe your [son's, daughter's, sister's, etc.] folk high school experience?
 - a. Was it positive, negative, neutral? In what ways?
2. What do you think your [daughter/son/etc.] learned from attending a folk high school?
3. In what ways do you think attending a folk high school has influenced the decisions your [daughter/son/etc.] has made since attending a folk high school?
4. What would you say have been the biggest challenges in your [daughter/son/etc.]'s life since attending a folk high school?
 - a. What have been the biggest successes?
 - b. What factors have contributed to these successes and challenges?
5. In what ways do you think attending a folk high school has helped your [son/daughter/etc.] overcome the challenges they have faced in life? To achieve their successes?
6. How might your [son/daughter]'s life be different if they had not attending a folk high school?
7. Based on what you know now, if you were to advise your [son/daughter/etc.] on whether to attend a folk high school, what advice would you give them? Why?

Appendix D

Interview Protocol: Folk high school teacher

1. How would you describe the goals of the folk high school?
 - a. How about the goals of your line of study?
2. What do you see as the most important element(s) of attending a folk high school? Why?
3. What do you think these aspects of a folk high school enable an individual to do later in life?
 - a. How do you think attending a folk high school helps students today?
4. In your experience as a folk high school teacher, what goes wrong for those students who don't do well at a folk high school?
 - a. How does their experience differ from those who have a positive experience?
5. In your view, what are the most significant differences between attending a folk high school and going on to university/college?
 - a. What are differences between high school and a folk high school?
6. From what you can remember, did anything significant or unusual take place during the school 2003/04 and 2004/05 school years?
7. What do you think the biggest challenge for the folk high schools is today?
 - a. What do you think it will be in 5 or 10 years?

Appendix E

Invitation to participate and consent information: focal participants.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPE AND CONSENT INFORMATION

Evaluating the long-term impact of education

You are invited to be in a research study about the long-term impacts of education. You were selected as a possible participant because you have attended a folk high school 7-8 years ago. Please read this document carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the long-term impact(s) of attending a folk high school.

This study is being conducted by Erik Erickson, a doctoral student in Comparative and International Development Education at the University of Minnesota

Procedures: You will be asked to do the following things in this study

- **Participate in three written response activities.**
- **Participate in one to two in-person interviews.**
- **Participate in an online interview.**

Risks of being in the Study

- **There is minimal to no risk of being in the study.**

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

You have the ultimate right to deny participating in this study or to withdraw from this study after you have agreed to participate at any time of your choice during the study. You also have the right not to answer those questions posed by the researcher that you do not want to give any answer or response.

Confidentiality:

Names of participants will not be used in the final report of this study and it will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. All records and transcripts of this study will be stored securely and only the researcher, Erik Erickson, will have access to them.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any additional questions, please ask them now. Or if you have any questions later please feel free to contact Erik Erickson at +1 763-742-6395 or email at eric1762@umn.edu. Also, if you want to talk to someone other than the researcher, please feel free to contact Dr. Peter Demerath, the researcher's advisor, at +1 612-626-0768 or email at pwd@umn.edu.

Statement of Consent:

If you have the understood the above information and are willing to participate in this study, please respond either by email or phone to give your consent to participate in this study.

Appendix F

Invitation to participate and consent information: focal participants.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPE AND CONSENT INFORMATION

Evaluating the long-term impact of education

You are invited to be in a research study about the long-term impacts of education. You were selected as a possible participant because you have either taught at or had a family member attend a folk high school 7-8 years ago. Please read this document carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the long-term impact(s) of attending a folk high school.

This study is being conducted by Erik Erickson, a doctoral candidate in Comparative and International Development Education at the University of Minnesota

Procedures: You will be asked to do the following things in this study

- **Participate in an in-person interview.**

Risks of being in the Study

- **There is minimal to no risk of being in the study.**

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

You have the ultimate right to deny participating in this study or to withdraw from this study after you have agreed to participate at any time of your choice during the study. You also have the right not to answer those questions posed by the researcher that you do not want to give any answer or response.

Confidentiality:

Names of participants will not be used in the final report of this study and it will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. All records and transcripts of this study will be stored securely and only the researcher, Erik Erickson, will have access to them.

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Statement of Consent:

If you have the understood the above information and are willing to participate in this study, please respond either by email or phone to give your consent to participate in this study.

Appendix G

Invitation to participate and consent information: survey participants.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPE AND CONSENT INFORMATION

Evaluating the long-term impact of education

You are invited to be in a research study about the long-term impacts of education. You were selected as a possible participant because you attended a folk high school 7-8 years ago. Please read this document carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the long-term impact(s) of attending a folk high school.

This study is being conducted by Erik Erickson, a doctoral candidate in Comparative and International Development Education at the University of Minnesota

Procedures: You will be asked to do the following things in this study

- **Participate in an online survey.**

Risks of being in the Study

- **There is minimal to no risk of being in the study.**

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

You have the ultimate right to deny participating in this study or to withdraw from this study after you have agreed to participate at any time of your choice during the study. You also have the right not to answer those questions posed by the researcher that you do not want to give any answer or response.

Confidentiality:

Names of participants will not be used in the final report of this study and it will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. All records and transcripts of this study will be stored securely and only the researcher, Erik Erickson, will have access to them.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any additional questions, please ask them now. Or if you have any questions later please feel free to contact Erik Erickson at +1 763-742-6395 or email at eric1762@umn.edu. Also, if you want to talk to someone other than the researcher, please feel free to contact Dr. Peter Demerath, the researcher's advisor, at +1 612-626-0768 or email at pwd@umn.edu.

Statement of Consent:

If you have the understood the above information and are willing to participate in this study, please respond either by email or phone to give your consent to participate in this study.