

Publication (2015) by Zoë Clark:

## Youth as a Capability? The Capabilities Approach as a Basis for Critical Youth Research



In this work, Zoë Clark elaborates an analysis of present theories of youth against the background of theories of justice, as well as a discussion of the ‚Capabilities Approach‘ with regard to theories of youth. The Capabilities Approach, a concept deriving from economics (Amarty Sen) and philosophy (Martha Nussbaum), has, especially recently, gained increasing influence in educational science. The attraction of the approach for the educational science lies, first and foremost, in its understanding of *Bildung* which is consistent with the understanding expressed in Critical Pedagogy: A conception of education that particularly emphasizes the development of the autonomy of young people. Furthermore, the Capabilities Approach offers an evaluative perspective on education, which is herein regarded as Human Development. Through this, the Capabilities Approach acts as a counterweight to functionalist perspectives on education, e.g. as expressed in the Human Capital Approach. ‚Real freedoms‘ – i.e. individual, social and

structural opportunities for doings and beings – are acknowledged as a valuation standard to assess the quality of life and the level of education within a society.

From this point of view, Zoë Clark discusses the most prominent present theories of youth (Cultural Studies, risk-theoretical based transition perspectives as well as the various variations of the youth moratorium). Based on these analyses, the author argues for a reformulation of present theories of youth based on the Capability Approach, namely for a theoretical model of ‚Youth as a Capability‘. The essence of this concept is the accentuation and awareness of the institutionalized gradually unequal access to youth as a phase of life and to youthfulness (Chap. 1).

In terms of theories of justice, this involves the key difficulty of including young people in the Capabilities Approach, which is oriented towards liberalism. As classic liberalism specifies justice as a relation between ‚roughly equals‘ (Rawls) the second chapter addresses the question of scales of justice appropriate for assessing relationships that are substantially asymmetrical. Hereby, the author elaborates on Martha Nussbaum’s feminist and care-ethical based reformulation of the Capabilities Approach.

As the question of unequal access to an existence in youthfulness remains an empirical question, the third chapter is dedicated to an empirical support of the analyses described in the first chapter. By means of quantitative research, an empirical approximation towards the gradually and structurally unequal access to ‚Youth as a Capability‘ is realized.

Zoë Clark holds a PhD in Human Development in Social and Cultural Research.

Her current work focuses the analysis of unequal conditions of growing up, theory of justice including the assessment of the standard of living and the quality of life of young people, as well as the specific human rights of vulnerable groups.

Further details and information online:

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