Are Children Seeds or Are They Soil?

A Comparison between Martha Nussbaum’s Capability Approach and Utilitarian Philosophy applied to Critical Thinking in the Rwandan Education System

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Abstract

Much research has been done within the field of Education on how to integrate Human Rights in education, both as a class subject and as a value system. Similarly, the research field of Education also contains many discussions of how “critical thinking” is taught and what its role in education is and should be. This thesis instead approaches the topic from “the other way round” so to speak, by using a “human rights lens” to explore ethical and political views on the goals of education generally and the role of critical thinking in education particularly, as they appear within a particular educational context – Rwanda’s education system. The philosophy of education of utilitarianism and that of Martha Nussbaum’s Capability Approach are here compared and contrasted with each other and act as a theoretical framework for understanding the Rwandan education system as it appears through the reading of policy documents and through the experience of a selected group of Rwandan primary and secondary school students. The thesis argues that an ethically acceptable and stable philosophy of education should spring from a conception of human beings as ends and not means. Starting with such a conception of human beings, the goal of education becomes that of developing each individual’s capabilities to their fullest potential. Additionally, the thesis argues that the role of critical thinking in education should be regarded as central, as the capability for critical thinking enhances the flourishing of other human capabilities.

Keywords: Children’s Rights, Critical Thinking, Education, Human Rights, Nussbaum, Rwanda, Utilitarianism.
The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being.

~ Socrates

Education’s purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one.

~ Malcolm S. Forbes
Acknowledgements

I wish to extend my most heart-felt gratitude to several people who have been tremendously supportive throughout the process of writing this essay. First, I wish to thank Elisa and Bethany at Save the Children, Kigali for encouraging me to pursue the idea for the study. Also, I want to direct many thanks to Marcel and Innocent for giving so generously of their time and energy to help arrange and facilitate the meetings with children and youth from Children’s Voices Today. On a similar note, I wish to thank the participants of the focus group discussions. I thoroughly enjoyed our hours together and I am deeply grateful for their willingness to share their thoughts and feelings with me and with each other. I feel honoured to have been given the opportunity to search for more knowledge and understanding together with them. Another person, with whom I have also enjoyed exchanging thoughts, is my supervisor, Susanne. Thank you, Susanne, for our inspiring and lively conversations in cosy cafés and for giving me much thoughtful advice and many wise comments. I also want to thank my mom, Christine, for reading through my text, and with her American catholic-school-acquired grammatical knowledge, meticulously pointing out to me the many dangling participles and split infinitives. Thank you, wonderful mother, for your help and encouragement. Finally, thank you to Mazon, who as a patient gardener, waters me tenderly with love every day, so that I may sprout and blossom.
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1 Introduction

When doing field research for my Bachelor’s Essay in Human Rights, titled *Children’s Right to Culture – A field study in Rwanda* (2012), I interviewed school-age children who were members of an acrobatic group, about their perceptions of the fulfilment of their right to culture. One reflection that I made during those interviews has stuck with me since then, and created the initial spark of curiosity that has inspired this Master’s Essay. My impression was that there seemed to be a contrast between the expectations that these children met from leaders and peers in the acrobatic group, and the expectations that they met from adults at school. The difference seemed to consist mainly in the degree that the ability of what I have chosen to call *critical thinking* was encouraged. From this observation, many questions followed, both on a philosophical level, and on an implementation level: “Can education with little or no encouragement of critical thinking be considered education at all, from a child rights perspective?”; “What does moral and political philosophy have to say on the subject?”; “How do children in Rwanda perceive that this ability is being encouraged in their schools?”; and “What education policies does the Rwandan Government have regarding the encouragement of critical thinking?” This essay will elucidate these questions.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

The right to education is articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) from 1989, in articles 28 and 29. Critical thinking is not explicitly mentioned here, although it might be inferred in article 29.a where one of the goals of education is stated to be the development of the child’s “mental […] abilities […] to their fullest potential.” My first aim is to discuss different ways of defining the ability of critical thinking, and the philosophical grounds for why this ability arguably should be considered as included in article 29. For this purpose I will use the “capability approach” as it is formulated by Martha C. Nussbaum. As will later be more fully explained in the theory chapter of this essay, the capability approach sees human rights as the fulfilment of human capabilities, two of which, according to Nussbaum, are the capabilities of “senses, imagination and thought” and “practical reason.” Both of these capabilities can be viewed as broader descriptions of cognitive processes in which “critical thinking” is an integrated part.

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1 Mollvik, Lia: *Children’s Right to Culture – A field study in Rwanda* (Stockholm School of Theology, Bachelor’s Essay, Human Rights Program, 2012).
3 Ibid., article 29a.
The philosophy of Nussbaum contrasts with utilitarian views on education, where the goal of education can be seen to be to increase the overall happiness or utility in society. Here, the role of critical thinking in education is motivated differently and tends not be given the same importance as in Nussbaum’s theory. The differences between Nussbaum’s philosophy and that of utilitarianism can be described by using a metaphor of “seeds and soil.” Nussbaum’s philosophy is rooted in the Aristotelean tradition, where human beings are regarded as “seeds” with inherent capacities, and where the ultimate goal of human life, and thus education, is to cultivate and nurture each “seed” so that it will grow to fulfil its individual potential. Utilitarian philosophy, on the other hand, is less individualistic, and thus human beings can be regarded as the “soil” in which a collective society plants different seeds (capacities) that are in demand. The goal of human life is the overall wealth and growth of society, or “the land,” and the purpose of education is to make the soil productive. A central aim of this study is to explore further the differences between these two theoretical perspectives and to evaluate them normatively.

Furthermore, my study will explore the implications for children that the aforementioned theoretical views on critical thinking and the right to education might have when implemented through a state’s education policies. Because Rwanda is a country where the education system is in a phase of rapid development and revision, it is an interesting choice for a case study. The discussion about the goals of education for individuals and for society has been fairly lively in Rwanda since the 1994 genocide, due to the current government’s admission that the education system pre-1994 contributed to the genocide by containing “too much about human differences and too little about human similarities.” Thus, the country’s history contains the experience of the devastating effects of an education system dominated by a violent ideology, and this in turn provides strong motivations for formulating education policies that are ethically defensible. In this essay, my main objective is to argue that the inclusion of critical thinking in the curriculum currently under development in Rwanda is imperative for the fulfilment of Rwandan children’s right to education, but also for the peaceful future of the Rwandan society as a whole. This argument will be supported by moral and political philosophical theories, as well as by empirical research on the content of Rwanda’s education policy documents and Rwandan children’s own perceptions and experiences of the teaching of critical thinking in their schools.

As the central aim of this study described above lies on a normative level, and the descriptive elements of my inquiry are both theoretical and empirical, I have formulated these inquiries into four research questions that are part of an overall problem statement.

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8 Ibid.
1.2 Problem Statement

The problem statement of this study contains two different levels of inquiry, a theoretical one, and an empirical one. On the theoretical level, the research questions read as follows:

1. What similarities and differences are there between Martha Nussbaum’s and utilitarian views on critical thinking and the role this capability has to play in education?
2. What implications could these views have for the formulation of educational policies?

On the empirical level, the research questions read as follows:

1. How do the interviewed Rwandan children perceive their schools’ ability to encourage them to develop Nussbaum’s internal capabilities of “imagination, senses and thought” as well as “practical reasoning and critical thinking,” and what reasons and/or influencing factors for their perceptions can be inferred?
2. How do the Rwandan education policies promote, or fail to promote, these capabilities and what reasons and/or influencing factors to the shaping of Rwandan education policies can be inferred?

The research questions on the theoretical level and on the empirical level, are interconnected, and are designed to find parts of the answer to the study’s overall problem statement, which is:

In what ways are the theoretical views on critical thinking in education, Nussbaum’s and the utilitarian’s respectively, currently appearing in the Rwandan educational policies, and what correlations can be found between this philosophy and the encouragement of children’s critical thinking in school, as this is experienced by a selected group of Rwandan schoolchildren?

1.3 Previous Research

Although there is much work written on human rights and education, referred to in for instance Rebecca Adami’s doctoral thesis in Education at Stockholm University in 2014,9 these works have primarily a pedagogical angle, and focus on methods of teaching or integrating the “subject” of “Human Rights,” and thus have limited relevance for this study, which instead approaches the subject of “Education” from a human rights-angle. Additionally, within the field of Pedagogy, there is much written on “critical thinking” and its role in education. The study of critical thinking can even be referred to as an independent field of research, con-

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sisting of works by critical thinking theorists such as Richard Paul and Harvey Siegel. Within the field of Pedagogy parallels have also been drawn between the view on critical thinking proposed by these theorists and the discourse ethics laid forth by philosopher Jürgen Habermas.

However, instead of adding to earlier research within the field of pedagogy, this study aims to fill a gap in the research within the domain of human rights studies, by normatively discussing philosophical approaches to education from a human rights perspective, and by also “testing” them in a unique context.

1.4 Delimitation

This study’s theoretical material consists only of Nussbaum’s capability theory and utilitarian theories on the role of critical thinking in education. Other theorists will be discussed solely for the purpose of enhancing the understanding of these theories. This is because Nussbaum’s theory and utilitarian theories can be seen as set quite far apart on a spectrum of philosophical theories about education, which makes them most useful when trying to define where on this spectrum the Rwandan education policy is situated.

For the discussion about Nussbaum’s philosophy as it relates to critical thinking and education, I have limited the material to four principal works that I have found most relevant for the subject matter in this study (see Selected Literature, chapter 2.2.1a). Whereas two of these works concern Nussbaum’s philosophy on a general level and contain discussions of how her theory of human capabilities relates to other ethical and political theories, the two other books focus more narrowly on her view on education.

For the understanding of utilitarianism in the field of education I have not managed to find any specific utilitarian philosopher who has written extensively on the subject. Although John Stuart Mill’s On Liberty (1859) contains comments on education, he is mostly concerned with arguing that education should not be directly provided by the state but that it should instead be provided privately, albeit with public funding. Although Mill shows how deeply he values critical and autonomous thinking when he writes that a reason why the state should not be the sole provider of education is the risk of the state “moulding people in only one shape,” I still find that the debate about state versus private education is beyond the scope of this essay.

Modern utilitarian philosophers appear not to be concerned with education. Instead, philosophers such as Peter Singer have focused their work on medicine and bioethics, reduction of

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11 Ibid.
13 Ibid., p. 116 (my translation).
poverty and ethical questions concerning the treatment of animals. From preliminary readings of Rwanda’s education policy documents however, I found that there were utilitarian tendencies within these documents that I wished to explore further. The decision to focus on utilitarian theory might thus be labelled as one of the “inductive” elements of this study. It can be argued that there is a research interest in exploring possible links between a modern state’s education policy and the ethical positions characteristic of utilitarianism. Therefore, the literature used for discussing utilitarianism concentrates on defining its general traits (see chapter 2.2.1a).

The empirical material is limited to the expressed views of a selected group of Rwandan children in primary and secondary school, as well as Rwandan policy documents and debate articles in a Rwandan context concerning the “philosophy of education.” The selection of policy documents is also narrowed down to those that have relevance for students in primary and secondary school, as opposed to those concerning higher levels of education. As it is not possible within the time-limitations of this study, to examine and rule out all probable factors influencing the perceptions of the interviewed children on critical thinking in school, and those factors influencing the formulation of Rwandan education policies, the study will only explore the correlated relationship between the interviewed children’s perceptions and Rwandan education policies, and will not endeavour to explore any causal relationship between the two.

1.5 Disposition

In the introductory chapter to this essay, the aims and objectives, problem statement and delimitation of this study are presented. The second chapter describes my research strategy and research design as well as the material that I have selected. Lastly, the stage is set for the theoretical chapter by seeking to first define the concept of critical thinking. Chapter three moves on to describe Nussbaum’s philosophy and utilitarian philosophy respectively, as these relate to critical thinking in education. The critique against both philosophical perspectives is also discussed. This chapter thus seeks to answer the first two theoretical research questions. The following chapter instead focuses on the two empirical research questions. First, a brief summary of the school system in Rwanda is given in order to provide background information to the reader about the context in which the focus group discussions were conducted. The results and analysis of the focus group discussions, as well as of the Rwandan education policy documents, are then provided. Finally, in the fifth chapter, the theoretical and empirical parts of the study are brought together and discussed. The conclusion is given in the sixth and final chapter.

2 Method and Material

In this chapter the research design, methods and materials used for this study are presented. First, the choice of overall research strategy is discussed.

2.1 Research Strategy

Alan Bryman writes in his book on social science methodology that the choices of research strategy, design and methods are dependent on how the research question is formulated and who the persons are that are going to be included in the study. As the research question in this study is about understanding how theoretical perspectives in the field of the right to education, can present themselves when implemented in a state’s education system, and the subjects are authors of Rwandan education policies, and more directly, children in Rwandan schools, I find it appropriate to adopt a qualitative research strategy, for reasons that will be more fully explained in the following.

According to Bryman, there are four things that define a qualitative research strategy and which distinguishes it from a quantitative research strategy. Firstly, a qualitative research strategy in its “purest” form is based on a general query and not on an already formulated theory. Qualitative research is therefore inductive rather than deductive. Secondly, qualitative research is based on an interpretive epistemology according to which the researcher cannot present the results as given facts but must interpret them. Thirdly, the ontological view that qualitative research strategy often presupposes is a constructionist one rather than a positivist one. These epistemological and ontological positions require that researchers acknowledge that social reality is inter-subjective and that they try to become aware of, and to some extent also give an account of, their own subjectivity. A fourth feature of qualitative research is what methods are used for data-collection. Researchers conducting qualitative studies often use methods such as unstructured or semi-structured interviews and observations.

By adopting a constructionist ontology, by conducting a partly inductive study through the use of less structured methods, and by interpreting and analyzing the results while at the same time acknowledging one's own subjectivity, Bryman points out that the internal validity of a study can be strengthened. Internal validity, according to LeCompte and Goetz as well as Kirk and Miller, refers to the correlation between the researcher's observations and the con-

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16 Ibid., pp. 25-27.
17 Ibid., p. 34-35.
18 Ibid., pp. 127 and 273.
19 Ibid., pp. 257-258.
cepts and theories that he/she uses. As my research question is about interpreting attitudes and perceptions in the particular context of the Rwandan education system, and how these correlate to theories about critical thinking and the right to education, internal validity can be seen as the most relevant criteria for evaluating the study, rather than the other three criteria formulated by the abovementioned authors and referred to by Bryman, *external validity and reliability* as well as *internal reliability.* Guided by the problem statement of the study, and in order to improve its internal validity, I have thus adopted a qualitative research strategy.

### 2.1.1 Normative Method

Because the overall aim of this study is of a normative nature, the study as a whole, besides using a qualitative research strategy, also uses what Björn Badersten calls a “normative method.” Badersten defines three different types of normative methods. The first concerns itself with clarifying different possible interpretations of a normative concept. Badersten calls this “normative concept-analysis.” In this study, this is done for example by clarifying how “critical thinking” can be used as an ideal in education by seeing the concept from Nussbaum’s perspective as well as from a utilitarian one.

Secondly, Badersten mentions “normative ‘given that’-analysis.” Here, the idea is that different interpretations of a normative concept are compared to each other, for instance by discussing what their practical implications might be. This is done in the third chapter of this essay, where the different implications that Nussbaum’s philosophy and that of utilitarianism might have on education policy are discussed. This comparative method is used further in the fourth chapter, where the empirical research material from the Rwandan context exemplifies how the two different theoretical views on the goals of education and the role of “critical thinking” in education can create different outcomes.

Thirdly, this study also adopts what Badersten calls “strictly normative analysis,” where arguments are given for why one particular normative position or interpretation of a concept should be preferred. Arguments of this kind can be found throughout this essay, especially in the chapters discussing the critique against Nussbaum’s philosophy and utilitarianism respectively, and in the two final chapters.

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22 Badersten, Björn: *Normativ metod – Att studera det önskvärda* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2006). The terms used by Badersten and referred to in this essay are my translations from Swedish.
23 Ibid., p. 50.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
2.1.2 Intersubjectivity and Reflexivity

Like Bryman, Badersten mentions the importance of qualitative and normative research being an *intersubjective* process, meaning that the researcher should strive to describe his or her interpretations in order to make it possible for others to critically evaluate them. With this ideal in mind, I have endeavoured to make the study as *reflexive* as possible. *Reflexivity* is a term used by Mats Alvesson and Kaj Skölberg in their work on qualitative methods. They describe the term as essentially entailing a reflection on your own “thinking, observations and use of language.” Through reflexivity, Alvesson and Skölberg suggest a way of conducting research without being too “locked in” by one particular school of thought within the qualitative research field, such as for instance Empiricism, Hermeneutics, Critical Theory or Postmodernism.

According to Alvesson and Skölberg, reflexivity as a form of qualitative research strategy involves reflecting on four different levels, and oscillating between these. The four levels of reflection occur: in the initial interaction with the research material; in the interpretation of the material on a “micro”-level; in the interpretation of the material on a “macro”-level by putting it in a broader context; and when reflecting on your own selectivity, on the power-relations between yourself and the subjects of the material as well as on your relation to other researchers, and on your own use of language. By oscillating between these different levels, Alvesson and Skölberg seem to mean that there is the possibility of achieving more creativity and flexibility than by concentrating very much on one thing, for instance on power-relations (Critical Theory), or on deconstructing language (Postmodernism).

Additionally, Alvesson and Skölberg write that a reflexive research strategy entails a particular view on the relationship between theory and empirical material, where empirical material is seen to have the potential to generate theories. Also, although empirical material cannot be used to “prove the validity” of a theory, it may instead strengthen a theory’s probability and clarify it. They therefore propose an oscillation between induction and deduction that they describe with the term “abduction.” As will be seen in the following subsection, abduction is a useful term to describe the way this study uses a case study to clarify the differences between Nussbaum’s philosophy and that of utilitarianism, and also to strengthen the study’s normative arguments.

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28 Ibid., p. 477.
29 Ibid., p. 492.
30 Ibid., p. 536.
31 Ibid., pp. 57 and 61.
2.2 Research Design

The choice of research design – a case study, was made considering that the problem statement is of an exploratory nature. The main objective when conducting a case-study, according to Bryman, is to show a strong connection between theory and empirical data in a specific case. Hence case-studies can both be used in order to try a theory and to generate new theories.\(^{32}\) Because the research question of this study concerns trying two theories about the role of critical thinking in education against “reality,” and as the time and resources available for the study are not sufficient to do a comparative study, for instance between two countries, I have therefore chosen one specific case – Rwanda’s education system, and only as this appears through the reading of policy documents and from how it is experienced by a very small selected group of Rwandan schoolchildren.

As I already mentioned, my choice of Rwanda was primarily motivated by my previous experiences in the country, and secondly by the fact that the educational policies there are in a process of being reformulated, and have been reformulated several times in the last 20 years, which provides rich written material on the subject. Thirdly, Rwanda’s previous experience of how education can shape attitudes in society in a “negative” way makes the interest in finding out how to reshape it in a “positive” way, more acute. The data-collecting methods and the selections of material vary according to the different sub-questions to the study’s main problem statement. These will be further accounted for in the following.

2.2.1 Theoretical Research Questions and Published Material

For answering both of the two theoretical research questions, as well as one of the empirical research questions, I have selected different types of published material, both in the form of philosophical literature and in the form of Rwandan laws and policy documents.

2.2.1a Selected Literature

The published materials that make up the primary sources for answering the theoretical research questions of this study consist of the following:

Nussbaum, Martha C.:


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\(^{32}\) Bryman: *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder*, p. 68.
• *Not for profit*. Princeton University Press, 2010: This book can be regarded as a condensed version of Nussbaum’s previous work *Cultivating Humanity* from 1998. In *Not for Profit*, Nussbaum argues for the importance of humanistic subjects in school curricula on all levels of education, as these subjects are necessary for developing democratic citizenship in a globalized society. She gives examples of how humanistic subjects are currently being under-prioritized in the United States, in Europe and in India, and that this indicates a global trend moving in the direction of treating education solely as a means to increase national economic growth. The book is a call for action directed to individuals, organizations and governments the world over to reverse this trend.

• *Frontiers of Justice*. Harvard University Press, 2006: In this book, Nussbaum offers a critique of contractarian theories of justice such as John Rawls’ theory, because she means that such theories do not properly include certain groups in the imagined contract-signing situation. The examples she gives of excluded groups are those with mental disability, people from other nations and non-human animals. She argues that the *Capability Approach* is preferable to contractarian theories of justice because it provides better ways of discussing justice for these previously excluded groups.

• *Cultivating Humanity*. Harvard University Press, 1998: This book is concerned with how higher education should be reformed in order to enhance three core values that Nussbaum deems essential for liberal education. These are critical self-examination, the ideal of the world citizen, and the development of the narrative imagination. She uses her own research from different higher learning institutions in the United States as an empirical backdrop for her arguments.

Rachels, James:

• *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. McGraw-Hill International Editions, 1995: This book gives a broad account of different strands of thought within the field of moral philosophy such as for instance Cultural Relativism, Subjectivism, Ethical Egoism, Social Contract Theories, Utilitarianism and Kantian Ethics. The chapter on Utilitarianism defines some of its general characteristics and uses examples of different hypothetical and historical life situations to discuss the implications of the theory. Rachels also gives examples of critique often raised against the theory and offers responses to this critique.

### 2.2.1b Selected Documents

The published material used for answering the empirical research question concerning the Rwandan Government’s education policies has been selected from the list of policy docu-
ments published on the website of the Rwanda Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) is responsible for formulating education policy documents, whereas the Curriculum and Pedagogical Materials Department (CPMD) of the Rwanda Education Board (REB) further develops the subject-specific syllabi. However, Rwanda does not have a curriculum framework document. Instead, a new curriculum is currently under development and is scheduled to begin to be implemented in 2016. Therefore, although some of the documents that I have studied are dated as far back as 2003, the more recent documents have been given more attention, as these are the ones currently guiding the design of the new curriculum. Also, I have only selected those documents that are relevant for primary and secondary education.

My list of studied documents other than those regarding policy consists of one legal document, as well as the subject syllabi for English and Social Studies in primary school, formulated by the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) in 2010, before the Rwanda Education Board was established.

The list of documents studied thus reads as follows:

11. Ministry of Education, National Curriculum Development Centre: *Social Studies Curriculum for the Basic Education Programme, Grade 1-6*.

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2.2.2 Empirical Research Question

The data-collection method adopted for the empirical research question concerning children’s own perceptions is focus group discussions with a selected group of Rwandan schoolchildren. This subsection will give an account of the methods used for the focus group discussions. The use of focus group discussions is a qualitative data-collecting method where the discussion is conducted by using a list of thematic questions, instead of, as for instance in a structured interview, by following a preconceived list of fully formulated questions. This data-collecting method allows the researcher more freedom to interpret the results. The choice of focus group discussions, instead of individual semi-structured interviews, was made out of considerations for time and practical feasibility.

2.2.2a Selection of Respondents

The selection of respondents has been what Jan Trost calls a *convenience selection* in order to achieve a *strategic selection*. A convenience selection is done, Trost explains, by “taking what you happen to find” while a strategic selection is done by choosing variables that one thinks might be of theoretic importance for the study (age, sex etc.). These are then divided into categories, for example: age: 5-10 years, 11-15 years etc. The third step is to create cells with different combinations of traits, for example: girl, 5-10 years; girl, 11-15 years. Lastly one tries to find respondents who represent these different combinations of traits. The purpose of using this method is to get a heterogeneous group of respondents.

Through a colleague at Save the Children, Kigali, Rwanda, where I did my internship September-November 2014, I came in contact with a group of children who go to different schools in Kigali, but who are all members of a debate group called *Children’s Voices Today*. I assumed that they would have had more opportunities to reflect on critical thinking, through their participation in debates. Although there was a potential risk that the children’s participation in the same organization would result in a homogeneity in the form of similar experiences and opinions, I still believed that the children’s experience from debate in *Children’s Voices Today* and their relative familiarity with each other, could potentially lead to more depth in our focus group discussions, and that these potential benefits outweighed the risks of homogeneity or conformity.

Together with my colleague, who was also my interpreter, we selected children for two focus groups. The variables considered when forming the groups were sex and age. Social class was also considered, but this would have required conducting focus group discussions or interviews with children attending private schools, which I did not have the opportunity to do. The main considerations were that the children would be able to express their views on abstract concepts, such as critical thinking, that they came from different schools, and that the group

36 Trost, Jan: *Kvalitativa intervjuer*, fourth ed. (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2010), p.140. *The references to Trost in this Master’s Essay can also be found in my Bachelor’s Essay: Mollvik: Children’s Right to Culture.*
constellations would make them feel at ease. For this latter reason, the groups were formed according to the age of the children, as I assumed that younger children might feel uncomfortable speaking in front of considerably older children. Another assumption was that the content of the discussion might vary with children’s age. The final group-constellations were:

First group: 6 boys, 6 girls, 7-13 years old.

Second group: 6 girls, 2 boys, 16-18 years old.

The gender imbalance in the second group was unintentional, and due to unforeseen circumstances. This has been considered during the analyzing of results. Also, the age of the children in the first group was lower than anticipated as I had requested to speak to children between 13 and 15. The age of the children is also considered in the analysis.

2.2.2b Topic Guide

In preparation for the focus group discussions I designed a topic guide with themes to be discussed during the focus group sessions. I also developed a questioning route where I formulated these thematic questions into full sentences (see Appendix). From my reading of Martha Nussbaum’s description of the capabilities of “senses, imagination and thought” as well as “practical reason,” I formulated questions that corresponded to different aspects of these capabilities, imagining how they might be practiced in a school environment, both through classroom teaching, but also through other activities led or supervised by a school. The purpose with the focus group discussions was to find out how the students perceived their schools’ ability to encourage these two capabilities (see chapter 1.2, Problem Statement). Because the focus lay on students’ own perceptions, I found it imperative to remain flexible while moderating the focus groups, allowing the discussions to flow as freely as possible. At the same time, I also made sure that the themes from the topic guide were covered. These were:

1. Background information about the participants (names, age, what school they attend).
2. What abilities the students are encouraged to develop in school.
3. What opportunities students are given to develop their critical thinking by giving and listening to thoughts, opinions and arguments, through organized discussions and debates, but also through informal everyday interaction with teachers and peers in the classroom.
4. What opportunities students are given to develop their critical thinking and imagination in school through artistic expression.
5. Students’ overall impression of their schools’ ability to encourage critical thinking.

37 The terms “topic guide” and “questioning route” are from Litosseliti, Lia: Using Focus Groups in Research (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), p.55-56.
The questions about background information were asked in order to put the respondents at ease, and also in order to be able to analyze whether factors such as age, gender or which school one attends, influence students’ perceptions in any particular way.

2.2.2c Techniques and Methods of Analysis

Both focus group discussions were held after each other on Saturday November 1st 2014 at a youth centre in Nyamirambo, Kigali, Rwanda. Each discussion lasted for about an hour and a half. My interpreter and one other adult known to the youth were present to facilitate both sessions. I did not use any recording equipment but took notes during and after the sessions. A couple of days after the discussions I wrote detailed summaries of them, including my own preliminary analysis and interpretation of statements put forth during the discussions, as well as reflections on my own role as a moderator, the group-dynamic and other general impressions from the sessions. These interpretations and reflections became part of the later-stage analysis, where the statements were categorized and grouped in accordance with how they answered my thematic questions. When analyzing the focus group discussions I have paid attention to the following points, recommended by Lia Litosseliti in *Using Focus Groups in Research* (2003):

- Issues ideas and themes in participants’ comments
- Consistencies in behaviour, perceptions, arguments, attitudes
- Inconsistent, contradictory comments and shifts in opinion
- Vague comments versus specific responses
- Context (for instance who makes the comment? Is it based on a prompted example, by the moderator or another participant?)
- Tone (for example irony) and intensity of comments
- Frequency or extensiveness of an idea [...]
- Balance of positive and negative comments about an issue or idea
- Qualifications and associations made about an issue or idea

2.2.2d Research Ethics and Other Considerations

Trost writes that when interviewing children, it is necessary to get informed consent from both the respondents and their legal guardians. The researcher should explain the purpose of the study and also clarify the respondents’ right to anonymity. Trost means that these measures are necessary in order for interviews with children to be ethically justifiable. Unfortunatley, I did not have the opportunity to meet with the legal guardians of the children in order to get their consent. I discussed this issue with my colleague at Save the Children, before he put me in touch with the respondents, and we both agreed that the rather informal context in which the focus group discussions were set would not require consent from the children’s guardians. Instead, each child gave their informed consent before commencing the

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38 Anonymized versions of these notes are given out by the author upon request.
group discussions. Also, to protect the respondents’ identity I do not use their real names in this essay.

Both focus group discussions have been conducted with the help of an interpreter. The use of an interpreter while conducting qualitative research is of course problematic since the researcher doesn’t get the exact wording that the respondents use and therefore misses many depths and nuances in their narrative. A focus group discussion is in its very essence an intersubjective process. This means that I as a researcher and discussion moderator must be aware of the fact that the way the respondents talk to me and what they tell me might not be the same thing that they would tell someone else. When there is an interpreter and other people present during a focus group discussion, this also influences the respondents’ answers in ways that are often subconscious and therefore very difficult to predict. When choosing my interpreter who was himself known to the respondents, I had to weigh the possible “risk” this entailed, with the possible benefits, namely that the respondents might feel freer to talk to someone they know and trust.

The relationships between me and the respondents can also be viewed from a postcolonial perspective, such as that of Chandra Talpade Mohanty. According to Mohanty, colonial history continues to influence the shaping of people’s identities, which can be divided into categories such as for instance “post-colonialist” and “post-colonized.” In this particular context, my role as a “post-colonialist,” conducting focus group discussions with groups of “post-colonized,” could potentially have had some relevance to the way we have perceived each other. However, upon reflection I have concluded that there are probably other factors, such as for instance age-difference between me and the respondents, and the fact that I am “an outsider,” that have had more influence on the relationship between us, than me being “white” and “post-colonialist.”

In this particular instance, the perception of me as coming from a culture distant from the respondents, both geographically and conceptually, might even have become an advantage, as the respondents might have become more free to disclose “culturally sensitive” information to me, than they otherwise would have done, had they perceived me as an adult from the same cultural background as they. When interacting with the respondents during the focus group discussions, I made an effort to create an informal and playful atmosphere where social hierarchies and skewed power-relations could possibly dissolve somewhat. The active involvement of my translator and the other contact person from Children’s Voices Today during the sessions was a valuable contribution to this effort.

2.3 Defining Critical Thinking

As “critical thinking” is a central concept used in this essay, I here seek to clarify the concept, in order to further the understanding of the following chapters.

The concept of critical thinking is a much debated concept within the field of pedagogical research and philosophy. One central controversy is whether critical thinking can be given a universal definition, or if the definitions are determined by those who formulate it, rendering the concept “Western” or “male” et cetera. To me, the most convincing argument against this kind of relativist critique of the concept of critical thinking is that the process that is involved in questioning the universal relevance of a concept is in itself a critical thinking process. In order to be able to criticize a definition of critical thinking for being biased, one must indirectly presuppose that it is possible to be less biased, and thus must abandon absolute relativism. Essentially, uncovering and seeking to avoid bias and prejudice are what critical thinking is all about. Consequently, I will offer a definition of the concept, while at the same time leaving it open for scrutiny. The definition used is by Michael Scriven and Richard Paul quoted on the Critical Thinking Community website:

Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.44

Another, similar definition reads:

Critical thinking is that mode of thinking - about any subject, content, or problem - in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them.45

In these definitions, critical thinking can be characterized as autonomous and rational, in the sense that a critical thinker seeks reasons for belief and action. In Educating Reason (1985) professor Harvey Siegel writes about these two central aspects of critical thinking in the following way: “The critical thinker must be autonomous – that is, free to act and judge independently of external constraint, on the basis of her own reasoned appraisal of the matter at hand [my italics].”46 He further argues that treating students as autonomous and rational beings, capable of independent judgement, is equal to treating them with respect.47 This line of thinking is reminiscent of Rainer Forst’s central argument in Rätten till rättafårdigande (The

46 Harvey: Educating Reason, p. 70.
47 Ibid., pp. 70-72.
Right to Justification, 2007). In this book, Forst argues that it is a fundamental human right to be treated as someone worthy of giving and receiving reasons and justifications for actions. Critical thinking and human rights can thus be seen as interconnected, and this understanding of critical thinking is what informs and permeates this study.

3 Theory

In this chapter, the philosophy of Martha Nussbaum and that of utilitarianism respectively, will be discussed and compared with each other regarding their view on the goals of education and the role of critical thinking in education, in order to find answers to the theoretical research questions of this study (see chapter 1.2).

3.1 Martha Nussbaum on Critical Thinking in Education

In this section, the philosophy of Martha Nussbaum as she describes it in Creating Capabilities – The Human Development Approach (2011), in Not for Profit – Why Democracy Needs the Humanities (2010) and in Cultivating Humanity – A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education (1998) will be discussed as it relates to education philosophy in general and to the role of critical thinking in education in particular. In the first subsection Nussbaum’s philosophical roots in an Aristotelean tradition will be briefly explained whereupon her theory on human capabilities will be presented. Thereafter, I will discuss how this theory can be translated into an “education philosophy.” The third subsection will address how critical thinking is given a central role in Nussbaum’s philosophy of education, and the possible implications that this might have on educational policies will be discussed lastly, in the fourth subsection.

3.1.1 Aristotelian Philosophy and Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach

Nussbaum’s philosophy takes inspiration from the Aristotelean tradition of virtue ethics.\(^{49}\) This form of ethics can be viewed as a merge between consequentialist theories and deontological, rule-based ethical theories. Instead of deciding on a set of desirable consequences or absolute ethical rules, and judging human actions according to these, virtue ethics prescribes a more context-sensitive way of evaluating human actions. This means that when an ethical dilemma confronts us, we should take into consideration both consequences, ethical principles, as well as the concrete circumstances of the particular case, and weigh these together.\(^{50}\)

Aristotle believed that it was possible to cultivate a propensity to make reflective ethical judgements, and this propensity for “right” action is what he meant for someone to be a “virtuous” person.\(^{51}\) Also, Aristotle believed that virtue should be cultivated within all of life’s different spheres through “contemplation.”\(^{52}\) Thus, the goal of political government, accord-

\(^{50}\) Badersten: Normativ metod, pp. 118-123.
\(^{51}\) Ibid., p. 121.
ing to Aristotle, was to create opportunities for each individual citizen to cultivate those abilities that they themselves deemed necessary for living a virtuous life. Aristotle regarded education as an important means to this end. Because he also realized vulnerability to external influences and social interconnectedness as parts of the human condition, as much as freedom of choice, he emphasized that government, besides education, must also provide basic conditions beneficial for human flourishing, such as clean water and food.

Nussbaum shares Aristotle’s view on human development and the role of government. The basis of her philosophy is most recently presented in her book Creating Capabilities – The Human Development Approach (2011). Here she defends what she calls the “Capabilities Approach.” In the beginning of the book she describes the approach as follows:

The Capabilities Approach can be provisionally defined as an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and to theorizing about basic social justice. It holds that the key question to ask, when comparing societies and assessing them for their basic decency or justice, is, “What is each person able to do and to be?”

Nussbaum further explains that there are five “essential elements” to the approach, namely: the approach’s moral view of treating each person as an end and not as a means; its focus on freedom of choice; its value-pluralism; its primary concern with entrenched social injustice and inequality; and its tasking of government and public policy to improve the quality of life for all people, as this is defined by capabilities. Thus, the primacy that Nussbaum’s approach gives to the Kantian categorical imperative of treating each person as an end and not as a means sets it apart from utilitarianism, which in contrast is concerned with aggregated well-being or preference satisfaction. The emphasis on personal freedom of choice and value-pluralism furthermore, help to define the Capabilities Approach as a politically liberal theory. The theory also has many similarities with what Nussbaum calls “Human Rights Approaches.” Nussbaum writes that:

The common ground between the Capabilities Approach and human rights approaches lies in the idea that all people have some core entitlements just by virtue of their humanity, and that it is a basic duty of society to respect and support these entitlements.

Nussbaum also specifies that her approach has an advantage over the concept of human rights, in the sense that it makes it explicitly clear that rights claims are founded on “human birth and minimal agency, not in rationality or any other specific property.” As will be further discussed later on, this means that the rights of people with disabilities are protected according to Nussbaum’s view, but for different reasons than from a utilitarian perspective.

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53 Nussbaum: Creating Capabilities, pp. 125-126.
54 Ibid., pp. 127-128.
55 Ibid., p. 18.
56 Ibid., pp. 18-19.
57 Ibid., p. 94.
58 Ibid., pp. 50-56.
59 Ibid., pp. 89-93.
60 Ibid., p. 62.
61 Ibid., p. 63.
To specify what is meant by “capability,” Nussbaum distinguishes between internal capabilities and combined capabilities. The internal capabilities are “trained and developed traits and abilities” that are more or less developed through interaction with the environment. For instance, the internal capability of critical thinking in a child can be seen as an ability that is developed through interaction with family-members, community members, teachers etc. Combined capabilities, on the other hand, are the “the totality of opportunity […] for choice and action” for a person within her specific environment. Again, using the example of critical thinking, a child might have developed this internal capability to some degree, but might still not be able, in her current life-situation, to actually give voice to her opinions. However, Nussbaum also admits that this distinction between internal and combined capabilities “is not sharp” due to the fact that one develops internal capabilities through exercising them, and one might therefore also lose some internal capabilities if one is not allowed to practice them. Still, Nussbaum finds the distinction useful in order to discuss the duties of society to support the development of internal capabilities, as well as to increase people’s combined capabilities for choice and actual functioning.

Although the Capability Approach is value-pluralistic, Nussbaum does concede that there are certain capabilities that human beings have the potential to develop, but that are either harmful to others, or just not important enough for society to have a duty to support. In the first category, she gives the example of the capability of “cruelty and humiliation” in a child and in the second category she mentions the capability of a child to “whist[e] the Yankee Doodle Dandy while standing on her head.” The realization that there is a certain hierarchy between different human capabilities, leads her to develop a list of ten “Central Capabilities” that is quite similar to the human rights catalogue, containing equivalents of both the so called “first generation” of civil- and political rights, and “second generation” social, cultural and economic rights. However, Nussbaum does not support the distinction between “first” and “second” generations of rights, but instead believes that all entitlements require “affirmative government action.”

The list of central capabilities that would require affirmative government action is a list of capabilities that Nussbaum deems are conducive to a life in human dignity. Thus, “human dignity” becomes the “measurement tool” for determining which capabilities are to be considered basic, and which in turn create obligations on society to respect and support the development of the same capabilities in individuals. The concept of human dignity is described by Nussbaum as an intuitive concept. Her defence for using the concept of equal human dignity, as an element that gives the capability approach its moral basis, is that she believes that it is possible to reach what John Rawls originally called an “overlapping consensus” on her list of central capabilities, using this concept. Rawls, according to Nussbaum, defends his

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63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., p. 23.
65 Ibid., p. 28.
66 Ibid., p. 67.
67 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
68 Ibid., p. 29.
theory of social justice, through arguing that it has the potential to resonate intuitively with and be endorsed by people all over the world, people holding otherwise differing opinions on metaphysics and epistemology.\textsuperscript{69} Similarly, Nussbaum believes that her capability approach has the same potential for universal endorsement. She further explains that “endorsement” should be understood as that: “the person really holds these ideas – as one part of her overall view on how to live.”\textsuperscript{70}

Human dignity, as a concept that many people might reasonably endorse, is a useful starting point for a discussion about human central capabilities. At the same time, Nussbaum also emphasizes that one might expect there to be differing opinions about which capabilities are to be considered as centrally important for living a life in human dignity. The concept of human dignity should therefore not be used without further arguments. For instance, Nussbaum gives an example of how it could be argued that forced intercourse within a marriage should be treated as a violation of a person’s bodily integrity, considering the negative effects that this has on other aspects of that person’s life, such as work and overall health, where there already consists a considerable agreement that these other affected areas are central to human dignity.\textsuperscript{71} The capability for “critical thinking” can in a similar way be defended as a central capability, fundamentally important for a life in human dignity. In section 3.1.3 it will be further explained how Nussbaum describes this capability and how she justifies it, but first I will discuss how the Capabilities Approach can be understood as a philosophy of education.

3.1.2 The Capabilities Approach and the Philosophy of Education

In \textit{Frontiers of Justice – Disability, Nationality, Species Membership} (2006) Nussbaum writes that “[e]ducation is a key to all the human capabilities.”\textsuperscript{72} From reading \textit{Creating Capabilities – The Human Development Approach} (2011) and \textit{Cultivating Humanity – A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education} (1998) I understand that what she means by the abovementioned statement is that education is a necessary means to develop internal capabilities in human beings. For Nussbaum, the development of central capabilities is regarded as valuable in itself.\textsuperscript{73} In this way, her Capability Approach requires a philosophy of education, where the ultimate goal of education is the development of internal capabilities in order to exercise these as combined capabilities. Therefore, she also strongly defends a broad education that pays attention to the development of \textit{all} the central capabilities, and not just to some of them. She writes:

Currently, [in 2011] most modern nations, anxious about national profit and eager to seize or keep a share in the global market, have focused increasingly on a narrow set of marketable skills that are seen as having the potential to generate short-term profit. The skills associated with the humanities and the

\textsuperscript{69} Nussbaum: \textit{Creating Capabilities}, pp. 90-91.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p. 90.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 32.
\textsuperscript{73} Nussbaum: \textit{Creating Capabilities}, p. 152.
arts – critical thinking, the ability to imagine and to understand another person’s situation from within, and a grasp of world history and the current global economic order – are all essential for responsible democratic citizenship, as well as for a wide range of other capabilities that people might choose to exercise later in life. Users of the Capabilities Approach need to attend carefully to issues of both pedagogy and content, asking how both the substance of studies and the nature of classroom interactions (for example, the role given to critical thinking and to imagining in daily study of material of many types) fulfil the aims inherent in the approach, particularly with regard to citizenship.\(^\text{74}\)

In this statement, Nussbaum justifies the inclusion and development of critical thinking and imagination in the curriculum and in classroom practices, because these are central capabilities, necessary for the exercising of democratic citizenship, as well as of other capabilities. As will be elucidated in the next subsection, Nussbaum’s emphasis on the particularly important role that critical thinking has to play in education is much due to the fact of the connection she makes between this capability and deliberative democratic citizenship. However, even if this were not so, the overall principles of the capability approach – to treat each person as a means and not as an end, and its view that the central capabilities are basically necessary for a life in human dignity, would make the approach fundamentally incompatible with an education philosophy where education is seen as serving national economic goals. I would argue that the capability approach would also be incompatible with an education philosophy that only focused on furthering national democratic goals, if this would lead to the stymying of certain capabilities on her list of central capabilities. Because Nussbaum sees the development of internal capabilities as having a degree of intrinsic worth, and because she regards education as a necessary means to this end, the development of the capability of critical thinking through education could potentially be defended by her solely on this ground. However, as it happens, Nussbaum’s defence of deliberative democracy and her defence of critical thinking in education go hand in hand and mutually enforce each other.

### 3.1.3 Critical Thinking as a Capability

In the introductory chapter of this essay, I mentioned that Nussbaum’s list of central capabilities includes two capabilities that both contain elements of critical thinking. These are “senses, imagination and thought” and “practical reason.” Nussbaum’s full description of these capabilities reads as follows:

*Senses, imagination, and thought.* Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a “truly human” way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one’s own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one’s mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid nonbeneficial pain.\(^\text{75}\)

\(^{74}\) Nussbaum: *Creating Capabilities*, p. 155-156.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., p. 33.
Practical reason. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance).76

Critical thinking can be seen as another word for what Nussbaum above refers to as “reason.” Nussbaum understands reason as a Socratic process of “critical examination of oneself and one’s traditions.”77 Such critical examination of one’s own actions, opinions and beliefs entails asking whether these are coherent and contradiction-free and based on some other argument than simply references to authority or convention. These questions can also be used to examine critically other people’s statements.78

Nussbaum believes critical thinking to be essential for the proper functioning of a deliberative democracy. An aggregated democratic ideal, where democracy becomes “simply a marketplace of competing interest groups,” is strongly rejected by Nussbaum.79 Instead, she purports that democracy should be viewed as “the expression of the deliberative judgement about the overall good.” Therefore, she writes: “It is not good for democracy when people vote on the basis of sentiments they have absorbed from talk-radio and have never questioned. This failure to think critically produces a democracy in which people talk at one another but never have a genuine dialogue.”80

Like Socrates and the Stoics, Nussbaum also argues that the development of critical thinking is a right of every human being.81 She argues against relativist claims that “logic” (which I understand as a part of critical thinking) is something “elitist” or “Western.” The main argument that she uses here is that there is no factual evidence supporting such claims, and that it is, contrary to most relativists’ intentions, demeaning to assume that because a person comes from a “non-western” culture, that he/she does not have the potential of developing logical (critical) thinking.82

Nussbaum’s defence of the important role that critical thinking has to play in education is thus primarily supported by arguments holding that it is a central human capability, that it is the right of every human being to develop. But also, because of its importance for deliberative democratic citizenship, every democracy should have a heightened interest in providing an education that supports the flourishing of this capability. In the following subsection, I will describe how Nussbaum envisions educational policies to this end.

76 Nussbaum: Creating Capabilities, p. 34.
78 Ibid., pp. 15-28.
79 Ibid., p. 19.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., pp. 26-27.
82 Ibid., p. 38.
3.1.4 Implications for Education Policies

Although *Cultivating Humanity* (1998) deals with higher education in the U.S., and not, as this essay does, with primary and secondary education in Rwanda, Nussbaum mentions in this book some general policy ideals that she finds important for the cultivating of critical thinking.

Firstly, on the practical level of the classroom, she highlights the importance of the teacher, who, regardless of the subject that is being taught, can encourage critical thinking.\(^83\) She also mentions that class discussions and writing of analytical papers are useful methods of encouraging this same capability.\(^84\) From this I conclude that a “Nussbaumian” policy document concerning teacher training would stress the importance for teachers to learn methods for encouraging critical thinking in students.

Secondly, on the curricular level, as previously mentioned, Nussbaum supports a curriculum that is broad and that besides Literacy, Math, and Science, pays equal attention to so called “liberal arts”-subjects, such as Philosophy, History, Literature, as well as the Arts. That these are relevant subjects to the development of critical thinking and imagination is a central theme of both *Cultivating Humanity* (1998) and *Not for Profit* (2010). This can also be inferred by her mentioning of free artistic expression as part of the central capability of “senses, imagination and thought” in *Creating Capabilities* (see my quotation on the previous page).

Lastly, on the level of general policy formulating the goals of education, Nussbaum stresses the kind of policies she would not support. She would not support educational policies that limit education to vocational preparation, since this to her would mean to “sell […] democracy short,” preventing it from becoming truly reflective and inclusive, as many will not have the critical reasoning skills necessary for exercising democratic citizenship. She expresses it this way: “People who have never learned to use reason and imagination to enter a broader world of cultures, groups and ideas are impoverished personally and politically, however successful their vocational preparation.”\(^85\)

As will be discussed in section 3.2, a utilitarian approach leads to rather different conclusions about what the ultimate purpose of education should be, and what kind of curriculum and classroom practices that would be recommendable. Before turning to utilitarianism however, we will first discuss some possible critique against Nussbaum’s theory.

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\(^{83}\) Nussbaum: *Cultivating Humanity*, p. 41.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., p. 43.

\(^{85}\) Ibid., p. 297.
3.1.5 Critique against the Capabilities Approach

Nussbaum’s theory can be criticized, first for relying too much on an intuitive concept such as human dignity, and second, for creating a specified list of capabilities and making too strong claims on their universality. These two criticisms will each be discussed in turn.

In *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (1995) James Rachels writes that utilitarianism’s main strength is its clarity. By only using one moral criteria – utility, it “avoids the danger of incorporating into moral theory prejudices, feelings and ‘intuitions’ that have no rational basis.”

Rachels thus warns against moral theory that relies on feelings and intuitions, as these are not always reliable. He gives an example of how racist views were once felt to be “common sense.”

I agree with Rachels that it is probably true that many of our moral intuitions will change with time and in different contexts, just as slavery and racism, that were once common practice, are now morally condemned and prohibited by international and national law the world over. Likewise, the meaning that we give to the intuitive concept of human dignity can differ and also change over time. However, Nussbaum herself does not claim that her capability approach and her interpretation of the meaning of “human dignity” are “right” for all time, in all places and for all people. Instead, she proposes that there be an ongoing deliberation and debate on this subject.

As a means of justification for her theory and striving to reach what John Rawls calls a “reflective equilibrium,” she does not solely rely on intuition, but instead combines different justifications. The reflective equilibrium is reached by an oscillation between reflecting on our moral intuitions and everyday practices, and reflecting upon our moral theories, in order to eliminate contradictions between the two. The method of striving for a reflective equilibrium is thus a way to balance rationality and emotions.

I find that the method of balancing rationality and emotions when creating a moral theory is more realistic than relying on rationality alone. Moral theories that are totally contrary to deeply felt moral intuitions would probably tend not to be stable and would be impossible to implement without the use of violence. Therefore, it can be seen as an advantage that Nussbaum’s theory contains an intuitive element, while it at the same time remains open for rational arguments.

The second criticism, that Nussbaum makes too strong claims on universality, is similar to the relativist critique against the human rights movement, claiming that this movement is “Western” and “imperialistic.” Relativists typically argue that human rights were created in the “West” and that it is a moral “cover up” for coercion and exploitation. Nussbaum herself

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87 Ibid.
88 Nussbaum: *Creating Capabilities*, p. 77.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid., p. 78.
91 Ibid., p. 102.
mentions this form of criticism and responds to it by stating that the history of the human rights movement is diverse, containing influences from many different cultures, and that her capability approach was similarly developed by people from many different backgrounds. Another argument that she brings forth is that human rights, as well as the capability approach, have been used, and can be used in the future as a moral framework to oppose imperialism. Finally, she writes that the capability approach has an advantage in relation to the human rights discourse, because it is less burdened with historical “baggage,” and because people who do not use the human rights vocabulary nevertheless ask themselves the same basic question contained in the concept of human rights but more clearly articulated through the capability approach: “What am I able to do and to be?”

As mentioned before, Nussbaum stresses that her list of capabilities is not meant to be universally endorsed by everyone, everywhere and at all times. She only argues that there is a high probability of it being endorsed by people from diverse backgrounds, and with different metaphysical and epistemological opinions and beliefs. In my opinion, Nussbaum hereby manages to deflect the relativist critique of her theory.

### 3.2 Utilitarianism and Critical Thinking in Education

As I described and discussed Nussbaum’s philosophy in relation to critical thinking in education in the previous section, so in this section utilitarianism will be discussed in the same way. However, I will not use any one utilitarian philosopher for this purpose, but instead refer to several versions of utilitarianism to identify common characteristics that will be used to create a general understanding of this school of thought.

#### 3.2.1 Utilitarian Philosophy

Utilitarianism was first proposed by David Hume (1711-1776) and later further developed by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Mill describes utilitarianism in this way: “[T]he ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that of other people), is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments.”

In Mill’s understanding, utilitarianism is thus a moral philosophy which defines the morally correct decision to be the one that creates the most enjoyment/happiness, or the least pain. However, this classical version of utilitarianism has been criticized for not taking into account

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92 Nussbaum: *Creating Capabilities*, pp. 102-106.
93 Ibid., p. 106.
94 Ibid., pp. 90-91.
95 Rachels: *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, p. 90.
96 Ibid., p. 91-92.
the psychological factor that human beings most often do not desire the good because it makes them happy, but rather, desire that which they find good, and are happy when they achieve it. An example given by James Rachels in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (1995) is that a person could be enjoying a friendship, not knowing that the friend was false, but if the person found out about the friend’s insincerity, the person would no longer value that friendship and the enjoyment would be lost. Therefore true and honest friendship is something that has intrinsic worth to most human beings.97 To use another example from the science-fiction movie *The Matrix*, most people would probably, like the movie-hero Neo, choose not to continue living in a simulated reality once they found out that their pleasurable experiences there weren’t real.98 Thus, autonomy and active striving are sometimes given more value than pleasure.

Attempts to modify the classical utilitarianism of Mill and Bentham, have been made through *preference utilitarianism*, where the goal of happiness/absence of pain is substituted by the fulfilment of preferences.99 For instance, preference utilitarian Peter Singer concedes the abovementioned statement that human beings actively strive to achieve their goals and that happiness is a side effect that people experience when they reach these goals.100 Thus this form of utilitarianism integrates freedom of choice and human agency into the theory.

Utilitarianism also contains a principle of impartiality formulated by its founder Jeremy Bentham as: “Each [is] to count for one, and none for more than one.”101 In preference utilitarianism, this would mean that the preferences of each person affected by a decision should be taken into account, and should be valued equally. However, although each human being’s preferences are counted in utilitarian philosophy, this is not the same as Kant’s principle of treating each person as an end, and not as a means. Utilitarianism is a consequentialist/teleological ethical theory, which states that moral decisions should be valued in relation to their consequences, not for their adherence to ethical rules or principles. Thus, according to utilitarianism, ends can sometimes justify the means.102 Furthermore, in the evaluation of consequences, it is aggregated happiness/preference fulfilment that is considered. So, for instance, according to this philosophy, one person’s life can potentially be sacrificed in order to increase the happiness/preference fulfilment of a great number of others.103

The common characteristics of utilitarianism can therefore be summarized as: focus on aggregated utility/happiness/preference fulfilment, impartiality and consequentialism. Preference utilitarianism, which will be the form of utilitarianism referred to from now on, further includes taking into consideration freedom of choice.

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99 Nussbaum: *Creating Capabilities*, p. 53.
103 Ibid., pp. 106-108.
3.2.2 Utilitarianism and the Philosophy of Education

Because there are few utilitarian philosophers who have written specifically on the topic of education, this section will not refer to any particular philosopher but will instead seek to describe the characteristic elements of preference utilitarianism and make some general conclusions about how these could be applied in the field of education.

Since utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory, education cannot be given intrinsic value, but will instead be regarded as “good” if it is seen to increase aggregated preference fulfilment. However, determining whose preferences are to be taken into consideration when evaluating the potential consequences of educational policies, becomes a daunting task, since education doesn’t only affect children, but also all of society. In addition, since the effects of education policies usually make themselves known more fully over time, determining what the consequences will be of such policies also becomes rather difficult. A tempting solution to this problem might be to limit one’s view so as to only consider those consequences that can be detected within a short time-frame, and to limit the definition of “preference fulfilment” to such things that can be measured, for instance gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. With such an approach, the ultimate goal of education policies within a nation is to increase the aggregated welfare of its citizens, measured in GDP, within a relatively short time-frame.

In conclusion, the consequentialism of utilitarianism, together with its focus on aggregated preference fulfilment across different aspects of life and across a whole population, leads it in the direction of adopting a philosophy of education where education is seen as means to an end – the average welfare or preference fulfilment of citizens within a nation, and potentially, because of the difficulties of finding other means of measurement, this end will be formulated in economic terms. With this narrow form of utilitarianism, which I will refer to as “economic welfare utilitarianism,” all education policies would be evaluated only with regard to their economic efficiency. The role of “critical thinking” in education, would thus be evaluated in the same way.

3.2.3 Utilitarianism and Critical Thinking

The role of critical thinking in education, according to economic welfare utilitarianism, could potentially be central, if the ability for critical thinking were to be seen as having a positive impact on a country’s economy. As will be seen in the chapters analyzing selected Rwandan education policy documents (4.4 and 4.5), critical thinking is valued by Rwanda’s Ministry of Education because it is an ability that companies are increasingly looking for when employing staff. The role of critical thinking according to an economic welfare-approach will therefore be discussed in more depth in relation to these findings.

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104 See chapter 1.4.
3.2.4 Implications for Education Policies

As has been shown, the implications of a utilitarian approach to the formulating of education policies could potentially lead to an emphasis on economic welfare. This in turn might lead to education policies focused mainly on vocational skills. On the classroom level, teachers might for instance be trained to see it as their purpose to prepare students for work and to make them competitive on the job-market. On the curricular level, subjects might be given priority according to how well they correspond to areas of expertise that are similarly required on the market. Again, these tendencies will be discussed in more depth in relation to the reading of Rwanda’s policy documents. For the purpose of the following comparison with Nussbaum’s approach to education, it is sufficient to state that utilitarianism would not disapprove of educational policies with a vocational focus, whereas Nussbaum highly disapproves of such policies.

3.2.5 Critique against Utilitarianism

A criticism often put forth against utilitarianism and the closely related GDP approach, is that the principle of aggregation, together with consequentialism, is counter-intuitive. The arguments for this will be further elaborated in the following, starting with the GDP approach.

A problem with the GDP approach, as discussed earlier regarding measuring “happiness,” is that it solely measures economic welfare, and thereby fails to take into consideration other aspects of life that are important to people, such as health, literacy etc. According to Nussbaum, some utilitarian economists have tried to solve this problem by instead inquiring about people’s total average life satisfaction. Again, a problem that Nussbaum points out is that these inquiries are about aggregated life satisfaction over several spheres of life, and across whole populations, and therefore they do not say much about the different degrees of satisfaction that people might have in different areas of their lives, nor do they say much about inequalities in life satisfaction within a population.

Aggregation across several spheres of life and across lives, conflicts with Kant’s categorical imperative to treat every person as a means. Not only is it in conflict with this moral theory, it is also in conflict with many intuitive ideas about justice and rights. The unharnessed consequentialism that utilitarianism defends leads to counter-intuitive conclusions such as for example the idea that it is acceptable to discriminate against a minority in areas of great importance to their lives, to increase the overall comfort of a greater majority. Similarly, when it comes to aggregation across different spheres of life, Nussbaum vividly illustrates the counter-intuitiveness of this with the following example:

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106 Nussbaum: Frontiers of Justice, p. 72.
107 Ibid., pp. 72-73.
108 Badersten: Normativ metod, p. 139.
Think about the satisfaction we feel in eating a good meal. How can that be compared to the pleasure or satisfaction we get from helping a friend in need, or raising a child, or listening to a harrowing yet profound piece of music? How might we even begin commensurating the pleasure of listening to Mahler’s 10th Symphony with the pleasure of eating an ice-cream cone?°

Some utilitarian philosophers argue that it isn’t important that a philosophical theory corresponds to our intuitions. For instance, James Rachels quotes an Australian philosopher, J.J.C. Smart who in 1961 wrote:

Admittedly utilitarianism does have consequences which are incompatible with the common moral consciousness, but I tended to take the view “so much the worse for the common moral consciousness.” That is, I was inclined to reject the common methodology of testing general principles by seeing how they square with our feelings in particular instances.°

Smart here abandons the method that Rawls later defends in A Theory of Justice (1971), of finding a “reflective equilibrium.” However, as I previously argued, a theory that discards emotions and intuitions risks becoming unstable, and would rely on implementation by violent means.

Another argument against abandoning intuition is that utilitarianism itself is based on the intuitive idea of aggregated utility/happiness/preference fulfilment as “good,” and cannot give any deeper foundations for why this is so. Thus it falls into the same positivist trap as it accuses more explicitly intuitive theories of falling into. Both Nussbaum and modern day utilitarian thinkers are wary of the dangers of describing moral principles as ontologically “true.” Although I agree with this ontological view on moral values that utilitarian philosophers and Nussbaum have in common, I also believe that Nussbaum’s way of handling the risk of becoming too “sure,” by explicitly stating what she has chosen to be sure about, is more constructive than to pretend, as some utilitarian philosophers seem to do, that one is “neutral.” To me, the most productive way to reason about morals is to look within ourselves, relate to others in a transparent way, and try to find balance and coherence between our intuitions and our theories.

3.3 Comparing Nussbaum’s Theory with Utilitarianism

This section will summarize the accounts of Nussbaum’s approach and a utilitarian approach to education respectively, with the primary intention of comparing them. The conclusions of these comparisons form the answer to the theoretical research questions of this study (see chapter 1.2 Problem Statement). Firstly, they will be compared on a general level. Secondly, the different ways that they value critical thinking in education will be discussed. Finally, I

° Nussbaum: Creating Capabilities, p. 52.
°° Smart, J.J.C as quoted in Rachels: The Elements of Moral Philosophy, p. 113.
will compare the different implications that these approaches have on the formulation of education policies.

### 3.3.1 The Philosophy of Education

In the previous sections, we saw that Nussbaum regards education as being the “key” to the development of human capabilities. Therefore, education that develops capabilities has intrinsic worth in Nussbaum’s view. By contrast, we saw that a utilitarian approach sees education as a means to an end which can be described as “increasing overall welfare or preference fulfilment.” Furthermore, because of the difficulties that utilitarianism has with further defining “welfare” and “preference fulfilment” it was concluded that the utilitarian approach could lead to a narrow definition of these, limiting the goal of education to increasing the economic welfare of a nation. Thus, the main disagreement between the two approaches consists in the way their different levels of consequentialism lead to the formulation of vastly different goals for education.

Ethical and political theories can be described by defining their position on the scale between consequentialism and deontology.\(^{111}\) Consequentialist views justify actions according to their consequences, whereas deontological views, as described by Nussbaum, “start from a conception of right action, and permit the pursuit of the good only within the constraints of the right.”\(^ {112}\) Although Nussbaum writes that her capability theory is more consequentialist than for instance John Rawls’ theory of justice, because hers is “outcome oriented” as opposed to “proceduralist,”\(^ {113}\) she also clearly declares that the capability approach is more deontological than utilitarianism. Utilitarianism, she writes “does not attach the right sort of salience to each person and to the idea of respect for persons.”\(^ {114}\) Instead, Nussbaum states that her capability theory: “holds that social welfare should never be pursued in a way that violates people’s fundamental entitlements.”\(^ {115}\)

In conclusion, the difference between the utilitarian consequentialism and Nussbaum’s outcome oriented, yet fundamentally deontological capability theory, is the main source of other differences between the theories’ implications in the field of education.

### 3.3.2 The Role of Critical Thinking in Education

The difference in means of justification between the capability approach and utilitarianism also leads to different views about critical thinking. As we saw earlier, critical thinking is an element of two of Nussbaum’s central capabilities, and is therefore on her list of “entitle-

\(^{111}\) Badersten: *Normativ metod*, p. 34.
\(^{112}\) Nussbaum: *Creating Capabilities*, p. 94.
\(^{113}\) Ibid., p. 95.
\(^{114}\) Ibid., p. 94.
\(^{115}\) Ibid.
ments” that should never be violated. On the other hand, we saw that utilitarianism does not give the development of critical thinking such intrinsic worth, but only values it so far as it serves the goal of achieving general welfare. In the analysis of Rwandan education policy documents the role that is given to critical thinking in this particular context will be explored further.

3.3.3 Implications for Education Policies

When it comes to the formulation of education policies, it was found that Nussbaum’s approach supports training of teachers in encouraging critical thinking and a broad curriculum that develops all central capabilities with a particular emphasis on the capabilities of critical thinking, deliberation and imagination, as these are important for democratic citizenship. Because the goal of education according to Nussbaum is to secure children’s right to develop *all* of the ten central capabilities, she is opposed to educational policies that are too narrowly focused on vocational skills. In contrast, because utilitarianism is consequentialist, it does not oppose policies that define national economic welfare as the goal of education, and that emphasize the development of skills valuable on the job-market when training teachers and when developing a national curriculum.

In the following examination of Rwanda’s educational policies and classroom practices concerning critical thinking, this essay will ask to what degree they are in harmony with Nussbaum’s views and utilitarian views respectively. We therefore turn to the task of describing the abovementioned Rwandan policies and practices.
4 Results and Analysis

Before describing and analyzing the results of the empirical part of this study, the first subsection of this chapter will provide a brief summary of the Rwandan education system on the primary and secondary level. The following subsections will present the results of the focus group discussions as well as of my reading of education policy documents. The analyzing sections will discuss these results in relation to the empirical research questions (see chapter 1.2 Problem Statement).

4.1 Background – The Education System in Rwanda

The Rwandan Government has strongly committed itself to restructuring and improving its education system, and to provide increased access to education. The results of these efforts are becoming apparent with regard to increased access to primary education and to gender parity. For instance, the net enrolment rate in primary school in 2013 was 96.6 percent, with a slightly higher number of girls than boys. One major reform in order to increase access to education was the Ministry of Education’s (MINEDUC) launch of “9 Year Basic Education” (9YBE) in 2003, which aimed at establishing a comprehensive, fee-free and compulsory nine year education system.

The structure of the current Rwandan education system on the primary and secondary levels is as follows:

**Primary:** 6 years. The official school age at this level is 7 to 12 years. Primary education ends with national examinations which determine eligibility for proceeding to Lower Secondary school.

**Secondary:** 6 years. The official age for this level is 13 to 18 years. It is subdivided into Lower Secondary (the first three years) and Upper Secondary (the last three years), both culminating in national examinations which respectively determine eligibility for upper secondary, and secondary graduation or entry to higher education. At upper secondary level students choose between continuing in general secondary schools, and enrolling in a Technical Secondary School (TSS) or a Teacher Training College (TTC) for studies to become a primary teacher.

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Thus, the 9 years of basic education cover the 6 years of primary school, and the 3 years of lower secondary school, for children aged 7 to 15.119

4.2 Results from Focus Group Discussions

In this section I will give an account of the result of my analysis of the two focus group discussions. When analyzing the results, I have grouped the comments according to the way they relate to the thematic questions in my topic guide (see section 2.2.2b). Each theme will be discussed in turn below. I have also analyzed the similarities and differences between the two focus groups. Since the first group consisted of children aged 7-13, who were thus in primary- and the first year of lower secondary school, and the second group consisted of children aged 16-18, who were in upper secondary school, some differences between the groups’ answers can be contributed to this fact. The similarities and differences between the two groups will be discussed under each thematic heading, as well as other background factors that have appeared relevant in order to understand the results.

4.2.1 Abilities that are Encouraged in School

In the beginning of the focus group discussions I asked general questions about school such as “Do you like school?” and “What is it that you enjoy in school?” From the answers given to such questions, and from examples that the respondents used, I noticed certain trends. The abilities that appear to be particularly encouraged at school, for students both in the lower, and upper primary, as well as for students in secondary school, were what can be described as: “discipline”; “precision and paying attention to detail”; “respect toward adults”; and “supportive and respectful social interaction with peers.”

The word “discipline” was used by respondents in the second focus group (of upper secondary school students) when asked what abilities were encouraged by their teachers. However, the precise meaning of this word was not discussed in further detail. In the first focus group, I deduced that “discipline” was an important ability to learn, from the examples that the respondents gave of how one is punished if one isn’t disciplined. One girl said that: “They [the teachers] beat you if you make noise or if you get zero at homework.” When asked if this was an experience that others in the group shared, five more out of the twelve children in the group raised their hands. When I asked these respondents to tell me more about why they think that the teachers “beat,” one girl answered: “If you come late to school or if the teacher asks a question and you can’t respond.”

From these examples, being quiet in class, doing your homework diligently and being punctual are all forms of behaviour that I categorize as “disciplined,” whereas the last example of

being able to answer a teacher’s question, is perhaps more about being able to memorize things that the teacher deems important. Since failure to behave in a “disciplined” manner can lead to physical punishment, I understand this to be an ability that the respondents’ teachers value in their students.

Precision and attention to detail were mostly mentioned by a couple of boys in the first focus group. Here, it was with some pride that these boys told me how they themselves had corrected minor mistakes that their teachers had made when writing on the blackboard, and that their teachers had appreciated being corrected in this way. It is unclear whether the teachers made these mistakes on purpose as a pedagogical “trick,” or if the mistakes were “real,” but either way, these teachers seem to encourage students to pay attention to detail.

The “ability” to treat adults respectfully was discussed in more depth in the second focus group. When asked to elaborate and give examples of the way teachers teach “the way to behave,” a girl made the following statement and a discussion followed upon this:

Sonia: Yes, like respecting elders and parents. Those who don’t go to school don’t respect others.

Lia: How do teachers teach you this?

Sonia: When we show respect for our teachers we go home and treat parents the same way.

Lia: How do you show respect?

Sonia: You humble yourself and do what they ask if it isn’t wrong.

Lia: Do you others agree?

Everyone: Yes.

Lia: What do you do if a teacher says something wrong?

Pierre: Teachers don’t lie. [Ironically]

[General laughter]

Lia: Do you others agree? [Smiling, ironically]

Everyone: No!

Abigail: Teachers are also human.

Lia: So what do you do?

Several voices: You report. [The teacher’s misconduct to a superior]
Abigail: *Teachers will never admit that they have made a mistake. Even if they know that they are wrong, they will insist that they are right.*

Lia: *Do you others agree?*

Deborah: *If you tell the teacher that he did something wrong, the teacher will think that you are stubborn. Unless someone higher tells them. Then they will listen. Otherwise, they will say that you are stubborn.*

Lia: *Why?*

Deborah: *They [the teachers] think that you [the students] have less knowledge. Like: “My capacity is better than yours, so I am right.”*

Interpreter/facilitator: *Is that true?*

Abigail: *In class courses they [the teachers] might know more, but in life they don’t.*

From this discussion it becomes apparent that showing “respect” to adults is a subject where the group showed some conflicting emotions. On a general level, everyone agreed that showing respect to adults by “obeying them” as long as what the adults tell you to do isn’t “wrong,” is a behaviour that they themselves value. But, upon further discussion, there also appeared to be a feeling of powerlessness involved in being obligated to show respect by obedience (“Even if they know that they are wrong, they will insist that they are right”). If the students do not agree with a teacher, the hierarchy of their school-system forces them to “report” the teacher to a higher authority, as the teacher is otherwise likely not to take their objection seriously (instead calling students “stubborn”). I see this as exemplifying that the school system as a whole structurally encourages deference to authority.

Another ability mentioned was what I have labelled as “supportive and respectful social interaction with peers.” This can be exemplified through statements that in school one learns to: “stay well with others, supporting each other” (Deborah, 17); and “how to interact with other people” (Theoneste, 13). Unfortunately, this was not discussed in any more depth in either of the focus groups.

Finally, whereas the ability to “pay attention to detail” was mentioned mostly in the first focus group, among children in primary school and lower secondary, “entrepreneurship” was mentioned by the upper secondary school students in the second focus group. When discussing a class that the students called “Creativity,” where the students do handcraft and tailoring using their individual designs, one girl said that she found this subject useful “both today and in the future” and another girl added: “Yes, if you can’t find a job after school, you can use your entrepreneurial skills that you have learned from that subject.” From these statements, it is not clear whether the school/teachers value this subject because of its fostering of entrepreneurship, or if this was only the respondent’s personal opinion. However, considering that the focus of the subject “Creativity” is to learn to create things that might potentially have market value, one might suppose that encouraging “entrepreneurship” in students is the underlying
value or goal behind the inclusion of this subject in the secondary school curriculum. The role of arts-subjects in school will be discussed further under section 4.3.3.

To sum up, the abilities that appear to be most strongly encouraged by the respondents’ teachers, both on primary and secondary level, are “discipline” and “respecting/obeying adults.” At the primary and lower secondary level, these abilities appear to be “encouraged” by physical punishment to discourage students from not living up to these requirements. On the secondary level, on the other hand, students are instead discouraged to question authority by facing the risk of being labelled as “stubborn.” The focus also moves from encouraging “paying attention to detail” on the primary and lower secondary level, to “entrepreneurship” on the upper secondary level of studies.

In my later analysis of these findings, I will argue that the existence of physical punishment in the early levels of education and the strong emphasis on deference to authority are in many ways working against developing critical thinking in students. As will be shown from examples already in the next section, respondents themselves find that these practices inhibit them from expressing themselves freely.

4.2.2 Opportunities to Exchange Feelings, Thoughts and Opinions through Discussion

During the discussions, I asked questions about what kind of opportunities the respondents had to exchange feelings, thoughts and opinions in school, both through informal classroom conversations and through organized debates. Whereas the first focus group could give very few examples of this, students in the second focus group counted several ways that they were given such opportunities.

In the first focus group, when asked “Do your teachers sometimes ask you to give your opinion about something?” one boy answered that when a teacher is about to introduce a new subject, the teacher will ask the students about their previous knowledge in that subject. Although my understanding of the word “opinion” is not only to express “previous knowledge,” asking for students’ previous knowledge might still be a way that a teacher encourages children to think critically about “new” and “old” knowledge and about how to evaluate knowledge.

However, my probing questions about opportunities to bring ideas to the classroom in the first focus group gave me a surprising answer. When I asked if anyone in the group had initiated any kind of idea in school that had given results, the same boy as quoted above answered: “When the teacher isn’t there, we call the teacher when some pupils in the classroom are making noise. We tell the teacher to punish them.”

Although the meaning of my question might have been slightly misinterpreted through an error in translation or otherwise, I still see the respondent’s answer as a very telling example of how physical punishment is “naturalized” in the classroom, so that the respondent would
regard suggesting that another pupil be punished as an example of “exercising ones freedom of opinion.”

The statement above caused a lively debate in the first focus group where many expressed the opinion that it is wrong for teachers to use physical punishment. Finally, I asked: “If teachers beat children, can children tell the teachers that this is not appropriate?” Whereupon there was a general mumbling of “No” and one girl clarifying that: “You can’t engage with teachers in that way.” This is another variant of the theme also discussed in the second focus group, (see previous section 4.2.1) about how it isn’t regarded as appropriate for a pupil to directly criticize a teacher’s statements or behaviour.

Not only do many of the respondents in the first focus group feel inhibited to criticize the practice of physical punishment in the classroom, they also expressed feeling inhibited to speak at all in class if not directly addressed, because of the fear of physical punishment. One girl said: “I don’t do that [add something to what a teacher is saying] because I fear the teachers because they beat students.” After some discussion I later posed a slightly leading question to the whole group: “That would make me afraid to speak in class, if I could be beaten if I gave the wrong answer…” The group responded with an almost unison “YES!” and the previously quoted girl said: “The students just repeat what the teacher says in order not to be beaten.” Even though my question was a leading one, from the very strong response I got from the group, confirming my assumption, I would conclude that the fear of physical punishment can inhibit students in a very far reaching way, making them afraid of spontaneously expressing themselves in the classroom.

In the second focus group, physical punishment did not come up for discussion. I believe that this indicates that students in upper secondary school are not subjected to physical punishment, or at least not to the same degree, as primary school students. In the second focus group, when asked about opportunities to exchange feelings, thoughts and opinions, the respondents gave examples of this, for instance having organized debates with students, teachers and administration every Friday afternoon, participating in debate clubs as an extracurricular activity, or having interesting and animated classroom discussions in History and Biology lessons. The respondents also expressed attaching strong positive value to these activities. For instance, when speaking about the Friday afternoon debates, one respondent said that she wished that they were held more often than just one hour per week. When speaking about the classroom discussions in History where students “brainstorm,” one girl said: “Those are really good lessons.” Another girl added that in Biology, when students discuss reproductive health, “people are engaged and even those who are normally quiet in class talk.”

The students in the second focus group thus had several opportunities to express themselves in the classroom and through organized debates, and were highly appreciative of these opportunities, although one respondent expressed a wish to have even more organized debates during school-hours.
The contrast between the first and second focus group is quite striking in this category, since some of the respondents in the first group had difficulties even to understand my questions about opportunities to express opinions, while the second focus group consisting of older students could easily come up with many examples of this experience. While the contrast to some extent could be due to differences in cognitive development – that “giving an opinion” is a rather abstract concept for 7-13 year olds, whereas 16-18 year olds might find it easier to grasp such an abstract concept, I still believe that the difference can also be explained through imagining that there is a general tendency among teachers not to give younger children opportunities to exercise their own reasoning skills.

I find that it is possible to make an interesting connection between the use of physical punishment and the lack of encouragement of critical thinking and reasoning skills in primary school. Not only can the fear of physical punishment inhibit students from expressing themselves, as the respondents of the first focus group clearly testified to, it can also set an example to children that “adults (authorities) do not need to give reasons for their behaviour.” If adults do not use critical reasoning to explain why they are using physical punishment, then children might interpret this to mean that critical reasoning is not an ability to be valued. Also, the use of physical punishment, instead of explaining why children shouldn’t behave in certain ways, implies an underlying assumption in the teacher that: “These children can’t listen to reason – they only understand the fear of physical pain.” Unfortunately, it has been beyond the scope of this study to find out how teachers who use physical punishment explain their choice.

In lower grades, opportunities to exchange feelings, thoughts and opinions seem to be given, not through classroom discussion, debates and dialogue but instead through artistic means of expression. This will be described in the next section below.

4.2.3 Opportunities to Exchange Feelings, Thoughts and Opinions through Art

When asked about what opportunities they had to express themselves through art in school, the respondents in both focus groups could give many examples. In the first focus group, the respondents explained how their teachers would let them draw, sing and do “mini-performances” of their own choice. Here, one girl of thirteen described how her teacher would sometimes divide the class into small groups and let them come up with anything that they wished to perform. Then, the groups would meet up again and perform for the teacher and other students. Another girl explained that her school organized assemblies every Monday where students could perform plays. The themes of these plays were “usually a scenario from life” that students themselves chose. She told me that the last play had been about Teacher-Student relationships and how students are sometimes subjected to sexual harassment and rape by teachers. She said that the message of the play was that students “need to be careful.” When asked if there was time to rehearse these plays in class, another girl answered that they organize the rehearsals themselves after class, but that it would “be better” if the they could be given time to prepare the plays in class. We spoke further about what avenues were available
to students to request time in class to rehearse plays, and several respondents helped explain to me that they would first need to go through a student representative – a “head boy” or “head girl,” and that that person in turn would speak to the administration. One girl of ten described how she had proposed that students should organize themselves in traditional dance troupes, and how her school administration had made school facilities available for this purpose on Friday afternoons.

Although these statements indicate that students in the first focus group, attending different schools on the primary and lower secondary level, had ample opportunities to engage in creative activities, there were also some indications that art subjects still were given a relatively low priority by school administrators, possibly directed by the national curriculum. For instance, during our discussion, it was explained to me that there are no art subjects at all in the curriculum for children during the first three years of primary school. Also, most of the examples that students gave were of activities that were extra-curricular, without much involvement from teachers. When I asked two children in the group if they wished to have more “creative” work in class, one girl answered: “Yes, I would love that, but it is only private schools that do that. They are more creative.” This indicates that the national curriculum gives room for great variation (or leeway) for schools to integrate art subjects in their curriculum to different degrees, and that there is a tendency for “rich” schools to be able to invest more money in this, for instance by hiring specialized art teachers.

As mentioned earlier (section 4.2.1), the respondents in the second group had “Creativity” in their curriculum, although instead of including a broad spectrum of art subjects, this subject was limited to handcraft and tailoring. This, together with the mentioning by the respondents that the subject teaches “entrepreneurial” skills, useful for “getting a job” might be an indication that the narrow focus of this subject on creating products with potential market value, is due to curricular directives that prioritize “entrepreneurship” more than “creative expression.” If the focus were more on developing the ability to creative expression, I would imagine that the curriculum would instead be broad, as on the upper primary and lower secondary levels.

Besides curricular limitations, another obstacle for students to freely express themselves that came up during the discussion of artistic expression in the first focus group, was again the mentioning of physical and psychological violence by teachers against students, this time in the form of sexual harassment and rape as a subject for a play. The fact that children themselves had chosen this subject-matter, and that one girl labelled it a “scenario from life,” indicates that this form of violence, just as corporal punishment, forms part of these children’s experience as students. Sexual harassment and rape are forms of abuse that can highly affect children’s overall development of any number of capabilities in a negative way. Also, sexual violence against children can potentially create a sense of powerlessness and subjugation. Therefore, the occurrence of sexual violence in school may be regarded as a particularly serious obstacle for the development of critical thinking. That one school allowed a play with sexual violence against students to be performed during Monday assembly is by contrast an example of children being given an opportunity to express a critique of destructive Teacher-Student relationships through art. However, if the message of the play was that “students need
to be careful” this shifts a lot of responsibility onto students as opposed to teachers, which again might contribute to a sense of powerlessness and subjugation in children seeing this play.

In conclusion, the opportunities to express feelings, thoughts and opinions through artistic expression were mostly given for respondents in the first year of lower secondary school, although curricular restraints together with funding restraints limited the amount of time for the development of the ability of artistic expression during school hours, and for guidance by specialized art teachers. For respondents in lower primary, the curriculum did not include art subjects, and for respondents in the second focus group, attending upper secondary school, the curriculum was focused on developing “entrepreneurship” rather than artistic expression. The occurrence of sexual violence by teachers against students mentioned in the first focus group could also be seen as a factor limiting children’s freedom of expression, be it artistic or otherwise.

4.2.4 Overall Views on the Ability of Schools to Encourage Critical Thinking

At the end of the second focus group discussion, I had the opportunity to ask for a summary of the discussion. I provided my own summary and asked the group if they thought that I had understood them correctly. The following dialogue ensued:

Lia: […] It seems to me that your teachers are sending you mixed messages. They seem to say that it is ok if you express your opinions, thoughts and ideas concerning a certain class subject or in art classes. On the other hand, if you try to give a teacher your opinion about that teacher’s behaviour, the teacher is likely to get defensive. Is this correct?

Abigail: Yes, most of the time, there is that behaviour [among teachers]. A child cannot tell someone else that he has done something wrong. You need to go through someone. But when it comes to creative subjects, the teacher will give you more freedom.

A boy later added that: “Teachers are different. Some want you to bring something new, and others find it wrong.” Finally, as a way of concluding the discussion, I asked each person in the group to tell me what percent of their teachers they perceived to encourage students to “come with own ideas.” The median and average number mentioned in the group was “fifty percent.”

From these concluding remarks by the participants of the second focus group, I deduce that the respondents’ teachers are generally not very prone to encourage critical reasoning in general and especially not on issues of great importance to students themselves, such as student-teacher relationships. Furthermore, although the respondents’ schools have complaint systems in place for students to bring criticism against a teacher (“You need to go through someone”),
it is highly unlikely that they will bring a complaint against as many as fifty percent of their teachers, for not encouraging critical thinking in the classroom! The structural power relationships in the respondents’ schools are therefore not conducive to the development of critical thinking.

Although there was no time for concluding remarks in the first focus group, the overall impression of that discussion was very similar to the second focus group. One difference between the groups was that in the first focus group, debate and discussion in classrooms appeared to be practically non-existent, and instead these children were more able to express themselves through artistic fora. The hierarchical structure and deference to authority permeating the school-system appeared to be a common experience for children in both focus groups, although in the first focus group, the use of physical punishment worked to enforce this hierarchy.

4.3 Concluding Analysis of Focus Group Discussions

The research question relating to the focus group discussions was formulated as follows:

_How do the interviewed Rwandan children perceive their schools’ ability to encourage them to develop Nussbaum’s internal capabilities of “imagination, senses and thought” as well as “practical reasoning and critical thinking,” and what reasons and/or influencing factors for their perceptions can be inferred?_ (see chapter 1.2)

Nussbaum’s description of the internal capability of “imagination, senses and thought” includes “[b]eing able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one’s own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth.”

Here, the discussions in the focus groups about opportunities of expressing oneself artistically in school brought us to the conclusion that such opportunities were primarily experienced by respondents in the lower level of secondary school. Also, curricular and financial restraints on these opportunities for artistic expression were found on all levels of primary and secondary school, indicating that art subjects were given relatively low priority. Although this will be discussed in more depth in the sections about Rwandan education policy documents (4.4 and 4.5), one can conclude at this point that the curricular design, and the way financial restraints force the respondents’ school administrators to under-prioritize art subjects, creates obstacles for the respondents to develop the capability of “senses, imagination and thought.” Furthermore, the respondents themselves several times expressed a desire to be given more opportunities for artistic expression.

_Nussbaum: Creating Capabilities, p. 33._
The second capability of “practical reason” was mostly captured in the focus group discussions about opportunities to express oneself through discussion and debate. The capability of practical reason entails: “Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection […].” The conclusion reached from the focus group discussions was that these opportunities were very few for respondents’ in the first focus group, while there were ample possibilities for the older respondents in the second focus group to engage in critical discussion and debate, both in the classroom, in weekly assembly meetings and through participation in extra-curricular debate clubs. However, discussion on more “politically sensitive” issues, such as teacher-student relationships, was found to be discouraged by teachers in the classroom. Although the respondents’ schools provided avenues for bringing complaints against a teacher, these were perceived as requiring quite a lot of effort to pursue.

The main obstacle to the development of the two capabilities, described by both focus groups, was found to be the hierarchy of the respondents’ school systems, which structurally encouraged deference to authority. This obstacle was more severely felt by respondents in the lower grades, since some of these respondents had experienced teachers using physical punishment as a means of enforcing obedience. In Nussbaum’s description of the capability of “senses, imagination and thought” she explicitly mentions that this capability includes: “Being able to use one’s mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech”; and: “Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid nonbeneficial pain.” As some of the respondents’ experienced the use of physical punishment as inhibiting them from expressing themselves freely in class, the use of this disciplining method has thereby been shown to have negative effects on the development of children’s capability of both “senses, imagination and thought” as well as “practical reason.” It can thus be categorized as inflicting “nonbeneficial pain” onto students.

The relationship between deference to authority, physical punishment and critical reasoning is discussed by Nussbaum in *Cultivating Humanity* (1998). In the introduction she describes how Socrates’ philosophy of critical reasoning and questioning of authority is parodied in Aristophanes’ comedy *The Clouds* in which a student of a “Think-Academy” (that teaches Socratic methods of critical reasoning) “goes home and produces a relativist argument that he should beat his father.” The fear conveyed by the opponents of Socratic reasoning in Aristophanes’ play is that it will lead to an overturn of social roles so that “children start beating their fathers.” However, this fear is legitimate only up to a point. Although the results of the focus groups in this study have shown that fathers (teachers/authorities) beating children can have negative effects on the development of children’s Socratic reasoning skills, and that children also can use critical reasoning to question such authoritative practices, it does not logically follow from this that critical reasoning will lead children to instead start “beating” their teachers. Rather, the conclusion that can be made from the focus group discussions together with the reading of Nussbaum’s capability approach in this study is that physical vio-

121 Nussbaum: *Creating Capabilities*, p. 34.
ience, no matter who the perpetrator and victim may be, is inherently wrong, because it hinders the development of several human capabilities.

In conclusion, although there are opportunities for the respondents to develop both capabilities involved in critical thinking, mainly through artistic expression for respondents in upper primary and lower secondary school, and through discussion and debate for students in upper secondary school, these opportunities are circumscribed by curricular restraints, as well as a hierarchical school system, encouraging automatic deference to authority, the last of which can be seen as the “nemesis” of critical reasoning, ever since the time of Aristophanes and Socrates.

4.4 Results from Reading of Policy Documents

This section will describe and discuss the content of the selected policy documents. The documents chosen for analysis have been selected from the list of policy documents published on the website of the Rwanda Ministry of Education123 (see section 2.2.1b).

The focus of my reading of the listed documents has been on statements regarding the overall goals of education, the role of critical thinking in education, and the motivations for specific choices and priorities. Some of the content of the documents has been deemed irrelevant to the research question, for instance when detailed implementation or budget issues are described. Instead of discussing the content of each document in turn, I have therefore chosen to give an overview of my findings under the same three thematic headings used for the discussion of Nussbaum’s philosophy and utilitarianism in chapter three, namely: “Philosophy of Education,” “Critical Thinking in Education” and “Implications.” These will be discussed in the following subsections. We will begin with the philosophy of education.

4.4.1 The Government of Rwanda’s General Education Philosophy

The Rwandan education policy documents contain elements of individualistic, self-actualization and rights-centred goals, as well as more collective, development goals. However, when taken as a whole, there is a stronger emphasis on seeing education as a means of achieving national economic development.

In Organic Law No. 20 from 2003, the Government of Rwanda spells out the goals of education in article 2, which are:

a) to educate the citizen in such a way that he/she is not characterized by any form of discrimination or favouritism;

b) to promote the culture of peace, tolerance, justice, respect of human rights, solidarity and democracy;

c) to provide each Rwandan citizen with a complete education based on cultural and moral values, knowledge, physical, social and professional welfare in order to promote competence and one's good behaviour and to build the nation for its sustainable development based on protecting and exploiting [sic!] environment;

d) to promote science, technology and research;

e) to encourage the Rwandan citizen, to like work, perform it well, to be committed to good quality of work and give priority to competence;

f) to prepare for the country, the necessary, competent and sufficient human resources at each level on its duties in accordance with the country’s development scale;

g) to educate the Rwandan to have freedom of thought, be innovative, have abilities to acquire and analyze ideas from other people and give his/her own ideas to others, to be patriotic and encourage him/her to know what is happening elsewhere in the world;

h) to advocate for the elimination of all obstacles that hinder the education of girls and women as well as of all those who clearly need special attention.

From this law, it can be deduced that the overreaching goals of education are a mix of Nussbaum’s values and those of utilitarianism. Goals a, b, and h are more in line with Nussbaum’s individualistic capability approach, whereas goals d, e and f are more in line with economic welfare utilitarianism. Goals c and g both start out in what I interpret as a Nussbaumian vein, and then turn to utilitarianism, when speaking of “build[ing] the nation for its sustainable development” (goal c) and when encouraging “patriotism” (goal g).

A recurring theme that I have found in several of the policy documents is the use of sentences that, as goals c and g quoted above, start by appealing to self-actualisation, rights and equity-values, and then end by appealing to more utilitarian values. One typical example can be found in the introductory chapter to the Ministry of Education’s latest Education Sector Strategic Plan from October 2013. This document is especially relevant because it sets the course for the development of the new curriculum. It includes the following statement: “Rwanda’s vision is oriented toward a future that offers a life of dignity and happiness for all, calling upon its citizens to fulfil their potential, for their own benefit and that of their state.”125 Here, we have a dynamic juxtaposition of the capability approach and utilitarianism with opposing pairs such as: “dignity” – “happiness” and “their own benefit” – “that of their state.”

The studied documents also move upon the scale from capability approach philosophy to economic welfare utilitarianism in accordance with their particular subject matter. The texts issued by the Ministry of Education on the education of girls, and of children with disabilities

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respectively, include several references to equity and to human rights. On the other hand, those documents authored by the Ministry of Science Technology and Scientific Research, a document issued by the Ministry of Public Service and Labour on particular skills on demand in the labour market, and a document issued by the Ministry of Education on the mainstreaming of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) in the school curriculum, all put more emphasis on poverty reduction, development and increased quality of life measured in GDP.

The reason why most education policy documents emphasize poverty reduction and economic development is that the Ministry of Education wishes to bring the Education Sector in line with the Government’s development goals, as these are formulated in the Vision 2020 (2000) and in the latest Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2013-2018 (EDPRS2). These two documents (in earlier documents EDPRS1) are cited in almost all of the education policy documents studied, and even when not directly referred to, their basic message can still be found in different formulations within all of the studied policy documents. The Vision 2020 and the EDPRS2 documents both define the goal of education as being to provide “human capital” with the skills required to transform Rwanda into a middle-income country with a knowledge-based and technologically advanced free market economy. This same goal is reflected in the mission statement of the Ministry of Education:

The mission of the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) is to transform the Rwandan citizen into skilled human capital for the socio-economic development of the country by ensuring equitable access to quality education focusing on combating illiteracy, promotion of science and technology, critical thinking and positive values.

The mention of “human capital” can be interpreted as utilitarian, as it views human beings as means for achieving an economic goal. The turn to “ensuring equitable access to education” is interesting, as even basic justice is mentioned, although not as a goal in itself, but also as a means for achieving the overall socio-economic development of the country. Although this might be an unfortunate turn of phrase that wasn’t intended to have that meaning, I have found similar tendencies in the reading of policy documents specifically discussing the inclusion of girls, as well as people with “special needs” in education. Although, as mentioned before, these documents contain references to education as a human right, they also contain references to economic goals. In the introduction to the Girls’ Education Policy, for instance, it is described how: “Education of all children is important: it promotes economic growth, social development and democracy. The education of girls yields extremely high economic and social returns.” When it comes to children with “special needs,” the document concern-

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126 See for example the emphasis on democratic participation in Ministry of Education: Girls’ Education Policy, April 2008, p. 3, as well as mention of education as a human right in Ministry of Education: Special Needs Education Policy, July 2007, p. 5.

127 See for instance the emphasis on GDP-growth in Ministry of Science, Technology and Scientific Research: The Republic of Rwanda’s Policy on Science, Technology and Innovation, October 2006, p. 3.


131 Ministry of Education: Girls’ Education Policy, April 2008, p. 3.
ing their inclusion in education contains many references to education as a human right. But even in this document, the Vision 2020 and the EDPRS goals are mentioned, and it is stated that: "[T]he government of Rwanda intends to achieve development by empowering with skills and knowledge, every potential contributor to its economy, and this plan naturally includes all those who are educationally disadvantaged."\(^{132}\)

Similarly, as will be explained further in the next section, the skills that the Ministry of Education wish to promote through education are mentioned because they are seen as imperative for achieving the transition to a middle-income, knowledge-based, technologically advanced society. Thus the mention of “critical thinking” in the last part of the Ministry’s mission statement, is motivated in a utilitarian way, rather than by referring to it as central human capability.

One can detect a tension in the documents between economic development goals and equity goals. To me, this becomes apparent in the above quoted section in the document concerning the inclusion of children with “special needs” in education. The stipulated goal is to include in the education system “potential contributors to the economy.” Here, one may ask what happens to those children with mental or physical impairments that render it highly improbable for them ever being able to make a contribution to society that can be measured in economic terms. From the perspective of economic welfare utilitarianism, it would be difficult to motivate government investments in the education of children with such mental or physical impairments. From the reading of the Rwandan policy documents and their stress on economic development and equity, it seems as though the Ministry of Education does not acknowledge any conflict between these different types of motivations, but instead view “economic development” and “human rights” as mutually supportive values in all situations.

In conclusion, the education policy documents contain both capability approach values and utilitarian values, but because the mission statement of the Ministry of Education has a more utilitarian bent, there is a tendency to put more emphasis on economic development goals in all education policy documents. In the policy documents, the view of education as a human right and the view of education as a means for economic development are not seen as being in conflict with each other, and they are often mentioned in the same paragraphs or sometimes in the same sentence. However, it will be explained in the two following sections that when the Government of Rwanda makes decisions on which skills and which subjects to prioritize, the economic welfare utilitarian goals take precedence over individual right claims. This is done by giving the curriculum a strong vocational orientation, focused on meeting labour market demands, instead of designing a broad curriculum, one that treats all central human capabilities as nearly equal in importance.

4.4.2 The Government of Rwanda’s View on Critical Thinking in Education

The concept of “critical thinking” can be found in several of the central documents on Education in Rwanda. It is also defined in the already quoted second article of the Organic Law No. 20 from 2003, where one of the goals of education is stated to be: “to educate the Rwandan to have freedom of thought, be innovative, have abilities to acquire and analyze ideas from other people and give his/her own ideas to others.”133 As previously mentioned, the exact words “critical thinking” appear in the mission statement of the Ministry of Education in the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2013/2014-2017/2018.134 They also appear in earlier policy documents, for instance in the Education Sector Policy of 2003, in the Girls’ Education Policy from 2008, and in the ICT in Education Policy, also from 2008.135 However, the concept is often not further explained or defined in these documents.

A more detailed definition of the concept of “critical thinking” can be found in the English subject syllabus for primary school. Here, different teaching strategies that the curriculum wishes teachers to adopt are listed, and among them is the encouragement of critical thinking. The definition reads:

Critical Thinking is the ability to think about ideas, make connections between new learning and previously learned concepts; evaluate, make inferences, and draw conclusions. In other words, it is the ability to form opinions that are supported by facts. 136

This definition harmonizes rather well with the definition of critical thinking previously given in this essay, and with the way Nussbaum uses the concept. However, the reasons given by the Ministry of Education for why this ability should be encouraged in the Rwandan classrooms are quite the opposite from the reasons given by Nussbaum. As we saw in the previously quoted mission statement of the Ministry of Education, “critical thinking” is valued as a skill of importance for economic development. This is further explained by the Ministry:

As Rwanda’s economy grows, diversifies and becomes subject to regional and global influences, ever increasing levels of skills and competencies will be required. […] National and international evidence suggests that employers, both in the public and private sector, value very highly a common set of “generic business” or “catalytic” skills. These include good skills in communication (written and oral), problem-solving, teamwork, creative and critical thinking […] The challenge of the [education] sector is to ensure that the curriculum, pedagogical, and language of learning practices reforms result in a higher proportion of the graduates of the various sub-sectors demonstrating these skills in abundance.137

137 Ministry of Education: Education Sector Strategic Plan 2013/14-2017/18, October 2013, p. 27.
From this statement it is very clear that the reason for making reforms to encourage critical thinking in Rwandan schools is to meet the demands of employers. As will be seen in the next section, the choices, not only to promote critical thinking and the other “soft skills” mentioned above, but also of core subjects in the curriculum, are motivated in the same fashion.

4.4.3 The Government of Rwanda’s Motivations for Specific Policy Choices

In the various education policy documents, specific skills are mentioned as being particularly important in order to achieve the national goal of economic development. Some of these skills, such as critical thinking, communication and entrepreneurship are referred to as “soft skills,” or oftentimes “life skills” in the policy documents.\textsuperscript{138} Some core skills in particular subjects are also emphasized as especially important, namely: Literacy, Numeracy, Math, English, Science and ICT.\textsuperscript{139}

The priority of the abovementioned skills is reflected in a suggested curriculum reform of November 2008 that was later implemented. The reform entailed a reduction of subjects in primary school, motivated by the goal of improving the quality of education by increasing the amount of hours a child spends per subject. As is explained in the summary of this reform document, the course reduction strategy was to be used together with specialization of teachers and “double-shifting” to: “reduce the costs and time to complete the roll out of Nine Years Basic Education in Rwanda.”\textsuperscript{140} It was thus first and foremost a cost-reduction strategy.

The reduction of subjects in primary 1-3 consisted of replacing Religious Studies, Moral Education and Civic Education with General Paper and the subject of Art with “compulsory extracurricular activities such as sport, culture, clubs, spiritual activities, music, drama, dance etc.” The current list of subjects for primary 1-3 students is: Kinyarwanda, English, French, Maths and General Paper together with extracurricular activities. In primary 4-6, the subjects of Political Education, Religious Studies, Civic Education, History and Geography were replaced by Social Studies, and Art was replaced by the aforementioned extracurricular activities.\textsuperscript{141}

In both lower and upper primary, the reformed curriculum allocates more hours to the English language than to Kinyarwanda and French respectively. Math and Science are likewise given roughly double the amount of hours compared to General Paper (P1-3) and Social Studies (P4-6).\textsuperscript{142} Thus, one can see how subjects that in policy documents have been mentioned as particularly important for the economic development of the country are also given priority when re-designing the curriculum. With the upcoming new curriculum in 2016, these priori-


\textsuperscript{139} Rwanda Education Board (REB), Dr. Webber, Richard: DRAFT: The Current Curriculum and National Aspirations, November 2013, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{140} Ministry of Education: Nine Years Basic Education Implementation: Fast Track Strategies, November 2008, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., pp. 11 and 12.
ties will assumedly not change very much. This can be deduced by an article from August, 2014 on the Rwanda Education Portal. This article states that there will be a slight increase in the time given to Kinyarwanda and that Sports will become an examinable subject.\textsuperscript{143} However, other than these slight changes, there appears not to be any more dramatic change in priorities regarding core subjects.

In conclusion, certain subjects and skills are given priority over others in the Rwandan curriculum, and these particular choices are motivated through appealing to the demands of the labour market, and to the overall goal of economic development of the country.

### 4.5 Concluding Analysis of Policy Documents

The research question relating to the education policy documents was formulated as follows:

> How do the Rwandan education policies promote, or fail to promote, these capabilities and what reasons and/or influencing factors to the shaping of Rwandan education policies can be inferred? (see chapter 1.2)

The capabilities referred to are those of “senses, imagination and thought” as well as “practical reason.” From the reading of the education policy documents, it has been concluded that these contain specific mention of “critical thinking” as an important skill (or capability) that should be encouraged in education. Although the concept is not further discussed or defined in the policy documents, definitions could be found in the Organic Law No. 20, article 2g, and in the specific subject syllabi for English. It was found that the definition of critical thinking used in both of these documents corresponds well to Nussbaum’s use of the concept. Thus the ability of critical thinking, as a capability that forms a part of both of Nussbaum’s central capabilities mentioned above, is given a central place in the Ministry of Education’s policy documents.

On the other hand, it was also found that the motivation for why critical thinking should be encouraged is radically different from Nussbaum’s motivation. In the Rwandan policy documents, a focus on critical thinking in education is primarily justified by pointing out that it is a skill currently on demand by employers, and thus the promotion of this ability becomes a means to achieving economic welfare utilitarian values, as opposed to individual rights values.

At this point, one might want to argue that it doesn’t matter if critical thinking is motivated by appealing to utilitarian goals, as long as the government is striving to encourage this ability in Rwandan classrooms. However, Nussbaum mentions that an important aspect of the capabil-

ity approach is that capabilities should be secured. This means that it is not enough for public policy to promote a capability, but instead policy makers must ensure that people can count on being given opportunities for exercising that capability in the future as well. Nussbaum writes: “for each capability we must ask how far it has been protected from the whims of the market or from power politics.” In this particular case, I would argue that the capability of critical thinking, as it forms a part of the capabilities of “senses, imagination and thought” as well as “practical reason” is not fully secured within the Rwandan education policy documents, because of the way it is justified by appealing to current demands on the job market, rather than to human rights.

I also argued in one of the previous sections (4.4.1) that the use of both economic development goals and equity goals within the policy documents can potentially become problematic when it comes to motivating the inclusion of children with mental and physical impairments in the school system. Whereas the inclusion of this group of children in education is difficult to motivate from a strictly economic welfare utilitarian perspective, it is by contrast highly supported from a human rights perspective, where the goal of education, in harmony with Nussbaum’s view, is to further every child’s right to develop their abilities to their fullest potential. Here, the underlying conflict between these different views becomes particularly clear, and I argue that the security of the right to education for this group of children is in a particularly vulnerable position if too much emphasis is put on economic welfare goals.

Furthermore, we saw that the emphasis put on education as a preparation for the world of work, also appears to influence the design of the curriculum, where subjects such as English, Math and Science are given priority before more “humanistic” subjects, such as Social Studies and Art. Because a central theme of Nussbaum’s book on higher education in the United States, Cultivating Humanity, as well as of her later work Not for Profit, is that education must encourage the development of a broad set of abilities, she would probably agree with my conclusion that the vocational orientation of the Rwandan primary school curriculum limits the ways in which children are able to develop and exercise the capabilities of “senses, imagination and thought” and “practical reason.” Although it is of course possible for a teacher of any subject to encourage critical thinking, I would further argue that different subjects bring out different kinds of critical thinking to different degrees. The different kinds of critical thinking I am referring to lie on a scale from being able to analyze linear events of cause and effect, to being able to use your intuition and creative imagination in order to understand events in a more holistic fashion. Whereas subjects such as Math and Science are perhaps further towards the “logical” side of the scale, Social Sciences and Art can both be regarded as positioning themselves slightly more to the “intuitive” side. As both of these aspects to critical thinking arguably fall under the capability of “senses, imagination and thought” and “practical reason,” a curriculum that favours “logical” critical thinking more than “intuitive/creative” critical thinking is thus not fully promoting these two central human capabilities.

144 Nussbaum: Creating Capabilities, p. 43.
145 Ibid.
146 See chapter 1.1.
In a previously mentioned article, *Educating Reason*, Harvey Siegel presents a similar argument as Nussbaum’s and mine discussed above, when he writes that different subjects such as Science, Literature and Art, have developed different traditions of reasoning.\(^{147}\) He also writes that accepting critical thinking as an educational ideal also entails a view of education as “empowering” students to be able to take control over their own lives.\(^{148}\) This corresponds well to Nussbaum’s definition of the ability of “practical reason” as being able “to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.”\(^{149}\) Educational policies that wish to promote critical thinking, thereby shouldn’t limit education to preparing students for any particular vocation, as this would inhibit them from using their independent judgement in creating their own future. Siegel writes:

> Critical thinking, in its open striving for the students’ early achievement of autonomy and self-sufficiency is incompatible with any educational plan which aims at the preparation of the student for some preconceived adult role or pre-established slot in some social arrangement.\(^{150}\)

To summarize, the Rwandan education policy documents do not fully secure the capabilities of “senses, imagination and thought” as well as “practical reason” because of the way critical thinking in education is motivated in a utilitarian fashion in the policy documents, and also because of the way concrete priorities in the design of the curriculum similarly favour a limited set of skills and subjects that are oriented towards preparing children for the life of work, rather than towards securing the development of a full personality.

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\(^{147}\) Harvey: *Educating Reason*, pp. 72-73.

\(^{148}\) Ibid., p. 71.

\(^{149}\) Nussbaum: *Creating Capabilities*, p. 34.

\(^{150}\) Harvey: *Educating Reason*, p. 70-71.
5 Comparative Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to unite the theoretical part and the two empirical parts of this study, in order to answer the overall problem statement, which is:

_In what ways are the theoretical views on critical thinking in education, Nussbaum’s and the utilitarian’s respectively, currently appearing in the Rwandan educational policies, and what correlations can be found between this philosophy and the encouragement of children’s critical thinking in school, as this is experienced by a selected group of Rwandan schoolchildren?_ (see chapter 1.2)

As was described in the previous sub-chapter concerning Rwandan policy documents, these contain elements of both Nussbaum’s and utilitarian philosophical views regarding the goals of education and the role of critical thinking in education. Taken as a whole however, the utilitarian tendencies were found to be more frequent and more emphasized. This became more apparent when analyzing the priority decisions concerning the design of the curriculum, where certain skills and subjects were found to be favoured because of their conceived positive role in furthering the economic development of the country. It was concluded that such utilitarian motivations for education in general, and for critical thinking in particular, were not conducive to the development of Nussbaum’s two capabilities of “senses, imagination and thought” and “practical reason” as they did not acknowledge a state’s obligation to secure these capabilities over time, and to protect them from fluctuations on the market.

The empirical sub-chapter concerning children’s perceptions of how Nussbaum’s two capabilities are encouraged in their schools, reached the conclusion that although there were opportunities for the respondents to develop and exercise these capabilities through artistic expression and through discussions and debate, inside and outside the classroom, they also experienced limitations in the form of curricular and financial restraints. Also, it was found that one possibly greater limitation to the exercise of these capabilities was the authoritarian structure of the school-system, which for students in primary school was enforced by corporal punishment in some instances. I further argued that automatic deference to authority and its enforcement through physical punishment can be directly harmful to the development of critical thinking.

It is hereby possible to see correlations between the findings regarding the philosophy of education in the Rwandan education policy documents, and the conclusions drawn from the focus group discussions. First, my conclusion from the reading of policy documents – that the curriculum doesn’t prioritise art subjects very much in comparison to other subjects, is confirmed by the respondents’ experiences. Second, because private schools were considered by one respondent to be “more creative,” one might also conclude that the opportunities for children to develop critical thinking through art subjects in Rwandan schools, is subject to “fluctuations of the market” that make children’s right to this particular form of expression unstable. This corresponds to my argument about the Rwandan policy documents’ utilitarian bent creat-
ing unstable conditions for the cultivation of the capabilities of “senses, imagination and thought” and “practical reason.”

Regarding the question of physical punishment, the results from the focus group discussions and those of the reading of policy documents interestingly differ. While several of the respondents have experienced the practice of physical punishment in their schools, the education policy documents by contrast, are mostly silent on the subject. When they do discuss it, it is in order to oppose it. In the policy documents studied, I found one mention of corporal punishment in the *Special Needs Education Policy* from 2007. Here it lists corporal punishment as one of the limitations for children to attend school. The statement reads: “Although corporal punishment was abolished, some teachers still practice it. This scares off the children from attending school.” Although the Government of Rwanda has taken legal measures to prevent corporal punishment, these efforts were apparently not seen as being enough at the time this document was written in 2007.

It is striking that corporal punishment is only mentioned in one single sentence, in one rather dated policy document, while the focus group discussions conducted for this study seven years later, reveal that corporal punishment is still a problem for some Rwandan schoolchildren. Also, the analysis of the focus group discussions sought to prove that corporal punishment doesn’t only “scare children off” from attending school, but that it seriously limits the quality of education regarding the promotion of critical thinking. If the government wishes to promote critical thinking, as is stated in the policy documents, there should therefore be more statements within any new policy documents on the importance of combating corporal punishment, not just to improve the attendance rates, but to improve the quality of education, and ultimately to protect children’s right to the development of their capabilities of freedom of thought and physical integrity.

As it is beyond the scope of this essay to investigate the causal relationship between the formulation of policy documents and how they influence the concrete actions of teachers, I will not speculate in what formulations of policy would most effectively create the desired change in attitudes in teachers currently practicing corporal punishment. I merely wish to argue that it is important that the question of corporal punishment be addressed more extensively in education policy documents, and that it is specifically mentioned as a limitation of the ability of critical thinking, in order for the documents to become more internally cohesive.

In conclusion, points of correspondence have been found between the two empirical parts of this study regarding the way utilitarian goals influence the design of the curriculum in a way that limits children’s opportunities to develop the capability of critical thinking. It has also been found that there is one essential point of difference between the policy documents and the experiences of the respondents regarding the question of corporal punishment. Here, I recommend that new policy documents should highlight the negative effects that corporal punishment and authoritarian practices in general can have on critical thinking in order to

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achieve better internal coherence. In the following concluding chapter, I will discuss the question of internal cohesion in the policy documents on a more general level.
6 Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to explore in what ways Rwandan education policy documents contain elements of Nussbaum’s views, and utilitarian views respectively, concerning the goals of education and the role of critical thinking in education, and in what ways the Rwandan Government’s positioning on this scale corresponds to the way children in Rwanda perceive that critical thinking is encouraged in their schools. The results of these inquiries have been described in previous chapters but can be summed up by stating that both Rwandan policy documents, and children’s own experiences, strongly indicate that utilitarian elements in the studied policy formulations and their influence on choices regarding curricular design, might have a correspondingly negative impact on children’s possibilities to develop the ability of critical thinking. In addition to its descriptive goals however, this study has also sought to contribute to the discourse of human rights research, by giving normative arguments for why education should be pursued using Nussbaum’s theoretical framework, rather than utilitarian theories. This goal on the normative level has permeated much of my arguments on the previous pages. In this concluding chapter I wish to state this normative argument more explicitly in relation to the Rwandan context.

One of the main problems that I have with the Rwandan education policy documents, is that they are lacking in internal coherence on a philosophical level, as they define goals of education both in utilitarian ways, and by appealing to individual human rights, without explicitly stating which of the two sets of motivations is to be regarded as having precedence. Perhaps this is intentional, so that readers of the documents can pick and choose from the list of justifications those that most appeal to them. However, this study has shown that the priorities concerning which skills and subjects that are promoted in the curriculum in effect give precedence to utilitarian goals where welfare is measured in economic terms. Thus, for the sake of clarity and coherence, I believe that policy makers should consider whether to make utilitarian justifications to education more explicitly “above” human rights justifications in the policy documents, or whether to instead change their curricular priorities so as to promote a broader set of capabilities, thus giving precedence to the philosophical view of education as serving the development of each individual child’s potential.

In the chapter contrasting Nussbaum’s philosophy with utilitarianism, I argued that Nussbaum’s theory, based on the Kantian principle of treating every person as an end and not as a means, corresponds with many universally accepted notions of justice. Utilitarianism goes against such notions and instead defines justice as aggregated welfare. I therefore extended my argument by stating that a normative theory such as Nussbaum’s is preferable to utilitarianism, because of the way that the former seeks to find a balance between “emotion” and “reason,” which gives it stability when implemented. For this same reason, I would argue that the normatively preferable option for the Rwandan Government, when adjusting its policies for internal coherence and clarity, would be to choose to explicitly give precedence to justifications to education based on the conception of each child as an end, and not merely as “human capital for the socio-economic development of the country.” To return to the metaphor
used in the introductory chapter, it is a moral obligation of the Rwandan Government to treat its children as seeds that education should water and nourish, rather than as soil that education should make “productive.” By embracing a “children as seeds”-view on education, the Government of Rwanda will grant critical thinking a more secure place within the education system, and Rwandan children will be more capable of creating their own future.
Appendix

Questioning Route

1. What abilities do your teachers at school encourage you to develop? (For instance discipline, attentiveness, memory, creativity, critical thinking, problem solving etc.)

2. At school, are you given opportunities to express your thoughts, emotions and opinions? How? or Why not?

3. At school, are you given opportunities to have conversations with others in which you can take in, and interact with, other people's thoughts, emotions and opinions? How? or Why not?

4. At school, are you given opportunities to express your own thoughts, emotions and opinions using different means of expression, for instance literary form, through music, drama, physical expression or visual arts? How? or Why not?

5. Through school/At school are you given opportunities to take in other people’s thoughts, emotions and opinions, expressed in any of the above mentioned ways? How? or Why not?

6. At school, are you given opportunities to discuss how to solve different problems that don't have an obvious "right answer"? How? or Why not?

7. Finally, what would you say in general about your school’s ability to help you develop your critical thinking, imagination and creative problem solving abilities, as well as giving you opportunities to practice these skills together with others? How? and Why?
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**Reports**


**Theses**
