

# A Quality Framework for Enabling Education

## Applying Sen's Capability Approach

Jonathan Green  
Charmaine Davis  
Jill Lawrence  
+ NAEAA Working Group

**Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA)** offers a robust way to assess human development by focusing on the opportunities, or 'capabilities,' individuals have to achieve what they value. In Enabling education, this framework shifts our focus from traditional academic outcomes to the broader capacities that support students' flourishing, including cultural, social, and personal development.

### Towards a Quality Framework

#### Comprehensive Evaluation of Student Capabilities


A quality endorsement framework grounded in Sen's CA will evaluate Enabling education programs based on non-traditional metrics, highlighting how they foster capabilities such as critical thinking, self-confidence, and social engagement.

#### Accessible and Supportive Learning Experiences

By emphasising student capabilities, the framework will ensure that institutions create inclusive and supportive environments, empowering students to pursue their educational and life goals.

#### Recognition of Contextual and Institutional Diversity

The CA allows for a nuanced understanding of diverse educational settings, ensuring that the framework acknowledges and accommodates the unique contexts and needs of different institutions.

-  Walker, M., & Unterhalter, E. (2007). *Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education*. Springer.
- Boni, A., & Walker, M. (2016). *Human Development and Capabilities: Re-imagining the University of the Twenty-First Century*. Routledge.
- [The Capabilities Approach Website: HDCA](#) – Resources and case studies on applying the capability approach in education.



### Why Use Sen's Capability Approach?

#### Empowers Students

- Positions student agency and well-being alongside traditional measures of academic attainment
- Promotes environments where students take control of their learning, rather than merely adapting to existing academic structures

#### Promotes Equity & Inclusion

- Addresses inequalities and historical injustices
- Recognises the experiences of First Nations peoples and other underrepresented groups
- Ensures education systems provide equitable access to resources for all students, irrespective of background

#### Adopts a Holistic View

- Expands focus from academic achievement to overall well-being and social integration
- Fosters belonging within the university environment

#### Fosters Flexibility

- Advocates for adaptive learning environments for diverse student learning requirements
- Enables students to succeed on their own terms

### Starting Point: a List of Student Capabilities

The **list of student capabilities** for Enabling education in Australia was developed through a collaborative process involving a multi-university working group from the National Association of Enabling Educators of Australia (NAEEA). This process drew on extensive collective experience in Enabling education and incorporated insights from existing research, including student feedback, to ensure the list was relevant and practical. The framework guiding the development of this list was designed to ensure that it is thorough, balanced, and responsive to the diverse needs of the Enabling education sector. It has at its heart the social justice ethos of Enabling education.

This draft list offers a structured framework of capabilities-building for Enabling students in Australia, starting with cultural and epistemic empowerment, followed by equitable knowledge acquisition and identity development. It then progresses through personalised growth, autonomy, and well-being, culminating in collaborative learning communities and barrier-free, socially just participation in university life.

### Get Involved: Shape the Future of Enabling Education

We invite you to contribute to refining this draft list of student capabilities. As practitioners in Enabling education, your insights are vital to ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of the developing framework. Your feedback will directly influence the list, helping it better meet the needs of both students and educators. Join us in this collaborative effort to create a more inclusive and impactful tool for the Enabling education community.

### Capabilities for Enabling

- Cultural and Epistemic Empowerment.** Ensure that students can access, contribute to, and shape knowledge in ways that honour diverse epistemologies, particularly Indigenous ways of knowing. Address historical injustices and foster a respectful educational environment where all voices are valued.
- Equitable Knowledge Acquisition.** Provide foundational knowledge and resources to bridge gaps in understanding. Ensure that all students, regardless of their prior educational experiences, can engage meaningfully with academic content.
- Equitable Identity Development.** Create a learning environment that supports students in developing their identity while respecting diverse backgrounds. Ensure that adaptive and culturally responsive resources empower students to succeed without compromising their personal and cultural values.
- Personalised Academic and Social Growth.** Support students in flourishing academically and socially during their transition to university. Tailor support systems to meet diverse needs, enabling intellectual development that respects individual and cultural differences.
- Autonomy, Well-being and Belonging.** Promote personal autonomy, ensuring students can make meaningful choices and act on them. Foster a sense of belonging in a university environment free from systemic barriers, where diverse identities are respected.
- Collaborative Learning Communities.** Encourage participation in inclusive learning communities that foster collaboration, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. Ensure all voices are heard, and all students can engage fully in their learning.
- Commitment to Social Justice.** Cultivate an understanding of social justice and a commitment to addressing epistemic and historical injustices. Create equitable learning environments that are responsive to underrepresented communities, especially First Nations people.
- Barrier-free University Participation.** Ensure students can fully participate in university life, including governance and decision-making processes. Remove systemic barriers to ensure that all students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can engage fully in the university experience.

