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Home-schooling for children with disabilities during the pandemic:

a study of digital-, musical- and socio-economic conversion factors

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Abstract

This article investigates how increased focus on home-schooling influenced children with disabilities´ everyday education during the pandemic. Specifically, I focus on how children with disabilities were able to engage in home-schooling on digital learning platforms according to their own interests during the pandemic. Conceptually I draw on theoretical arguments developed within the 'capability approach' with a particular emphasis on "conversion factors" as this model allows me to identify the different mechanisms that may hamper, and/or enable, children with disabilities´ learning practices. I pay specific attention to what I call digital-, musical- and socio-economic conversion factors, and describe how these three contexts (musical practices, digital platforms and socio-economic background coupled with ethnicity) influenced the children's educational experience.

Three lessons can be learned. First, socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds became even more consequential during the pandemic, as many children with disabilities were left more on their own and offered less support from educational institutions and the welfare services due to various infection-control measures. This placed single mothers and parents with few resources and/or immigrant backgrounds in a particularly vulnerable position as they struggled to make the ends meet while absorbing all of the new responsibilities of home-schooling. Second, many people experienced the new virtual classroom as chaotic, which marginalised children with disabilities who had trouble handling online social codes, either on teaching and learning platforms or through social media. Third, musical practices represented an important part of some children's everyday education which parents discovered anew during the pandemic. Music facilitated learning while simultaneously contributing to a sense of well-being and social participation for their children. More work is needed on how musical practices, digital technologies, and socio-economic features may hamper and facilitate the educational experience of persons with disabilities.

Keywords: music, children with disabilities, education, capability, conversion factors.

Focus and existing research

Inclusion, adaptive education, and democracy in the classroom are key values in Nordic schools (Biseth, 2009a, 2009b; Oftedal Telhaug, Asbjørn Mediås and Aasen, 2006; Wendelborg and Tøssebro, 2008; Wendelborg and Kvello, 2010). These values have come under pressure during the Covid-19 pandemic, because digital schooling has changed the ways in which students and teachers engage with another (Azevedo et al., 2020; Blikstad-Balas, Roe, Dalland and Klette, 2022; Krumsvik, 2020). Despite a growing body of research on how children were influenced by the new school context (Reimers, 2021; Ocaña et al., 2020; Foti, 2020) we know little about the ways in which the pandemic and subsequent home-schooling shaped the educational experience for children with disabilities. Still, existing studies suggest that differences in socio-economic and ethnic background (Biggeri and Mehrotra, 2011; Biggeri and Karkara, 2014; Unterhalter and Brighouse, 2014; Erevelles and Minear, 2010), as well as the increased use of social media and digital learning platforms may both hamper and facilitate learning for children with disabilities in complex ways (Finnvold and Dokken, 2021; Finnvold, 2021, 2018; Bøhler and Giannoumis, 2017). Other studies suggest that arts and music constitute important educational tools for children with disabilities (Ockelford et al., 2011; Chen et al., 2020; Howe, 2020; Jellisson and Taylor, 2007; McCord, 2004; Hargreaves and Marshall, 2003), and these may either have been amplified or downplayed during the pandemic. Inspired by this research, and the growing importance of the 'capability approach' within disability studies (Burchardt, 2004; Vorhaus, 2015) and special needs education (Reindal, 2009, 2010, 2016), this article investigates how increased focus on home-schooling influenced children with disabilities´ everyday education and sense of well-being during the pandemic. To study this, I have formulated the following research question:

To what extent were children with disabilities able to engage in home-schooling and digital learning platforms according to their own interests during the pandemic?

I focus particularly on how parents were able to assist and accommodate different educational arrangements for their children, and how the children experienced this new educational context. Conceptually I draw on theoretical arguments developed within the 'capability approach' (Sen, 1992, 1993, 2009), with a particular emphasis on "conversion factors" (Robeyns, 2005; Hvinden and Halvorsen, 2018; Assmann et al., 2021). This allows me to analyse and identify the different mechanisms that may hamper, and/or enable, children with disabilities´ learning practices. I pay specific attention to what I call digital-, musical- and socio-economic conversion factors, and describe how these three contexts (musical practices, digital platforms and socio-economic background coupled with ethnicity) influenced the children's educational experience. However, to study this systematically, I find it fruitful to operationalize the aforementioned research question to more precise sub-research questions, which I have defined as follows:

How did the parents´ socio-economic and ethnic background influence the new home-school context and everyday education for the children? (RQ1)

To what extent did social media and digital platforms facilitate or hamper learning for children with disabilities during the pandemic? (RQ2)

In what ways did music and arts constitute new educational resources during the pandemic that increased the children's sense of well-being and learning? (RQ3)

I explore these sub-research questions empirically through in-depth analysis of eight qualitative interviews with parents of children with disabilities carried out in January 2021 and use the aforementioned concepts of 'capability' and 'conversion factors' as conceptual frames. This theoretical framework offers a prism to study processes of social exclusion and inclusion in educational practices by starting with an axiomatic understanding of equality—that is, everybody has the right to a sense of relative freedom and to the opportunity to live a life according to their needs, visions and values in specific contexts (Sen, 1992, 1993, 2009). Related arguments have been made by several disability scholars, often in the context of activist scholarship (Shakespeare, 2018; Peters, 2018), and by scholars that aim to integrate persons with disabilities themselves into the research (Halvorsen et al., 2017a; Halvorsen et al., 2017b; Charlton, 1998; Werner et al., 1998).

The capability approach was both influenced by and a contributor to the development of human rights and new thinking around active citizenship (e.g. Halvorsen et al., 2017a; Halvorsen et al., 2017b; Nussbaum, 2007; Sen, 2005), both of which inform Norwegian national regulations and laws related to inclusion (e.g. Loven om likestilling og forbud mot diskriminering, 2021; Opplæringsloven, 2021) as well as the national educational curriculum (e.g. Kunnskapsløftet, 2020). The UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), coupled with an increased emphasis on citizenship within Norwegian education (Biseth, Seland and Huang, 2021; Huang et al., 2017; Stray and Sætra, 2015), have further emphasised the importance of differentiated and adaptive education in Norwegian education (Bachmann and Haugh, 2006; Fasting, 2013; Kunnskapsløftet, 2020; Solberg, Edwards and Nyborg, 2020).

To capture the impact of the pandemic on the everyday education of children with disabilities in this context, I invited the parents of children with disabilities to describe the complexity and nuances of their own experience and contexts, then analysed this material qualitatively (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Marshall and Rossman, 2014; Silverman, 2020). I will present that analysis after I briefly describe the context of the pandemic in Norway, discuss the capability approach in relation to this study, and summarise my methods and data sources.

Context: disabilities in Norway during the pandemic

Covid-19 and the subsequent shutdown of welfare services and educational institutions in Norway and elsewhere complicated the nation's relationship to the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which Norway signed, ratified and promised to integrate into its governance. According to the convention, Norway is committed to ensuring that persons with disabilities enjoy 'all human rights and fundamental freedoms'[1], including, for example, adaptive education for children with disabilities in Norwegian schools (which follows upon the UNCRC as well). According to the Norwegian National Human Rights Institution (NIM), the shutdown of educational institutions following the outbreak

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[1] See https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html

of the pandemic disrupted Norway's ongoing commitment to these crucial human rights. In a letter written to the Ministry of Health and Care Services, Ministry of Modernization, Norwegian Directorate of Health and the National Institute of Public Health on 6 April 2020, NIM warned officials about the potential negative consequences of the country's various infection control measures and its closure of a number of welfare services (including schools and other established structures within the educational system). Other agencies underscored the related threat to key values of the Norwegian Education Act and national educational curriculum. While Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg and other politicians kept insisting that the measures should not disproportionately impact marginalised or vulnerable people (Regjeringen, 2021), researchers and disability organisations and activists have drawn attention to the subsequent systematic neglect of children with disabilities (Bossy and Hervie, 2021; Bøhler, 2021; Bøhler and Ugreninov, 2021; FFO, 2021). One recent report (Bøhler and Ugreninov, 2021) suggests that children with disabilities were marginalised in complex ways during the pandemic due to the prohibition of physical contact with their personal assistants, educators trained in special education, and physiotherapists, for example. In all, the shutdown of educational institutions and welfare services undercut Norway's commitment to offering 'varied forms of assessment, learning resources, learning arenas and learning activities so that everyone gets the best possible benefit from the education'[2]. In the interests of unpacking this difficult situation, I will next elaborate upon how Amartya Sen's capability theory, as well as related work on citizenship and work in education studies, offers a productive approach.

Capability and citizenship as conceptual frames of study

Amartya Sen's capability approach (1992, 1993, 2009) draws attention to an individual's relative freedom and opportunity to live a life according to their visions, needs and values in a given context. To study how capability manifests empirically in practice, Sen developed the related concepts of 'functionings' (Sen, 1992, p.40), which are different realisations of one's sense of capability in specific contexts. These functionings are always shaped by what Sen calls 'conversion factors' (1981, pp.26-30) — social, personal and material aspects of a given context which impact capability. In short, conversion factors are the contextual features that shape a person´s sense of capability in practice and these may be social-, personal-, material-, aesthetic- and technological, or composed of other dynamics, depending on the context. It is a concept that refers to the specific interactions between a subject, and his or her environment, and how this interface influence that person´s ability to realize capability.

In recent decades, capability theory has been used widely in the interdisciplinary field of disability studies to underscore the importance of developing educational tools and policies which allow persons with disabilities to partake in society as equal citizens (e.g. Halvorsen and Bøhler, 2017; Hvinden et al., 2017; Halvorsen et al., 2017) — work often inspired by the UNCRPD, as described above (e.g. Sépulchre, Lindqvist, Schuller and Bøhler, 2017). Much of this research places capability theory in dialogue with theories of citizenship as both start from a premise of equality and seek to study the

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[2] See https://www.udir.no/laring-og-trivsel/tilpasset-opplaring/(fra utdanningsdirektoratet)

different mechanisms and structures which facilitate and/or hamper this principle. Sen himself has often used persons with disabilities as an illustrative case when arguing for the importance of developing special educational policies and practices, as well as different forms of social security and welfare services (Sen, 1994; Nussbaum and Sen, 1993). Universal design, for example, improves the sense of capability for persons with mobility impairments and allows them to participate in society on equal terms with their non-disabled fellow citizens. In the European and Nordic context, capability theory has often been combined with a social approach to citizenship (Halvorsen et al., 2017a; Halvorsen et al., 2017b) in the interests of a more inclusive society (Mannan, Maclachan and McVeigh, 2012).

All of this recent work has impacted education studies as well (Banks, 2001; Naval et al., 2002; Pashby et al., 2020). The capability theory may serve as both a model for more empirical research and an instigation of progressive social change through the identification of concrete problems (for example, those related to the implementation of universal design in the classroom and other contexts). In a recent study, Gøril Molfjord (2020) draws on Sen´s mentioned arguments to illustrate how "the capability to obtain high-quality special education, and the capabilities made possible through education" (2020, p.3) constitute two important pathways for developing public policy. Other scholars have developed related arguments inspired by new and more inclusive approaches to citizenship which stress the importance of translating policies of adaptive education from theory into practice (Etienne et al., 2005; Halvorsen and Bøhler, 2017; Veugelers et al., 2017). Both theories of active citizenship (Halvorsen et al., 2017a and 2017b; Hoskins and Mascherini, 2009; Lawson, 2001) and social citizenship (Marshall, 1950) have been mobilised to these ends, and both Sen and Nussbaum have recently revisited capability theory in light of theories of citizenship and human rights (e.g. Nussbaum, 2007; Sen, 2005).

As underscored in a recent study by Blikstad-Balas et al. (2022), the pandemic had a profound impact on learning and educational practices in Norway, because much teaching was conducted virtually. While some children, and particularly those who already performed well at school, benefitted from this new digital teaching context, others appear to have lost important opportunities during the pandemic. Recent international research suggests that socioeconomic and ethnic background (that is, the various resources provided by parents) may have become more impactful during the pandemic because children got less individual help from teachers and were left on their own more (see, for example, Bakken et al., 2020; Blikstad et al., 2020; Bubb and Jones, 2020; Federici and Vika, 2020; Krumsvik, 2020; Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Miks and McIlwaine, 2020; Mæland et al., 2021; Reimers and Schleicher, 2020; WHO, 2020). This development is likely to magnify existing social inequalities in education already evidenced by a number of studies assessing the importance of socioeconomic background to school performance (e.g. Bakker, Denessen and Brus-Laeven, 2007; Marks, 2006; Tieben and Wolbers, 2010). Obviously, the pandemic and subsequent shutdown of educational practices had a disproportionate impact on children with disabilities as well, who often rely on special teachers, assistants and health personnel of different kinds (Barnes and Mercer, 2005; Singh and Ghai, 2009; Engwall et al., 2019; Greenway and Eaton-Thomas, 2020). Relatedly, we already know that the family, and in particular mothers, plays a key role in the educational experience of children with disabilities (Ryan and Runswick-Cole, 2008; Traustadottir, 1991). More broadly, a number of studies have shown

how children with disabilities have been socially excluded and marginalized in different educational and digital contexts prior to the pandemic (Humphrey and Symes, 2010; Nutbrown and Clough, 2004; Myklebust, 2002; Finnvold and Dokken, 2021; Kliewer et al., 2006).

In the following analysis of qualitative interviews, I will draw on the capability theory to look at how positive and negative conversion factors facilitated or hampered the sense of educational capability of children with disabilities in the context of the pandemic. First, I will briefly outline the methods and data sources I used.

Methods and data

For this study, I carried out semi-structured qualitative interviews in January 2021 with eight parents who had children with disabilities (8-15 years). Due to the regulations of the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) it was not possible to interview the children themselves. While this is technically possible, it requires extensive permission which was not possible to get within the timeframe of this study. Existing studies, however, suggest that in-depth qualitative interviews with parents can provide important insights into the children's educational experiences (Berger and Lorenz, 2016; Brett, 2002; Wiart et al., 2010; Dias et al., 2016; Mandarakas, 2014). They also provide the perspective of an adult third person and shed light on mechanisms and aspects of the educational experience which are difficult to grasp from the viewpoint of the children themselves. More importantly, the new home-school context that was propelled by the pandemic created new relationships between parents and children with disabilities that are important to explore in detail as many parents acted as teachers, mentors, and supervisors for their children. The eight informants (three men and five women) included two parents with immigrant backgrounds and six native Norwegians. They covered a diverse socioeconomic landscape, including high- and low-income families, as well as a range of academic experience and training. They self-recruited after I posted an invitation to participate in the research project on websites frequently visited by persons with disabilities (see appendix A for the full advertisement text). All eight informants signed an informed consent before the interviews (appendix B), which were carried out on Zoom, recorded and later fully transcribed. To enhance comparisons across the qualitative data, all the interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide (Kvale, 2008) organised around the following key questions:

1. How did Covid-19 influence the everyday education of the child?
2. What characterised the new everyday education?
3. To what extent were the special needs, values and preferences of the child considered and taken into account in this new context?
4. How did you, as a parent, participate in everyday educational activities?
5. How did the pandemic influence education in different subjects (e.g. mathematics, Norwegian, music, etc.)?
6. How did musical practices, or other arts, stimulate well-being and new forms of learning in the new home-school context?

While all the interviews followed the same interview guide, they were also shaped by the internal dynamics of the social interaction between me and the informants and varied considerably in length (some lasted an hour, others almost two hours). While capability theory did not inform the interview guide as such, I explored it both explicitly and implicitly through follow-up questions in tandem with question 3 above. Below, I will briefly introduce the eight informants and their children. In my analysis of the research data, I focus mainly on quotes and fragments from the interviews that shed light on the aforementioned research questions and sub-research questions (RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3) and discuss these data in light of the presented capability theory with a particular emphasis on how conversion factors manifest in digital, musical and socio-economic contexts.

Data sources and informants

Five of the interviewees had pursued higher education and secured permanent employment, and they gave the impression of being relatively well off. Three of the interviewees had not completed higher education and had fewer resources. Two of the interviewees lived in a relationship where one parent or both of the parents stayed at home to take care of the child. One interviewee was divorced and lived with his new girlfriend; another was a single mother. To anonymize the interviewees, I use the following pseudonyms:

- Farah was Maria's mother and was single. She had arrived in Norway from East Africa already pregnant and had very poor economic circumstances, relying on student loans and social support from the government while she studied to become a secretary. Maria was nine years old and went to a special school and had multiple disabilities (both physical and cognitive).

- Magdalena was Julia's mother and had arrived in Norway from southern Europe together with her husband four years before. Magdalena and her husband were struggling to make the ends meet. Julia was 10 years old and had some special assistance in ordinary school and was bullied regularly, according to her mother.

- Jens was Thea's father. Both he and Thea's mother were home during the pandemic to assist Thea in her education and everyday life, and the family was well off. Thea was 15 years old and was multi-disabled; she had the cognitive abilities of a three-year-old, according to her father.

- Ada was Grete's mother. Ada had been staying home to take care of her daughter since 2018 while her husband worked; the family was well off. Grete was nine years old and had multiple disabilities (both physical and cognitive).

- Thorbjørn was the father of Kristian, who was 15 years old. Thorbjørn was divorced and lived together with Kristian and his new girlfriend. Kristian struggled to control his impulses; he was reportedly often violent and aggressive.

- Turid was Therese's mother and lived together with her husband and two other non-disabled children; the family was well off. Therese was 10 years old and had multiple disabilities, both physical and cognitive.

- Stine was the mother of Kjetil, who was 14 years old, and Margrete, who was eight years old; both children were disabled. Both Stine and her husband worked and they were relatively well off. Both Kjetil and Margrete had multiple disabilities.
- Ole was the father of Kåre, who was eight years old but had multiple disabilities; his cognitive abilities were at the level of a one- or two-year-old according to his father. Ole lived with his wife and two other children and was relatively well off.

In addition to these eight primary informants, I carried out an interview with the Pakistani-Norwegian activist and expert on minority politics, black feminism and social exclusion, Fakhra Salimi. Salimi was awarded the Ossietszky Prize of PEN from Norway in 2005 and the prestigious St. Halvards medal in 2015 for her ground-breaking work on the rights of woman with immigrant background and black feminism. Salimi is a prominent and outspoken intellectual in the public sphere in Norway. The interview with Salimi was semi-structured, and organized around findings from the eight interviews, and was more characterized as an expert interview. Salimi is currently leading the MiRA center: Resource Center for Black, Immigrant and Refugee Woman and has deep knowledge on how discrimination and integration work in Norway. Discussing findings from the eight interviews with Salimi provided important additional interpretations that I explore and discuss below.

Taken together, the eight primary informants, and the expert interview with Salimi, provided rich data with which to explore how children with disabilities were impacted by the new educational environment of the pandemic. As I consider the 'conversion factors' which enabled or hampered the children's educational experience and everyday life, I will begin by exploring RQ1, and describe how socioeconomic and ethnic background influenced the new educational setting.

The importance of ethnic and socioeconomic background during home-schooling

The interview data suggests that children in families with only one parent working and the other at home to support the child benefitted more from virtual home-schooling than those children in families with both parents working full time. Ada had been out of work since 2018 to take care of her daughter, Grete, while her husband worked at an international company:

"You know, we have been living quite isolated for two and a half years now [since I quit my job], so, in a sense, we were used to this situation of the pandemic. But all this was only possible because I was at home and could dedicate time and care to our daughter, while my husband worked. We could afford it. I could assist her in home-schooling [. . .]. In the beginning, it was very difficult, but then we started to structure our own school at home. We often started with two classes in Norwegian. Then one class in English. After every class, which lasted 45 minutes, we had a 15-minute break. And we also had a longer break during lunch. It was just like the school. Then we had one more class in mathematics. Afterward, we had a class for physical exercise, followed by [classes in] science and social science education. We used the timer on the smartphone to organise the day. We tried to follow the teaching plan provided by the school. In our home-school the bell rang for break-out time [smiles].

> In the beginning, it was a challenge to concentrate all the time for both of us. But after some adjustments and experience, we managed very well. For example, we adjusted from day to day, if necessary. In retrospect, I actually think Grete learned more during this period of home-schooling than at the ordinary public school. In mathematics, we were able to go through all the curriculum for the second grade and even spent some time on the third-grade curriculum. We were also able to get quite far in the science and social science curriculums. I think we were very creative. But there was one cost. I had to dedicate all my time to following up. For example, sometimes we followed the teaching plan provided by the school, and other times I had to be creative and rearrange and organise the teaching material in new ways. For example, we decided to use digital teaching platforms, like Ordriket, which we got free access to from Fagbokforlaget. I really recommend this. It was great. And in social science education and science, we used the digital platform Mylder, and we downloaded additional educational material from Bredtboka [an online resource]. A number of different publishers [forlag] gave us free access, and all that was very helpful. However, we got little support from the school and the teachers. I am very glad I had the time and energy to act as a substitute teacher. If not, I think Grete would have struggled a lot during this period." (Ada)

According to Ada, her daughter learned more during the pandemic than before it, but only because Ada had the time and energy to act as a substitute teacher for her nine-year-old daughter. The school and its established structures of special education support from assistants and teachers were absent from Grete's life due to infection control measures, among other things. Still, the family's circumstances allowed Ada to collaborate with Grete on a positive learning environment that helped Grete to flourish and realize a sense of 'capability' within the framework of her own values, needs and visions. This finding echoes other studies which have pointed to how socioeconomic background shapes learning outcomes in complex ways (e.g. Bakker, Denessen and Brus-Laeven, 2007; Tieben and Wolbers, 2010).

In the families where both parents worked, it was harder to adapt to the pandemic-driven restrictions. When I asked Turid how her daughter, Therese, had tackled the pandemic's new virtual classroom and home-schooling, she started to cry, then said this:

> "It was too much. Very little support from the school, the regular teachers or the assistants which used to help her. A lot of work for me and my husband. We both worked full time, including new digital solutions at work, and all that added to the burden. But then we also had to assist Therese in the home-schooling. On top of that, the assistant we usually had (BPA, which refers to 'Brukerstyrt personlig assistent', which may be translated to 'User-Based Personal Assistant') could not come and help us due to infection control measures. It was a very hard time. [. . .] There was a lot of creative schoolwork during the pandemic, but Therese got very little of the additional help she needs. The pandemic made everything complicated, and it was all about new digital solutions. But she needs help with the cognitive parts of learning. She needs support to talk to somebody to solve her assignments—people that explain things to her. In addition, she needs help to talk with her friends. All that was very difficult on the digital platforms. It was very stressful, and it also placed a lot of pressure on me and my husband. I was afraid that we would not make it, and that all this would threaten our relationship as well and the family at large, and because of that I was even more scared."

Turid's struggle was echoed across all the interviews with parents who had to work full time and still participate in the new home-school context. The pandemic made an already complicated life even more

difficult, meaning that Turid and Therese's sense of capability was severely undercut during the pandemic, thanks to both institutional (the lack of educational support and welfare services) and economic conversion factors (Turid and her husband both had to work, in contrast to Ada who could afford to say home).

As a native Norwegian, however, Turid was at least able to voice her frustration and communicate with the welfare apparatus and school system in her mother tongue. She knew how the system worked and what she was entitled to. For Farah, who had come alone to Norway as a refugee from East Africa, it was harder still. As a single mother in Norway who had lived most of her adult life in East Africa, she was much less familiar with the Norwegian welfare state and school system than either Ada or Turid. When I asked her how the pandemic influenced the schooling of her daughter, she responded:

> "Everything became very difficult because of the shutdown of public transportation and the school and all of it. For me, it was particularly difficult, as I am in the process of learning Norwegian and it is difficult for me to communicate with NAV [the welfare administration] and the school system. I am very grateful for the support I get, and I think the special school for my daughter is amazing, but during the pandemic much of this was placed on hold. Also, I am alone, and I must take care of my daughter even though we live on a student loan and with support from NAV. [. . .] When the school closed, I had to do everything. But I am no teacher. I am a single mother. I study Norwegian and [study] to become a secretary. […]. It was difficult. The home-schooling had a strong impact on Maria. She loves her school [a special school for children with autism], and she loves her friends there. Maria enjoys the music classes, the social interaction and all of that. But she hates social media, iPads and computers. She wants physical contact with teachers and students. Social interaction. It was very hard for me to deal with all of this. Most of the assignments they gave us from school did not work. However, some did, particularly the ones which were more practical. For example, yesterday we got the assignment of going out in the woods to find a beautiful flower that we should take a picture of and then learn about. That was very enriching. However, the pandemic-school situation made everything unstable. First it was this, then it was that. It was hard to deal with for Maria, as she needs stability. It is part of her diagnosis. She hates disruptions."

The pandemic clearly hampered Farah and Maria's sense of capability. They were already living at the threshold of poverty, by Norwegian standards, when the pandemic made things harder. While both Ada and Turid were critical of what they viewed as a systematic neglect of children with disabilities during the pandemic, Farah continued to express her gratitude toward the Norwegian welfare system, school system and society at large. Activist Fakhra Salimi elaborated on this gratitude when I discussed the interview with her:

> "I think many immigrant and refugee families often express a strong sense of 'depth of gratitude' (*takknemlighetsgjeld*) because they compare the Norwegian system with their countries of origin, for example Pakistan, Somalia or elsewhere where the social welfare benefits are almost non-existent. Therefore, many tend to be very grateful in terms of what they receive here. However, this is problematic, because we know that, in order to get a number of welfare benefits, you often have to struggle and prove that you are entitled for these benefits. The 'depth of gratitude' sometimes prevents many from applying, or fighting for their genuine welfare rights. In addition, many immigrant and refugee women have a limited knowledge about the benefits provided by the Norwegian welfare state and the school system, so they don't know what to expect. Norway is a welfare state and compared to many other countries we have generous welfare benefits. This

became very clear during the pandemic. It is therefore very important that all citizens have access to the same benefits regardless of their immigrant or refugee status. There are many women who do not get adequate help and we are working daily to help these women in accessing their rights within the welfare system. I think that it is very important to make it clear that equal rights are not some charity the government is doing for us immigrants. The person in your interview (Farah) is overcome by this 'depth of gratitude', and is not aware of the fact that these are her rights. I meet many women like her through my work and it is our responsibility to inform them that they are Norwegian citizens and thereby eligible for equal rights." (Salimi)

While it is difficult to prove the 'depth of gratitude' theory empirically, data gathered by the MiRA center, where Salimi works (Kapoor and Salimi, 1995; Salimi, 2004a, 2004b), and other data (Hagelund, 2005; Næss and Moen, 2015) suggest that immigrants tend to know less about the welfare rights to which they are entitled than native Norwegians do. I found this as well in a recent report I wrote based upon the same interviews—native Norwegians had a stronger critical voice and were more capable of articulating their concerns and critiques (Bøhler and Ugreninov, 2021) compared to Norwegians with immigrant background. In terms of capability theory, we can see that the Norwegian language itself and a familiarity with the Norwegian educational system and welfare state were perhaps the most important conversion factors which hindered Farah and Maria from living a life according to their own needs, values and visions during the pandemic. If the Norwegian welfare state, including its educational structures, is mainly accessible to the white native-Norwegian middle class and unable to reach Norway's most vulnerable citizens (for example, black immigrant single mothers with children with disabilities), we have uncovered a racial bias which is important to address in future studies and policy development. In any case, we can see that race, education, language and economic resources can interact as conversion factors in a negative feedback loop which constrains a sense of capability in a black Norwegian woman and her child with disabilities.

Magdalena, who came to Norway five years before the pandemic from southern Europe with her daughter and husband, was a bit more explicit in her critique than Farah, because she had already been fighting for better support for her daughter at school when the pandemic happened. Her critique, however, was articulated in English, as Magdalena had not yet been given a course in Norwegian by the government and struggled to speak the language:

"I don't understand why I, as a parent, did not get an education and special support for dealing with special education at home. I should get more information about how I could help and assist my daughter. Now, with corona, I see that the teacher that used to help her at school for one hour per day does not come anymore. With corona, it all becomes very difficult. No special education during corona. We must do it all ourselves. And both I and Julia [Magdalena's daughter] very much miss the personal assistant who used to come by the house and help out, both in terms of special education and in terms of providing social support. She was an important friend to my daughter. And we have to do home-schooling all the time, but home-schooling is difficult. Because we are working and don't have the time." (Magdalena)

While Magdalena had long sought better special education and support for her daughter, the rector at her school rejected her application, and she was not able to file a complaint due to language limitations. In all, Magdalena's negative conversion factors included not knowing Norwegian, not understanding

the Norwegian welfare state and school system, and lacking economic resources, as her job prevented her from assisting her daughter with schoolwork during the pandemic.

The analysis clearly suggests that pandemic home-schooling impacted families differently depending upon their socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Well-off families which could afford to have one parent stay at home were less affected than those who had to work and help their children with disabilities at the same time. The virtual schooling situation was also particularly challenging for parents with immigrant backgrounds who might find it hard to communicate with the school and teachers, as well as the relevant parts of the welfare system. Scarce economic resources probably added further to these parents' burdens. However, other conversion factors also influenced the children´s learning and well-being and below I analyse the qualitative data with a particular emphasis on the second sub-research question and the new digital school context.

How to engage and be social in a digitised school context? 'Everybody talked at the same time'

One important lesson which children learn at school is how to navigate social relationships (McDermott, 1977; Milsome and Glanville, 2010; Schonert-Reichl and Hymel, 2007). While academic learning is important, many scholars suggest that the social learning which goes on in the breaks between classes is equally important, and social competence is an integrated dimension of the Norwegian national curriculum (Læreplanen, 2020). During the pandemic, of course, these social spaces were weakened according to what Turid described as 'the anarchistic nature' of social media platforms:

> "One problem seemed to be that the teacher was not able to organise and handle the new digital classroom—for example, socialisation after class but also talking in class. They organised 'class chat' (*klassechat*), and during class chat they all talked with each other. Complete chaos. The teacher struggled with this concept and tried to say to the children, 'everybody has to talk to each other'. However, it became clear that the most popular children tended to dominate the conversation. In this context, Therese [Turid's daughter] struggled and was excluded. Therese struggles to understand the social codes of social media—she posted things that others didn't understand, or that they disliked, and she grew sad and disappointed. We would like to have some guidance with regards to how children with disabilities like Therese can behave on and use these social media platforms. What digital social codes are in place for a nine-year-old kid with disabilities? What does she need to know socially, on social media, to be part of the class? There are several great digital platforms available, but we should also have some guidance with regard to the use of such platforms. If not, these new digital social spaces can be new spaces for bullying and social exclusion. I miss more guidance from the school." (Turid)

To avoid the social exclusion of children with disabilities, authorities must develop guidebooks, policies and models for teachers so they can ensure a socially healthy environment. It is also important to establish a sense of order and ethics related to children's interaction on social media platforms to avoid chaos, anarchy and exploitation. While some studies suggest that certain digital solutions can be a positive conversion factor which can increase learning for some students (Berry, 1999; Blanck, 2014), social media can also be a negative conversion factor which excludes children with disabilities from this form of engagement (Finnvold and Dokken, 2021; Bøhler and Ugreninov, 2021), as Turid argues.

Ada also lamented the lack of oversight on social media platforms in the pandemic-driven virtual classroom:

> "My daughter did not like to be on Facetime when the school organized it. It was too loud, too disorganised. Chaotic. Part of the reason was that most of the children forgot to mute their microphones. And then you had one who wanted to show that he had learned something new on the guitar, and others started singing or shouting, and multiple conversations were going on at the same time. We had no guidelines from the school or the teachers in terms of how to engage on Facetime. And the teacher seemed to be a bit lost in all of this. After a while we decided not to participate further on this platform. We just did our own thing."

Ada, of course, had the time, resources and educational background to carry out an alternative educational program, whereas Thorbjørn, Kristian's father, found this to be much more difficult:

> "If they go back to home-schooling, Kristian will not have any school. I cannot say this to the authorities, but it is the reality. It is better if he loses one month of school than that I assist him in home-schooling. School on social media does not work for him. He gets very angry and will throw the computer or iPad on the ground. Do you know how many iPads he has destroyed? And, if he has to have home-schooling, then I cannot work but I must assist him all the time. It doesn't work for either Kristian or me. If it must be home schooling, there will be no school!"

In all three cases above, social media served as a negative conversion factor which hampered the children's ability to enjoy an everyday education modelled on their own values, visions and needs. It was perhaps worst for Kristian, as the engagement on social media excluded him from actual school, where he regularly participated with the help of several assistants. The virtual classroom hindered these children's sense of capability at school and came to represent a negative conversion factor which could then interact with others — Thorbjørn, for example, could not work at his job if Kristian had to have digital home-schooling. While Turid later nuanced the situation by noting that the increased use of voice recording via social media to give and receive assignments had actually helped Therese's education, most of the interview data suggested that virtual schooling had a negative impact on the everyday education of children with disabilities.

Music as a positive conversion factor and educational resource

One surprising finding in the interview data was related to the importance of music in this new home school context. While only one of the questions addressed music in child education specifically, several parents talked about it at the end of the interview. For example, Ole, Kåre's father, said:

> "You know what, I think music is in fact very important to achieve what we have talked about [education during the pandemic]. One of the best ways for Kåre to learn new things is through music. Rhythm, in particular, is very important, as we use it frequently to teach him language and to increase his vocabulary. Singing is very important. Singing along. We did it more during the pandemic, as we had to do a lot of home-schooling. We were a bit left on our own, and both me and my wife know that Kåre loves music, so we used it more actively. He learns a lot through songs by singing along and remembering melodies, sometimes in combination with images. He can learn new words, letters, numbers—almost everything. In addition, music is one of the things that Kåre enjoys the most. So, music also made the everyday more joyful. At the special school, he often engages musically with other children, and through that he is also able to develop social skills, to

be together with others, and to enjoy a sense of recognition. He cares [about it] and it gives him access to a sense of community [. . .]. In addition, some songs are very useful for learning about movement and increasing his physical abilities, which is crucial, according to the physiotherapist. Songs like 'Ro, ro, ro din båt' (Row, row, row your boat) and 'Julene på bussen de går rundt og rundt' (Wheels on the bus) are both joyful to sing and induce movement for Kåre. He loves it. I think rhythms are particularly important, as he can act upon them, dance, move and participate in the music, and learn new things through this. Learning seems much easier for Kåre when it is through music. His attention seems to increase when there is movement and music in play, and we have used music a lot during the pandemic, as we were very much left on our own. Before, we had between 12 and 15 people who were involved in Kåre's life (physicians, psychiatrist, assistants, etc.), but now it is mainly the two of us and Kåre. That has been a struggle. But music helps."

Translated into capability theory we may, perhaps, interpret Ole´s description as a particular *musical conversion factor* as particular organizations of musical sounds allowed Kåre to enjoy an everyday education which was more attuned to his own needs, visions and values. These musical conversion factors made learning joyful as if learning, for Kåre, was 'converted' from something abstract and boring to an engaging practice as he was singing or moving along a rhythm or a melody. This finding does recall several studies within music education and music therapy which have elaborated upon how music facilitates learning, stimulates well-being, and enables social interaction for children with disabilities (Bunt, 2003; Cohen et al., 2012; Hallam and Council, 2015; Lee, 2014; Rinta, 2019; Yang, 2016). While the pandemic made an already difficult situation more difficult for Ole and his wife, it also made them more aware of how music could help with the everyday education of their son and facilitate learning across subjects and fields. Through music, Kåre could learn new words, letters, numbers, and basic mathematics, as well as complex movements, and it facilitated social interaction and new friendships.

Another parent who talked extensively about the importance of music was Thea's father, Jens. According to him, music had always been important to Thea, but the pandemic and the shutdown of educational services made it even more so. As both Jens and Thea's mother stayed home to take care of their multi-disabled 15-year-old daughter, they were able to use music much more actively:[3]

"You have to understand that Thea's disability is quite complex, so even though she is 15 years old, her mind is more like a four- or five-year-old's, and she has a number of challenges, both physically and intellectually. So, when Thea is at school, it is not so much about learning something and preparing her for a job in the future. We all know that she will not get a normal job anyway, due to her disability. School and learning for Thea are more about learning how to take care of herself—establishing daily routines, brushing her teeth, social interaction, and learning to read and calculate at a basic level. During the pandemic, we learned that music was crucial to get her through these everyday rituals. Well, in one sense, we already knew it, but it became clearer during the pandemic as we both were home to take care of Thea. For example, to wake Thea up in the morning, we always play the song from the *Frost* movie. She loves it and always wants to get out of bed when we put it on. And it is impossible for Thea to take a shower if we don't sing and dance with her on the way to the shower. She always dances her way into the shower and sings her way

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[3] Jens received fully paid permission to stay home to take care of his daughter during the pandemic by his employer and was very grateful for that, and his wife and been a housewife for 3 years

out of the bed. Lately, she has learned to move her hips, thanks to music. She loves it, and the physiotherapist says that those movements are really great for her. Music is a great tool to develop her physical skills. And she also has her own song to go to the toilet. […] After breakfast, we always sing Thorbjørn Egner's 'Den uheldige mannen' to structure her day, so that she knows what to do. Each day we sing a new version of it, with new letters to help her remember the plan of the day— to get through the everyday rituals and to plan ahead. She often says "Dad, sing about that plan we have for that day'. We sing all the time in order to make her do things. Lately, she has been a bit grumpy—after all, she is a teenager now in the middle of puberty and everything. But when she is in a bad mood, we always play Kaptein Sabeltann or Katie Perry's 'California Girls'. Then she immediately gets into a good mood. I play a number of instruments, and we have always used music in Thea's life, but during the pandemic we used it even more. I think it was partly because we were both home to take care of Thea, and, in addition, many of the other services were no longer available. Music both enables her to learn and increases her sense of well-being."

Jens's story illustrates yet another example of how musical conversion factors allowed Thea to live a life and have an educational experience more aligned with her own values, needs and preferences. Singing, dancing and listening helped her through the basic routines of everyday life and through her school lessons, so that she could hopefully live a more independent life as an adult, perhaps in her own apartment. This echoes similar findings in studies within music education (Skogdal, 2015; Jones, 2015; Jellison and Taylor, 2007) and music therapy (Berg-Olsen, 2015; Brotons, 2001; Flower and Oldfield, 2008), but more research is needed on the ways in which music can enhance the capability of children with disabilities and facilitate learning, well-being and social interaction in novel ways and in dialogue with other educational practices.

Concluding discussion

This study explored how children with disabilities in Norway were able to enjoy home-schooling according to their own interests during the pandemic. Through an analysis of eight qualitative interviews with parents of children with disabilities, I examined how digital technology, socio-economic background and musical practices served as conversion factors which either hampered or facilitated adaptive education according to capability theory.

Three lessons can be learned from this study. First, socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds became even more consequential during the pandemic, as many parents were left more on their own and offered less support from educational institutions and the welfare services due to various infection-control measures. This placed single mothers and parents with few resources and/or immigrant backgrounds in a particularly vulnerable position as they struggled to make the ends meet while absorbing all of the new responsibilities of home-schooling.

Second, many people experienced the new virtual classroom as chaotic, which marginalised children with disabilities who had trouble handling online social codes, either on teaching and learning platforms or through social media. While some digital tools were indeed productive (children with mobility impairments, for example, could receive and hand in assignments through audio files sent via email or social media platforms), the interviews showed that the virtual classroom created new forms of social exclusion, particularly for children with disabilities.

A third lesson from the study was that musical practices represented an important part of some children's everyday education which parents discovered anew during the pandemic as they took on their more active roles. Music facilitated learning while simultaneously contributing to a sense of well-being and social participation for their children. More interdisciplinary work is needed to explore how music can further help children with disabilities.

In one sense, these findings are not new. A number of studies have illuminated how music, digital technology and socio-economic background influence the life and education of persons with disabilities (Howe, 2020; Biggeri and Mehrotra, 2011; Blanck, 2014). However, the qualitative data analysed in this study suggest that some of these mechanisms may have intensified during the pandemic and more research is needed on this matter. Some theoretical lessons may also, perhaps, be explored. The three empirical findings may be theorized as digital, musical- and socio-economic conversion factors which constrain or enable education for persons with disabilities and used as conceptual frames for future studies. At least it is worthwhile discussing, and interpreting, how musical practices, digital technologies, and socio-economic features may hamper and facilitate the educational experience and well-being of persons with disabilities.

In short, more empirical and conceptual work is needed to fully grasp how the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing differences associated with socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds in Norwegian society (and elsewhere) among other things. It is difficult to generalize from qualitative studies, so it is particularly important to carry out systematic surveys and other forms of quantitative studies as well. It is also important to further explore the everyday education of children with disabilities according to the capability approach and theorize how different conversion factors manifests in the lives of particular people.

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