

The Capability Approach and Inclusive University Education

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Abstract

Injustices of higher education which concern widening participation professionals occur in three phases: coming into higher education (access); being at university (participation); and going out of university into the rest of life (outcomes). To illustrate how the capability approach can be used for thinking about distributive inequalities in higher education, this presentation focuses on participation (post entry widening participation). Participation in higher education is conceptualised as capability expanding, that is as expanding opportunities and freedoms for individuals to be and/or do what they value.

The presentation begins by clarifying the core ideas and principles of capabilitarian theory, which has arisen from welfare economics and is based on interest in human development and social justice. I turn then to the comparatively small number of existing capabilities lists related to participation in higher education, showing how such lists are generated. All these lists include a capability for knowledge (often related to learning and/or imagination). So, by way of illustration, the presentation will focus on the capability for 'epistemic contribution' which has been identified as a universal human capability and which is being explored in a current research project on South African higher education. I will show that students from extremely low-income and rural backgrounds, on the one hand, arrive capable of making valuable contributions and, on the other, must be offered educational arrangements which expand the capability of contributing to society's stock of meanings.

Some Core Terms and Ideas

- Poverty or deprivation are defined as the contraction of freedoms and opportunities to live a flourishing and valued life.
- Wellbeing: expansion of freedoms and opportunities to live a flourishing and valued life.
- 'Capabilities': the freedoms and opportunities that allow an individual to choose who s/he wants to be and do.
- 'Functionings': actual beings and doings (or achievements)
- 'Conversion factors': e.g. Social, personal, geographical. Social/educational arrangements
- Policies and practices are preconditions (means) for capability expansion and so are evaluated according to whether they expand or constrain capabilities and functionings (ends).
- The principle that the interests of every person should be served or protected.

Capability Lists/Sets

Martha Nussbaum's List of 10 universal, comprehensive human capabilities: life; bodily health; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; control over one's environment.

Participation in Higher Education Lists/Sets

Walker (2006)	Wilson-Strydom (2015)	Review of higher education research, McLean (2018)	MIRATHO (provisional in 2019)
Knowledge and imagination	Knowledge and imagination	Knowledge of the field	Epistemic contribution
		Deliberative participation	Epistemic contribution
Practical reason	Practical reason	Practical reason	Navigational and narrative reasoning
Learning disposition	Learning disposition		
Social relations and social networks	Social relations and social networks	Affiliation	Ubuntu
Respect, dignity and recognition	Respect, dignity and recognition	Respect and dignity	Inclusion
Emotional integrity	Emotional health	Emotional health	Subsistence capabilities
Educational resilience		Resilience	
	Language competence and confidence		Subsistence capabilities
Bodily integrity			Work

The Capability for Epistemic Contribution (Fricker, 2015)

'[An] internal capability for forming and sharing beliefs about the world [and] not have them rejected or under-rated.'

'Testimonial injustice happens when a person offers their view on something [...] but receives a deflated level of credibility owing to prejudice on the hearer's part.' (relating to 'informational materials')

'Hermeneutical injustice [is] the kind of epistemic injustice that relates to the creation and use of interpretive materials. This occurs when someone who is hermeneutically marginalised (in some degree, in some area of her social experience) makes an unsuccessful or semi-unsuccessful attempt to

render an experience communicatively intelligible to others, where the lack of intelligibility is significantly caused by her hermeneutical marginalisation. Someone counts as hermeneutically marginalised when she enjoys less than some reasonable level of participation in the generation of shared social meanings (concepts, interpretive tropes, and so on).’

Potential sources of knowledge (epistemic materials) relevant to succeeding in higher education: Community cultural wealth constitutes these capitals: Aspirational, Linguistic, Familial, Social, Navigational and Resistant (Yosso, 2005)

Pedagogy and curriculum mediate epistemic contribution by providing ‘**epistemological access**’ (Morrow, 2009).

Questions

- Why capabilities?
- What capabilities (freedoms and opportunities) would characterise having been at university, or put another way, being a graduate?
- What conversion factors are necessary for epistemic contribution as a capability of higher education?
- How can the NERUPI framework be used in a capability-type of way?

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