

SECTION TWO

Within Higher Education

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An evaluative framework for a socially just institution

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it's like one time I had to realize I'm not like other students and I felt like it was unfair for my lecturers to treat me like the rest of the other students and no one knows and no one cares you just have to adapt and be whatever you need to be. (Lindi)

Introduction

Lindi arrived at a privileged South African university from rural Kwa-Zulu-Natal, having been top of her class most of her life. She suddenly found herself unable to participate as an equal in her new environment. This is the situation many South Africans find themselves in when coming to university for the first time, or when starting a postgraduate course at a new university. In this chapter we consider what institutional arrangements would be necessary for students to participate as equals in higher education regardless of – or in fact *taking into account* – social class, race, gender, sexuality, ablebodiedness, language or religion. We view higher education as both a valuable process and an outcome. But what does this mean in contexts of severe inequality? How do we achieve education as a public good, and how do we know when we are achieving it? To answer these questions, we make use of a normative framework which assists us in examining the values that underpin higher education policies and practices. We regard this as an important stepping stone in building visions of what may be possible in higher education institutions. It allows alternative discursive spaces to be opened up for public debate and policy development in higher education.

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A comprehensive and dynamic approach towards achieving higher education as a public good can, we suggest, be achieved by combining three important contemporary normative frameworks:

- the capabilities approach of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, which has been applied to higher education by Nussbaum and Melanie Walker, amongst others
- the social justice approach of Nancy Fraser, which emphasises the complementarity of a politics of recognition, representation and distribution
- the political ethic of care approach, based on the work of Joan Tronto.

Rather than providing explanations for why inequalities exist, these approaches are normative frameworks – they help us to interrogate what we do about social justice in higher education and how we judge or evaluate it. We provide examples from our experience as educators and from our research in higher education in order to elucidate the various approaches. Our final intention is to use the three approaches to suggest an institution-wide framework that takes into account the various dimensions of the university as an institution so that it can indeed live up to the question asked by Soudien in chapter three: ‘What options are open for the system in dealing with the issues of access and quality, openness and excellence?’

The capabilities approach

As Martin Hall stresses in chapter two, the value of this approach lies in its conception of higher education as less instrumental and more transformative. Walker (2006) sees the purpose of university education as including both intrinsic and instrumental purposes, and as involving personal development, economic opportunities and becoming educated citizens. The capabilities approach thus provides a view of higher education as ethical as well as instrumental, producing skills for economic development alongside human beings who are capable of critical thought and connection (Unterhalter, 2009). Nussbaum (2002:302) stresses the formative value of higher education in producing critical and empathic individuals able to consider what it means to be human, ‘producing Socratic citizens who are capable of thinking for themselves, arguing with tradition, and understanding with sympathy the conditions of lives different from their own’. Amartya Sen (2005; 2006) also emphasises the importance of critical thinking and public debate as well as the inclusion of subjugated knowledges and marginalised voices.

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Capabilities are opportunities to flourish or achieve well-being in the form of functionings, which means to be and to do what a person has reason to value. In the context of higher education, examples of functionings are graduate attributes, such as being critically literate or numerate or ethically and environmentally aware and active (Alkire and Deneulin, 2009; Unterhalter, 2009; Walker, 2010). Conversion factors refer to the ability of the individual to translate resources into desired functionings and are conceptualised in three categories: personal or internal conversion factors such as genetic predispositions; social conversion factors such as higher education policies and power relations (gender, race, class); and environmental conversion factors such as the physical or built environment (Robeyns, 2011).

For Walker (2010a:898) social justice requires the 'equality of capability for diverse students and not just those whose backgrounds and cultural capital are taken for granted'. She continues: 'the practical question that follows is how universities address pedagogical obstacles to student achievement and develop student capability. It leads us to ask questions such as: Are valued capabilities distributed fairly in and through university education? Walker's approach encourages us to think about what resources need to be put in place if individuals are to benefit from them and realise the capabilities as 'functionings'.

Despite the importance of removing 'pedagogic obstacles', often referred to in the literature as 'unfreedoms' (Deneulin and Shahani, 2009), a capabilities approach sees agency and structure as functioning alongside each other (Walker, 2006). Walker refers to Sen on the point that being free depends to a significant extent on the choices of others:

... for example, university teaching and a university's arrangement to support equality of capabilities for all students. While the idea of opportunity to choose a valuable life is central, the individual is not viewed as a freely choosing subject as in neo-liberal thinking; social dimensions of choice are acknowledged. (Walker, 2010a:904)

Robeyns (2011) alerts us to three specific ways in which the capabilities conceptual framework can be used in higher education: the assessment and evaluation of individual well-being, through social arrangements and via social interventions including social policies.

Attention to capabilities and the conversion factors needed to achieve functionings cannot be the sole responsibility of the pedagogic realm. It also pertains to the professional and intellectual abilities of students and academics

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as teachers, educational arrangements, university conditions and social arrangements (Walker, 2010b). Walker (2006) refers to Sen on the importance of having a participatory and inclusive process to ascertain what capabilities are important in a particular setting. She stresses the value of the human capabilities approach as a framework to assess the purpose of higher education, diverse individuals' needs and what they would require to achieve these capabilities. The framework is intended to assess the needs of the general and the particular; in other words, both global and local contexts. An example of this would be the functioning of critical reflection: is the student provided with the conversion factors to achieve this functioning, not only by being provided with physical resources such as texts to read, but, furthermore, with the opportunity to engage with these texts in a critical manner, via interactive and supportive teaching methods? We should consider not only what resources are provided to the student and what their needs are, but what conversion factors exist for them to acquire that functioning.

To illustrate the relationship between capabilities, conversion factors and student needs, which are influenced by their biographies, we take two examples from a study conducted on student and academic biographies at the University of Stellenbosch entitled 'Identity, Teaching and Learning'. Riana, a white Afrikaans professor in the Linguistics Department, practised forms of academic debate in the home which, she argued, were appropriate in her disciplinary setting:

Through the way in which we were brought up I did get a lot of ... a lot of academic debate ... you have to articulate your argument clearly ... if things are different then you have to show that they're different and not start muddling things ... and that part of being educated [is typical] in this department. (Leibowitz, 2009:269)

With regards to conversion factors, Riana required no particular institutional arrangements to support her achievement of the more academic capabilities because of her home background. A different set of conversion factors was indicated by Lindi, a black IsiZulu speaking postgraduate student studying soil sciences. Lindi grew up in a rural area (physical environment), and because her parents were well off compared with her classmates at school (social conversion factor of class), she saw herself as privileged and came top of her class. However she could understand no English when she finished primary school and because the standard of education around her was low, she was ignorant of how little she knew in terms of the dominant discourses: 'Because you know you are one of the best students and you are from a rural

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area, you think you are the best but actually you are not and that was very obvious.’

When Lindi arrived at university she felt a measure of panic: ‘I could do the maths but when it came to writing I would just panic and remember nothing.’ To acquire the functioning of academic literacy, Lindi required institutional arrangements that would support her acquisition of English and Afrikaans as academic languages. She achieved this with the support of additional one to one mentoring, as well as strong moral support and encouragement from the Dean of the faculty. She was, however, instructed to register for an extended degree programme, completing her first year over two years, and this upset her greatly. One could argue that the institution, assuming what her needs were, believed they could be met through resources such as additional time and support to study in the sciences. Her particular need, however, was for more support with learning English and Afrikaans for academic purposes. This points to the need for greater care when establishing what an individual’s needs are in relation to conversion factors, as is stressed by the capabilities approach.

In the next section we consider Fraser’s views on social justice, which focus more directly on what ‘participatory parity’ might entail.

A three-dimensional view of social justice

Nancy Fraser sees the major goal of social justice as ‘participatory parity’, by which she means being able to interact as peers in an equitable way in social life. In an important contribution to the idea of equality of opportunity, she posits the idea of the complementarity of three dimensions necessary for participatory parity: the distribution of resources, the politics of recognition (2008a and b) and the politics of representation and belonging (2009).

Redistribution of resources at the level of higher education could refer to resources such as access to computers, mobile phones or even being able to afford meals, which some students may not be able to do. How an inadequate distribution of resources, such as financial aid and access to transport, affects a student’s ability to participate in university life is demonstrated in this example taken from research conducted at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) on student needs:

My financial aid does not adequately cover my fees and puts additional strain on financial constraints at home. And I have to worry about finance for the following year which impacts on my concentration and exam results. (Bozalek, 2010)

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Recognition is concerned with how people are regarded in relation to the social markers or distinctive attributes that are ascribed to them. Misrecognition, in terms of a lack of respect for individuals on the basis of their social markers – race, gender or religion, for example – prevents people from interacting as full partners or in an equitable manner with others. In the research on student needs conducted at UWC, much of the commentary came from students complaining about instances in which they perceived themselves to be misrecognised because of their race. There were also reports of additional instances where students felt misrecognised at the university because they were from other parts of Africa:

I'm a male Nigerian that was not supposed to be at UWC and was expected to drop my academic quest to go and sell drugs. Not just at school but at the hospital where I do my clinical hours. (Bozalek, 2010)

Rather than assume that one has to conform to dominant norms, a social justice perspective aims to redress misrecognition by replacing values that impede parity of participation with ones that foster or enable it (Fraser, 2000). The range of ways it does this include institutional and policy changes, since it holds that if institutional practices have led to institutional harms then these require redress. The practices which are normalised and appear to be universal should be exposed for their distinctiveness. In other cases their distinctiveness requires de-emphasis. An example of a distinctive practice that needed to be recognised and dealt with comes from the Identity, Teaching and Learning research we have previously referred to. Newly appointed at Stellenbosch University, Nothemba, a black psychologist whose first and second languages are IsiXhosa and English respectively, attended a one-day orientation programme at the University. The entire event was conducted in Afrikaans and she found the experience 'traumatic' and did not participate at all.

The political dimension refers to social belonging and provides a frame for determining who counts as a social member. It also concerns whose voice will be heard as legitimate and who thus has a right to access and structural arrangements for support and care. Fraser writes:

Far from being of marginal significance, frame setting is amongst the most consequential of political decisions. Constituting both members and non-members in a single stroke, this decision effectively excludes the latter from the universe of those entitled to consideration within the community in matters of distribution, recognition and ordinary political justice. (2009:19)

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The value of the distinctions between the three dimensions is evident when we analyse attempts of transformatory educational practice. One such attempt is an educational design project which the authors of this chapter were part of. This project is discussed in detail by Nicholls and Rohleder in chapter nine. The course was extremely successful in getting students from contrasting universities – University of the Western Cape is more working-class than the ‘exclusive’ University of Stellenbosch – to engage across boundaries of social difference, which for many was a first-time experience (Rohleder *et al*, 2008; Leibowitz *et al*, 2010; Bozalek *et al*, 2010). Thus whilst issues of recognition and misrecognition received much attention in the dialogue of the students, issues of distribution and maldistribution had not been sufficiently taken into account and planned for. Examples of this include the difficulties students from UWC sometimes had in accessing computers; the fact that students from SU were more likely to have transport to sort out group preparation for presentations; and the greater access students from more privileged backgrounds had to powerful literacies such as use of powerpoint or traditional academic texts. In the third iteration of the course the social work students from UWC were each issued with their own laptops as part of another scheme. The positive impact this had on their participation was striking.

The three dimensions are not only significant in relation to an individual’s participation in present educational situations; they inform students’, academics’ and administrators’ biographies. This implies that while institutional arrangements to achieve participatory parity must take into account how aspects of the three dimensions influence the current phase of an individual’s trajectory, they must also consider how individuals came to function as they do. Examples of students’ biographies affecting their academic experiences are provided in Leibowitz (2009).

When considering how to encourage the participation of individuals or groups in higher education, not one of the three dimensions of social justice can be ignored. The dimensions interact in a complex manner over time and their impact will vary for each individual. In each higher education setting, one cannot simply legislate or categorically predict which individuals or groups will require this or that structural arrangement – and surely, one could not imagine a university with millions of permutations, each arranged per individual! How individuals’ needs are considered within a broader political, ethical and philosophical framework is the focus of the next section.

The political ethics of care

Tronto's political ethics of care approach (1993) sets the terms for the dialogue required to develop a strategy for caring institutions and the nature of the strategy itself. For Tronto, aspects of care 'need to be worked out consciously ... become more visible and require a deliberate, political process to enact them' (2010:162). Furthermore, she argues that we require formal practices to review and evaluate how well we are meeting these obligations.

Care, according to Tronto, is 'about meeting needs' (1993:116). Referring to Nussbaum's work on capabilities she says that 'humans need the help of others in coming to develop their capacities' (1993:140). Care should be considered as a practice rather than an emotion or disposition, as this allows us to take the full context into account, including the needs of the care-giver and the care receiver. Tronto also discourages the tendency to sentimentalise or privatise care and to view it in a larger social and political context as well as that which is more personal (1993:137). For Tronto, there are four elements of care as a practice. The first is attentiveness: noticing the needs of those around us; the second is responsibility: making certain that the needs are met; the third is competence: the hands-on work of care-giving; and the fourth is responsiveness: how care receivers respond to the care. The example Tronto provides for competence is apposite:

Imagine a teacher in an inadequately funded school system who is ordered to teach mathematics even though he does not know mathematics. Isn't there something wrong with morally condemning a teacher who does his best, since the fault is not of his own making, but of the inadequacy of the resources? (1993:113)

This comment suggests that care involves more than one institution: it involves a strategic approach across the system as a whole. It further suggests that it is the responsibility of institutions, and of individuals within them, to collaborate and share with each other, including across North and South divides.

Care also involves an acknowledgement of one's vulnerability and dependence. Lindi, for example, requires care from the other students or academics, while Deans are dependent on cleaners of their offices in order to work competently, just as they are on faculty administrators and tutors to take care of their students in small groups for additional learning opportunities.

One danger associated with the practice of care that Tronto (2010) warns us against is paternalism: deciding on behalf of others what their needs are.

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Thus, the decision that Lindi needs an extra year of study in her content areas can be viewed as a form of paternalism. A second danger Tronto (2010) identifies is parochialism, where one restricts care to a very localised level and becomes too concerned with those in their immediate caring context and pays no attention to those at a distance. This takes us back to Nancy Fraser's notion of representation and belonging, where an institution may be very caring but only for those whom it regards as having a right to be there and as belonging to the institution.

In Tronto's view, the practice of care does not imply that the self is subsumed in the caring relationship and that 'to fail to care for oneself impairs one's capacity to function as a fully responsible moral agent' (Monchinski, 2010: 98). The lecturers of first-year students who neglect their own professional development and only pay attention to the needs of the students is just as likely to face burnout as they are to become resentful towards colleagues who are promoted ahead of them because they did not care so much for students. This affirms the requirement for an institutional approach in which the needs of all are negotiated. Further, the political ethic of care, like the capability approach, sees an important role for agency: 'an ethics of care is a flexible ethic responsive to context and communities and demands autonomy and agency from individuals' (Monchinski, 2010:82). The system should therefore not patronise students as helpless victims and deny them the opportunity to exercise agency.

While students are care receivers they are also care-givers – for others in their homes, families and communities and in the classroom or the residence. From this point of view their active participation in a dialogue about all aspects of their educational experience becomes essential. This calls for curriculum design that encourages the emergence of graduate attributes such as dialogue, collaboration, agency and engagement with the 'other'. In the project discussed by Nicholls and Rohleder in chapter nine, in which we collaborated, we placed students into groups of six or seven, ensuring a mix of educational and disciplinary backgrounds within each group. The students reported that they established ground rules for working together collaboratively. They did this spontaneously, as they had learnt to negotiate caregiving in their previous three years of study in the human service professions. We contend that learning to work collaboratively and practicing care in relation to the learning of fellow students is an essential element of the undergraduate experience that all students should undergo – and not only in the health or caring sciences.

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How, then, does an institution ensure that it is a caring institution? Tronto outlines the three aspects of care that should be worked out:

a clear account of power in the care relationship and thus a recognition of the need for a politics of care at every level; second, a way for care to remain particularistic and pluralistic; and third, that care should have clear, defined, acceptable purposes. (2010:162)

Elements of care that are normally taken for granted or go unspoken should be made explicit. The political ethic of care takes into account the need for a discursive space in which the needs of all within an institution can be understood, negotiated, allocated and evaluated. By 'particularistic', Tronto means that each person or setting may be different. By 'pluralistic', she means that there is more than one way to achieve an end, and further, that people may enjoy trying out different ways to achieve specific ends. Tronto acknowledges that caring for different needs and at different levels can be immensely complex and difficult to negotiate. For this reason, how the politics of care is negotiated, and thus how organisations make their decisions, becomes extremely important: 'non-family care can be outstanding in its quality, but only if organisations that provide care also care about their own ways of working (Tronto, 2010:169).

Conclusion

Writers on all three of the frameworks have provided models or lists of questions for institutions to use to examine whether the institutional arrangements they provide enable flourishing, equal participation and allow people to live as best as possible. Pointers towards such a schematic representation that can serve as a heuristic for universities to reflect and design backwards are provided with regard to higher education by Walker *et al* (2010:8). Tronto's 'seven warning signs that institutions are not caring well' (2010:163ff) also provides a useful set of possible indicators. Our synthesis of the three approaches can be summarised in the list of questions for each institution to ask itself. This list demonstrates that education for the public good is based on attention to process as well as to outcome. By indicating the overarching and interrelated nature of all the dimensions that have to be considered, it demonstrates that attention to social justice requires attention to budget, will and effort.

We stress the importance of explicit, ethically informed and democratic dialogue at all levels at higher education institutions about what we want to achieve and how to go about it. The importance of democratic dialogue is

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emphasised in all three normative paradigms that we have expanded on in this chapter. To quote Fraser (2008b:290): ‘what could once be called the ‘theory of social justice’ now appears as the ‘theory of *democratic justice*.’

Questions for each institution to ask of itself:

From the capabilities approach

What is the stated purpose of our teaching? What capability-based graduate attributes do we aspire to produce?

What unfreedoms or pedagogic obstacles exist at the institution and for our students (and, for that matter, our lecturers?) (These are personal, social and environmental)

What conversion factors or institutional arrangements have we put in place for students (and lecturers) to achieve these as functionings? (These may be in relation to individual well-being, social arrangements and interventions).

From Fraser's tri-valent view of social justice

What aspects of maldistribution require attention?

What aspects of misrecognition require attention?

Are all students (and lecturers) seen as legitimate ‘citizens’ in an institution and given a voice?

From Joan Tronto's political ethics of care

Do we have formal practices in place to review how we are meeting our caring responsibilities as an institution?

Are we attentive to the needs of students (and lecturers)?

Are we responsible in meeting the needs of students (and lecturers)?

Are we competent in meeting the needs of students (and lecturers)?

How do students respond to our teaching and learning?

How do we approach needs and care? Do we assume for the other what their needs are? Are we caring for the needs of present and potential citizens? Is there a discursive space in which needs can be negotiated? Who gets to define needs in the institution?

Are students and lecturers given the opportunity to practice and receive care?

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We have brought together three key normative frameworks from development and education, politics and philosophy to set the basis for proactive discussions on the public good in higher education institutions. Whilst we have focused our study on the individual institution, it is clear from the discussion that many aspects of social justice require a broader gaze at the educational system as a whole (Bozalek and Boughey, 2012) and at society more broadly, since educational institutions are also a product of the socio-cultural and economic phenomena that envelop them. They are influenced by broader societal influences, which include issues such as recognition and distribution in the public domain. What learners are able to do once they graduate depends not only on what happens in their institutions, but on how their achievements are recognised socially and in the professions, thus the 'rules of exchange' and 'enabling conditions' (Luke, 2008:350) existent in society.

Several key elements are evident in all three approaches. Most importantly, any attempt at working towards social justice in higher education is necessarily complex, and must be seen within a broad, systemic approach. This approach involves attention to the needs of students, academics and administrators, and the at times conflicting needs that require negotiation and dialogue – as Nancy Fraser (1989:116) puts it, 'the politics of needs interpretation'. Attempts to meet the varied needs should be planned for proactively, but not in such a manner that these are taken for granted and bureaucratically catered for. Three important aspects of the process are the process itself, the need for an explicit evaluative framework against which to measure how well the institution is meeting needs, and a clear sense of the purpose of higher education. Interventions based on these evaluative frameworks would include educational and social arrangements. It would consider the policy environments as well as material arrangements and cultural practices. Responses to needs vary in terms of quantity and nature. Consequently, the institutional arrangements to meet the needs of Lindi would vary significantly from those to meet the needs of Johann, Riana or the student from Nigeria. Finally, these needs are not to be seen as commodities or as fixed in nature (Fraser, 1989; Tronto, 2010), but as needs generated via the misrecognition, misrepresentation and maldistribution in our unequal society. These forms of injustice require attention and engagement by all roleplayers in higher education, and they require attention to the needs of all roleplayers. This requires a measure of agency so as to achieve the human flourishing and participatory parity that higher education can deliver, the 'promise' that it should measure up to.

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