An Evaluative Framework for Social Justice in Higher Education Teaching and Learning

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Introduction

In this presentation/paper we would like to address the following two questions in relation to social justice in higher education teaching and learning:

- What framework would be useful to make judgements about whether institutional contexts are conducive to student flourishing and wellbeing ?
- What sorts of practices and considerations would need to be implemented in the South African context in order to achieve student flourishing and wellbeing?

The importance of analysing moral frameworks

- Alert us to what is important in social arrangements in higher education
- Provide the means to weigh up and make complex moral and political judgements about the adequacy of social arrangements for human well-being
- Examine taken-for-granted assumptions
- Examine limitations of conceptions

Introduction

In this paper/presentation we examine the usefulness of certain normative frameworks relating to social justice and care:

- The human capabilities approach of Nussbaum and Sen
- Nancy Fraser's concept of justice
- The political ethics of care as developed by theorists such as Tronto and Sevenhuijsen

We argue that all of these approaches are useful for developing a framework through which judgements about the adequacy of care, participation and human flourishing can be made regarding teaching and learning in particular higher education contexts

Social justice, the ethics of care and difference

- Social Justice approaches are traditionally concerned with how social resources are distributed in society
- Partially useful as no accommodation of difference
- The idea of 'rational economic man' who is disembodied, autonomous, independent and equal is the normative ideal of a citizen that John Rawls had in mind. This man is furthermore able to enter voluntarily into exchanges of goods and social cooperation with other citizens for his own benefit (Rawls, 1971; Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 2009)
- The human capabilities approaches of Sen and Nussbaum, Nancy Fraser's concept of justice and the political ethics of care do in fact accommodate difference, particularity, otherness, plurality and context – the **concrete other** as opposed to the **generalised other** (Rawls, 1971) about whose circumstances nothing is known (the 'veil of ignorance')

Questions these approaches allow us to ask in relation to teaching and learning in higher education

- What are students able to be and to do? What human capabilities can they exercise?
- How are students privileged or disadvantaged and what implications does this have for their lives?
- Are students able to interact on a par or an equal basis with others?
- How do students fare in being able to give and receive care in situations of their own choice?

A summary of each of these approaches

- Human capabilities
- Fraser's three dimensional notion of social justice
- Political ethics of care

The Human Capabilities Approach

- Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum pioneers of this approach
- Addresses both general and particular
- Takes into account how people are positioned and what they are able to do with personal, social and material resources
- Does not assume that we are equally placed in relation to resources – resources in themselves aren't meaningful in assessing human flourishing
- Particularity and context are important in deciding which resources are needed & how effective they will be for being able to flourish

The Human Capabilities Approach (conted)

- Brings in how people are differently placed and challenges the liberal idea of equal agents (Rawlsian social justice)
- Looks at people as ends rather than as means to ends and as valuable in their own right
- Sources of agency, rather than aggregations e.g. as individuals rather than as homogeneous groups
- The good life, according to Sen (1984; 2001) and Nussbaum (1995; 2000; 2006) is the ability to do valuable things and achieve valuable states, as well as being able to choose from different livings and meaningful affiliations, and not to be constrained into a particular form of life.

The Human Capabilities Approach (conted)

- In order to promote the good life, participatory parity and human flourishing, a particular person's needs in terms of his/her current situation would have to be considered. First generation literate rural person studying for the first time vs urban middle class person from literate home would need more & different resources to attain capability
- According to the capabilities approach, individual preferences or desires are not always reliable indicators of human needs, as those who are advantaged or disadvantaged easily become accustomed to their situations and adjust their expectations and aspirations accordingly e.g. students' needs assessments

Nancy Fraser's views on justice

- For Fraser (2008; 2009) the ability to participate in an equitable way as full partners in interaction with others and full members of society (participatory parity) is the ultimate goal of social justice
- In order to achieve this you need a redistribution of resources (economic), recognition of status (cultural) (bivalent view of justice) and she later (2008; 2009) added social belonging and representation (political)
- Recognition has to do with how people are regarded in relation to the social markers or distinctive attributes that are ascribed to them
- Social belonging is about inclusion and exclusion – who counts as a member of the community entitled to make justice claims. Transcends the geopolitical space into transnationalism

The political ethics of care

- In addition to who is able to do certain things and to achieve certain states, who has access to resources, who is afforded recognition or respect, who is excluded or included, it is also necessary to ask who gets assigned to what work, i.e. what responsibilities do people have in terms of paid work and in terms of unpaid care of dependents.
- The political ethics of care approach enables one to ask questions about the distribution of caregiving work in society, the relations of power which affect this work and are affected by it, and the sort of practices engaged in to ensure the care of family members. It thus raises questions about care, dependency and vulnerability in relation to people's participatory parity and human flourishing.

The political ethics of care (contd)

- Assumption that the world consists of independent, self-sufficient, equally placed humans is erroneous but prevalent – we are all dependent at different times of our lives and dependents all need to be cared for.
- Recognition that dependency is an inevitable condition in human life and that it is usually assumed to be a familial obligation is important for people's participation and for their survival. In terms of the ethics of care, dependency is seen as a normal part of human life, and one which should be considered in social sharing of burdens, just as education, health services and road maintenance are (Kittay 2002).
- Joan Tronto's (1993) notion of 'privileged irresponsibility' and Val Plumwood's (1993) 'backgrounding', both of which involve the denial of dependency on another, where the services of the other are used but not acknowledged, encapsulate a dark side of the refusal to recognise dependency or care work as valuable and our own vulnerability in this respect.

Normative framework for judging individual's abilities to achieve participatory parity and flourish

Indicators of social justice	Social Marker				
	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Prior Education	Ability	Sexuality
Recognition					
Access to resources					
Responsibilities					
Representation					
Goals of social justice and political ethics of care	Human flourishing/well-being; participatory parity; ability to give and receive care in situations of choice				

Systemic model for social justice w.r.t. teaching and learning (focus on the student)

Arenas	Nancy Fraser's three dimensions (2009)		
	Distribution	**Recognition**	**Representation**
	"Fair distribution of material resources to all"	"Respect for the culture and identity of all"	"Opportunity for the representation of all"
Administration **Planning** **Policy and directives** **Policy support** **Programme design** **Teaching**	Access to residence Access to computers/labs/ bandwidth Access to food Software facilitates access by all Access to academic discourse (foundation programmes, writing intensive modules, academic literacy modules, restructured programmes)	"Legislates" opportunities for students from all cultures to pray, or for languages of students to be validated Validates prior knowledges, references or languages of students in modules	Ensures that class representatives or SRC represents the voice of all Uses information about students' subjugated knowledge to inform curriculum design

Remaining Issues

- University is embedded within a macro distributional context (economy) and culture of context
- Universities are themselves dependent on the context, and can only do "so much" to ensure social justice on their own – can we work towards interdependence or collaboration between them?
- Human agency remains crucial. One should read the previous table against the light of an "interplay" of context and human agency (Margaret Archer, 2000).

Conclusion

- If we want to ensure social justice in relation to teaching and learning, we require a systemic, multifacetted approach which takes into account all aspects of a student's being and becoming, and which requires all role-players to play a part.
- It requires dialogue and a willingness to engage imaginatively but critically with the life and learning experiences of each other.

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JAT system of Fraser (1989)

- The American political theorist, Nancy Fraser (1989: 154) describes this as a distinctive style of operating in service delivery and refers to the system as 'the juridical-administrative-therapeutic state apparatus' (JAT). This apparatus operates according to and works in practice by linking together the juridical-administrative-therapeutic procedures. The juridical element refers to service users' welfare rights which can be condoned or denied depending on the interpretation of the need and benefit claimed. This element then links with the administrative element in which service users have to petition their needs to an administrative body. It is only this body which is empowered to decide on whether service users' claims meet administratively defined criteria or not. The modus operandi which then follows is the therapeutic element when social workers concern themselves with interpreting these needs as mental health and behavioural issues which require intervention in service users' lives. As a result the welfare system executes political policy that in practice appears to be non-political (Fraser, 1989:154).