Conceptualising cosmopolitan values in internationalised higher education: A capabilities approach (0029)

Stephanie Bridges
University of Nottingham, UK

Introduction

The increasingly internationalised nature of higher education has enhanced the potential for students to benefit from a more diverse student body, yet there are gaps between the rhetoric and ideals of internationalisation and the lived realities for both home and international students (Harrison 2015; Sovič 2009).

As a contribution to addressing the issue, this study drew upon two main theoretical resources: Kwame Anthony Appiah's (2008, 2006) conception of cosmopolitan values, in imagining what kind of graduate might emerge from an internationalised higher education; and Amartya Sen's (1992, 2009) 'capability' approach, as a means of both evaluating and promoting students' intercultural development through learning environments.

Conceptualising and actualising intercultural values: the 'capability approach'

'Intercultural competence' describes the acquisition of cultural knowledge, communicative skills and openness to difference through internationalised curricula and cross-cultural interactions (Alred et al. 2006; Deardorff 2006). Rather than define what should be 'acquired', the identification of capabilities offers all students opportunity and freedom to develop more intercultural, cosmopolitan selves through their interactions.

The 'capability approach' (Sen 1992; Sen 2009) promotes the quality and value of individual lives through expanding freedom and choice. A 'capability' is an opportunity or freedom to do or be what one considers valuable. The exercising of capability - termed 'functioning' - is affected by circumstance, others' actions and individual choices. A 'capability set' describes one's combination of functionings. Within education, the capability approach has been offered as a means of conceptualising and evaluating pedagogical arrangements which promote justice, and considering the role of professional higher education in helping graduates become oriented towards contributing to public good (McLean and Walker 2012; Nussbaum 2002; Unterhalter 2007; Walker 2006; Walker and McLean 2013).

Methods

This study involved formulating a provisional capability set for being intercultural and applying it to student interview data. It was conducted in a UK School of Pharmacy in a university with a strong emphasis on international higher education. Semi-structured interviews with 44 home and international students explored views and experiences of their course, friendships and social lives and, specifically, intercultural interactions.

The analytical process explored the relationship between theoretical intercultural capabilities and students' experiences and perceptions. This was done by constructing a capability set for being intercultural, informed by capability theory, Appiah's conception of cosmopolitanism and the empirical data. The process was iterative, moving between capability theory, capability set and pilot interview data. The four capabilities, each defined by a number of functionings, were: *Social Relations and Participation; Respect, Dignity and Recognition; Mind and Imagination* and *Enquiry and Reflection*.

Findings

Interview data was analysed for evidence of capability and functioning in each of the four capabilities. This approach helped to indicate the extent to which students did and were able to function, rather than solely their possession of capability.

Social Relations and Participation

The forming of relationships through *Social Relations and Participation* appeared fundamental to enabling other intercultural capabilities. Analysis by capability helped to identify personal, social and pedagogical factors which created a more enabling environment or, conversely, inhibited functioning. Group work, through requiring students to interact and work with others with whom they might not naturally mix, emerged as a powerful enabling factor. Functioning with this capability often required effort, courage and confidence, but students who made the effort to cross 'borders' appeared to connect the inclusion of others with their own wellbeing, helping to enhance agency and capability in others.

Respect, Dignity and Recognition

Analysis of the data against *Respect, Dignity and Recognition* pointed to the potential impact of educational arrangements, particularly group work, in enabling or diminishing capability. The student learning community provided a forum for developing respectful, inclusive attitudes, but also for stifling capability through disregard for others. Mutual respect featured in enhancing or diminishing students' agency and sense of self; having the freedom to function was highly dependent upon the capability of others.

Mind and Imagination

The capability of *Mind and Imagination* involves the way in which one views others and the challenge that this might present to one's self. All students had encountered some challenge to their views and opinions through the multicultural environment at university and many described the value in this. However there was some evidence of low capability for *Mind and Imagination* in the reinforcing or forming of negative stereotypical opinions about members of other groups, particularly in the academic environment; 'others' were consistently seen to be the problem. Coming from situations of relative cultural narrowness, some students had used the opportunities presented to consider difference and how it related to their own lives. This was facilitated by functioning with *Social Relation and Participation* as students got to know and judge the individual rather than merely associating them with the expected behaviours of a group.

Enquiry and Reflection

Intercultural friendships and working relationships provided a medium through which students could explore and develop their identities. Some (particularly international) students had embraced a cosmopolitan ethos and *actively* sought to explore difference. Students functioned with *Enquiry and Reflection* as, seeking to understand and learn from each other's situations, they reflectively considered their own - some experiencing a transformation of self as their own lives and perspectives were thrown into contrast.

Implications

This study illustrated the potential for exploration of students' intercultural experiences through the lens of capability and illuminated the broad spectrum of intercultural mixing that appears to exist. The capability set proved to be a good descriptor of the capabilities required for a more cosmopolitan outlook and a means of evaluating students' intercultural capabilities. It has the potential to be used as a heuristic tool for informing thinking about creating an academic environment which enables student agency and self-development and

which helps to illuminate the features which foster agency, justice and the maximising of intercultural capability. Students' capability can be constrained or enabled by social and pedagogical arrangements as well as by personal or relational factors and, therefore, choices made by university staff about pedagogical practices influence the opportunities and choices available to students.

References

Alred, G., Byram, M., and Fleming, M. (2006). "Being Intercultural", in G. Alred, M. Byram, and M. Fleming, (eds.), *Education for Intercultural Citizenship*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Appiah, KA. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, London: Allen Lane

Appiah, KA. (2008). "Bending towards justice." *Journal of Human Development*, 9(3), 343-355

Deardorff, D. (2006). "Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalisation." *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241-266.

Harrison, N. (2015). "Practice, problems and power in 'internationalisation at home': critical reflections on recent research evidence." *Teaching in Higher Education*, 20(4), 412-430.

McLean, M., and Walker, M. (2012). "The possibilities for university-based public-good professional education: a case study from South Africa based on the 'capability approach'." *Studies in Higher Education*, 37(5), 585-601.

Nussbaum, M. (2002). "Education for citizenship in an era of global connection." *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 21, 289-303.

Sen, A. (1992). *Inequality Reexamined*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Sen, A. (2009). *The Idea of Justice*, London: Allen Lane.

Sovič, S. (2009). "Hi-bye friends and the herd instinct: international and home students in the creative arts." *Higher Education*, 58, 747-761.

Unterhalter, E. (2007). "Gender equality, education, and the capability approach", in M. Walker and E. Unterhalter, (eds.), *Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Walker, M. (2006). *Higher education pedagogies: a capability approach*, New York: SHRE and Open University Press.

Walker, M., and McLean, M. (2013). *Professional Education, Capabilities and the Public Good: The role of universities in promoting human development*, Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.