Operationalising higher education and human development: a capabilities-based ethic for professional education

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Abstract

Drawing on the pioneering human development framework developed by both Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, the article outlines an argument for a new imaginary in the form of a capabilities-based ethic for professional education in universities. It then operationalises such an ethic in the form of a working list of professional capabilities grounded in a research project in South Africa which drew on theory, dialogue and data from three universities and five professional education sites. The capabilities (opportunities and personal powers) on the list are presented as having potentially wide relevance for professional education aims and practices, as well as providing the basis for public scrutiny and deliberation. The functionings (professional education achievements) from the data are understood as contextual and likely to vary from situation to situation. Finally, the paper offers extracts from the case study data to illustrate context-based functionings from which the capabilities are derived, using the example of the capability of 'emotional reflexivity'.

> *When people cannot name alternatives, imagine a better state of things, share with others a project of change, they are likely to remain anchored or submerged even as they proudly assert their autonomy* (Maxine Greene, 1998, p.9).

Introduction

This article applies a development ethics framework to higher education, and more specifically to professional education in universities, drawing on the capabilities approach to development. This was formulated originally by economist Amartya Sen (1999, 2009) and further developed by philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2011). In this approach to development, progress and social justice is advanced by looking at how or if people's capabilities to be and do in a variety of ways that they have reason to value have been increased, in the case discussed in this article by the contributions of professionals educated in universities. Professional education is seen as significant for the way it sits at the nexus of the university and the society which it serves and hence is important in considering how universities might

contribute to reducing multi-dimensional poverty and to better lives in South Africa, but also in other national contexts. The huge inequalities in South Africa recently reported by the World Bank (see Keeton, 2012) make such attention urgent and important on the part of higher education. Where the poorest 50 per cent of the population earns just 8 per cent of the income there are implications for access to decent public services staffed by university-educated professionals. The paper thus argues for a capabilities-based ethic, and its application to the formation of professional agents in universities.

In order to move beyond ideal theorising, that capabilities formation ought to be the focus of professional education and professional practice, to the what is of practice, we operationalise such an ethics in the form of a working list of professional capabilities for 'public-good professionals' (Walker and McLean, 2013). These capabilities are derived from a South African research project, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESCR) and DfiD, and emerge from theory, dialogue and data. The normative (ideal) capabilities can be the subject of dialogue across diverse professional education Schools, and have potentially wide appeal. The empirical functionings are contextual and likely to vary from situation to situation. Extracts from the case study data therefore illustrate the contextual functionings from which a capability is derived, taking the example of 'emotional reflexivity'. The paper concludes that a capabilities ethic and the list enable us to first imagine public-good professionalism as a possibility, and then by using the list, to make it the subject of educational experimentation towards this possibility.

A capabilities-based professional ethic and professional education in universities

In this paper we offer a version of professionalism grounded in the view that university-based professional education of nurses, doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, social workers, economists, and so on ought to contribute to what Sen (1999, 2009) and Nussbaum (2000, 2011) call 'capabilities' (freedoms or opportunities) to choose and exercise various and incommensurable beings and doings ('functionings' or achievements or outcomes). The approach was conceptualised by Sen (1999) as an alternative to other ways of thinking about human well-being. In the capabilities approach to human development the focus is not only on a single measure of

well-being, such as income and other resources (computers, libraries, university buildings and infrastructure, for example). Resources are the means but not the ends of development and further, they do not tell us how much of the resource each person has. A resourcist approach, even if it was egalitarian in giving each person an equal amount, would still not tell us about a student's ability to convert her basket of resources into actual achievements. Nor do we only ask how about people's perceived welfare, that is how satisfied people are with their lives (and then aggregate satisfaction for the country). Although we would certainly want to know the answer to this question, it is not the only question we need to ask, and we would want also to know how satisfaction is distributed. Moreover, people adapt to bad as well as good circumstances and an aggregate satisfaction calculus will not reveal this.

To evaluate well-being Sen (1999) rather proposed capabilities as the metric of justice. The approach asks us to consider what a person is able to do and how resources do or do not enable someone to function in a fully human way (Nussbaum, 2000). Capabilities are the potential to achieve functionings – such as being knowledgeable, using one's knowledge in worthwhile ways, being inter-culturally aware and sensitive, and so on. They are actual freedoms people have to do and to be what they value being and doing in order to live in ways they find meaningful, productive and rewarding individually and collectively to the good of society. A functioning may be intercultural competence; the real opportunity for this achievement is the corresponding capability. But we do not look only at this single functioning (e.g. thinking critically) and then say that a person has well-being. Capabilities are the freedoms each person has to choose and exercise a *combination* of ways of beings and doings they have reason to value, and in comparison to others. Thus, if we agree that intercultural competence is important in professional education, then this would require addressing the shortfall if at all possible whereby some students are able to develop this and others are not. In between capabilities and functionings lies the agent, choosing functionings from her capability set; professional education can potentially shape values, knowledge and skills for these choices.

Professional capabilities operationalised in professional education can, then, be rather significant. But Sen (2009) refuses to endorse a fixed list of capabilities, preferring participatory public reasoning, while Nussbaum's (2000, 2011) normative approach insists on a list of ten universal and central human capabilities (see Nussbaum, 2000). For a professional ethic, a middle

way is preferred. A list is proposed but considerable leeway would be allowed in how the professional capabilities are operationalised contextually and for each professional to achieve the functioning "in her own way", to "take control" over how a capability and its corresponding functionings is realised (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2013, p.163). Moreover, such a list is also not the end point of discussion but is open to further development and participatory revision.

Nonetheless the point is endorsed here that capabilities and functionings should point to what it is that professionals ought to be and do; the matter cannot be left entirely open. In other words, there is an ideal of the 'good' professional at stake, to enable us to evaluate good professional practices against the less good. Even though Sen (2009) himself is not in favour of 'ideal' justice, it is hard to see how comparisons alone, for example of forms of professional practice, would enable us to adjudicate or evaluate what is right and good without some professional and social ideal towards which we try to advance (Deneulin, 2010). We cannot avoid moral reasoning and moral judgements about professional practice and we make these judgments in relation to deliberations about the "best way to live" (Sandel, 2009, p.10) because justice is "inescapably judgmental, and the right way to value things" (p.261), including valuing professional accountability and judgements about the right thing to do. To develop through education our personal powers is then also to have a view on which powers are worthwhile developing – and which are not. However, notwithstanding Deneulin's (2010, p.387) critique of Sen's idea of justice for not providing the "ethical equipment" to deal "with hard moral choices" (for professionals, what is the right thing to do), Sen's commitment to public reasoning has something crucial to offer. In South Africa we need urgently to debate in a reasoned way what kind of professionals we need. What kind of professionals will help to create a more just, decent and humane society in which capabilities for all are valued and pursued through public policy measures and practices? This ought to be the focus of widespread discussion and an ideal list offers an entry and can provide helpful direction.

The version of professionalism offered here thus encompasses the idea of equitable, creative and empowering 'human development' (Haq, 1999) in which people are the ends of development, rather than a narrower understanding of people as the human capital means to development and economic growth. Nussbaum's (2011) foundational value of human dignity offers guidance, and substantially informs the professional ethic outlined in

this article. For Nussbaum (2011), fundamental to creating capabilities is the human dignity of each person. Any 'decent' plan "would seek to promote a range of diverse and incommensurable goods, involving the unfolding and development of distinct human abilities" (p.127). Because human beings have dignity, "it is bad to treat them like objects, pushing them around without their consent" (p.130). The question then becomes what kind of education plan is needed to permit human abilities to develop – helping people to develop towards their best selves – and human equality to be respected (Nussbaum, 2011).

The first element then in a capability-based ethics applied to professional education in universities is to foster capabilities and the exercise of functionings which advance human dignity. Professional capabilities and professional functionings would be directed to human development for all, and in the case of South Africa, the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalised that constitute the majority of the population (see Taylor, 2000).

A university education is still a relative privilege in South Africa and many other countries. In South Africa 16 per cent of the age cohort attend university and 84 per cent do not (Singh, 2011). This arguably imposes certain obligations, especially on public universities. Those who do not attend university, and here we have in mind in particular the poor, disadvantaged and vulnerable, are also relevant external stakeholders in what universities ought to do. Here Rawls (1999, p.266) is helpful when he articulates his difference principle that, "Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to be of the greatest benefit to the least-advantaged members of society". Thus having the privilege of a professional education from a university imposes a moral obligation to those not so advantaged through no fault of their own. Similarly, Sen (2009) emphasises that as a key feature of justice, we need to understand that capability is a kind of power. If someone has the effective power, he argues, to make a change that they can see will reduce injustice in the world; there is a strong social argument for doing just that.

Applied to professional education this would require the education of agents who understand and respond to the plights of others, and who have acquired through their university education the competencies, knowledge and values to contribute to human development. Following Sen, professional graduates have effective power to contribute to society, and are obligated to do so, Moreover, Sen and Nussbaum are specifically concerned with the poor so that

a capabilities-based professionalism requires professionals to attend to these lives, whatever else they might choose to do and be as professionals.

The second element is thus that professional ethics operationalised in professional education imposes obligations to act as professionals – as other-regarding agents – to advance the well-being of others, paying attention to actual lives and circumstances.

The third element we can extrapolate from (i) professional capability formation to advance human dignity, and (ii) other-regarding professional agents, is that (iii) practitioners should evaluate what they do in the light of a larger public good. As the then Finance Minister, Trevor Manuel, commented publicly some years ago, South Africa's "ability to deliver a deep and durable democracy focused on improving living standards will never be attained without the commitment of our public servants in the key social sciences" (quoted in Joseph, 2008, p.3). Hence in our capabilities-based approach, professionals are conceptualised as "public-good professionals" (Walker and McLean, 2013). 'Public-good' is also not open to any or all interpretations. The trumping rule in justifying and implementing professional capabilities for us is Nussbaum's (2011) fundamental concern with human dignity and action to secure such dignity to all.

To sum up. Professionals can advance the capabilities of others. University graduates are advantaged overall, they have more opportunities and more power; they then owe obligations to others. Professionals ought to be educated in the direction of holding public-good values and of commitments to the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged in any unequal society. Taken together, this points to a capability-based professional ethic and professional education, which seeks to contribute to public policies and actions which enhance people's valuable functionings.

A professional capabilities list

Our research project in South Africa (Walker and McLean, 2013) therefore set out to operationalise the ideas sketched above by establishing which professional capabilities were theoretically valuable and which were regarded as empirically important by diverse stakeholders in professional education. However, more than a list of professional capabilities was required. A

complex matrix emerged in which capabilities were embedded in educational and social arrangements to capture Sen's concern that individual freedom involves a "two-way relation between (1) social arrangements to expand individual freedoms and (2) the use of individual freedoms not only to improve the respective lives but also to make social arrangements more appropriate and effective" (1999, p.31). Thus the list is especially significant, but not the only element to be taken into account (see Walker and McLean, 2013 for an extended discussion). Nonetheless, here the focus is only the list as the most central element.

The first stage of developing a list of professional capabilities was theoretical and normative. As noted above, the core underlying idea was that of human development and capabilities. The conceptual framing was i) capabilities, ii) aligned with a capabilities-based 'public-good' professional, and iii) professionals working to secure human dignity. Through ii) and iii) the project hoped that professional capabilities developed through professional education processes would align and integrate individual development and commitments to others, rather than promoting selfishness and a turning away from public-good contributions. Without such synthesis, we would not have the kind of professionals who can bring about social change for justice.

We wanted to find out which capabilities and functionings are specific to professionals working for social transformation and which should, therefore, be incorporated as broad goals in professional education and training. To address this, case studies were initiated and conducted by the authors, assisted by the research team, at three South African universities, with different apartheid histories. Five professional education case study departments across the three universities were investigated – Social Work, Public Health, Law, Engineering and Theology. To facilitate on-going dialogue, the project included a research working group (RWG) at each site. Volunteer students were interviewed in focus groups and included black and white, and male and female students. In addition, a dean or deputy dean and head of department and one or two lecturers in each department were interviewed, as well as a university leader, all individually. To capture perspectives among practitioners, alumni were interviewed as well as NGOs, the latter specifically committed to poverty reduction. In total 120 people were interviewed. The data collection aimed to establish which professional capabilities were valued and why, the form and purposes of professional education, educational arrangements and the overall university ethos in relation to poverty reduction, and what might be external constraints or obstacles. What emerged over 18

months was a broad consensus around a list of eight professional capabilities, embedded in educational arrangements to prepare graduates for what it means to 'act rightly' as a professional in conditions of profound inequality and poor quality of life for large numbers of South Africans. Prompts took the form of an initial discussion of Nussbaum's list and capabilities taken from this which might be relevant. While these ideas were initially helpful, the value positions held by participants themselves and the empirical data were both especially significant in the robust dialogue towards developing what one of the participating deans described as 'a framework of interrogation' for professional education.

The eight professional capabilities on the list are the opportunities that would be provided in and through professional education in universities, for example the opportunity or freedom for informed vision; the functionings would be the valuable outcomes from the formation of these capabilities (see Table 1 for functioning examples and the capabilities extrapolated from these). The capabilities are therefore presented as vague and broad, while the functionings are specified in more detail, based on what was found in qualitative data across the five professions. The process of identifying capabilities was an extrapolation from observable empirical functionings, dialogue and theorising. The capabilities would be interpreted for different contexts and realised as situated functionings, where the latter may differ from context to context.

Table 1: Public-good professional capabilities

Realisable Functionings (examples selected from empirical data)	**Ideal/ Normative Capabilities (from data, dialogue and theory)**
Understanding how the profession is shaped by historical and current socio-economic –political context national and globally; being able to imagine alternative futures and improved social arrangements	1. Informed vision
Care and respect for diverse people; developing relationships and rapport across social groups and status hierarchies; communicating professional knowledge in an accessible way/courtesy and patience	2. Affiliation (solidarity)
Perseverance in difficult circumstances; fostering hope	3. Resilience
Community empowerment approach/promoting human rights; contributing to policy formulation and implementation; leading and managing social change; working in professional and inter-professional teams; participating in public reasoning.	4. Social and collective struggle
Empathy/narrative imagination; compassion	5. Emotional reflexivity
Acting ethically; being responsible & accountable to communities and colleagues; striving to provide high-quality service	6. Integrity
Expressing and asserting own professional priorities; contributing to policy; having confidence in the worthwhileness of one's professional work	7. Assurance and confidence
Having a firm, critical grounding in disciplinary, academic knowledge; having a multidisciplinary / multi-perspectival, stance; integrating theory and practice.	8. Knowledge, imagination and practical skills

The proposal from the research is that professional education at university ought to foster these multi-dimensional capabilities so that graduates in the professions might develop a wide capability set from which to choose

functionings to be and do as public-good professionals who work to enable human development.

A working list

This list is also work in progress; it is revised as new ideas or new angles on the data and context, come to light. For example, after an exchange in July 2012 with one of the participating universities, what began as the capability of 'emotions' has been changed to the more nuanced 'emotional reflexivity'. The change is seemingly slight, but important nonetheless, in that it better captures how emotions in higher education learning can be directed to transformative professional reasoning and critical emotional reflexivity (Zymbalys, 2008).

For her part, Nussbaum (2001) argues that an adequate ethical theory requires an adequate theory of emotions. Human beings are "both dignified and needy" (2001, p.405); we can be both agents and victims in life. We wherefore need to understand what contributions emotions bring to ethical deliberations, personal and public. Emotions cannot be side-lined but must form part of our system of ethical reasoning and we must be prepared to deal with grief, anger, fear, and so on. Moreover, emotions are not divorced from reason or thought as the Stoics argue but can be potential allies and constituents in rational deliberation. She argues that, "if we think of ourselves like self-sufficient gods, we fail to understand the ties that join us to our fellow humans. . . Emotions of compassion, grief, fear, and anger are in that sense essential and valuable reminders of our common humanity" (2004, p7). Emotions constitute part of our inquiries into a complete human life, opening our eyes to suffering in the face of human vulnerability and enabling the imagination of human suffering. Nussbaum is especially concerned with empathy for the disadvantaged and sees compassion "within the limits of reason" (2001, p.414) as essential to a "decent" society (p.350).

But emotional reflexivity requires expanding this framing of emotions as a professional capability to capture something richer and thicker. Boler (1999, p.157) argues that Nussbaum articulates only a 'passive empathy', with Nussbaum (2001) herself admitting that however empathetic we may be we may fail to carry out any change. Boler (1999) indeed argues that Nussbaum does not go beyond passive empathy towards those suffering and that this

does not require that we act for more justice. This form of empathy towards the other, for example, empathy from the privileged professional to the disadvantaged client, can be slippery and paternalistic and may not change anything in the lives of people living in poverty. Boler (1999) explains that it is therefore "not a sufficient educational practice". Rather, what is at issue, is not only the ability to empathise with the distant other, but "to recognize oneself as implicated in the social forces that create the obstacles the other must confront" (p.159).

While the point is well made, it is nonetheless debatable that this applies to Nussbaum (2001) who argues for the importance of compassion as a pathway from private thoughts to public altruism and for the role of empathy in public judgments for justice. Her work on the emotions makes the case for maximally humane personal relations, which one can assume demands action as well as good intentions, given that relationships are lived and not merely imagined. Her view of the imagination as educative further suggests a concern with relationships, with the social, and with changed persons who might act differently in the world. For Nussbaum, compassion and its attendant empathy can therefore be rather crucial to public deliberations about justice and the obligations of justice: "Compassion is not the entirety of justice, but it both contains a powerful, if partial, vision of just distribution and provides imperfect citizens with an essential bridge from self-interest to just conduct" (1996, p.57). The more important issue, however, is that both Boler and Nussbaum are deeply concerned with the interconnections of emotions and beliefs and with making justice in the world, and we needed to better capture this in how we described the capability.

Zymbalys (2008) captures what we think both of them are advocating in the form of 'critical emotional reflexivity' (CER). Such reflexivity, in relation to our emotional responses to situations and people and our communal or cultural loyalties, involves thinking critically against the grain of taken-for-granted world views. We learn to address awkward questions about the way things are and how and why we are situated in relation to advantage or disadvantage. Thus CER "is grounded historically and politically and in power relations: it consists in the ability to question emotionally charged, cherished beliefs, exposing how privileged positions and comfort zones inform the ways in which one recognises what or how we have been taught to see and act (or not see/act) and empowering different ways of being for the other" (Zymbalys, 2008, p.65). Secondly, Zymbalys argues that it is not enough simply to acknowledge the role of emotions but to change, to become

and to be more compassionate, more just, etc. This seems especially relevant to a public-good professional education in the context of unequal societies and unequal access to professional education opportunities in universities.

The lesson for the evolving list is that it must be open to being shaped by new conversations and new theorising, or even old theorising revisited. It is furthermore an ideal list – what the best professional education and professional ethics ought to work towards. The functionings signal what is valued in professional practice pointing both to real world realities but also to where professional education might intervene to encourage development which is closer to the ideal. The list therefore is helpful for situational analysis, for participatory professional education development among stakeholders, and for evaluation, or for all three.

Illustrative data extracts

How then did the professional capabilities emerge from the functionings that people discussed in interviews? Here we focus on one capability of emotional reflexivity to illustrate the process. We found valuable functionings and descriptions in the data and from dialogue – such as trust, care, empathy, concern. We try to capture these responses as forms of emotional reflexivity which are realised more or less imperfectly in actual functionings across the professions. While emotional reflexivity is the ideal to work for, the practice may be more awkward, ambivalent and undeveloped. This is especially among students still in higher education, among students trying to grasp the inequalities in their society of which they may not have been fully aware or even aware at all given the persistence of apartheid patterns of geography and social relations, of students confronted with the lives of people who are poor and needy, and with variation across the five professions studied.

In *Theology* all the informants emphasised the need for capabilities linked to the self, such as self-knowledge, personal growth, self-esteem, and centredness, linked to spiritual and religious identity. The outer work of social transformation is intimately related to the inner task of personal transformation. One of the students, Sara[1], argued that there was a need for deep self-reflection to facilitate individual transformation. She spoke about

[1] All names used as psuednyms

this in the context of the involvement of an individual's family, community and self in South Africa's apartheid history. A visiting black professor, Jonathan Jansen (see Jansen, 2009), had spoken of 'bitter knowledge', a concept that resonated strongly for her. Jansen's work on personal transformation focuses particularly on white Afrikaans students' responses to political change in the country and in their universities. However, the processes that he discusses are relevant for all South Africans, particularly youth, who are making a transition from the apartheid past into the future. Sara said, '[Even though] we are a different generation and we view this stuff a lot different than our parents have. . .' she said, 'we have to realise that. . . we all have that bitter knowledge, whether we were part of apartheid or not. It's something that's passed on and along and I think we have a responsibility to fight actively. . . against the bitter knowledge that's in us'.

Aidan, a black student, thought that religious ministers or community workers needed 'to know themselves or have grown to know themselves [so that there would be] a level of authenticity' when they were engaged with other people. He said 'a lot of the people that I engage with were people with extremely low self-esteem. Now if I cannot accept myself, then there's a sort of barrier that comes across. . . and in accepting myself I give almost permission to other people if you can use that term, to be themselves, whatever situation they come from, whatever brokenness [they experience]'. Jan, one of the lecturers, valued a capability which he referred to as 'emotional intelligence – understanding people and their needs'. He said that the science of theology was oriented towards making a difference in people's lives. Ministers needed to work with people, love them and care about them. In order to do this, they needed to examine their own reasons for being a minister, their commitment, life experience, virtues and integrity. They needed to ask themselves the question, 'Why do you do what you're doing?' While Jan identifies this capability as emotional intelligence, it is linked to reflexivity. His association of love and caring with capability for reflexivity resonates with Nussbaum's integration of the emotion of love with thought. She argues that the emotion of love and patterns of action associated with caring are best understood as involving "quite a lot of thought and interpretation, especially evaluation" (Nussbaum, 2000, p.265).

In the case of *Law*, strongly linked to the capability for affiliation (see Table 1) was the capability to feel emotion and empathy, particularly in cases where the personal distress of the clients was great. One alumnus, Thandi, emphasised the importance of respecting and tolerating others' views, having

empathy and through this finding an emotional 'balance'. In particular, because clients may have been through very difficult experiences, it was important to be able to empathise with them; not to advise them on particular courses of action, but to make them fully aware of their options, valuing people's ability to choose their own options. Thandi described this in terms of treating others as you would like to be treated yourself, 'how would you like to be treated if you find yourself in such a situation. . . what do you expect from the next person?'

A student, Nazia, spoke of how she tries to forge an emotional connection and relate to their clients in this way, 'I try to sit with my client and to first make her feel that she's human again, you know, I try to give her advice and we sometimes laugh together with the client especially when they come to see you and they cry their heart out because they can't believe that they can get out [of an abusive marriage]'. Contrary to stripping the law of emotions, the democratic governance and rights unit at the University of Cape Town has called for judges with empathy, compassion, humility, open-mindedness, courtesy and patience. Roberts (2009) cites the South African deputy chief justice as remarking that, while cowboys don't cry, judges do. This is something of a departure for the more traditional legal education emphasis on distance, and supports the case for emotional reflexivity being on the list.

In *Social Work*, lecturers, students and alumni emphasised the need to be a reflective practitioner and to engage in life-long learning and on-going professional development, which is close to Zimbalys's idea of emotional reflexivity. As one lecturer, Miriam, explained, '[Social Work graduates should be able to] reflect on their capabilities, their strengths, their weaknesses and to try and constantly build on their strengths and work through whatever weaknesses they have. . . .if there's anything that we would want to emphasise in our training and education is that this has to be a lifelong cycle for our graduates that in the professional work setting they need to reflect not just what they're doing but their ability to do it and learn from what has happened and bring those learnings into different practice' . While Anne, an alumnus, commented that the ethos of her organisation was 'relationship before projects and so that I feel very, very strongly about that'; as a social worker one needs to be 'open and teachable, learn from [people in the community], take time to form relationships, even if it takes a year before you actually effectively are in there, even though their needs are tremendous, it takes time to build a relationship and trust'.

In *Engineering* emotional reflexivity was present in a much undeveloped form, but there were signs of its value to students and lecturers, even as there were signs of the limitations of this awareness among mostly white, mostly male students. It took the form of responses to gaining awareness of disadvantage and poverty through a module in which students worked in schools in the local and very poor black township. As one of the few black students on the programme said of white students, it was important for them to 'see how people are actually living, because they never came to these areas firstly, and they don't even, you can't even relate to them because they [white students] have no idea what those people are actually going through. For me it was good that some of them could also go there and see what is really happening, because I'm sure in their lifetime most of the whites wouldn't go' (Fabian). But Fabian also added: 'Even we [coloured students] don't always understand what the whole thing is about, the gap between the rich and the poor. But when you actually go from the University, let's say the nice areas where the streets are so clean. And then you go to an area like that where the houses are built with tin, old motor parts and stuff – you know, how can we be in, not even the same country, just be in the same town and you can have those extremes?'

These students clearly felt discomfort, frustration and non-acceptance that such levels of inequality continue to exist in South Africa today; and at least part of this discomfort seems to have been engendered through their experiences on the course. But some student responses showed that while they have been exposed to a new side of society, this has not really changed their world-view. For some white students, the trips to the township seemed more of an exciting curiosity and foray into an 'other' world, than a reframing of their understanding through realising social reality and a catalyst for change. Mandla, the only African student interviewed, was keener to offer a solution, and to see better housing prioritised, for example. Nonetheless, as the lecturer on the module suggested, perhaps university courses can at least aim for the 'bottom line' achievement of raising awareness or indeed engendering 'discomfort' (Boler, 1999).

Finding evidence of emotional reflexivity was more difficult in the Public *Health* case which was a postgraduate programme focused on health systems and targeted at health managers. Jane Simons, the Programme Coordinator, explained that, 'We want to develop attitudes of inclusiveness, of community orientation, of recognition of why people are under-resourced and poor. . . embedded in the whole notion of equity but also with an understanding of

why that has come about, particularly through the colonial past and. . . history'. There was an overlap between emotions and the broad capability of affiliation. In order to work in an empowering way with poor people they needed to be able to respect people, listen and put themselves in the shoes of others. In order to practise health care in a community-centred way, the capability of respect and treating people with dignity were highly valued by alumni and students. We can however extrapolate from the capabilities of awareness, for example, to argue that emotional reflexivity would have to be a constituent part.

What these extracts have thus attempted to do is to show which functionings emerged from the data as of value, and how a capability was extrapolated from these functionings. The same process of identifying functionings was done across all the interview data for all five professional sites, and scrutinised and discussed with university participants over three iterations of a list of professional capabilities and in the light of capabilities theorising to generate the professional capabilities list in its current form.

In conclusion

The development of a capabilities-based professional ethics and its operationalisation in a list captures, we think, many of the complexities and challenges of professional education. The list is the result of negotiations, arguments and compromises with those dealing with a harsh reality. Yet it expresses the hopes and actions of these people and has the potential to be critical and transformative. It is not fixed or universal and will always require re-negotiation. It could enable an evaluation of goals, policies and practices across different professional groups with different status and interests, testing the capabilities and identifying valuable functionings in and through education.

To argue for a capabilities-based professional ethic in professional education is therefore to propose the concept of a public-good professional as 'experimental'. By this we mean that what it means to be such a professional is not yet settled, but a subject for conversations between and with people in the situation out of which will come thinking and action. Rather like a Stenhousian (1975) curriculum, public-good professionalism is first imagined as a possibility, and then made the subject of experiments grounded in

educational and professional practice, and then reviewed in turn against an ideal (we propose our professional capabilities list).

Rather like democracy, we think that public-good professionalism is never finally settled 'but always a quest that must be renewed and reshaped over time' (Sullivan, 2005, p 220). Yet this openness to renewing and reshaping what it means to be a public-good professional is also not arbitrary. Instead, it is infused with a deep concern for dignity, justice and a world in which every person has a fair chance of fulfilling her human potential. Translated into professional education this requires us to ask what it means to be human and what this in turn means for professional service in a decent society. These are radically open questions animated by social justice and directed towards the future. But these are also questions that should be addressed in the immediate present by actually doing education, rather than as a question that needs to be settled before we can begin. We will make a capabilities-based, public-good professional ethic by actually doing professional education, animated by a vision of dignity and justice.

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