



The University of
Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA



Jubilee Press Working Papers

Theorising Further Education through a capability lens: vulnerability and freedoms

Aurora López-Fogués

www.nottingham.ac.uk/education

***Theorising Further Education through
a capability lens: vulnerability and
freedoms***

*A Research Paper by
Aurora López-Fogués*

ISBN 978-1-906235-12-3

Aurora López-Fogués, 2012

First Edition published 2012

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission in writing from the Publishers.

The Nottingham Jubilee Press
School of Education
University of Nottingham
Dearing Building
Nottingham NG8 1BB

Theorising Further Education through a capability lens: vulnerability and freedoms.

Aurora López-Fogués¹

Abstract

The current crisis has put the dissatisfactions with utilitarian discourses under the spotlight. The reforms that are undertaken in Further Education (FE) are part of that transformation. This paper claims that there is a need to expand the theoretical debate by including disciplines outside educational research. I present a theoretical framework built on the Capability Approach (CA) and the writings of the philosopher Iris Marion Young as an alternative framework to design and evaluate FE. The combination of both theories seeks to put the students at the centre and at the same time identify the forces that limit students' freedoms. In the paper I present a brief characterization of the CA and the five "faces of oppression" (Young, 1990:39) with the intention to highlight the contribution of analyzing FE beyond a human capital approach. Consequently, I illustrate how both theories complement each other and the added value in examining FE in relation to students' freedoms and vulnerabilities. Finally, I address the implication of this framework and the need for further research in order to advance the debate around FE from a social justice perspective.

Keywords: Capability Approach, Vulnerability, Further Education, Freedom, Oppression, Development, Social Justice.

This paper addresses the discourses underpinning current educational paradigms. Specifically, using a development and social justice perspective, I present a theoretical framework with which to examine Further Education (FE) in relation to its contribution to students' freedoms and hence their well-being. This framework engages in the debate in which economics and humanities are currently presented as a one side-choice in European educational reforms by claiming a need to reconsider educational purposes from an ethical and developmental standpoint. I seek to present a framework in which the employability discourse is a part of a bigger aim: human flourishing. The capabilities approach (CA), complemented with the writings of Iris Marion Young

¹ The author is an Early Stage Researcher at the School of Education, University of Nottingham in the Marie Curie Project EduWel (Education as Welfare, www.eduwel-eu.org). Email: aurora.fogues@nottingham.ac.uk

(1990, 2000, 2001) represent the two sides of the same coin. Therefore, a combination of both provides a way forward for framing FE within the space of freedom and vulnerabilities.

Following the work of Amartya Sen (1979, 1993, 1999, 2009) and Martha Nussbaum (1997, 2000) in decoupling the concept of development from economics, I urge a similar strategy on the literature and practices concerning FE. My intention is to decouple the term FE from the term productivity. This requires a process of challenging the vast majority of existing FE literatures that seek routes to competitiveness (Ashton and Green 1996; Crouch et al. 1999; Brown et al. 2001), and that go in line with current FE reforms on the European Union level (i.e. Copenhagen Process). Focusing on some of the discussions addressed in other levels of education (Ball, 2008; Brighouse, 2006; Wolf, 2002), I frame the paper around three questions: i) what is the ultimate goal of education?; ii) what constitute equality?; and, iii) what are the forces limiting students' freedoms?

In the current European reforms, the FE sector occupies an uneasy nexus of policies relating to employability and social cohesion. FE is seen as an "instrument for strengthening Europe's competitive power worldwide" (EC, 2002:1) by "match(ing) the professional competencies required by the job market and the needs of companies" (Cedefop, 2009:21). Although the basis for this position has been challenged in the work of Pring (1995) "Closing the Gap" and the research of Winch (2000) on the relation of FE and work, the employability discourse has settled within FE. At the school level, we can find studies emerging from the tradition of critical pedagogy concerned about what goes inside colleges and how learners engage in their studies (TLRP, 2008).

In the last decade researchers have analyzed FE mainly building on the work of sociologists. Atkinson (1985) builds on the work of Bernstein to discuss the legitimacy in the production of knowledge. Similarly, the writings of Bourdieu are also used to investigate about the power of the structure to constitute learner and teacher identities (see James and Bloomer, 2001; Avis and Bathmaker, 2004). Also with a big theoretical ground, other authors have contributed to create awareness about the risks of managerialism (Newman and Clarke, 2004), the perverseness of human capital theory (Coffield, 1999; Ainley, 2003), or the challenges that integration policies presents to FE (Souto-Otero, Fleckenstein, et.al, 2008; Guillén, Fontrodona et. al, 2007).

Nevertheless, there is a lack of research that addresses the aims of FE in relation to broader societal aims.

The absence of a philosophical component that links FE policy within social justice carries deficiencies that I suggest deepen the stigma of a Cinderella service (Randle and Brady, 1997). My research acknowledges the work conducted in the field, but at the same time considers that it fails to get to the heart of problems that individuals face in their daily basis. To answer the three questions posed above I move out of the discipline of social sciences and engage with the philosophy and political literatures to picture the student and his/her well-being as the centre of analysis.

Departing from the demand to address foundational questions concerning FE, I propose a new starting point. A starting point that departs from a framework constituted in the space located between the struggle of individuals to negotiate their vulnerabilities and the space for freedom to realize their life plans. The claim is to move beyond the relation between economy and FE to take into consideration FE as a place to enhance students' freedoms for doing and becoming. Under this framework of freedom, the student is portrayed not as a passive recipient but rather as an agent capable and responsible for critical reflect on his/her preferences, plans and life.

The paper hence, departs from a positional standpoint in which the first question formulated above (what is the role of education?) is already assumed. In my normative framework, education should provide students with abilities to diminish their vulnerabilities as well as to empower their agency and spaces to perform valuable actions. The term vulnerability here encompasses all aspects and situations that undermine the bargaining power of the individual² and therefore one's real opportunities to lead a valuable life for one and for the others.

In the following section I develop some of the key concepts and foundations of the CA. The concept of vulnerability is further developed using the writings of Iris Marion Young in the second section. Having explored the basics of both approaches, I offer a representation of a

² The term vulnerability involves multiple meanings and is mainly used in environmental contexts. For a non-exhaustive list of them, see the definitions provided by the Vulnerability Network and Observatory: <http://www.vulnerabilitynet.org/>. Another vision of vulnerability is provided by Brene Brown as part of her study on shame and empathy.

theoretical framework to be used in education based on the concept of freedom and vulnerability. Finally, I conclude with greater challenges for educational research.

Amartya Sen – The Capability Approach

As an alternative to human capital discourse (Mincer, 1958; Becker, 1964) Amartya Sen (1979, 1993, 1999, 2009) offers a framework where people's well-being is at the centre of attention. The CA builds on philosophical roots to bring attention to the real opportunities of each individual to become and do meaningful actions. Its origins can be placed in classics such as Aristotle and his discussion of eudemonia, human flourishing - (Sen, 1993:46; Nussbaum, 1997, 2000); the theories of work and analysis of life by Adam Smith (1776); or on the relationship with the emancipation and human freedom analyzed by Karl Marx (1884). At the same time, this theoretical framework takes also the work of a seminal contemporary theorist John Rawls (1971) and his analysis of primary goods as a social justice theory, and economists as Paul Streeten (1981) and Francis Stewart (2000) which elaborate a Basic Needs Approach (BNA).

This brief account has the purpose of evidencing the holistic approach that the CA has due to the amount of disciplines from which this approach further develops. By questioning two issues: Development for what?, and Equality of what?, the CA brings together philosophical, economic, social and ethical issues for a common goal: to increase peoples' freedoms to live a meaningful life. The uses of the CA are mostly centred in the field of development (i.e. Human Development Index). However, this framework has been gaining ground in diverse areas such as gender studies (Unterhalter, 2003), disability (Terzi, 2008; Biggeri, 2011) and technology studies (Oosterlaken, 2009). In the field of education, the work of the philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1997, 2000) is of particular interest in as far as it represents the strategic role of the humanities for a dynamic, progressive and peaceful society.

The CA development is decoupled from economic terms (i.e. increase of the rent per capita or GDP). If we translate that into education, and concretely FE, the starting point is to position the student, his/her decisions and options at the centre instead of a country's demands in terms of economic production. The shift is to move from an education for work to an education for flourishing and FE becomes formed and evaluated on the basis of the genuine opportunities that it offers to

students, referred to by Sen as capabilities. In the CA, capabilities are understood as a set of real opportunities an individual has to choose from in order to achieve a life he or she has reason to value. Thus, a capability is not just an opportunity but a feasible one. Nussbaum (1997) links this vision with classical liberal education that, paraphrasing Seneca, makes an individual completely human. The author advocates for an education which "cultivates humanity"(Nussbaum, 2002:290), meaning by that self-conscious, autonomous, and capable of recognizing and respecting the condition of all human beings regardless of their origin, social class, gender or ethnicity. Authors mainly centred in higher education have conducted research on along those lines in several countries such as UK (Walker and Unterhalter, 2007), Germany (Otto and Ziegler, 2010), Mexico (Flores-Crespo, 2007) and Spain (Boni, 2010).

At this point we could ask, if the CA is a human-centred theory where individual freedoms and well-being are the goal where is education positioned in relation to it? Education, due to its condition to improve individual freedoms for pursuing valuable beings and doings - functionings- (Walker, 2003), can be considered in the language of the capabilities as a meta-capability or "fertile functioning" (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007:10). Fertile, as far as it stimulates the creation of valuable beings and doings of the person and also it helps him/her to form and to constitute "a conception of the good" (Nussbaum, 2000:79). Education is then, a prerequisite in the process of generating informed decisions that matter in the conceptualization and development of the life of the person (Walker, 2003). Under this humanist perspective, the value of seeing education (in this case formal FE) through the CA lens lies in its power of liberating the agent by providing functionings that enlarge the capability set to plan one's life and to undertake reasoned decisions. This, I shall argue, is a revealing shift on the conceptions of policies. The two key questions of the CA provide a greater insight on the changes generated from assessing FE from a developmental perspective.

Development for what?

To the defenders of economic growth as a development mechanism, Sen (1999) refers to a conversation written in a Sanskrit text around the 8th century BC. This takes place between a woman Maitreyee, and her husband, Yajnavalkya. Maitreyee asks him whether if the whole earth, full of wealth, belongs only to her, if she would be able to

achieve immortality. With the denial of her husband, Maitreyee poses the following rhetorical question: What should I do with that by which I do not become immortal? The dichotomy between wealth and her life, and the inability of the first one to ensure the second, is where Sen poses criticism to accumulation for its own sake, *per se*. The CA steps out from traditional linear approaches and questions the power of growth in assuring well-being (metaphorically, immortality).

The multidimensionality of well-being³ and the positioning of it as an end in itself, imply to clarify the distinction between instruments and goals. In this narrative the reader recognizes that economic growth is valuable for its contribution to some of the facets of well-being (i.e. to alleviate hunger, provide shelter, and other material aspects), but it is insufficient for providing others (i.e. empathy, safety, or environmental reason, among others). Economic growth is through the capability lens; good whether it extends the possible combinations of a person to do and to be (Deneulin, 2009). Therefore, growth is relevant due to its contribution to welfare. Owning the entire world's wealth becomes important to Maitreyee depending on how it increases her opportunity vectors (capability set) to be and to do what has a meaning for her, which in this case is immortality.

This human-centred vision of well-being as multidimensional and, most important the position of it as the ultimate goal, forces us to rethink the value of formal education today. According to the Eurobarometer report of the European Commission when referring to FE:

(VET) is an essential tool in its attempts to prepare young people for work in the modern economy and also in its bid to ensure that Europe remains competitive and innovative in the face of increasing global competition and shifting demographics. (EC, 2011: 369).

The goal of this statement is the economy (competitiveness), and FE therefore is portrayed as a tool for achieving it. This economic and instrumental view of education (education for the economy) is, as noted before, very rooted in FE literature (for a critique see Beck, 1999; Gleeson and James, 2007). But as in the story of Maitreyee, the design of FE as an education for work becomes insufficient to provide students, not just with training, but with an education that makes their capabilities possible. Education is then, a fertile functioning.

³ For a greater differentiation between happiness and well-being, see Chapter 13 of the "The Idea of Justice" (Sen, 2009).

Returning to the theoretical concepts of the CA, besides capability and functionings, another key element to take into account for the conception of FE is agency. Within the CA, agency refers to the ability to pursue goals that are valued by the person and by society as a whole. An agent is "someone who acts and brings about change" (Sen, 1999:19). According to Issahia Berlin an agent is

"(...)somebody, not nobody; a doer - deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted on by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of having a human role (...) " (Berlin, 1958: 131 cited in Crocker, 2009:157).

Agency freedom, as Crocker (2009)⁴ uses it, is in the CA represented as "inevitably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us" (Sen, 1999: xi-xii). The concept of agency, and in particular, agency freedom sheds light for defining FE in the space of the CA. Under this lens, FE has the greater role of unwrapping student's agencies in order to provide them with abilities for shaping their own future. This perception transcends FE as an education for employment, and presents FE as an education for the society. FE is then an education based on human flourishing.

Keeping the concepts of capability, functioning and agency freedom on mind, I portray the role of education, and particularly FE, as a role that transcends ensuring only access to education or securing a job. Its roles include providing and encouraging students with skills, competences and in fact, knowledge. The combination of all of those enables the students to negotiate and realize functionings addressed to their own plan of life. FE should provide students with broader beings and doings that enhance their agency freedom. The economic paradigm that frames FE is, however, far from this conception of education for freedom.

Equality of what?

"Equality of what?" (1979) refers to the title of a paper presented by Sen in the Tanner Lectures and represents a threefold critique of egalitarian discourse. There are two main criticisms: assuming that all

⁴ Crocker explores the relation between agency and welfare and the distinction between Sen and Nussbaum. "While Sen claims that people and societies should use their agency individually and collectively to determine the nature and importance of that social minimum, Nussbaum assigns that job to philosophical reflection" (Crocker, 2009:163).

people are created equal; and seeking uniformity by ignoring diversity. Sen's contribution to this question lies once again in the change of lenses. If in the previous section I presented human well-being as the point of arrival for enlightening future FE strategies, now with the question of equality of what, I aim to delimit and assess what should constitute the starting point of FE policy.

As I noted, education should be a fertile functioning that enhance a student's capabilities and freedoms to define his/her life-plan. The CA focuses on "the freedom to achieve various lifestyles: the power to say" (Conill, 2004:165). However, the students already before they join an FE classroom, are different among themselves. But on what basis do their differences lie? The most common division used among CA scholars to categorize factors that alter individual's ability to transform resources into functionings is the one provided by Robeyns (2005). She, informed by Sen's readings, divides into three types: environmental, social and personal. Using this categorization I move now to Sen's example of the bicycle.

The bicycle example used by Sen (1993) is a classic to illuminate why resources are not a valid measure of equality and, therefore, the need to focus on the capabilities as a more just and moral indicator. A bicycle is a commodity, but the fact that a person can transform this resource in a valid way of transportation that allows one's mobility depends on several factors. Environmental aspects (i.e. the state of the road), social (i.e. in that particular society is legally or morally accepted that a person with the features of the owner rides it), and personal (i.e. agent physical and learned abilities) factors alter the conversion. Therefore, even though one has to acknowledge that to have a bike is better than not to have one, the fact of having it does not automatically translate into greater capabilities (genuine opportunities). From this example we extract that to know if an action contributes to the welfare of a person we need in advance to take into consideration the individual conversion factors. It is once the conversion factors are known when one can evaluate agents' capabilities to transform resources into valuable functionings. Therefore, and in order to address the question posed at the beginning, equality should not be measured in terms of resources but in terms of capabilities.

The message coming from this story is that one should be cautious about taking as granted the benefits that an increase in resources

provides. Technology, greater installations or even new classroom pedagogies are goods or methods with the potentiality to turn into valuable functionings for the students. Nonetheless, the final evaluation should be based not on their own existence. It should be based on the ability of those for enhancing students' capabilities to develop a critical and empathic vision of the world. Wrapping up, there are two main conclusions extracted by positioning once again the individual at the centre. First, I state that there is a need to demystify the benefits of resources because their impact is related on the conversion factors of each student (personal features, social circumstances and environmental location) and therefore success stories cannot be directly translated. Secondly, and in a broader sense, I conclude that there is a need for further research into the discourse of equality in order to establish what kind of equality is being referred to. I propose that FE needs equality but on the basis of students' capabilities and that it can be done using the capability lens. It implies that in order to level the field and ensure students' equality in terms of freedom, some entrance inequalities (i.e. greater counselling or gender discrimination) need to be practiced.

Having stated that an increase in resources does not ensure an increase in students' freedoms to develop a meaningful life, I address the last question of the paper: what are the forces limiting students' freedoms?

Iris Marion Young - Politics of Difference

The philosopher Iris Marion Young (1990) offers the other side of the story. If the CA is centred on freedom, the writings of Young centred on oppression naturally complement the approach.

The author departs from the area of social criticism to focus on the disadvantages and injustices of minority groups. She centres her writings on those left behind in the distributive paradigm (Rawls, 1971; Fraser, 1997). Like Sen, Young defends the necessity of ending the economic paradigm for being an incomplete paradigm. The criticism that Young argues is that liberalism underpins a wrong social ontology in which everything is turned into commodities and in which institutions are assumed objective in its redistribution. In her own words, "rights are relations and not commodities" (1990:25). It implies that, recalling the point made above about resources, rights or opportunities cannot be distributed one to one. It is necessary to pay attention to individual

differences in order to secure equality. Thus, distribution policies are inadequate because they build on incorrect assumptions of equality, and by doing that they leave aside the well-being of individuals and groups. Under these assumptions, the change that the author is advocating is a structural reform based on a politics of difference (Young, 1990).

In her philosophical arguments, development is understood as "personal development" (Young, 2000: 31 - 32) and involves knowing and recognizing the needs of each individual, the organization of power within institutions, the status of the agent, and the communication in a given space-time. At this midpoint, the college as an institution is not only responsible for providing conditions of access or conditions of learning, but rather the college is responsible for providing to each student with insight knowledge for personal development. To unwrap the term of personal development, I elaborate on the three aspects that Nussbaum compels to liberal education. Firstly Nussbaum refers that for *Cultivating Humanity* (1997) one needs the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions for living what (adapting Socrates) she refers to as the examined life. Secondly, a democratic citizen requires an ability to see oneself not simply as a citizen of some local region or group but also, and above all, as a human being bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern. Finally, and related to the other two, Nussbaum presents the ability to have a narrative imagination as the capacity to see the world from another person's point of view. In short, FE acquires the role of going beyond providing practical knowledge to acquire the role of activating individuals' agency in the society. From this logic, a college that does not provide individuals with the ability to elaborate and negotiate their plans of life in relation and also consideration of the rest of inhabitants is not a good education, no matter how good the academic results of that college are.

Like the CA, the focus is again on the development of each individual. However, if the CA dealt with the "freedom to" expand capabilities, Young (2000) questions which are the constricting forces. What is limiting individual and group freedoms to develop a life that we value?. Young mobilizes the concept of oppression following the demands of American activism. The author defines the term oppression as, "the advantages and disadvantages experienced by some people, not because of a tyrannical power of coercion, but by the practices of a well-intentioned liberal society." (Young, 1990:74)

Thus, oppression is here understood as the various forms and impediments that a person faces and limits freedom to carry one's functionings. This oppression for carrying valuable beings and doings can be translated into a lack of agency freedom.

As people, we live in structures and in relation to others (Nussbaum, 2000; Young, 2001); therefore some behaviours and restrictions are necessary to ensure the general freedom. Nonetheless, Young (1990) alerts us to the dangers of normalization and normativity and their underlying intention of pursuing a common good. The absence of a pure and neutral standard model of life, a statement often referred to in qualitative research as well as in critical pedagogy, is the backbone in Young's speech. The common good, is demystified by Young's writings as the good of the few (1990, 2002) because its tendency to turn into a situation and experience of a privileged group. This privileged group is often defined as a man, white, middle or upper class and conservative. Additionally, the majority group will be the one who defines the universal point of view and their vision then will turn as a difference to label those who are different to them as the absolute otherness⁵.

The fear of normalization as a mechanism of exclusion perpetrated by a majority is reminiscent of the writings of Goodin (1996). The author warns about the language of inclusion used by development agencies. In his view, inclusion always presupposes that there are people outside and people inside (that is the ones who frame the speech), and policies must be developed for bringing outsiders inside. In the educational context, the production and transmission of knowledge is highly influenced by majority concerns and in my opinion it represents a risk of turning into a single discourse which ends up excluding the most vulnerable.

An educational example of the risks of the common good of inclusion can be the use of a textbook in a subject with the initial aim of providing equality across different classrooms. Despite of the good intentions, this can turn into three features of oppression. First, an exclusion felt by low income students that year after year have to face

⁵ For further literature about the concept of inclusion and specifically exclusion of "the others" see the work of Ruth Levitas (1996).

the purchasing of new books. Second, if the case is that the course aim is to finish the book, the rule turns into an oppression of teacher's freedom to adapt the content to the specific features of the classroom (which in turn increases the vulnerability of the students because they have to adapt to the path and knowledge stated by the book). Finally, the use of a textbook in the classroom can also be a factor of oppression if the book becomes the only source of knowledge production and thus the transmitter of the irrefutable truth that Young demystifies.

In the book, *Politics of Difference* (1990), Young pays special attention to the various forces that shape oppression and establishes five faces: exploitation, marginalization, powerless, cultural imperialism and violence. In a brief way, I move now to present the first four. The fifth face of oppression, violence, in my understanding lies in all the others either explicitly or implicitly, as violence per definition is always related to oppression. In the following subsections I detail each of the faces.

Exploitation

With a distinctly Marxist tone, Young uses the term exploitation to point out that although in modern societies there are laws that guarantee equal citizenship access or bargaining power in work relations is restricted to certain groups or individuals.

The use of exploitation for an analysis of FE acquires relevance to research the relations between teachers and student inside the classrooms. Additionally, the awareness of unequal access to power sheds light on issues of the labour conditions of FE students after finishing college. Under this perspective of power, labour is evaluated beyond income and includes issues such as autonomy or job guarantees.

Marginalization

The association with the adjective marginal goes back to the inside and outside references made by Goddin (1996) and Young (2000) in their respective social analysis. For marginal, Young refers to "those persons whom the work system cannot or will not use" (1990:53). A person is marginal as his/her functionings are outside of what is understood as the common good. Similarly to the concept of "otherness", the stigmatization of a person as marginal is done by a group and excludes one's perceptions and preferences.

Using the capability lens, to be marginal is seen as result and therefore does not carry any judgmental evaluation about if it is bad or good. The label provides no information in itself. The evaluation should be always made on the basis of individual's functionings and freedom to exercise his/her agency.

Therefore, one should interrogate about his/her life-plans and his/her personal, social and environmental conditions before stating a valuable judgment. I move now to give a simplified example of how marginalization can be a restricted choice and therefore a conversion factor for individual's decisions. After finishing FE a student faces three options: carry on studying, working or being unemployed. This student who is also a mother has as a plan of life that is to open her own cake-shop. However, she has not enough money to start that activity. If she works for others, due to the lack of experience and country regulations, her salary will just be enough to cover the cost of a baby sitter. There is also not any state support money; therefore she starts to help elderly people without any type of contract. Working without legal guarantees allows her to bring the baby with her, to be flexible regarding schedule, and meanwhile saving for her dreamt business. In conclusion, due to personal and social factors she becomes "marginal" for the system. This approach to marginal breaks the common believe that work is good in itself and an open decision for everyone to shed light on the complexities of work. This case, despite of its simplicity, illustrates how the exercise of one's agency depends on the nature of work in itself (i.e. conditions, salary or relations), the institutional forms and societal welfare, as well as the personal conditions of the individual. The combination of all that factors makes the capability set of this person very reduced.

Powerless

This face of oppression refers to the situation that non-professionals experience because of their inability to participate in decisions that affect their lives. For Young, non-professional designates those who do the material work and are poorly paid. The lower position of non-professionals allows that free professionals can take care of the business, and enrol in intellectual and managerial activities. This division of labour is usually linked to a division of class and gender.

The example given above reflects a powerless situation. If the person would have been a man, instead of a woman, the lack of a State that

cares about family conditions would not have been so heavily noticed. Consequently, the capability set of the person would have been bigger and working in legal conditions may have been a genuine opportunity. The degree of power of the individuals for developing their own life-plan and also within the society is important to understand the real nature of "choices" that FE students' face in and outside the college.

Cultural Imperialism

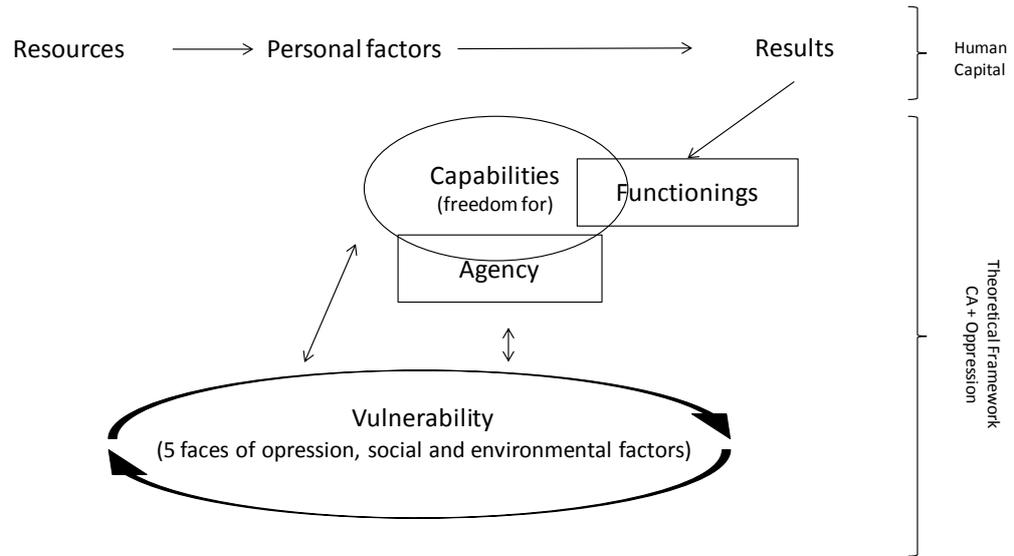
This face of oppression is at the centre of the protests of feminists and theorists of black liberation. Cultural imperialism refers to how society favours a particular group and builds simultaneously stereotypes about "the Other" to the point of making them invisible.

Examples of cultural imperialism are easy to find in territories where two languages are legally spoken but one is favoured at the administrative level because it is the most used by the privileged group. In this case, legal equality, do not translate into a genuine equality because not all members of that society count with the same capabilities to be heard. Language, in this case, turns into vulnerability.

Even though the five face of oppression are closely interlinked with the conversion factors mentioned above (Robeyns, 2005), I consider that Young specification of oppression gives a greater dimension to the aspect of freedom. The conversion factors are focused on the individual and in his/her relation to the society. Complementary, the writings of Young conceive an individual as part of a group (i.e. woman, black, FE student, national of a country, etc) and due to that condition position that individual with a set of oppressions that goes beyond one's control. In conclusion, conversion factors together with the faces of oppression set the degree of vulnerability of an individual and consequently, the freedom to carry one's life-plans.

Theoretical framework

Having briefly outlined the main features of both theories, I move now to illustrate the contribution of those to educational research. The graph represents an original conceptual combination that aims to reframe FE design and practices from a humanistic perspective.



Developed by the author, 2011

In human capital discourse results are conceived as outcomes, represented at the end of a linear process in which the individual and the resources come into play. This linear analysis implies that performance is evaluated in terms of personal factors as well as available resources that the individual counts with⁶. A simplistic example of this could be that if the results are unexpected (i.e. college dropout) the solution that under the human capital perspective will be taken will be to reflect on the two steps before that event. Consequently, the college will either blame it on the student's abilities, personal factors, or will demand for greater resources that attract students into the college.

The theoretical framework that I propose establishes an interlinked and dynamic situation where the goal is to enlarge students' capabilities and therefore to expand their reasoning and thinking for developing independently a valuable plan of life. This framework allows assessing FE in relation to its abilities to enhance the capabilities space and students' agency. The value lies not in the result, but in its influence on the person and his/her freedoms. Consequently, the analysis is not

⁶ Another key difference that is not reflected in the illustration is that under utilitarianism the results to be considered as good results have to be related to an economic increase and also it comes with an increase of the individual happiness. In the CA literature there is an extensive differentiation between happiness (as economic, individualistic and momentary pleasure) and well-being (as human, society centred and multidimensional). For greater references see Sen chapter 13 in the Idea of Justice "Happiness, Well-being, and Capabilities"

limited to the end of the graph (right side – the results), but to the middle, the process. Focusing on the process implies to start by questioning whether the results obtained by the individual correspond to functionings, it means to beings or doings valued by the person and chosen without coercion and through reasoning. Taking the example of a student dropping out, this framework will start by interrogating what are the reasons for this. Is the education received in the college helping the student to become and to do what he or she values? Put into other words, what is the impact of the education received within the college? The fact of addressing the two, the institution and the education system, is relevant in order to evaluate practices rather than outcomes. This framework will differentiate from meritocratic analysis done by the human capital approach because it will interrogate the student's capabilities and vulnerabilities rather than just the outcomes.

An educational policy developed within this framework takes into consideration the forces that constrain and distort the capability of people and therefore undermine their agency. The operationalization of the CA is complex, but thanks to this complexity the analysis provides greater insight and acknowledgment of the impact of the vulnerabilities in the freedom to carry on the agency. Vulnerabilities, understood as forces that limit the space of freedom and determine individual capabilities, are represented with circular arrows to emphasize that they are corrosive (Wolf and De-Shalit, 2007). They are corrosive due to the fact that they transcend other areas such as access to resources, individual personal abilities, agency, results and ultimately functionings, the value that the individual gives to his/her results.

Even though not named on the diagram, education would be positioned inside of the functionings and therefore, as a set of fertile functionings that inform students' agency and reduces their vulnerabilities. This multidimensional framework represents the capabilities in between a continuous tension among freedom and vulnerabilities. It can be used as an evaluative framework as far as it sheds light on the ability of FE education to provide students with valuable beings and doings, as well as spaces to cultivate agency, but also as a normative framework where to develop policies based on enhancing student freedoms by taking into account individual and societal vulnerabilities.

Conclusion

In this article I have pointed out some of the shortcomings of current paradigms underpinning FE. Through the lens of capabilities I have

tried to challenge those by proposing a new framework constructed on students' vulnerabilities and focused on their freedoms. A theoretical framework that places well-being at the centre implies rethinking educational purposes, and thus policies, from the perspective of an education that aims to extend the capability of each student to become agents and carry out a life meaningful for them but also for the society as a whole. This view emphasizes the role of education as a transformative action that goes beyond economic spheres. It is then an education for freedom and emancipation.

With these theoretical foundations of freedom and vulnerability, I suggest that the current economic paradigm focused on results and growth is at least insufficient. From this perspective, the starting point to reform the pillars of FE must be to settle the objective of providing a space for levelling the field and increasing the capabilities of each student and nurturing a dynamic and transformative agency. FE is an education primarily oriented to gaining skills and knowledge for performing a job, but not conceptualized only in this sense. This field would immensely benefit from an education which supports agency, a plural education with a general focus where employability has a place but is not the ultimate end. FE requires from analyses and proposals coming from authors of universal disciplines such as philosophy, but also more concrete perspectives such as environmental, gender, class or racial studies for illuminating individual diversities and universal challenges. This education needs to move its interests beyond managerial and pedagogical fields. It is important to position students not just as mere students but rather as individuals who participate in all spheres of the society and who can flourish or suffer.

The diagnoses of Further Education as the "Cinderella sector" are nourished by linear educational designs that obscure those effects. In this paper I hope to have contributed to develop more fruitful frameworks that position actions inside a holistic approach to life, in which humans are interlinked and constituted by their beings and doings in the society. Concepts of capabilities and agency are as important as vulnerabilities understood as Young's oppressions, because all together determine well-being and therefore need to be taken into account if we want an education for life, and not only for revenues.

Acknowledgements

My gratitude goes to my first supervisor, Professor Melanie Walker, for her encouragement, advice and guidance along my research and constructive comments on this paper. My acknowledgment also to Dr. Alejandra Boni Aristazabal, Dr. José Félix Lozano Aguilar and Ana Sofia Ribeiro Santos for exchanging ideas that have contributed to improve the quality of my opinions expressed here. My gratitude also to the Jubilee Press team for their advice in terms of style and format. Finally, the analysis and opinions expressed are solely mine; any mistakes or errors remain the author's responsibility.

References

Ainley, P. (2003), 'Eight statements of the 'bleeding blindingly obvious' and a PS on education as social control.' *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24(3), 347-355.

Ashton, D. and F. Green (1996), *Education, Training and the Global Economy*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar.

Atkinson, P. (1985), *Language, structure and reproduction: an introduction to the sociology of Basil Bernstein*, London, Methuen.

Avis, J. and Bathmaker, A.-M. (2004), 'Critical pedagogy, performativity and a politics of hope: trainee FE lecturer practice.' *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 9(2), 301-313.

Ball, S. (2008), *The Education Debate*, Bristol, Policy Press.

Beck, J. (1999), 'Makeover or takeover? The strange death of educational autonomy in neo-liberal England.' *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20(2), 223-238.

Becker, G. (1964), *Human Capital, A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education*, London, University of Chicago Press.

Berlin, I. (1958) 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in Isaiah Berlin (1969) *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. http://www.wiso.unihamburg.de/fileadmin/wiso_vwl/johannes/Ankuen digungen/Berlin_twoconceptsofliberty.pdf (accessed, 31st of January, 2012)

Boni, A. (2010), 'La educación superior desde el enfoque de capacidades. Una propuesta para el debate' (Higher Education from a capability approach. A proposal for the debate). *Revista de Educacion y Formacion de Profesorado*, 13 (3), 123-131.

Brighouse, H. (2006), *On Education: Thinking in Action*, London, Routledge.

Brown, P., A. Green and H. Lauder. (2001), *High Skills: globalisation, competitiveness and skill formation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Cedefop (2009), *Spain: VET in Europe Country Report. Reports on vocational education and training*, http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/eu/pub/cedefop/vetreport/2009_CR_ES.pdf. (Accessed, 24th of February 2011).

Coffield, F. (1999), 'Breaking the consensus: lifelong learning as social control.' *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(4), 479-500.

Conill, J. (2004), *Horizontes de economía ética. Aristóteles, Adam Smith, Amartya Sen* (Economic ethical horizons. Aristotle, Adam Smith, Amartya Sen), Madrid, Tecnos.

Crocker, D. (2009), *Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability and Deliberative Democracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Crouch, C., D. Finegold and M. Sako. (1999), *Are Skills the Answer? The political economy of skill creation in advanced industrial countries*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Deneulin, S. and Shahani, L., (2009), *An Introduction to the Human Development and Capability Approach: Freedom and Agency*, London, Earthscan.

European Commission (2002), 'Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission' Copenhagen 29 - 30 November
http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc125_en.pdf (Accessed, 31st of January, 2012).

European Commission (2011), "Attitudes towards vocational education and training", Eurobarometer

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_369_en.pdf

(Accessed 18th of November, 2011).

Flores-Crespo, P. (2007), 'Situating education in the human capabilities approach', in Walker, M. & Unterhalter, E. (Eds.) *Amartya Sen Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education*, Great Britain, Palgrave.

Fraser, N. (1997), *Justice Interruptus From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in From Redistribution to Recognition?*, in *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*. New York and London, Routledge, 11-40.

Fukuda-Parr, S. (2003), 'The Human Development Paradigm: Operationalizing Sen's Ideas on Capabilities.' *Feminist Economics*, 9(2-3), 301-317.

Gleeson, D. and James, D. (2007), 'The paradox of professionalism in English further education: a TLC project perspective.' *Educational Review*, 59(4), 451-467.

Goodin, R. E. (1996). 'Inclusion and exclusion.' *European Journal of Sociology*, 37 (1), 343-371.

Guillén, M., Fontrodona, J., et.al (2007), 'The Great Forgotten Issue: Vindicating Ethics in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).' *Journal of Business Ethics*, 74(4), 409-423.

James, D. and Bloomer, M. (2001), 'Cultures and learning in further education', in: *British Educational Research Association Annual Conference*, Leeds, University of Leeds.

Levitas, R. (1996), 'The concept of social exclusion and the new Durkheimian hegemony.' *Critical Social Policy*, 16(46), 5-20.

Mincer J. (1958), 'Investment in human capital and personal income distribution.' *The Journal of Political Economy*, 66(4), 281-302.

Newman, J. and Clarke, J. (1994), 'Going about our business? The managerialization of public services', in: Clarke, J. et al. (Eds). *Managing social policy*, London, SAGE, 13-31.

Nussbaum, M. (1997), *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Harvard, Harvard University Press.

Nussbaum, M. (2000), *Women and Human Development*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Oosterlaken, I. (2009), 'Design for Development: a Capability Approach.' *Design Issues*, 25(4), 91-102.

Otto, H.-U. and Ziegler, H. (Ed.) (2010), *Education, Welfare and the Capabilities Approach – A European Perspective*, Farmington Hills, Barbara Budrich Publisher.

Pring, R. (1995), *Closing the Gap: Liberal Education and Vocational Preparation*, London, Hodder.

Randle, K. and Brady, N. (1997), 'Managerialism and professionalism in the 'Cinderella Service'.' *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 49(1), 121-139.

Rawls, J. (1971), *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Robeyns, I. (2005), 'The Capability Approach: A Theoretical Survey.' *Journal of Human Development*, 6(1), 93-114.

Sen, A. K. (1979), 'Equality of What', in Sterling M. McMurrin (Ed.), *The Tanner Lectures on Human Value*, Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 195-220.

Sen, A.K., (1993), 'Capability and Well-being', in M. C. Nussbaum & A. K. Sen (Ed.), *The Quality of Life*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 30-53.

Sen, A. K. (1999), *Development as Freedom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Sen, A. K. (2009), *The Idea of Justice*, London, Penguin Books.

Souto-Otero, M., Fleckenstein, T. and Dacombe, R., (2008). 'Filling in the gaps: European governance, the open method of coordination and the European Commission.' *Journal of Education Policy*, 23 (3), 231-249.

Stewart, F. (2000), 'Income Distribution And Development' QEH Working Paper Series - QEHWPS37 Working Paper Number 37 <http://www3.qeh.ox.ac.uk/pdf/qehwp/qehwps37.pdf> (accessed, 31st of January, 2012).

TLRP (2008), *Inside Further Education: the social context of learning*, September, No. 52 - <http://www.tlrp.org/pub/documents/JephcoteRB52final.pdf> (accessed, 31st of January, 2012).

Terzi, L. (2008), *Justice and Equality in Education: A Capability Perspective on Disability and Special Educational Needs*, New York, Continuum.

Unterhalter, E. (2003), 'The capabilities approach and gendered education An examination of South African complexities.' *Theory and Research in Education*, 1 (1), 7-22.

Walker, M. (2003), 'Framing Social Justice in Education: What Does The Capabilities Approach Offer?.' *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 2 (1), 168-187.

Walker, M. and Unterhalter, E., ed., (2007), *Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

Winch, C. (2000), *Education, Work and Social Capital*, London, Routledge.

Wolf, A. (2002), *Does Education Matter?*, London, Penguin.

Wolff, J. and De-Shalit, A. (2007), *Disadvantage*, Oxford, Oxford Political Theory.

Young, I.M. (1990), *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Young, I.M. (2001), 'Equality of Whom? Social Groups and Judgments of Injustice.' *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 9 (1), 1–18.

Young, I.M. (2002), *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

www.nottingham.ac.uk/education



The University of
Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM • CHINA • MALAYSIA

NOTTINGHAM
JUBILEE PRESS

j