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What Can Young People Tell Us About Promoting Equality and Inclusion Through Widening participation in Higher Education in England?

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Introduction

Education continues to be presented as a political priority for human development in countries worldwide. The agendas for education are promoted through a variety of means and become formalised through the presentation of policy. There is a current global trend to expand participation in education by people from diverse backgrounds. This expansion has involved increasing provision of primary, secondary and tertiary education as well as attempting to widen access to address longstanding inequalities relating to gender, class and ethnicity. Whilst progress has been made there is still a long way to go and now there is a growing need to consider matters beyond provision and access to education. In particular, the nature of young people's *participation* in formal education settings must come under scrutiny in order to gain a better understanding of whether success has been achieved in terms of an agenda for social justice. Quantitative measures of participation in terms of, say, aspiration, application and admission to higher education institutions (HEI's) are limited in what they can say about the nature of participation by individuals. This paper aims to expand the concept of participation, using the example of higher education in the UK, to help further understanding of how education policies and practices can be more inclusive and socially just. Although the case in point is UK oriented there are international parallels to be drawn in relation to the theory underpinning dominant education policy, the nature of young people's participation and the alternative perspectives that the Capability Approach can offer.

Background to research

A case study was conducted with 580 young people from a South Yorkshire city in the UK during the academic year 2006-07. Focus groups, surveys, group and individual interviews were used to learn more about the aspirations of sixth formers and the opportunities and support they have in exploring and pursuing these aspirations. Further key aims were to learn more about young people's experiences and participation in education in relation to notions of equity and inclusion. Using the evaluative framework of the capability approach, the findings were considered in relation to current UK government policy to widen participation in higher education.

In the city where the research took place there are two main forms of sixth form education. There are five schools with sixth forms which are all located in the affluent south-west of the city. There are also two new sixth form colleges based in the north-east of the city where most of the students come from the local area where there is multiple socio-economic deprivation. Over 90% of the sample was aged from 17-18 years with the remaining students being 19 years old and mainly based in the two colleges[1]. The sample was fairly evenly split in terms of gender with 45% males and 55% females. The majority of students (72%) described their ethnicity as 'White UK' with the remaining individuals spread across several ethnic groups including 8% who described themselves as 'Asian' and 6% who described themselves as 'Black'. There was significant variation in the mix of young people from different ethnic backgrounds in the four institutions studied.

Data were gathered on participants involvement in paid work and helping at home, participants' thoughts about the future beyond school/college and their ideas about higher education. Twenty four individual interviews were conducted with volunteers from the survey sample. The findings showed that although many students aspired to higher education there were others who did not. Furthermore there were a number of students who felt compelled to apply for higher education whilst their alternative aspirations were ignored. The processes by which students were encouraged to apply for higher education revealed contradictions in terms of the narrowing of choice and the reduction of individual agency experienced by some students. The importance of the nature of individual participation in decision-making and engagement regarding higher education emerged as a crucial factor in developing a socially just education strategy.

UK Policy to Widen Participation in Higher Education

The British government's Aimhigher strategy aims to increase participation in English higher education to 50 per cent of those aged 18 to 30 by 2010 (DfEE, 2000). The participation rates for young people aged 18 or 19 remain well below this target and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) strategy emphasises, 'reaching out to those for whom higher education seems beyond reach, not for lack of ability, but often simply for reasons of background or family tradition' (HEFCE, 2003). Within Aimhigher widening participation policy there is an implicit assumption about what 'aiming higher' means and what constitutes a 'high' or 'low' aspiration. The main groups targeted by the Widening Participation agenda are referred to as young people from 'disadvantaged areas', 'deprived areas', 'disadvantaged backgrounds' and 'under-represented groups' (HEFCE, 2003).

The Government has targeted the promotion of fair access as a key priority area. In its widening participation strategy (DfES, 2003), the Government outlined the action being proposed under four headings including attainment, aspiration, applications and admissions. (Universities UK, 2005:12). Schools, colleges and HEI's are being monitored on their progress towards government targets to increase participation and

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[1]Pseudonyms are used in the examples presented and permission sought from all participants for purposes of this conference paper and presentation.

their performance is assessed. There is an implication that if similar percentages of young people from diverse socioeconomic groups go onto experience higher education then a greater degree of equality will have been reached. However, the way the policy has been implemented has led some students with non-university aspirations to feel excluded. A multi-faceted concept of 'disadvantage' is needed to highlight within group differences and to go beyond the traditional structural notions of inequalities based on class, gender and ethnicity.

The pursuit of a socially just approach to the education of our children falls under the broader remit of securing a basic minimum of human rights for young people. Eleanor Roosevelt emphasised the crucial role of schools and colleges in a speech to the United Nations:

> ' Where after all do human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.' (Eleanor Roosevelt, Speech to UN, 27 March, 1958).

It is now fifty years since Eleanor Roosevelt made this landmark speech yet the projects to achieve greater justice, opportunity and dignity for citizens worldwide retain their significance. It has been argued that these human rights, based on a principle of equality, can be achieved through more the enlightened participation of individuals in society. In this paper the focus is specifically on young people's participation in education and the way in which the capability approach can help speed progress towards greater social justice. Sen has questioned whether a social justice agenda necessarily needs to pursue equality and even so what kind of equalities might be sought. For example, two individuals might need different resources to arrive at a similar level of 'well-being achievement'[2]. The capability approach proposes instead that it is beneficial to expand an individual's 'capabilities' so that s/he is able to choose between a range of ways of being and doing they have reason to value in order that they might live a flourishing life.

The nature of young people's participation in the formal education system plays a crucial part in whether they are able to develop a range of valued opportunities from which to choose and the research examples presented later in this paper help to illustrate this further. However, first it is useful to expand the concept of 'participation' generally and in the context of education and the Capability Approach.

Participation and the Capability Approach

Participation in education has tended to be seen from a binary perspective with individuals either inside or outside of formal education i.e. participation or non-participation. Efforts have been principally directed at continuing to engage children

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[2] Sen distinguishes 'well-being achievement' from 'well-being freedom'. The former is the well-being actually achieved by an individual whilst the latter represents the full range of valued opportunities they have chosen from. See Hart (2007) for further discussion.

in education as they reach the end of each stage of schooling and to raise their attainment in terms of exam success. International policy relating to education such as the UN Convention on the rights of the child, the Millennium Development Goals together with national policies have strived to provide better *access* to all for education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels (UN, 1990; DfID, 2006). However, access and presence within a formal educational setting does not indicate anything of the quality or meaning of the experience for a given individual. The UN Convention on Children's Rights states, '…the education of the child shall be directed to…the development of a child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.' (UN, 1990:9). This can only be carried out with the active and willing participation of children. Furthermore, there are numerous examples of students recounting negative experiences of schooling and higher education, particularly relating to class but also other aspects of individual identity (Unterhalter, 2003; Archer *et al* 2003; Power *et al* 2003; Reay *et al* 2005). This evidence suggests that the nature of children's participation in education needs to be taken seriously if we are to pursue an education agenda in the interests of social justice.

Incorporating the term 'participation' into the UK government's policy on expanding higher education is strategic because this term is closely linked to human rights agendas. The term 'participation' is loaded and trades on the assumption that increasing numbers is synonymous with better forms of participation. The literatures on human rights, and children's rights in particular, have addressed the concept of participation in a more general context. This paper draws on this previous work in order to expand the concept of participation specifically in relation to education. Roger Hart developed a model of young people's participation related to citizenship and decision-making (based on earlier work by Arnstein) using a ladder to signify different levels of participation and non-participation (Hart, 1992). Each ascending rung corresponds to an increasing level of participation beginning with 'manipulation'. Those who are manipulated are seen simply as being used to support the causes of others and one step up sees young people used to support a cause (e.g. by use of images) but having no direct involvement in it ('decoration'). The third rung of 'Tokenism' goes little further and in this case young people are presented as if they have a voice and yet they do not (for example, being asked to sit on a committee for the sake of appearing democratic). Further up the ladder, Hart identifies five hierarchical ways in which young people can participate more meaningfully in decisions affecting them. At the top level 8 children initiate shared decisions with adults allowing them maximum involvement in decisions affecting their lives. Although the model was developed with reference to children's citizenship it serves to illustrate that there are many different levels at which young people might participate in their education too and simply looking at numbers enrolled in different stages of education may give a false impression of progress towards democratic ideals. It is proposed that in order maximise the potential of formal education processes to expand young people's capabilities it is vital that attention is focussed on developing more meaningful participation of young people.

In relation to the formal education system three broad dimensions of participation were distinguished from the case study. The first dimension relates to participation in the *decision* to engage in a particular form of education. The second dimension relates to the *experience* of participation (or non-participation) in a given form of education. The third dimension relates to the *outcomes* of participation. Participation

can be described as an iterative rather than linear process. The dimensions identified cannot easily be separated from one another and serve mainly as a conceptual tool. The young people's narratives are frequently multi-dimensional and examples are used in the following section simply to illustrate each dimension. The dimensions of participation can be seen internationally at different levels of education systems ranging from the primary to tertiary sectors. They are highlighted well by the example of non-compulsory tertiary education in the UK. The next section addresses these three dimensions of participation in more detail.

First Dimension of Participation: Decision-making

The evaluative framework of the capability approach highlights the importance of the quality of participation by young people in educational settings. Sen argues that the freedom to choose a way of life that an individual has reason to value (well-being freedom) is more important than the life they actually lead (well-being achievement) (Hart, 2007). Quantitative outcome based indicators of participation rates for higher education in the UK may suggest positive progress has been made in making higher education more accessible and inclusive yet the qualitative data presented here show that the situation is much more confused. The following examples help to illustrate how the nature of participation in terms of *decision-making* can vary dramatically. For example, there are young people from middle class backgrounds who are being pushed towards higher education without having other valued opportunities to choose from. On the other hand, there are young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds who feel they have been labelled as not being capable of going on to higher education and they therefore feel excluded by the way the UK widening participation policy has been implemented. My earlier work in this area highlighted four different kinds of young people's participation in relation to decision-making regarding application to higher education. Interviews with sixth formers regarding their lives beyond school showed the decision to participate in higher education could be seen broadly as an independent, shared, guided or conflicting decision depending on the specific circumstances of an individual (Hart, 2004)[3].

The interview data from the case study illustrated that for some young people the process of deciding whether to apply for a higher education place was complex and involved a significant challenge to their identity. In the survey only 45% of students indicated that they felt that had enough time to talk to Connexions [careers] Advisors and it seemed that some young people might benefit further from having greater opportunity to talk openly about their feelings surrounding their potential participation in higher education. Indeed, this might provide greater insight to educational practitioners regarding how higher education can be made more amenable to students and facilitate higher degrees of participation.

In the following extract Michael, (a white male from a predominantly middle class school sixth form), describes how teachers makes assumptions about what will constitute the best future for students in the sixth form in terms of applying for a higher education place. There appears to be a lack of consideration of the way

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[3] See Hart, C. (2004) for further discussion of these groupings.

students are excluded from the decision-making process regarding what might constitute a valued future:

M: ..Once you're there [in the sixth form] you're just left there as such and then you get on with the work and then they just say to you at the end of the first year or second year, have you thought about University? And you've not really had the opportunity to sit down with the teacher and talk about it, so you don't know what to say to them really.
....

CH: ...Have you actually had a chance to feed that back?

M: No you don't really have the chance because, for example, in a Key Skills lesson you'll have a look on the Internet or whatever, you'll tell the teachers. You just say 'oh I don't really think about going to University or whatever' and then they sort of say 'oh it'll be good for you, you'll get more experience there' and stuff like that but it's just more work. They don't speak to the people individually. They just think get them all off to University. They don't actually sit down with the person and say 'are you capable of doing the coursework?' 'are you more hands-on?' 'would you like to go to University?' or 'what would you like to do?'. Do you know what I mean, give you that option? They just sort of seem to like put everyone in the same bucket and say 'oh at University, you will have a good time' sort of thing and that's it, they don't actually speak to you one-on-one sort of thing.

For students who said they did not wish to apply for a higher education place the situation sometimes became uncomfortable. For example, Rachael (white female at a high achieving middle class school sixth form) commented:

R: ...she [Guidance teacher] were trying to force me to apply even though I really weren't gonna go. She was like 'oh you may as well apply'

Later in the same interview:

R: If you don't go to guidance you don't get anything. They don't like ... like the teachers will say to my friends 'oh how's your applications [for university] going then?' and blah, blah, blah. Nobody will say to me 'oh have you found a job yet?' or whatever. They just ... it's as if I'm not like, once I've finished A-levels I'll just go into oblivion or summat. It's weird.

CH: So how does that make you feel then?

R: Well I don't know, a bit demoralised really because I could really do with help and like people who aren't biased towards Uni helping me...

It is useful to consider whom else young people may turn to when making decisions about their lives beyond school. There is a tendency to assume young people talk to their friends about these decisions although this is not necessarily the case. There are a few studies which have extended decision-making research to consider the influence and dynamics of friends and families which are important because they reveal unexpected tendencies. For example, Brooks (2003) suggests that young people do not, contrary to popular belief, discuss their higher education choices in depth with

friends (in part due to the risk and pressure this might put on such friendships). Other studies have looked at the involvement, or lack or involvement of parents in young people's decision-making processes regarding post-18 choices (Pugsley, 1998; Hatcher, 1998, David *et al*, 2003). Such work helps to demonstrate the way families are differentially empowered to understand and negotiate the higher education marketplace leading to the continued reproduction of class-based inequalities. This makes it all the more important that staff in schools and colleges play an active role in ensuring that young people have the opportunity to freely discuss ideas and obtain advice about a variety of valued futures. Only then can they develop the capability to choose a valued life in Sen's terms.

Students have the opportunity to talk to Connexions Advisors (careers advisors) about their future plans but there was evidence that the advice given was not always neutral. In addition to the availability of Connexions Advisors students at one of the research sites also had a weekly 'Guidance' lesson with a member of the Sixth Form management team. The term 'guidance' seemed somewhat misleading for those students who did not wish to apply for a higher education place and again there was evidence that whilst some students were helped by this lesson others were excluded. Katie describes the lesson in more detail:

CH: So what was the purpose of the Guidance lesson from your point of view?

K: University was the total focus of the Guidance lesson like first you had to do your UCAS form [application form for university]…and then it went on to student finance and then after that I don't know…
…

CH: Right and I mean what were your feelings about applying for higher education at that point? What were you thinking?

K: Well I didn't really know what I wanted to do but I just sort of applied because like you were supposed if you know what I mean do you know like just everybody were doing it so I just applied really.

In this instance Katie actually ends up applying for a university place even though she does not want one. There is a sense that she is doing it to keep her teachers happy and avoid hassle. In fact Katie is in the British Women's Kickboxing Team and has said she would like to pursue this rather than go on to university at this stage. Katie describes the process of filling in the UCAS form:

K: I just said that I'd been interested in it for a long time, just all the stuff you're supposed to say, do you know what I mean like everybody's written a personal statement and lied about it, do you know what I mean like that's what you're basically told to do isn't it? You make yourself sound over-interested don't you?

Evidence emerged of students sensing an expectation to present a certain dimension of themselves, a feeling that certain traits are valued and others are not, that HEIs want to hear particular values and interests being expressed – somehow the idea that what they are is not enough or of the same worth. This is being reinforced by the attitudes and behaviours of teaching staff and encouraged by the government policy.

Katie explains that her teachers said it would be a 'bit of a waste' if she didn't go to university and gave her 'a bit of a lecture' about why she should go. The following extract helps to describe how she felt during this time:

C   Right and how did that make you feel then?

K   Maybe I weren't like bothered by it but I just, I don't know it just felt like I had to apply so I did.

C   Right.

K   For something that I didn't want to do.

She goes on to explain that she ended up applying for university, selecting six institutions to studying nursing degrees. This came about because she had accompanied a friend who was interested in nursing to a university open day. Hence they only looked around that department. Katie explains, 'I was more trying to convince myself that I wanted to do it because you know so I could apply but I weren't really that bothered'.

Second Dimension of Participation: Experience

The survey data showed that almost half of the sample (47%) was finding it hard to achieve their aspirations due to the difficulty of staying motivated. This was a surprisingly high statistic and remained fairly consistent across all four schools and colleges. There are complex reasons why students may lack motivation and many of these may lie beyond institutional control. However, there are instances where evidence emerged of circumstances where policies and practices acted to create a sense of exclusion and inferiority for some young people and therefore point to areas for improvement.

The following interview extract with Katie shows some of the difficulties encountered by young people transferring to schools with sixth forms in the south west of the city from schools without sixth forms in north-east. It is difficult for working-class students coming from outside the school to fit into to the middle-class culture and to break into existing structures of friendship groups. Katie feels that she is seen as different from the other students and has a sense of inferiority. She has made a difficult choice to come to this school, largely because of its good reputation, but it is an uncomfortable experience and her ability to participate is limited as a result. This is compounded by the fact that despite being predicted for A grades in all subjects at A2 level she does not want to go on to university. This 'outsider' phenomenon is reinforced for those who elect not to apply to higher education and the variable level of participation in the social side of sixth form life becomes apparent:

K: *I didn't really ... I didn't like sixth form at first when I first came. I wanted to leave but you get used to it.*

CH: *What was it you didn't like then?*

K: The people.

CH: Right.

K: I don't know, I think it's hard to get on like a lot of them are quite, I don't know, rich and posh and a bit, you feel a bit like do you know like a bit less than they are in a way.
...
CH: What do you think of the sixth form common room?

K: I never used to go in there at first. It were a bit like daunting with all the people that knew each other but I don't know, it's alright.

When we talk about a higher education experience it is important to recognise from the outset that this experience will be very different for each individual. The level and form of participation an individual is able to achieve will emerge from a combination of factors such as personal background and social/cultural capital, institutional *habitus* as well as structural features. Indeed, there is a diverse range of higher education institutions in the UK and this is coupled with great diversity of student intake in different places. Institutions achieve varying degrees socio-economic and ethnic diversity. Within institutions themselves there is a vast range of courses, sites, teaching methods and facilities. Brennan and Osborne observe that, 'It remains the case, of course, that at institutional level there are large differences in the proportions of students from different social and educational backgrounds" (Brennan & Osborne, 2008:180). Brennan & Osborne have recently studied how the diversity of students interacts with the diversity of institutions to, 'generate differences in student experience of higher education' (2008:180). Archer *et al* write about the varying experiences of students based on factors relating to social class. They argue that, '…working class students may perceive higher education as a threat to their class identity.' (Archer, Hutchings & Ross, 2003:93-94). Archer and her colleagues comment that the middle class *habitus* experiences less friction and disjuncture when it comes into contact with the educational field. In contrast, Power *et al*, 'question the homogeneity of middle classness and the consequently assumed ease of progression [in higher education]' (Archer *et al*, 2003; Power *et al*, 2003:81). Ultimately, the diversity of opportunity to participate in the social milieu of a given higher education institution both creates and reinforces inequalities. Furthermore, individuals are not only excluded at the point of entry to higher education but within the realms of higher education institutions themselves.

My research findings showed evidence that there are processes occurring in schools prior to students making their decisions regarding staying in post-compulsory education which contribute to individual's feeling of exclusion. Reay argues that, 'Within the same school institutional *habituses* are mobilized differentially for different pupils' (Reay, 1998:524). For example, in the following extract John is describing how his girlfriend, Helen, felt excluded by the way she was separated from the group of students in her school deemed to be capable of going on to higher education. There were three groups described by the students as the Aimhigher group, the middle and bottom groups:

J: Yeah, so she were always in the middle, so no-one did anything for people like her..there were never like special trips arranged...like the lower ones got special trips arranged for them, higher ones got special trips arranged for them and she obviously felt a bit disenfranchised by the fact she couldn't do anything like that.

CH: Right and do you think..that's disadvantaged her..in terms of her choices and things?

J: To an extent, because I know it looks amazing on CV when you've done stuff, like you write down all these things I've done because school pushed me. I've gone to all these different groups. I've been member of all different things because school's pushed me. She'd never had opportunity, not even to turn it down. She's just never been given the opportunity to do stuff like that.

In the interview with Helen (John's girlfriend) the issue of being in one of the three defined groups was discussed again. Helen describes how the way the policy has been implemented has led to segregation of students within her year. In terms of participation, Helen has not been given the opportunity to discuss and share her ideas for the future. She does not appear to be listened to and the basis for what amounts to discrimination against her remains unclear to her.

CH: And then you talked about the Aim Higher people. So who are the Aim Higher people?

H: The people that were in like the special assemblies, the people who go on trips to different Universities, people that got taught that there's more to life than getting a job// So they're pushed to more of their abilities because you sort of spend time with them and thought like, well these people have got summat, we'll ignore everybody else below that because they're shit basically, they can't ... what are they gonna do with themselves? They're past help...we'll push them to make our school look amazing. It's like they don't want middle people to represent their school as the Aim Higher people. First, I'm not being big headed but I could have had a lot of potential....I felt like you know like I'd had two fingers stuck up to me, do you know what I mean?

(Later in the same interview)

CH: Right so you've talked about this Aimhigher group. Was it clear to you then who was in the group and who was not in the group?

H: Yeah.

CH: How was it ... how did you know?

H: I mean they're always called for meetings and they're always on trips and they're always, always doing summat that the rest of us weren't doing.

The separation of students into groups according staff decisions regarding who has potential to go onto higher education may result in increased numbers applying for a university place. However, such methods do not allow all students to have the opportunity to benefit and appears to make some students feel excluded and ignored.

Six out of ten of the young people surveyed indicated that they were involved in paid work in addition to their studies. Similarly seven out of ten students indicated being involved in work at home. The amount of time spent on these activities varied significantly with some young people spending several hours a day caring for older relatives or younger siblings. In addition there 16% of students regularly worked more than 16 hours a week. These data suggest that the priority and status of educational experience to any given individual is dependent on its relationship within a complex myriad of other social experience. An individual's relationship to education and their desire as well as ability to participate is mediated by circumstances far beyond the educational institution. However, the form and flexibility of educational experience may be crucial in facilitating higher degrees of participation across a diverse range of students.

Third Dimension of Participation: Outcomes

Students with the same level of qualification from the same course at the same institution may have different prospects in the job market. Furthermore, Bourdieu argued that,

> 'There has been a devaluation as a simple effect of inflation, and also as a result of the change in the 'social quality' of the qualification holders. The effects of educational inflation are more complicated than people generally imply because a qualification is always worth what its holders are worth, a qualification that becomes more widespread is ipso facto devalued because it becomes accessible to people without social value.' (Bourdieu,1993:97-98 in Reay et al, 2005:163).

Reay argues that whilst some students 'find themselves' through a higher education experience there are many others who risk 'losing themselves'. (Reay, 2001:337). The issues relating to identity raised here emphasise the significance of listening to students' voices in an effort to understand better how they construct their identities which in turn may lead to better institutional support to help them realise their aspirations without losing their sense of identity (Archer, 2007). For example Dalia describes her experience as follows:

D: I just felt lost because I always thought there were so many students just ahead of me, just because they had, you know the Internet access or you know they had the parents that were looking into it for them and ringing up Universities for them and I just felt lost…

Dalia opted out of applying for a university place for a number of reasons including the stumbling block of having to write a personal statement as part of her UCAS application:

D: I just didn't know what to do with it and I thought well where do I start? What do I say, because I felt like if I didn't add certain things then I'd be wasting, you know, my opportunity really…and I just thought what do I need to add in, what don't I….and I just thought 'oh God why am I writing this?' and I just thought this is such a mess…. that was actually part of why I decided not to apply, as well, because I just thought I really don't know what I'm gonna put…

This contrasted with other students who had university educate parents to help them with the application process such as Jason who commented, '*I mean I knew it was good because my parents helped me write it…*".

All three dimensions of participation described interplay with one another causing multiple advantage or disadvantage for young people. It is crucial that we find a way to unravel these micro-processes and begin to find ways to help young people discover and develop their capabilities.

Concluding Remarks on Using A Capability Approach to Find a Way Forward

The level and quality of young people's participation in education is determined, at least in part, through the negotiation of policies and practices. Therefore policy makers and practitioners have key roles in encouraging more meaningful and just structures of participation by young people in education. A greater focus on the nature of participation in formal educational settings would help towards developing individuals' well-being freedoms and expanding capabilities amongst young people. The capability approach may be able to inform policies and practices that can enhance the ability of young people to determine, pursue and achieve their aspirations. Sen argues, "the quality of life a person enjoys is not merely a matter of what he or she achieves, but also of what options the person has had the opportunity to choose from. In this view, the 'good life' is partly a life of genuine choice, and not one in which the person is forced into a particular life – however rich it might be in other respects." (Sen, 1999:45). Without the freedom to fully participate an individual is not given the chance to consider the full range of possibilities they construe as valuable ways of being and doing as part of a valued life. The capability to aspire freely in a supportive, non-judgemental environment provides a starting point. In turn those aspirations need to be nurtured and developed into capabilities. The young people in the case study had some suggestions for a way forward for a more inclusive and fair process of education. Dalia commented that it would be helpful, 'if they were a little less biased and a bit more sort of open and more encouraging" and Rachael suggested the following:

R: *I'd just like one person like who's like a teacher who knows a bit about like not going to Uni, like opportunities available. Just like to work quite closely with somebody like that then to like say that they have a look on the Internet or phone somebody and like get like some information and then to like work with me on that and then for me to go off and find some things and like you know just somebody who's like, I don't know, like almost like a mentor to go back to and sort of ... because like if I knew that there was somebody there like who was interested and like who wants to help me then that would make me feel like well yeah I'll do it but I don't know. I've got a problem with this.*

This is where policy and pedagogic action may be able to play a vital role. In due course a selection of the capabilities which arise from aspirations may be converted into functionings. These functionings will be valued ways of doing and being for an individual and may or may not include becoming a graduate. Above all it cannot be stressed enough that a capability is only a capability because it is perceived by the

individual as representing a personally valued way of life. Thus it is vital to strive for the meaningful participation of young people in expanding their capacity to make choices they have reason to value affecting their lives beyond school.

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