

Evaluating the Transformative Impact of International Education: A Case for Operationalizing the Capability Approach Using Bourdieuan Theory

Lien Pham - lien.pham@mq.edu.au
School of Education, Macquarie University Sydney AU

Background to Research

- Significant rise in number of foreign students in tertiary education in last 15yrs
- 2005: 2.5m students in higher education abroad (OECD 2012)
- 1.3m students from China and India
- Research in international education focus mostly in policy, practices, regulation, student experiences
- Some research about graduates outcomes, mainly in labour market
- Little research about impact of international education particularly for graduates have returned home

Capability Approach

Key elements (Sen 1999)

- Education is a means to capability
- Education achievements are achieved functionings (F)
- Capability :
 - freedom or opportunity to achieve functionings (C).
 - ability to choose from set of alternative set of functionings
- F and C are dependent on:
 - people's values and preferences
 - extent of interdependence between individuals and their social structures, (social relations and networks)
 - level of education
 - family endowment of values
 - financial resources
- Agency is capacity to act and bring about change

Strength:

- Useful normative framework to identify what needs to change to enable capability beyond economic utility => Evaluate conditions for human development (people-centred)
- Valuing diversity of race, gender, disability, socio-economic and other social classification
- Allows for heterogeneity of people and connects individual biographies and social arrangements

Weakness:

- Emphasizing an individualistic normative understanding of freedom and capability (Robeyns 2005).
- Overlooks role of culture in shaping reasoned preferences
- Assumes power of people to reject biological or social structure constraints in agency process
- Does not allow room for analysing interaction dimensions of education achievements: social opportunity; student outcomes; causality of freedom or opportunity
- Abstract and not sociologically situated to explain variances in people's access to opportunity for achievement, hence how capability and achievements may or may not arise

Purpose

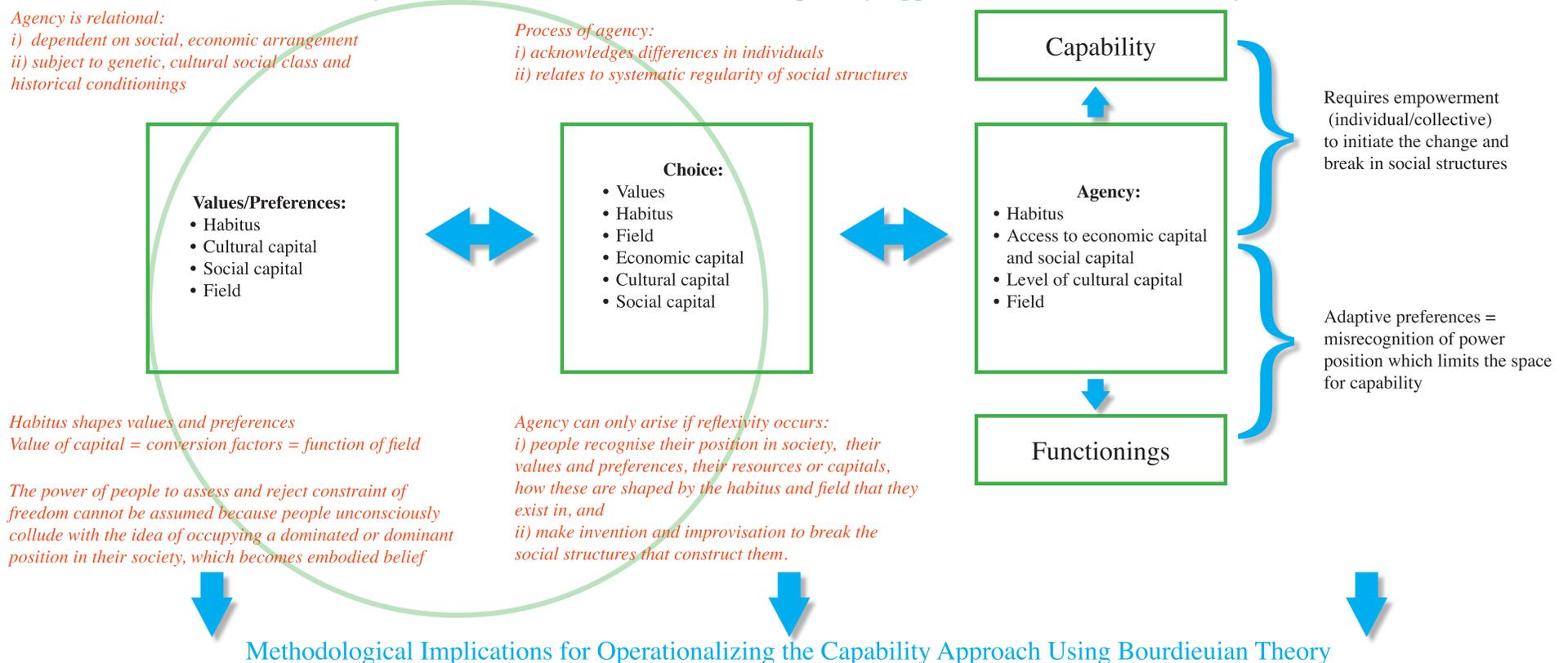
- Proposes conceptual framework to evaluate the transformative impact for international students and their societies in their home countries as a result of their overseas education:
 - Understanding economic, personal and social consequences for graduates
 - How international tertiary education contributes to achievements and opportunities to achieve in terms of career, income, well-being, capability for agency and citizenship
 - How international tertiary education contributes to people making valued personal and social change

Bourdieu's Theory of Field, Habitus and Capital

Key elements (Bourdieu 1986)

- People do what they do in accordance with ideologies, values and beliefs of their social structures, and in so doing, they:
 - Construct values, beliefs and ideologies and their social structures
 - => Misrecognise their power position in society (symbolic power) in thinking that is how they have to behave
 - => Unconsciously enforce social structures that represent the symbolic power that they misrecognise
- Reflexivity is when people recognise their misrecognition of symbolic power and break the structures => Change can only occur when there is reflexivity and a break in structures
- Field: system of structured positions that people exist in. People play the game to gain advantage in the field and at the same time they abide by the rules of the game which reinforces the rules of the game. People's participation in the game depends on their habitus and their capital.
- Habitus : people's subjective dispositions, constituted by beliefs, values, tastes, common sense and habits; historically cumulative of people's upbringing and lived experiences.
- Capital: people's means to achieve; carry different values depending on the field that people operate in; work interdependently and in an aggregative fashion
 - Economic capital - money, monetary wealth and financial assets.
 - Social capital - people's social connections and personal networks.
 - Cultural capital - assets of an educational, linguistic or symbolic variety.
- Allows the space to evaluate agency by examining people's dispositions and resources and what they can achieve taking into account their social context and networks.
- Useful tool to:
 - Analyse social reproduction and transformation
 - Examine practices that maintain or override social structures

Analytical Framework that Combines the Capability Approach with Bourdieu's Theory



Methodological Implications for Operationalizing the Capability Approach Using Bourdieuan Theory

- Allows for an analysis of people's agency to develop capability using the capital (resources) that people have in the social context that they live in, and the dispositions to reason and do what they value doings and beings.
 - => Looking at the capabilities and functionings alone is not enough to understand the conditions for capability.
 - => Social advantage and disadvantage needs to be considered to understand the capability derivation as conditions for social change or social reproduction (Robeyns 2005).
 - => Multi-staged, mixed method of quantitative and qualitative approaches:
 - First Stage: Analysis of provisional capabilities using Sen's capability enhancers (Flores- Crespo 2007)
 - Second Stage: Analysis of 1) agency process; 2) opportunity for agency; 3) choice and functionings
 - Third stage: Re-establish capabilities and evaluate transformative impact and conditions for capability development.
- Allows establishing capability in the process of people making their voices heard, and deliberated through dialogue to understand their social advantage and disadvantage as a result of overseas education.

1st stage: Evaluating provisional capabilities

- Capabilities assessed using two dimensions: 1) social opportunities and 2) economic facilities
- Examined at three levels: personal, professional and social:
 - Personal: knowledge; change in personal attitudes and values; consumption patterns; ability to convert resources or capitals to valuable functionings.
 - Professional: employment and career opportunities; specific skills and knowledge; income earned; ability to choose desired jobs/career path.
 - Social level: social position and status; social networks; social mobility; participation in social activities, knowledge and transfer of knowledge; change in social values and attitudes; ability to convert social

- capital into valuable functionings.
- Capabilities to be redefined in the second stage
- Data collected using quantitative means e.g electronic survey to overseas education alumni living in their home countries

2nd Stage: Analysis of agency process

- Evaluate levels of capital and values of capital (using categories developed from 1st stage)
- Evaluate people's level of independence and autonomous thoughts, their ability to recognise their social belonging and power in the social structures surrounding them, how they play their game in the fields, their ability to reason about their preferences, and the knowledge they have to choose options to overcome constraints.
- Examine the social categories and classifications that people belong to and how these impart and impose on them the values for preferences and choices
- Understand what is it that people do, the kind of skills, knowledge qualification that they have, the kind of job or social participation that they undertake, and the reasons for them to do so. These functionings have to be analysed in reference to people's preferences and choices, resources and ability to use those resources in particular ways.

3rd Stage: Evaluating the transformative impact of acquired education

- Re-establish and confirm the provisional capability set and functionings list developed in the 1st stage using interview data from 2nd stage.
- Analyse the enabling and/or restraining factors for established capability set (from above), and whether graduates' practices uncover symbolic power associated with those practices

Conclusion

Situating the capability approach in Bourdieu's theory of sociology allows a more nuanced and meaningful understanding of people's values, preferences, resources, and agency in light of their social structures to achieve freedom and valued functionings. An understanding of social advantage and disadvantage, as enabling and constraining factors to capability development, complements the capability approach by emphasising its freedom focus and equality oriented approach to education.