Strengthening professionalism for the public good

Monica McLean (University of Nottingham, UK)
Seminar at Stellenbosch University, 13/10/08

'Development discourses: higher education and poverty reduction in South Africa' : conceptual framework

Amartya Sen (*Development as Freedom*,1999) and Martha Nussbaum (*Women and Human Development*, 2000)

'Capability approach': Capabilities (effective opportunities to be and do) and functionings (actual beings and doings) - apply both to clients ('comprehensive capabilities') and professionals ('human development professional capabilities')

- Poverty defined as multi-dimensional: low income; low quality of life, the denial of choices and opportunities for a tolerable life (as capability deprivation).
- Poverty reduction defined as expanding human well-being and agency (as capability expansion)

Comprehensive Human Capabilities (Nussbaum)

- Life
- Bodily Health
- Bodily Integrity
- Senses, Imagination and Thought
- Emotions
- Practical Reason
- Affiliation
- Other Species
- Play
- Control over one's environment

'Development discourses: higher education and poverty reduction in South Africa'

Research Questions (explored with colleagues as consultants in Research Working Groups)

How might university transformation be understood as:

(i)   contributing to poverty reduction?; and

(ii)   contributing to poverty reduction through expanding the capabilities and functionings of students in professional education?, who in turn are able

(iii)   to expand the capabilities of poor and disadvantaged individuals and communities?

(iv)   How does the capability approach assist in answering these questions?

Why professional education?

- Human lives can be enriched by access to public services staffed by professionals committed to human development;

- Professional education is where academic knowledge, values and notions of professionalism meet the world of practice and interact with the people who are the users and recipients of professional services.

- If universities are essential in processes of cultural change, then professional education is a key arena to put this to the test;

The discourse of ideal-typical professionalism

'[...]what makes one free and renders life worth living is finally neither satisfying one's desires nor accomplishing one's purposes, valuable as these are, but instead learning to act with the good of the whole in view, building life act by act, happy if each deed, as far as circumstances allow, contributes to general welfare. Anyone who has been stirred and inspired by a committed teacher, an attentive health care provider, a dedicated pastor or rabbi; anyone who has experienced a well-functioning business firm or public agency, school or cultural institution has glimpsed the enlivening possibilities inherent in communities of professional purpose.' (Sullivan, 2005, p.290,)

The discourse of 'ideal-typical' professionalism as a resource

- **Main sources**:Sullivan, W.M.(2005) *Work and Integrity: The Crisis and Promise of Professionalism in America,* Jossey Bass and Freidson, E. (2004*) Professionalism: The Third Logic*, Cambridge: Polity Press

- **Main argument extrapolated from this work**: The discourse of ideal-typical professionalism emphasises vocation and service for the public good. Prestige and (comparatively) good pay are the individual rewards. However, in practice there has always been a tension: between vested interests, economic functions and reproducing social hierarchy; and public service and the social function, which can have transformative, freedom-bestowing effects. While the former prevails in the world today, there is hope that specific configurations of professional education will strengthen the latter.

Multiple definitions of 'professionalism'

'*By professionalism I mean thinking of your work as an intellectual as something you do for a living, between the hours of nine and five with one eye on the clock, and another cocked at what is considered to be proper, professional behaviour –not rocking the boat, nor straying outside the accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable, hence uncontroversial and unpolitical and "objective"'* (Edward Said, 1994,p. 55).

The ideological history of professionalism- sources of definitions

- Autonomy and prestige granted by the state in return for expertise and service: government-imposed forms of 'expert professionalism' focused on skill and standards;

- Communities expressing common (or vested) interests, identity and commitments: 'social trustee professionalism' defined as moral vocation; But, '*the flattering conception of professions which stresses [their] dedicated moral character […] glosses their own self-seeking character as a status group with vested interests.*' (Gouldner, 1979, p.37);

- Never apolitical or neutral –'professionalism' = a discourse, a weapon in an ongoing politics of knowledge, power and social organisation. Claims to moral and technical superiority are contested; and, gains in privilege and autonomy can always be withdrawn, they need to be defended.

Professionalism for the public good

- *'[…] (1) professional skills is human capital that (2) is always dependent for its negotiability upon some collective enterprise, which itself (3) is the outcome of civic politics in which the freedom of a group to organize for a specific purpose is balanced by the accountability of that group to other members of the civic community for furtherance of publicly established goals and standards.'* (Sullivan, 2005)

- *'[Professionals] are concerned with different aspects of [public] good, in some cases the immediate good of individual patients, students or clients, in others of firms or groups, and in others the general good. But such service must always be judged and balanced against a larger public good, sometimes one anticipated in the future. Practitioners and their associations have the duty to appraise what they do in light of that larger good, a duty which licenses them to be more than passive servants of the state, of capital of the firm, of the client, or even of the immediate general public.'* (Freidson, 2004)

Professionalism and the capability approach in the project

- A special emphasis on poverty reduction, pro-poor professionalism
- *'Linking responsibility to effective power'* (Sen, 2008): there is a strong social argument for those who have the power to act to reduce justice to do so.
- Professional education and practice generate obligations to be responsible for acting to promote democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights: '…*capability is a kind of power, and it would be a mistake to see capability only as a concept of human advantage, not also as a concept in human obligation.*' (p. 336).

HE context of a global crisis in public-good professionalism

- Worldwide economic policies prioritise markets and free trade so;

- Value of higher education linked predominantly to enhancing national economic competitiveness within a global economy;

- Emphasis on narrow, individualistic economic goals at the expense of social goals and the public good;

- Responsiveness to markets and incoming-generating schemes; closer links with industry and business; managerialism; curricula of 'employability'; perception of the 'instrumental' student; and,

- Professionals inclined towards technical-rationality, muting of social function, loss of trust and accountability systems imposed.

South African HE context

- The Constitution
- White Paper on Higher Education (1997): the purposes of higher education in South Africa is to contribute to the process of societal transformation by combining economic priorities with the need to support a democratic civil society.

The education of professionals oriented to the public good

- *'The challenge for professional education is how to teach the complex ensemble of analytical thinking, skilful practice, and wise judgement upon which each profession rests.'* (Sullivan, p. 195)

The University and public-good professionalism:an enabling environment

- The preparation of professionals is one of the essential social functions of the university (Habermas [1989]) : it is the '*pivotal point at which social needs and economic and political imperatives meet advancing knowledge and aspiring talent.*' (Sullivan, 2005)

- In South African universities the transformation agenda is a resource;

- Challenges: e.g. complete change- more efforts are needed,'catch-up' from under-investment, an international presence (*Cape Times*, August,2008)

The Faculty and public-good professionalism: character, attitude and values

'[*Professional Faculties*] *institutionalize a culture that is built up through pedagogical practices plus academic activities such as scholarship and research […] they aim at a goal that is in a profound sense holistic. Their mission is to educate for professional judgement and performance.*' (Sullivan, 2005)

They develop '*commitment to the occupation as a life career and to a shared identity, a feeling of community or solidarity among those who have passed through it.*' (Friedson, 2004).

The Faculty represents the profession: professional expectations, standards and values are expressed in the overt and hidden curriculum, teaching. learning and assessment .

Curriculum and pedagogy for public-good, pro-poor professionalism

1. Identifying capabilities, functioning and indicators

2. Sullivan's apprenticeship model

3. More capabilities/ functionings/indicators?: contextual understanding; developing professional identity; transformative learning.

An example of a human development professional capability

Human development professional capabilities	Professional goals and qualities as functionings	Indicators in/from professional education and training
Capability to be a change agent	Being able to form a conception of the good Having 'pro-poor' professional values; valuing human beings and their human dignity Having critical theoretical knowledge, but also able to integrate theory, practice and professional values. Leadership skills and confidence to speak/ advocate; strong sense of their own agency Networking ability to work effectively with other agencies; working collectively with fellow professionals for transformation Contributing to pro-poor professionalism beyond own profession	Formation of professional ways of being: teaching both critical knowledge and orientation to act to reduce injustice Pedagogies of discussion, dialogue, deliberation and collaborative work Respectful relations between staff and students, and students and students Learning how to identify and listen to the 'better' argument Learning to live with and value diversity; learning how to act/be interculturally aware and competent, and to act and communicate in an anti-sexist and anti-racist way

An example of a human development professional capability

Human development professional capabilities	Professional goals and qualities as functionings	Indicators in/from professional education and training
Capability to make affiliations	Showing concern for others Imagining and understanding how the world is experienced by poor persons Respecting each person's identity and dignity Acting in an ethical way	Formation of professional ways of being: teaching both critical knowledge and orientation to act to reduce injustice Pedagogies of discussion, dialogue, deliberation and collaborative work Respectful relations between staff and students, and students and students Learning how to identify and listen to the 'better' argument Learning to live with and value diversity; learning how to act/be interculturally aware and competent, and to act and communicate in an anti-sexist and anti-racist way

An example of a human development professional capability

Human development professional capabilities	Professional goals and qualities as functionings	Indicators in/from professional education and training
Capability to be 'strong evaluators'	Having the capability for practical reasoning (to do the right thing, at the right time in the right circumstances). Able to evaluate some ethical values or ideals or goods to be more important than other. Able to reflect on and to be able to re-examine their valued ends, drawing on theory and academic knowledge.	Formation of professional ways of being: teaching both critical knowledge and orientation to act to reduce injustice Pedagogies of discussion, dialogue, deliberation and collaborative work Respectful relations between staff and students, and students and students Learning how to identify and listen to the 'better' argument Learning to live with and value diversity; learning how to act/be interculturally aware and competent, and to act and communicate in an anti-sexist and anti-racist way

Sullivan's apprenticeship model for promoting integrity

◼ Holistic conceptualisation of professional education

◼ Integrity: integration in professional work of cognitive, technical and ethical dimensions :

'*The unmet need is to ensure that […] forms of work and education recognize that there is no successful separation between the skills of problem-solving and those of deliberation and judgment, no viable pursuit of technical excellence without participation in those civic enterprises through which esoteric knowledge and skills discover their human meaning.*' (Sullivan, 2005)

◼ a tripartite 'apprenticeship' which reflects the three dimensions of professional practice in which modelling /coaching are central

'cognitive': theory, analysis, argumentation and logical reasoning; technical, tacit case studies and workplace practice; ethical: 'values and attitudes shared by professional community [which are] taught through dramatic pedagogies of participation […] through which the student's professional self can be most broadly explored and developed' -always competing.

Pedagogic elements to strengthen public-good, pro-poor professionalism: for discussion

1. **Contextual knowledge and understanding**

. A broad, critical and reflective understanding of context: current socio-economic, political conditions; history (change agents-the larger public good)

2. **Developing identity, commitment and community**

. '*the most influential source of evaluation and protest comes from a collegial body which provides authoritative support to individuals and expresses forcefully the collective opinion of the discipline.*' (Friedson, 2004). (making affiliations; pedagogies of participation and mutual respect)

3. **Transformative learning**

challenges at personal (values, assumptions, attitudes) and social (underlying assumptions or worldviews) levels. EG Paulo Freire's 'pedagogy of hope'; and,Jerome Bruner's 'cultivating the possible'. (strong evaluators)

Professional education: gift and obligation

'Meaning refers to the sense of value people experience when they understand their own lives to be linked in a significant way with the larger processes at work around them. It has both an inner and a public face. To discover meaning is to find a point to living by recognizing oneself as a participant in a worthwhile enterprise whose accomplishment calls out one's energies and whose purposes define and vindicate one's having lived.' (Sullivan, 2005, p.184)

References

- Freidson, E. (2004) *Professionalism: The Third Logic*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Gouldner, A. W. (1979), *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class:* New York: Seabury Press.
- Habermas, J. (1989), 'The Idea of the University: Learning Processes, in J. Habermas', trans. S. Weber Nicholson, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate.* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2000), *Women and human development: The capabilities approach*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Said, E. (1994), *Representations of the Intellectual.* London: Vintage.
- Sen, A (1999), *Development as Freedom*,Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Sen, A. (2008) The Idea of Justice, *Journal of Human Development*, 9 (3), pp.331-342
- Sullivan, W.M.(2005) *Work and Integrity: The Crisis and Promise of Professionalism in America*, Second Edition, Sanford, CA: Jossey-Bass

Project website

http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/projects/mw-poverty-reduction/index.php.

[We welcome suggestions for adding to/expanding the website.]