

The Higher Education in Healthcare from a Social Justice Perspective – the empirical use of the Functionings Approach.

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This presentation shows the empirical use of the functionings approach within university education in healthcare. It is consensus the importance of having an ethical training of healthcare professionals that prepare them to make decisions and actions based on respect with patients and users of health services with consideration of their differences and choices, within the multiplicity of identifying features, such as cultural, social, racial, gender and other.

Therefore, studies from different countries have shown that there has been growing violence in graduate healthcare education, such as discrimination, prejudice, bullying, sexual harassment, physical violence, power abuse and other. This happens either among students, teachers and students or between those with university clinics patients. This type of behavior is subliminally encouraged or pedagogically legitimized in health care education, and remains invisible. Such background has been part of moral education for the future health professionals.

This empirical study used the functionings approach as a conception of justice to reveal these hidden issues in healthcare university education so that they can be brought to light and resolved. We analyzed the pedagogical, curricular, organizational and political processes of a healthcare training under the functionings approach.

We recognized the basic functionings for moral identity of the students after listening them and teachers of a Dentistry school. Noticeably, these functionings must be expanded and cannot be harmed along the university training. From the result of these interviews, we produced a scheme showing both the basic functionings and the conditions of possibility to reach them:

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We identified 4 basic dentistry students functionings: moral, social and political action; recognition and respect for diversity; self respect, confidence and emotional integrity; and physical and moral integrity.

The condition of possibility of the moral, social and political action functioning is the student capacity to judge, choose and act in an ethical, reflective, sensitive and argued way which is important for the moral action of the future healthcare professional. Another condition of possibility for this functioning is assisting patients in university clinics and hospitals in an ethical, sensitive and respectful way given that disrespect to patients undermines this functioning of moral, social and political action.

As a last condition of possibility for the moral, social and political action functioning is to act and develop skills for a social and political training. This is particularly important in contexts of inequalities as seen in Brazil in which the health care professional should act beyond the strictly technical or individual role.

For the second functioning, that is the recognition and respect for diversity – we identified two conditions of possibility through the interviews: respect and affirm diversity. These should be active, promoted within the educational process and inserted in the curricular structure, especially considering the increasing racial, social and cultural diversity in Brazilian universities.

Another condition of possibility for the recognition and respect for diversity functioning is to be free from prejudice, exclusion and constraints related to each one identity features. The interviewing of a black woman quota student from low income family demonstrated relevant damaging for this functioning which reveals the disrespectful and the unequal treatment within students that are part of the same course in the same university. Her narrative depicts situations of exclusion within her classmates and teachers. For example, a teacher denied to help her when she asked for, two classmates

affirmed she suffer a kind of exclusion from the other students, and all her speech demonstrated that she needed to struggle in the relationship with her friends. Notwithstanding, this student began her graduate course with the recognition and respect for diversity functioning potentially developed. Instead of enhancing this functioning during the healthcare training, it has been further damaged which undermined her social and racial disadvantages. Such situation is also noted in other vulnerable groups, which reproduce the injustices of society in the education of future health care professionals. These are likely to remain reproducing social injustices on their health care activities and promoting social inequality, as we have noticed in literature review about social injustice between healthcare professionals and patients in public clinics, such as prejudice, social exclusion, moral harassment and others

Therefore, the functionings approach also allowed comparative analysis of experiences of these students, considering its multiple identity features and revealing the distinct process by which students experience that culminates either on the expansion or damage of the functionings.

The third functioning: self respect, confidence and emotional integrity has as condition the ability to experience their education process with confidence in themselves and in the teachers. However, the interviews showed that pedagogy of fear prevails in which the student leaves the course itself less confident than when it entered.

The amount of testimonials from students who reported disrespect that configures moral harassment from teachers demonstrated another condition of possibility of this third functioning, which is to be free from humiliation, intimidation and power abuse in the teacher-student relationship. Such violence became a practice pedagogically legitimized.

The last functioning is physical and moral integrity. The conditions of possibility are configured also by students descriptions of physical and sexual harassment, disrespect to gender and sexual orientation, be that amongst students or students and teachers.

Physical violence occurred in the university clinic, in front of patients and sexual harassment happened through teacher jokes towards women students. Jokes are trivialized and culturally reinforced by the majority of the academic community, for example.

These functionings, while constituents of the moral identity of future healthcare professionals, are required to hold further ethical actions and choices socially responsible. From this table of functionings with its conditions of possibility and from suggestions of the stakeholders interviewed on this study it was possible to bring, as part of the conclusions of this study, concrete proposals for pedagogical, curricular, political and organizational arrangements, which are important tools for university courses that aim for students social justice and ethical healthcare training.

These functionings are, in part, potential functionings of the students and is expected to become part of the educational process by offering the conditions to do so. Differently from the capability approach of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, the functionings approach considers potential functionings that will make the functional system that identify each one, and not just those already reached. This allows observing the processes by which students have their functionings being expanded or damaged along the educational process. Therefore, from the analysis of the contents that generated each functioning, we can reveal relationships, contexts and pedagogical practices that disrespect or undermine the functionings and do not allow them to become fully realized functionings.

Using the functionings approach as a criterion of justice also allowed to identify the social norm that sets this training, with undemocratic, sexist, heteronormative and elitist features. These features adversely interfere the profile of the future health care professional.

We conclude from this empirical study that applying the functionings approach in the this analysis has resulted on identification of basic functionings of students in the

healthcare area, its conditions of possibility for reaching them and the factors that disrespect and damage its development. Also as a result of the study, we could bring a concrete contribution for the analyzed course with elaboration of institutional arrangements to be applied in order to reach each functioning. This approach proved to provide very plausible justice criteria useful in healthcare education and helpful to evaluate what is right or wrong, ethical or unethical in institutional and pedagogical processes.