

## **The Capability Approach and Inclusive University Education**

Injustices of higher education which concern widening participation professionals occur in three phases: coming into higher education (access); being at university (participation); and going out of university into the rest of life (outcomes). To illustrate how the capability approach can be used for thinking about distributive inequalities in higher education, this presentation focuses on participation (post entry widening participation). Participation in higher education is conceptualised as capability expanding, that is as expanding opportunities and freedoms for individuals to be and/or do what they value.

The presentation begins by clarifying the core ideas and principles of capability theory, which has arisen from welfare economics and is based on interest in human development and social justice. I turn then to the comparatively small number of existing capabilities lists related to participation in higher education, showing how such lists are generated. All these lists include a capability for knowledge (often related to learning and/or imagination). So, by way of illustration, the bulk of the presentation will focus on the capability for 'epistemic contribution' which has been identified as a universal human capability and which is being explored in a current research project on South African higher education. I will show that students from extremely low-income and rural backgrounds, on the one hand, arrive capable of making valuable contributions and, on the other, must be offered educational arrangements which expand the capability of contributing to society's stock of meanings.