Book review

Calitz, Talita M.L. (2019). *Enhancing the Freedom to Flourish*. London, U.K.: Routledge.

Reviewed by Monica McLean[*]

It is evident that, whatever the country and system, some students benefit from higher education more than others. Talita Calitz addresses the problem of equal participation with conceptual clarity and practical proposals which have global relevance. In my view, the outstanding achievement of her book is to replace the usual deficit view of students whose economic and social circumstances make it difficult for them to benefit from university education with a theory of participation which emphasises agency and inclusion. This achievement results from Calitz's combining a human development approach with insight from the life stories of eight students in a South African university who faced economic and academic barriers to equal participation.

The book of eight chapters starts with two chapters presenting the big picture of inequalities in higher education and structural barriers to participating in it. The first chapter describes the global phenomenon of how family income, geographic location, race, gender and quality of schooling influence the capacity of an individual to benefit from higher education. Across the world, low-income, working-class and academically underprepared students are more concentrated in lower-status universities and lower-status courses and find it more difficult to achieve the same outcomes as their more privileged peers. This situation is "intensified" (p. 7) in South Africa where severe racial inequalities have persisted as a legacy of colonial rule and apartheid. The second chapter explains how university policies that align with neoliberal policies in the wider world not only jeopardise the integrity of academic life but offer little incentive to support more vulnerable students in effective and humane ways. Rather, economic and regulatory pressures on universities contribute to a deficit approach which Calitz defines as:

> [B]lam[ing] individual students for their failure without equal attention given to the role of institutional structures in enabling participation. The assumption that the individual is solely responsible for the motivation, academic effort and social adjustment needed to make the transition from school to university misframes students as academically underprepared, demotivated or culturally deficient. (p. 27)

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From this point in the book, Calitz keeps the reader's attention on how universities fail to do justice to some students and what, as institutions, they might do about it. The first step is to recognise the resourcefulness and agency of students struggling to overcome structural barriers.

Having established the parameters of the problem of unequal participation in higher education, the third chapter introduces a tripartite conceptual framework, comprising the capability approach, founded by the economist Amartya Sen and the theories of Nancy Fraser. For the capability approach, "capabilities" are opportunities or freedoms to be or to do what any individual has reason to value, and "functionings" are the achieved beings and doings. The approach evaluates the justice of social and political arrangements in terms of human flourishing that arises from freedom and agency. Using this approach, Calitz conceptualises higher education as a site where well-being outcomes should be achieved. In this view, government and universities are responsible for arrangements that promote the freedom to flourish. Nancy Fraser's egalitarian theory is used to show what kinds of redistribution, recognition and representation would address current structural inequalities; and Paulo Freire adds the idea of pedagogic arrangements that are participatory and directed towards the development of critical consciousness which equips students to question and transform society.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 relate the eight student narratives, which constitute the heart of the book, analysing them in terms of the conceptual framework. The data for these chapters were produced by using participatory methods. Chapter 4 introduces the reader to the students and explores their lives prior to university, showing how access to and use of resources at home and school enabled and constrained their agency and freedom. All the students brought resources to university and have clearly achieved the capability for entry to university, yet the combination of socioeconomic inequalities with constraining school environments put limits on their freedom to pursue alternatives. Chapter 5 picks up the narratives once the students arrived at university. It discusses the students' experiences of five factors which act as structural constraints on students' capability to participate: individualising failure rather than recognising what arrangements the institution should make; failure to support students' critical engagement with knowledge; lack of consultation with students; little contact with lecturers, resulting in alienation from them and other pedagogical arrangement; and misrecognition of students' academic ability and resources, leading to a deficit view. The overall effect of these experiences was that students' potential for full participation in and benefit from transformational learning was curtailed.

In parallel with the constraining factors in Chapter 5, Chapter 6 discusses five factors that enable participation: building affiliative relationships with supportive lecturers; building affiliative relationships with peers; opportunities for having a voice; access to disciplinary knowledge and skills that could be converted into valued capabilities and functionings; and having capabilities recognised. Pedagogical arrangements that promoted these factors increased students' freedom to participate by supporting them to mobilise their agency to navigate the structural constraints depicted in Chapters 4 and 5.

Calitz shows that to effectively support more vulnerable students requires sophisticated understanding of how socioeconomic disadvantage accumulates if it is not disrupted and why transformed institutional culture and pedagogy and curricula are needed. Chapter 7 draws on what her research – empirically and theoretically – indicates is possible when "students and staff enact agency and resistance, despite systemic inequalities" (p. 145). It is, therefore, the culmination of the book, aiming to "design capability praxis for higher education environments where students are vulnerable to unequal participation" (p. 147). Here she proposes a capability list for equal participation: practical reason, critical literacies, undergraduate student research, deliberative democracy, critical affiliation and values for the public good. A final chapter is titled 'Creating just universities' which makes suggestions about what a just university might look like from a capabilities perspective.

In keeping with Sen's conviction that specific capabilities and social arrangement need to be locally debated and agreed upon, it is both unlikely and undesirable that Calitz's capability list and proposals for more just arrangements will be taken on wholesale anywhere. That said, what she offers in this rich book chimes internationally with other higher education research which focuses on social justice. Moreover, it makes a significant conceptual and practical contribution to grasping the complexities of the kind of actions necessary to address what can often seem an intractable problem of some student groups systematically gaining less than they should from participation in higher education.