CHAPTER 23

Showing Up for the Rat Race: Beyond Human Capital Models of Higher Education

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Introduction

This chapter addresses questions around the relationship between higher education and graduate work. In particular, it examines how the purposes of higher education are framed in terms of preparing graduates for work in a knowledge economy. In Part 1, I argue that although social democratic promises of the postwar period for upward mobility, job security, and political and social equality have been shown to be empty, they still influence higher education in problematic ways. Most notably, students are encouraged to pursue an ideal of the "good life" that is impossible for many to attain through no fault of their own.

In Part 2, I draw on the capabilities approach and provocative ideas about rethinking work as alternatives to traditional human capital models in higher education. Such alternatives widen the lens beyond learning for paid work by giving equal priority to education for citizenship, public good professionalism, and social justice through strong state support for human development.

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Part 1: Problems with Neoliberal Human Capital Models of Higher Education

Neoliberalism and Its Effects on the Public Sphere and Democracy

Since 2008, capitalist accumulation has involved the commodification of public services, facilitated by neoliberal trade policies, and the continuing development of information communication technologies (Huws, 2014). As a result, it has become easier to relocate economic activities and manage them remotely, including the outsourcing of public services. The commodification of welfare systems has caused growing labor insecurity in the public sector (Doogan, 2009), which affects both public sector workers and citizens more generally. Concurrently, there has been an increase around the world in nonstandard work arrangements including the "on-demand," "platform," or "gig" economy (Brown et al., 2020). Trends toward more insecure and routinized work are likely to continue with productivity improvements from digital technologies eliminating many jobs and routinizing others.

In the realm of politics, Wendy Brown (2019) argues that three decades of neoliberal policies constitute an assault on democracy and conceptions of the common good. The violence that accompanied the transfer of power from President Trump to President Biden in January 2021 is only one example, which resonates with the rise of authoritarian populism internationally. In Canada too, decades of neoliberal policies have taken a toll. Neoliberal attacks on the society have meant the disappearance of "the space of civic equality and concern with the common good that democracy requires" (cf. Brown, 2019, p. 183).

Neoliberal policies encourage a discourse of free, responsibilized individuals who self-invest in order to maintain or enhance their human capital. According to Feher (2009), human capital discourse has shifted over time with the growth of globalized and unregulated financial markets that are more concerned with maximizing the distribution of dividends in the short term than with optimizing long-run returns on investment. Accordingly, he argues that human capital investments have become less about maximizing the returns on one's investments (monetary or psychic) than with increasing the stock value of the capital with which one is identified. This broader conception of human capital maps on to what we hear from working undergraduates.

The Problem of Pressure and Burnout

> For undergraduate students today, juggling multiple commitments is the norm. What feminist writers in the 1980s referred to the second shift–i.e., the unpaid domestic labour that compounded women's paid work–has become a "triple" or even "quadruple" shift for students who are balancing paid work, academic work, domestic labour and/or volunteer work. (Taylor, 2020)

Brown et al. (2020) suggest that "rather than education being a source of individual and economic freedom, there is increasing psychological pressure on students, resulting in rising numbers suffering from mental health problems" (p. 2). Our interviews with working university students in Canada confirm that many are struggling with the perceived pressure to prepare themselves during their program for post-graduation work. This pressure is often described in terms of becoming the "super student" who invests appropriately in their own human capital in the hopes of future rewards. This is the student who moves seamlessly across multiple activities: attending classes, acing exams, demonstrating leadership in extra-curricular activities, volunteering to demonstrate their suitability for professional programs, and working in career-related areas to secure their future. As one undergraduate reflects, "even if it's not a job, [it's] a rat race to get to the next thing, Because I know in undergrad once you're in fourth year in the honors program, then it was 'how are you getting to grad school, are you applying for [funding], are you doing this?' It's just like *go, go, go*, how are you getting to the next thing?" She concludes, it's tough "to have to be here plus be five years into your future, ten years into your future."

The feeling of pressure is expressed even more poignantly by those who feel they're not succeeding in the "rat race." For example, another student comments:

> It's really discouraging to see myself do poorly in things that I'm really invested in. You know, like when I put off some work or something, it's not out of laziness, it's out of like the inability to be in like the emotional state to tackle it right now. And that's definitely hard because like [pause] there is so much competition on the [university] campus and there are so many people that do so well, if not flawlessly. … So, you know, trying to compete with people who may not have the same obstacles as I do.

Obstacles for students include learning disabilities and mental health challenges as well as financial pressures. International students face additional pressures if they wish to pursue permanent residence in Canada after graduation. A great deal of invisible work is required for students to feel they are competitive (Taylor & Taylor-Neu, forthcoming). The predominance of the human capital model of subjectivity—for students as well as for other groups (cf. Feher, 2009)—often translates into self-blame, when one struggles to "invest" adequately.

Another student, who works throughout the year because she has to finance her own studies, worries that her combined labor will take a toll later:

> I have a fear that in working and going to school, I'm gonna burn myself [laughs] out and that when I graduate, I'm just not gonna want to do anything … So, that's why I kind of am thinking I won't do grad school right after. I might go into the work field for a few years. And then hopefully, that will allow me to pay down my student loans, get some work experience and then

> hopefully travel a little bit … just find a healthier balance before I decide to do grad school or more research. But yeah, I'm scared that I'm gonna graduate, like even with the passion and like the direction I have, I'd just be tired.

These quotes from students raise questions about what the work of being a student and employee involves, why they're working so hard, and whether their efforts are likely to be rewarded by attaining the kind of work they desire. The studies referenced in the next section make it clear that the workplaces we are preparing students for are changing and the promises about returns on investments in education look increasingly hollow.

The Problems of Job Scarcity and Quality

Although it is common in policy circles to hear employers and governments talk about the need for knowledge workers with higher education credentials, there are good reasons to be skeptical about the discourse of labor scarcity as well as assumptions about the economic returns on investments in education. Recent research that examines international trends highlights the failure of orthodox human capital promises. For example, Brown et al. (2020) suggest rates of return on education in American and Britain over a forty-year period seriously challenge the learning-earning equation. Data suggest that there is a scarcity of good jobs rather than a scarcity of labor. Livingstone (2019) adds that although the Canadian labor force has "the highest level of general post-secondary education completion in the world" (p. 156), the underutilization of professional employees' qualifications has become a significant problem. Together, these studies suggest that although an "educational arms race" (Livingstone et al., 2021) has been a common response to "credential hyperinflation" (Brown et al., 2020, p. 2), the relationship between learning and earning is more complicated.

Brown et al.'s (2020) analysis draws on census and labor force data in the United States and United Kingdom between 1970 and 2010 to look at wages and earnings over time. Interestingly, wages were higher in real terms for most workers in 1970 than in 2010. These authors also compared the incomes of college graduates and high school graduates over this period, but instead of focusing on averages (which hide a great deal of variation within groups), they also examined the bottom and top segments of the distribution. This approach revealed "increasing segmentation, stratification, and in some cases polarization within and between occupations" (Brown et al., 2020, pp. 59–60). In spite of the rise in educational attainment over time, "investment in a college education has not resulted in parallel income growth" (p. 54). Overall, the median earnings of graduates have not been commensurate with the rise in technical, managerial, and professional employment. Further, outcomes are stratified by type of education and institution as well as by class, gender, race, ethnicity, industry, and occupation. In sum, authors describe the problem as a

shortage of quality jobs and differences in labor market power—not a scarcity of qualified labor, as suggested by orthodox human capital models.

Like Brown and his co-authors, Livingstone et al. (2021) suggest that there is no necessary correspondence between formal educational qualifications and the actual skills required for jobs. In fact, a greater supply of qualified applicants is likely to result in less bargaining power. Canadian data confirm this—while about a quarter of the employed labor force had completed a post-secondary credential in 1982, this proportion had grown to around two-thirds by 2016 (Livingstone et al., 2021). Survey data also confirm an increase over this period in both *credential underemployment* (those reporting a credential greater than required for their job) and *subjective underemployment* (the extent to which respondents perceive themselves to be overqualified for their jobs). For post-secondary graduates, credential underemployment increased from 34 to 45% between 1982 and 2016, while subjective underemployment increased from 22 to 38% (Livingstone et al., 2021). The proportion of professional employees reporting underemployment also grew significantly over this period. Younger workers and racialized youth tend to have higher rates of underemployment (De Jong & Madamba, 2001). Underemployed workers report declining task autonomy, and diminished participation in organizational decision-making. Thus, professional employees appear to have become "proletarianized" over time in Canada as well as in the United States (Pulskamp, 2006).

In sum, the research conducted by Brown et al. (2020) and Livingstone et al. (2021) provides counter-narratives to the discourse of "learning for earning" in higher education. These authors argue for a closer examination of changes in labor markets, work processes, and the trends that are likely to impact future work. Following such an examination, Brown et al. argue for a new human capital model in higher education that places individual growth throughout life at the center. They acknowledge that rethinking higher education is insufficient without also rethinking work and the current distribution of opportunities in society. Ensuring that all employees are able to apply their skills in workplaces through collective action is important, as is addressing growing economic polarization in society.

The Problem of Value and the Imperative to Rethink Work

> That action of getting what one can because the other people are getting theirs, that action of thinking that "fairness" in democracy equals no one having a cushion (and so claims on economic justice become special-interest claims rather than the claims any member of the body politic might make)—this kind of dark relationality comes out of political depression and an incapacity to think otherwise. (Berlant, 2012)

My discussion to this point has focused on the hollow promises of human capital models in higher education that are highlighted in analyses of the changing relationship between education and work (Brown et al., 2020) and the proletarianization of some forms of professional work (Livingstone et al., 2021). Further, human capital promises are troubling insofar as they are rooted in a system of value and values that opposes the public good that is necessary for human flourishing. In her book "Cruel Optimism," Berlant (2011) asks, "Why do people hold on to fantasies of the good life, meritocracy, the family, or the political" when these optimistic attachments are detrimental to their wellbeing? Through the lens of affect theory, Berlant explores the techniques people adapt to navigate the "exhaustive terrain of neoliberal capitalism" (Lippert, 2013, p. 143).

David Graeber's (2018) book about contemporary work supports Berlant's claim that work and pleasure need reinvention. Graeber traces shifting ideas about the value of work over time: most notably, the shift from the notion that labor produces value to the belief that capital produces value; the economic value of paid (over unpaid) work; the contradictory nature of attitudes toward work; and the inverse relationship between the economic value and the social value of many jobs.

Dominant ideology holds that capitalists are the drivers of wealth and prosperity, in contradistinction to a labor theory of value. Economists have long equated value with paid work, despite the fact that unpaid work—including household work, charitable works, political volunteering, and many artistic activities—have value that is more difficult to quantify. Brown et al. (2020) and Livingstone et al. (2021) also problematize the invisible nature of gendered reproductive work in the home, including care work, that is essential to sustaining society. As Brown et al. (2020) affirm, "it is only when social activities get bundled and formalized in labor contracts that they are judged to constitute part of labor demand because they are defined to have market value" (p. 175). This vision of value also omits the growing range of nonstandard paid work (including gig and platform work), which fails to conform to the standard employment relationship of full time, year-round work with one employer.

Graeber (2020) refers to the moral value placed on work historically to explain the contradictory reality evident in sociology of work literature: the fact that although people find their sense of self-worth in work, most people also claim to hate their jobs. He traces this back to the Puritan tradition, which perpetuates the idea that people gain their self-worth from their work *because* they hate their jobs. The "work-as-an-end-in-itself" morality is described in terms of an ethic that "if you're not destroying your mind and body via work, you're not living right" (Graeber, 2018, p. 216). He further observes that a perversion of values has developed as a result, whereby those who are doing pointless or even harmful work are paid more than those who know their work is socially valuable and useful. He elaborates his ideas as follows:

> Bullshit jobs proliferate today in large part because of the peculiar nature of managerial feudalism that has come to dominate wealthy economies—but to an increasing degree, all economies. They cause misery because human happiness is always caught up in a sense of having effects on the world; a feeling which most people, when they speak of their work, express through a language of social value. Yet at the same time they are aware that the greater the social value produced by a job, the less one is likely to be paid to do it. (Graeber, 2018, p. 243)

In the context of Covid-19, this argument became more compelling, as it became obvious that low-paid "front line" service workers including grocery store workers, bus drivers, and laundry workers in hospitals are essential workers, unlike hedge fund managers, political consultants, and marketing executives. The inverse relationship between the economic value and social value of jobs helps to explain why people may hold onto visions of the good life that impedes their flourishing (Berlant, 2011). In what follows, I consider ways of disrupting the narrow value system that has developed over time.

Part 2: Alternatives to Neoliberal Human Capital Thinking

In Part 1, I discussed how changes in work over time challenge simplistic ideas about the financial returns to higher education. I further argued that the problematic valuation of work in society calls for a reinvention of work, which attends to the inequitable distribution of and valuation of labor. So, what does this mean for higher education? In Part 2, I suggest that universities could do more to disrupt the influence of traditional human capital models by playing a greater role in challenging social inequities, including those related to how different kinds of work are valued. The capabilities approach provides a partial direction for this kind of change as do Marxian-inspired ideas.

Paid Work vs. Community-Engaged Learning and Unpaid Work

How do universities perpetuate a discourse of learning for earning? The concept of work-integrated learning (WIL) has become very popular in Canadian universities and internationally as a way of enhancing graduates' employability in a competitive labor market as well as enhancing their learning (Jackson, 2015; Taylor et al., 2020). WIL includes short-term work placements, cooperative education programs, internships, practicums, project-based learning, and community-based learning (Drysdale et al., 2016).

However, access to WIL opportunities (especially more prestigious ones) is inequitable. For example, research suggests that first-generation students (students whose parents did not complete post-secondary education) in Canada (Sattler & Peters, 2013) and international students in Australia

(Gribble et al., 2015) have less access to WIL. While Sattler and Peters (2013) do not explain the lower rate of participation of first-generation students in Canada, our research suggests that such students often lack information about opportunities as well as forms of social and cultural capital that would help them secure positions. International students in Australia were also found to face barriers related to their lack of social networks and English language proficiency, as well as less willingness on the part of employers to invest in them (Gribble et al., 2015). Relatedly, a European study found that ethnic minority students worked more hours and perceived more work–study conflict than others (Meeuvwise et al., 2017).

Although community-engaged learning (CEL) is usually included under the umbrella of WIL, the aims of CEL go beyond employability. Further, CEL programs tend to lack parity of esteem vis-à-vis other WIL activities. Such programming:

> [U]sually includes a 'course-based, credit-bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility' (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 222). It can be distinguished from work-integrated learning programs in the type of community partners involved (usually not-for-profit sector) and the aims of learning (e.g., learning for citizenship as well as employment). (Raykov & Taylor, 2018)

Both in the United States and Canada, CEL is often marginalized within higher education in terms of core funding for programs, the extent to which faculty are provided with support and recognition for this work, and as a result, the number of faculty and students who participate (Butin, 2006; Taylor, 2017). Especially when CEL programs are housed within student services offices at universities (including career centers), staff feel pressured to justify their work in terms of graduate employability. While our interviews with students who participated in CEL during their undergraduate programs at a small eastern Canadian university suggest that such experiences often play a significant role in their further education and career decisions (Taylor et al., 2021), a narrow employability focus tends to reduce such experiences to their economic utility and misses their broader potential for collective human flourishing and active citizenship. Our research on service learning identifies features that are more expansive. In particular, what Butin (2007) describes as "anti-foundational service learning" encourages students to question common-sense social categories and welcomes tensions and dilemmas in student learning as opportunities for reflection. Through thoughtfully constructed CEL opportunities and dialogue about their boundary-crossing experiences between classrooms and communities, students can participate in

socially valuable work and reflect on their place in the world in relation to others.

Our 2019 survey of undergraduates at a research-intensive university in western Canada indicates that around half (49%) engaged in a wide range of unpaid work for an average of six hours per week, including student clubs and associations, curricular or co-curricular volunteer work in the community, and internships (Raykov et al., 2020). Common motivations for such participation included making a social contribution as well as socializing with others. Interestingly, unpaid work was reported by students to be more influential than paid work for developing career-related skills, deciding on future education plans, and for career plans. Our interviews with students indicate further that they often felt more freedom, less sense of hierarchy, and greater ability to control what they did in unpaid compared to paid work. At the same time, low-income students reported an inability to participate in unpaid work because of their requirement to work for pay. Other writers also acknowledge that the costs of unpaid opportunities are prohibitive for many students (Bassett et al., 2019; Grenfell & Koch, 2019). Our interviews with students support survey findings about the value students place on "meaningful" work as well as differences in access to opportunities.

The Aspiration for Socially Valuable Work

As suggested in Part 1, many students in our study felt pressured to succeed "the way that they [universities] want us to." At the same time, when asked how they perceive meaningful work, most students responded in ways that go beyond learning for earning. For example, an international student replied:

> [A] big thing for me is [work] has to give back to the community. If I don't see myself giving back then I don't think there is a purpose. And … some of the classes you take are just requirements. And I tend not to do well in those because I don't think they're important to the community for me or when I go back, how is it going to help my community or my place.

Another student shared that she wants to help others develop, as well as to grow personally:

> I find my job meaningful [when] … I am given an ability to grow as a person and change as a person and realize things as a person. … and when you're collaborating with other people, you are allowing them to grow as a person because they're learning things from you and … [One wants] work that you feel is self-fulfilling and you're not leaving it feeling like empty as a person, right? You're feeling more satisfied with your life, if that makes sense.

A third student expressed a desire to be involved in social change:

> I want to be able to make some sort of small-scale difference in individual lives. … I want to have both parts of the career where it's meaningful on a day-to-day level with people, and then eventually meaningful on like a policy, changing some of the things about how we approach law in this country, make it better.

These comments are typical of student responses to questions about what they want from work, and suggest that their aspirations are more expansive than is assumed by traditional human capital models.

Our research findings regarding CEL and students' unpaid work more generally can be productively put in dialogue with the human capabilities approach (CA). Brown et al. (2020) and others advocate for such an approach as an alternative to traditional human capital models in higher education in order to place human development at the center. I argue further that to effectively disrupt the problematic valuation of contemporary jobs (Graeber, 2018) as well as to address the external conditions that enable or limit opportunities (Sayer, 2012), CA should be informed by other critical theories, most notably Marxian thinking. The next section explores this approach to economy and education.

Higher Education and the Capabilities Approach

> [Amartya] Sen carefully distinguishes between the accumulation of human capital and the expansion of human capability (Sen, 1997, 1999). While the former aims at enhancing productivity or production possibilities, the latter focuses on the ability to lead a life one has reason to value, thereby implying that valuable lives may include aspects beyond mere participation in productive activities. (Bonvin, 2019, p. 275)

The capabilities approach was developed by the economist and philosopher Amartya Sen (1992) as a way of rethinking the meaning of human development; it builds on ideas from humanist social philosophy and humanist economics (Boni & Walker, 2013). In its challenge to traditional economics, CA is reminiscent of work by feminist economists. For example, Marilyn Waring (1990) also raised important questions about the limitations of economic measures like GDP (Gross Domestic Product), including a disregard for the invisible work of women and the costs of environmental degradation. CA proposes that assessing people's quality of life involves examining what opportunities they have to lead the lives they value. Debates within CA center on how it is applied—notably, the selection of relevant capabilities and the relative priority or weighting given to each capacity. While Sen argues that any list of capabilities is context-dependent, Nussbaum (2000) argues for a general list that can be translated into different contexts. The political impact of CA is evident in the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report, which focuses each year on a theme related to development, understood as the expansion of people's capabilities. The CA has also been

used to assess gender inequality in advanced economies, and to empirically assess policies (Robeyns, 2006).

CA relies on two key concepts of capabilities and functionings. While "functionings" refer to what a person actually is or does, "capabilities" refer to what a person can be or can do (Bonvin, 2012, p. 11). Following Sen, CA proponents recognize that because different groups face distinct challenges (e.g., persons with disabilities), what is required for them to convert resources into capabilities or real freedoms to lead a valuable life differs. In addition to material resources, Sens' work suggests that the development of capabilities requires the possibility to voice one's preferences and expectations and for these to count in decision-making processes; in other words, there is a requirement for democratic governance (Bonvin, 2012). Sen's concept of conversion recalls Bourdieu's ideas about how the conversion of different forms of capital affects social inequalities, and in fact, some writers have drawn on these ideas to examine how conversion factors help or hinder the development of capabilities (cf., Hart, 2019).

Hart's (2019) Sen-Bourdieu framework raises an important point about the strengths and weaknesses of CA. While Robeyns (2003, p. 66) describes the strengths of CA as its attention to "people's beings and doings" in non-market as well as market settings and its recognition of human diversity, she acknowledges that it is "underspecified" and requires additional social theories. Sayer (2012) argues further that the radical potential of CA is missed because of "attempts to use its normative theory without an adequate account of the social structures that enable or limit human capabilities in particular situations" (p. 580). Sayer and other authors attempt to address the gaps in CA. For example, Walker (2010) argues for bringing Sen's CA together with ideas from critical pedagogy to inform undergraduate university education with social justice aims, and Robeyns (2003) presents a feminist capability perspective on gender inequality. Sayer (2012) draws on the theory of contributive justice to ask questions about what kinds of paid and unpaid work people are allowed or expected to contribute, as key to understanding the external constraints on the development of capabilities.

In Part 1, I highlighted the importance of bringing Marxian perspectives to the discussion of CA. This could offer insights into the reproduction of inequalities within new modes of capital accumulation. More encompassing theories of value in society further complement these approaches. A brief look at how CA has been taken up in higher education confirms the need for such theoretical dialogues.

The Capabilities Approach in Education

The CA approach has been taken up by writers focused on gender equity in South African schools (Walker, 2006); the vision of public good professionalism in universities (Walker & McLean, 2013); and a more expansive vision for vocational education and training (VET) (Bonvin, 2019; Powell &

McGrath, 2019). The education system is seen as having a crucial role to play in developing students' capabilities and developing professionals who advocate for social change. In the latter case, writers believe that a critical interpretation of the capabilities approach can provide an ethical framework for professional education (Walker, 2010; Walker et al., 2009). This perspective advocates for universities as places that contribute to more equitable and democratic societies by challenging the current distribution of opportunities as well as developing students' capabilities. Professionals are seen as elites who must play a role in social change (Walker et al., 2009). I argue elsewhere (Taylor, 2021) that while this perspective is morally compelling, it does not take into account the changes that have occurred in professional work. Thus, while it makes sense to see university students in professional faculties as privileged vis-à-vis students who lack access to higher education, they can also be seen as caught up in the pursuit of visions of a "good life" that are not realizable and workplace structures that are far from equitable.

Some of the writings on vocational education and training are more attentive to what is required for CA to critically address the complex relationship between higher education and work, and the ways in which the social organization of work and existing power relations can restrict capabilities. For example, Powell and McGrath (2019) suggest that human capital models in the VET system in South Africa fail to support the aspirations of unemployed youth. Like the Canadian university students cited above, their interviews with youth suggest that they desire work that produces what is needed, promotes recognition and self-worth, provides a livelihood, and contributes to their communities—aspirations that are "more broadly human and collective" than is suggested by "productivist" discourse (p. 388). Bonvin (2019) adds that a CA approach considers the intrinsic value of education and its non-economic contributions to collective as well as individual human and social development.

A capability-friendly economy and society would consider the availability of jobs, job quality, working conditions, labor regulations, workplace relations, and collective agreements (Bonvin, 2012). It would also view the social welfare system as key to people's ability to refuse "valueless" work and to balance work and family life (Bonvin, 2012, p. 15). Such an approach asks important questions like Who is able to develop different kinds of competencies? Who benefits from this development? How are different work opportunities distributed? What levels of worker discretion are provided in different jobs? And, most importantly, how are inequities in the ability to live a life that one values addressed?

This last question gestures toward the discussion raised in Part 1 regarding how to reinvent work. Graeber's (2018) historical analysis suggests that the validation of "bullshit jobs" is deeply rooted, and democratic governance will require significant struggle. As Sayer (2012) observes, "democracy usually stops at the workplace door" (p. 585). As a partial solution, Graeber, like Brown et al. (2020), advocates for a universal basic income (UBI) as a way of detaching work from compensation—detaching the domain of economic

value from the domain of social values. A government program in which every adult receives a minimum income would establish the principle that everyone deserves the material resources to live. It establishes the "right of material existence for all people" (Graeber, 2018, p. 279).

Bringing this discussion back to the student voices cited above, our interviews point to students' yearning for meaningful work. During their undergraduate programs, many students are engaged in "survivalist" work rather than "opportunity" work (Powell & McGrath, 2019, p. 387). Further, many cannot consider the possibility of unpaid work because of mounting student debt. Movement toward a vision for higher education that embraces a critical CA approach requires wider access to opportunity work, for example, through a more generous student finance system or universal basic income. For example, Nordic countries like Finland and Norway offer more generous support for students, including free tuition as well as generous public subsidies (Garritzmann, 2016; Välimaa, 2015). An alternative vision also requires a shift from the narrow focus on graduate employability toward a focus on graduate capabilities directed toward participation in families, communities, politics, and society, as well as the labor market.

Concluding Comments

Higher education enrolments have become more skewed toward practical or applied programs over time in North America (Brint et al., 2005). There is no question that students are concerned about their future work prospects. However, changes over time in work mean that this future is more uncertain and quality work is scarce. It is also problematic that socially valuable work is often least valued. In such a context, I believe higher education has at least three roles to play.

The first role involves expanding the ways we think about "preparing" undergraduate students to include opportunities focused on developing capabilities beyond qualifications for specific professions. Our research on community-engaged learning and students' unpaid work suggests that work is more consequential in positive ways when students are able to choose it, when workplace relations are less hierarchical, and when that work is seen to have social value. More opportunities of this kind could be built into programs and made accessible to a wider range of students. Second, universities could promote critical analysis of work. It is unfair to task students with being public good professionals if they're likely to experience work that is proletarianized within a system that promotes winners and losers. As workplace technologies proliferate, including artificial intelligence, it is clear that a rethinking of work is urgently needed. Finally, increasing access to higher education must be accompanied by greater attention to how pedagogical practices privilege some students and disadvantage others. The capabilities approach's commitment to equal valuing of diversity based on gender and sexuality, race, ethnicity, social

class, and disability reinforces the critical role of education in human and social development.

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