CEEHE Professional Development Resources: Misrecognition

Reflective Activity

The film 'Misrecogntion' draws on the students' reflections of constructions of 'capability'. Students are aware of how assumptions about 'SES' and 'ethnicity' influence judgements of capability. Their sense of capability is produced in relation to their pedagogical encounters (both formal and informal) and related to processes of mis/recognition. Capability is contextually constructed through ongoing pedagogical relations and processes.

"Yeah students who looked a little bit low SES, they didn't look like they were going to achieve. I don't know if they did or didn't ... and a lot of the [minority] ethnic students, depending on what ethnicity, that also was a major factor in what people thought in terms of whether they were going to achieve or do really well."

"I've felt dumb all my life and I thought uni was out of my reach. Only smart people — not people like me — went to uni. Yeah… That probably came from my parents. I was always told I was dumb and useless when I was a kid. I remember when I was at school I was in Year 10 and I wanted to go onto Year 12 and I said to my mum — I said, 'I want to go onto Year 12' and she said, 'No'. She said, 'You're too dumb for that, go and get a job' and it always stuck in my mind… I mean, I was told I was dumb all my life so I thought I was dumb. I feel like people who maybe didn't live in [the region] and go to the schools we went to and have the families that we had, might not feel that way because maybe there's never been that expectation of them… So I feel like it's because of the expectations put on me."

"Well, even — look, not even specifically relating that you should come to universities but when they conduct media reports on Today Tonight or A Current Affair and they go into a low socio economic environment and there's Housing Commission and they're saying — oh, they're painting with the broad brush. All these people have a very high chance of being drug dealers and all these people have a very high chance of being dole bludgers, then I think that as a side-effect of that, whether intentional or not, makes people watching think — oh well, they're not going to achieve anything. Well in reality that's not true and the reality is not there."

"Definitely, yeah. I feel like people think that you have to be Einstein to go to uni and you have to be really smart. I guess to some extent you have to have some sort of academic capability but you also have to have an interest and I guess if you have the interest, there are other pathways of getting in if you don't quite have the marks… But I definitely think that there is a stereotype of people that go to uni… I guess it was mainly through school, mainly conversations that you have with your friends or people that necessarily aren't your friends… like you're a nerd if you go to uni and even I guess on Facebook probably that's a big thing as well, just pictures and things that you see on Facebook that kind of depict a particular type of person that goes to uni."

Activity:

Reflect on the film 'Misrecognition' and the students' accounts of their understanding of capability and how this impacted on their sense of being or becoming a university student. Some questions that might support your reflection include:

- How are stereotypes constructed through public discourses (such as 'university student' and 'low SES')? How does this impact on feelings of not belonging or not being capable?

- Did the students' accounts resonate with your own experiences of higher education in any ways?

- What are the discourses of capability that are at play in the students' accounts? Do you recognise these discourses in the contexts in which you work?

- How do constructions of capability play out differently in different disciplines/subject areas? What are the equity issues this raises?

- What might be some of the pedagogical challenges raised by the students' accounts? How might such discourses be challenged? How might teaching and/ or equity practices help develop a student's sense of capability?