

Gaining epistemic access and achieving the capability of epistemic contribution through higher education in South Africa: four case studies

Ann-Marie Bathmaker and Monica McLean
December 2017

Contact: a.m.bathmaker@bham.ac.uk ; monica.mclean@nottingham.ac.uk

Taking a capability approach lens, this paper conceptualises university education as expanding students' personal, social, economic and civic capabilities. It is argued that graduates should be able to make valuable contributions to the meanings and understandings that circulate in society. This is known as the capability for epistemic contribution which we propose is a central capability. It requires access to (inter)disciplinary knowledge or epistemic access.

A central concern in gaining epistemic access concerns the capability for sufficient and secure financial resources. We have classified the student participants in the Miratho Project into three poverty categories (absolute poverty, intermediate poverty, and emerging middle-class). All four students below are classed as experiencing intermediate poverty.

Table 1: background information about four participants

Pseudonym	Gender	University	Subject studied	Short/medium term future
Sonto	F	City	BA ordinary degree Politics	Get an Honours degree in Sociology at City; become a public manager of education in an underdeveloped area
Dumisani	M	City	BA Language	Do another degree more focussed on film and 'creativity'
Lwazi	M	Rural	Medicine	Two-year internship, followed by community service, before becoming an MD. He is considering specialising in psychiatry and neuroscience.

Olwetho	M	Rural	BSc ordinary degree in Biological Sciences	Take Honours and then Masters degrees, perhaps in the UK or US; become a lab scientist abroad because job opportunities are few in South Africa
---------	---	-------	--	---

Sonto (City University)

Family, School and Community

Sonto (20) is taking a BA in Politics (not Honours) and is the first in her family to go to university. Born in a rural area, she came to a township when she was 8 with her brother and mother. Sonto's mother works for a feeding scheme and has always encouraged her education, but her stepfather calls her university 'fake', though her polygamous father, who had discouraged her, is now proud.

While her township secondary school was under-resourced (no computer or book access and classes of over 50), Sonto thinks that the teaching from textbooks was good and appreciates that her English teacher was intelligent and open minded and taught her that 'there was no one right answer'. Her teachers discouraged pupils from going to university. Her ambition to go to university arose from watching television dramas about lawyers when she was in primary school. Sonto says 'I had to push myself individually so that I can be where I want to be in life.'

Five of her matriculation class of 50 did go to City after a visit by Thusanani (though by chance someone else had already given her forms). City is comparatively near to home, and she and her classmates didn't know about other universities, except a higher-status one nearby which they thought they'd be 'kicked out of'. At Matric, Sonto had taken and achieved the following grades: commerce; English (65); isiZulu (90); accounting (42); economics (60); business (70); life orientation (80); maths literacy (having dropped pure maths) (78).

The township Sonto lives in is 'rough' and unsafe, with a high crime rate, including rape, about which police do little. Lately, though, the community is helping itself, and at weekends Sonto is collecting donations for families to have funerals; or clearing rubbish. She's left the church because she disagrees with ministers preaching that 'suffering is the norm' and because they are judgemental.



Experience of poverty (intermediate poverty group)

The Thusanani Foundation is funding Sonto's fees (R35,000 pa) and she has no other source of money. She lives at home and it takes up to 4 hours to travel to and from campus on buses, for which she can wait 3 hours. She often walks. She hasn't got her overall mark from last year because her fees were not paid.

Sonto is fully involved in the #FeesMustFall protests because without access to adequate funding, which does not have to be repaid, black people are trapped in a cycle of poverty- even the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is incompetently administered and corrupt. She knows about decolonisation but is not interested:

That's the rich students. I don't know, man, I'm not as involved in that one, it doesn't matter to me if the statue's there or not, what matters to me is academic excellence [...] And having enough money to finish [...] you know, obtaining your degree and being lucky enough to say that I've made it and I've worn this gown and I've graduated and I've walked through the Great Hall that's what matters to me, you know, because that one opens a lot of opportunities for you, but now looking at things such as statues, a statue is just a statue, it falling will not benefit you in any type of way, but you want confirmation to say that this is my country, this is the land of my ancestors so therefore I don't want this here, this person did 1, 2, 3, 4 to us, I don't think that's going to help us progress in any way, so I'm not interested in that side of it.

Epistemic Access

Education means a lot, man. If it wasn't for this, and people fought for this education and they died for it, so [...] it might be seen as a privilege but education is a right and everyone must be exposed to this education. Everyone must be, you know, given, and must be encouraged to be educated, because I was looking at the structure now and this area we're living in, education is everything, without education you're not going to go anywhere.

And I think it's important that they not only teach students how to cram but also teach students how to think, how to come up with your own ideas, tell you what your view is about this, not just, what, according to who, who, who, who, who.'

When she arrived at City, Sonto was 'overwhelmed' with happiness, and continues to feel extremely fortunate 'I'm very, very lucky to be in this situation right now, because not many of us could make it'. She says she belongs at City because she has as much 'right' to be at university as anyone - looks and possessions don't matter, everyone is pursuing 'academic excellence'.

University has exposed her to different worlds and makes her feel 'more alive'. She finds politics highly interesting because it enlightens everyday life 'I love [politics], I'm very passionate about people and the community and I think politics [will] enable me to [...] make a change.'

The course comprises politics, public management and governance and sociology. The topics she has enjoyed are: race gender, religion, group dynamics, Pan Africanism and identity.

Sociology is Sonto's favourite:

Oh, I love sociology because I remember someone once asked me which one do you think is better between sociology and psychology, and I told them that personally I think it's sociology because psychology is the study of individuals but then sociology is the study of individuals and how they interact with the society or the communities and vice versa, and personally I think that our society or community has a large impact on who we turn out to be at the end because had I grown up in XX I'd be different from who I am right now compared to, you know, the person that I am, so, yes, I think... So I love sociology very much, it has exposed me to lot of things, I'm starting to question why is what like this, why do you have certain things and, yes, I love sociology.

Struggle and failure/success

There about 6 ½ contact hours and Sonto does 'a lot' of 'self-study' between classes and often at night between 10 pm and 1 am at home (she never studies with others). The 2nd year is harder than the first because students are expected to read widely even if they are not tested on all the topics. From some modules, Sonto thinks she has gained knowledge (for example, from one on Pan-Africanism and identity) but in others (like foreign policy) she is simply told what the facts are. It is difficult for Sonto to understand the white lecturers' accent and she is often 'in the dark' (it was a relief when she found out it was the same for

others). So she studies material by herself (getting the slides on the computer); goes for consultations (though lecturers are often not in the office when they say they will be and she has no relationship with them); and attends tutorials where there is some discussion to help her to get the picture. She struggles with typing 10-page assignments because she has to do all the research herself; doesn't have a computer; and spends so much time travelling. She complains that because she gets no feedback on work, she doesn't know how to improve. Nevertheless, she is doing well, never getting marks below 70% in class tests and for individual modules.

The Future

Sonto feels under pressure from family expectations that she will lift them from poverty. For her, a university education means the 'basic things' a black person can aspire to: extending or buying a new house for her family and a car. In the future, Sonto wants to get an Honours degree at City in sociology and become a public manager of education in an underdeveloped area. She is interested in work which will improve the country.

Dumisani (City University)

Family, School and Community

Dumisani is 21 and studying a BA in Language Practice. His parents migrated from Mozambique in the early 80s; both were from rural areas, had little formal education and had lost their parents. He is one of four children, with two older brothers and a younger sister. His father first worked in bakery and then in construction, which required him to work in Limpopo. Over time he built the family a solid house just 5 minutes from Dumisani's high school. However, in 2016 his father had a stroke and has been at home unable to work since then. Dumisani continues to live with his family in a large, relatively poor satellite township about 50 km from a major city. The secondary school he attended was established in 2006, and had a bad start: 'It wasn't a great start for that school because there were a lot of other people and they were doing like, all that stuff like vandalising the school, being disrespectful and everything. So, the school was known for its misbehaving and everything.'

He says that by the time he attended the school in 2010, it was much improved and that the teaching was good although the school did not have many resources – there were no

science labs for example. What made the difference was the new headteacher: 'Yes, it was the new head teacher, Mr M. The teacher was interactive between them and our parents and everything in order to make the school right, he involved the police, just to keep out those things because people used to carry weapons to school.

Dumisani was in the science specialism matric class. However, he did not take his school work seriously ('I hit the snooze button') and decided not to write matric in 2014 but to delay to 2015, much to his mother's dismay. It was a good decision:

I wrote my matric in 2015 and that's when I got the marks that I desired because I put more effort in it and I studied hard. I didn't sleep, I made sure that I didn't repeat the same mistakes.

His best friend moved in with him and they studied very hard together as they both wanted to go to university, 'that partnership, that friendship also helped into making me who I am today. Another 'push factor' was his older cousin ('sister') who had made it to university and just graduated from Metropolitan with a Bachelor in Accountancy. His parents were also supportive: 'That's one thing he prioritises as a father, that if something is for school you need to go to'. His school teachers were important motivators, telling students:

guys, you don't need to, like, marry right now, or be people in the streets. You have to have goals and university is your goal, if you study hard, if you become a doctor, this is what you need to do, if you want to be a lawyer, If you want to be a pilot, all those things, you need to go to university. And that was one of the pushing factors, because they also wanted to see a change in our lives.

He said he got good marks when he completed his matric, though he is not very specific: physics (72, life sciences (distinction); English (improved grade). He originally hoped to study medicine, but his marks, particularly in maths, were not good enough. He considered Stellenbosch University, but decided that City was closer and would be less costly. He settled for language practice at City because he loves novels and writes his own poetry. He has also drafted the first chapters of his own novel. He sees himself as having good fortune: one of his brothers wanted to go to university to study law, but finances prevented him, and although he started a part-time study programme at UNISA, he dropped out.

Experience of poverty (Intermediate poverty group)

Since his father had a stroke and could no longer work, income in the house is very thin. His older brothers help where they can but they too have families to support. Nevertheless, his father has always been determined to support his education:

I can wear shoes, my father stayed almost five years without having proper shoes as a little boy. If I said, I don't have a school shirt, even though he was earning little, he would make sure that I get a school shirt, he makes sure that I am like each and every other kid in school.

In his first year at university, he did not have NSFAS funding but the Thusanani Foundation paid his registration and fees and in 2017 his registration fees. Without funding, he decided to live at home as it was cheaper to pay for travel than pay for accommodation. He travelled over an hour each way to university each day. Transport is expensive and sometimes he has to miss days because he cannot pay for a taxi; the free bus to the city centre is also very overcrowded and he is often late for classes. He has a part-time job arranged through his brother [cousin] which helps, and he uses the money to pay for travel, and to pay for food if he has enough money left over. Yet he says:

There are students who are in the worse situation than I am, there are students who came from Eastern Cape I know, they didn't have a place to stay, I had a place to go to after school. I just live 51 kilometres from Johannesburg, they live miles and miles away, Eastern Cape is miles and miles away so, being in a foreign place and you don't have a place to stay, that's one of the problems.

He is very much in favour of fees falling and proper funding of students, 'how can you study without eating, how can you study without having toiletries, how can you study without having all of those things?':

I'm for the fees falling, I'm for the whole action behind it and the reason being, I'm from [name of district], I know people who are more intelligent than I, who didn't have the chance to go to school because of financial situations. I, myself is facing the same financial situation, if it was a right for us to go to school, then it shouldn't be a privilege because right now, it seems like a privilege, it seems like you need to have money. Everything revolves around money right now, for books you need money, for accommodation you need money, for going to school, registration you need money so, not everybody has that, I don't have that as well.

Epistemic access

He talked about a love of learning from an early age as part of 'how things were' in his family:

my brothers were in school already so that made me to be curious. When they were speaking between themselves, I'd get curious and ask questions, when we used to do homework in one place with our neighbours, that's when we tried to engage, write things, try to rap here and there. So, the love for learning

He talked about what he enjoyed in his Language practices degree:

last year I really liked English because we're doing like a lot of reading novels and poetry, which is one of the things I love. I enjoyed language practice because I found it very simple for me because it basically answered my questions, all the curious questions I had about languages, it basically summed it up in a year. Linguistics, I loved the way, I understood how humans first acquired language, how do we interact, what happens with you because it involved a lot of life sciences, which is one of my favourite high school subjects so it was like easier for me to understand.

He described what epistemic engagement in his subject meant for him:

we basically analysed everything, when we're saying this is language in power, we're displaying it as this and that if somebody is shouting at you, doing this and that, that's how they use language to show power in politics, referencing to everything that we know or have seen in our daily lives, so it wasn't more technical but it was more of an analysis and an analogy of an idea and how that idea represents a certain entity that we find in our classes.

Struggle and failure/success

When he first arrived at City it was a 'culture' shock' and completely unfamiliar even though his best friend was with him. They found a school colleague from 2014 matric who helped show them the ropes but he still feels as if he has to live in two different worlds: 'during the day I'm at school, I'm supposed to act as if everything is normal to my life....but how am I going to get to school tomorrow if I don't have money today?' His first semester in 2016 was

fine but he failed two subjects because of money worries and had to write supplementaries which he passed.

Overall he is not doing as well as he feels he should though and hopes 2018 will be his best year. He has a firm belief that he will eventually succeed:

my start wasn't like the best of them all but I'm not one to give up with my start, my finish should be the strongest one yet, to come. [...] And when I'm rolling, everybody knows, when I'm rolling I'm like a tumbling rock from a mountain, I gain momentum as I go.

The future

He hopes to complete another degree more focussed on film and 'creativity', but it is not clear how he has developed this imagined future, nor how realisable it is and whether it will lead to employment.

Lwazi (Rural University)

Family, School and Community

Lwazi is 21 and in his 4th year of studying medicine at (MBChB) at Rural University. He was born and raised in a rural village in the Eastern Cape. Both his parents are deceased (father died in 2005, when he was 10; mother died a few months later, he had turned 11). He is the second of four boys. He doesn't know the circumstances of his father's death because he didn't live with him at the time. He suspects his mother died of TB. He and his brothers have since been taken care of by a legal guardian (who has several biological children of her own). He describes his family as follows: 'It's a great, incomplete family, but it's complete in my heart.' At university, it saddens him that he doesn't get to see his brothers as often as he used to; they are very close, but being at university distances him from them ('we're not always together, or like scattered all over') but they try to maintain a close relationship by

keeping in touch ('When I'm here at school, we communicate with each other, yes, we have a good relationship with all of them').

The school Lwazi went to was poorly resourced (they shared textbooks, and there was no science laboratory), but teachers were dedicated –they used weekends for extra classes, and also helped students with getting and filling in application forms for university. He explained that:

In the high school, we... I specifically, and [name], my friend, we made friends with the teachers in school, and then we kind of made them expect a lot from us by befriending with them. So that when we're doing Grade 12, they expected us to pass, and not do what the previous classes did.

He did well in matric (Pure maths-78%; life sciences -79%; geography-'83% or 84%, can't remember clearly', and the rest: physical sciences; isiXhosa - home language; English -1st additional language; life orientation, 'were around 72% or 73%, 'can't remember all of them'). He played cricket and soccer and sang in the school choir. Once travelled to Durban with the school choir; he had the lead role in a musical (but insists that he cannot sing).

He thought about going to university at an early age (8 or 9). Teachers encouraged him to study further. He remembers jokingly telling his mother that he would become a doctor, and her encouragement for him to do so. Lwazi's older brother is at university and he has cousins who have gone to university.

Experience of poverty (intermediate poverty group)

Until he turned 18, living costs were covered by money that paid out from his father's life insurance policy (father was a teacher; mother was unemployed). However, the money has since run out:

Now, I don't know what we're surviving on, we're just surviving by god's grace. Because we... The guardian was taking care of us, she's got her children too, and us. So, she tries her best to give us money every now and then, but you don't have maybe a sure source, of financial source that we depend on, that we're sure that every month, this is what we get. No, we don't, but we survive even though we don't, yes.

When he got to the point of applying for university, two of Lwazi's teachers offered to help him raise funds to enter university; family members also pitched in. The money raised was enough to cover registration fees. He had no idea where tuition fees would come from, his guardian said he should just focus on what he can do: 'just study'.

Int: So, where did you... How did... What happened after that, in terms of getting enough money to register?

IE: Oh, remember I told you about my maths teacher? So, in registering you have to pay five point something, so during my matric year, my maths teacher and life sciences, they were both [unclear]. The maths teacher, which was the husband, he came to me early January, maybe February, when we do matric. He said he can, if I want, if... He taught me in Grade 11, and then he said he can see that I want to study and go further, he and his wife can maybe a month, put some money together to help me next year for registration. And they did so, when Rural accepted me, I went to them and I told them that I finally got a place at Rural. And then they asked how much registration was, and then I told them, then we found out that the money that they raised was short of maybe one point five short. Then the family tried to get the rest of the money, and then I registered using their money. And then after I registered, I asked myself: okay, now who's going to pay for my fees? Then around March I called my guardian, I told her that: so, now I've registered, and I don't know who's going to pay for my fees, because [unclear] first didn't take me. I didn't know what to do, and then she just said: you know what, I also don't know what you're going to do, but there's one thing that you can do, just study. We also don't know what you're going to do, but study in the meantime, and that's all you can do.

In the second semester of his first year, he heard about the Thusanani Foundation (TF) from a cousin's sister; started getting support from TF. TF helped him secure a National Skills Fund bursary, and things have been going well since then ('Once I got the bursary, everything became easy, because I could buy food, and buy books, not worry my family').

Epistemic Access

His narrative is full of accounts of practising medicine. At the time of the interview, he was on an internal medicine block. His favourite subject has been neuroscience, though he explained that 'the way it's structured, it's complicated and difficult', because it involves



independent problem- solving. He said there were not many lectures, except in ‘critical topics’ [essential topics?], ‘the other stuff you have to acquire it yourself.’ He says there is a big difference in him to when he first arrived at university: ‘academically I was new to studying, like serious studying. Now I have to study, like study, I wasn’t used to that.’

Struggle and failure/success

“The best thing is that the struggle never ends, especially for a black child, it never ends. You want to think you’ve went that uphill, but there’s another one coming”.

“Due to the fact that I was raised in the rural areas (...) I’m used to struggling, so it’s not something new for me, but for others it is (...). I’m used to it. So, it’s not a bizarre thing”.

At the time of the interview, Lwazi said he was doing well and set high standards for himself (he counts anything below 60% as a fail). But when he first got to Rural University, he struggled to make out what the lecturers were saying because of their Cuban accents (‘their B is a V’ and ‘their English is not English’. ‘But they try to teach you in English, and they are good, but if you are not used to their English, you won’t see that they are good’). He also had difficulty studying because the campus can be quite rowdy over the weekend (‘initially it is difficult, because the people there drink a lot, they go around singing, if you study in res, maybe on a Friday, you won’t be able to be productive). He eventually adapted to these conditions and is able to study and maintain his focus despite the noise. He stays on campus in a single room. He is happy with his studies. He has passed all his modules to date. He refers to failing his third year, but it is not clear if he got lower grades than he wished for (below 60) or actually failed.

Lwazi’s days are long and tiring. He typically starts with a 8 o’clock morning meeting, where people who were on call the previous night present what happened during the call. Thereafter he goes through different wards in the hospital, doing rounds with the doctors. On a good day he gets to go for lunch at 1pm. On a bad day he has to spend that time at a patient’s bedside, in a tutorial, or preparing a case presentation or write-up. At 2 pm he has another tutorial until 4pm. Sometimes longer. When he is not on call he usually heads home at around 4. If he is on call, he stays at the hospital until 9pm. He relies on public transport, and limits his commute to save money. At times he has had to hitchhike to get a lift from campus to the hospital. This, his fourth year of study has been the most physically tiring so

far ('only this year I'm feeling it. Because there in the hospital we don't sit down, you stand for long hours, and some of us are not used to standing. So, even the shoes that we wear... It's difficult').

He supports the student strikes and explains:

people wonder why Rural strikes every time. Because in the morning, we have to catch a bus, and we don't have cash, our money comes on a student card. If that bus come full, and you can't get in, you'll be late for the morning meeting, if you had to present your own present. Then the doctors don't take the excuse that you were left by the bus, the others could come, you couldn't. You couldn't because you couldn't get in, the others got in, they won't take that. So, we have to make means to get to the hospital, you don't even have money, like cash to get to hospital. Even during lunch, if maybe the bus has left already, but you are still in the hospital, it's not going to come back for you. You have to make means to get to school, and then eat and then go back.

So, especially in the clinical years, which is four, five, six, the challenge like transportation. Because you need to go around school, hospital, school, hospital, and if you don't have your own car, you take the bus, you can't do that. Anyway, you're going to be inconvenienced, or end up not doing other things. I don't complain much, I just accept what's coming my way. So, like, if the bus left me, and I don't have money maybe, I ask from friends, or just walk and hope that someone is going to give me a hike. And if he doesn't, I walk, and then I'm late. Then explain to the doctors even though they don't take those excuses of being late because of busses, but sometimes they do take them, yes.

The Future

Once he has completed his 6th and final year at university, Lwazi will do a two year internship, followed by community service, before becoming an MD. He wants to further his studies beyond that (I think I'll continue because I'm still young, I haven't studied the things I want to study, yes, so I'll continue). He is considering specialising in psychiatry and neuroscience.

Lwazi thinks his family expects him to ‘be maybe like a father, or like a provider’ for them in the future. He expects that his youngest brother might come and live with him once he has left university, and he will take care of him.

He does not want to return to where he was brought up, partly because he has no immediate family there and partly because he does not want to return, he wants ‘to live in a house in other cities’. He says: ‘I would go there once in a while, just to check up on them’.

Olwethu (Rural University)

Family, School and Community

Olwethu (20) is studying an ordinary degree in BSc Biological Sciences. He comes from a remote rural farming village and is the first in his family to go to university. His mother died three years ago after giving birth to his brother, he also has a 5-year-old sister who are with their father. He feels responsible for his siblings. At home, he lives with his uncle, a pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Africa, who advises him, and he has grandparents there who farm. The extended family is proud of Olwethu.

Class sizes at high school were 90+. The principal was extremely supportive and encouraging, but there was an unequipped science lab and no computers (he first used a microscope at university). The principal did not allow extra-mural activities so that students could concentrate on academic work. His Matric results were: Pure mathematics (87); physical sciences (81); life sciences (70); geography (70); home language, Xhosa (80); English as a first additional language

(67) and, life orientation (83). Because the principal pushed, c. 60% of students went to university from Grade 12 (about 20 of his classmates are at Rural, most doing education, and are his closest friends).

He loves going home every holiday (200km away) and his relationship with his family improved because he encourages and gives information which he did not have to the younger people, he mentors in maths. His village is ‘evolving’ because people like him go to university and bring it into ‘the modern world’: ‘we’re like heroes, we encourage most of our community so, they feel encouraged and so they have an ideal.’ He feels he is representing his community, which does not have social problems.

Experience of Poverty (intermediate poverty group)

At school, without internet, making applications to universities was a problem, despite the principal trying his best to get hard copies of forms made. Olwethu had wanted to go to different higher-status universities, but the application process by post took too long or the application fee was too high.

Thusanani hadn't come to Olwethu's school but they called in January of the first year to say he had a NSFAS bursary, which he was receiving but late (in March last year and still hadn't got it in April the 2nd year). He can't apply online. His fees and accommodation (a student residence on campus) are paid, but there is not enough for a laptop (he has a R4000 book allowance) or clothes. While waiting for his bursary, his grandparents are helped him out.

Olwethu has taken part in the student protests and pointed out that students with money and white students do not support the protests. He hasn't heard of the concept of decolonisation, saying:

I'm not so into politics but I've seen the #Rhodesmustfall thing. but it's hard for me to comment on that because I do not understand the idea, where does that hate comes from, the Rhodes guy, the statue, the statue being removed [...] I just want my allowances.

Epistemic Access

Olwethu found secondary school exciting (most of his family hadn't made it there), it was challenging but he likes challenges. In his village, most boys aspired to be policemen or soldiers. But when Olwethu was 14, his mother got a smartphone. He played with it and found the internet by chance and became 'obsessed' with famous people's lives, discovering that 'education is just the base of everything'. His passion for science led him to question an uncle who was a staff nurse about health-related science (pathogens and blood types) and found that his uncle didn't know. He decided that because he is 'very curious' he must go to university, although his family discouraged him because they thought it would be too difficult. So, he told his teachers and his principal gave him extra more difficult mathematics to prepare him, Olwethu liked and was top at mathematics and sciences, for which he got distinctions in Matric.

BSc Biological Science was not a degree Olwethu knew about so he applied for medicine at first. But he mistakenly thought his Matric results would be sent automatically so he was not interviewed. He was offered the general degree in Biological Science and had intended to go back to medicine, but he's found he's very interested in plant pathology. The knowledge he is gaining about plants is fascinating him and has direct relevance to farming at home.

The thing is, when it comes to plant pathology, there are things that I'm studying now, like how come a plant be in this condition? It's because of A and B and C, of which I have different theories when growing up because we used to plant with my grandparents, planting the small garden. So, we're planting, we're planting so, I always ask my grandparents, what happened to this and they just say, 'No, it's just rotten'- they don't have much knowledge. So now, if there is this much damage, probably it's bacteria affecting his plant, probably it's a virus affecting it, so that's how I got interested in this.

It is because now, when I go home now, I find my granny [...] she's planting something so, I go there then I say, 'OK, you see this plant here, it's being affected by fungal so, how are you going to kill this grandma?' And so, I will just see and then she will be like, 'I'm going to buy medicines' and I say, 'No, when you buy your medication, be specific' [...] just So, it's been so good - I'm helping her and I'm expanding my knowledge at the same time since then.

He is also taking modules on ecology, geography, surveying techniques and biochemistry.

Struggle-Failure/Success

When Olwethu arrived at university, he was very disappointed at its poor resources, facilities and infrastructure. It seemed just like high school. The residences are in a decaying condition and students buy their own stoves for their rooms. But he has a large group of friends (60) whose languages he is enjoying learning. He works hard and keeps fit: he plays rugby for the university in a lower division, runs and goes to the gym every day; he goes to church; and does not drink or smoke. He studies every night for 2 hours after gym, going to bed at midnight.

Contact hours are c. 25 hours a week. Although facilities are poor, the lecturers are good. They go at a slow pace and give extra tutorials for 10-15 students. They are friendly and



encouraging and when he doesn't understand he can find the lecturers in their offices to ask questions.

It's like they're not moving with so-called intelligent people, they are working with those who take information slowly so, they are not moving [with the] fast guys but their pace moves with the slow guys. At the same time, they are not interfering with their syllabus, they do each and everything, they will arrange extra classes, tutorials so, they do everything in their power.

He got 60s and 70s last year and would like higher marks. The major academic challenge is not having a laptop for assignments.

The Future

Olwethu wants to take Honours and then Masters degrees, perhaps in the UK or US, and become a lab scientist abroad because job opportunities are few in South Africa. When he's financially stable, he'll come back and establish an affordable farming consultancy (higher yields and quality) in rural communities.