

Low income rural and township youth: which capabilities matter for inclusive higher education learning outcomes

Melanie Walker and Merridy Wilson-Strydom

Paper presented at CEID Annual Conference on Higher Education and International Development London, 19 June 2018

T: +27(0)51 401 9111 | info@ufs.ac.za | www.ufs.ac.za

 UFSUV |  UFSweb |  UFSweb |  ufsuv

*Inspiring excellence. Transforming lives.
Inspireer uitnemendheid. Verander lewens*

UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA



Research team

- Melanie Walker (PI), Merridy Wilson-Strydom and Mikateko Hoepfener (UFS); Ann-Marie Bathmaker (Birmingham), and Monica McLean (Nottingham)
- Partnership with Thusanani Foundation (youth-led NGO)
- Consultants: Alberta Spreafico and Enrica Chiappero-Martinetti (University of Pavia)
- ESRC-DfID funding, with NRF
- Why 'Miratho'? (www.miratho.com)

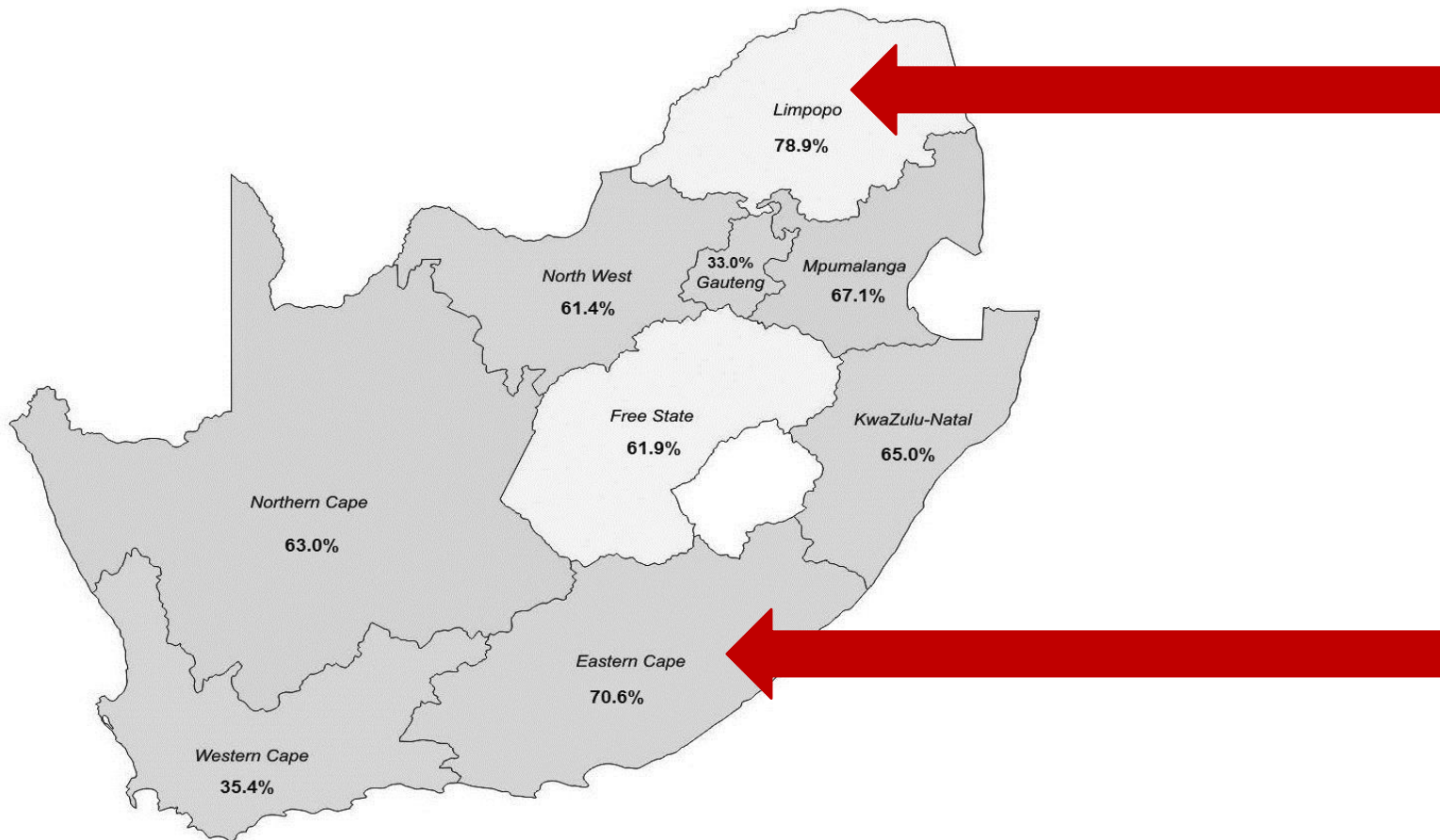


Project overview

- Four year project (2016-2020) (ESRC-DfID and NRF funded)
- Focus on inclusivity/fairness of access to HE, participation and success (outcomes) by rural and (some) township youth – five university case sites
- Working with 65 (63 from Y2) students who have been supported (in various ways) into the five case universities by the youth-led Thusanani Foundation (TF)
- Qualitative, quantitative & participatory data
- Capability approach conceptual framing.

Questions

- How do 'disadvantaged' youth from rural and township schools access, participate in and succeed in higher education, and then move into work?
- What contextual dimensions of economic, policy, social and educational conditions enable or inhibit access, participation and success?
- Which multi-dimensional higher education [capabilities-based] learning outcomes matter: in theory, to students, to lecturers, to policy makers.....?



Provincial poverty statistics (StatsSA, 2016)

Higher education in South Africa

- South African society has high levels of poverty and is grossly unequal: Gini coefficient of .69
- Influences/shapes higher education landscape, esp. for low income youth
- HE provides opportunities for social mobility and can strengthen equity, social justice and democracy (NDP, 2011); offers high private (as opposed to public) returns in South Africa (World Bank).
- BUT, the system is also seen to be reproducing both individual and institutional inequalities that were entrenched by apartheid (Ministerial Oversight Committee on Transformation in South African Public Universities, 2015).
- These historic and structural inequalities are evident at all points in personal higher education journey – access, participation in higher education and outcomes.

‘Learning outcomes’ – accounting for learning

- Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to understand, value, or demonstrate after completion of a process of learning.
- *Learning Outcomes are measurable, and communicate expectations to learners about the skills, attitudes and behaviors they are expected to achieve after successful completion of a course, program or degree. Accurate assessment of learning outcomes is an essential component of competency-based education. <http://www.queensu.ca/qloa/>*
- Instead, we focus on a capability set or a normative (what is valuable and desirable) set of educational goods (cognitive, affective, social, and material).

Capability approach framing

- Capabilities (eg. to access higher education) are the substantive freedoms or real opportunities to lead the kind of life that people value.
- Freedoms or opportunities which are put into practice are 'functionings' -
actual beings and doings (eg. accessing higher education, financial security, participating in learning, relationships, social inclusion in HE). Both capabilities and functionings matter during HE.
- The capability approach envisages enlarging people's choices about what they value choosing to be and to do, with concern for economic and non-economic issues, equality of opportunities and the conditions for achieving genuine choices.
- Capabilities are shaped also by the actions of others.
- Capabilities are dynamic (improve or worsen), can cluster and intersect, and a combination and plurality of contextual and conversion factors shape individual capability sets.
- Having choices and options allows us to recognise the conscious and deliberative aspects of human agency, but also the way power and society (and universities) may erect barriers to full justice.

Higher education capability

- Every student in Miratho expects that HE will make difference to their lives and that of their families. They have reason to value it significantly.
- To be educated is a multiplier/generative capability, contributing to the expansion of other valuable capabilities.
- Education has the potential, but is not guaranteed, to
 - support individual well-being freedom - intrinsic contributions to the formation of persons with many interests and aspects to their well-being and life quality.
 - influence social change (encouraging social participation and 'critical agency' Sen, 2002)
 - influence economic production (developing an educated populace with potential to contribute to and drive economic production) - acknowledges education as an instrumental investment in human capital its importance to economic opportunities especially for disadvantaged students and communities.

Emerging findings...

- **Four intersecting well-being/flourishing dimensions** that appear critical for opportunities and the realization of inclusive learning outcomes
 1. Material – food, shelter, transport, basic living conditions
 2. Epistemic – epistemic contribution, public reasoning, critical thinking
 3. Social – relationality, belonging, respect, participation in and out of class, relationships with peers and lecturers
 4. Psychological/emotional – mental health, resilience, confidence, optimism

Material well-being (higher education specificity)

- Poverty (lack of material well-being) is multidimensional and can be defined as “a lack of economic capacities (both resources and competencies to fittingly use them)” (Lotter, 2016: 344).
- “For poor [students] a lack of economic capacities implies some things cannot be acquired, some activities cannot be engaged in because the prerequisites are not there, the enabling circumstances to make something of their lives are absent. They just don’t have what rich [students] do. The things, support, circumstances and resources to acquire what is necessary to engage in a [flourishing student] life are not accessible.” (Lotter, 2011; kindle location 4854-4857)

Indicative data snippets (1)

“I’m struggling here, I have nothing, I have nothing to eat, so since last year I was surviving with Gift of the Givers, at City University we have Gift of the Givers. In the morning, its three slices in the morning and then in the afternoon around three o’clock you get a plate. So like even this year I’m still surviving with Gift of the Givers.” (Buzwe)

“My biggest challenge at the moment is – for me, I might not have food to eat or anything, but the challenge mostly that I have is in terms of accommodation. I want to have freedom in terms of where I’m staying, like okay, I can say I’m staying here, I’m not going to be chased out at the end of the month. Because once the month is about to end the accommodation thing now comes back. Now it takes off your focus, like what’s going to happen if they want to chase me out now, what’s going to happen?” (Makungu)

Indicative data snippets (2)

“You know, for my first year, like since I didn't have those expensive clothes, expensive things, you see how people dress on campus and stuff. I would feel so small. I would just sit in the corner and be like no, what am I doing here? I am just fooling with myself. I don't belong here and stuff. It's not actually nice.

Even though like it was kind of difficult for me to ask for help, because I see people, I view them as they are different from me. Like, they won't understand even though I ask for help and stuff, so I just do things on my own... ” (Anathi)

Material well-being – sufficiency and security

- What counts as sufficient/adequate/threshold economic capacity for student wellbeing and for achieving inclusive learning outcomes?
- But sufficiency alone does not take us far enough, we also need to take account of how secure (into the future) a student's economic capacities are.
- Our data shows that both lack of sufficient and lack of secure economic capacities places limits on student wellbeing and ultimately on inclusive learning outcomes.

Conceptualising epistemic well-being

- Fricker (2015): People have a right to contribute on an equal basis to the shared stock of society's meanings, ideas, arguments.
- Fricker's capability for epistemic contribution is to have the freedom and the capacity to choose to make and to receive contributions as knower, enquirer and teller in society.
- Equality of access to university knowledge or 'epistemological access' is a condition for developing this capability.
- In Fricker's view, the capability for epistemic contribution can be denied in two ways: by way of distributive injustice when people do not have access to epistemic goods, such as education; and, discriminatory injustice whereby people's knowledge is not taken as credible or is not understood.
- Our empirical aim is to explore epistemic well-being – as critical thinking/reasoning - what enables or hinders students to engage with university knowledge, to give and to receive knowledge contributions, under what conditions of 'social uptake' and therefore to gain (or not) the freedom to choose to make epistemic contributions to society.

LH1 Indicative moments– receiving (1)

- *“University exposes you to a whole lot of things, it’s a different world. I never knew most of the things until I got to university, everything about it gives you life, you feel more alive because you’re exposed to so much...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.” (Sonto)*
- *“In public administration, you get assignments, like our recent one that says: critically analyse social welfare, as compared to other countries. So, you're like, oh, maybe you see: oh, education is actually performing well. Oh... or maybe the health sector is actually performing badly.” (Khethiwe)*

Indicative moments – giving (2)

- *“the time I’m at home I spend my time asking people information, because when I was defining this IKS [Indigenous Knowledge Systems] I said it’s cultural studies, so as for me, I’m still young. I don’t have that much about culture, about different cultures. So I go maybe old ladies and ask them about the culture...and let me say almost every day I’m always adding some information in the lecture because I go out in the field and ask people about IKS. So when I’m in class I’m having [something to share]” (Rimsa)*

In conclusion...

- These four dimensions of well-being (material, epistemic, social, emotional) provide the foundation from which we are identifying a capability set which matters for inclusive learning outcomes. We want to advance a more expansive view of learning outcomes.
- Current round of LH2 qualitative data analysis includes a specific focus on identifying valued capabilities
- These will be workshopped with students in the coming months to finalise, agree on definitions, and prioritise.
- The capability set identified through this process will then inform the final inclusive learning outcomes index/rubric to be developed (to be both qualitative and quantitative).

Thank you

www.miratho.com