

## **Bearding the Capability Deprivation Machine: The Pedagogical Deal for Post-Apartheid Young South Africa**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this essay is to reflect on how we in South Africa are managing the task of higher education in an environment marked by poverty. The paper makes the argument that the question of how to proceed when considering the relationship between the phenomenon of poverty and the experience of education is regularly resolved through invoking the syllogism that increased levels of education will bring about increased levels of income. Drawing on Sen and his ideas of capability deprivation, it is contended here that income-deprivation ideas by themselves do not adequately encompass the full complexity of how deprivation works. The approach taken here, therefore, is different. It works with the proposition that education needs to respond to the full range of social, cultural and other inhibiting factors with respect to the development of capabilities. Positing, therefore, the contention that human beings need to flourish in all the areas of their social lives and not just the space of work, the paper argues for the need to develop an education system that works with capabilities that are valuable in the full range of social spaces young South Africans inhabit. Using this introduction as a point of departure, the paper begins with an attempt at characterising the phenomenon of poverty and then moves on to look at the challenges the sector faces in teaching and learning with respect to it. Thereafter it provides an overview of the sector's responses to these challenges and finally, drawing on the idea of capability deprivation, makes a critical assessment of these responses.

**Keywords:** capability and education; poverty and education; South African higher education; teaching and learning and poverty; transformation in higher education; youth and South Africa.

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## Introduction

How does poverty bear on higher education? And what *effect* does it have on how young South Africans relate to it – their ability to access it, their experience of it, and particularly how they learn and are taught within it? Much of the analysis of the relationship between poverty and education focuses on the benefits of increased education to employability (see, for example, Nieuwenhuis and Beckman, 2012; Bhorat and Jacobs, 2010; Badsha and Cloete, 2012; Atmore, van Niekerk and Ashley-Cooper, 2012). This makes sense. Education must prepare young people for the world of work. It must also, always, however, do more than that. It fundamentally has the task of putting people in a position where they can engage with the world in which they live in self-conscious and critical ways and not to accept it as it comes to them. When education, even when it is technically efficient, socialises young people into dispositions of acceptance, it no longer is education. It is something else. The purpose of this essay is to reflect on how we in South Africa are managing the task of higher education in an environment marked by poverty.

## Theoretical Framing

The question of how to proceed when considering the relationship between the phenomenon of poverty and the experience of education is regularly resolved, as suggested earlier, through invoking the syllogism that increased levels of education will bring about increased levels of income. Important as this idea is, it is contended here that by itself it is essentially instrumentalist. Education in this approach is something that is done to people. It presumes to give them the skills that it thinks are important. The approach taken here is different. It works with the proposition that education is about ideals that are larger than employability. Central is the idea of human flourishing. I take from Amartya Sen (1999: 86) the proposition that ‘poverty can be sensibly identified in terms of capability deprivation; the approach concentrates on deprivations that are *intrinsically* important (unlike low income, which is only *instrumentally* significant) (his emphasis)’. Critical about the capability deprivation notion is the idea that there are factors other than income that influence the access people have to opportunities which will enhance their capabilities. Sen suggests that it is important to understand the ‘difficulties that some groups of people experience in “taking part in the life of the community”’ (Sen, 1999: 90). The value of this approach is that it shifts ‘primary attention away from *means* (and one particular means that is usually given exclusive

attention, viz., income) to *ends* that people have reason to pursue, and correspondingly, to the freedoms to be able to satisfy these ends' (Sen, 1999: 90).

Unterhalter, Vaughan and Walker (2007), Walker (2005, 2006) have also written extensively on the significance of this approach. Walker (2011: 103) has emphasised how much capability is about optimising the conditions for what people are 'able to do'. Thinking about 'ends' also puts into sharp relief Sen's extraordinary insight that 'attempts to eradicate inequality can, in many circumstances, lead to loss for most – sometimes even for all' (Walker 2011: 103). As South Africans we need to be clear-eyed about what the losses may be. They include things that are not within our line of sight, such as stocks of knowledge that emanate from lifestyles outside of our market-economy dominated mainstream – obviously those of working-class life and, somewhat less so, those associated with 'tradition' or indigeneity. And so, to temper our inclination to focus on 'means' as the idea of means is subsumed within a logic of employability, what critics would call a human capital approach (see Tikly, 2009), it is useful to recall Sen's idea of 'development as freedom', in which people have the freedom to develop the capacities *they* value.

This idea was elaborated by Nussbaum (Garrett, 2008: 2) in her argument that human beings, no matter where they were situated in society, derived their dignity from the capacity to 'plan their (lives)... in accordance with (their)... own evaluation of (their) ends'. I deliberately borrow this insight to draw attention to the need for developing an education system that works with capabilities that are valuable in the full range of social spaces young people inhabit and not just the capabilities valued by markets looking for readily deployable skills. The relevance of this analysis is acute for South Africa where one dimension of modernity – that of operating in a largely white world – has come to minimise the importance of the lived experience for most South Africans of making a living across a multiplicity of social and cultural realities. How does one teach to and how do students flourish in a society where the whole spectrum of approaches to living socially and sociably, from the ultra-modern reliance on cutting-edge technology to the habituated need to appease the ancestors, are part of one's everyday?

Using this introduction as a point of departure, I begin this article with an attempt at characterising the phenomenon of poverty and then move to look at the challenges the sector faces in teaching and learning with respect to it. Thereafter I provide an overview of the sector's responses to these challenges and finally, drawing on the idea of capability deprivation, make a critical assessment of these responses.

### **Characterising the Phenomenon of Poverty and Inequality**

According to the World Bank, South Africa's Gini-Coefficient, the index for the distribution of income or consumption among individuals or households within an economy measured in relation to the deviation from a perfectly equal distribution, for 2009 was 63,1 (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SLPOV.Gini>), the highest recorded in the world for the period. The next highest was Honduras with a figure of 57. The income share accruing to the 10% highest income earners in the country was 51.7% (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicators/SI.DST.10TH.10/countries>), and that to the highest 20% was 68.2% (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicators/SI.DST.05TH.20/countries>). That shared by the lowest 10% of income earners was 1.2% (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicators/SI.DST.FRST.10/countries>). The poverty gap at US\$1.25 per person per day, indexed as the mean shortfall from the poverty line with the non-poor counted as having a zero shortfall expressed as a percentage of the poverty line, and so reflecting the depth of poverty as well as its incidence, for that period was 2.3% (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicators/SI.DSTPOV.GAPS/countries>), by no means the highest in the world, but still considerable. The percentage of the population living on US\$1.25 per day at 2005 international prices was 13.8%, again by no means as high as the highest recorded for that period of 43.4% for Angola, but still considerable (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicators/SI.POV.DDAY/countries>).

While there has been some disagreement about the accuracy of the Gini co-efficient calculations, with some arguing that 'South Africa was doing better than we are giving ourselves credit for' (see Donnelly, 2013: 2), the constitutive nature of the problem is indisputable. Sixty per cent of the South African population only earn 16.7% of its income (tabulated from World Bank data). With a population approaching the 50 million mark (49.9m), 22.0% fall below the poverty line (Bishop, 2010: 21). Unemployment is high with estimates ranging from 20 to 40 per cent (ibid). The number of individuals on one form or another of social welfare is 14 million. The profile of the people in formal employment is dominated by low-income earners, the majority of whom earn under R50,000 per annum. Only 6,7 million of people in the formal sector fall in what could be considered to be the middle-income category of R50,000 to R300,000 per annum. More than half of these earn less than R120,000 per annum. They contribute less than 5% of all the income tax collected in the country. The bulk of this tax, 95% of it, is generated by 6 million individuals. Recent reports suggest that half of credit-active South Africans are classified as being 'impaired' in

credit terms, ie, they have payment statements reflecting arrears status on three or more accounts or have credit judgements against them (all the statistics reported above are drawn from Bishop, 2010: 21).

Conscious of Sen's broad capability deprivation approach it is important to emphasise how much this kind of poverty indeed features in the world of South Africans. It is elemental. But, leaning on Sen, the experience of poverty in South Africa is not just about income. It is also deeply influenced by the politico-socio-cultural history of the country and particularly by the historic experiences of racism, patriarchy and the broad exclusionary cultural edifice of language, religion and custom represented by colonialism and apartheid. I argue that cumulatively these have come to produce for South Africans who are not white what Sen called 'capability poverty' (Sen, 1999: 91).

I sought to argue in a previous piece that our history of education failure in the country is essentially due to an under-estimation of what I called 'The "A" factor' – the legacy of apartheid with its deep scarring of the psycho-social make-up of South Africa (Soudien, 2007). In relation to this, I suggest that self-esteem, as the prime manifestation of this scarring, is an under-researched question. Of course, as the work of Jacob Dlamini (2010) shows, apartheid was by no means so totalising that it was able to extinguish the agency of oppressed South Africans. It effectively, however, set out to subvert the legitimacy of African knowledges, on the one hand, and regulate access into European modernity, on the other, making opportunities for black people inferior to those made available to whites.

Through a barrage of legislation, from the migrant labour system to Bantu Education, black people, and Africans in particular, were systematically deprived of the opportunity to realise their freedoms and therefore the full potential of their capabilities in the complexity of the cultural universe which they inhabited – in those elements one would think of as African and those of as Western and European. They could flourish neither in the autochthonous space of tradition and the burgeoning world of modernity, nor the thoroughly hybridised world produced by the interplay of tradition and modernity. The extraordinary complexity and indeed creativity of this hybridity, as it is lived, is a feature of South African life that our sociology only weakly engages. The point to emphasise, however, is that structurally the world into which politically, economically and culturally disenfranchised South Africans were inserted sought to hold them in a generalised state of intellectual impoverishment. In operation against them was a massive capability deprivation machine. It is the enormity of this that defines the full complexity of South African injustice. How one creates a higher

education experience which speaks to well-being, both material and psycho-social, is the challenge before us. Can modern education as we currently know it encompass this kind of sensitivity? Can we beard the machine?

### **How is the Impact of Poverty on Education Explained in South Africa?**

In light of the explanation of the discussion above, of thinking about poverty in expanded terms and towards thinking how a process of education can be instituted which talks into this complexity, how the South African context is explained in the education literature and how it is responded to by the state and institutions of learning in South Africa is important to understand. It is to this that the article now turns.

There is, strikingly I argue, a particular feature of much poverty-focused analysis and description in South Africa. Central in this work is the question of income distribution. This distribution, however, is explained not primarily in economic terms. Race is consistently invoked (see Lam and Seeking, 2005; DBSA, 2008). The contribution of economists such as Lam, Ardington, Branson and Leibbrandt (2012), is extremely useful here, providing, as they do, the clearest exposition of how this tendency works. They argue that income clearly determines levels of participation in higher education: “Issues of affordability may therefore play an important role in determining who is able to enrol.”

Interestingly, *how* Lam and his colleagues present concepts such as affordability, however, is by no means explicated in a straight income deprivation approach. I cite an extensive extract from their analysis to show how they explain what is happening in the encounter between poverty and education. They say that,

(o)ne striking feature of the table is the large decline in the percentage with less than grade 9 education – from around 31% in 2000 to around 20% in 2007 – in both the African and coloured columns. This is a significant improvement in the bottom part of the schooling distribution. There has been much less improvement at the top of the distribution. The proportion of Africans with grade 12 or higher increased from 36% to 41%, but the proportion going beyond grade 12 increased only slightly – from 7.4% to 7.5%. These compare to 80% of whites getting at least grade 12 and 32% of whites going beyond grade 12 in 2007. Only 1.7% of 25-29 year-old Africans had a university degree in 2007, roughly the same as 2000, compared to 16% of whites (Lam et al, 2012: 2).

**Table 1. Highest level of education for 25-29 year-olds, South Africa Labour Force Survey 2000 and 2007**

Highest grade completed	African		Coloured		White	
	2000	2007	2000	2007	2000	2007
Less than Grade 9	31.1	20.2	32.9	20.7	2.6	2.1
Grade 9	8.0	9.0	10.4	8.9	1.6	3.6
Grade 10	10.3	11.6	12.6	14.9	10.1	9.1
Grade 11	14.8	18.4	8.4	10.7	8.5	5.7
Grade 12	28.4	33.3	27.8	38.1	41.1	47.1
Post-matric diploma/certificate	5.8	5.8	4.0	5.3	19.1	16.3
University degree	1.6	1.7	3.9	1.4	17.1	16.2
At least Grade 12	35.8	40.8	35.7	44.8	77.2	79.6
Beyond Grade 12	7.4	7.5	7.9	6.8	36.1	32.5
% of Grade 12 going further	20.6	18.5	22.2	15.1	46.8	40.8
% of Grade 12 completing university	4.4	4.2	10.9	3.2	22.1	20.3
Observations	9,176	6,655	1,240	1,045	673	372

**From** Lam, Ardington, Branson and Leibbrandt, 2012: 24, based on Labour Force Survey, 2000-2007, Statistics South Africa.

Race is central to the way Lam and his colleagues explain poverty and not, interestingly, income levels. They draw attention to the fact that African and coloured high school graduates are much less likely than their white counterparts to receive any kind of post-secondary schooling. In 2000 only 21% of Africans aged 25-29 had gone on to post-secondary education compared to 47% for whites with declines for both groups between 2000 and 2007. More pertinent was the fact that 4.4% of African high school graduates went on to complete a degree in 2000, declining to 4.2% in 2007 (Lam et al, 2012: 5).

Clarity is needed here. What is happening is that this approach conflates race and class and elides the effects that *may* be distinct to them. This approach is evident in most explanations of the relationship between poverty and education in South Africa. It was evident, for example, when Higher Education South Africa (HESA) addressed the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Higher Education in February 2011 (see <http://www.pmg.org.za/report/20110208-higher-education-south-africa>). It remains evident in all the official documentation of agencies such as the Council on Higher Education (CHE) where the demographics for student and staff in the system are only presented in racial terms (see CHE, 2000, 2012).

This mode of analysis is sustained in explaining how young Africans struggle once they enter the higher education system (see Table 1 above). Scott (2010), working with the statistics for

the cohort of students entering the system in 2000, discovered that only 30% graduated after five years. 56% left the system without graduating. Striking about the representation of the explanation is how less-privileged black students perform compared to their more privileged counterparts. In relation to a target of 80% set by the Department of Education, between 1996 and 2006, as indicated in Appendices 1 and 2, the success rate, measured as passing registered courses, of African students increased from 62% to 65%, while that of white students remained stable at around 77%. The gap between the African and white success rate is further confirmed by a cohort analysis of first-time entering undergraduates in 2000, which indicates that the average graduation rate for white students is double that of African students. This is illustrated in Appendix 2, which indicates that by 2004, 65% of African students had dropped out and 24% graduated, while 41% of white students dropped out and 48% graduated. Of the 69,636 African students who entered the system in 2000, 40,713 had dropped out by the end of 2003. At the end of 2000, the first year of registration, 21,096 did not return. Only 13,394 were able to graduate within that time period. The rest remained within the system without having completed their studies.

Is there anything wrong with this approach? It is important, to begin with, to acknowledge how important this explanation is. That race and class segue into each other so neatly is a reality that most commentators, expert and lay, would accept. But in conflating the experiences which lie behind exclusion based on social class and racial discrimination, even as we recognise how intertwined those experiences might be, the explanations lose the specificity of the processes behind each, and, crucially what the nuances, overlays and even subterfuges in their articulation might be. While scholars such as Lam et al acknowledge the complexity of the situation they confront, conceptually they under-theorise the sociology of marginalisation in South Africa beneath it and do not get to account for the full gamut of deprivation and denial of freedoms I described in the discussion above.

Conflation is a useful but inadequate sociological shorthand for South Africa. The most critical omission is that of *racism* as a deep structural cultural reality with its durable psycho-social effects on the South African poverty landscape. It is assumed that the simple recruitment of the concept of *race* by itself does the sociological job of explaining racial reality and particularly the process of racism. In this approach the depiction of the landscape in racial terms is required to do the job of explaining the complexity of the deprivation induced by the process of racism. One could make exactly this argument for the concept of gender and the complex of patriarchy in which it is set. I argue that simply recruiting the idea



of race, and indeed gender, is not adequate for the purpose of explaining racism (and sexism) and the processes around it (them). This is an important concept to keep in mind in thinking about what the teaching and learning experience should be all about in South Africa. It is important because education itself is profoundly a psychosocial process. It is not just about material lack. Not having money for food connects to extraordinarily impactful experiences of self-concept. Deprivation is a complex phenomenon.

The critique raised by Haggis (2003:92) about what she calls the ‘surface’ approach of much literature on student learning is pertinent at this point. She explains that much of the discussion about student learning focuses on how environments can be changed to increase deep learning approaches. This approach in its concentration on the manipulation of the relationship between conceptions/perceptions and outcomes/grades, she suggests is narrow, and ‘reveal(s) a tendency to view research findings in this area as a kind of neutral, cognitive “truth”’ (Haggis, 2003: 92-93). Lying behind the problems with narrow approaches, she suggests, is an undeclared bias on the part of lecturers and teachers. Central to understanding this bias is recognising that the ‘meaning’ they seek in ‘deep’ learning is one which is ‘highly constrained by disciplinary boundaries, cultural norms, and assessment mechanisms’, on the one hand, and by ‘liberal humanist ideas about empowerment’, on the other (Haggis, 2003: 94). The insight is extremely valuable in alerting us to the powerful but completely unarticulated ontologising effect of dominant approaches to learning. Of deep concern is the possibility that this approach to deep learning is so occluded. Its proponents do not bring to what they call deep learning an awareness of their own cultural emplacement.

### **What, Then, Have Responses in the System and from Institutions Been?**

How evident is this larger complexity in what South Africans are doing in the policy-making arena and in their work in institutions? Against this explanation above, what, from a teaching and learning point of view, has been the response of role-players in the system? It is important, in describing this response, to acknowledge the large number of initiatives both from the system as a whole and from within institutions themselves. Government and higher education institutions have responded at several levels to the legacy of poverty confronting young people and their families. Does this response encompass the complex of deprivation?

In what follows I describe initiatives at a national level and then show how institutions are responding. I do not refer to key initiatives which institutions are developing in relation to

adding ‘breadth’ to their curricula. While some of the thinking behind these initiatives is that of ‘enrichment’, and so, to a degree, is about the ‘poverty of the curriculum’ and, so, therefore, about poverty, they do not take as their focus the fact of poverty. They are important, nonetheless. Key initiatives in this vein include:

- The Grounding Initiative at the University of Fort Hare (UFH, 2007),
- The University of South Africa’s (UNISA) (Richards, 2008) South African Research Chair Initiative into Transformative Pedagogies,
- The Global Citizenship and Social Justice Initiative at UCT and,
- The commitment at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN, 2013: 14) to ‘design and develop curricula informed by African scholarship, both within individual disciplines, and through cross-, inter- and trans-disciplinary programmes that consolidate and build upon existing synergies, and engage critically with local issues and challenges’.

The most important initiative of the post-apartheid state acknowledging the socio-economic landscape of the country came through the publication of White Paper 3 (WP3) in 1997 (Transformation in Higher Education (Department of Education, 1997: 16-18). It spoke directly to the legacy of inequality inherited by the new state and committed this new state to a redress agenda. A number of critical policy innovations in higher education came in the wake of WP3, the most significant of which included the South African Higher Education Act of 1997 (RSA, 1997), the establishment of the Council on Higher Education and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) in 1999 (see RSA, 1999). All of these initiatives bore on teaching and learning in some way, but the NSFAS was the major instrument in the state’s repertoire of reforms. Its purpose was to establish a fund to ‘redress past discrimination and ensure representivity and equal access’ (RSA, 1999: 5). Between 1991 and 2011 the scheme supported 991,759 students and made available R25,1 billion in grants and R2,3 million in loans to higher education ([http://www.nsfas.org.za/docs/annual-reports/2012/Annual Report2012.pdf](http://www.nsfas.org.za/docs/annual-reports/2012/Annual%20Report2012.pdf)). Beneficiaries of the fund have, year-upon-year, been largely African students<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See, however, Macupe (2013: 8) in which student organisation South African Student Congress (SASCO) planned to march in protest against the African National Congress not fulfilling its 2007 resolution to provide free education to poor students. SASCO’s deputy secretary-general, Luzuko Buku is quoted as saying: “The workers of this land must know that it is them who are suffering because they must pay fees.... The poor people of this land must know that for as long as their children are not educated it means they will remain poor” (Macupe, 2013: 8).

The state, reflecting on the scale of the problem before it, has acknowledged that it could be doing more. Recognising the challenge facing students it instituted a Ministerial Review Committee in 2009 to look into effectiveness of the NSFAS. This Committee found that

(d)espite the budget increases, the growth in funds has not kept pace with the ever-increasing demand. Even a five-fold increase in 10 years leaves NSFAS with a massive funding shortfall. It would probably need to triple its budget to meet even current demand.... (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2010: x)

The most critical point to make by way of assessment of the significance of this intervention came from the Review Committee itself. It suggested that a ‘new policy framework for higher education and further education and training envisages taking the step in the progressive realisation of the constitutional right of access to education by providing free and further education to students from poor and working class communities’ (DHET, 2010: x). It made clear that NSFAS was underfunded in relation to the lack of income of students. It also found, a matter which will be returned to below, that ‘only 19 per cent (125 210) (NSFAS-supported students) have graduated, while 48 per cent (316 320) have dropped out or otherwise not completed their studies’ (DHET, 2010: xiii).

Two other important initiatives of the state specifically to respond to historic disadvantage need to be noted. The first has been the institutional factor grants awarded to institutions with large numbers of disadvantaged students: ‘These grants for disadvantage take account of this priority by deeming disadvantaged students to be African and coloured students who are South African citizens’ (Ministry of Education, Ministerial Statement on Higher Education Funding, 2006: 16). The other has been the allocation of Teaching Development Grants. These awards, however, have been used in flexible ways by institutions. At institutions such as the University of Cape Town they have been used primarily for supporting students in academic development programmes.

Universities themselves have put their own resources into supporting students or borrowed expressly for the purpose of supporting needy students. The University of Cape Town for example, announced in 2012 that from 2013 it would make

make more funds available to a larger number of eligible students to cover a wider variety of need. The Institution has increased its financial assistance to R100 million that is available from UCT’s own coffers. This amount is available over and above the R120 million that we expect the National Student Financial Aid Scheme of South

Africa will make available to UCT students for financial assistance' (UCT Radio, 2012).

The University of Johannesburg announced in 2012 that it would borrow R113,2 million to support 2,095 students at the university (Manyathela, 2013).

In terms of the success of students in the universities, beyond assisting them in securing access, the state and the universities themselves have also been proactive. Three macro initiatives are important to highlight. The first is the proposal of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) for the reconfiguring of the three-year bachelor's degree to a four-year structure. The essential argument of proponents of this idea is that the mean time of students from first registration to graduation is already four years and that it would make pedagogical sense to have a four-year curriculum through which students can be taken to ensure mastery of the knowledge they need. Scott, Yeld and Hendry (2007: 42), writing for the CHE in support of the four-year proposal, make the argument that

the educational factor to which poor performance is perhaps most commonly ascribed... is student underpreparedness for standard undergraduate programmes.... Underpreparedness should not be equated with a fundamental inability to cope with higher education.... An alternative view is that a significant part of the problem is inadequate articulation between the secondary/further education system and higher education in its existing forms.... The resulting 'articulation gap'... is manifested in students as a lack of sound foundations for tertiary studies, and has profound effects on students' ability to respond positively to higher education studies....

This work has since expanded into the CHE's *Proposal for Undergraduate Curriculum Reform in South Africa* (CHE, 2013). The core of this proposal is a new flexible curriculum of four year's duration '(t)o meet the needs of the majority of the student intake.... (t)o ensure the maintenance or improvement of the standards of qualifications, curricula...' (CHE, 2013: 20).

The second is a development in the CHE's Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) around its quality assurance mandate. The HEQC is debating, in light of the poor throughput record of the country, whether it should be making teaching and learning the focus of its institutional audits. The idea is to try to find an acceptable set of instruments and procedures which will steer the focus of the higher education system towards issues of teaching and learning. The third is a commitment made by the Minister of Higher Education and Training,

after the publication of the Ministerial Review into Discrimination and Social Cohesion in South African Higher Education (DoE, 2008), to the development of Teaching and Learning Charter. This commitment was effectively delegated to Higher Education South Africa (HESA) which established a Teaching and Learning Strategy Group (HESA, 2013). This initiative is currently underway. Included in its terms of reference are key commitments

- a. ...
- b.
- c. To foreground and promote the importance of teaching and learning at universities and in higher education
- d. To promote the theorisation and monitoring and review of and research on teaching and learning, including qualifications and programmes, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, language and multilingualism, academic development programmes, foundation programmes, financing of teaching and learning, and articulation between universities and other post-school institutions
- e. To promote initiatives aimed at improving student academic success and building the teaching and learning capabilities of academics and capacities of universities
- f. To initiate projects and conduct and/or commission studies on teaching and learning related matters (including alternative entrance mechanisms, cohort studies, tracer studies, ‘under-preparedness’, large class teaching, open learning, ICT in teaching and learning, the efficacy of teaching development grants, etc.) (HESA, 2013: 4).

Many institutions have also sought to develop initiatives to respond to students’ needs. Most universities have appointed Teaching and Learning Deputy Vice-Chancellors. Most have Strategic Plans in which teaching and learning feature prominently. Many of these plans acknowledge the importance of preparing young people for employability and social development. UKZN’s (2013: 14) Strategic Plan 2007-2016 (Revised 2012) says, for example, that

there is an increasing call from stakeholders,... for higher education to be relevant to the job market and to empower graduates to contribute to society.... The University

will review and (re-)design its curricula...informed by research and responsive to the vocational needs of students.

The University of Pretoria's Strategic Plan (2011: 9) says that it seeks to produce 'knowledgeable and high-level skilled graduates in line with the needs of the South African economy and society, and to replenish our own human capital needs...'. The University of Zululand (n.d: 4) has as its first goal the establishment of 'high quality academic and career-focussed programmes which are relevant and responsive to the needs of students and society'. The Mangosuthu University of Technology's (n.d.: 13) Enrolment Plan which includes its strategic plan, says that 'it seeks to excel in academic learning and achievement'. It has learning as its second priority and explains that it will seek to attain this 'through attract(ing) and support(ing) outstanding students with high academic potential from the historically disadvantaged backgrounds' (MUT, n.d.: 18).

'Quality Teaching and Learning' is the second strategic objective of the University of Venda (n.d.). Speaking issues of throughput, which it recognises as a national priority, its strategic plan says that the University has put in place strategies to improve success of its students and draws attention to its intervention to implement an admissions score initiative 'to ensur(e) that only students who have a good average pass are admitted'. Wits' (the University of the Witwatersrand) (n.d: 25) Strategic Plan commits the University to 'continuously strengthen(ing) the quality of education provided by the University' and says that it will seek to achieve this through the currency of its curricula and in the demands it will place on its students to be 'top achievers' (n.d: 25).

Poverty is never referred to in the initiatives of institutions, but it cannot be said to be a factor which is being overlooked. It is present in some of the long-established academic development (ADP) initiatives that continue to exist at many universities. Prominent places where such activities continue and where there is extensive debate and discussion about how to improve the delivery of an academic development service, include Rhodes University, the University of Cape Town, the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Stellenbosch University, the University of the Western Cape and indeed many others. The Education Development Unit (EDU) initiative in the Commerce Faculty at UCT is illustrative of innovative work being done in this community. The EDU programme was developed at the University in 2005 to support promising disadvantaged students studying for the bachelor of commerce degree.

Distinctive about the programme is the recognition of how much attention needs to be paid to the quality of the student's learning experience. It seeks to provide students with the kind of affective and academic support that will increase their chances of succeeding in the university. It separates them from the mainstream programme in the commerce faculty which follows a conventional programme of lectures and tutorial support. The students are required to develop a meta-sense of their own strengths and weaknesses. They do quarterly self-evaluations of what is working and what is not in their learning and have the opportunity of a rigorous debriefing with a member of the EDU staff in relation to the evaluation. Significantly, the aggregate performance profile for students in the programme for the last four years has consistently been better than for those in the mainstream and has helped to make the programme desirable (see Appendix 3). The EDU programme is based on close monitoring of the students' progress. Alongside of a structured programme of workshops and seminars students are able to access individual assistance (compiled from material sourced from the EDU).

Important to be aware of in this discussion about academic development programmes was the decision of Wits to discontinue its ADP offerings and to integrate this kind of work into its mainstream academic programmes. In doing so, it has introduced an initiative focused on the identification and nurturing of talent among students. As part of this initiative it has, with the active support of the University's Executive, begun an annual workshop in which scholars from within and outside the University meet to talk about the challenges and impediments for disadvantaged students in reaching their potential before and as they enter the University and the strategies and approaches used by academics to work with these difficulties.

Outside of ADP-type interventions, are interventions such as the First-Year Initiative (FYE), first introduced by the University of Johannesburg, but now also a feature of the responses of Stellenbosch University and UCT. Significant about the UJ (2012: 13) initiative is its commitment to epistemological access to ensure 'that students who gain access... also gain access to academic practices and ways of approaching academic studies'. Central, as part of its attempt to 'establish( ) an ethos and a way of life so that all first year students positively experience the transition from school into university life' are the following FYE initiatives:

- Tutorial programmes
- Extended orientation activities
- Academic excellence in the residences
- Student Tracking (SAFENET)

- Senior students
- Placement testing (NBT research)
- Using student data to inform academic practice
- FYE central and faculty committees (UJ 2012).

Critical also is the adoption of policies for multilingualism, beyond the dominant languages of English and Afrikaans, at several institutions. Significant new initiatives include the following:

1. The use of Sepedi at the University of Limpopo in the country's first explicitly dual-medium undergraduate degree where, according to the initiators of this programme, 'Sepedi (was) not just used as a medium of instruction but also as a language of assessment. (The point was to use) English and Sepedi for epistemic access. (We tried to show that) what you acquire in one language ... can be transferred to another language. The goals were essentially about creating key resources in Sepedi, doing advocacy work for multilingualism. Students did the translating into Sepedi' (Talk given by Esther Ramani and Michael Joseph at the Neville Alexander Commemorative Conference, 6-8 July, 2013, NMMU, Port Elizabeth). Critical, they argued, was the dignity accorded people when they came to understand that their language was capable of hosting ideas.
2. The introduction of compulsory isiZulu at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). This idea first appeared in the University's 2007-2016 Strategic Plan (UKZN, 2013): 'Multilingualism will be promoted in the process of curriculum review and transformation. While English will be the primary academic language, the development and use of isiZulu as a medium of instruction will be promoted with associated resources'. The University has since announced that it intended making isiZulu a compulsory course for all students across the campus. The idea was that all students should develop conversational competence.
3. In the wake of the visits of the Ministerial Committee into the Use of Indigenous Languages, it is evident that many universities across the country have multilingual policies. How these policies are being implemented will be made clear in the report of the Ministerial Committee.



## **Conclusion**

So, given these initiatives, how is the system engaging with the complexity of capability deprivation? How much of the complexity does it grasp?

It is important to acknowledge the real steps being taken to engage with the country's legacy. The efforts of the national government in terms of increasing access and throughput are not insignificant.

In terms of increasing access, the increasing commitments the state itself is making are deeply important. The size of the financial commitment on the part of the state is considerable. As the NSFAS Report suggested and as cited above, however, more is required. The state will have to put a great deal more resourcing into higher education if it is to break the back of the lack of personal income in the country. This is clearly always going to be a challenge for a country such as South Africa where, as we saw above, the country has to rely on such a small proportion of its citizens able to contribute to the tax base.

With respect to the challenge of throughput, there is also a great deal of initiative on the part of the state and the universities. Of these initiatives, the four-year degree proposal is the most significant. It represents the country's boldest attempt to date to *actually* engage with the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. Also not insignificant are key initiatives which are emerging in institutions, such as the EDU initiative at UCT and the language initiatives of the University of Limpopo and the fledgling isiZulu initiative at UKZN.

Acknowledging the well-established argument that education by itself cannot transform society, there are still issues. Looking at what the state and institutions are doing what are these issues?

A central issue is the persistent sociological under-theorising of the nature of capability-deprivation. The problem with much of the thinking and the responses produced by this thinking is its insufficient attention to the multifaceted nature of the experience of deprivation. A kind of shorthand has become institutionalised in analysis which seeks to bring the experiences of economic and racial discrimination together, through the use of race as a category, where emphasis is laid on the differential and discriminatory distribution of rights, but which never gets round to exploring the substance of the experience through which people go. The essential argument is that particular racially defined groups are experiencing economic deprivation. In not paying attention to the content and the specificity of the experience, the analysis in elaborating itself has to be framed paradigmatically. It is here that

it defaults to economics and fills the substance which is required to be specified with what is assumed to be what the necessities for living a reasonable life might be. It conjugates the everyday then in terms of an everyday anywhere. And, of course, it is partially correct. But it is not wholly so.

The South African poor is sufficiently assimilated into a universal working-class modernity which makes them like their counterparts anywhere else in the world. But there is more to them. It is that *more* that we see some responses in the system in *moments* of clarity coming to understand. It reaches towards this clarity when it begins to think of Sepedi as a mediating vehicle for managing the education of young people and when it begins to make a case for the urgency of isiZulu for them to speak to the people with whom they will be in contact on an everyday basis. What initiatives such as these activate is the proximity, and perhaps not yet the opportunity to engage in critical dialogue around the cosmologies in those environments, to ways of doing life that is more than the presumptive universalism of the market-place. It helps us understand how the experience of structural racism excised this other world out of much formal analysis and how important a more complex analysis and explanation of the racially discriminatory and ultimately racist ways in which life was and is lived helps us to come to understand how our responses need to be cultivated in much more thoughtful and sensitive ways. In these terms, a human capital analysis in the way it excludes certain dimensions of the South African human experience is inadequate.

There is a clear sense in progressive educational circles that increasing the intake of students into the system, that is increasing access, is not by itself an adequate response to the capability-deprivation problem of South Africa. Increasing throughput is a central but not comprehensive articulation of the problematique confronting the sector in its fulfilment of the responsibility it has to the issues of what it teaches, how it teaches and how young people learn within it. A full articulation, I argue, has to do with the challenge of realising the full range of capabilities of young South Africa.

I suggested in the introduction to this essay that accounts and analyses of the relationship between poverty and education emphasise the benefits that accrue to the poor with increased access and exposure to education. They do not sufficiently explain the difficulties the poor have in engaging what I describe above as the ‘capability deprivation machine’ - in just *beginning* the journey out of poverty, and accessing opportunities to take charge of their own well-being. How this can be done is by bringing the full density of the country’s history into the learning experience.

The challenge is great. It is a matter of finding ways of bringing the full range of knowledges that circulate in the everyday experience of most South Africans into the orbit of the teaching and learning experience and finding ways of making teaching and learning engage with this experience consciously and critically. It is not a simple multicultural gesture of inserting African culture and especially unproblematised incorporations of ideas into the curriculum and accepting them simply because they had previously been left out, but of finding respectful ways of engaging with them critically. In this way, the educational experience acknowledges the larger palette of socialities which encompass South Africans' everyday experiences and puts them in range of working with these experiences in ways that allow them to be able to begin to make decisions about these larger socialities. This provides them with the freedoms to make choices in which the whole complexity of life which they are experiencing, which they have desires and aspirations about, can become objects of their critical engagement. The world of work which an economic deprivation analysis constructs is not the only world they need preparation for. There is much more.

### **Bionote**

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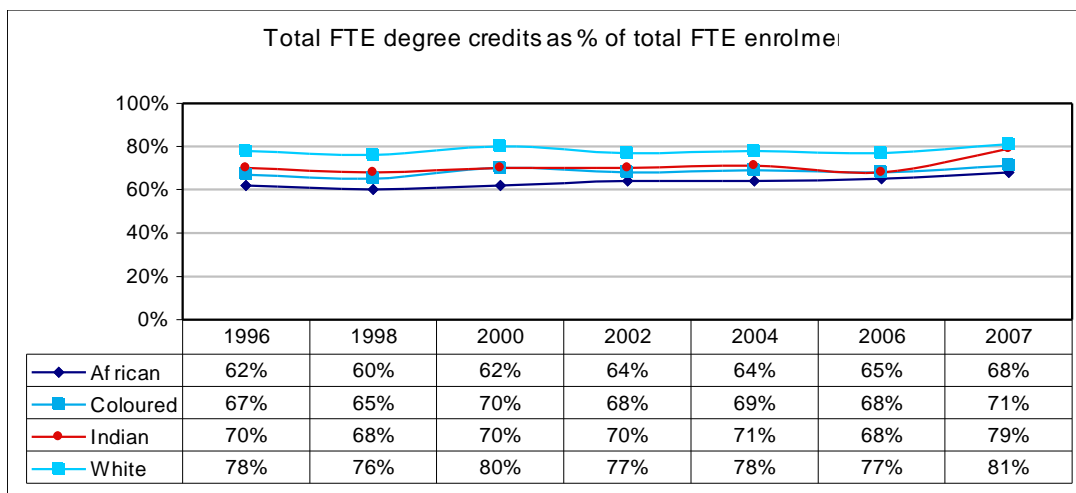
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**Appendix 1: Average Course Success Rates by Race: Undergraduate & Postgraduate**



## Appendix 2: Cohort Analysis of First-Time Entering Students in 2000

	1st Time Ent U/Gs	Grad: end of 2000	Dropouts: end of 2000	Grad: end of 2001	Dropouts: end of 2001	Grad: end of 2002	Dropouts: end of 2002	Grad: end of 2003	Dropouts: end of 2003
African female	36,261	406	10,364	903	4,458	3,088	2,919	3,363	3,136
African male	33,365	247	10,723	599	4,302	2,290	2,946	2,398	2,855
<b>African Total</b>	<b>69,636</b>	<b>653</b>	<b>21,096</b>	<b>1,502</b>	<b>8,761</b>	<b>5,378</b>	<b>5,865</b>	<b>5,761</b>	<b>5,991</b>
Col female	3,712	40	939	45	359	539	282	438	232
Col male	3,140	15	1,009	45	361	272	264	302	215
<b>Col Total</b>	<b>6,852</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>1,948</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>720</b>	<b>811</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>447</b>
Indian female	4,276	17	839	20	436	668	238	664	198
Indian male	3,513	11	779	31	378	416	246	426	196
<b>Indian Total</b>	<b>7,791</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>1,619</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>815</b>	<b>1,084</b>	<b>484</b>	<b>1,090</b>	<b>394</b>
White female	14,949	80	2,763	125	1,058	3,849	748	2,923	547
White male	13,384	60	3,107	83	1,160	2,281	761	2,209	648
<b>White Total</b>	<b>28,336</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>5,872</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>2,219</b>	<b>6,130</b>	<b>1,509</b>	<b>5,132</b>	<b>1,195</b>
Female total	59,205	543	14,908	1,093	6,314	8,144	4,187	7,388	4,114
Male total	53,410	334	15,621	758	6,204	5,259	4,218	5,335	3,914
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>	<b>112,776</b>	<b>1,010</b>	<b>30,554</b>	<b>1,851</b>	<b>12,521</b>	<b>13,403</b>	<b>8,405</b>	<b>12,723</b>	<b>8,028</b>

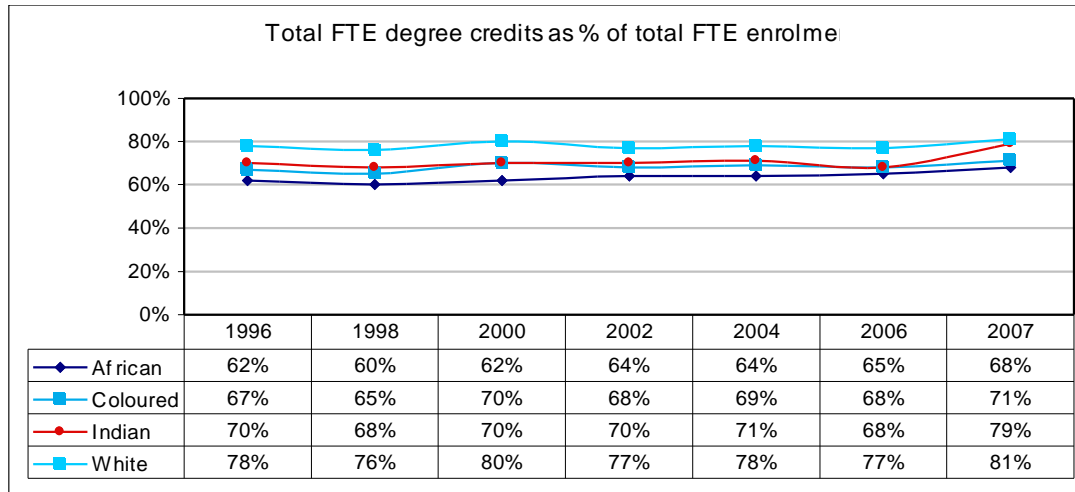


**Appendix 3**

**Top Ten CADP Performers 2005-2008: Aggregate Course Attainment**

<b>Name</b>	<b>2005%</b>	<b>2006%</b>	<b>2007%</b>	<b>2008%</b>
NN	79			
KS	79	75	73	
JA	78	73	68	
NA	78	73	75	
MN	78	69		
CZ	77	72	73	
AA	76	69		
BU	76	73	71	
MB	76			
NL		72		
NN		69		
GS		69	73	
KN			73	73
FC			69	
AB			68	64
AH			67	
GK				69

**Graph 1: Average Course Success Rates by Race: Undergraduate & Postgraduate**



**Table 2: Cohort Analysis of First-Time Entering Students in 2000**

	<b>1st Time Ent U/Gs</b>	<b>Grad end of 2000</b>	<b>Dropouts: end of 2000</b>	<b>Grad: end of 2001</b>	<b>Dropouts: end of 2001</b>	<b>Grad: end of 2002</b>	<b>Dropouts: end of 2002</b>	<b>Grad: end of 2003</b>	<b>Dropouts: end of 2003</b>
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