‘Being in’ and ‘Being of’: Reflections on Being a Rural Working Class Student, and Academic Support Practitioner, in Higher Education

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Abstract
Although higher education as a sector is open for access to many more students than has been the case in the past, students from rural backgrounds continue to be confronted with many barriers which construct them as misfits for university studies. This paper presents my own reflections on how being a student from a rural community has influenced my practice as an educator who has coordinated Academic Monitoring and Support at a South African university. It examines layers of academic and non-academic challenges experienced by students from rural working class backgrounds, through the lens of my own narrative. Using Participatory Narrative Inquiry (PNI), I include my personal experiences and insights as a participant researcher and interrogate these experiences and observations using Bourdieu’s (1985) cultural capital theory. The evidence suggests that the growth in the number of students from rural socioeconomic backgrounds entering higher education is not matched by the preparedness of students for tertiary study, or by institutional readiness to support and nurture these students. I highlight lessons learnt for rural schools’ praxis.

Keywords: Access, higher education, narrative inquiry, cultural capital, preparedness for tertiary studies.

Background/ Context
While higher education has increased access to students from previously

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marginalised backgrounds, students from rural backgrounds continue to be confronted with many barriers which construct them as misfits for university studies. Both academic and non-academic support and mechanisms to nurture students from rural background should take into consideration who these students are. Failure to understand the nature of our students will continue to negatively affect throughput. Scott *et al*. (2007) found that about 25% of students drop out from university at their first level of study, with only 21% of students being able to graduate within minimum time. South Africa's graduation rate of 15% is one of the lowest globally, according to the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) compiled by the Department of Education in 2001 (Letseka & Maile 2008). One of their findings is that students were dropping out because they were first generation students to attend university. Students from rural backgrounds become alienated by institutional cultures and subcultures of the university and they take time to adjust (D'Andrea & Gosling 2005). The new culture of doing things at university, such as the absence of the bell to time students, and the move from being dependent on teachers and family to being independent requires that the students make a radical adjustment to the new environment on their own. Such self-reliance while navigating the higher education space can be daunting.

One of the major factors that is a barrier to students from rural areas while navigating academic space is academic literacy and English as a medium of instruction (Kapp & Bangeni 2011). If students struggle with the medium of instruction or cannot access academic language, then they will be challenged in terms of epistemological access.

Literature Review

Globally, increasing rates of students' access has brought into focus the question of the readiness of both higher institutions and the students them-selves (Archer 2005). It is equally observed that levels of student and institutional preparedness differ across countries (Archer 2005). The increase in enrolments has not been met with sound throughput owing possibly to lack of student and institutional preparedness. However, increasing need is being recognised globally and locally, for higher institutions to attend to students' transitional support needs before they become 'at risk' of completion because of initial challenges to adjustment to the life and demands of higher education studies. Increasing efforts are aimed at what Adams (2016: 15) sums up as 'to equip them with knowledge and skills that will enable them to succeed in their

studies'. South African higher education enrolment increased by 193000 between 1993 and 2004 and the majority are first generation students (Vincent & Hlatshwayo 2018).

In the context of South African universities, expanding access and ensuring throughput is identified in the literature as a perennial challenge (Goastellec 2010). Since the 1930s, evidence from literature shows that the nature of access and throughput challenge has changed (Foster 2017) over time. Before the transformation period in higher education in 1996, there were racial imbalances in terms of student access to higher institutions (Akojee & Nkomo 2007). McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) recognise that the focus of higher education institutions continues to shift from restrictedness to expansion of access to other races and working class people, opening doors to accommodate a diverse community of students. However, Akojee and Nkomo (2008) observe that the social and political agenda that accompanied the transition and transformation era of South African universities meant that the challenge of access has been defined within these agendas.

There is no clear or sufficient evidence from research about how these social and political agendas shape, influence and contribute towards students' 'at risk' factors, and their eventual dropout or non-completion of degrees and diplomas. Thus far, focus has been placed on accelerated physical access, its challenges, its enhancement and the special and pedago-gical support it requires (Hornsby & Osman 2014). There are also assumptions that relevant resources of support provided for the disadvantaged students suffice for the challenges of transition and adjustment to university (Gellin 2003). However, once in the system, how the disadvantaged students access the support provided and use resources on the one hand, and the ways in which these support provision and resources are put in place and made accessible to them on the other, are experiences and narratives with which we are not yet familiar.

Letseka and Pitsoe (2013) brings a contextual appreciation to the term 'access', as it applies to South African higher education. They explain access to mean the process whereby students register to study a certain degree or profession full time (Letseka & Pitsoe 2013). Access is taken to mean that students are accepted and admitted based on certain criteria such as matric points. According to Nyamapfene and Letseka (1995) and Moll (2004), access in higher education is challenged by under-preparedness of students who come from secondary schools to engage with teaching and learning at university level. Some of these students are recognized as coming from homes where they

are first generation university students, implying that their social network is limited. These students may be coming into the university with little exposure to the notions of university life and experiences. Boughey (2003) observes that, as much as access into higher education has improved, epistemological access is still a concern. While gains in access to higher education are being made, the not-so-smooth transition from secondary school level to the level of university undergraduate studies in the South African context remains a challenge that compromises student success.

Presently, some higher education institutions in South Africa offer 'Access' programmes. These are programmes that are specially designed as bridging courses aimed at ensuring that students who do not meet university entry requirements, particularly those that come from disadvantaged backgrounds, are supported foundationally to start their degree studies (Waetjen 2006; Maphosa & Mudzielwana 2014). The South African government also gives scholarships and loans such as National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFSAS) to students from low socio-economic status backgrounds to access higher education (Wangenge-Ouma 2010). Whereas opening up of access to higher education has translated into opportunity for students from diverse backgrounds to enter the university, it has also opened up other challenges for higher education access and success. The emerging issues around what has been recognised as epistemological access in South African higher education are particularly of concern (Slonimsky & Shalem 2006).

Making Sense of my Learning Using Bourdieu's (1986) Social Cultural Capital Theory

I use Bourdieu's (1986) social cultural capital theory as a lens through which to examine systemic and cultural contexts and influences that impact on students from rural low socio- economic backgrounds who enter learning institutions from different structural positions associated with different social habits (Hattam *et al.* 2009: 304). For the purpose of this paper, I focus only on the following: the gap between higher education and students from rural economic backgrounds, the kinds of capital that are valued and the kinds of capital that are discounted and reasons thereof, and what effect they have on higher education's claim to offer all deserving students a place (Thayer 2000). Bourdieu (1986) argues that cultural capital considers the family influence on a student's academic activity across the historical, evolving institutional

systems. The central notion is to recognize socio-economic and sociocultural contexts that may impact on individuals. Some behaviours are located within the family and the sociocultural environment, such as students being socialised into voicing their opinions and becoming independent. Some students enter university too underprepared to be independent and adjusting to decision making like making sound financial decisions without proper financial literacy. Bourdieu's cultural capital concept refers to collection of symbolic elements such as skills, mannerism, clothing, credentials etc. He points out that cultural capital is a major source of social inequality. Students enter higher education with different cultural capital and struggle to fit in and cope with tertiary education expectations. As first year students enter the lecture room, lecturers assume that all of them are ready to engage with the content and are able to handle all demands such as typing assignments, engaging with academic work using technology, and confidently voicing their opinions in front of their peers using English as a medium of instruction. Failing to acknowledge this lack of skills perpetuates social inequality and exclusion.

Some cultural capital, such as use of the medium of instruction, is located within the school environment. Students from rural economic backgrounds are used to being taught in native language or having content explained in their native language, and that is missing in tertiary education (Mngomezulu 2014). This shift enlarges the gap between what the university expects from students and what students bring with them. This disjuncture impacts negatively on students' success.

Thus the research question guiding this study is this: What are the challenges in higher education experienced by students from rural backgrounds?

Methodology

In this paper, I use Participatory Narrative Inquiry (PNI) methodology to explore the gap between higher education practices and expectations and what students from rural socioeconomic backgrounds bring. According to Shacklock and Thorp (2005), narrative inquiry is concerned with personal accounts of lived experiences that are interpreted and produced. These stories are selected and told as they are remembered, to give an account of personal experiences. When locating a story with a particular context, it shows that individual experiences are not happening in isolation but within complex societal structures (Tierney 1999). I make explicit understanding and interpretation of my experiences within the boundary of my context. This study is auto-

ethnographic in nature as it follows the norms of narrative inquiry (NI) (Creswell 2006). It shows my central role as a participant and main narrative contributor as I reflect on my journey as a rural working class university student, as well as my practice. I come from a village populated by Black Africans; the village is situated in the coastline of Northern KwaZulu-Natal, where most people survive by sugarcane farming and working in forestry while some work in the nearby town. I attended quintile 1 schools from primary to secondary schools in the area where I matriculated. The paper narrates my personal experience growing up in a rural working class family, the challenges I encountered at university, and how I figured out how to persevere and succeed within my struggles. I also narrate my journey as Academic Monitoring and Support coordinator of students who are targeted 'at risk' of academic failure. The narrative is inward and outward looking as it shares the know-hows, approaches and dispositions of transition in higher education (HE), outwardly exploring systemic and structural issues of academic support programmes at the university. I also explore that many barriers I confronted that constructed me as a misfit in university studies. I also explore my experience of interacting with students who are targeted 'at risk' of academic failure, and the role of the support environment. In order to analyse my lived experiences, I use Bourdieu's work to conceptualise the gap between preparedness of HE and readiness of students from rural socioeconomic backgrounds. I further use Stierer's (2008) construct of reflexivity to explore a deeper meaning of my journey. I also make explicit the discourses that challenged me as a rural working class student and barriers faced by students who are targeted as 'at risk' in HE.

As both a participant and a researcher, I give a narrative description of my story, as I did not go to the field to collect data. The narrative derives from my four years as an undergraduate student and three years as an AMS coordinator. It tells my academic and non-academic encounters as a student and as the AMS officer interacting with students and various institutional stakeholders in various forums (both formal and informal). As much as I have many experiences to reflect on, I have only selected critical moments that were pertinent in my journey as both rural working class student and AMS coordinator. I conclude the paper by arguing for re-examination of the gap between the readiness of HE and preparedness of students from rural backgrounds as it is not clearly understood – in particular, the kinds of capital that are valued, and reasons thereof, and the kinds of cultural capital that are

discounted, with attendant reasons. I question what effect this has on HE's claim to offer all deserving South African students a place.

How I Navigated the Terrain as a Rural Working Class Student

I grew up in what is considerably a village background where I attended a quintile 1 school (school in poorest community). I had aspirations from my earliest years to my maturity, including aspiration for university education. My being a village 'girl' could not diminish the aspirations, but rather was instrumental in my aspiration to work hard, push boundaries, and go extra miles to succeed. I became one of those referred to in literature as 'first generation' students and 'non-traditional' students, meaning those who are usually not college going or university candidates because they are from disadvantaged educational backgrounds or the first in their families to enter university (Blackwell & Pinder 2014). Thus, though it was achievable, navigating my way as a university student was never easy. The adjustment from secondary school to HE was a cultural shock. At school, the bell, teachers, parents and school community assisted us in managing our time and telling us what we needed to do, what was expected of us and where we should be. The university assumed that we knew where we were supposed to be at particular time. There was a sudden big shift and the expectation that you had the cultural capital needed to navigate your way in this new environment. For me, university meant layers of challenges, and because of my poor socio-economic background, it meant staying outside campus in the cheapest accommodation, having limited interactive spaces and little socialisation time with peers, having no access to the library in the late afternoons, and experiencing little exposure to English language (the only medium of instruction used on campus) (Murray 2014). This was in contrast to my peers who came from well-resourced schools. Students who came from advantaged schools were offered more opportunities in terms of resources and the type of education they received at a school level. Being exposed to English as the medium of instruction and better resources enjoyed by my peers at school gave them an edge in university.

First generation Black rural working class students struggle to negotiate their way to success in HE because they are alienated by university systems (Vincent & Hlatshwayo 2018). As a second English language speaker, for almost two weeks I struggled to understand the accent of a Professor who

spoke very softly in a lecture of about 300 students. In the third week, I used to come very early for this lecture to occupy the front seat so I could hear him. This, however, did not help much owing to my not being used to being taught in English for the whole lesson. The challenge was compounded by the heavy accent and the speaking rate of the lecturer. I had to buy a textbook in order to cope with this lecturer. As he was teaching, I would underline in a book what he was teaching then make meaning of what was taught on my own. The reality was that, being a second language English speaker who was used to code switching, and to teachers using our native language to explain concepts, I felt marginalised. This is how the university cultural capital entrenches and perpetuates the disadvantage of those from disadvantaged environments. However, realising that the medium of communication was a barrier, I then decided to read a lot and use previous question papers to understand the type and language used in assessment. Foster (2017) questions how, for instance, students whose mother tongue is not the language of instruction or second language speakers cope with the academic and discipline-specific writing demands. This deepens the issue of how institutions understand the importance of language in pedagogical access.

Adjustment for me was not a curve, but a sharp and challenging experience. I recall too, what a lonely and untutored experience it was, even in the midst of the sea of people which the university seemed to be for me then. On one hand, I was on my own as a first year student, on the other, here was the university, which required of me pedagogical knowledge, literacies and cultural capital I did not possess. I needed to instantly adjust and transit to this new life in the university. At first, I was excited to be on campus, but later was disappointed with being confronted by many barriers which constructed me as someone not matched to university studies. Being unprepared or inadequately prepared, and being unable to fit into the neatly carved institutional expectations and culture, created barriers to success in my journey. However, as a student, I knew that I had only one chance of success and work towards a scholarship. I knew that if I worked hard and did well academically, I would qualify for a scholarship. And with funding sorted, at least I would have respite from worrying about money and become focused and energised to pull through other challenges. This realisation eventually became the motivating force which drove my firm resolve and developed my initial resilience. I was able to strive against all odds, and my resilience contributed to eventual success cumulating in my first degree, graduation with a *cum laude*. Having a strong

will and working towards a set target made success a reality for me. But this may not have been the same story for all those who shared similar experiences to mine, no matter how 'oh what a happy ending' it sounds. My personal journey impacted in a strong way on my practice as the coordinator for the Academic Monitoring and Support. This is because, in many ways, I was able to relate to the problems and issues that defined the students' support needs and how these impacted students' experiences on campus.

Self-reflection on my Journey as a Practitioner

When I started as Academic Monitoring and Support coordinator at the university in 2010, I was guided by the university policy. I tried to draw from these to understand the issues and challenges 'at risk' students faced as well as their experiences. My understanding was from both the policy and practice point of view. I had an insight into to what students attribute their academic challenges. My understanding positioned me to know how to approach problems related to students' support needs, particularly related to their academic performance.

However, the narratives of 'at-risk' students challenged this presumptive confidence on and about whom the students were and what their support needs were. These narratives were experienced in many divergent ways. This increased my knowledge of not only the challenges students bring with them to campus in terms of support needs, like personal baggage, but also how such challenges would remain a barrier if they were not resolved. Another important form of knowledge was that students have active agency in terms of the way they want to be supported. I observed that students are aware of what their support needs are, and how they are to be supported to meet those needs. I observed too, the support environment, the structural, cultural and policy environment, and the students themselves. Through intense observation, I was able to identify a number of issues.

Two months into the job, I began to have a different approach to handling these dynamics and a better appreciation of the existing realities. I reflected on what was on the ground in real time and space and decided on a number of steps to address these issues. At the time, we had challenges in terms of lack of student attendance in the support programme. One of the reasons why students were not attending the programme was their perception of the AMS, which carried a certain stigma. At the beginning of each semester, students 'at risk' attended a compulsory session to determine their challenges

and discuss intervention strategies. The popular narrative amongst the students was that the AMS was a programme for those considered as 'failures', perhaps seen as not fit to be in the university. In response, I worked with colleagues to change interventions programme and the name of the programme. It was then called the STAR (students at risk of academic failure) programme. We had to reconsider the paradigm how we view these students without losing the reality that these are students who are at risk of academic failure. With this sort of rebranding, we saw a shift in terms of attitude and participation as STAR is associated with something positive. The second initiative was that the programme shifted from being the programme for 'at-risk' students only and was made open to all first years. This was meant to encourage wider acceptance and participation and to increase levels of student engagement. This resulted in increased attendance and participation at AMS activities.

At another level, it became clear to me that 'at risk' interventions are, structurally speaking, reactive in approach. Interventions are meant to try to work on a problem with students who have already 'failed'. WE re-looked at the existing programmes, and tried to re-draft these in ways that the intervention programmes could suit the many student's needs. In particular, the capacity and support related to supporting the students' subject content knowledge need, in terms of mentoring, had to be fully spread and maximised. With this in view, I applied for funding from University Teaching and Learning Office (UTLO), Competitive Research grant to enable the AMS / STAR to start a peer-mentorship programme. With a successful funding grant application (thanks to the UTLO), the STAR Mentorship programme came on board. Besides being accessible as a support intervention to the 'at risk' students, it supported many other students. The programme was also an added layer to the positive conception of AMS, its programmes and activities amongst the student body on campus. With the funding, the AMS could hire student mentors to support students, and also set up a Mentoring Drop-in Centre where mentors took turns in providing subject content knowledge, mentorship to mentees and information, and in responding to the immediate needs of students. Through a reawakened experience of the job, of the students themselves, and of the dimensions and complexities of students' 'at risk' support needs, I began to experience in myself a deep prompt and interest in choosing to research AMS, particularly for furthering my studies. This was the push I needed to register to study for a PhD degree focusing on AMS. Being AMS coordinator positioned me to work with a Mentorship Programme, where mature students were mento-

ring first year students and those that are 'at-risk' of academic failure. Chaplin (2006) observes that Ubuntu is an attempt to help people in the spirit of service, to be respectful, honest and trustworthy. I learnt that there was a spirit of Ubuntu or community spirit between mentors and mentees. Students with funding and those that could afford it, were buying food for the less privileged students who could not buy food, and those that did not have funding. The mature students were looking after first years in a brotherly and sisterly spirit.

Cultural Capital of Students from Rural Working Class Families

Students from rural working class families come with an added layer of support needs during transition from secondary school to university. Some have never seen the huge and tall buildings, some lack competencies occasioned by the poor socio-economic backgrounds of students such as lack of computer literacies. Not only are they confronted with academic transition, but also with the physical navigation of their journey. Leaving home for the first time where I had a support structure and community members who played a pastoral role regardless of which family I came from, was a difficult decision to make. Leaving people who cared most about me was daunting, scary and exciting at the same time. I wondered how I would adjust to the new environment but was equally excited about being a university student who came from the village. Being the first child to go to university came with lots of expectations. Family and community members had high expectations, as I was deviating from the norm by focusing on education rather than on the job and getting married. However, as I entered the university, I carried with me the spirit of Ubuntu, togetherness and community care that I had experienced from my rural community. I needed both to leave behind some things – such as the expectations around job and marriage but also to bring with me the spirit of Ubuntu.

Students who come from rural working class families are socialised in a particular way and they come with knowledge which is not fully valued in academic spaces, such as ways of showing respect (not looking at the adult in the eye, how you communicate with an adult), also the spirit of togetherness (emanating from extended family and rural community). As a result, this makes them feel isolated and forced into a foreign paradigm, not only in their lecture rooms but also outside lecture rooms, in their new found social space (how they dress, what they eat, how they conduct themselves, how they fit in).

How Differences between my Background and University Set me Up for Failure

When I entered the university I was confronted with the opposite of what I knew. In my view it promoted individualism. Rurality promotes a sense of belonging: 'I am a human being because I belong' (Desmond Tutu 2003). Students who come from rural contexts value themselves and others because this is what is practiced in their upbringing. When they enter university, the sense of belonging is diluted by embracing other new cultures and confronted with individualism. The communal nature of rural life that I know of becomes a valuable resource when students are working in groups. The culture is different from school where there is conformity and teachers are behind you. One can be misled by seeing people moving up and down and with no understanding that they have been to classes or are waiting to attend lectures. The significance of the community values and identity that the rural working class students bring cannot be overstated as they contribute to academic success.

The Agency to Succeed against All Odds

My understanding of the institutional culture made me enact my own agency of wanting to succeed against all odds. The inspiration of making a difference in my family and my community has driven me to focus in my studies. I know what it means to complete my degree on time and start working. What was also pushing me was that in my clan, girls were not allowed to go to the university. Since my father had taken a decision, different from the norm, of allowing me as a woman to further my studies, it also pushed me not to disappoint him in his family. I also wanted to break the poverty cycle and become a role model in my community. This was the agency which contributed to my success.

Discussion

Challenges Emanating from Being a First Generation Student and the Rurality of my Background

From my own experience and observations as a student and as AMS coordinator, first generation students and students from working class families come with an added layer of support needs. Such students navigate major challenges in the transitional space from school to university because siblings and parents

lack the relevant educational experiences (Collier & Morgan 2008). As much as non-traditional students comes with an added layer, once they receive relevant support, they become resilient and succeed. A study conducted by Arbelo-Marrero and Milacci (2016) focused on understanding undergraduate non-traditional students in their last year of study. Their findings suggest that family context, personal aspiration played an important role in the perseverance by participants. In my context, the majority of students from working class families experience using computers for the first time whereas the university expects them to access information about the qualification online/ using Moodle site. Some students still struggle to cope with the medium of instruction and are challenged by incompetence in academic literacy. As much as there are university structures in place to support students academically, the capacity is not matched with enrolments. Students also struggle to manage their time effectively as they are not adequately prepared at a secondary school level. Universities provide funding to students from disadvantaged background. However, as much as the funding is made available to students, financial literacy is still a challenge and the worry about poverty contributes to students using the money intended for their studies to support their families.

Lack of Institutional Readiness to Accommodate Student Diversities

Reflections on being a rural working class student, and being an academic support practitioner provide an interesting position of how students navigate their success in HE and what cultural capital and characteristics students entering HE from a working class background come with.

Post 1994, universities have opened doors for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds with the assistance of government funding. The physical access of students from low socio-economic status has been improved. However, not much attention has been put on institutional readiness and the layers of challenges such students are faced with (Badat 2016). The student demographics have changed in higher institutions, however, the pace is not matched with the changes in the institutions to accommodate the change in who the students are that enter HE. Levine (2017) argues that the academic profession has drastically changed and one of the reasons is the changing characteristics of university students and further that what is propelling the change are forces outside the institutions, hence the lack of readiness. As much

as university are experiencing swift change with regards to students, not much change has occurred with regards to the systems. Some students find themselves not coping with the system and not easily adjusting to academic demands or to the quick shift from dependency to becoming independent non-mentored young adults. Adjustments comes with certain expectations or epistemological demands and this results in student drop out (Suhlmann, Sassenberg, Nagengast & Trautwein 2018). The reality is that, as much as institutions are responding to transformation, there is inadequate exploration of diversity and of who these students are. Focusing mainly on matric scores or standardized tests and using assumptions and a blanket approach to the readiness of students coming from different quintiles, may mean that there is something we are missing on how we can help them reach their potential.

Coming from disadvantaged background does not mean that you are not capable. Some support to bridge the gap or some mentorship during the transition period is crucial for both academic and non-academic development. As the reality shows, that transition period requires some form of mentoring in most spaces, and lecturers should also assume pastoral roles in their teaching spaces.

Conclusion

In this article I presented an auto-ethnographic narrative on my personal experience on being a rural working class student and academic support practitioner in HE, and reflected on challenges confronted by students from a rural background in HE. I used Bourdieu's (1986) social cultural capital theory as a lens through which to examine systemic and cultural contexts and influences that impact on students from rural low socio- economic backgrounds. I have come to realise that the recognition of socio-economic and sociocultural contexts of students in HE may positively impact on their academic success. I now realise the impact of the gap between learners from disadvantaged and well-resourced schools. The insight that I gained from my journey both confirmed and contradicted the literature I have read about students from rural backgrounds. There is an assumption that students from rural communities have low educational aspiration (Tieken 2016). Despite this general statement, many of my peers at secondary school aspired to further their studies. The greater barrier was, however, funding. Although findings from the study conducted by D'Andrea and Gosling (2005) suggest that being

a first generation student is a risk factor, it is important to also note that students who are first generation and come from rural background are resilient and have agency to succeed to support their families. For some, challenges they are confronted with become a motivation to succeed against all odds. I have come to realize that access and funding become the greatest enabler for students from poor backgrounds. The implicit assumption has been that a student from a rural working class family will be able to cope with well-designed university programmes like other students who were privileged in terms of resources, the use of language and their ability to adjust socially to a new environment. This is not the case.

Through my experience as a rural working class student and working in academic support, I have come to realise that as much as rural working class students come with resilience and self-agency to do well, an added layer of support is essential for this group of students. I have also observed that, as much as institutions provide support, the increase in enrolment becomes a limiting factor in providing adequate student support. It has been argued that in order to balance the intake with the throughput rate, extensive intervention support programmes should be established (Agar & Knopfmacher 1995). How this act of balancing is achieved within the South African HE landscape is important to study and understand. This is particularly so in order to further develop systems that best enhance students' success. It is also important that HE system understand who their students are and what their support needs are and whether they can be met to successfully navigate their academic journey. Seeing generally the dissonance between institutional capital and that which students bring, it is important to understand what is it that institutions are doing to bridge the gap.

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