AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENT CAPABILITIES IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Higher education in South Africa in the 21st century faces the complex challenge of balancing the demands of the neo-liberal global agenda with meeting national goals and addressing individual student needs. Research reveals the current South African higher education system to be inefficient, characterised by high attrition and low success rates. This is despite major restructuring, new legislation and a committed focus on access and equality. Lack of government funding, inadequate capacity and public demonstrations of student frustration are indicative of a crisis. This study used the capability approach to investigate student experiences in a private higher education institution. Using a sequential explanatory mixed methods design within an interpretive paradigm, a broad survey was followed by in-depth individual interviews to understand the factors that enable and constrain first-year student opportunities and achievements. The study found that student access to and participation in higher education is strongly driven by aspiration, and supported by affiliations as well as students' ability to reflect on their experiences. These capabilities foster identity, learning and agency. There are many personal, social and institutional factors that restrict student functioning. While these might constrain achievement and have the potential to foreshorten a student's higher education career, students who are able to adapt and develop resilience to the particular challenges they face within their daily experience have further opportunities for realising their higher education aspirations.

KEYWORDS:

Capability Approach; Higher Education; Inclusion; Diversity; Capabilities

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

Fenella Somerville

Date:

No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable

~ Adam Smith ~

Poverty is not just a lack of money; it is not having the capability to realise one's full potential as a human being

~ Amartya Sen ~

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AET	Adult Education and Training
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
FET	Further Education and Training
FGS	First-generation student
HEI	Higher Education Institution
NDP	National Development Plan
NPC	National Planning Commission
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
PHEI	Private Higher Education Institution
PSET	Post-School Education and Training
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UCT	University of Cape Town
UNESCO	United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNISA	University of South Africa
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. Setting the scene

In October 2015 the South African higher education world was rocked by the *#FeesMustFall* movement calling for free higher education. The protests raised awareness that despite significant transformation in the education sector in the two decades since democracy, there are still vast challenges that need to be addressed (Webbstock, 2016). The education sector has done much since 1994 in striving to achieve the national goals of quality, equity and transformation. In 2009 the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) was established to focus specifically on post-school education and training, with a mission

> "…to develop capable, well-educated and skilled citizens who are able to compete in a sustainable, diversified and knowledge-intensive international economy, which meets the development goals of our country" (DHET, n.d., para. 4).

Higher education has a significant role to play in rebuilding South African society not only in driving a social justice imperative and redressing past inequities but also in meeting national economic and human resource goals, and responding to the global knowledge economy (Webbstock, 2016). Over the past twenty-two years the higher education landscape has been fundamentally altered. National policies have been revised, the institutional structure has been reshaped, and processes and mechanisms have been reviewed. Particular attention has been paid to increasing access to institutions which has opened up opportunities for more students and also radically altered the demographic profile (Webbstock, 2016). These are significant achievements, and yet the classes of 2015 and 2016 are still facing the harsh realities of poverty, inequality and exclusion. Despite the fundamental changes and overall growth in higher education, there has been limited success arising from systemic interventions. The higher education environment is characterised by increasing student numbers, widening diversity in the student body, decreasing resources, uncertainty about policy, and growing

external control in the form of quality management, reporting demands and pressures for efficiency (CHE, 2010).

The DHET aims to have approximately two million students enrolled in South African universities by the year 2030. An estimated 0.5 million of those enrolments are to be in private institutions (DHET, 2013, p. 7). As part of the strategy to meet this target, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training states:

> As participation increases, universities must simultaneously focus their attention on improving student performance. Improving student access, success and throughput rates is a very serious challenge for the university sector and must become a priority focus for national policy and for the institutions themselves (DHET, 2013, p. xiv).

With more students coming into the system there needs to be a commensurate improvement in performance so that more students will graduate. With government playing a facilitative and supportive role, higher education institutions assume responsibility for meeting the challenge of improving student performance. Retention and success in higher education cannot be ascribed to a single factor but results from a complex interplay between factors inherent in the system as well as external factors relating to social, cultural and material circumstances of students (CHE, 2013). Access to institutions needs to be supported by access to higher education knowledge (Morrow, 2007). Once students are granted formal access to an institution, their progress is shaped and influenced by a range of elements that form part of their higher education experience. The institutional culture, pedagogical processes, including the content and teaching and assessment methods, the staff, as well as the policies and procedures that drive the everyday interactions, all play a part. These factors combine with the characteristics of an ever-widening student body – that reflects increasing diversity with regard to socio-economic status, academic preparedness and affective engagement with their studies – to significantly influence student success (CHE, 2013). If access is going to translate into participation, retention, throughput and success, the institutional conditions and processes need to take into account the diverse composition of the student body.

The *#FeesMustFall* protests are not solely about university fees. They are a reflection of deep-seated fissures in society, serving as a reminder of persistent poverty, inequalities, exclusion and lack of access to resources that create ill-being. The protests are a reminder that physical access without financial access (Maree, 2015), epistemological access (Morrow 2007; Muller, 2014), cognitive access (DBE, 2012), affective access (CHE, 2013) leads to anger, frustration, exclusion, inequalities and failure. The political pressure for increased access to higher education will not abate. Achieving national goals of quality, equity and transformation, and sector goals of improved success and throughput rates, requires adapted approaches that take cognisance of student diversity. Morrow (2007) suggests a change of mindset as the future of higher education in South Africa lies in learning to cope responsibly with the pressure for greater access to higher education.

1.2 Problem statement

Higher education institutions in South Africa need to improve student performance and success rates. Much research has been conducted on student access and throughput (Walton et al., 2015) as well as student dropout and retention (Manik, 2014). Nationally, the student population increased exponentially between 1996 and 2013. Despite this growth at entry level, there is an attrition rate of 40% from undergraduate programmes by the end of regulation time (33% of the cohort is lost in the first year), with only 27% of students graduating in regulation time from undergraduate programmes, and only half the cohort successfully completing their qualification within five years (CHE, 2013, p. 42 - 49). Increased access is not articulating into academic success. High failure and dropout rates are accompanied by low throughput and success rates leading to an inefficient system that is not meeting the national goals or the needs of the student body (CHE, 2013). There have been many studies on factors that impact on and constrain student success in higher education, particularly first-year students. Few studies have been located in private higher education.

The higher education student body is increasingly diverse but support programmes have generally focused on standardised interventions of a 'one-size-fits-all' bridging or support programme. Private institutions, unlike public universities, are able to respond to the national plan by managing their own change independently of central structures of power, and therefore have the freedom to adopt approaches that respond to the diverse needs of their student body (Nieuwenhuis & Mokoena, 2005). Access to higher education ought to enable each student to achieve well-being and provide opportunities for a future of capable citizenship that is of value to the individual and to others (Walker, 2015a). Factors that constrain student functioning limit their achievements and well-being. Addressing institutional constraints can promote student performance and success.

1.3 Purpose statement

The purpose of this research is to investigate student capabilities in the context of a private higher education institution. The intention is to gain an in-depth understanding of the personal, social and environmental challenges students experience that affect their achievements and well-being. The aim is to determine how individual student capabilities are facilitated in the context of the institution.

1.4 Research questions

The following questions formed the quest of this research project:

1. How are individual student capabilities facilitated in the context of a private higher education institution?
2. What personal challenges do students encounter that limit their academic functioning?
3. What institutional practices restrict student functioning?
4. To what extent are students' functionings enabled or constrained in their specific context?

1.5 Research methodology

This study makes use of a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design within an interpretive paradigm. Participants in this research project were registered first-year students at a private higher education institution. In the first phase of the project, using a comprehensive sampling strategy, all the first-year students across the institution's three campuses were invited to participate in the study and given access to an online survey which they completed and submitted electronically. The questionnaire comprised 20 questions incorporating 82 statements to which participants responded using a four-point Likert-type scale. It also included six optional open-ended statements. The quantitative data obtained from the survey grounded the design of the interview questions for the second phase of the project (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006).

In the second phase of the project, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted. Participants who completed the survey were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in an individual interview and to provide their contact details on the questionnaire. From the group of volunteers, a random sample of ten participants was drawn for the interviews. The semi-structured interviews comprised five open-ended questions. The interviews, of approximately one-hour duration, were audio-recorded and were transcribed verbatim. The interviews elicited rich qualitative data for interpretation. A thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data from which patterns were coded and themes inductively extrapolated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These were used for meaningful interpretation and discussion of the findings. Detail on the research design, methodology, instruments and data collection is presented in Chapter Four.

1.6 Terminology

The following terminology relates to concepts that are fundamental to the project. They are briefly explained in this chapter, with further detail and clarification provided in later chapters where relevant.

1.6.1 Capabilities

This term is a core concept in the capability approach which forms the conceptual framework for this project. Capabilities define what a person is potentially able to achieve, that they value being able to do and that would provide them with a sense of well-being. Sen (1992, p. xi) describes capabilities as “our freedom to promote objectives we have reason to value”. They are the opportunities people have to lead the kind of lives they value based on choice. Capabilities are closely related to the concept of functionings which are a person’s achievements, what they are actually able to do and to be. Capabilities are potential functionings, not yet realised, but they represent the freedom to achieve the combination of functionings that a person values and considers feasible to achieve (Sen, 1999). Functionings are constitutive of a person’s well-being, whereas capabilities represent the freedom to achieve well-being (Sen, 1992). Nussbaum views capabilities from a social justice perspective as an approach to comparative quality of life assessment. She has listed ten central capabilities as a minimum level of human dignity (Nussbaum, 2011).

Integral to capabilities are the notions of freedom or opportunity, and choice. Sen states that the opportunity of reflective choice contributes to a person’s well-being but, if the option we might choose is not available, then there is no increase in the freedom to choose. Also, increased options do not necessarily lead to increased freedom if the choice is not one that the person values (Sen, 1992). Capabilities provide an approach to the evaluation of social arrangements as a way to assess inequalities. Thus, moving beyond assessment of differences in means and actual well-being, to the opportunities a person has to access those means or the freedom to choose what is valued.

The significance of these concepts in the context of education is that a student’s functionings represent what he/she is able to do or be, they include skills and knowledge he/she has, for example to study, write, reason, participate. Education enables capabilities, instrumentally through the expansion of freedom, and intrinsically as a capability itself (Walker, 2006). The significance of capabilities

in the context of this project are that they represent what students value to be able to do and be, and the freedom and opportunities that they have in higher education to be able to choose and to achieve those capabilities and well-being.

1.6.2 Inclusive education

The concept of inclusive education is discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two where it is contextualised in higher education in South Africa. Inclusive education is a complex notion that does not succumb to a simple definition. In principle, it is an ideology for a reformed approach to education. In purpose, it is the antithesis of exclusion, segregation and marginalisation (Slee, 2011). In practice, it is an approach that recognises diversity and offers opportunities for access, participation, belonging and success for every student (Florian, 2014). Inclusive education is driven by a social justice agenda with the core values of equal opportunity, respect for human dignity and the belief in the capacity of all people to learn. An inclusive pedagogical approach provides learners with choices, it encourages participation and engages learners in directing the course of their own learning (Florian, 2014). An inclusive approach is, I believe, essential to transforming education and transformative education in this country, and to achieving not only national goals but providing the freedom for people to live the lives they have reason to value.

1.6.3 Private higher education

Higher education in South Africa forms part of the broader national education system. It comprises formal post-school education provided by universities in either contact or distance mode on a full-time or part-time basis (DHET, 1997b). This sector is governed by the DHET with whom all institutions must be registered in accordance with the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997. In terms of the Act, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) is an independent statutory body that functions as the Quality Council for Higher Education responsible for quality assurance and programme accreditation for higher education. Higher education institutions are registered as either public (government funded and managed) or private (independent of central government). Private higher education institutions

are those that are privately owned, funded and managed but remain accountable to the DHET and CHE for compliance within the regulatory framework of the Higher Education Act of 1997.

1.6.4 Student / Learner

According to the Higher Education Act of 1997 a student is “any person registered…at a higher education institution” (DHET, 1997b, p. 9) as distinct from a “learner” who is an individual in the basic schooling system. In this study, the term student is used when referring to participants in the study or their peers registered at the institution that formed the context of the study. The term learner is used occasionally either to refer to high school learners, or as a generic term to refer to any person who learns (in any learning environment) in the context of an educational principle.

1.6.5 Access

The term ‘access’ in the context of education has a nuance that differentiates it from the everyday meaning of having the ability to approach or gain entry. The *Dictionary of Education Concepts and Terms* defines ‘access’ as

> A measure of opportunities available to learners for learning comprising factors such as the availability of learning places, travelling distance, transport availability, affordability and other barriers faced by learners in enrolling and remaining in an education programme (DBE, 2012, p. 10).

This definition, distinct from the everyday meaning, implies that having the ability to gain entry is not a normative concept. Access is dependent on having opportunities for access to learning, and the ability to gain entry is measured relative to having freedom from various barriers that may prevent learners from enrolling and remaining in an education programme. Although this dictionary was compiled for the school system, the term is relevant to all levels of education. Also significant in the context of this study is the additional comment that “*physical access* to learning opportunities does not necessarily translate into *cognitive access* or *meaningful access* to learning” (DBE, 2012, p. 10). This is an important distinction between two dimensions of access within education. There is formal access of admission to an institution, and epistemological access to the

knowledge and goods distributed by educational institutions (Morrow, 2007). When students are able to gain physical access to an institution or an educational programme, they may still experience barriers to accessing understanding and learning. This is significant to the purpose of this study based on the national drive for 'access' to higher education (DHET, 2013). The regulations may facilitate the formal access, where the institutions then face the challenge of facilitating epistemological access.

1.7 Outline of chapters

A brief outline of each chapter of this project is given below as an overview of the study.

Chapter 1: Introduction and background

This chapter starts by setting the scene and placing the study in the context of the present-day South African higher education environment. From there, the research problem is stated together with the purpose of the study and the research questions that directed the quest. A brief overview is given of the research methodology used in the study. Finally, key terminology is explained in order to clarify important concepts and their use in this project.

Chapter 2: Contextual framework

This chapter provides a review of the contextual framework of the study. It frames the study within higher education in the 21st century and the economic, social and political forces that are influencing higher education globally and in South Africa. It hones in on private higher education and the important question of the role of higher education as public-good or private-good, which is particularly pertinent to South Africa currently. This is one of a couple of the specific challenges currently facing South African higher education that is mentioned. Constitutionally, education in South Africa strives to be inclusive. The concept of inclusive education is presented together with the implications of putting inclusive policies into education practice. Finally, a case is presented that (*what*) inclusive

education should be practised (*where*) in higher education (*why*) as a matter of ethics and social justice, because "[i]t conveys something that is valuable" (Reindal, 2016, p. 1), a proposal is made for (*how*) using a capability approach as a means to equitable access, widened participation and dealing with diversity in South African higher education. The multifarious elements of this context weave their way into the discussion of the research findings in Chapter Five.

Chapter 3: Conceptual framework

This chapter provides an overview of the conceptual framework of the study. It starts with a discussion of the concept of human development which forms the backdrop to presenting the core concepts of the capability approach, namely capabilities, functionings, freedom, choice, well-being and agency, as well as conversion factors that influence functionings. The capability approach is presented from the perspective of both Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum paying particular attention to the differences and commonalities in their approaches. A few points of critique of the capability approach are also mentioned. Based on the conceptual underpinnings of the approach, consideration is then given to the capability approach in the context of education. The literature is reviewed on the capability of education and education as a capability, followed by discussion of the approach and its application in education. Finally, four specific capabilities for higher education are presented. These were included retrospectively having emerged from the thematic analysis of the data. The concepts presented and discussed in this chapter form the framework for the discussion of the research findings in Chapter Five.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

This chapter presents the research design and methodology of the study. The design is a mixed methods sequential explanatory design. The chapter starts with an overview of the philosophical underpinnings of the interpretive paradigm in which this study is set. This is followed by a discussion of the mixed methods design and a justification for the selection of a sequential explanatory design for this study, also bearing in mind the limitations of this design. The research

methodology and process is presented for the two phases of the project. First, the quantitative phase, including a description of the sampling technique, the instrument, including the pilot study to test the questionnaire, and the data collection and analysis procedures. Next, a description of the qualitative phase and its relevant sampling technique, instrument and data collection and analysis. Each phase is explicated and the decisions pertaining to the specific methodological choices within the sequential explanatory design are justified. Finally, statements of commitment are made to the ethical considerations as well as the authenticity and credibility of the research.

Chapter 5: Findings and discussion

The data was processed within an interpretive paradigm using an inductive analytical approach. The interpretations (findings) that emerged from the thematic analysis are presented and discussed in this chapter. The data provides a description of the students' experiences in higher education and is presented in their voice. Four broad themes emerged that represent patterns of categories and codes extrapolated from the data. These significant themes of aspiration, affiliation, reflection and resilience frame the discussion. Set within the conceptual framework of the capability approach, the rich narrative data was analysed and interpreted to elicit meaning in response to the research questions.

Chapter 6: Summary and conclusion

The final chapter presents a summary of the research project. The research questions are revisited and addressed in the light of the findings. The questions are answered based on the meaning extrapolated from the data. Reflection on the project as a whole leads to a presentation of the limitations of the study. With the limitations in mind, recommendations are made for further research. The final conclusion draws the project to a close.

CHAPTER 2
CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This research project is contextualised in a private higher education institution in Johannesburg, South Africa. This is a relatively small, but growing segment of the national higher education sector. The national education framework is comprised of two departments, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) that deals with school education, and the DHET that directs and regulates post-school education and vocational training. The DHET seeks to provide quality learning to serve young people and adults outside of the schooling system, and to develop key skills for economic growth and social development (DHET, 2015). The Department has oversight of three main categories of Post-School Education and Training (PSET) institutions, namely Adult Education and Training (AET) centres, Further Education and Training/Technical and Vocational Education and Training (FET/TVET) colleges, and Higher Education institutions (HEIs) (DHET, 2015). The system accommodates public and private providers in each of these sectors. Although relatively small, the private higher education segment has a significant role to play in the delivery of higher education as part of the National Development Plan aimed at eliminating poverty and reducing inequality (RSA, 2013). This chapter provides an overview of the context of higher education globally and nationally. Within that setting it looks at private higher education in South Africa and its role in the economy partnering with public institutions in addressing access and equity issues, and in the development of capable citizens who can lead flourishing lives.

2.2 Higher education – the global context

Higher education in the 21st century is part of an "academic revolution" associated with globalisation (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009, p. iii). This is a dynamic

process of transformation on a global scale, characterised by significant growth in participation rates that has fundamentally redesigned the nature of higher education institutions, their operational processes and their programme offerings. Altogether, higher education has become more complex.

2.2.1 Globalisation and massification

Globalisation is the notion of an inter-connected global community characterised by development of information communication technology, economic integration, and the emergence of an international knowledge network (Altbach et al., 2009). It is a process of “deterritorialization” (Walker & McLean, 2013, p. 10) in which social activities, including education, are no longer tied to geographical locations. The reality of the growing importance of the global context has had a profound influence on higher education. English has become a dominant universal language, which together with new technologies have created easy and instantaneous contact and flow of knowledge across continents (Altbach et al., 2009). Borders have become porous, opportunities have expanded, competition has increased and identities are becoming universal. It is a wave of change sweeping across the globe that on the one hand is new and exciting but on the other is doing away with all that was established, familiar and traditional.

The challenge of increasing social mobility of students and massification of higher education has forced changes and diversification in institutional structures (Altbach et al., 2009; Webbstock, 2016; University of Oxford, 2015). There has been a proliferation in the number and types of institutions, academic programmes and educational offerings internationally. The purpose and content of curricula have changed as have teaching and learning approaches. Curricula need to be relevant and useful for economic purposes, pedagogy has shifted from knowledge-based to skills- and outcomes-based approaches, and delivery options are extending out of the classroom to open learning and blended modes (Webbstock, 2016). The outcomes have become more utilitarian with professionally orientated programmes rising in popularity and demand for international recognition of qualifications. Students have become ‘consumers’ of

education and knowledge has become a commodity (Altbach et al., 2009; Walker, 2006; Webbstock, 2016). Developments in technologies and the need to be part of the global knowledge economy requires higher education to prepare students with new skills and a range of knowledge and competencies to cope in a complex and interdependent world (Altbach et al., 2009).

2.2.2 Internationalisation

Internationalisation is a response to globalisation resulting in student mobility driven by international policies and programmes (Altbach et al., 2009). Governments facilitate movement and make study permits and visas available to encourage foreign students to study abroad. Institutions make provision for international participants and establish partnerships to collaborate with institutions in other countries. Five million students were studying outside their home country in 2014, with a predicted eight million international students by 2025 (University of Oxford, 2015, p. 5). The predominant flow is to host countries in North America and Western Europe with the most mobile international students coming from Asia. South Africa is currently the destination of choice to almost half of Sub-Saharan African students (University of Oxford, 2015).

International opportunities are not equitable and current trends perpetuate middle and upper income privilege (Altbach et al, 2009). Institutions compete for students, funding and academic status on international league tables (THE, 2017) and national hierarchy rankings (Webometrics, 2017) making them increasingly sought after, more exclusive and for some, more elusive.

2.2.3 Increasing participation and diversification

Participation rates in higher education have increased significantly across the globe. Institutions are providing for international and local participants. Generally, there are more students and in some instances the demand for places in higher education exceeds space (Mortlock, 2017; Ramphele, 2016). Increased demand has led to the expansion of existing institutions and new institutions are opening up to absorb the overflow. Competition for admission has resulted in an

increasingly diversified student body and a new sub-group of 'non-traditional' student has emerged (Craven, 2012). This includes foreign students, first-generation students, mature students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Despite the expanded inclusion there is vast disparity that results in increased inequality and exclusion (Altbach et al., 2009; Craven, 2012; Webbstock, 2016).

Governments (including South Africa) have implemented strategies to increase access to higher education. In spite of the inclusion of greater numbers, access to and participation in higher education is restricted by social, geographic, cultural and financial disadvantage (Altbach et al., 2009). Increasing demand has placed pressure on institutional infrastructure, facilities, staff, resources and funding. Managing the inclusion of 'non-traditional' students has required the implementation of bridging and support programmes and systems of student support (Craven, 2012; Webbstock, 2016). Increased fees restrict access for some and halt participation for others. In addition to fees there are mounting costs for accommodation, books and living expenses making a very different student experience for students who are socially disadvantaged (Craven, 2012).

2.2.4 Private provision

In response to the increased demand there has been a surge in growth of private higher education provision worldwide. Private enrolment exceeds 30% of higher education enrolment globally and in some South American countries enrolment in private higher education is in excess of 70% of the student population (Altbach et al., 2009, p. 79; Webbstock, 2016, p. 11). Private higher education is also showing considerable growth in Africa (Akplu, 2016). Originally private higher education served an elite clientele but increasingly these institutions are part of the mainstream system (Altbach et al., 2009). Private institutions operate on a business model without financial assistance. The primary source of income is the fees, which are consequently high, and for some students, prohibitively so. For international students, affordability of fees is also subject to currency conversion rates.

2.2.4.1 Role of private higher education

Much of the growth of the private sector originated from the role private providers play in absorbing the excess demand for admission to public universities (Altbach et al., 2009). They are able to take in students who do not get admitted to public institutions. In many countries the burgeoning growth of private institutions has been facilitated by absence of regulatory structures for this sector. This allowed room for a range of offerings, not all operating with the same levels of quality and integrity. There is an increasing drive for quality assurance of this sector (Altbach et al., 2009). It also allowed the space for institutions to diversify their offering with specialised and niche programmes, and expand the modes of transmission. The growth of private higher education in Africa has included major initiatives in creating online learning environments (Webbstock, 2016). This allows the reach of higher education to more people and to more geographically remote areas.

2.2.4.2 Types of private higher education

There is a range of different types of private higher education providers, from elite to semi-elite and non-elite (Altbach et al., 2009). Most operate for profit, although some are non-profit. The fastest growing type of private institution is the non-elite, for-profit institution that is demand-absorbing.

Semi-elite institutions may operate independently being either family-owned or part of a large company, some of which are listed on the stock exchange (Altbach et al., 2009). These institutions are described as follows:

> Semi-elite institutions stand between elite and non-elite and thus have above-average selectivity and status. Their salient characteristics appear to include priority on good practical teaching or training and not the kind of research that defines world-class universities (although they may do good applied research). The social-class of students may be quite high, often including accomplished graduates of the secondary system, and also including those capable of paying private tuitions. Some, but not nearly all, semi-elite institutions, are niche institutions concentrated in a given field of study or on a cluster of related fields, especially business. Most semi-elite institutions are explicitly and often successfully job oriented (Altbach et al., 2009, p. 84).

This description accurately describes the characteristics of the institution that forms the context of this study. For-profit institutions are expanding internationally. Some are larger universities (public in their own country) that form

partnerships and operate as a private enterprise with smaller local institutions, e.g. Monash (Setswe, 2013).

2.2.5 Towards 2030

Higher education has a significant role to play in the global community. It is subject to the same forces and constraints that drive developments and processes of globalisation. The trends that have characterised the "academic revolution" of the early 21st century are likely to continue towards 2030 (Altbach et al., 2009, p. iii). Demographically, student participation will continue to expand, widening diversity and broadening the social base of students. Financially, budgets of institutions and people will be increasingly constrained. The expenses will increase and the availability of funding will decrease. An enormous and complex challenge lies ahead in attending to inequalities and trying to mitigate a widening gap between the haves and the have-nots as "[t]he multiple and diverse responsibilities of higher education are ultimately key to the well-being of modern society" (Altbach et al., 2009, p. 21).

2.3 Higher education as private right or public good

The academic revolution is changing conceptions of the form, identity, purpose and character of higher education. Universities that were regarded as discrete institutions of higher learning for the elite few, serving to reproduce social structures, have evolved into a global system of institutional types that offer universal education of democratised knowledge to a mass market (Webbstock, 2016). Higher education – within broader national and international education systems – have become central to global development agendas. They drive skills and knowledge development for graduate employability in competitive market economies (Walker & McLean, 2013). But the value of higher education cannot be reduced to a utilitarian purpose, "…it is fundamentally about transformation, enhancement and growth – of individuals being educated as well as the institutions and societies in which they live and work" (Webbstock, 2016, p. 12).

2.3.1. Public good

The concept of education as a public good implies that education is a good to be provided by the state. It comprises a notion of state commitment to the well-being of both individuals and society through the engagement between the institution, society and the state. It is driven by policies to address social inequalities supported by government funding. This conceptualisation adopts a humanistic approach to education focused on the full development of the individual, taking the cultural, social, economic, ethical and civic dimensions of education into consideration (Daviet, 2016). It is an inclusive concept based on values of human dignity, cultural diversity and social justice (Daviet, 2016; Walker & McLean, 2013). International policies on Education for All (EFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) place an expectation on nations to commit to expanding education opportunities and reducing inequality and poverty through the provision of education (Rizvi, 2016).

Higher education is a public good in itself, it also produces public goods to the benefit of individuals and society (Tilak, 2008). As a public good, higher education serves society by educating citizens, developing human capital, boosting economic and civic development and enabling capacity for social participation. Access to higher education has come to be considered "…the *sine qua non* of a healthy democracy and economic and social development" (Webbstock, 2016, p. 12). The particular value of higher education as public good lies in knowledge development and transfer, as well as the fundamental commitment of higher education to the interests of society (Walker & McLean, 2013). Knowledge production and dissemination in higher education can be used in society as a public good (Altbach et al., 2009). Knowledge retains its value when shared and has value for all who share in it. That which is of benefit for one can be used to the benefit of all. When individuals use their education to serve the interests of the public, the singular public good of higher education transfers into plural public goods (Walker & McLean, 2013).

The changes occurring in higher education as a result of globalisation are forcing a reconsideration of the notion of higher education as a public good (Daviet, 2016). Massification and internationalisation of higher education has put governments under increasing strain in managing their responsibility to support higher education. Demand exceeds supply and costs exceed the resources, making it financially unsustainable. The “social contract” between higher education and society at large is being restructured and a share of the financial burden placed on the institutions, students and their families (Altbach et al., 2009, p. 99).

2.3.2 Private good

The rapid rise in demand for higher education around the world places pressure on the feasibility for provision to be entirely funded by the state. State allocations for higher education may need to be supplemented or replaced by alternative sources. In many countries, the state is providing less than 50% of the income for public universities (Altbach et al., 2009, p. 14). Higher education, of which the student is the primary beneficiary, is increasingly seen as a private good (Altbach et al., 2009). This notion is used to justify the idea of the cost of higher education being paid for by the beneficiary. Higher education providers are responsible for generating more of their own revenue, and both state and institutions lean more heavily on students using the private good justification.

Higher education as public good has shifted to private good with the growth of the private higher education sector and privatisation of public institutions. This has relieved the state and continued to serve development agendas by expanding access and opportunities. It has also suited neoliberal agendas with a focus on human capital and commodification of education (Rizvi, 2016). Private initiatives range from small, local institutions to the emergence of a global education industry comprising large transnational organisations that invest in the business of education for profit. The private good has contributed to expanding opportunities, increasing the possibility of access and participation to previously excluded populations. However, this carries its own consequences (Rizvi, 2016).

Privatisation is redefining the nature of education as it becomes a commodity for trade (Rizvi, 2016). The traditional aspirations and values of the public good – education for community development and social cohesion – are undermined and replaced with drive for economic self-interest and profit (Rizvi, 2016). Driven by market considerations, institutional cultures are transforming, as are their curricula, their teaching and learning and their objectives. Instead of reducing inequalities, they are increasing in a widely differentiated sector that is unequally distributed. The apparent increase in opportunities for all becomes increased disadvantage for the individual who cannot afford the fees, the transport costs, the books or the accommodation.

2.3.3 Common good

Higher education sits at a crossroads. On the one hand, the state is unable to support the function of education as a public good (Daviet, 2016). On the other hand, the risk of treating education purely as a commodity for trade at the expense of social benefits has dangerous implications (Tilak, 2008). Privatisation and commodification of higher education serves the global agenda, but higher education is more than a business commodity and a government also needs to serve its own national identity and its citizens. Higher education is the preserve of national culture, values and tradition. It is the seat of intellectual independence while also pushing the frontiers of exploration and modernisation. Withdrawal of public-good undertakings relinquishes the traditional social role of universities and the public good embedded in their academic, social and cultural functions and traditions (Altbach et al., 2009). Lack of public funding for institutions may reduce the community and service functions of universities and restrict research activities. It also leaves disadvantaged students who do not have the means, without access to higher education.

The boundaries between public good and private good have been blurred. The practice of public good is unable to serve all, the principle of private good serves the ends of only a few. The ramifications of this lack of clarity are playing out in *#FeesMustFall* debates. UNESCO (2015) calls for the principle of education as a

'common good' in rethinking education in the changing context of society, state and market. This approach calls for inclusion, transparency and accountability. Education as a common good affirms education as a social responsibility that is concerned with the good life of individuals as well as the goodness of life in common. Education as a common good nurtures diversity while respecting fundamental rights and well-being. Education as a common good is an inclusive process that goes beyond the public-private dichotomy, aspiring towards new forms of participatory democracy and educational opportunities for knowing, doing and being (UNESCO, 2015).

2.4 South African higher education

Higher education in South Africa in the 21st century is framed by the global context but dominated by its own socio-historical context. The period of the global 'academic revolution' has coincided with this country's democratic evolution. South African higher education has been subject to the forces of global higher education, while at the same time this sub-sector sits inside the national education system where the priority has been on transformation and restructuring in response to a deeply divided and unequal system inherited from the apartheid era.

2.4.1 The landscape

The first higher education institutions in South Africa came into being in 1918 making South Africa's higher education history one of the longest in Africa (Fongwa, 2012). It is a history that is rooted in the colonial past. Over the past century the system has been created by and responded to the forces and challenges of social, economic and political change (DHET, 2013; Fehnel, 2006; Fongwa, 2012; Webbstock, 2016). It is a system that has been directed by policy and regulation to achieve particular goals (Webbstock, 2016). It bears the scars of a legacy of elitism, fragmentation and inequality. Over the past 22 years there has been significant restructuring and reorganisation of the institutional landscape. In 2017 South African higher education is a transformed system. It is

a product of a new regulatory framework. There has been exponential growth in terms of student access and enrolment, with a concomitant shift in racial and gender equity in the demographic and there are ongoing policy intentions of modernisation, transformation and integration steered by mechanisms of funding, quality assurance and planning (Webbstock, 2016).

2.4.2 The framework

The role of the DHET is to co-ordinate all post-school education and training. Its vision is for "…a differentiated and fully-inclusive post-school system that allows South Africans to access relevant post-school education and training, in order to fulfil the economic and social goals of participation in an inclusive economy and society" (DHET, n.d.). Supporting the Department are other statutory institutions with various regulatory and quality assurance responsibilities. This includes the CHE an independent body whose functions include quality assurance. The Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) of the CHE conducts institutional audits, programme accreditation, standards development and quality promotion (CHE, n.d.). The South African Quality Authority (SAQA) is a juristic body that oversees the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). They are the custodian of qualifications and maintain a comprehensive system for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications (SAQA, 2014). There are other smaller bodies, all of which contribute to the regulation and operation of a differentiated but integrated framework.

Since 1994 there has been extensive development of legislation and regulation in response to the developing national context, setting policy for broad transformation (Ballim, Scott, Simpson & Webbstock, 2016). Flowing out of this was considerable policy development for higher education including *Education White Paper 3* – A Programme for Higher Education Transformation (DHET, 1997a), the *Higher Education Act*, (DHET, 1997b), the *National Plan for Higher Education* (NPHE) (DHET, 2001) as part of the National Development Plan (NPC, 2013), and more recently the *White Paper for Post-School Education and*

Training (DHET, 2013). These policies set the framework for re-engineering the sector. Since then the stratified system of the past has been reconfigured into a more co-ordinated system. Old institutions have been re-formed, restructured or removed from the system, and new institutions have come into being (Webbstock, 2016).

2.4.3 The size and shape

More than half of all students enrolled in the post-school education and training (PSET) sector are enrolled in higher education (DHET, 2015, p. 4). These enrolments are spread across public and private institutions.

2.4.3.1 Public higher education

The higher education sub-sector comprises 26 public universities that accommodate over one million students. There is a target to increase the student population by 500 000 by the year 2030 (DHET, 2013). Within public higher education institutions, undergraduate programmes account for more than half of the total student enrolment. In 2013 there were 158 389 first-time students enrolled in undergraduate programmes and 180 823 graduates, 33% of whom qualified with an undergraduate qualification (DHET, 2015; p. 17).

Public higher education institutions are funded largely through public funds and student fees, as well as third stream revenue (subsidies, donations and investments). The public funding comes directly from the DHET that allocates approximately 75% of the PSET budget to public higher education institutions. Funds are allocated based on a number of criteria and planning processes, including student enrolment. NSFAS is a loan and bursary scheme funded by the DHET for disadvantaged students who do not have the financial means to fund their higher education studies. These funds are administered via the institutions (DHET, 2015, p. 71). Fees vary depending on the institution and the programme, but undergraduate programmes range from ±R20 000 to R65 000 per year (AfricaCheck, 2015). This does not include fees for application, registration, accommodation or books and equipment.

2.4.3.2 Private higher education

At the time of writing there are 93 registered private higher education institutions on the DHET register (and another 31 institutions with provisional registration) with a combined enrolment of approximately 100 000 students (DHET, 2017; Webbstock, 2016). Data on the demographics of private higher education institutions is scarce and unreliable (CHE, 2011). The CHE's 2011 study of the private higher education sector found that most of these institutions have fewer than 500 students, and only 10% of the institutions have enrolments over 1 500 students. This study showed a total graduate output from private institutions of 28 797 students, 63% with an undergraduate qualification (CHE, 2011).

The 2011 study showed that 60% of the income of private providers came from student fees and 15% from donations. Fees for undergraduate programmes range from ±R50 000 to in excess of R70 000 per year (CHE, 2011). This may include registration and books at the discretion of the institution. A more detailed review of private higher education in South Africa follows in sub-section 2.5.

2.4.3.3 World ranking

On the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) the South African higher education system has been placed in the range between 27 and 33 (Cloete, 2014). South Africa has 4 universities in the ARWU top 500 and the top two South African universities on this ranking (University of Cape Town (UCT) and University of the Witwatersrand (Wits)) are ranked in the 201-300 range (ARWU, 2016). These two universities lie in the top 200 (of 980) on the Times Higher Education (THE) ranking that features eight South African universities (THE, 2017).

South Africa claims six of the top 15 places on the Times Higher Education snapshot ranking of the best universities in Africa, with UCT and Wits in the top two spots respectively (THE, 2016). South Africa is the top knowledge producer in Africa, although Nigeria and some other North African countries are closing the gap (Cloete, 2014). Growth and rankings notwithstanding, the system

faces considerable challenges. Enrolment has become more equitable however the system as a whole is described as a “low-participation, high-attrition system” (Cloete, 2014, p. 1358) with sub-optimal performance in skills development capacity.

2.4.4 The challenges

The objectives for higher education set out in the Government’s *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training* include expanded, equitable access; increasing diversity; quality education for all students; increasing participation; and improved student performance, success and throughput, with priority action from institutions (DHET, 2013). Despite the fundamentally altered higher education landscape, several systemic issues remain and inequalities persist (DHET, 2013; Fongwa, 2012; Walker & McLean, 2013; Webbstock, 2016). Participation and success rates are still skewed by race and prior education, attrition rates are high and success rates are low, and there is yet to be an improvement shown in throughput and graduation rates (Maree, 2015; Walton et al., 2015). Linked to these issues is a wide articulation gap that appears to exist between school and university (McGhie, 2012; Mudhovozi, 2012; Wilson-Strydom, 2015).

2.4.4.1 The challenge of retention and throughput

The description of South African higher education as a low-participation, high-attrition system raises the challenge of retention and throughput. Participation rate is measured through enrolment as a proportion of the cohort aged 20 to 24 years (Cloete, 2014). There is a correlation between higher education participation and measures of economic development such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Human Development Index (HDI) and global competitiveness, with more economically developed countries (with high GDP and low HDI and competitiveness ratings) showing higher participation rates (Cloete, 2014). South Africa’s participation rate is 19%, which puts it well below comparable middle-income countries but above the 6% average for Sub-Saharan African countries (Cloete, 2014, p. 1358; Webbstock, 2016, p.6). The primary issues associated

with participation are racial group representation, growth rate and success rate (Cloete, 2014). In spite of the exponential growth since 1994 in the number of students in higher education (which has more than doubled) there has been marginal growth in participation rate. Participation and success rates remain racially skewed (Webbstock, 2016).

Graduation in regulation time is a key measure of the effectiveness and internal efficiency of a higher education system (CHE, 2013). The regulation time for an undergraduate qualification is usually three years. The significance of graduation in regulation time is its relevance to throughput and success rates. Current figures show that by the end of regulation time more students have been lost to failure and dropout (40%) than the number who graduate (29%) (CHE, 2013, p. 43). These figures too are racially skewed.

There are many reasons for student dropout from higher education. These hold implications for further research, and ultimately for systemic as well as institutional action (Tinto, 1975). Student progress is more strongly influenced at the level of the student than at course, institution or state level (Van den Berg & Hofman, 2005). Particular factors that were identified by Van den Berg and Hofman (2005) that negatively impact on study progress include, (*i*) students' use of time; (*ii*) the amount of time devoted to study. This was exacerbated if the student had a job and worked for more than 12 hours a week; (*iii*) the number of subjects, with more subjects leading to less success; (*iv*) 'passive' forms of education e.g. lectures, resulted in less success for first-year students than 'active' forms such as seminars and tutorials; (*v*) 'non-traditional' students made less progress than their peers. Of particular interest are the findings that: (*a*) no significant difference was found between students in different academic years. The implication is that students in second and third-year also require support; (*b*) study progress was generally better in female than male students; (*c*) students who had a performance-related or progress-related grant showed more study success than students without a grant; (*d*) no differences were found in the study progress between students with university educated parents and those with less

educated parents. Therefore retaining students in the system requires interventions that start with the student as individuals.

2.4.4.2 The challenge of articulation

First-year attrition rate is a significant measure because it indicates the capacity to meet the needs of the students entering the system. Currently, one in every three students who enters higher education is lost to the system during the first year (CHE, 2013, p. 44). Amongst the first-year cohort, first-generation students have their own unique characteristics that make them particularly vulnerable to the articulation gap (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004). In South Africa, this sub-group of first-year students frequently comes from disadvantaged backgrounds and is characterised by relative deprivation (Manik, 2014). Despite their vulnerability there is no significant correlation between student progress and the level of their parents' education (Van den Berg and Hofman, 2005).

High first-year attrition rate is a characteristic of higher education around the world, and many studies have been done to try to identify the nature of these students (Adams, Berzonsky & Keating, 2006); the issues that lead to first-year dropout; (Lowe & Cook, 2003; Wilson-Strydom, 2015) and how to retain them (Brooman & Darwent, 2014; Modipane, 2011; Pym & Kapp, 2013). Part of the responsibility for addressing the issue of the academic underpreparedness of students entering higher education lies with the schools (Walton et al., 2015; Wilson-Strydom, 2015). Once they arrive on the doorstep of higher education, the DHET (2013) lays the responsibility with higher education institutions to support the transition and retain students so that they can graduate and enter the labour market.

2.4.4.3 The challenge of translating access into success

Over the past 22 years the number of students accessing higher education has doubled. This is a significant achievement. Formal access alone (Morrow, 2007) does not serve the social justice and equality agenda; yet social expectations on

universities are high (Altbach et al., 2009). Students enter higher education carrying historical burdens of social disadvantage and inequality. Increasing access may have the unintended consequence of reinforcing, or possibly exacerbating the inequalities and underperformance that it seeks to address (CHE, 2013). Greater access, more students and a more diverse student population, creates a range of other challenges in meeting the ultimate goals.

Specific strategies are required to translate access into success. The loss of approximately 70 000 students from a cohort means that higher education is not producing sufficient graduates to meet national economic and social development needs which has an impact on students' futures and that of the country (Letseka & Maile, 2008). Bridging and support programmes have been put in place to facilitate inclusion into higher education but these ironically can serve to exclude (Botsis, Dominguez-Whitehead & Liccardo, 2013; Hlalele & Alexander, 2012). Access provides more opportunity for many to participate, which in turn should feed into opportunities for each one to progress and succeed. It is not enough to widen access "...the pressing need is...rather to widen *successful* participation" (CHE, 2013, p. 53, italics in original).

Gale (2011) proposes the promotion of institutional approaches to taking students *in* to the system in preference to focusing on student characteristics that keep students *out* of the system. This can be done through developing capacities of mobility, aspiration and voice which provide a more equitable approach to student equity and widening participation. Student mobility lies firmly in the hands of state and institutional response to the global processes and "transnationalisation" of higher education (Sellar & Gale, 2011, p. 1). The demand on increased, more diversified provision stimulates creative solution-seeking in expanding equity that includes amongst other options, policies and programs that transcend national systems and strata and pays "attention to the lived experience of inequality in particular localisations of global higher education" (Sellar & Gale, 2011, p. 3). The extent to which higher education systems respond to these needs reflects the aspirations of nation states to meeting the demands of the global knowledge

economy (Gale, 2011). It also opens the way for students to articulate and pursue their aspirations, particularly the marginalised who have not previously had access to higher education. This requires listening to the voices of students. It requires within higher education a shift from "a politics of *representation*… to a politics of *recognition*" (Gale, 2011, p. 111, italics in original) giving recognition to student diversity and different ways of knowing and being.

2.4.4.4 The challenge of #FeesMustFall

The *#FeesMustFall* movement of 2015/16 brought a dramatic and vociferous message challenging issues to do with access, participation and social justice that lie at the heart of higher education. Arising out of the protests are deeper expressions of "underlying faultlines" in the system (Baijnath, 2016, p. ix) as well as a rise in popular politics in response to the reification of race and class privilege in South African universities (Naicker, 2016). This politics reflects a position of ordinary people who feel marginalised and excluded. The students have demonstrated a growing lack of faith in the higher education system to effect transformational change at the individual level (Naicker, 2016). In 2017 the South African higher education system faces the ongoing pressures of underfunding in the context of growing enrolment and limits in academic staff capacity that potentially threaten the quality of provision (Baijnath, 2016). In addition, there is the juxtaposition of the need to respond to global trends of neo-liberalisation and increasing student expectation and frustration prompting a rejection of the neo-liberal model (Baijnath, 2016; Naicker, 2016). The system faces a crisis that challenges the substantive heart of higher education (Webbstock, 2016). Systemic response and institutional agency are part of the ongoing transformation of higher education in South Africa (Baijnath, 2016; Naicker, 2016).

2.5 Private higher education in South Africa

As a sector, private higher education in South Africa dates back to 1829 when the South African College was founded. Eighty nine years later this became the

first public university – the University of Cape Town. Since then public and private institutions have co-existed. Private higher education provision has tracked its own developmental path within the same broad national system of higher education as state provision, with varying degrees of convergence and divergence over time (Mabizela, 2002).

2.5.1 The identity of private higher education

In line with the rest of the education system, the private higher education sector in South Africa has largely been shaped by political and economic developments in the country (Mabizela, 2002). Prior to the 1990s private institutions operated entirely separately from the public higher education system delivering mostly vocational programmes with certificate or diploma qualifications (Mabizela, 2002). Post-1990, together with the restructuring of the education system came rapid growth in private higher education provision. As sanctions lifted with the end of apartheid, South Africa re-joined the global knowledge society and new business opportunities arose in the education sphere. More private colleges opened and international institutions entered the country to form partnerships with private institutions or to operate independent campuses (Setswe, 2013).

Lack of regulation enabled private institutions to flourish. By 1994 there were approximately 330 private post-school institutions. Institutions added programmes to their offering, including delivery of undergraduate programmes such as business and management qualifications that were low cost to run so that they could benefit from the fees (Ballim et al., 2016). This brought private providers into direct competition with the public institutions for the first time. Prior to that, the programmes they had offered had filled the gap not offered by public institutions or they had collaborated with large correspondence public institutions (UNISA specifically) offering face-to-face support in delivering their syllabi while at the same time falling under the accreditation of the public institution (Ballim et al., 2016; Mabizela, 2002). The lack of regulation raised concern about the sector as a whole which was seen as lacking quality and credibility (Ballim et al., 2016). From 1999 the sector became formally regulated and subject to the same

accreditation and quality assurance processes by the CHE as public providers. This improved the image and bolstered confidence in private higher education provision generally (Ballim et al., 2016). It has also added some stability to an otherwise disparate sector that remains a challenge to the regulatory bodies.

Quality remains the biggest challenge to the private higher education sector. Unscrupulous and unaccredited providers jeopardise the reputation of all (Akplu, 2016). The diversity of the nature of different institutions makes consistency difficult and greater self-regulation of individual institutions is required in order to assure confidence in the quality of their provision (Ballim et al., 2016). A development in the private higher education sector that has the potential to assist with quality accountability is the merger of small private institutions under the governance umbrella of a group holding company e.g. Advtech/IIE. This enables small institutions to benefit from centralised management and administration while the corporation benefits from the diverse offering of the smaller entities. The holding group operates as a large business entity listed on the stock exchange while the small institutions focus on the academic mandate (AdvTech, 2014; IIE, n.d.).

2.5.2 The role of private higher education

The DHET acknowledges the role of private providers, complementary to public institutions, in addressing access and equity issues, and meeting the objectives of an integrated and effective post-school system (DHET, 2013; Fehnel, 2006). Public and private institutions are not in direct competition for students (Mabizela, 2002). Being smaller by nature, and financially and organisationally independent, private institutions are more adaptable than their public counterparts and able to respond fairly quickly to market needs (Akplu, 2016). As they have done in the past in South Africa, private providers are able to offer unique programmes not offered by other providers. This may include niche and vocational programmes which serve the development of scarce and critical skills required for the country's economic growth. As public institutions are challenged by the financial and capacity constraints of mass education, private institutions are able to absorb and

reduce the demand on public institutions (Akplu, 2016; Altbach et al., 2009; Odon, 2015; Setswe, 2013). Private providers also have the flexibility to extend their delivery in response to the students' needs (Akplu, 2016; Froneman, 2002). Distance learning enables higher education to reach those who don't have access to traditional institutions or the advantage of cross-border mobility (Froneman, 2002). This mode of delivery has made a significant impact on widening higher education access and participation in Africa (Altbach et al., 2009).

The private higher education sector has much to offer by way of widening access to and improving the quality of higher education in the country generally. Expansion of private institutions through Africa has contributed to higher education to meet needs that the public sector was unable to address (Akplu, 2016; Setswe, 2013). This includes widening access to higher education, improving the quality of education, improving the student experience and providing international recognition to the qualification. However, private institutions have been unable to reduce the costs of higher education (Setswe, 2013). With most of the income being generated from student fees, these are usually high. Private higher education institutions in South Africa receive no financial support from the government. Like any commercial enterprise, they are essentially driven by market opportunity and profit, and face a continual battle of the balance sheet. Tight financial margins potentially result in cost-cutting e.g. reduced equipment, high staff-student ratio, fewer facilities, which places the quality of provision at risk (Bezuidenhout & De Jager, 2014).

2.5.3 The market of private higher education

The existence of private higher education has generally been driven by market need rather than elitism. The existence of private institutions depends on their ability to attract and retain students. Student attrition inevitably leads to loss of income for the institution. Therefore, as a market enterprise it is important to meet the satisfaction of their 'clients' (Bezuidenhout & De Jager, 2014; Hasan, Ilias, Rahman & Razak, 2008). Students are "discerning consumers who will select those institutions that would potentially satisfy their needs in the best way"

(Bezuidenhout & De Jager, 2014, p. 65). The specific attributes that these clients prioritise will vary according to context. Bezuidenhout and De Jager's study (2014) across three South African private higher education institutions showed that the most important performance indicators for institutions were (*i*) safety and security, (*ii*) increased employment prospects and (*iii*) well-equipped facilities (Bezuidenhout & De Jager, 2014). According to the study, students attributed their choice of private higher education institution to these factors.

2.6 Inclusive education

Inclusive education is a very complex notion (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010; Norwich, 2013; Slee, 2011). On the face of it, it is an approach to education that includes all people and opposes exclusion of groups and individuals, but it is conceptually more extensive than that as it is underpinned by philosophy, history and value systems, and in education it requires engagement in policies and practice (Armstrong et al., 2010). Inclusive education has multiple identities – it is concurrently a discourse, an ideology, a field, a concept, a domain, a principle and a value. The definition of 'inclusive education' has been much debated and remains contested. Its meaning is in a constant state of evolution "…that must be articulated within the possibilities and constraints of particular contexts" (Walton, 2016, p. 48). Inclusive education is an educational approach in response to diversity (Barton, 1997) and in the struggle against failure and exclusion (Slee, 2011). Slee (2011) describes inclusive education as a tactic in the metaphorical battle against segregation, marginalisation, oppression and the collective indifference that entrenches unequal social relations. However, it is simultaneously an aspiration for inclusion, reform and democracy in education (Slee, 2011).

2.6.1 The aspiration of inclusive education

The aspiration of inclusive education is written into policy at international and national level (Walton, 2016). In 1994 the Salamanca Statement made an international call for countries to adopt the principle of inclusive education as a

matter of law or policy (UNESCO, 1994). This provided a vision for which the Dakar Framework for Action: Education For All (UNESCO, 2000) and the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2002) set specific targets to encourage collective commitment towards policy implementation and action. Since 2015, there has been a renewed vision and commitment to transformation through inclusion, equity and access to education set in the Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2015). South Africa enshrines human rights in the Constitution (RSA, 1996). This includes, amongst others, the right to equality, human dignity, citizenship and education. These democratic rights filter through at a policy level into the frameworks for implementation at all levels in the education system. The White Paper on Post-school Education and Training commits to achieving social justice through equitable access to quality education and increasing diversity (DHET, 2013). Inclusive policies provide descriptions of institutional roles and functions, as well as people's responsibilities. This is the aspirational discourse (Walton, 2016) that sets the framework for the goal of inclusive practice.

2.6.2 Inclusive education and democracy in practice

Inclusion is inextricably linked with democratic education (Bernstein, 2000; Slee, 2011) and the values of a democratic society (Terzi, 2014). Social inclusion, individual enhancement and participation are fundamental rights of democratic education (Bernstein, 2000). Democracy in education enables the creation of opportunities and 'schooling' serves as the agent (Slee, 2011). But Sen (1999) states that an institution is not a mechanical device for development. Education for all is not only about policies that recognise diversity and grant universal access. Democratic rights need to be put into practice through enabling the use of those opportunities (Sen, 1999).

> The achievement of social justice depends not only on institutional forms (including democratic rules and regulations), but also on effective practice (Sen, 1999, p. 159).

Inclusion for social justice needs to move beyond policy into practice. In a democratic classroom this has implications for organisation, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Slee, 2011). It is in those practices that social justice

occurs. Education in the 21st century is caught up in the global wave of integrated market economies, new information and communication technologies and internationalisation. Policies are embedded in a human capital agenda and it is not easy to push back against the influence of the market economy on higher education (Walker, 2015a). Walker (2015a) acknowledges the strain between a global dominant human capital policy agenda and human development. Slee (2011) states that inclusive education needs to be disentangled from the neoliberal education imagination and values of competitive individualism. The potential exists for injustices to be sustained despite the best of policy intentions. Inclusive education requires interrogation of the existing structure, policies and practices within education, and it requires us to be committed to its values for democratic education and social change (Slee, 2011). Democratic higher education is focused on the development of humans. Policies that focus on the students' right for individual enhancement and social inclusion facilitate the implementation of democratic practice that enables opportunities for students.

2.6.3 The capability of inclusion

Inclusive education in practice is the means to the end of establishing an inclusive society. While policies in this regard provide a framework for *what* needs to be done there is little information on *how* it should be practised (Florian, 2014; Reindal, 2016). It is possible that the right *to* education may be achieved at the cost of rights *in* education. The right to education provides access for students. Access should be supported by equitable practices. An inclusive approach ensures that the curriculum, pedagogy, assessments and organisational processes provide opportunities for individual enhancement, social participation, belonging, and adequate support to ensure success.

2.6.3.1 The place

Inclusive education is applicable at all levels of education. The focus of attention for development in education is often shone on primary education, as specified in the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2002) – not inappropriately so. The Incheon Declaration for Sustainable Development Goal 4

extends the commitment "…to promoting quality lifelong learning opportunities for all, in all settings and at all levels of education" (UNESCO, 2015, p. 8). This serves as a directive to give attention to higher education. The context of this project is higher education, which is "a site for personal engagement, transformation and change through individual development" (Walker, 2006, p. 3). This makes higher education campuses a most suitable site for inclusive education. The policy objectives in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013) call for rooting out inequalities, recognition of diversity, equitable access to quality education, equal opportunity, the achievement of greater social justice. This is a call for inclusive education in higher education.

Inclusion is not bounded by the classroom, but is closely tied to relationships and a sense of connectedness with others (Adderley, Hope, Hughes, Jones, Messiou & Shaw 2015). Higher education in the 21st century is educating and shaping young people for a globalised world. However, preparing students for more than human capital requires building rich networks of human connection (Nussbaum, 2002b). This prepares students to be included in the world with others, not only to become a means for capital gain. Higher education curricula and pedagogies that deal with diversity have a central role to play in producing citizens who can function in a complex integrated world and who contribute to a rich network of human connection (Nussbaum, 2002b). This is the mechanism and purpose of both higher education and inclusive education in an era of global connection.

2.6.3.2 The purpose

Inclusive education creates a framework for attending to diversity and the possibility for individuals to flourish (Reindal, 2016). Inclusion is not just a social or structural matter directed by the way an institution is organised or its staff, teaching methods or cultural structures. Inclusion is an ethical issue "…because it is for the purpose of something. It conveys something that is valuable" (Reindal, 2016 p. 1). Reindal (2016) states that the ethical purpose of inclusive education

pre-empts the question of why education should be inclusive and prompts an answer to how inclusion should be practised.

An inclusive pedagogical approach recognises diversity as part of the human condition. It is focused on supporting the participation and learning of every individual in which practices are aligned to the core values of respecting human dignity, the provision of equal opportunity, and the belief in the capacity of all people to learn – values that are consistent with a social justice agenda for education (Florian, 2014; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This suggests that inclusion is not a 'top-down' approach but rather one based on interconnection. Collaboration and participation are central values of inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) and central to the development of capabilities (Sen, 1999). Reindal (2016) argues for the development of capabilities as an inclusive approach. The capability approach offers a paradigm for thinking beyond access to education and providing opportunities in and through education (Hart, 2012). Inclusion involves the development of capabilities focused on each person as an end. This is the value and ethical imperative that responds to how inclusive education can be implemented (Reindal, 2016). The capability approach provides a purpose to inclusion in the development of capabilities so that all learners have equal opportunity to achieve functionings that they value and the freedom to flourish.

2.6.3.3 The approach

The capability approach is an inclusive approach. It has value because it serves a social justice agenda promoting equity and addressing inequalities. Diversity is the starting point and it centralises well-being and agency of every individual in the educational process supported by the principle of equal opportunities (Terzi, 2014). It has a place in an inclusive higher education system and a purpose developing capable citizens for participation in an inclusive economy and society.

2.7 Conclusion

Education in democratic South Africa is an ideal context for inclusive education. The Constitution espouses the values of equality and non-discrimination as fundamental provisions and the right to education as a basic human right (RSA, 1996). The education system is seeking transformation from a fragmented and segregated past to an integrated, equitable system focused on inclusive principles (DHET, 2013). Inclusion is not just an issue of human rights, it is underpinned by a philosophy of social justice in a stance against exclusion. It gives recognition to diversity and addresses issues of access, belonging, participation and success of learners in educational contexts (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Inclusive education is described as an ideology, an ethical project, a political project, a process and a human right (Barton, 1997; Slee, 2011). This is a description that could equally apply to the capability approach. Underlying both the capability approach and inclusive education is an aspiration for reform, at the heart of which lie the principles of democracy (Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 1999; Slee, 2011). The next chapter presents the capability approach as the conceptual framework for this project.

CHAPTER 3
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Introduction

The conceptual framework of this research project is the capability approach. This is an approach to human development (Sen, 1999). It is an approach to dealing with diversity and addressing inequalities as a matter of social justice, with a deeply embedded human rights purpose (Nussbaum, 2002a). The capability approach focuses on each person as an end and gives attention to the provision of well-being in a range of areas of human functioning (Nussbaum, 2002a). This chapter gives a definition and outline of the concept of human development and presents the core concepts of the capability approach. Within this framework, the capability approach is applied to education which is both a capability itself as well as being instrumental in the development of other capabilities. Finally, consideration is given to a few capabilities relevant for higher education.

3.2 Human development

The concept of human development may be described simply as the development of people, but it is simultaneously as complex and multi-dimensional as is the human being and the varied areas in which people function and have the potential to develop. The first report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on Human Development, states:

> People are the real wealth of a nation. The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives. This may appear to be a simple truth. But it is often forgotten in the immediate concern with the accumulation of commodities and financial wealth (UNDP, 1990, p. 19).

The ultimate purpose of development is for people to flourish. People's well-being takes priority even in a commodity based global market economy. Access to income and financial wealth are important as a means to well-being but are not

the sum total of human endeavour. Human development is governed by principles of equity, efficiency, sustainability and respect for human rights (Alkire, 2010). Development should benefit people equitably and when individuals flourish, so does the nation.

Human development is defined as “a process of enlarging people’s choices” (UNDP, 1990, p. 11). The most critical of which are the choice to live a long and healthy life, to be educated and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living (UNDP, 1990). It is through development that people are enabled to progress towards their full potential and lead a productive and creative life in accordance with their needs and interests (UNDP, 1990). The components of human development are adapted to be relevant and responsive to different times, cultures and contexts (Alkire, 2010). Social arrangements, including education, play an important role in creating enabling environments for the achievement of the capabilities for well-being.

Not only should people have choices but also the freedom and agency to exercise their choices (Alkire, 2010). People are both the beneficiaries of development as well as participants who engage actively in the process. They are empowered and able to have a voice in the process of advancing their own well-being and that of others. “Human development is development *by* the people *of* the people and *for* the people” (Alkire, 2010, p. 25, italics in original). Development of people occurs through development of capabilities. Development for people occurs through providing real opportunities to use their capabilities and improve their lives. Development by people occurs through enabling people’s active agency and participation in the processes that shape and benefit their lives (UNDP, 2015a).

Human development globally is monitored and measured using the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI[1] is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress of human development according to three basic dimensions: a long

[1] In 2015, South Africa was positioned at 116 out of 188 countries on the HDI.

and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), access to knowledge (measured by mean and expected years of schooling) and a decent standard of living (measured by Gross National Income per capita) (UNDP, 2015b, p. 2).

The achievement of human potential lies not only in the formation of human capabilities but also the use of capabilities. Having the opportunity for good health, knowledge or social interaction is realised in the use of those opportunities whether for work, leisure, political or cultural activities (UNDP, 1990). Human development is both a process and an outcome that is intended to benefit people and advance social justice. When it is successful, people have opportunities and are free to make choices and participate in decisions that shape their own lives and benefit others. Human development enables people to enjoy longevity and quality of life, to be educated, to work and be productive, to enjoy relationships with others and to live the life that they have reason to value. People's lives are central to human development, and "ultimately success is evaluated in terms of the lives people are able to lead, the capabilities they enjoy" (Alkire, 2010, p. 25). The capability approach is conceptually synonymous with human development, for which it provides the foundation (Alkire, 2010).

3.3 The Capability Approach

The capability approach is a normative framework for the assessment of well-being and human development that emerges from the theoretical contexts of economics, social justice and political philosophy underpinning the work of Amartya Sen (1985a, 1987, 1992, 1993, 2000, 2005) and Martha Nussbaum (2003, 2006, 2011) respectively. Amartya Sen pioneered the approach, advocating capabilities as a means to assess people's well-being in favour of the more traditional economic measures of commodities and utility, which he considered had "…not been very interested in the plurality of focus in judging a person's states and interests" (Sen, 1987, p. 1). Sen was concerned with the inadequacy of economic theory that takes a view of human beings that fails to recognise individual distinctions (Sen, 1987). He explored what he called "a moral

approach" (Sen, 1985, p. 169) that considers the perspectives of well-being and agency in the assessment of people's states, actions and their freedom. According to Sen, the focus of welfare and quality of life needs to be on freedom determined by people's functionings and capabilities as a more equitable measure of individual well-being and advantage than aggregative resource-based or utilitarian approaches (Sen, 1985, 1987, 1993, 1999). Martha Nussbaum takes a theoretical and philosophical approach that Alexander refers to as a "hybrid theory of capabilities that blends Aristotelian philosophy with certain liberal doctrines" (2008, p. 4). Nussbaum developed a list of ten abstract, universal capabilities as a conception of justice based on human dignity and equality drawn from the Aristotelian and Marxist concept of 'truly human functioning' (Alexander, 2008). Despite specific differences in Sen and Nussbaum's approaches (Robeyns, 2003b; 2005) the lens of this research will be their shared conception of functionings as a person's being and doing (evident as outcomes or achievements) and capabilities, which are the opportunities or freedom to realise those states of being and doing (Robeyns, 2006a) reflected in their sense of agency and freedom. It is in this 'space' that the capability approach offers the framework to assess individual well-being, evaluate social arrangements and design policies for social change (Sen, 1992; 1993).

3.4 Sen's approach – from welfare economics to capabilities

Sen studied the political economy of famine from which emerged the concept of 'entitlements' in relation to resources. His analysis of famine and poverty revealed the impact on human life not from lack of food but rather from lack of access to food leading to loss of entitlement to health and nutrition. Consequently, Sen advocated that people's well-being and quality of life are not determined by resource availability but rather by their entitlements or capabilities (Alexander, 2008). Sen defines *capabilities* as "…the various alternative functioning bundles [a person] can achieve through choice" (Sen, 1987, p. 18). According to Sen, a *functioning* is "an achievement of a person… [that] reflects…part of the 'state' of that person" (Sen, 1987, p. 7). Functionings describe what a person is able to do

or to be. This may include activities such as being able to read, to eat, to walk, or states of existence ranging from basics such as being well-nourished, being mobile, being free from infection, to more complex states such as having self-respect, being free from shame, or participating in social interactions (Sen, 1985). These states of being and acts of doing form the basis of assessment of a person's well-being. Sen specifically distinguishes functionings from the commodities used to achieve those functionings or their utility – they are an end rather than the means or the resultant feeling (Sen, 1987). Capabilities are the opportunities an individual has to achieve valuable combinations of human functionings (Sen, 1987, 2005). The difference between a functioning and a capability is similar to the difference between actually achieving something (an outcome) and having the freedom (opportunity) to achieve it (Robeyns, 2003a). Capabilities shift the focus from a person's actual 'beings' and 'doings' in their life, to their freedom to choose what they want, or value to be and to do in order to lead a particular kind of life. This may include having the opportunity to be well educated, to be well nourished, having the freedom to participate in community interactions. Alexander (2008) explains that capabilities comprise the inter-related elements of having capacity and opportunity.

Sen describes the range of functioning combinations within a person's reach as their "capability set" (1985a, p. 201). A person's capability set corresponds to their overall freedom to lead the life that they have reason to value (Robeyns, 2003a). This reflects their choice of possible livings (Sen, 1992) and provides the primary informational base in determining their quality of life (Sen, 1993) as a more adequate and pluralist measure than resources and their utility. Sen explains that…

> "…seeing opportunity in terms of capability allows us to distinguish appropriately between (i) whether a person is actually able to do things she would value *doing*, and (ii) whether she possesses the *means or instruments or permissions* to pursue what she would like to do." (Sen, 2005, p. 153, italics in original)

It is the shift in attention away from means, such as income and primary goods, towards what a person is actually able to do, that distinguishes the capability approach from other theories. The capability approach gives recognition to the

possibility that two people with the same means do not necessarily have the same substantial opportunities and are therefore not equally advantaged (Sen, 2005).

3.4.1 A normative framework

The central premise in Sen's capability approach is that of human diversity (Sen, 1992). The capability approach uses the evaluation of functionings and capabilities to account for diversity. Fundamental differences exist between people physically (age, gender, physical and mental abilities etc.), socially and culturally (race, class etc.) and circumstantially (social background, asset ownership, physical environment etc.). These differences create relative advantage and disadvantage when comparing one person with another. Assessment of (in)equality derives from comparison. This drives an egalitarian agenda, striving for equality for all. Functionings and capabilities are the measure for interpersonal comparison and evaluation of quality of life. In other words, evaluation is based on what people are able to be and do and their actual opportunities to function as they would want to, taking interpersonal variation into account (Sen, 1993). The capability approach gives recognition to the role of personal, social and environmental factors that influence what a person is able to achieve. The purpose being to address inequalities as a matter of social justice so that all people have the freedom to achieve well-being and live the life that they have reason to value.

3.4.1.1 Interpersonal comparison

Sen (1987) attaches importance to interpersonal comparisons of the **actual** opportunities different people have to achieve functionings. In substantiating the notions of 'well-being' and 'advantage', Sen distinguishes between the former as the achievement of being well; and the latter, which he describes as "…the real opportunities that the person has, especially compared with others" (Sen, 1987, p. 3). Functionings are constitutive elements of well-being (Sen, 1992) but it is in the freedom to achieve well-being (capability) that advantage lies; more so than in the *state* of well-being itself (functioning). This freedom is significant for recognising a person's relative advantage and identifying inequality. Having the

means to freedom is distinguished from the achievement of freedom (Sen, 1990). Equal means (resources) does not necessarily equalise people's substantive freedom because there are significant variations in individual personal characteristics that influence a person's ability to convert resources into valued functionings.

3.4.1.2 Conversion factors

Interpersonal comparison and assessment of inequality takes into account differences in external characteristics but also needs to consider differences in personal characteristics that influence how we might use a resource and the choices we make (Sen, 1992). The ability to 'convert' a resource into an effective outcome depends on various conversion factors. These factors influence what a person is able to do and be. There are three categories of conversion factors – personal, social and environmental (Sen, 1992; 1999). Personal conversion factors are internal features such as metabolism, intelligence, physical condition. For example, a person with a physical disability may not be able to achieve the same functioning with a bicycle as an able-bodied person (Sen, 1987). An evaluation based on this resource alone reveals unequal states of well-being between them. The bicycle does not provide the disabled person with the same freedom of mobility as it does for the able-bodied person, who consequently has a comparative advantage. Should two people have equal resources and functioning, such as two able-bodied people with bicycles, they may still not have the same capabilities due to individual differences in gender, age and physical strength that would influence what they could accomplish with that bicycle. Social conversion factors relate to policies, social norms and practices and other factors that 'govern' society. For example, there may be laws or social mores pertaining to the use of bicycles by women that would determine differential functioning in comparison to men. Socio-economic status may also play a role, where a high income earner may use the bicycle purely for weekend leisure activity whereas someone without the means to buy a car would need it as a mode of transport. Environmental conversion factors relate to the physical surroundings and geographical location. For example, there would be differences in the use of a

bicycle for someone living in a city compared to someone in a rural area, or in farmland compared to forest.

Measures of inequality are based on interpersonal comparison. The capability approach as an evaluative framework moves away from aggregate or generalised measures and focuses on human diversity (Sen, 1999). The approach takes cognisance of the influence of personal, social and environmental factors in determining what a person is able to do and be, and values being able to do and be. It also acknowledges that relative advantage/disadvantage is based on a number of variables. It allows for evaluation of a plurality of variables, however the specific functionings and capabilities that are being used to measure a person's well-being need to be identified (Sen, 1992).

3.4.1.3 Equality of what?

As a normative framework, Sen's capability approach is premised on human diversity not just as a matter of equality but more specifically as a matter of justice (Sen, 1990). Sen (1992) states that due to the pervasiveness of human diversity the provision of equality in one variable does not assure equality across the board. Depending on the variable, equality for all may only be achieved through unequal treatment of some. According to Alexander (2008, p.2):

> …the focus of the capability approach as a theory of justice is not to level down or even out people's differences in talents, capacities and potentialities, but to design society's economic and political institutions in such a way that adequate material and social resources are available to everyone in order to possess and exercise a set of basic capabilities that go to make up a decent life.

The basic structure of society is unequal and the realisation of basic capabilities for all as a matter of social justice may require unequal distribution of some resources through social structures as a matter of social responsibility rather than individual merit. People do not have equal need, desires or abilities, therefore the availability of resources does not need to be equal but rather 'adequate' to provide for their individual opportunity for a decent life. In addition to this, individuals differ in the value they attach to different functionings. For these reasons the quest for equality, according to Sen, should be pre-empted by the qualifier "Equality of what?" He states, "…every normative theory of social

arrangement that has at all stood the test of time seems to demand equality of *something*" (1992, p. 12, italics in original). The identification and focus on the particular object of value creates a particular 'evaluative space' for the analysis of inequalities (Sen, 1993). Sen takes an approach that focuses on the values of individual capabilities – people's opportunities to achieve – as "*that* space" (1992, p. 4, italics in original) in which to recognise and address inequality, distinguishing particularly between achievement and the freedom to achieve.

3.4.2 Freedom

The concept of freedom is fundamental to the capability approach. Freedom of individuals is the building block of human development. Sen refers to 'substantive freedom' as the ability of a person to be able to achieve what is important to him in life (Sen, 1999). Such freedom lies not just in the absence of restriction or interference but from the presence of elements that enable active choice and promote capabilities. Capabilities enhance people's freedom to live the kind of life they value, and with greater freedom people have more opportunity to help themselves and to influence the world around them (Sen, 1993; 1999). Thus, freedom is important for people and society as individual freedom fosters social development.

3.4.2.1 Freedom as a means and an end

Having greater freedom to do what one values has intrinsic significance. It is an end in itself. Having the substantive freedom that lies in basic capabilities such as avoiding starvation, being literate, enjoying freedom of speech, enriches people's lives and enhances their well-being. In the capability approach it is people's intrinsic freedom that forms the basis of interpersonal evaluation. Freedom also has instrumental significance in what people are able to do and be. It is the means to providing opportunities for other valuable outcomes. Expansion of a particular freedom (or right or entitlement) leads to the development of other freedoms. For example, being literate, expands opportunities for education; having freedom of speech expands opportunities for political participation, leadership and so on. The importance of instrumental freedom in the capability

approach is as a measure of the effectiveness of the achievement of social development (Sen, 1999).

> Greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves and also to influence the world, and these matters are central to the process of development (Sen, 1999, p. 18).

Freedom therefore serves to develop individuals, but also, by fostering opportunities for other outcomes it serves to develop society. Freedom is both the primary end and the principal means of development. Individual freedom and agency is enhanced through capability development (which is an end in itself) and it is the exercise of agency and social participation that opens further opportunities (as a means) for development and capability enhancement (Sen, 1999).

3.4.2.2 Social arrangements

There are various social institutions and interactive agencies that contribute to enhancing people's substantive freedoms and opportunities of well-being (Sen, 1993, 1999). Sen (1999) identifies distinct types of freedom that are instrumental in advancing capabilities and are fundamental for well-being. They include political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security. These freedoms cover particular rights and opportunities that inter-link and complement each other in enhancing development. Sen includes education amongst the freedom of 'social opportunities' that facilitate development and economic participation. These opportunities not only improve the individual's state of being but also enable him to participate more effectively in economic and political activities. The opportunity for participation engages the individual actively as an agent of change, rather than a passive beneficiary of dispensed benefits (Sen, 1999). Through freedom comes agency and through agency comes freedom. But Sen points out that freedom is not only the expansion of opportunities, but also the removal of people's deprivations, their "unfreedom" (1999, p. 4). Unfreedom may be related to poverty, lack of public facilities and social care, or restricted political or civil participation, any of which may result from either inadequate processes or inadequate opportunities. For example, lack of functional education in a

developed nation deprives people of their substantive freedom, creates disadvantage and constrains development.

3.4.2.3 Freedom of choice

The freedom to lead a particular type of life and achieve well-being is reflected in a person's capability set. Capabilities have instrumental value that determines "how good a 'deal' a person has" (Sen, 1992, p. 41). A person's freedom must be assessed in terms of their opportunity for choice, and what it is that they value.

> It is odd to conclude that the freedom of a person is no less when she has to choose between three alternatives which she sees respectively as 'bad', 'awful', and 'gruesome' than when she has the choice between three alternatives which she assesses as 'good', 'excellent', and 'superb' (Sen, 1993, p. 34-35).

Freedom does not lie in the number of options from which to choose, nor in a range of choice from amongst factors that a person does not value. Freedom lies in being able to make a choice from a range of valued and viable alternatives. For this reason, the evaluation of a person's freedom to lead a life that they value has to be done in relation to that life and the choices the person is free to make (Sen, 1993).

3.4.3 Choice and well-being

The capability approach is an opportunity-based approach (Robeyns, 2003a) and as such the evaluation of a person's functionings and capabilities takes choice into account (Sen, 1992, 1999). Deciding and choosing are part of life. Making use of an opportunity involves making a choice and the capability approach focuses on people's own self-determination of valued ends as a result of reflective, informed choice (Walker, 2006). Freedom of choice is directly related to well-being (Sen, 1992). A person's freedom to live the way they would like is determined not only by the individual's own personal, active choices in defining functionings that he[2] values – whether it is the choice to get an education, or the

[2] Or she. In the Preface of *Inequality Examined*, Sen explains his use of 'he' and 'she' interchangeably to justify the apparent inconsistency in his use of these personal pronouns in instances when there is no symbolic significance attached to the gender form of the pronoun. He is concerned to avoid the charge of discrimination with the exclusive use of either 'he' or 'she'. He is also concerned that "using 'he and she' everywhere every time is verbose, cumbrous and ugly" (Sen, 1992, p. xiv). I share Sen's concern on both counts, but feeling stronger about the latter, I have opted to risk the former and have predominantly made use of 'he' as a gender-neutral pronoun in similar instances throughout this project. I request the reader's tolerance in this regard as this decision was made with due consideration, and no discrimination or offence is intended.

choice to go on hunger strike – but also by the choices of others, for example in public action and policy (Sen, 1992, 1993). Functionings may reflect a choice made from amongst available alternatives but it is also possible that functionings are conditional on the choices made by others. Sen states, "…choosing a life-style is not exactly the same as having that life-style no matter how chosen, and one's well-being does depend on how that life-style happened to emerge" (1992, p. 52). One cannot assume well-being is subsumed in an achievement if there was no opportunity for choice. Having capabilities – the opportunity for genuine choice, reflection and decision-making – can enrich a person's quality of life and the achievement of well-being (Sen, 1993, 1985b, 1992).

Well-being has intrinsic significance as a valuable state of being. It is a personal quality or state achieved. Evaluation of a person's well-being requires attention not just on the functioning, but also on the person's capability set i.e. their freedom to achieve well-being. Sen stresses the distinction between achievement of well-being and the freedom to achieve well-being (1992). The former positions the person "as a beneficiary whose interests and advantages have to be considered" (Sen, 1985, p. 208) the latter provides opportunities for choice, which allows a person to take responsibility for himself and others. While people will generally make choices in the interests of enhancing their own well-being, this is not always the case (Sen, 1985).

3.4.3.1 Conflict between choice, freedom and well-being

Choice, freedom and well-being are not always positively correlated. "Indeed, sometimes more freedom of choice can bemuse and befuddle, and make one's life more wretched" (Sen, 1992, p. 59). Sen makes this statement to counter the presumption that freedom is always advantageous. Some choices are valuable and offer opportunity but it is possible that choices that are either trivial or that involve obligation do not expand a person's freedom (Sen, 1992). In addition, when a person is faced with a combination of opportunities that reflect basic functionings but which are not available simultaneously, for example whether to use a meagre income to buy food or pay the rent, this may also result in the need

to make a difficult choice and off-set freedom in one functioning with restriction in another (Robeyns, 2016).

3.4.3.2 Adapted preference

A further notion associated with choice and well-being is that of adapted preference. People adapt their consideration of what is feasible according to what they think is practically possible (Sen, 1987). Consequently, they may lower the bar they set for their own well-being if they feel the outcome is not realistic and feasible for them. In situations of entrenched inequality and deprivation, a person may adapt his aspirations and become resigned to living a reduced life out of necessity or as a means of survival (Sen, 1992; 1999). For example, in countries where women are denied an education, an illiterate young woman may give up all hope of being educated and resign herself to an arranged marriage. In this way, her choices for well-being are compromised against the reality of her life, and are not necessarily made in her own best interests (Walker, 2006). Adaptation of preference is not just a result of absence of information or lack of resources, it may involve deeply internalised values based on a person's upbringing (Nussbaum, 2011). Walker (2006a) gives examples in a higher education context of aspirational limitations in students whose social and individual identity constrains their self-belief and consequently their capabilities.

The issue of adapted preference may be particularly serious in instances of inequality. Social arrangements play an important role in giving people the opportunity to grow in their opportunities and freedom to make choices and take responsibility for their own actions (Sen, 1999). Agency forms a link between freedom, choice and well-being (Sen 1985a).

3.4.4 Agency

Agency is a person's ability to make choices in pursuit of goals that he values for the type of life he wants to live (Walker, 2006). The concept of agency is significant in the capability approach which considers each person as an individual. Sen describes an agent as a person who can bring about change, who

participates in economic, social and political actions, and who can be judged in terms of his own values and objectives (1999). Agency and well-being are inter-related concepts. The role of agency involves a sense of personal autonomy and liberty in which the person, as responsible agent, makes his own judgements in pursuit of goals that he values. The responsibility to identify and pursue what he personally values in his assessment of choices lies with the agent.

3.4.4.1 Agency and well-being

A person's goals will generally involve pursuit of his own well-being. Agency has a significant participatory component to the extent that the agent is actively involved and instrumental in his own well-being (Sen, 1992). However, his objective can be realised without his direct involvement in the process. Sen (1999) favours education and empowerment rather than provision of welfare to enhance well-being, individual emancipation and social transformation.

3.4.4.2 Agency and freedom

Agency is closely linked to the concept of freedom. "More freedom makes more (agency) alternatives available" and lack of agency can restrict the freedom to make choices, which potentially equates to disadvantage (Walker, 2006, p. 34-35). People need to be free to achieve goals that they value. There is a difference between having the freedom to choose a goal and actually achieving the goal. Agency freedom is the freedom to bring about achievements that one values (Sen, 1992). It provides the "open conditionality" (Sen, 1985, p.204) for a person to make reflective choices in the pursuit of goals and values, without any pre-specified objective, making room for his own conception of the good to take precedence over his well-being or advantage (Sen, 1992). This leaves a person's choice of what they want to achieve to their own judgement, for which they take responsibility. A fasting person who chooses not to eat reveals the person's agency freedom which results in his denial of the opportunity to eat thus sacrificing his own well-being for another (ideological) goal (Sen, 1985). It is important, therefore, in the evaluation of quality of life, to bear in mind that people's choices are not always made from a perspective of self-interest,

therefore opportunities cannot be judged solely by a particular outcome or functioning but rather in the context of their capabilities and agency (Sen, 1999).

3.4.5 In summary

Sen's capability approach emerged from the context of welfare economics as an alternative to normative theories used to determine people's quality of life. The capability approach is a broad framework for the evaluation of individual well-being, assessment of social arrangements and design of policies based on individual diversity and focused primarily on what people are effectively able to do and to be i.e. their capabilities. The purpose of such an approach is on removing obstacles so that people have the freedom to live the life they have reason to value (Robeyns, 2005). The core concepts of this approach are functionings, capabilities, freedom, choice, well-being and agency. From this foundation, Martha Nussbaum's approach complements and supplements Sen's approach.

3.5 Nussbaum's approach – from political philosophy to a list of capabilities

With a background in Philosophy and Classics, Nussbaum's perspective on capabilities focuses on human rights and social justice through the specification of basic entitlements (2003). Alexander (2008) credits Nussbaum with philosophising the capability approach, supplementing Sen's framework with Aristotelian political philosophy, thereby enhancing its theoretical structure. Nussbaum adopts Aristotle's anti-hedonistic conception of 'valuable human functionings' as a reflection of the good life with many components. The plural nature of this conception of the good life aligns with Sen's counter-utilitarian sentiment that denies value lies in individual utility (Sen, 1992). However, in a departure from Aristotle's hierarchical view of social status (which denied full social and political participation to certain categories of people, including women

and foreigners) Nussbaum extends more liberal doctrines that prioritise equality and human dignity for all citizens (Alexander, 2008).

3.5.1 Capabilities

Nussbaum supports Sen's view of the importance of capabilities – people's freedom to be and to do – as an indicator of quality of life and for establishing development goals (Nussbaum, 2003). Both Sen and Nussbaum view capabilities as inextricably linked to human rights (Nussbaum, 2003; Sen, 2005) and as a normative approach to well-being and social justice irrespective of social, cultural, historical or political tradition. Nussbaum brings in a distinction between two types of capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011). Internal capabilities reflect particular characteristics of a person, they are dynamic traits and capacities. They incorporate internal learning and may be likened to skills and abilities. Education plays a particular role in the development of these capabilities. Combined capabilities are the totality of opportunities available to a person for choice and action in the context of the specific environment. They presuppose the existence of internal capabilities as "…combined capabilities are defined as internal capabilities plus the social/political/economic conditions in which functioning can actually be chosen" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 22). Nussbaum stresses the significance of the distinction because it is possible for society to focus on the development of internal capabilities without paying attention to combined capabilities. For example, it is possible to educate people to think critically (internal capability) but society may deny the opportunity for free speech and social or political participation (combined capability) in which case there is no opportunity to function in accordance with the capability. Sen makes no such distinction. His notion of capability implies the contextual opportunity of combined capabilities. In this project the conceptual discussion of capabilities implies combined capabilities as mutually understood by Sen and Nussbaum. The later reference to capabilities in the context of education and the study is more inclined to internal capabilities (as skills) given that education is the context in which the opportunity is potentially provided.

Sen's pioneering motivation to use capabilities as a normative framework for welfare economics is supported by Nussbaum (2003, 2011) who feels the generalised nature of economic measures of growth, and their inability to disaggregate aspects of development or reflect life quality, fail to reveal the reality for deprived people. Instead, an evaluative understanding of what people are able to be and to do reveals social inequalities and barriers to justice. The capabilities[3] approach focuses on each person as an end, their individual choices and freedom, thereby providing a more appropriate way to compare development achievements and quality of life. "The goal is to produce capabilities for each and every person, and not to use some people as a means to the capabilities of others or of the whole" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 35). Policies are often based on groups, but Nussbaum stresses that capabilities belong to individuals and each person is worthy of equal regard.

Like Sen, Nussbaum's approach centralises human diversity and inequalities, prioritising agency, autonomy and freedom in the development process (Nussbaum, 2003). Unlike Sen, however, Nussbaum believes that it is necessary to specify a minimum level of capabilities required for a just society, and she is critical of Sen for his reluctance to offer some kind of guidance or commitment to the substance of capabilities.

> "…Sen never says to what extent equality of capability *ought* to be a social goal, or how it ought to be combined with other political values in the pursuit of social justice. Thus the connection of his equality arguments with a theory of justice remains as yet unclear." (2003, p. 36, italics in original)

She feels this weakens Sen's argument for capabilities as a measure of equality for social justice. Nussbaum argues that it is essential to identify a minimum level of capabilities required for a flourishing human life, and she has produced a list of ten fundamental entitlements, offering universal values "without which no society can lay claim to justice" (2003, p. 36). The list of capabilities is a significant

[3] Nussbaum (2011) states that she specifically prefers the use of the plural term 'capabilities approach' to emphasise the plurality and non-reducibility of the elements that determine quality of life, in response to economic measures that reflect people's well-being in a single, generalised metric. Sen more commonly refers to the approach in the singular - 'capability approach'.

difference between Nussbaum and Sen's versions of the capability approach (Alexander, 2008).

3.5.2 Fundamental entitlements

Nussbaum (2011) compiled her list of central capabilities to identify what she considers the minimum requirements for a life worthy of dignity for every person (Appendix A: Nussbaum's list of Central Capabilities). The list comprises a wide range of capabilities – from a fundamental freedom to life, bodily integrity and good health, to the more complex capabilities such as social affiliation and control over one's political and material environment. They are general, abstract and universally applicable values, based on the assumption of human diversity and considerations of pluralism (Nussbaum, 2003). The ten capabilities form fundamental entitlements to be endorsed as a minimum account of social justice, because, according to Nussbaum, "a society that does not guarantee these to all its citizens, at some appropriate threshold level, falls short of being a fully just society, whatever its level of opulence" (2003, p. 40).

Nussbaum (2011) offers her list as an open-ended proposal highlighting the social justice principle of establishing a threshold level for human dignity over and above the specific functionings. She invites challenges and alternative offerings but insists on the presence of all ten capabilities to constitute the good human life. The items are distinctive but are mutually supportive such that none should be excluded. Nussbaum stresses their "irreducible heterogeneity" (2011, p. 35) stating that promotion of one capability over another leads to citizens being "shortchanged" which is equivalent to justice failure (2003, p. 40). Nussbaum endorses her list of capabilities to serve not only as a focus for comparative measurement of quality of life, but also for the formulation of political principles. In terms of the latter, she considers that the items should explicitly serve political rather than specific cultural or religious purposes (Nussbaum, 2003). She insists on decoupling the justification of the items from their implementation so that the latter is not dependent on the former (Nussbaum, 2003). Nussbaum's list targets opportunities rather than achievements, where support is given to a capability as

a fundamental universal entitlement, rather than a functioning which is potentially influenced by personal belief, choice and culture.

3.5.3 Democratic participation

Both Sen and Nussbaum advocate well-being characterised by freedom, agency and autonomy exercised in co-operation with others (Nussbaum, 2003; Sen, 1985). They both address the significance of deliberative, democratic participation in this process but ironically they promote the same process to argue their key difference – Sen to justify his lack of commitment to a specific list of capabilities (Sen, 2004) and Nussbaum to justify her commitment to a list of central capabilities (Nussbaum, 2003). Sen (1993, 2004, 2005) argues against producing a fixed list of capabilities because to do so "is to deny the possibility of fruitful public participation…the reach of democracy…and…progress in social understanding" (2004, pp. 77 – 80). Sen deliberately keeps his approach incomplete and unspecified. He is unapologetic for his "intransigence" (1993, p. 47) as he holds no claim to presenting a theory (in fact he promotes the combination of the approach with supportive theories and the supplementation of other sources of information (Robeyns, 2003b, Unterhalter, 2003; 2007)) and claims the deliberate incompleteness of the approach opens the way for alternative routes to be taken to achieving the good life (Sen, 1993). He concedes that a pre-determined list such as Nussbaum's can be practically beneficial for addressing minimal rights, but argues that a fixed, pre-determined list of capabilities is unnecessary as the specificity and value of capabilities vary according to social conditions, priorities and purpose. In his view, as any list would be context-specific, it is best determined in context through public discussion and reasoning where its role, reach and significance can be better understood, therefore different lists would be required for use in different purposes (Sen, 2004, 2005). In fact, Sen states that it is precisely the emergence of capabilities and human rights from the rigorous scrutiny of public debate that vindicates their selection (2005).

By contrast, Nussbaum insists that a prescribed list is required as a minimum metric for social justice (2003, 2011). She argues that her list has specifically been kept abstract and general in order to create the space for democratic deliberation and allow customisation according to circumstance. Nussbaum is critical that without a specified list of capabilities Sen's approach is vague, potentially undermines its own commitment to pluralism, and is limited in addressing social justice (2003). Alexander (2008) weighs in on the philosophical debate around the appropriateness and legitimacy of using universal values (such as Nussbaum's list) for the purpose of assessing people's quality of life. He states that the imposition of pre-determined values risks undermining cultural differences, individual autonomy and democratic agency. However Nussbaum contends that cultural pluralism and autonomy are in themselves universal values that require dynamic cross-cultural dialogue, thereby reinforcing the central tenets of the capability approach (Alexander, 2008; Nussbaum, 2003).

3.5.4 In summary

There are some key differences between Nussbaum and Sen's approaches (Robeyns, 2005). Being situated against different backgrounds gives each approach a slightly different focus. Sen's focus is on equality and economic development while Nussbaum's is on social justice and moral philosophy. They take contrasting views on their conception of specified capabilities, as has been discussed. Also, Sen has a stronger focus on agency than Nussbaum, although Robeyns (2005) states that Nussbaum's capability of practical reason may serve as a site of agency. Despite their differences, the primary conceptual underpinning in the development of the capability approach for both Sen and Nussbaum is a philosophical one orientated around the Aristotelian view of the human good and the centrality of fair distribution of capability to function in the political context (Sen, 1993). They concur on the value of capabilities as a space for evaluation of inequality and quality of life for individuals, measuring what people are able to be and to do, and its significance in addressing issues of human rights and social justice.

The capability approach has come under scrutiny by Sen and Nussbaum themselves, of each other and by others, generally with the intention of constructive development (Pogge, 2010).

3.6 Critique of the Capability Approach

Sen first introduced the capability approach in the early 1980s. It emerged as a critique in response to shortcomings of standard economic theories. Since then it has gained wide support from academics, theorists and policy makers, and been applied by practitioners in their respective fields (Clark, 2005). The approach has been recognised for its strengths, which include its flexibility and interdisciplinary nature that allows application to a range of evaluative purposes. Also, its focus on people as ends in themselves rather than as a means to economic ends, the recognition of human diversity, agency, participation, and acknowledging that people have different values (Clark, 2005; Robeyns, 2005). The capability approach has also been subject to criticism from different angles (Clark, 2005; Pogge, 2010; Robeyns, 2005). A few of the key criticisms include:

Sen's approach is underspecified

As discussed and shown to be an issue between Sen and Nussbaum themselves, there has been much debate generally over these different approaches, which capabilities are most important, and whether capabilities should be prescribed (Clark, 2005; Robeyns, 2005). This has also raised issues regarding the difficulty of its 'operationalisation' (Clark, 2005).

Differential resource allocation

Sen was influenced by and strongly critical of Rawls's emphasis on primary goods (Sen, 1992). Pogge (2010) weighed up the claims of capabilities against a resourcist approach (such as Rawls's) to determine its plausibility as a public criterion of social justice. He is critical that the capability approach to evaluating individual difference imposes a vertical hierarchy of inequality which positions people as less or more well-endowed. The horizontal resourcist view focuses on

equal allocation of resources which avoids the stigma of vertical inequalities (Norwich, 2014). Pogge acknowledges that both approaches are able to address deprivation, albeit differently. He concludes that the capability approach cannot be awarded superior status as a public criterion of social justice over the resourcist approach, as Sen has claimed.

Overemphasis on freedom as the dominant value

Gasper & Van Staveren (2003) centralise the concept of freedom in their critique. Particularly Sen's shift in emphasis to a generalised conception of freedom to encapsulate all capabilities in achieving individual well-being and social development. They claim that not all values can be described in terms of freedom which excludes other important values such as democracy, respect and friendship. Different capabilities need to be recognised as valuable in their own right, not just as examples of freedom.

Capabilitarianism

"Capabilitarianism" is a term that Robeyns (2016, p. 397) suggests is synonymous with the capability approach that aptly reflects the wide-ranging and powerful character of the approach. This notion frames her critique of elements of Nussbaum's approach and introduces the alternative view she offers to address the "flaws" (p. 397). Robeyns is specifically critical of Nussbaum's emphasis on social justice theory and comparative quality of life, to the exclusion of other values. She feels Nussbaum restricts the capability approach to these two strands which prevents analysis of other values (such as sustainability and efficiency) and excludes conceptualisation of social practices (such as education). Robeyns argues that a capabilitarian framework includes theoretical and conceptual work on values and purposes beyond social justice and quality of life. She is also critical of Nussbaum's lack of accurate focus on the core characteristics of the capability approach. She feels that only two of Nussbaum's five essential elements are in fact core properties. To address the critique, Robeyns proposes a cartwheel view as an alternative perspective on the

approach that simultaneously reflects a more focused core and more wide-ranging (plural) applications (Robeyns, 2016).

An approach not a theory

The capability approach is not a theory. While this offers some flexibility, Walker (2015a, p. 294) describes the approach as "vulnerable to domestication". Consequently, application of the capability approach generally requires the addition of an explanatory theory (Robeyns, 2005) to make it more robust. This is also achieved by locating the approach within human development values, or attaching it to worthwhile capabilities in education (Walker, 2015a). The approach has been criticised for its absence of substantive theory and inability to explain poverty, inequality or well-being, particularly in an educational context (Unterhalter, 2003).

Walker (2015a) offers critique specifically in the context of higher education, identifying gaps for development in higher education research. She cautions against highly individualised and decontextualized accounts of well-being. Such a view fails to acknowledge entrenched social stratification (Hart, 2012; Unterhalter, 2003). She suggests that data, evidence and explanations should be placed in historical context. And she points out that the approach should not ignore economic factors but rather keep a multi-dimensional focus on well-being and agency, "working iteratively from lives to structures, histories and contexts, with due attention to power" (Walker, 2015a, p. 294).

Despite the critique, Clark (2005, p. 12) puts paid to concerns about the value and application of the capability approach. "The shear (sic) number, quality and diversity of practical applications that have emerged in recent years arguably lays to rest any remaining concerns about the possibility of making the CA operational". There is growing interest in applying the capability approach to investigate issues of inequality, exclusion, well-being, human rights and social justice in a wide range of fields, including education. This project is one such attempt.

3.7 The capability approach and education

Since 2003 educationists and academics have been exploring the "potentially strong and mutually enhancing" relationship between the capability approach to human well-being and education (Saito, 2003, p. 17). Education plays a developmental role in society, helping people live lives that are more capable, fulfilling and productive (Sen, 1997). The capability approach offers a conceptual tool for reflecting on the effectiveness of this role, and to consider how the process and content of education address inequalities and injustices (Hart, 2012).

3.7.1 Education as a capability

Education is a capability itself (Walker, 2006; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Education, both formal and informal, develops people's existing capacities into internal capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011). Teaching and learning results in the achievement of various valuable functionings. People develop knowledge, skills and abilities that enhance what they are able to do and be. Terzi (2007) argues for the status of education as a fundamental entitlement on the basis that it plays a crucial role in people's well-being, and absence of the opportunity to be educated essentially disadvantages individuals and would constitute unacceptable inequality.

Education has intrinsic value being an achievement in and of itself for the individual (Sen, 1997; Walker 2006a). Nussbaum reinforces the intrinsic value of education "as a source of lifelong satisfaction" (2011, p. 152). As a capability, education needs to extend beyond development of basic achievements and internal information. Skills and knowledge are important but the health of democratic society depends on creating citizens who have critical capacities, who can be creative, make decisions and participate actively in society. Education plays a significant role in developing capabilities that increase the freedom of the mind in its social environment (Nussbaum, 2006).

3.7.2 Education develops capabilities

Education is directly relevant to the well-being and development of people. It plays an instrumental role in the formation and expansion of (other) capabilities (Walker, 2006; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). It expands the opportunities of what people are able to be and do, such as be employed or to study further. The processes and outcomes of education facilitate agency and autonomy, and potentially provide the freedom to flourish. Nussbaum describes the instrumental role of education as a "fertile functioning" (2011, p. 152) in the development of other capabilities vital for addressing disadvantage and inequality. Sen (1997, 1999) acknowledges the significant role education plays in human development by enhancing human capital (providing people with skills as means of production) as well as human capability (enhancing the substantive choices people have). The former focuses on the agency aspect in promoting economic productivity and individual income. Although this is important, the benefits of education go beyond economic purposes to promoting a better life, thus bringing about economic *and* social change (Sen, 1997).

Nussbaum (1997, 2006) specifically identifies three capacities i.e. critical thinking, world citizenship and narrative imagination, central to her philosophical ideal of liberal education as "a higher education that is a cultivation of the whole human being for the functions of citizenship and life generally" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 9). Accordingly, healthy democratic society is enhanced by the capability of citizens who can engage in critical self-examination, think independently and reason logically about choices; who can deal respectfully with diversity, recognising their mutual humanity; and who are able to display compassion and insight into the experience of others (Nussbaum, 1997, 2006). This thinking concurs with Sen's capability view of people as active agents who make reflective choices and take responsibility for themselves and others. In this way the capability of education has a fundamental role to play in enhancing choice, agency and the capabilities for democratic citizenship.

3.8 Education as freedom

The capability approach is a human rights approach (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). The central idea being that all people have basic entitlements by nature of their humanity and that society has a duty to respect and support those rights. Nussbaum (2011) states that the notion of capabilities is broader than the notion of human rights. As such, the capability approach is one that can embrace education. The fundamental right to education (UN Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26) is a universal one that "…shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (United Nations, 1948). As a capability, education provides people with the ability to exercise freedom in choosing one kind of life over another, and it contributes towards the removal of 'unfreedoms' such as poverty, access to basic facilities or denial of basic rights (Sen, 1999, p. 4). These are potential barriers to basic freedom that deny people choice and opportunity, and that prevent development of further freedoms. From a capability perspective, education is about human development and the promotion of well-being of students "… not simply as abstract ideas, but as lived capacities at the level of everyday life" (Walker, 2005). It is both the means and end to freedom. The capability approach is a means by which society can meet its duty to the provision of education as a fundamental entitlement to contribute to human flourishing.

3.8.1 Functionings and capabilities

Educational functionings are learning achievements and they include what learners are able to do. For example being able to think critically, to interact with staff and other learners, to feel confident. These achievements may be set as deliberate goals, for example critical thinking may be a specific learning outcome within the curriculum. Or they may be achieved indirectly through the educational processes, for example a student may develop the ability to think critically through engaging in class discussion.

Educational capabilities are the opportunities learners have to achieve learning outcomes. For example, having the material or input that stimulates critical

thinking, being given group work tasks or having class discussions in which teachers and learners can engage with each other. Evaluations of what is fair and equal for different learners requires a focus on the capabilities rather than the functionings. It is possible for two learners to achieve the same educational outcomes without having the same capabilities (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). For example, two students may be equally able to think critically, but if the one has access to participate in a debating society and the other lives in a shack and heads the household, their opportunities to achieve that functioning are not equal. The capability approach focuses on the freedom to achieve those functionings and capabilities that the individual values. Although from a pragmatic point of view, Sen states that "…in practice, one might have to settle… for relating well-being to the achieved – and observed – functionings, rather than trying to bring in the capability set" which is not directly observable (Sen, 1992, p. 52). This might be more aligned to Nussbaum's internal capabilities.

Nussbaum's list of capabilities can be applied in an educational context and she highlights particularly the capabilities of *Affiliation*, *Practical Reason* and *Senses, Imagination and Thought* as being intrinsic to education (Nussbaum, 2002b; 2006). Walker (2015a) highlights specifically affiliation, critical capacities and ethical citizenship in higher education. Walker and Wilson-Strydom have proposed their own capability lists specifically for education. These serve as a core of educational capabilities for student development. Walker (2006) has compiled an ideal-theoretical list of eight capabilities for higher education. She offers this list of opportunities as a starting point for skills and capacities to be fostered in higher education. Wilson-Strydom (2016) used a 'top-down and bottom-up' approach to compile a list of seven capabilities as an evaluative measure of performance and readiness for student transition into university.

3.8.2 Education for capability development

The focus of the capability approach in education is of capabilities as the means and the end of the educational process. Capabilities are developed by giving learners as individuals, the opportunity to reflect on what they value, to make

meaningful choices (from a range of options), to participate actively, and to achieve valuable functionings (a capability set) in order to live the life they have reason to value. A student with a wide capability set has more functionings from which to choose and is empowered to do more with his life, which ultimately gives him the potential to achieve greater well-being (Walker, 2015a). Education is a complex arrangement of resources, processes and outcomes, and the promotion of valued doings and beings cannot be automatically assumed (Flores-Crespo, 2007).

> In order to situate education within the capability approach, it is necessary to recognise the simple but important fact that the educational process normally occurs within institutions, that knowledge is achieved through written and visual material, that pupils are guided by teachers, and that generally students are educated by having an intense social interaction with others. The school environment, therefore, entails diverse factors that may condition the acquisition of knowledge, the development of reason and, therefore, our present and future human freedoms. (Flores-Crespo, 2007, pp. 60 – 61)

There are many factors in the school environment that contribute to and enable the development of capabilities. However, in the absence of opportunity, these same factors have the potential to contribute to "capability failure" (Sen, 1992, p. 109).

3.8.2.1 Access and capabilities

While access to education is an important first step, focusing on access does not guarantee development of capabilities (Flores-Crespo, 2007; Trani, Bakhshi & Nandipati, 2012). The study by Trani et al. (2012) showed that despite international policies that encourage access to education for all, and in spite of systemic changes enabling access to education for children with disabilities as well as significantly increased resources in schools in Afghanistan, the opportunities of these children were not commensurately increased and they remained marginalised and excluded. Access to education needs to be supported by learning content and processes that expand the choices of vulnerable groups and individuals and creates opportunities for social interaction and participation (Trani et al., 2012).

Capabilities do not guarantee access. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may leave school with the required capabilities. However, they are often constrained by personal, social or environmental factors from converting the aspiration for higher education into access. For them, the disadvantage of not accessing higher education could perpetuate their disadvantages (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015).

Access to higher education is marked by a difficult transition, and access does not guarantee success. Students need the basic capabilities for university readiness in order to be able to participate and achieve success in higher education (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). In this respect schools have a responsibility to develop capabilities to prepare school leavers for the opportunity of accessing higher education and enabling them to cope with the transition.

Access and capabilities may translate into success. Some students from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds do gain access to higher education. Research has shown that despite their background these students have been able to draw on their agency and resilience in order to succeed (Ellery & Baxen, 2015; Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010). Studies on the first-year experience have shown that students need support, and can benefit from programmes that harness their agency (Pym & Kapp, 2013).

These factors relating to access to education are important in the South African context where priority is being given to access to higher education. Access will not translate into success without capabilities developed in school to assist with the transition, and without capabilities development in higher education to enable effective participation and success, particularly given the growing numbers and increasing diversity amongst students.

3.8.2.2 Choices in education

Choice is a central concept in the capability approach, closely linked with a person's agency. When it comes to education choice the UN Declaration for

Human Rights on Education (Article 26) states that parents have a prior right to the choice of their children's education (United Nations, 1948). According to the capability approach there are situations where an adult may make a choice on behalf of a person whose agency is limited particularly when the choice influences the individual's future freedom and well-being (Sen, 1985). Children need support in choosing what is best for their lives (Saito, 2003). For example, a parent may choose a school/university for a child, or a professional may guide a student on programme selection. Capabilities need to be considered in terms of a person's lifespan so that not only current but also future choices and freedoms are taken into account (Saito, 2003; Walker, 2005). Decisions over subject choice made now will influence career direction in the future. A student may be incapable of conceiving the longer-term implications of his subject choice at the time of having to make the selection, in which case the choice may need to be made on his behalf, or directed by a parent or teacher, in order to provide him with options and opportunities in future.

There is a triangular relationship between learners (specifically those who lack agency), adults (parents or guardians) and organisations (including the state and schools). This raises a "choice-equity dilemma" in education provision (Norwich, 2013, p. 125). The dilemma lies in the tension between autonomy and control, where decisions made by those in control need to ensure they advance the autonomy of the learner. Choices must ensure equitable provision of opportunity and the protection of the rights of the less advantaged. Those rights include the option to participate in the choice.

3.8.2.3 Choice of institution

An educational institution plays a significant part in students' well-being. Therefore the choice of institution is important for parents and students. Kelly's (2012) research in secondary schools in England on the relationship between schooling and well-being, revealed the following factors pertaining to students' choice of institution: (*i*) Students' choice is made according to options that are considered to be feasible, affordable and have perceived value for the individual.

The ‘first-choice’ of institution is based on the best available institution, limited by their personal circumstances. For example, the option of attending a private institution is not an opportunity if it is not affordable or if they don’t perceive the curriculum to be relevant. (*ii*) Students adapt their preferences for choice of institution according to what they think is possible and realistic rather than what they want. Kelly explains that this apparent ‘lack of ambition’ may result in higher levels of fulfilment and well-being for those individuals. (*iii*) Choice (or non-choice) is influenced by (conversion) factors over which a student feels he has no control, for example his rate of learning. Such factors may engender low expectations or “anti-aspiration” (Kelly, 2012, p. 288). Consequently, having a wider choice of schools does little to increase the student’s performance and aspiration due to school-non-choice factors. (*iv*) The extent of choice is important in determining satisfaction. Students’ perception of a ‘good education’ is more closely related to having had genuine choice than it is about being in a ‘good school’ or on a ‘good course’. (*v*) Choices are subject to elements of chance and uncertainty. A student’s perception of choosing an institution that will provide them with advantage is that which reduces the risk from uncertainty. Kelly describes this as a motivation for opting for private education, “…what private schooling does is lower the risk from uncertainty by reducing the number of additional ‘inferior’ elements in the set of possibilities” (Kelly, 2012, p. 289). In this way, private schooling mitigates against the unwanted variables that potentially exist in state education. On the whole, the choice of institution is made based on personal, social and circumstantial factors that will enable the student to convert the schooling (as a resource) into achievements that they value.

3.8.2.4 Participation and well-being

The right to education goes beyond access, to participation (Deprez & Butler, 2007). Widening participation is a central tenet in international policies aimed at transformative education that is inclusive and equitable (UNESCO, 2015). Learners should be given the opportunity not only to participate in education/schooling but should be ensured of the opportunity to participate in the educational processes, for example, class discussion, group projects or even

extra-curricular activities. Participation in educational programmes has been shown to increase students' confidence, sense of self-worth and future aspiration. It enhances capabilities development including agency and affiliation with others (Deprez & Butler, 2007; Raynor, 2010).

Absence from participation denies the individual the opportunity for learning and for capability development. When students are denied the opportunity to participate in education – by their parents, by lack of funding, by student protests, by cultural tradition or values – Sen states this is a denial of the basic conditions of participatory freedom (Sen, 1999). This denies the student the opportunity for future freedoms and well-being (Saito, 2003) and deprives society of informed and capable citizens for the future (Nussbaum, 2011). This is an argument for compulsory education at all levels.

The notion of choice is closely linked with participation. When lack of participation is accompanied by lack of choice it leaves the individual without control in her life. When a parent dictates what his child should study or that she may not study, it denies the student agency. This could result in adapted preference settling for a future role that was socially expected of her rather than what she wanted to do (Raynor, 2010). When students choose not to participate in lectures this pits their right to choice against their right to participate. In these circumstances agency is of prime importance in making the decision and understanding the consequences involved and in taking responsibility for the choice.

Lack of participation is not always attributable to lack of opportunity or exclusion. The South African government, and many other countries worldwide, are driving agendas of widening access and participation in higher education. However, there are costs, both time and financial, associated with participation in higher education. Add to this any school-non-choice factors (Kelly, 2012) such as poor marks, language difficulty etc. that may lead to low expectations at the time of leaving school and it may be that young people do not aspire to participate in higher education. They may prefer to find a job to earn an income (Watts &

Bridges, 2006). The study by Watts and Bridges (2006) dispels the assumption that lack of participation in higher education reflects an adapted preference or lack of aspiration. The development of capabilities is centred around freedom to choose what one *values to be or do*. If higher education does not offer an individual an option that he values then it is not a choice that he will make (Kelly, 2012) and it will not expand his capabilities. The benefits of education in expanding capabilities are evident. Non-participation in higher education (and participation in something else) is also a choice for young people in choosing what they value to be and to do.

3.8.2.5 Agency and well-being

Development of student agency is very important in higher education. Student agency is central to higher education pedagogical processes and outcomes as students have to take responsibility for themselves and apply self-discipline in their work. It is important they are given the opportunity to enhance their agency. According to Walker (2015a) agency operates at two levels in higher education. Firstly the level of agency in choice, this addresses the extent to which students have the freedom to make choices. The ability to make choices requires having the capacity to reflect on and consider options, and then to take responsibility for the option selected. Students make subject choices, career choices, choice of which group to work with etc. Secondly, the level of agency values and goals, this addresses the extent to which students have the opportunity to develop values and reflect on how they act and the choices they make, particularly regarding others. Education imparts values and individual values form part of a student's capability set. Education prepares students not only as capable, responsible individuals but also to contribute towards and be responsible for others in the world. Advancing students' agency contributes to their well-being. When students advance the well-being of others this too contributes to their own agency and sense of well-being. Higher education that engages students in critical and reflective thinking and decision making processes fosters participation, agency and well-being, empowering them to make a difference in their own lives and in the lives of others.

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Agency enhances well-being and success. Education programmes can advance student agency through developing personal identity, particularly for first-generation students (Luckett & Luckett, 2009), providing opportunities for critical and creative thinking and ethical citizenship (Biggeri & Santi, 2012; Walker, 2015a); providing opportunities for students to express themselves (Biggeri, 2007). Existing capacities of agency need to be harnessed and expanded (Ellery & Baxen, 2015; Pym & Kapp, 2013). Lack of agency, or constrained agency equates to disadvantage (Walker, 2006). While support programmes can benefit students, they also run the risk of undermining student agency (Botsis, Dominguez-Whitehead & Liccardo, 2013; Pym & Kapp, 2013).

3.9 Capabilities in higher education

The thematic analysis of the data collected in this study revealed four themes – Aspiration, Affiliation, Reflection and Resilience. The themes are an abstract description of the patterns of meaning that emerged from the analysis. These comprise capabilities relevant for higher education. The inductive analytical process of coding and pattern seeking that was followed is described in detail in Chapter Four and the themes form the framework for the discussion of the findings in Chapter Five. Each of the themes is presented here to situate them in the study, firstly giving a broad definition and description of the concept, followed by an explanation of its role as a capability and its potential as a capability in higher education.

3.9.1 Aspiration

Aspirations are dynamic, future-orientated hopes for something that lies ahead. They can be relevant to any aspect of life and are commonly situated in the context of higher education (Galliot, 2015; Othman, Nordin, Nor, Endot, Azmi, Ismail & Yaakob, 2013; Rahim & Azman, 2010). Aspirations relate to changed preferences of how people want to be in future, driven by new needs, and striving for new ways of being and doing (Nathan, 2005). They drive action and play an

important role in people's opportunities for well-being (Hart, 2016). Aspirations are realistic, even if they are ambitious, and may be used for setting and measuring personal targets as a person strives for something they feel is attainable. Rather than being inherent properties that get revealed, aspirations are constructed as they are contemplated and are revealed through a reflective process of becoming aware (Conradie and Robeyns, 2013). An individual may have a high degree of agency with regard to their aspirations or they may be determined under the influence of others (Hart, 2016).

3.9.1.1 The capability of aspiration

Aspirations are related to capabilities as they are embedded in what a person strives to be able to be and do. Capabilities are inherently aspirational, fuelled by a hope either to have an opportunity or for its achievement. Nussbaum relates dignity to the idea of active striving, and therefore aspiration is linked to capabilities as "something inherent in the person that exerts a claim that it should be developed" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 31). Aspiration has a dual role in the capabilities approach, not only do capabilities enable aspiration but aspiration is also a "forerunner" to many capabilities (Conradie & Robeyns, 2013; Hart, 2016, p 329; Nussbaum, 2016). Nussbaum's list of capability entitlements makes demands for goals, policies and constitutions that strive for equality, social justice and human dignity. These entitlements are themselves intended to give hope for the pursuit of well-being and a flourishing life (Nussbaum 2016). There are many factors that influence the freedom a person has to aspire, the kinds of aspirations they develop, and the conversion of aspirations into capabilities. This includes social, economic, cultural, political and geographic factors that result in individual and group differences in aspiration (Hart, 2016; Nathan, 2005).

3.9.1.2 Aspiration in higher education

Higher education is an aspiration for most school leavers (Othman et al., 2013; Rahim & Azman, 2010) even for school 'failures' (Wright, Maylor & Becker, 2016). It inspires a hope for a better future, it is considered an opportunity for individual transformation, social upliftment and promotes a sense of possibility (Wright et

al., 2016). Parents aspire for their children to attend higher education, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds who did not have the opportunity themselves (Rahim & Azman, 2010). The aspiration for higher education and its potential as a gateway for social mobility can unlock agency and enable achievement that transcends social, cultural and financial barriers (Conradie & Robeyns, 2013; Ellery & Baxen, 2015). Many students assign importance to the role of higher education in meeting their aspiration for employment prospects (Bezuidenhout & De Jager, 2014). Consideration of educational aspirations in the framework of the capability approach allows a multi-dimensional view beyond the narrow, instrumental human capital view of labour market aspirations (Hart, 2016; Kenway, 2011).

Educational institutions may promote the capacity of individuals to aspire, however without the freedom to exercise this capacity, aspiration is constrained and the capacity to convert aspiration into capabilities is restricted. Ray (2016, p. 320) describes an "aspirational gap" which is the difference between socially generated aspirations and the current socio-economic level that the individual enjoys. In such circumstances a change in aspirations is a source of frustration and resentment rather than an inspiration. This is reflected in the *#FeesMustFall* movement which is a response to the frustration of such aspirations in conjunction with constrained capability. Widening access and participation in higher education to improve student equity may well open the way for young people to achieve their aspirations. However, the presence of other external and internal constraints, such as lack of accommodation, unaffordable fees, inadequate schooling, unreliable transport can fuel frustration and resentment when hope fades and aspiration is not met. Aspiration is a social, cultural and spatial practice that reflects ways of knowing and being, giving recognition to the diversity of individuals, their aspirations and opportunities, particularly in higher education contexts (Kenway, 2011). Evaluating well-being through the recognition of diversity and the real freedoms people have to choose and live the life they have reason to value (Sen, 1987) means recognising different individual aspirations.

3.9.2 Affiliation

The concept of affiliation has its root in the Mediaeval Latin term *affiliare* which means to adopt as a son, indicating the closeness of association linked with familial bonding (Collins, 2012). Affiliation speaks of a connectedness, a sense of belonging and identification with others; it is intimately linked with inclusion. As humans we have affiliations with individuals and social groups which often reflect ideals of 'sameness' and equality.

3.9.2.1 The capability of affiliation

Humanity lies at the centre of the capability approach. We have a common humanity but as humans, our physical and social characteristics distinguish us individually, and in comparison, differentiate us from each other. Sen rejects the presumption that all men are created equal, as the problem of inequality arises from the empirical fact of pervasive human diversity (Sen, 1992). The quest for equality, though, arises foremost from our sense of affiliation as humans, and our desire that things should be as equal as possible amongst us.

Development is an individual and social responsibility "as competent human beings" (Sen, 1999, p. 283). There is an interplay between our role as individuals in society and society's impact on our individual lives. Individual freedom is a social commitment, our individual agency is constrained and enhanced by social, political and economic influences and opportunities. We live a social existence and the freedom to achieve valuable combinations of human functionings is evaluated in a social context and operates through social institutions. Capabilities are formed in society; they affect the lives of individuals intrinsically and also instrumentally impact the lives of others. Nussbaum (2011) states that capabilities belong first and foremost to individuals, and then by derivation to groups. Social institutions enhance and sustain individual freedoms and with freedom comes responsibility (for self and others). Not only are capabilities socially developed but also society plays a role in determining the specific capabilities that are significant in that social context (Sen, 2005).

The capability of affiliation is one of three amongst Nussbaum's ten central capabilities that are particularly relevant for education. It is described as "architectonic" (Walker, 2015a, p. 290) as it plays a distinctive role in structuring other capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011). This capability is foundational for a capability approach in higher education (Walker, 2015a). Walker's (2006) ideal-theoretical list of capabilities for higher education includes two capabilities in particular that are focused on affiliation. *Social relations and social networks* involves the ability to participate in groups, work with others, form friendships and experience a sense of belonging. *Respect, dignity and recognition* generally involves trust (for oneself and others), being treated with dignity, valuing diversity, acting inclusively, and being able to speak and be heard.

3.9.2.2 Affiliation in higher education

Education plays a significant role in the development of capabilities. It is a social institution and has affiliation at the core of its substance and processes. The outcomes of higher education include the expectation that graduates will make a contribution to social well-being and public life (Walker, 2006). We live in an era of globalisation and internationalisation. The world of the future is going to be increasingly interconnected.

> Citizens who cultivate their humanity need, further, an ability to see themselves as not simply citizens of some local region or group but also, and above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern. …the world around us is inescapably international (Nussbaum, 2002b, p. 295).

Students in higher education are being educated for citizenship in a complex interlocking world and as such, higher education institutions can prepare students by providing them with the opportunities for affiliation.

3.9.3 Reflection

Reflection is a metacognitive process in which thoughtful consideration is given to experiences in order to attach meaning to them. It is based on input from all the senses and involves an integration of the thoughts, feelings, motivations and interactions that make up an experience in a cognitive surfacing of what has happened or is happening (Ryan, 2005). Reflection transforms experience and is

at the heart of how people navigate their world (Dyke, Johnston & Fuller, 2012). Reflection is contextual, being impacted by and taking into account the environment and other people who form part of the experience (Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Dyke et al., 2012; Ryan, 2005). Critical reflection is a recursive process of reflection that incorporates the contemplation of alternatives and potentialities based on experience (Brockbank & McGill, 2007).

3.9.3.1 The capability of reflection

Reflection ties in closely with Nussbaum's central capabilities, particularly *Practical reason.* Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 34). Reflection also involves the capabilities of *Senses, imagination and thought* connecting experience and choice, which can be developed through education; as well as *Emotions* and *Affiliation* as our experiences frequently occur in relationship and are seldom devoid of emotion. The opportunity to make decisions or take action based on reflective introspection provides a person with a sense of agency that can influence their educational and career pathways (Dyke et al., 2012).

> Development of the person is the aspiration, where the capacity to learn is increasingly in the learner as greater autonomy is reached. The learner is able to be critical in relation to the domains of knowledge, self and the world, where the learner is able not only to embrace knowledge but also to bring self, including emotion and action, into the learning process. (Brockbank & McGill, 2007, p. 4)

The capability of reflection enables other capabilities. When students think critically about what they are learning, they simultaneously learn about themselves and how they learn. This empowers them to take control of their own learning process. Not only do they become more knowledgeable but also more efficient in developing their knowledge.

3.9.3.2 Reflection in higher education

Thinking and reflection underpin growth and learning (Ryan, 2005). Reflection and the ability to reflect plays a significant role in epistemological and ontological 'becoming' (Brooman & Darwent, 2012; Fataar, 2010). Fataar's study of first-generation university students (2010) showed that students' learning is situated

in their background experiences on which they reflect and which influences their capabilities and professional 'becoming'. Reflection may occur intrinsically and autonomously, it may also be explicitly facilitated by another. In the context of higher education both teachers and students are involved in the process of reflection in the pedagogical interactions. The institution is instrumental in enabling the capability of reflection. Reflective practice has been shown to benefit first-year students in the transition to higher education even if they are not experienced or accomplished reflectors (Brooman & Darwent, 2012).

3.9.4 Resilience

Resilience is the attribute of being able to bounce back after being under pressure. The attribute of being able to rebound is not only a physical property relevant to elastic objects (The Physics Classroom, 2016) it has also come to describe a psychological trait, and is an important contributor to a person's well-being. In general, resilience is acknowledged as "a dynamic two-dimensional construct including the experience of adverse conditions and the presence of positive skills in coping with these conditions" (Beddoe, Davys & Adamson, 2013). Adverse conditions broadly include those that place a person at risk, under stress or hardship and are disruptive to their functioning (Adamson, Beddoe & Davys, 2014). Adversity may impact on a person's being physically, emotionally, cognitively or psychologically. While an adverse experience has the potential to compromise well-being, "positive adaptation" (Adamson et al., 2014, p. 524) is a response to adversity that potentially promotes well-being. Resilience lies in the ability to adapt positively in the face of adversity. It can be viewed as a personal quality, a process, and an outcome (Beddoe et al. 2013).

What constitutes adversity differs from person to person, as does each individual's range of skills to cope with any form of stress. As people respond differently to risk or adversity, resilience reflects those individual variations both in the response and the extent of the rebound or transformation (Ledesma, 2014). Resilience capacity is fuelled by a person's values, efficacy and energy, which account for the uniqueness of response. Responses may range from survival

(ongoing, albeit possibly impaired functioning), to recovery (return to baseline functioning) or thriving. Thriving is a transformative response characterised by growth and strengthened resilience as a result of a “cognitive shift” (Ledesma, 2014, p. 3).

3.9.4.1 The capability of resilience

The opportunity for an individual to flourish requires resilience. The capacity to thrive is strongly influenced by a number of internal and external variables that determine how an individual interprets and deals with the adversity he encounters (Ledesma, 2014). Personal factors that support resilience include personality attributes, personal values and experience (Beddoe et al., 2013; Ledesma, 2014). This includes skills and attributes that promote hardiness and the ability to cope such as strong motivation, a strong sense of agency and control, emotional intelligence, self-awareness and a reflective disposition, as well as a belief in one’s own capabilities (Beddoe et al., 2013; Ledesma, 2014). It is the presence of these traits in the individual that facilitate the capability of resilience. Above all there is a positive correlation between optimism and positive response to stress. People who expect positive outcomes from stressful situations are more likely to experience growth (Ledesma, 2014). There are also external variables that influence a person’s resilience. These lie in the social and contextual environment. In line with the laws of physics, the ‘energy’ for the rebound response lies in relation to others. Relationships are central to an individual’s ability to coping with adversity.

> At the core of a person’s ability to sustain himself is his intimacy with others, and sometimes these relationships serve as the major catalyst of the transformation in one’s life and within oneself (Ledesma, 2014).

Affiliation, social commitment and support form a critical component of resilience and an individual’s ability to respond positively to adversity (Beddoe et al., 2013; Ledesma, 2014).

3.9.4.2 Resilience in higher education

Resilience can be learned and education has a role to play in strengthening students’ resilient qualities and building resilient practitioners (Beddoe et al.,

2013; Ledesma, 2014). Educating people to become resilient practitioners is important for the development of professional identity, sustained practice and retention in the work place, as well as enhancing individual well-being (Beddoe et al., 2013). This can be translated into students becoming resilient scholars, where the value lies in retention and throughput in the programme, and their well-being as students. Once qualified, there is the potential for students to transfer this knowledge to become resilient practitioners in the work place. Sriskandarajah, Bawden, Blackmore, Tidball and Wals (2010) support the argument for addressing resilience through education, however they extend its value beyond preparing resilient work practitioners. Educational strategies need to do more than teach *about* resilience, and educate *for* resilience but should develop resilience *in* education. Learning as a transformative process at the individual level incorporates education for knowing, doing and being. As students reflect on and make sense of their experiences, and understand their role as agents in their own learning system, they develop knowledge and values that transform their ways of doing and being in the world (Sriskandarajah et al., 2010).

> In a nutshell, the more complex the epistemic perspectives of learners, the greater their capacity to deal with complex, messy uncertainties in the situations they come to experience in the course of their everyday lives (Sriskandarajah et al., 2010, p. 569).

Resilience compounds and engenders greater resilience. Accordingly, first year students are less resilient than students at more advanced levels of study. As students learn from experience they are able to adapt their knowing and to transform what they are able to do, which promotes further resilience. This promotes an argument for preventing student dropout. Dropping out reinforces failure. If students can be retained in the system, they have a better chance of being successful as they become more resilient.

3.9.4.3 Organisational resilience

Organisations have the capacity to foster (or diminish) resilience in people through the environment they create, the culture, structures and legislative frameworks (Adamson et al., 2014). Organisational factors that impact resilience are context-specific but generally relate to inter-personal relationships and

professional skills (Beddoe et al., 2013). Contextualised in a higher education institution these factors include, amongst others, support from peers and lecturers, development of professional knowledge and skills, and understanding institutional culture. Educational organisations need to ensure that they create the environment to support and foster the development of resilience in learners. This can take place through educational strategies that prepare and equip students for resilient practice (Beddoe et al., 2013; Ledesma, 2014). There are elements that are intrinsic to the institution that forge students' resilience, such as the culture, procedures, policies etc., but it can also be instrumentally developed through the curriculum, disciplinary knowledge and through the teaching and learning interactions (Beddoe et al., 2013). These institutional factors may constrain or enhance student resilience and thereby their functioning and well-being.

3.10 Conclusion

The capability approach is a comprehensive and "deeply interdisciplinary" approach (Robeyns, 2006b, p. 79) with rich implications for education theoretically, empirically and in professional practice (Hart, 2012; Unterhalter, 2013). The growing interest in the capability approach, and the suitability of education as a particular "creative space" for the application of the approach (Unterhalter, 2013, p. 187) has led to an increasing volume of literature on the capability approach in education. The suitability of the approach within education in South Africa lies in its human rights agenda giving recognition to diversity, inequalities and promoting equity. Its suitability in higher education in South Africa lies in its focus on the potential of what lies beyond access, and development of individual opportunities in and through education. Its suitability for South African students lies in the opportunity to become capable agents and active citizens who are able to flourish in the interconnected world of the 21st century.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Research methodology is concerned with the philosophical values and principles that underpin a research quest. The methodology describes the approach taken in the research process, and draws attention to the theoretical constructs that form the conceptual framework for solving the research problem. The methodological principles form the basis on which the research design is premised that in turn shape the methods of data collection and analysis (Ma, 2016). The methodology is the theoretical framework that supports and guides the research practice. It provides the way in which the ideas and evidence are organised, the format for communicating the findings, and is essential for establishing the legitimacy of the research work (Daly, 2003).

The purpose of this chapter is to make explicit the methodological paradigm in which this research project is located, as well as the design and methods it informed. The research procedures and processes will be explained and accounted for, also taking the design limitations into consideration.

4.2 Research paradigm

This study makes use of an intensive research design in an interpretive paradigm, the central endeavour of which is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Interpretivism is a school of thought that argues that knowledge of reality is subjective and socially constructed through interpretation (Chowdhury, 2014; Goldkuhl, 2012; Walsham, 1993). Meaning is found through social interaction and people's actions must be interpreted and understood in the context in which they occur. This stands in contrast to the positivist view that knowledge is objectively deduced outside of

human experience. An interpretive approach sets out to understand the social world, looking for meaning and motives behind people's actions. The researcher is personally involved in the knowledge acquisition therefore interpretivists recognise the researcher's personal influence on the enquiry and role as a variable in the sense-making. As the interpretation of meaning is subjective, "[k]nowledge therefore is always a matter of knowing *differently*" (Usher, 1996, p. 19, italics in original). This allows for multiple interpretations of reality. Educational research, which is focused on social practices, provides an appropriate context for the use of an interpretive methodology (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Usher, 1996).

4.3 Research design

The research design describes the general conditions and procedures to be followed in conducting a research study, including how the data will be collected and analysed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The design structures the enquiry according to guidelines derived from the philosophical basis – which in this study is an interpretive paradigm. The research design needs to be 'fit for purpose' therefore the specific design selected should be one that is most appropriate to address the purpose of the research (Cohen et al., 2007).

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of students' experiences and their actions and interactions within the social context of a higher education institution. An intensive research design takes a predominantly qualitative approach making detailed observations and seeking to build understanding of social meaning by focusing on depth rather than numerate quantity (Daly, 2003). The following characteristics of qualitative research described by McMillan & Schumacher (2014, pp. 345 – 348) are relevant to this study. These are briefly listed here and will be discussed in greater detail as the research method and data processing is explained later in this chapter.

Context sensitivity: this is a context-based study. The participants' responses and their interpretation of the meaning of their experiences is situated in the context of the institution and the larger context of their lives.

Direct data collection: the researcher will collect the data directly from the participants.

Rich narrative descriptions: the daily higher education experience of participants will be described in their own voice to provide rich narrative descriptions.

Participant perspectives: the participants will describe their own subjective reality; their experience from their own perspective. The participants will be "interpreters and co-producers of meaningful data" (Goldkuhl, 2012, p. 6).

Process orientation: the study seeks to understand not only what students experience but also how they interpret their experience and what meaning they give to it. The study also seeks to explain the factors that influence those experiences.

Inductive data analysis: the data will provide understanding and meaning will be obtained by means of an inductive analytical process.

Complex understanding and explanation: in this study the "double hermeneutic" (Usher, 1996, p. 19) will apply as the researcher is seeking to interpret the way in which the participants interpret their world. This is an iterative process as complex understanding emerges through the to-and-fro, and as the interpretation of parts builds a fuller understanding of the whole (Goldkuhl, 2012; Usher, 1996).

The intention of this study is not to abstract a normative account of human behaviour, but rather to focus on the individuals' interpretations of the world around them in order to elicit meaning within the specific context. This study will reflect a reality in one place and at one time. However, bearing in mind the risk of such an approach becoming "hermetically sealed" beyond the 'boundaries' of the participants' activities (Cohen et al., 2007 p. 26) and in the interests of the findings having the potential to be transferable to other contexts, consideration was given to using multiple methods to achieve the purpose of this study.

4.3.1 Mixed methods design

Research methodologies incorporate a range of approaches, techniques and procedures used within a research paradigm to gather data (Cohen et al., 2007). Traditionally, researchers selected either a quantitative or a qualitative paradigm in which to conduct research. While each is strongly argued from positivist and constructivist epistemologies respectively, it is questionable whether either of them on their own is able to serve the purpose of educational research (Alexander, 2006). In response to this duality, the argument is presented for a third research paradigm (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). Mixed methods research introduced a new era of integrated approaches across social and behavioural sciences (Greene, 2008; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007a). According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, a mixed methods approach offers a logical and practical alternative to broker the peace in the "paradigm wars" (2004, p. 17) accommodating both quantitative and qualitative methods, drawing on the strengths and minimising the weaknesses of each method. Despite paradigmatic differences in the traditional approaches they have areas of commonality and are able to complement each other, particularly in the increasingly complex and inter-disciplinary world of social research (Collins, Onwuegbuzie & Sutton, 2006; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007a).

There have been inconsistencies in the conceptualisation of whether the focus of the mixed methods approach is on methods or methodology (Morgan, 2007; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007a). Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) provide an inclusive definition that focuses on the integrative nature of mixed methods research which they define as:

> research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry (p. 4).

The focus on integration is significant, as mixed methods research is more than a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Fetters, 2016). Johnson et al. (2007, p. 129) describe it as "an intellectual and practical synthesis". It is a meaningful convergence of philosophy, viewpoints, traditions, methods and conclusions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014) for mutual benefit, so that the end

product is more than the sum of the individual quantitative and qualitative parts (Bryman, 2007). As a 'best of both' it offers a "transcendent view" (Alexander, 2006) beyond the objective vs subjective, the theory vs practical, the empirical vs phenomenological that is relevant to attempts to understand the purpose and meaning of human experience in educational settings. In intersection with issues of social justice, mixed methods can serve as a "transformative paradigm" for research that contributes towards enhancing human rights as a basis for social change (Mertens, 2007, p. 22).

4.3.2 Mixed methods 'fit-for-purpose'

A mixed methods approach was selected for this study investigating the capabilities of students in the context of their higher education experience. The study aims to identify and understand the personal, social and environmental factors that enable and constrain student functioning in order to ascertain how student capabilities are facilitated in the context of a private higher education institution. A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was selected as having the appropriate fitness-for-purpose for this study that explores mixed research questions including interconnected "what" and "how" components (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007b). This implies collection and analysis of first quantitative and then qualitative data in two consecutive phases within the one study, connected in the intermediate stage (Creswell, 2012; Ivankova et al., 2006; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The advantages of this design include the opportunity for the quantitative data to inform the qualitative research. The limitations include the length of time spent on the processes and the feasibility of effectively processing the volume of data collected (Ivankova, et al., 2006).

The visual model in Figure 1 (p. 89) shows the multi-stage design procedure of this research project portraying the activities that were followed in the research process. In line with mixed methods design, consideration was given to the sequence, priority, implementation and integration of the quantitative and qualitative approaches (Ivankova et al., 2006). The model specifies the sequence of the phases of data collection and analysis. It also provides some detail on the

procedures within each phase as well as the products or outcomes at each phase of the study. The capitalisation of the term ‘QUALITATIVE’ indicates the priority of this phase over the quantitative phase, and it shows its position following the quantitative phase as appropriate for a sequential explanatory design (Ivankova et al., 2006). The dark grey ovals represent the stages of integration of the quantitative and qualitative phases. Their relative position in the overall sequence of activities is evident, together with the relevant procedures and integrated products.

4.3.2.1 Complementary phases

The first phase of the project employed a quantitative approach comprising an online survey to obtain data pertaining to student functionings and capabilities. The second phase employed a qualitative approach comprising ten individual semi-structured interviews to obtain rich narrative data directly from the voices of participants describing their experiences in higher education. Neither of the elements individually would adequately answer the research questions. The major rationale for the use of a mixed methods design in this study – according to the list proposed by Greene et al. (1989) (cited in Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 22) – is *complementarity* (elaboration and enhancement of results from one method with results from the other), *development* (using the findings from one method to inform the other method) and *expansion* (using different methods to expand the breadth and range or research). The qualitative data collected in the latter phase enriches the understanding of the quantitative data obtained in phase one. As the intention was elaboration and expansion of data, the depth of focus lay with the interpretation of the qualitative narrative data.

4.3.2.2 Priority

This refers to the phase of the design where the emphasis lies (Ivankova et al., 2006). Throughout data collection and analysis, the emphasis of this study lies on the qualitative component (quan–QUAL). This was decided from the beginning of the project driven by the philosophical underpinnings and the purpose of the study which was to understand the subjective world of student experiences in

private higher education. The intention was not to do thorough statistical analysis of the quantitative data. The purpose of the quantitative phase was to identify student functionings and capabilities in the wider population to provide the grounding for elaboration in the interviews, and also to pre-empt the sampling for the second phase. The emphasis lies in the interpretation of the rich narrative data collected in the semi-structured interviews.

4.3.2.3 Implementation

This refers to the structure of the design and the sequence of the phases (Ivankova et al., 2006). In this study the phases ran consecutively with the qualitative phase following the quantitative phase. They were interconnected by an intermediate stage in which the quantitative data was analysed and the qualitative instrument prepared.

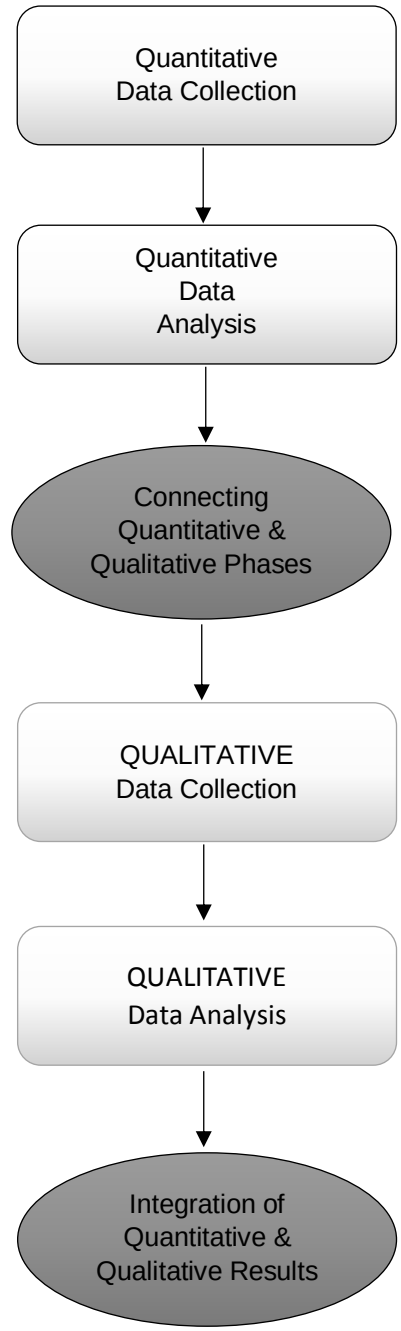
4.3.2.4 Integration

This refers to the stage in the research process where the quantitative and qualitative methods connect (Ivankova et al., 2006). Integration may take place at different stages in the research process to enable the complementary phases. There may be integration of research questions (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007b), sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), methods (Johnson et al., 2007) and inference (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007b). In this study, integration occurred (*i*) in the design stage where both quantitative and qualitative research questions were introduced; (*ii*) in the quantitative phase where the survey incorporated a Likert-type rating scale together with open-ended questions; (*iii*) in the intermediate stage where the interview questions were grounded in the quantitative data, and enabled participant selection for the qualitative interviews; (*iv*) in the qualitative phase where the survey responses were integrated into the interview for explanation; and (*v*) in the analysis stage where the text survey data was analysed together with the interview data, and where the findings from both phases were integrated into the discussion.

FIGURE 1:

VISUAL MODEL FOR MIXED METHODS

Sequential Explanatory Design Procedure



PHASE	PROCEDURE	PRODUCT
Quantitative Data Collection	• Online survey	• Numeric data • Some qualitative data
Quantitative Data Analysis	• Survey analysis	• Reports on response frequency • Reports of comments • Identify volunteers as potential interview participants
Connecting Quantitative & Qualitative Phases	• Development of interview questions • Random selection of interview participants	• Interview schedule • Sample of interview participants
QUALITATIVE Data Collection	• Individual semi-structured interviews with 10 participants	• Text data – interview transcripts • Audio data – recording of interviews
QUALITATIVE Data Analysis	• Coding and thematic analysis	• Codes and categories • Themes
Integration of Quantitative & Qualitative Results	• Interpretation and explanation of qualitative results • Response to quantitative and qualitative research questions	• Findings • Discussion • Implications • Future research

Adaptation of Visual Model for Mixed Methods Design (Ivankova et al., 2006)

4.4 Research process

This was a small-scale project conducted within the scope and parameters of a Masters' research project. The primary purpose of the study was to better understand the factors that enable and constrain student functioning in the context of a private higher education institution. This research project was structured in two phases in a sequential explanatory mixed methods design. The methods and procedures of the research process were conducted in accordance with the research paradigm and the research design. The quantitative data was collected at the end of the first semester (end of May/early-June). Interviews took place early in the second semester (mid-July to early-August).

4.4.1 Context and site

In line with the interpretive paradigm this study is concerned with interpreting students' experience in their unique situation in pursuit of "contextual depth" (Chowdhury, 2014, p. 434). The context is higher education and the research was conducted in a private higher education institution in South Africa. The particular institution has been my place of work for the past two years and was selected on the basis of convenience providing ease of access to participants.

The institution was established over twenty-five years ago and has campuses across the country. The educational offering includes a range of programme options, including Bachelor's degrees, Diplomas, Higher Certificates, as well as occupational and short learning programmes, providing a diverse range of learning and career options for students. The site of this study is an entity within the larger institution that has a niche programme offering at three campuses, in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Durban. Students are registered for one of two programmes – a four-year Bachelor's Degree or a three-year Diploma – on either a full-time or part-time basis. These programmes are framed in an overarching work-integrated learning conceptual framework where the academic curricula are linked to the workplace. Fees for these two programmes are upward of R45 000 per year based on a fixed rate per academic credit.

My working knowledge in the institution is of a diverse student demographic ranging across the socio-economic spectrum. The majority of the students come from middle to low income families having attended township and rural schools. Many of these students come from families that cannot afford the fees and are dependent on financial and other forms of assistance to attend higher education. I am aware that the institution makes financial assistance available to students by means of the option of a payment plan if required. It is not uncommon for students at this institution to adjust (reduce) their academic load according to their means, or even to suspend their studies for a period while they try to earn and save enough money to resume their studies. At the other end of the socio-economic spectrum are students who come from high-income families. Many of these students have a background of private schooling, live in the suburbs, drive their own cars, and their parents pay the fees.

Situated in this context, the study considers the influence of this institutional environment, as well as factors that are part of the wider context of each individual's life, on what they are able to do and be. For the purpose of this study, the single, clearly defined academic context has the advantage of consistency. The disadvantage is that this can lead to limited research findings that are not able to be generalised.

Having decided to locate the research in this institution, formal permission was requested from the Board of Directors, and granted by the Head of Institution (Appendix B: Institution permission request). I liaised with the three campus managers who co-ordinate the student lists, and the distribution of the communications and survey was centralised through the Marketing Co-ordinator who manages the institution's databases and communications media. These channels were followed at the behest of the institution's management who wanted to ensure their PoPI[4] compliance in the protection and dissemination of student information.

[4] Protection of Personal Information Act

4.4.2 Population

The population is the group of individuals from which a sample is drawn (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The population of this research project was registered first-year students. This cohort of students was specifically selected in preference to those in more advanced years of study for the following reasons:

a) First-year students are in transition into higher education and research shows that gaining an understanding of student capabilities can potentially facilitate the transition of students into higher education, and therefore also their retention and success (Wilson-Strydom, 2015).
b) The promotion of access to higher education has reinforced the diversity, inequalities and exclusions amongst first-year students (CHE, 2013; Walton et al., 2015) therefore it is important to address this level of student as a matter of social justice (Wilson-Strydom, 2015).
c) The highest rate of attrition occurs amongst first-year students (CHE, 2013). This has financial and academic implications for the individual, the institution and the national economy (Letseka & Maile, 2008).

4.4.3 Quantitative phase

The quantitative phase was a simple descriptive design, the goal of which was to encapsulate the current status of student capabilities as an initial investigation. It was not aimed at providing intervention (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The purpose of this phase was to respond to the "what" research questions (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007b). Quantitative data was collected using a survey. A survey is a popular method used in educational research to collect personal information directly from participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). It is a versatile approach that can be administered efficiently and economically to a relatively large number of people. The data obtained is numerical and accurate, and can be used for inference, description and explanation (Cohen et al., 2007).

4.4.3.1 Quantitative phase: Questionnaire

A questionnaire is an economical instrument that elicits the same information for a specific purpose from all participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). It is not

a sophisticated instrument but is a useful tool for data collection from a relatively large and dispersed sample and can be administered without the researcher being present (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This instrument was selected for this phase of the research as it is formatted with standard structured questions that enables a broad range of issues to be addressed, including relatively personal or sensitive issues that can be presented objectively and responded to anonymously (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The structured questions have the benefit of providing standardised data, however it does not allow for explanation or clarification of responses (Cohen et al., 2007, McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). As a research instrument, the researcher needs to bear in mind a questionnaire is an "intrusion" into the time and privacy of the respondent who should not be seen as a passive data provider but someone who is willingly involved in the research (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 317). Despite its ease of implementation, a questionnaire is a difficult and time-consuming tool to develop.

Questionnaire design

A questionnaire is designed according to its specific objectives in responding to the research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Questionnaire design follows a deductive process in which the general research purpose is translated into concrete aims aligned with the main concepts or topic and then formulated into very specific elements being researched about which direct empirical data can be gathered (Cohen et al., 2007). The type of questions asked (open, closed, scaled, ranked etc.) as well as the wording and content of the questions will determine the type and nature of data obtained from the responses. In constructing the questionnaire the nature of the questions posed should be those deemed most suitable to elicit the type of data best suited to respond to the research questions (Cohen et al., 2007). Question format and sequence as well as general layout of the questionnaire are also important elements in questionnaire design that can influence respondent participation (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

Prior to designing a new questionnaire, I researched existing surveys that had been conducted in empirical studies using the capability approach as a framework for evaluation. The existing questionnaires mostly measured well-being and quality of life in a variety of contexts – from Economics to public health and chronic pain (Anand, Hunter, Carter, Dowding, Guala & Van Hees, 2007; Kinghorn, 2010, Lorgelly, Lorimer, Fenwick & Briggs, 2008). None had been used in the context of education or could be used in its current format, therefore I determined to design a new questionnaire. I was able to take guidance from the questions in those studies as far as the general values-based and conceptual capabilities questions were concerned. Anand et al.'s (2007) study was most useful as it covered capabilities and well-being generally. Using those ideas together with my knowledge of the concepts of capabilities from the literature, and my understanding of educational principles based on my experience working in higher education, I adapted and formed questions for the specific context of this study.

The questionnaire was designed in accordance with the guidelines in the literature (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The purpose and objective of using a survey for this phase of the project was to obtain preliminary information from a broad and diverse sample of the student population as a general measure of their capabilities (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The aim was that this data would provide descriptive information of what students feel they are able to be and do, their sense of agency and autonomy, their participation and sense of belonging, and difficulties they experience. This numeric data provided an indication of frequency and patterns of responses as a general summary of students' experience. The intention was that this information would be explored and explained in greater depth through the individual interviews in the next phase of the project. Basic analysis was done to reveal areas where there was poor correlation of responses, so that these areas could be specifically investigated in the interviews (this is explained in paragraph 4.4.3.5). There was no attempt to provide detailed analysis of this data as the intention was

descriptive rather than to draw conclusions, to explain, or to generalise the information to the wider student population within the institution or beyond it.

Questionnaire content, structure and layout

The concepts being investigated were those that are central to the capability approach as evidence of what students have the opportunity to do and be. The aim was to identify the personal, social and environmental factors that influence the conversion of resources into capabilities for first-year students, including challenges that students experience that restrict their functioning. This aim informed the specific questions that were formulated that would provide the data required to respond to the research questions (Cohen et al., 2007). The questionnaire was semi-structured and most of the questions were closed form with predetermined responses but there were some open-ended questions. It is acceptable to include open questions in a questionnaire when the sample is small (Cohen et al., 2007). The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in the data collection stage is in line with a mixed methods approach (Ivankova et al., 2006). It combined the benefit of obtaining patterns from general responses to the closed questions with some specific individual input from the open responses (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

The questionnaire comprised 20 closed questions incorporating 82 statements. The questions were grouped in broad categories – Agency and autonomy; Academic participation; Belonging; Social participation; and Difficulties. Participants responded using a four-point Likert scale to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree). The neutral point was deliberately excluded from the scale in a forced-choice format so that respondents had to make a choice to either agree or disagree with each statement (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). A rating scale made it relatively easy for the respondents to score this number of responses without it being too arduous or time consuming. This question form builds in a small degree of differentiation of response and generates numbers of the frequency for each level (Cohen et al., 2007). This

provided adequate descriptive information required for the purpose of this phase (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The disadvantage of a rating scale is that it does not enable explanation and no information is obtained as to why a participant agrees or does not agree – unless an open-ended option is included.

In addition to the scaled items, there were six optional open-ended questions in the questionnaire. These provided respondents the option to comment and elaborate on elements in the questionnaire. The value of these questions was in allowing respondents to provide a free account of their experience in their own words as well as to qualify and explain any items relevant to any of the closed questions (Cohen, et al., 2007). One of the open questions provided the opportunity for participants to include an additional response besides the categories presented. This has the advantage of shedding light on unique factors or items that the researcher had not previously thought of. The data generated by the open-ended questions served to surface issues for exploration in the qualitative phase of the study. The disadvantage of using open questions is that respondents may include irrelevant or redundant information, and the data is arduous and time consuming to process (Cohen et al., 2007). In this study there were only a few open questions and the advantage of the specificity of the response and its transfer to the qualitative phase outweighed the fact that they required more processing than the numeric data.

The format of the survey was electronic, and it was hosted and administered online on the SoGoSurvey website. The questionnaire was formatted with a few compulsory questions upfront. Most important were the questions that ensured (*a*) that the participant had read the participant information letter and provided informed consent, and (*b*) was a registered first-year student. Failure by the participant to confirm either of those pre-requisites blocked their further participation through an electronic branching system coded into the questionnaire. Some of the other compulsory questions pertained to student registration details e.g. campus and registration status. These were included with the intention to collect data that would enable comparison between campuses or

between full-time and part-time students. This was beyond the scope of this project but remains a possibility for future research. In the body of the questionnaire, questions were structured in the aforementioned categories. Within each question category were a number of specific statements to which participants provided their response rating that generated the data. The final two questions in the questionnaire asked respondents about their willingness to participate in the interview in the next phase of the project. If they marked 'Yes' they were asked to supply contact information. This data provided the population for the qualitative phase of the project.

Web-based (online) questionnaire

Online questionnaires are becoming increasingly popular (Van Gelder, Bretveld & Roeleveld, 2010) and advancing technological developments in digital communication are making this format increasingly easy as an instrument for both the researcher and the respondents. The construction of an electronic questionnaire is subject to important considerations that can influence participation (Cohen et al., 2007; Van Gelder et al., 2010). Primarily there is the consideration of respondents' access to computers and the internet. Then there are technical considerations such as file size, which has implications for speed and ease of download. This also has design implications as the inclusion of design elements, graphics or attachments increases the file size and download time. Other design considerations relate to the presentation of the questionnaire such as layout of the screen, length of instructions and the number of questions that can appear on a page.

The advantages of a web-based survey are that it is cost- and time efficient to administer, provides ease of access for participants, and response time can be quick (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Van Gelder et al., 2010). An electronic survey can be distributed quickly, easily and simultaneously to a large number of people who are geographically dispersed. Using a specialist survey website (such as SoGoSurvey) enables distribution across multiple platforms and some programs also offer the service of basic statistical analysis. The SoGoSurvey

software made it easy to construct and format the questionnaire, and to test simulated versions ahead of implementation. Web-based questionnaires have been shown to have low response rates and issues with data reliability and validity in open access questionnaires (Van Gelder et al., 2010). My main concerns pertaining to the implementation of the electronic questionnaire in this study were that firstly, the file size should be small so as not to use much of the students' data in downloading and completing; and that it should be equally easy to read and complete on a computer screen and on a smartphone screen, either of which the participants may have chosen to use. In order to test the questionnaire before implementing the survey, I ran a pilot study.

4.4.3.2 Quantitative phase: Pilot Study

The validity of an instrument is the degree of appropriateness of its measure; the extent to which it tests what it aims to test. The validity of an instrument is relative to the context (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The reliability of a test is the consistency of the measure; the extent to which it produces the same results on repeated tests (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). It is important that a questionnaire has high validity and that a survey is reliable. For this reason it is important to give a questionnaire a pre-test (Cohen et al., 2007; Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001) and I conducted a pilot study. The intention was to use the pilot study to evaluate and refine the questions and facilitate the implementation of the survey (Creswell, 2012; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This included testing the efficiency of the online system, including access to and submission of the questionnaire, measuring the approximate amount of time taken to complete the questionnaire, and obtaining feedback on the language and clarity of instructions as well as the questions and response scale (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

The pilot study was conducted with a group of 23 fourth-year students. The questionnaire was administered electronically in a simulation of the full survey. Pilot study participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and then to answer a few more questions providing feedback on the process of the survey

and the content of the questionnaire (Appendix C: Pilot study). Only three responses were received. These responses provided negligible input on the content of the questionnaire, but the feedback provided did show that the online implementation was smooth, the web-based questionnaire easily accessible, and easy for respondents to complete and submit. Due to the disappointing response rate on the first attempt, I conducted a second pilot study in the format of a contact session to which a group of third-year students were invited. Only four students attended the session but this enabled me to test the timing (how long it took to complete the survey) and the volunteers provided verbal and written input on the content and language of the questions. Based on their feedback some modifications were made to the questionnaire (Thabane, Ma, Chu, Cheng, Ismaila, Rios, Robson, Thabane, Giangregorio & Goldsmith, 2010). The refinement of the questionnaire was done in discussion with my supervisor and entailed removing redundant and repetitious questions, and simplifying the language and structure of some statements to make them easier to understand. The questionnaire was updated and the final version was prepared and saved online in order to conduct the survey (Appendix D: Online questionnaire).

4.4.3.3 Quantitative phase: Sampling

The research sample is the group of participants from whom data are collected that represents the population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). For this phase of the project a non-probability, convenience sample was selected from the population of approximately 1 000 registered first-year students in the institution. Despite the limitation of being non-representative (Cohen, et al., 2007) this sampling strategy is common in small-scale studies and educational research where the researcher uses participants who are easily accessible (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). All the first-year students across the institution's three campuses were invited to participate in the study and given access to the survey. There was no expectation that the participants would represent a wider population other than themselves, and no intention to generalise the findings (Cohen, et al., 2007). The convenience of the site selection meant the sample was easily accessible and readily available (Cohen, et al., 2007; Creswell, 2012;

McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). 78 participants responded to the survey. This constitutes a response rate of approximately 8% although as the final contact lists and survey distribution was managed by institution staff, it is not possible for me to ascertain exactly how many students were contacted or actually received the SMS invitation to the survey.

4.4.3.4 Quantitative phase: Data collection

An SMS was sent to the first-year students at the three campuses inviting them to participate in the survey. They were able to access the questionnaire easily via a hyperlink in the SMS. Once the participants had read the participant information letter (Appendix E) and provided informed consent, they could respond to the survey on their smartphone or computer, and submit it online. The survey was available for two weeks and two reminder SMS messages were sent out during the period to encourage participation. Once the survey closed, the questionnaires and basic analysis reports were downloaded from SoGoSurvey.

From the responses to the final two questions, a list was drawn up of the survey numbers and contact details of those participants who volunteered to participate in an interview. 41 students volunteered, which comprised 53% of the respondents. A communication was sent to the volunteers asking them to confirm their amenability to be included in the next phase of the project, in which case they would be contacted to schedule an interview if they were drawn in the random sample.

4.4.3.5 Quantitative phase: Data analysis

There were two forms of survey data that served different purposes and were each subject to different forms of analysis. The numeric data from the structured questions was used to identify response patterns in order to elicit items for further exploration in the interviews. No in-depth statistical analysis was performed on this survey data. The textual data from the open-ended questions was coded in conjunction with the qualitative data from the interviews.

Numeric survey data

The data from the structured questions was downloaded from SoGoSurvey in the form of reports showing the rating frequency per question. This was represented graphically and numerically as shown in Figure 2 below. An Excel report also provided basic descriptive and inferential statistics for each response.

PLEASE READ EACH STATEMENT CAREFULLY ANDCHOOSE THE RESPONSE THAT MOST ACCURATELY APPLIESTO YOU.			
Q10. Select one option			
10 (h) : Select one option: Higher education will give me more employment opportunities			
Answer	**Responses**	**%**	**Percentage of total respondents**
Strongly Disagree	5	6.41%	
Disagree	6	7.69%	
Agree	42	53.85%	
Strongly Agree	23	29.49%	
(Did not answer)	2	2.56%	
Total Responses	**78**		20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Figure 2: Sample of basic graph from survey response

All the questions were phrased in such a way that there was a direct correlation (either positive or negative) between the statement and the response scale (extent of agreement). On analysis, I extracted all responses that showed a wide frequency distribution i.e. in which the distribution was not strongly skewed either negatively or positively, reflected in a Pearson skewness rating close to 0 (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The responses that reflected absence of skewness included the following questions from each of the categories:

Agency and Autonomy:

- I function independently in my daily university activities
- I know how to manage my time
- I am able to ask for help

Academic participation:

- I regularly attend all my classes

- I engage with my lecturers outside of lecture time
- School prepared me well for higher education
- I give up quickly when the work is hard
- I understand the work easily

Social participation and belonging:

- My social circle consists mostly of people who are not students at the institution

Difficulties:

- I experience financial difficulty
- I experience transport difficulty
- I feel out of my depth
- I need additional social support
- I need financial assistance

The wide distribution of response frequency was indicative of variable response patterns from participants. These findings were deemed to warrant further investigation and formed the basis of the design of the interview schedule discussed later in paragraph 4.4.4.1.

Textual survey data

The data for the six open-ended survey questions took the form of written comments from participants. This textual data was downloaded from SoGoSurvey in a report in which all the comments were tabled for each of the open-ended questions. This data was held in abeyance to be combined with the narrative data in the interview transcripts for thematic analysis at the end of the qualitative phase. This is discussed later in paragraph 4.4.4.4.

.

4.4.4 Qualitative phase

The qualitative phase comprised individual semi-structured interviews. The goal was to gather detailed data to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' experience in context (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The purpose of this phase

was to respond to the “how” and “to what extent” research questions (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007b). Qualitative data was collected in individual semi-structured interviews. The interview is a flexible method for data collection, it is a conversation in which participants have the opportunity to express their point of view and describe their interpretation of the world as they experience it. It is a multi-sensory tool and the interviewer is able to obtain information from verbal and non-verbal communication (Cohen et al., 2007; Gillham, 2000; Leonard, 2003). Through the exchange knowledge is constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee. As such, “…the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 349).

4.4.4.1 Qualitative phase: Interview

The nature and type of interview used in research should be ‘fit for purpose’ determined according to the type of data that would best address the research questions (Cohen et al., 2007). There are many types of interview and in-depth semi-structured interviews were selected for this phase in order to gain rich narrative data from participants. In-depth interviews use open-ended questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). A semi-structured interview incorporates structured open-ended questions but includes the option for the interviewer to prompt and to probe to guide the conversation or elicit more detail (Cohen et al., 2007). A semi-structured interview is fairly specific in its intent and broad topics or questions may be pre-determined by the interviewer but this format does not require the interviewer to follow the exact sequence and wording with each respondent (Cohen et al., 2007). Flexibility plays a key role in guiding the interaction which takes a predominantly discursive format, allowing for the participant’s response to develop (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Leonard, 2003). This type of interview serves the mixed methods approach in this study by integrating quantitative and qualitative strands of the research.

The interviews were focused on students’ experience, including behaviours, opinions and values. The semi-structured interview format had the advantage of

guiding the conversation around the participants' higher education experience while the open-ended nature of the questions meant that the participants could tell their story in their own way, and the opportunity for prompts and probes enabled clarification and a depth of meaning to be established (Cohen et al., 2007; Leonard, 2003; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Lack of interview structure can be a limitation. If questions are not reproduced from one participant to the next it can affect the consistency of data and reduce interview reliability (Cohen et al., 2007). It can also make comparisons difficult. Neither of these shortcomings would impact on this data collection as each case was considered individually with no intention to compare or draw generalised results. Interviews are time-consuming and it can be complicated co-ordinating the diaries of both the participant and the researcher. This factor did impact on the process of this project as there were occasions when, despite a scheduled appointment, the participant did not come for the interview and it needed to be re-scheduled. The subjectivity of an interview reduces anonymity and may restrict respondent participation (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Lack of anonymity of the subjects in this study was mitigated through the use of pseudonyms. The interviewer also needs to be sensitive to his/her 'effect' on the process and outcome (Cohen et al., 2007; Leonard, 2003). Interviewer subjectivity in the form of bias, expectations or preconceptions can potentially influence responses or the interpretation of data.

The intention of using a sequential explanatory mixed methods strategy for this study was that the quantitative data from the first phase would be used to ground the interview schedule (Ivankova et al., 2006). This would identify areas for further exploration and elaboration in the qualitative phase in order to gain an understanding of the elements within the institutional environment that enable or constrain student functioning, as well as to explore details of social and personal factors affecting student functioning and capabilities.

Interview design

Designing an interview schedule (or protocol) occurs in a similar deductive process to the design of a questionnaire. It is planned firstly around the broad purpose of the research, translated into the general goals and finally the questions are formed to frame the specific objectives (Cohen et al., 2007). These plans determine the structure of the interview and the format of the questions.

Interview schedule

The findings that emerged from the survey data (as per paragraph 4.4.3.5) formed the basis for structuring the interview questions. The broad conceptual categories of Agency and autonomy, Academic participation, Social participation and Difficulties were taken as being central to both phases of research forming the core for the integration between the quantitative and qualitative data. I had listed the survey findings. When starting to formulate the interview questions, I worked with concepts tied to the research questions i.e. the institution and student support, achievements and opportunities, and diversity and inclusion. I then drew up a draft list of possible interview questions. For each, I considered the alignment of the question to the conceptual categories and the survey findings. This was an iterative process working from findings to concept to question and back, in the process refining the questions and reducing their number. Finally, in a deductive process, the concepts were synthesised into four questions. A diagrammatic representation of this process is shown in Figure 3 (p. 105). These were open-ended questions that allowed for further elaboration of the quantitative findings while also leaving room for probing and new information from interviewees. A fifth and final question was included to explore specific survey responses that I had identified prior to the interview. The interview questions required participants to reflect at a meta-level on themselves and others, both within and outside the institution. Their responses reflected the meaning they attach to their lived experience in context.

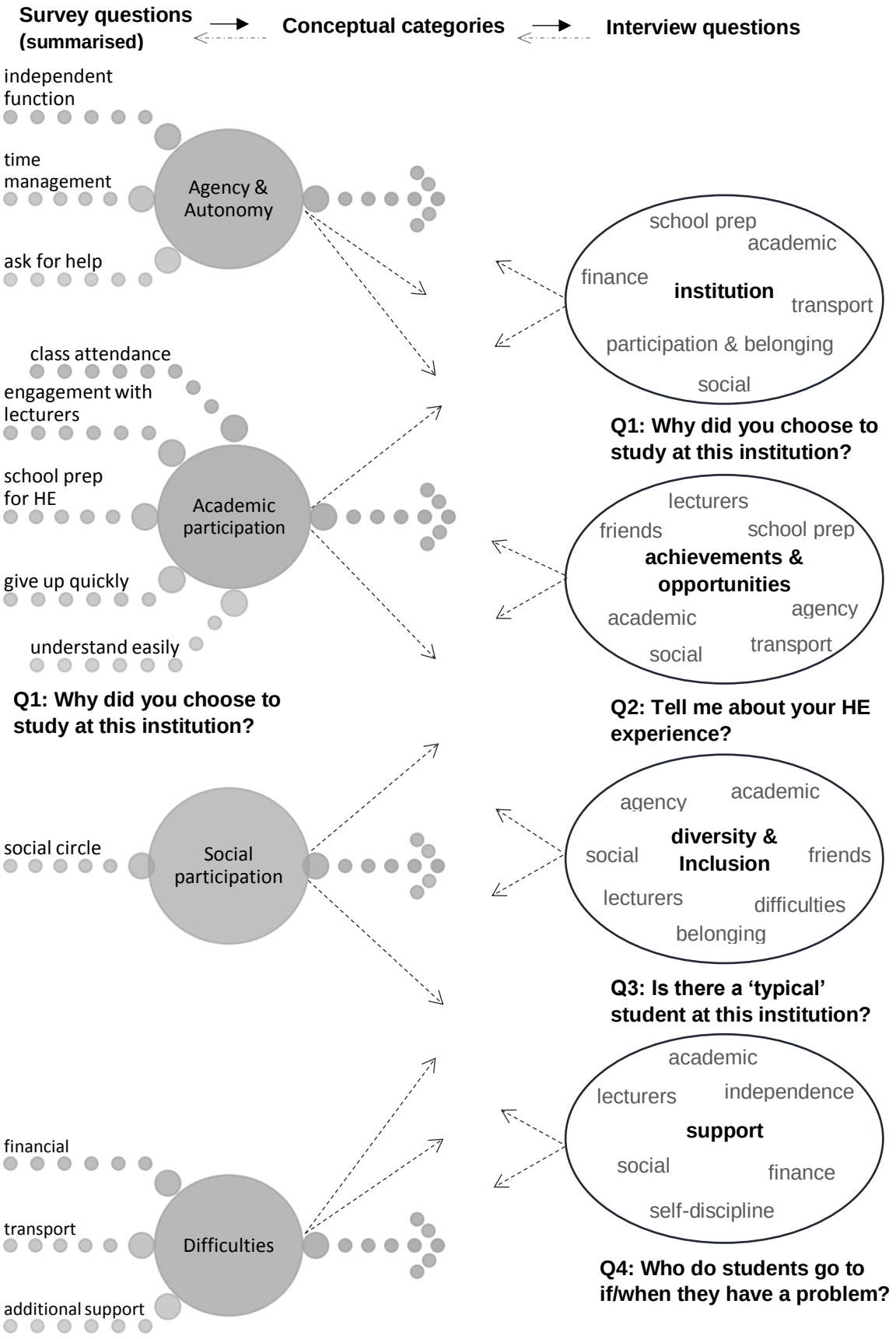


FIGURE 3: Diagrammatic representation of conceptual progression from quantitative data to inform the interview schedule

I did not run a pilot study to test the interview schedule but did an informal trial of the questions with a couple of first-year students (randomly chosen while they were sitting in the grounds) to get their feedback on the ease of comprehension and to ensure there was no ambiguity in interpreting the questions. The interview schedule is included in Appendix F.

4.4.4.2 Qualitative phase: Sampling

For this phase of the project, the population comprised 41 students who had completed the survey and volunteered to participate in the interview. Due to the small population, a simple random sampling strategy was used to select ten participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The draw was made using an open source internet-based computer program called Research Randomizer (available at www.randomizer.org). A list was compiled of the 41 volunteers and each person was allocated a number. Ten numbers drawn on Research Randomizer were matched to the respondents' numbers on the list. These participants formed the sample of participants to be interviewed.

A communication was sent to the ten participants requesting them to confirm their availability and schedule an appointment for the interview. One participant opted not to be interviewed. Some participants did not respond and then, after allowing a reasonable amount of time, a further draw was made. Ultimately, 19 numbers were drawn to obtain the ten interviewees. This did ensure that each volunteer stood an equal chance of being selected (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

4.4.4.3 Qualitative phase: Data collection

Participants were interviewed individually at a time and place of their convenience. After the introduction, I re-stated the purpose of the interview and briefly explained the process. I drew the participant's attention to the consent form that included the consent for the interview to be audio-recorded (Appendix G: Informed Consent form). Interviews were recorded to ensure a true and complete record of the verbal interaction and this provided material for reliability checks

during data analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Once the participant had signed the form the interview commenced. The interview schedule was used to guide the interview.

Once I had posed the initial question, the conversation evolved with the participant's response. As it was a semi-structured interview, I was able to probe for clarification, to ask for explanation and to confirm my understanding of the meaning in the participants' response. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis occur concurrently in an iterative process that forms an ongoing part of the study (McMillan and Schumacher, 2014). In this way, the data analysis and collection influence each other. This integration was an important stage in this mixed methods study as I was able to prompt the direction of the interview to ensure that the elements of agency, academic and social participation, and difficulties that had emerged from the survey data were addressed.

During the interview, I made notes recording particular words or comments, as well as non-verbal responses made by participants. I also jotted down my own spontaneous thoughts to support the process of transcription that would follow. After each interview I wrote a reflective record elaborating on the exchange, noting thoughts, meanings and information to be integrated with the analysis of the interview data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Each interview was approximately one hour in duration. The audio files were downloaded and saved on my computer in MP3 format to be transcribed for data analysis.

4.4.4.4 Qualitative phase: Data analysis

Qualitative research produces a large quantity of data that needs to be systematically organised, interpreted and explained (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Meaningful interpretation and plausible explanation of the data is dependent on objective, systematic and rigorous processing of the data, while at the same time remaining sensitive to the context, and ultimately framing it all within the research purpose. Thematic analysis is a flexible tool for the analysis of qualitative data that is compatible with an interpretive paradigm. The

approach taken for this study was an inductive process in which data was coded, then systematically organised into categories in order to identify patterns (themes) and relationships which were then interpreted and explained (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a relatively straightforward form of analysis that is not bound by theoretical or technical knowledge, however, there are pitfalls pertaining to the accuracy, depth and appropriateness of the method. These can be avoided by applying the method rigorously and systematically and ensuring that the method remains congruent with the data and the purpose of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After the interview the voice data from the MP3 files was transcribed using Express Scribe Transcription software into a Word document format that facilitated analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The advantage of doing the transcription myself was that it enabled me to start becoming familiar with the data. I then re-read all the transcripts several times while simultaneously listening to the audio files. This was a time consuming process but I found the dual-sensory input allowed me to immerse myself in the data and it helped me to interpret the meaning of the transcript content as I re-lived the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During that iterative process, I began identifying segments which I noted in the margin of the transcripts and highlighted in the text. As repetitive ideas emerged I identified semantic codes, which I refined as I worked through all the transcripts (Appendix H: Transcript coding sample). Then I made a list of the 31 codes which I tabulated with the ten transcripts to cross-check the number of repetitions and get an idea of relevance and significance (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Next, I re-arranged the list of codes into groupings of similar codes and followed an inductive process that ultimately led to the identification of broad categories (Figure 4, p. 109).

Using “the dining room table” method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p. 405) I reflected on and re-worked the categories and codes, writing them onto large sheets of flipchart paper revealing patterns, as codes and categories overlapped or took on more or less significance. The abstract themes emerged intuitively. A

sample of the inductive process of thematic analysis is shown in Figure 4 below. The appropriateness of the themes was reviewed in conjunction with re-reading the transcripts, and also testing the 'fit' of categories with their codes and the formation of coherent patterns. At this stage I also made note of powerful extracts from the data texts that potentially served the themes. The themes were also positioned within the conceptual framework of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014) for suitability in telling "the complicated story" of the data and in addressing the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). This formed the substance of my interpretation and meaning-making that is reported in the research findings and discussion in Chapter Five.

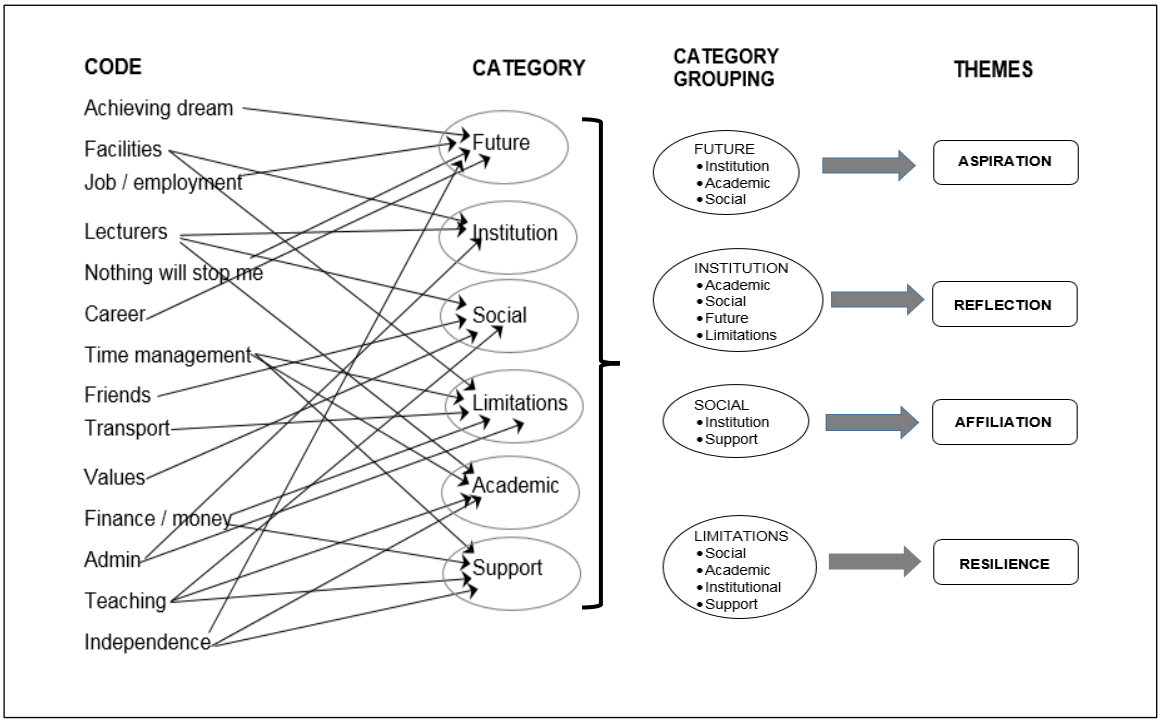


Figure 4: Sample to show inductive process of thematic analysis followed in this study

4.5 Authenticity and credibility

Measures of validity and reliability are important requirements to determine the rigour of research. Validity measures the extent to which research findings describe the phenomena being researched, and reliability relates to consistency of results and the extent to which they can be replicated (Cohen et al., 2007).

Unlike quantitative research that measures objective data, it is argued that the qualitative researcher collects data from people in their natural setting and is part of the world that he/she is researching, therefore complete objectivity is not possible (Cohen et al., 2007). The perspectives of the researcher and those of the participants are equally valid, therefore the validity of a study lies in the extent to which the interpretations of the participant and the researcher hold mutual meaning (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The notions of *authenticity*, *credibility*, *reflexivity*, *trustworthiness*, *confirmability* and *dependability* are amongst the terms used to determine the rigour of qualitative research findings, all of which broadly imply application of a critical attitude towards the data and recognition of the factors that may influence the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). As a predominantly qualitative study, I have chosen to use the qualitative terminology for these measures in this study.

4.5.1 Authenticity

The qualitative researcher, particularly in an interpretive paradigm, is interpreting and applying meaning to the participants' perceptions. Authenticity is the faithful reconstruction of those perceptions; the ability to report a situation from the perspective of the participant (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Authenticity is important as it provides for extension of findings, which enables others to understand the findings and apply them in subsequent studies. This is mostly influenced by the research design (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The following elements strengthen the authenticity of the findings in this study:

4.5.1.1 Data collection

The two-phased approach of the sequential explanatory mixed methods design enabled the integration of quantitative data from the survey with the qualitative data from the interviews. The descriptive numeric data was complemented and validated by the depth of explanation obtained in the narrative data. Also, the iterative process of the semi-structured interviews allowed for reflection on what participants said. In this way I was able to obtain confirmation of details from

participants and minimise misunderstanding or misinterpretation by asking for clarification from participants of their implied meaning.

4.5.1.2 Authentic narrative

The narrative in the report on the findings is made authentic through the use of verbatim quotations that present the participants' responses in their own voices and their own words. The audio recording of the interviews and the verbatim transcripts provide documented evidence of the data collection and the authentic narrative.

4.5.1.3 Context and participants

The context of higher education and the involvement of first-year students as participants makes it easy for the replication of this study in a similar context with similar participants.

4.5.1.4 Conceptual framework

This study is set in a clear conceptual framework, which, despite being non-theoretical, has very specific central concepts.

4.5.2 Credibility

The credibility of a study is the extent to which the findings approximate reality and are therefore deemed to be trustworthy and reasonable (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Credibility of a qualitative study is important as it enables the findings to be plausible and convincing (Cohen et al., 2006). The following factors provide credibility to this study:

4.5.2.1 Accountability

The study has been driven objectively around addressing the research questions, and as a student researcher I am accountable to my supervisor with whom I have had regular contact through the duration of the project. As an employee in the institution in which the research was set, I am also accountable to the institution, therefore all communications, as well as the processes of the study, were direct

and transparent. All the research data has been documented with a clear 'audit' trail of decisions and coding processes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

4.5.2.2 Data collection and presentation

Data collection in qualitative research occurs through an interactive process and the researcher's engagement with participants, and reflexive consideration of these relationships. The two-phased approach of data collection in this study enhances credibility through the corroboration and expansion of findings in the qualitative phase. In this study, the data is presented in context and does not claim to be representative beyond this context (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

4.5.2.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity relates to the researcher's rigorous and critical self-scrutiny throughout the research process. It is an important procedure for establishing credibility as it ensures that the researcher takes his/her subjectivity into account (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). A reflexive strategy that enhances credibility is that of the researcher reflecting on his/her personal positioning and displaying his/her own lens on the project.

4.6 Personal positioning

This study combines three of my passions – education, inclusion and student support. Consequently, I was aware that I needed to consciously separate my role as researcher from my persona as educator or counsellor for the duration of the project. Having chosen my work place as the site for this study, I reflected on the risks of being this closely involved.

From the perspective of the participants, I knew they would be aware that I am a staff member. This meant there was a risk that they would perceive the research as being part of the institutional processes rather than an independent external study. First-year students are still relatively new in the institution and this

perception may potentially have led them to withhold information or participation thinking it may impact on them personally (despite being assured otherwise).

From my perspective, as researcher-practitioner, I was aware of the risk of researcher bias. The conflict of purpose and conduct of the teacher/researcher can be a dilemma (Wong, 1995). However, I do not work directly with first-year students so there was no risk of familiarity or bias either in the selection of any participants or in the interpretation of their responses. I made every effort to ensure that my prior knowledge of the institution and any preconceptions that I might have of the student body did not influence the students' responses, the findings, or the research in any way. I hope that my familiarity with the institution, its processes and the programmes served as an advantage in facilitating context sensitivity and assisting with insights to help provide deeper, more meaningful interpretation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). By adopting a reflective strategy of rigorous examination of my personal and theoretical commitments throughout the project, I trust the combination of roles as researcher/educator has been "less tension than intention" (Wilson, 1995, p. 21) in meeting the purpose and outcomes of this research project.

4.7 Ethics

Educational research involves people, which places important ethical and legal responsibilities on the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The researcher needs to understand the ethical principles and requirements of social research in order to minimise potential risks as well as any possible misinterpretations or misuse of results. There are ethical implications for both quantitative and qualitative approaches that must be given consideration in a mixed methods study. Ethics is not an isolated act on behalf of the researcher but reflects an axiological position that is inherent at all stages of the research process (Palaiologou, 2016).

4.7.1 Ethical principles

Ethical and legal constraints in research are generally focused on the protection of the rights and welfare of the participants (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The principles include:

Transparency: The researcher needs to be open and honest, fully disclosing all aspects of the study to participants. This includes the purpose and processes of the research as well as the role of participants.

Voluntary participation: Participants have free choice whether to participate in a research study or not without being compelled or coerced. This also gives them the right to opt out at any stage of the process should they wish to, as well as to not answer questions.

Informed consent: Once participants have been fully informed of the research, they are given the opportunity to provide informed consent. This implies that they agree to participate with full knowledge and understanding of the details of the study.

Absence of harm: The researcher needs to give consideration to and anticipate elements of risk in order to prevent harm to participants. This includes physical or mental discomfort or injury to participants.

Privacy: The researcher needs to protect the privacy of participants. This includes maintaining anonymity and confidentiality so that participants cannot be identified or directly linked to the information provided. This includes lack of identification of the research setting. The researcher is also responsible for the safe storage of research data and documentation.

4.7.2 Ethical practice

Qualitative research engages the researcher and the participants collaboratively in a shared process of collective activity. This raises a fundamental dilemma between the quest for knowledge and the right and privacy of participants (Cohen et al., 2007). It is the personal intrusion in the interactive data collection processes of qualitative research, more so than in quantitative methods, that raises an

ethical dilemma, so that methodological and ethical issues are inextricably intertwined in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Palaiologou, 2016). The following procedures aimed to ensure ethical practice in performing this research study:

4.7.2.1 Permission

Before embarking on the research project, I applied for and was granted ethics clearance from the University of Witwatersrand Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities (Appendix I: Ethics clearance letter). I also applied to the institution that was the intended research site, for permission to conduct the research amongst their first-year students. Permission was approved by the Board of Directors and granted by the Head of Institution. I was committed in the performance of this research project to prioritise ethical considerations, and to be aware of and sensitive to "the costs/benefits ratio" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 51) for all parties concerned, with particular responsibility towards the participants and the institution, as well as my own professional integrity (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014).

4.7.2.2 Voluntary participation

Student perspectives are a key element in the quest of this research project. As a participatory project, this research was conducted ethically in all respects in an open democratic form (Scott & Morrison, 2005). Participants were given a letter informing them of the nature, purpose and process of the research, and inviting them to participate. Participants were strongly encouraged to participate in the project but were in no way coerced or made to feel obliged to participate. In the letter they were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that the research procedures, for participants and non-participants, would not impact on their academic processes or results in any way. An invitation to participate was also sent out by SMS through the institution's communication system, with reference to the letter which remained accessible on the institution's website for the duration of the study. The institution's Board of Management determined the terms pertaining to the timing and mechanism of communication with students

and the implementation of the survey as they deemed suitable in order to ensure minimum impact on individuals and the academic programme.

4.7.2.3 Informed consent

The participant information letter made participants aware of their rights and the ethical considerations of the study. Participants were notified of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage and/or to omit any responses, with no negative consequences for participation or non-participation. They were also assured of absence of harm during or as a result of this research project. Based on their knowledge of the purpose and processes of the research, participants were able to make an informed decision about their participation. All participants provided informed consent prior to participating in both the survey and the interview. Participants in the survey were required to acknowledge having read the Participant information letter and tick the box providing informed consent in order to gain access to the questionnaire. Interview participants signed the informed consent form and gave it to me prior to participating in the interview.

4.7.2.4 Confidentiality and anonymity

The role of participants as co-researchers and co-constructors of knowledge in qualitative research raises a tension with the issue of confidentiality and anonymity. However, the role or view of participants notwithstanding, researchers are obliged to safeguard the identity of participants (Palaiologou, 2016). The Participant information letter assured all participants of their privacy and the confidentiality of all data. They were assured that neither their names nor that of the institution would be made public in the research report or beyond the scope of the project. Participants in the survey had the option to complete the questionnaire anonymously. Those who volunteered to participate in the interview phase made an autonomous decision to do so and decided what contact details to provide. They were at no time obliged to reveal their name and pseudonyms were used in the report.

4.8 Limitations

The limitations of this research project lie in the design and methodological difficulties inherent in a sequential explanatory mixed methods study, some of which have been mentioned earlier in this chapter. On reflection the following limitations in the execution of this research project were noted:

4.8.1 Interview participants

The rich depth of qualitative data discussed in this project emerged from the individual semi-structured interviews. The participants who participated in the interviews were those who had volunteered, who formed part of the random sample, responded to the follow-up communication with the request to schedule an interview, and then who also ultimately came for the interview. These procedural layers served to filter participants such that the interviewees were those who were sufficiently robust and willing to endure those layers. The final random sample predominated from one campus (Johannesburg) with only one participant from Pretoria, and the Durban campus not represented. Despite this, the sample adequately represented the population with each person standing an equal chance of being selected. In addition, the purpose of investigating student experience is not served any differently by the location of the participant and no comparison between campuses was intended.

4.8.2 Interpretation of data

I am cognisant of the validity constraints of the “double hermeneutic” (Usher, 1996, p. 19) that applies in qualitative data analysis in which the researcher seeks to interpret the way in which participants make sense of their world. Herein lies the risk of misinterpretation of the student’s interpretation. I attempted to address this risk through reiteration during the interview in which I checked the meaning of the student’s response so that the student could validate my understanding. I also made notes during and immediately after the interviews that were relevant to the dynamics of the engagement so that the details would not be lost in transcription where the data became more literal.

4.8.3 Generalisation of data

This study was located in one private higher education institution with a single, clearly defined academic context. This presents limitations with regard to generalisation of the findings to other contexts. However, as with any qualitative research findings that illuminate the particulars of a specific situation, this does not preclude the possibility of extension or extrapolation of the findings to contribute to the broader bodies of knowledge on the capability approach and transformation in higher education in South Africa.

The limitations above notwithstanding, educational research seeks to make evidence-based contributions to enhance student learning which may emerge from context-bound studies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Human behaviour is understood in context and unearthing the unique perspective on the student experience through the participants' real-life reflections in their specific context offers insight into the potential of operationalising the capability approach in inclusive higher education practice.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the detail of the design and methodology of this research project, from the interpretive paradigm in which it is set to the methods and instruments. The data collection and analysis processes were explained. The next chapter presents a discussion on the findings.

CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

When students enter higher education they start a new phase of their life. The transition from school to university presents students with a range of new experiences and possibilities academically, socially and personally. Higher education is a site for personal development, and the outcomes of higher education serve to enhance the well-being of the individual and society (Walker, 2006). In order to achieve these outcomes the institution needs to create an environment that enables students equitably despite their diversity. This can be done through the development of capabilities that enhance students' well-being.

It was not the intention of this study to establish a list of capabilities for private higher education but rather the focus of the research questions was on the students' experiences and the extent to which the institution enables or constrains conversion of resources into functionings for students. Data pertaining to student experiences was collected during in-depth semi-structured interviews. An inductive process of thematic analysis was applied. The data was semantically coded and categorised, and patterns of meaning were extrapolated from which four abstract themes emerged. The significance of the data was interpreted within the framework of the themes drawing on the conceptual framework of the capability approach. The interpretation led to the findings as presented in this chapter.

The emergent themes are Aspiration, Affiliation, Reflection and Resilience (shown in Figure 4, p. 109). These themes are capabilities in themselves (although that is not the primary reason they were selected). They each broadly represent patterns of meaning that were extrapolated from the categories and codes. There is some overlap across different themes. A sample indicating patterns and links between concepts and themes is shown in Figure 5 below.

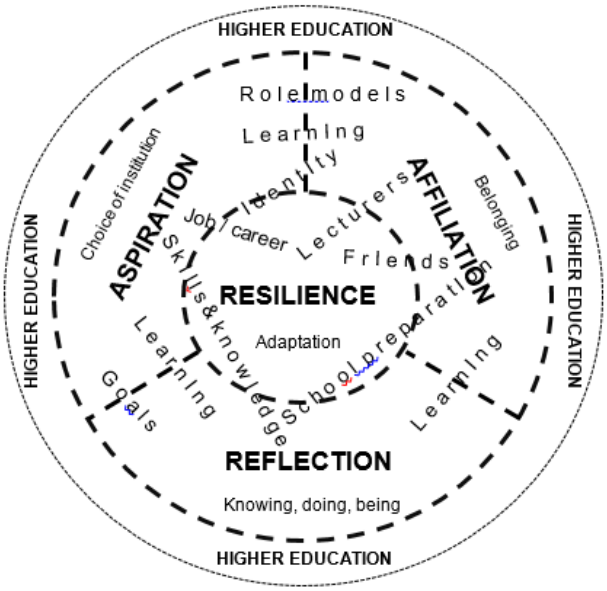


Figure 5: Representation of the inter-relationship between concepts and themes

In the sections that follow, each theme is briefly introduced and located in the context of the study before the discussion of the findings and their implications. The findings are related to the conceptual framework of the capability approach, which is "a forward-looking approach to change" (Walker, 2015b, p. 2). The significance of the findings reveals the details of participants' dreams, connections, thoughts and struggles in higher education. Bold phrases in the narrative extracts throughout the chapter serve to reinforce the concepts contained within the theme and the sub-topic. These findings contributed to answering the research questions.

This is a large and convoluted chapter. To facilitate navigation for the reader I have inserted a diagrammatic overview of the data analysis within each theme at the entry point to the discussion. This provides a summary of the sub-section that follows and the elements of discussion presented relevant to that theme.

5.2 Aspiration

The increasing demand by students for access to higher education is driven by aspiration for a better future and for what they might become. School leavers – and sometimes their parents on their behalf – aspire for learning, employability and job opportunities, social and geographical mobility, achievement, self-development and the possibilities that higher education can provide (Othman et al., 2013; Rahim & Azman, 2010). Once the aspiration for access to higher education is met there are also aspirations within education as students strive for academic achievement, financial support, recognition, affiliation and other personal goals. Aspiration in education does not only lie in the people, it is also embedded in policies as descriptions of intention and hope of what the institution will be able to be and to do (Walton, 2016). Higher education institutions aspire to create conditions for learning in which students can realise their aspirations on the path to and after graduation (Brockbank & McGill, 2007).

5.2.1 Locating the theme

The introductory interview question asked participants, '*Why did you choose to study at this institution?'* It was aimed at contextualising their experience and it seems to have opened the door to the expression of aspiration, which wove its way thematically throughout the interviews. In the narrative of their higher education experiences the participants expressed aspiration (a) for higher education (and specifically at this particular institution); (b) of higher education, the institution and its processes; and (c) of the capabilities enhanced by higher education. Within these broad aspirations individuals have their own specific milestones and goals that they hope to achieve. Kenway (2011) cautions against reducing aspirations to individuals, norms and vocations. The interpretations presented here have emerged from one-on-one interviews, however, they are located in a social, cultural, spatial context of the participants' higher education experiences. The interpretation within the capability framework gives recognition to the diversity of the participants as they aspire to particular ways of being and doing that they value.

The graphic representation below summarises the patterns of aspiration revealed in the data and forms the structure of the discussion on this theme.

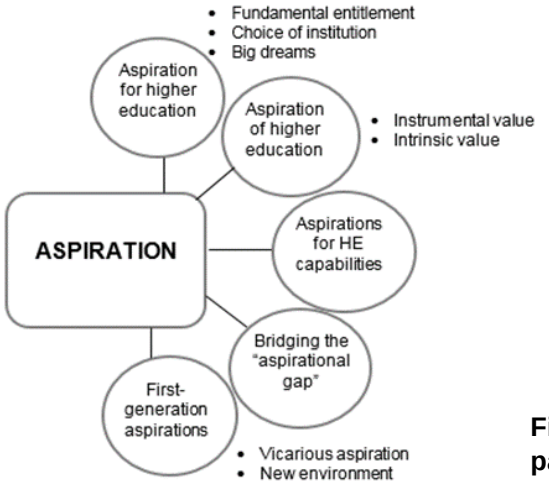


Fig 6a: Overview of data patterns of Aspiration

5.2.2 Aspiration for higher education

The participants in this study are first-year students whose aspiration for higher education has been realised. The realisation of an aspiration is not an end in itself as aspirations are relational, dynamic and often connect to other aspirations (Hart, 2016). In the interviews participants reflected on the values that formed the aspiration for higher education that had brought them to the point of access to this institution.

5.2.2.1 A fundamental entitlement

All the participants acknowledged the priority of education in their lives, considering it a basic need rather than a hope. Tshepo[5] described metaphorically the significance higher education holds for him:

> Tshepo: ***It's more like the clothing that you need to wear****, you know, because you're going to be exposed to the sun, the wind, rain, you know,* ***and if you don't have that you're going to be vulnerable*** *and you're going to be sick, even though you consider yourself as a strong person.*

Tshepo considers higher education so fundamental that, like getting dressed, it is not a choice. It is a basic need, required for survival. Clothing protects us from

[5] Pseudonyms have been used for all participants

the elements and illness. Similarly, education provides protection from the harmful elements of poverty, inequality, illiteracy, unemployment and other factors that restrict well-being. The aspiration lies not in whether to attend higher education but in the choice of institution.

5.2.2.2 Choice of institution

Without exception, the participants have chosen to come to this particular institution because of its specific context and the role it plays in fulfilling their career aspirations. Reasons given for studying at this particular institution indicated a passion for a specific craft, the desire to work in a particular job, the dream of recognition and success in the industry. Amongst the participants each one had his/her own particular goals but there was a universal recognition that this particular institution was the means to those ends. This was represented in Angela and Simon's responses:

> Angela: *I know where I want to be and where I am heading towards*
>
> Simon: *I've always had a love for [field-specific] studies and **I felt that this place would help me get a head start**. Mostly that experience that I needed to go into the industry*

Participants deem this institution to be the best choice in meeting their aspirations of where they want to be, what they want to be able to do, and who they want to become. They recognise that alternative institutions (both public and private) could offer them a qualification in the same field, but this was their institution of choice based on their perception that a qualification from this particular institution would enhance their chances of employment and success. They ascribe this to the good quality of education offered by the institution which would enhance their opportunities for employment and present more career options. This corroborates research in secondary schools in England that revealed that "a 'good education' is not one in which a student is forced into a good school or on to a good course, but is about having genuine choice" (Kelly, 2012, p. 290). Students' perceptions of quality of education are not purely based on achievements but also on having a range of options from which to choose. The fact that there are other institutions

with the same offering boosts participants' perceptions of the quality offered at this institution and their aspiration to study there.

5.2.2.3 Big dreams

All but two of the participants alluded to the institution's reputation in influencing their choice. Various celebrities serve as brand ambassadors for the institution, and their fame and success serve as a strong aspirational drawcard in the choice of institution. Mafani explains one of the reasons for her choice to study at this institution:

> Mafani: *…so I thought if [celebrity] went to that school and he's doing so well for himself… I mean, you know, I could also…*

Aspirations are ambitious but also realistic. It is a striving for something that a person feels is attainable (Conradie & Robeyns, 2013; Hart, 2016; Nathan, 2005). For Mafani, evidence that her aspiration for success (or celebrity status) is attainable lies in the success of someone who has preceded her at this institution. If he (a celebrity) could achieve success, then her reasoning is that she too should be successful by following the same path. Role models help shape a map of the future. Student engagement with alumni provides personal narratives with which they can identify. The capability to think about future goals subsumes other basic capabilities such as having the freedom to anticipate, imagine or reason such a future (Hart, 2016).

5.2.3 Aspirations of higher education

Many students arrive in higher education with a sense of excitement, feeling liberated and full of hope for the possibilities that lie ahead (Pym & Kapp, 2013). The participants expressed expectations that higher education will serve both instrumental and intrinsic purposes in their lives. Intrinsically, they anticipate their own growth and personal development through their higher education experience. Participants expressed a desire to learn, and described aspirations for knowledge, skills and a qualification to enable personal growth and employability. They are also ambitious for positions in the industry and have visions of themselves in particular jobs, careers and roles. They expect higher

education to be instrumental in opening up the way for them. Most participants consider that studying at this institution is the start of the realisation of a lifelong passion, for a future that excites them, that is already forming part of their identity. This is exemplified by Tshepo:

> Tshepo: *I am in a hurry because my future excites me,* ***it excites me because I want to be a role model****. I want to inspire other people to do. …the thing is I have a lot of things that I really want to achieve in life,* ***but the first thing that I want to do is see myself getting that certificate.***

Tshepo has clear goals that he aspires to, but he realises that the qualification is instrumental in achieving them. His qualification is then the first of his many goals, and higher education the means towards a future of possibilities and the realisation of his dreams.

5.2.3.1 Instrumental value

Participants anticipate that their higher education will prepare them for what they want to be able to do. They expect their qualification to be instrumental in getting a job and starting work. Two of the participants are studying part-time while they work. Despite already having a job, they are studying for purposes of career enhancement and their future work opportunities. Angela aspires to a change of career direction in an area of interest that has evolved, while Jasmine has realised, and been informed by her company, that she needs a qualification to keep herself employable. She explains:

> Jasmine: *I've had this job for 8 years, without a qualification, and basically they've told me because they look for people with qualifications,* ***if I were to re-apply for my own job I would not get it****. And to grow because they've also told me I'm a strong employee but* ***I cannot grow if I do not have some sort of qualification to back me****.*

For Jasmine, her higher education qualification is instrumental in retaining her current job and in her career progression. Jasmine is finding that despite eight years of work experience she now needs a higher education qualification to secure her place in a job that she is already doing very capably. Comments by

her employers that she cannot grow without a qualification behind her affirms the value they put on a higher education qualification.

Participants view higher education as the means to a job, an income, post-graduate studies and other ends that they want and value. Notably, these participants on the whole made little reference to a drive for financial ends, this was overshadowed by their hope for their higher education as the means to providing opportunities for intrinsic purposes such as happiness, independence and giving back (see 5.2.3.2 below). Participants see their capability to work in their job of choice as the means to other ends which will benefit themselves and others. In contrast, Pym and Kapp (2013) found that students from disadvantaged backgrounds selected their higher education programme predominantly for instrumental reasons, focused on gaining access to employment rather than based on career aspiration. For them higher education offers an escape route out of their home circumstances and the opportunity for improved social positioning through access to employment (Pym & Kapp, 2013). This view was supported in Firfirey and Carolissen's (2010) study of poor students in South African higher education.

5.2.3.2 Intrinsic value

Respondents' aspirations focused on the intrinsic benefits of higher education such as being prepared for the real world, being independent, and making their family proud, particularly in response to the parents' financial sacrifice for them to attend this (private) institution.

Several of the participants expressed the view that higher education is fulfilling their sense of purpose in life. In accordance with Pym and Kapp's study (2013) there was evidence of participants' implicit sense of vocation as they reported their aspiration to use their career and future work to give back to others. Lesego and Tshepo, who were raised in the townships, aspire to give back to the community from which they have come by educating and inspiring others to rise up out of their circumstances, as they feel they are on the path to doing. Tshepo states:

Tshepo: *I need to give off to other people and t**he first place that I need to go to is where you're from**. Where people have given up.*

Interviewer: So, the giving back is important to you? More important than the money? Earning? Fame?

Tshepo: *More important than the money. **More important than anything**. I feel like, people when they remember me, I don't want them to say, "that guy who always looked good, had nice phone, nice watches, had nice cars, nice houses". **I want them to remember me as a person who made dreams possible. Who gave other people opportunities, who made them realise their potential as well, that they can become like me**.*

They see themselves as agents pursuing their own goals, not only responsible for themselves but also able to bring about change in the well-being of others. As agents, Boitumelo, Carole, Thomas, Simon, Mafani and Nonku aspire to make an impact on society and the world. They stated their desire to leave a mark on society and make a difference in people's lives.

Boitumelo: *I feel like I can make a great impact out there with my studies. **I'll be different… I've more to give to the people… I want to make a difference***

Thomas: *That is the main aim – travelling. Hopefully get a job somewhere in that side of life, **leave a mark there you know, travel, leave a mark, travel, leave a mark***

Nonku: *I am happy, **the school has given me an opportunity of… I don't know… maybe a lifetime.** Yeah. So this is just the start. **I will be doing big things… I have so many opportunities***

These participants feel that this institution specifically, and their higher education generally, is giving them the opportunities to do what they aspire to do, and be who they aspire to be.

5.2.4 Aspirations of the capabilities enhanced by higher education

Participants view higher education as an investment in their future in preference to other options. They have made a choice to study rather than work. Participants made mention of friends from school and their communities who have opted to

try find a job and earn money rather than spend money on further education. Simon said that he had given serious consideration to working and earning straightaway after school rather than studying because of his financial constraints, but realised this would change his future because *"…if you have a higher education you [are] inclined to think in a more… diplomatic way… whereas if you're…[without higher education] I wouldn't say you're nothing...*". Participants are aware of the capabilities that higher education is giving them. Simon feels enabled to think differently. Simon, Tshepo, Lesego and Thomas all expressed the fact that they were learning to be independent. Thomas described learning the "*language of higher education*" which he explained as being a different level of English. All the participants alluded to the need to be self-disciplined and the freedom of higher education in contrast to school. Carole, Mafani, Lesego and Thomas stated the value of higher education giving them access to network of others, particularly people in the industry. Participants used these as descriptions of their learning in higher education, and Simon's comment (above) drives this as a distinction between those with higher education and those without.

Carole explained that she had felt set to achieve her goals straight out of school, without a need for higher education. However, being in higher education she is learning about what she didn't know.

> Carole: ***I do have goals but I can't really achieve them as easily as I thought when I was in high school.*** *Cos I just thought OK cool, I'm going to leave high school, open my own company, then this, then that (laughs) and then when I got here it was like, nope, you don't know a lot, you think you know a lot, you think you are streetwise but you actually don't know a lot.* ***So it has helped me also humble myself into creating a better plan to achieve my goals and having to understand certain things.***

Through her (albeit short) experience in higher education Carole has come to realise how much there is to learn and that higher education can teach her "*better*" ways.

Society benefits from people's skills, knowledge and effort. School leavers and graduates alike contribute to the economy in the form of human capital, but the

benefits of education exceed its role as human capital (Sen, 1997). The higher education graduates have opportunities beyond their jobs. For Carole, as described above, these were hidden benefits only revealed once she arrived. The instrumental end of getting a job may be the same with or without higher education. Higher education is an investment of time, money and effort to going beyond the role of human capital. Nussbaum (2011) explains that education "is a source of employment *and* political power" (p. 153, my emphasis). Education enhances bargaining power and opens up opportunities (Nussbaum, 2011). It enables capabilities beyond work skills. Lesego explains how people in his community view higher education:

> Lesego: *I've heard some say… Lesego,* ***he will make it because he is in higher institution*** *instead of us looking for jobs which make us quick money. For him…* ***he's going for a long run****.*

They understand that Lesego's investment in education will cost him money and take him time but ultimately "*he will make it*". It is a means to an end, where "*quick money*" is an end in itself. Sen (1992) makes a distinction between the means and ends when it comes to distinguishing between a concentration on human capital versus human capabilities which can lead to "more worthwhile and more free lives" (Sen, 1992, p. 295).

5.2.5 Bridging the "aspirational gap"

Participation in higher education, particularly private higher education, is costly. Most of the participants expressed constant concern about their financial difficulties and the potential this has to limit their higher education experience, as exemplified by Tshepo:

> Tshepo: *…the only negative that I have has nothing to do with the school as such and my experience, it's more of my finances because I…* ***we cannot necessarily afford being here****. …****That's my biggest worry. It's always hanging…***

Tshepo has found a weekend job and has to balance time on his studies against the time spent earning money. He is aware that missing lectures or failing a subject will put his higher education in jeopardy as he cannot afford the cost of

repeating a subject. Taking on part-time work can place undue pressure and demands on students. It can impede study progress (Van den Berg & Hofman, 2005) and it can impact negatively on self-worth and well-being as students sacrifice academic standards in an attempt to balance a cycle of indebtedness (Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010).

Aspirations can be "a double-edged sword" motivating behaviour positively or destructively (Ray, 2016, p. 310). They have the potential to inspire and motivate action constructively. When talking about the impact of financial constraints on their higher education, Tshepo and Simon had the following reaction:

> Tshepo: ***I'll make a plan****… if you put me in a corner that's when something great comes out*
>
> Simon: *I'm worried about next year… I mean,* ***I guess it's what drives me now… to try get that fear to push me from behind instead of block me"***

Tshepo and Simon have financial constraints that serve as a potential barrier to the completion of their higher education. Despite this reality, their aspiration enables a positive response, to "*make a plan*" i.e. take an extra job, and to work harder rather than give up. Aspirations also have the potential to cause frustration and conflict. The matter of financial difficulties is clearly an emotional issue towards which some participants respond in denial, "*I don't think I wanna think about it*" (Boitumelo) and others with passive aggression, "*I fight the processes …[because] I know if I walk away tomorrow how much I owe…*" (Jasmine). Financial constraints notwithstanding, when participants were asked if these difficulties would prevent them from obtaining their qualification they all stated categorically that nothing would stop them. When aspirations increase they lower the threshold for satisfaction and inspire greater effort (Ray, 2016).

5.2.6 First-generation aspirations

Six of the participants in the study are first-generation students and the first person in their family to attend higher education. (The remaining four participants stated that they were not the first people in their family to go to university, however this does not preclude them from being 'first-generation' students as the family

member who preceded them could be a sibling rather than a parent). Distinct factors emerged that influence the aspirations and capabilities of the first-generation participants in this study.

5.2.6.1 Vicarious aspiration

In relating their higher education experience, first-generation participants in this study, as in other studies, were unanimous in describing their role in living the aspirations of their parents and grandparents vicariously for the education and life they had not been able to have (Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005; Heymann & Carolissen, 2011). Students are aware of this responsibility even if it is not explicitly stated by parents. Carole and Mafani explain the implicit message from their families:

> Carole: *I feel like… because I am the first kid and all my siblings are looking up to me, so it wasn't said that you need to go to school, but* ***it was implied in certain ways*** *and stuff. So, yeah, and they also just wanted to have, well* ***my parents, wanted to be able to say that my kid goes to tertiary****.*
>
> Mafani: *I know that with* ***my mom she's always wanted to go to university****. [It is important] being able to sort of have someone in the family to do something that they haven't done.*

Mafani feels she represents her mother who aspired to higher education herself. Carole's parents aspire to higher education for their children rather than themselves. The first-generation student embodies the hope of their parents and grandparents (and other members of the family) for a better life for all members of the family. Having the opportunity of higher education they are able to do and be what their parents could not, and the participants feel the responsibility of carrying not only their own aspiration but also those of their parents. Tshepo describes the vicarious aspiration for success:

> Tshepo: *It's more like… it's not a win for themselves,* ***it's a win for the whole family****. Like if you get that degree, you've shown that* ***we can be successful, we are intelligent,*** *as opposed to your grandmother or your mother who never went to school.*

Tshepo feels that his family will be able to share in his success, and will reflect and affirm the success and intelligence that they were not given the opportunity to reveal. Shared aspirations can produce shared achievements and mutual rewards. It can also add undue pressure. Jasmine says the fear and pressure of family expectation that she carries caused her to delay going into higher education. Now that she's studying, she described how the pressure has become her reality:

> Jasmine: ***I just feel pressure*** *(laughs). … But they still do that to me, they're like, "You know that you'll be the…" and I said, "Stop! … "Shutup! (laughs) Right there,* ***stop saying it"*** *…So, ja, it is,* ***it's the pressure of you're the first one****... and 'we believe in you and make us proud',* ***and like I don't even know if I can do this…*** *Wait! (laughs)*

Jasmine is aware that her family members mean well. In response she is trying very hard but the responsibility she feels fuels her doubt and anxiety in her ability to achieve. Studies have shown that the motivation driven by family expectation does not significantly influence the first-generation students' educational outcomes. Achievement is more strongly related to a student's sense of academic integration, driven by intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation (Dennis et al., 2005; Heymann & Carolissen, 2011).

5.2.6.2 New environment

Pressure from the family is not the only issue that first-generation students face. Tshepo described how the family pressure is compounded by social pressures in the higher education environment:

> Tshepo: *Ja, I feel that pressure.* ***And they kind of putting that pressure on me (laughs) but I understand that it's coming from a good place because they don't want me to suffer as they did. They want an easier life for me.*** *And so, another thing is when we as a pressured student get to college or university,* ***now there's a whole new different environment****. … And now you're re-defining what success is, you know. And in the process as well you're getting exposed to drinking. You cannot afford, your mother gave you money for food, you know, and you're trying to drink instead of buying the groceries that you need to buy.* ***So you end up getting***

confused and you don't know what's going on. And when it's time for you to go to class your mind is blocked.

Higher education is a culture of academic codes, rituals, discourses and structures. There are traditions, processes and politics that are specific to higher education (Jansen, 2009). In addition, each institution has its own unique elements within that culture. Consequently, when first-year students enter higher education they need to learn about and adapt to the culture, and for some this may be a culture shock. Students have to learn to negotiate different norms, values and attitudes from their home environment that may cause considerable conflict or turmoil (Pym & Kapp, 2013). Tshepo found that with access to higher education came "*a whole new different environment*", including conflicting values and social pressure that he found confusing. Transition to higher education requires a great deal of adaptation for all students (Wilson-Strydom, 2015) but first-generation students in particular often feel vulnerable and face academic and social integration challenges (Heymann and Carolissen, 2011; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella & Nora, 1996).

5.2.7 Why does aspiration matter?

Aspirations have an important role to play in human development, they are "…powerfully situated as the forerunners to many capabilities" (Hart, 2016, p. 329). Providing students with the freedom to aspire is valuable in its own right (Hart, 2016). They show what a person has reason to value, and influence and enable what they are able to do and be (Conradie & Robeyns, 2013; Hart, 2016). The realisation of the aspiration for higher education opens the door for the creation of other aspirations and the development of capabilities in higher education. In higher education, educational and career aspirations are not the only important goals. Students have different aspirations and different capacities to aspire based on their background, interests and experiences. Students' aspirations reflect their different ways of knowing and being, and help shape their choices and student identity (Kenway, 2011; Walker, 2006). Identity formation in turn enables students to realise their sense of agency. As students exercise the voice of who they are they nurture the aspiration of who they want to become

(Walker, 2006). Personal identity and social agency are pre-conditions for academic success and development of professional identity (Luckett & Luckett, 2009). Giving cognisance to students' aspirations as part of a social, cultural and spatial practice enables us to understand their different needs, wants or identities and to open up their world to the possibilities and opportunities for what their life can become (Kenway, 2011).

Higher education facilitates student capabilities by harnessing the aspiration and agency which enabled students to attain access to higher education (Pym & Kapp, 2013). Their aspiration for who they want to be and what they want to become drives student participation in the processes of higher education. By providing opportunities to aspire the institution enables students to make choices amongst available options and navigate their own pathway through higher education, providing the space for the pursuit of human flourishing (Nussbaum, 2016). The findings in this study support those of Conradie and Robeyns (2013) who say that aspiration facilitates capabilities, playing a role in both capabilities-selecting and agency-unlocking.

5.2.7.1 Aspiration is capabilities-selecting

Aspiration in higher education provides students with opportunities to be and to do what they value being able to be and do.

Aspiration gives hope. The students arrived on the threshold of higher education filled with aspiration for what they want to do and be in a future three or four years hence and beyond. Each participant spoke of their own goals and priorities which ranged from gaining specific knowledge and skills to be able to find a job, to becoming financially independent ("*When I have a car, a house…*" – Lesego), to professional growth to retain their job (Jasmine). Mafani hopes for a career path that will bring her fame and fortune. She hopes to emulate the success of celebrity alumni who have gone before her, visualising the potential of what she might become. Tshepo and Lesego hope to find a career that gives them a platform to reach out to others and become agents for change in their communities where

they can be role models and inspire other people's dreams to come true. First-generation students aspire to lead the way in their family to achieving a higher education qualification, taking on agency on behalf of their parents and grandparents in an attempt to make reparation for past inequalities.

Aspirations are fecund. During the course of the semester, new knowledge presented students with new opportunities, new hopes and new goals. As Carole came to realise, she has a lot to learn and higher education gives her the opportunity to create "*a better plan*" for her future. Successes and failures reveal current abilities and what still needs to be realised. The achievement of one aspiration inspires a proliferation of others; they generate capabilities for tomorrow ("*a distinction*" – Thomas) and for the years to come ("*to make a difference*" – Boitumelo).

5.2.7.2 Aspiration is agency-unlocking

Aspiration in higher education can unlock students' sense of agency to become active participants in the processes that shape and benefit their own lives.

Aspiration promotes choice. All the participants had made a choice to register at this institution (out of many) as a quality provider that they deem the best means to achieve their dreams. They have also made choices pertaining to the particular programme and subjects they register for that will give them the opportunities to which they aspire. The students have freedom to make choices for which they become responsible. Some of their choices determine their personal and social identity – what to wear (to fit in), where to eat lunch, how much time to spend with friends. Some determine their academic progress – whether to attend lectures, when to submit an assignment, who to work with, how to manage their time.

Aspirations are empowering. Thomas's aspiration to get good marks (and to meet his family's expectations) brought him back on track. It unlocked his agency with the realisation that he needed to take responsibility for himself and to attend lectures more regularly. Tshepo's aspiration to make a difference in people's lives

is driving his agency to "*make a plan*" and get a weekend job so that his studies are not derailed by financial issues. He is not waiting to be a passive beneficiary of his mother's benefits, "*…if my mother can pay for my fees, I can pay for my day to day activities – coming from school, you know, to work… and buy my own food*." He feels empowered to take responsibility for his own well-being and aspires to be an agent of change in his own life and the lives of others.

5.3 Affiliation

The capability of affiliation is the opportunity to relate to and interact with others in relationship; both to adopt and be adopted by someone. Affiliation is embedded in most capabilities when people are given the dignity of freedom of choice and are respected as social beings (Nussbaum, 2011). Interpersonal relationships and interactions are fundamental to our functioning as human beings. Relationships are also central to education which is a social process. The pedagogical process enhances individual development and thereby also social development (Walker, 2006). Affiliations exist between students and the institution; between students and other students; and between staff and students. Higher education provides students with the opportunity for self-exploration and social engagement. It is in relation with others and in social interactions that students negotiate who they are and who they want to be. Communal activities in which students play a social role and receive affirmation and recognition support identity and agency formation (Adams et al., 2006; Luckett & Luckett, 2009; Pym & Kapp, 2013; Walker, 2006).

5.3.1 Locating the theme

Interview participants were asked open-ended questions about the inter-personal relationships that form part of their higher education experience. They were also probed for their sense of inclusion/exclusion, of themselves and others. Emerging from this conversation came expressions of affiliation (*a*) with the institution; (*b*) with lecturers, peers, and others; as well as (*c*) their sense of belonging and recognition within the institution.

The graphic representation below summarises the patterns of affiliation revealed in the data and forms the structure of the discussion on this theme.

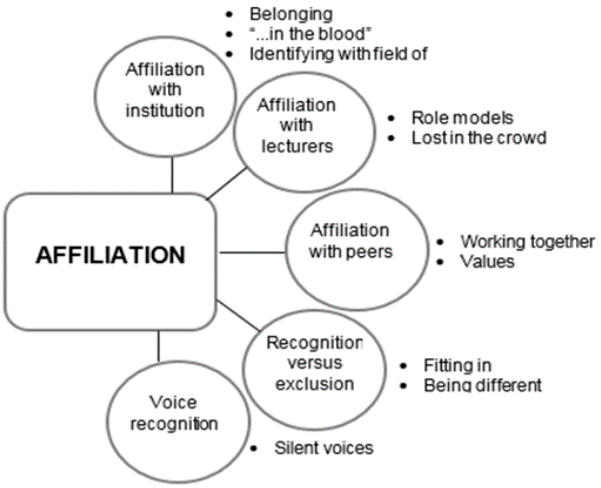


Fig 6b: Overview of data patterns of Affiliation

5.3.2 Affiliation with the institution

A person's social identity is their sense of self in a social context. It is derived from the social and cultural structures that make up their world. A person's social identity is a sub-set of their personal identity (Luckett & Luckett, 2009; Walker, 2015b). Students' affiliation with the institution is closely aligned with their aspiration for the context of the field of study, as well as the affiliation with alumni of the institution and their aspiration to be like those role models. On the whole, the participants in this study identify positively with the institution. Finding himself in a higher education institution where he can pursue his dreams, Tshepo feels the institution has been "*tailor-made*" for him. He described it as, "*It's more like the vehicle that I'm travelling with to my destination"*. He feels comfortable in the institution and it is the means for him to get to where he wants to be.

5.3.2.1 Belonging

Affiliation is generally a reciprocal relationship. When individuals feel part of a community where they feel safe, are recognised and have a sense of identity, they are able to establish a sense of belonging (Pym & Kapp, 2013). Unlike Tshepo's custom-fit in the institution, the two part-time students – Angela and Jasmine – do not feel this way. They feel that the institution is focused only on

full-time students and does not recognise the separate identity or specific needs of part-time students. Jasmine explains:

> Jasmine: *I get it, they speak to kids, but they need to also understand,* ***when you speaking to an adult, change your approach a bit. Like we're grown folk, we're not giving you "my dog ate my homework" excuses*** *(laughs).*

Both the part-time participants had experienced feeling they were being treated like children by administrators and lecturers. Both are mature students who recognise that there is a wide diversity in the part-time student cohort, which includes students who are just out of school as well as people with previous qualifications (like Angela) and people who have several years of work experience (like Jasmine) but they expect to be recognised and treated as individuals and capable adults. They explained that "*not everybody has the fight to fight the system*" and told of classmates for whom the relationship had broken down and who were unlikely to succeed. A sense of belonging is important in enabling students to connect with the discourse. This strengthens their sense of agency and enhances their chances of success (Pym & Kapp, 2013).

5.3.2.2 "…in the blood"

First-generation students do not have the benefit of inheriting embedded institutional knowledge from their parents (Jansen, 2009). These students have a different dynamic when it comes to their sense of belonging in higher education as they do not have "knowledge in the blood" (Jansen, 2009, p. 170). This is a deeply embedded, habitual knowledge that is transferred to the second-generation student forming and informing their understanding of themselves, their world and others. Parents who have no experience of higher education themselves do not understand the emotional, social, economic, political, psychological lives of the higher education community, nor the underlying traditions or discourses (Jansen, 2009) and as such are not equipped to advise or assist their children in coping with this transition (Dennis et al., 2005; Heymann and Carolissen, 2011). Having not inherited this 'knowledge' the first-generation student relies on "second hand information" (Siyengo, 2015, p. 94) and becomes

the pioneer of the higher education terrain. In this regard, however, development of capabilities and agency can assist first-generation student establish their higher education identity (Ellery & Baxen, 2015; Luckett & Luckett, 2009; Pym & Kapp, 2013).

5.3.2.3 Identifying with the field of study

Carole, Lesego, Mafani and Thomas expressed an expectation that through their higher education experience they will be able to build a network of friends and industry connections with the prospect of enabling future opportunities in life. Higher education provides opportunities for everyday interactions with staff and other students that builds a "social connectedness" (Pym & Kapp, 2013, p. 278). This helps students develop an individual identity, establishing who they are and want to be, as well as a social identity that comes with a sense of belonging in the institution. Students may develop a strong affiliation with the knowledge of the field of study. Bernstein used the term "pedagogic identity" to refer to the "particular moral disposition, motivation and aspiration" that is constructed in students by the curriculum, and that becomes "embedded in their performances and practices" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 65). In other words, what students learn becomes ingrained in what they do and who they are. There is evidence that students' can develop a pedagogic identity in higher education that subsumes personal and social identities, and supersedes social inequalities (McLean, Abbas & Ashwin, 2015). Similar evidence was found in this study where students had a very strong identification with the contextual field of the programme. Thomas described the student body as "*all of the people here are just the same*". Mafani had the same view:

> Mafani: *For me, the students are, they're um, the same... **they're the same but then they still different at the same time**. They're the same in the sense of it's like a group of creatives. Everybody is so creative … but they're different in terms of their personalities and the way their creativeness is.*

In Mafani's view students' personal differences are subsumed by their collective social identity.

5.3.3 Affiliation with lecturers

The participants all feel a strong affiliation with the lecturers, who they describe as ‘cool’, accessible, approachable, helpful, knowledgeable and motivating.

5.3.3.1 Role models

Participants value being able to learn from the experience of people who have worked in the industry for which they are being prepared. Mafani explains:

> Mafani: …*I know this is not someone that is telling me [what to do] but they’ve never done it themselves, you know. So it really did encourage me, it made me understand that if I work hard enough I’ll be able to do it because* ***I’m being taught by someone who’s already been in the field, he’s got the T-shirt, he’s sort of done everything.***

Role models can inspire and motivate students (Pym & Kapp, 2013). For Mafani, the credibility of the lecturer and the value of her learning lies in the fact that her lecturers are able to do what they are teaching her to do. This encourages and motivates her. A couple of the participants alluded to the fact that some students select their subject choice according to the lecturer. Carole referred to this as “*people who are just following, if not the crowds then the fun*” rather than having their own sense of agency and sticking with their intended career direction. In contrast, Lesego interprets such moves as evidence of students having the opportunity to make choices as people find what they value in the career direction they take. The subject selection in first- and second-year influences students’ elective major subjects for their qualification. Therefore, students’ relationships with lecturers have a strong influence not just in the knowledge capabilities they will build but also in influencing their career choice and who they are able to become in future.

5.3.3.2 Lost in the crowd

Participants, particularly those who had attended small schools, felt lost in the large numbers in class, which impacted on their ability to connect with the lecturer. They acknowledge that under those circumstances it is not possible for the lecturer to know and connect with each student individually. They accept that

the absence of direct connection with the lecturer is not a personal rejection but rather a characteristic of large classes in first year. Those who need to connect with their lecturers for information or support find them willing to make themselves available either in person or by email. None of the participants felt restricted in any way from being able to access and relate to their lecturers by some means or other. They feel they have the necessary support from the lecturers to find their way when they need it. This will require them to call on their agency in initiating that contact.

5.3.4 Affiliation with peers

When it comes to their peers, participants feel a very strong affiliation with other students, even those in different year groups. Nonku feels as though they are family:

> Nonku: *Students from my campus are friendly actually. I don't know why,* ***it's like we are from the same family. We treat each other equally and we have got that love even though we don't know each other.*** *So it is a good thing.*

Nonku feels there is a mutual respect between students. All the participants said they had made friends and described a sense of belonging and participation as part of the student body and the institution (also assisted by the attitude of the lecturers, as described above).

5.3.4.1 Working together

Participants explained that they frequently have the opportunity of working in groups. Peers can be a particularly valuable source of academic support in shared outcomes (Dennis et al., 2005; Siyengo, 2015). This is not always a favourable experience if the support is not viewed as being instrumental to the outcomes, which may be the case when there are mixed ability and effort levels amongst group members. Some participants feel that group work is an obstacle that hinders their achievements due to "*slackers that don't do anything*" (Angela). Angela spoke of the frustration of having to compensate for weaker members in her group, but realises the value of using her strengths to assist others:

Angela: *Unfortunately **I get really irritated** with that but I am like, okay, well **if I have to carry you I will carry you on my back and we will run this**. I always say we are like in a war, and we don't leave anyone behind, we will carry them. **So we will carry them until they are dead and you can't carry them anymore**.*

While retaining her affiliation for her group, Angela takes responsibility for her own outcomes, and those of others. She is able to realise her own sense of agency in the metaphorical battle by carrying weaker group members so that they all achieve success. For some, group projects provide them with the opportunity to support their peers, in turn there may be times when they are able to benefit from the support. Tshepo told of the support and encouragement he receives from his friends:

Tshepo: *I have the coolest friends ever. I wish I'd met them 10 or 20 years ago. …I feel like they are people that I need in my life right now because t**hey always push me as well to be an excellent student.** They always like, "Guys, we need to go do assignments. Did you go to class?" You know… **I'm around a circle of positivity at all times.***

Tshepo appreciates both the instrumental role of these friendships in his academic processes, as well as the intrinsic value of the friendships in making him an excellent student. This "*circle of positivity*" is helping him to flourish. Many of the participants shared this sense of affiliation and social identity with new friends they have met at the institution. Studies have shown the significant value of friends in providing psycho-social support, identity formation and promoting academic success (Adams et al., 2006; Dennis et al., 2005; Heymann & Carolissen, 2011; Siyengo, 2015).

5.3.4.2 Values

Affiliation is grounded in personal values. Reflecting on their own values, Boitumelo and Carole describe their particular perspective on their social interactions and friendships:

Carole: *In terms of socially and stuff, I know where I stand so I also totally understand that **I'm not here for friends** and so whether the students try to make me feel a certain type of way, it just doesn't work with me.*

Boitumelo: ***If you can't value my worth, I can't be with you****. That's why I choose, it's either they continue their lifestyle or I leave them…* ***I need people who are positive and want to be something, that are hard workers****.*

Both these students appear to have a well-established sense of personal identity reflecting what they value in their social relationships and therefore who they affiliate with. The freedom to make choices on the basis of what one values lies central to the capability approach. They both show their sense of agency in their choice of friends and expect affiliations to be based on mutual respect and shared values.

5.3.5 Recognition versus exclusion

Recognition is an inherent part of the capability of affiliation incorporated in social interactions and the ability to live with and toward others (Nussbaum, 2011). Communal activities in which students play a social role provide opportunities for recognition and affirmation (Luckett & Luckett, 2009). Notwithstanding the apparently strong pedagogic identity and social affiliation that most participants expressed, Lesego, Tshepo and Carole told of the social pressure they feel to fit in amongst peers.

5.3.5.1 Fitting in

Participant responses to interview questions that probed for grounds of exclusion indicated that the main criteria for fitting in at this institution are fashion and appearance. Lesego describes his perspective:

Lesego: *Most of the students here wear brands like labels and stuff like that. Others…are different in a way because they're trying to fit in but it's hard for them. As now, you see* ***I'm wearing BOSS. It's not because I bought it, I had to go and take it from my uncle just to fit in at school.*** *So in a way, I'd say, we're not the same, we're different.*

Lesego feels different and in order to fit in he has had to borrow a brand-name jacket. He knows he cannot afford to purchase clothing brands, which makes it difficult for him. Having money enables a person to buy expensive clothes and look fashionable, however, participants did not indicate that any judgement is

made on a person's wealth per se, nor does it seem that socio-economic status is a criterion for acceptance or exclusion. Those who don't have the resources, make an effort to project apparent wealth. Tshepo explains, "*You need to look like you're wealthy, you need to live up to a certain standard of living*". The ability to fit in is based primarily on external appearance, including the detail ("…*even the smallest things, the accessories, nice watch*" – Tshepo), but there are also other 'measures' of social fit:

> Tshepo: *Ah, they not cool enough. Their fashion is not that nice, they don't speak good English. They don't listen to HipHop, you know. And they don't have the nice shoes as well.*

None of the participants had been subject to exclusion directly, although some said they were aware of other students who are excluded and seen to be different. Mafani felt that the issues at this institution are minor. She made a comparison with other institutions:

> Mafani: *… when I hear from what my friends say, um, they sort of face racism, and um, people being homophobes and what not, but* ***I haven't actually experienced anyone being like that****.*

Other participants concurred and the reason was generally given as being a result of the single context of the institution that makes the students like-minded "…*in this school, everybody's together*" (Mafani) and open-minded "*…we tend to embrace being different and… people doing things differently, leading different lifestyles*" (Simon).

5.3.5.2 Being different

Despite the apparent absence of social prejudices participants concurred that at this institution introverts are treated as different. Shy, quiet individuals experience potential barriers to inclusion.

> **Interviewer: Are you aware of any students who might be perceived to be different or who might feel different?**
>
> Simon: *Yes,* ***I certainly notice those introverts****… I notice a lot of students, young students who are homosexual, per se, and outspoken but then I don't really see them being treated as differently because that being outspoken, that*

being extroverted just makes them mingle more with people… but they're not treated differently. I think they embrace their being different.

According to Simon, the extroverts mingle but the introverts are noticeable. Simon admits he is an introvert, but clarifies that it is not necessarily others who are excluding him but rather he who possibly excludes himself. Students who view their particular difficulty as an individual burden may be inclined to terminate their studies (Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010). Simon is trying to adapt to being more open but feels he stands out as being different in several ways – he is from a small town in a different province, his language and dress code are different, as are his lunch habits.

Simon: *I think there are some who are really well off and **you tend to see it in their behaviour and how they sit and where they sit, where they'd have lunch, what they'd have for lunch. Whereas I'm immediately different.** I wouldn't be… in lunch time, I wouldn't be sitting at a car having lunch from maybe Pick n Pay and those types of things, but maybe sitting in the canteen having my lunch from a lunch tin.*

Despite his strong sense of being an outsider, he doesn't feel that anyone would stop him from joining others for lunch at the car with his lunch tin, but it is clear he is unlikely to try to do so.

Simon: *…some of the things are just quite obvious and **you know who fits in where**, it's quite evident and so we don't really try to be in that landscape.*

Simon recognises that his identity differs from others, but he views it as being different not unequal.

5.3.6 Voice recognition

Listening to student voice is a means of paying attention to students' experiences and trying to see things from their perspective as a mechanism of understanding diversity and exposing inequalities (McLeod, 2011). Voice can become an instrument to provide opportunities for affiliation as students work with their lecturers, policy makers, university management, and with each other to gain representation and recognition as "embodied, real, live students" (McLeod, 2011,

p. 211) in the institution. Attention needs to be paid to hearing *what* is being voiced, by *whom* and *how* best to respond as this is an important mechanism for evaluation of the good academic life (McLeod, 2011).

5.3.6.1 Silent voices

Participants were probed for their sense of having a voice in the institution. When it comes to understanding student voice, it is necessary to differentiate between the opportunity of being given a voice (by the institution) and (the student) taking the opportunity to voice. The latter involves the active engagement of the student as agent whereas the former is a 'dispensed benefit'. Participant responses were mixed and generally based on abstract scenarios. The participants are first-year students, who, at the time of conducting the interviews, had been at the institution for between one and six months. While some may be in full voice and some still need to find their voice, it was apparent that these opportunities were not yet part of their lived experience. Boitumelo and Carole felt sceptical that their voices would be heard amongst the numbers. Despite Carole's belief that her lone voice holds no significance, her agency extends to being a voice for the well-being of others (Sen, 1985).

> Carole: ***I care about other people's feelings sometimes more than my own*** *and so if they were to complain to me, and a number of them, and it becomes a frequent thing, then that would definitely make me stand up. Especially I feel like people who don't know how to voice themselves because* ***I know I was blessed with a voice and a personality*** (laughs)

Carole feels she has the personality to support the voice which she would use for herself and others. Personality and identity seem to play a large part in students having the confidence to exercise their agency.

> Angela: *I will definitely raise my voice…* ***it is just part of who I am*** *… but whether your voice is being heard is a different story so I don't know.*
>
> Nonku: *I think that my voice would be heard if I tried, at least,* ***I am not sure if they will deliver what we want****, but we would just try to see how it goes.*

Angela and Nonku stated unhesitatingly that they would extend their agency and raise their voices if necessary, despite their uncertainty as to whether anyone would be listening.

5.3.7 Why does affiliation matter?

Learning takes place in affiliation with others both in and outside the classroom. There is evidence of the benefits of social interaction on learning (Adams et al., 2006). Relations within the institution between students and peers, and between students and lecturers, can help to foster identity, intellectual and affective development. This in turn enhances agency, which contributes not only to learning and academic success but also to the broader development of citizenship and social responsibility (Adams et al., 2006; Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Dennis et al., 2005; Pym & Kapp, 2013; Walker, 2006). The capability of affiliation has been shown to make a significant contribution to people's mental well-being and occupational functioning, serving as a "key to living" and transformative being (Mousavi, Forwell, Dharamsi and Dean, 2015, p. 14).

5.3.7.1 Affiliation fosters identity

Higher education facilitates student capabilities through affiliation in which students develop their personal, social and disciplinary identity.

Personal identity: Students enter the institution with their own personal identity shaped by the family values and social interactions of their childhood. Identity is shaped throughout life and higher education is a stage of identity "moratorium" (Adams et al., 2006, p. 81) when students are not sure whether "*to be wild and free…or serious*"" (Tshepo). They establish their own values so that they can "*know where they stand*" (Carole) and other people can "*value my worth*" (Boitumelo) because they know "w*here they want to be and where they are heading*" (Angela). Personal identity comprises social identity.

Social identity: The data showed that on the whole participants have a strong sense of affiliation with the institution and with other students which gives them a

sense of belonging. Although it was evident that the part-time students do not share in this sense of belonging. They feel that the institution does not recognise them as having different needs from the (younger) full-time students. Consequently, they do not identify as strongly with the institutional identity and when asked about their experience, Angela and Jasmine made frequent reference to "*they*" (the institution) and "*we*" (students). Most of the other participants, when asked the same question, chose instead to describe their activities and participation.

Social interactions inside and outside of the classroom give students the opportunity to see themselves relative to others and affirms who they are and who they want to be. Tshepo feels he and the institution are "*tailor-made*" for each other, Nonku feels like part of a family, Mafani says everyone is "*together*". Thomas agrees that they are "*… all kind to each other… accepting… and we get along with each other*". However, there are people who do not fit in with the social identity – introverts and those who are not fashionably dressed. Fitting in, or not, can be a choice. Some choose to borrow clothes to fit in (Lesego), some choose to be "*out-standing*" (Tshepo), or withdraw rather than feeling excluded (Simon). Boitumelo's choice is that others should fit in with her. At lunch time they learn to respect that some may eat from a lunch tin in the canteen and others will buy lunch from Pick n Pay (Simon).

5.3.7.2 Affiliation fosters learning

All the participants like their lecturers, they like what they are learning from them, and they said they are learning a lot. Lecturers who have "*already been in the field*" (Mafani) serve as role models. This earns them respect and credibility as they have "*got the T-shirt*" (Mafani) and it inspires and motivates the students in their learning. This, despite the fact that first-year class numbers are large and it is not possible for the lecturer to establish a personal rapport with every student. Participants generally felt a connection with their lecturer even if indirectly.

Students work in groups with peers where some carry their team members (Angela), and others are pushed "to *be an excellent student*" (Tshepo). On campus and in crowded lecture rooms they discuss, enquire and think critically. They can express an opinion and test their voice, or be the voice for others because "*I was brought up that way*" (Angela), because they care about other people's feelings more than their own (Carole), or so that "*…they [the institution] will deliver what we want*" (Nonku). As students learn, their knowing becomes part of their being and they develop their identity in "…*a group of creatives*" (Mafani).

5.3.7.3 Affiliation fosters agency

When students interact with others they learn to take responsibility for themselves and for others. Angela takes responsibility for the "*slackers*" in her group, and Carole will become the voice for those who need to complain. It is their affiliation with their peers that motivates them to take on this role and responsibility.

5.4 Reflection

Reflective thinking is a metacognitive process in which students learn about their own learning. In reflection students review their experiences (and the experiences of others) in an attempt to make sense of their circumstances and this shapes their thinking and becomes the basis for decisions and action (Dyke et al., 2012). Reflection is a means of drawing theoretical knowledge into practice, and provides the opportunity for thinking about ways to improve one's practice. It involves interaction between thinking, doing and being (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). Pedagogical processes engage participants in reflection, and higher education can play an instrumental role in enabling the capability of reflection and reflective learning (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). Lecturers reflect on what they teach, how they teach and the students' learning. In their educational experiences students reflect on what they learn as well as on how they learn.

Reflection occurs intrinsically through internal dialogue. Internal conversations may also be externalised with others enabling critical reflection and informing action (Luckett & Luckett, 2009). Dialogue plays an important role in reflective learning as it "…engages the person at the edge of their knowledge, their sense of self and the world as experienced by them" (Brockbank & McGill, 2007, p. 65). There is a distinction between reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action (Brockbank and McGill, 2007). The former being retrospective critical reflection following an experience, the latter being emergent reflection that arises during an experience, giving it significance.

5.4.1 Locating the theme

Participants were asked to reflect on the extent to which their schooling had prepared them for higher education. Four of the ten interviewees felt they had not been well prepared by their school for the demands of higher education. Thomas and Lesego said that as a result of having been told at school what to do, when and how to do it, they felt completely unprepared for the freedom and flexibility of higher education. Simon and Mafani acknowledged that their schools had made an attempt to prepare them, but having been given the knowledge *that* higher education would be different from school rather than *how* it would be different or being taught *how* to cope with the different demands, left them feeling inadequately prepared. Mafani also felt that the subject knowledge she learned at school was irrelevant for her current studies. These responses concur with other studies which show students enter higher education feeling inadequately equipped for the cognitive and personal skills and demands of that level of education (Molapisi, 2009; Pym & Kapp, 2013; Siyengo, 2015; Wilson-Strydom, 2012). Inadequate preparation for higher education is one of the primary reasons for student dropout (Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010).

Boitumelo, Carole and Nonku, by contrast, reflected with appreciation on their schooling. Beyond subject knowledge, they had been taught skills of time management, independence, self-discipline, and various academic skills such as referencing that were equipping them to cope with the 'freedom' of higher

education, while they noticed many other students who were unable to cope. Jasmine, despite entering higher education some years after having left school, said that her school learning had provided a fundamental base of knowledge and processes that enabled her to cope with life after school and further studies. Tshepo felt that the general ethos of a township school education prepares students well for higher education through the principles and practices of long days and hard work. This concurs with Pym and Kapp's (2013) findings that despite their circumstances, students from underprivileged backgrounds were still able to emerge from school with positive identities (having achieved) and a strong sense of agency.

Reflecting on their school experience and university readiness required the participants also to reflect on and evaluate their higher education experience. In this reflection-in-action they identified the functionings and capabilities that are part of their daily higher education experience; what they are able to do (or not) and what they hope to be able to do. They were able to interact between their thinking, doing and being (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). To this extent, whether as a result of the inputs and processes from school or higher education, they were all able to demonstrate the capability of reflection.

The graphic representation below summarises the patterns of reflection revealed in the data and forms the structure of the discussion on this theme.

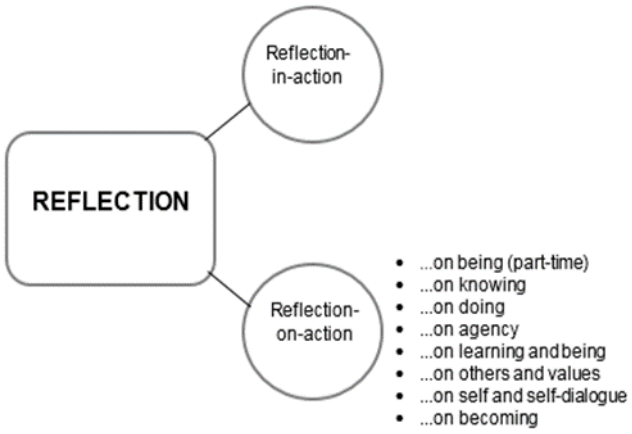


Fig 6c: Overview of data patterns of Reflection

5.4.2 Reflection-in-action

Reflection-in-action is a process that emerges spontaneously during the course of action (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). Reflection-in-action happens in the moment and it is distinguished from reflection-on-action which is retrospection on past happenings. Consequently, it was not possible to ask participants about their reflection-in-action because to do so would have been reflection-on-action. Also, the purpose of the interview was not to measure students' reflection-in-action. Therefore there is minimal discussion for this report on this element. However, Thomas did provide some insight in this regard to indicate that he does reflect in action.

As Thomas was reflecting on his learning experience in higher education, he described what happens as he is learning.

> *Thomas: …there are times when I can see it, then like you know "do that" – that is what I say – but then* ***there are other times when I don't see it and I am just like, "ooh, look at that"*** *(laughs)*

Thomas's self-dialogue, "*ooh, look at that*", reflects the characteristic of reflection-in-action, which Brockbank and McGill (2007, p. 90) describe as a "…surprise occasioned by the unaccustomed …an emergent critique of the way of doing something that gives rise to a modification in the way the action will be undertaken" (Brockbank & McGill, 2007, p. 90). Thomas's 'surprise' moment of revelation prompts his conversation with himself and his response to "*do that*".

5.4.3 Reflection-on-action

Reflection-on-action involves a cognitive 'taking stock' of past, current and future (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). Not only were participants required to do this in answering interview questions but also their responses revealed that this form of critical reflection is part of their daily functioning in higher education. Participants told of various elements in their experience on which they reflect.

5.4.3.1 …on being (part-time)

The part-time participants spoke about how different they perceive their experience to be from that of the full-time students, having to balance the demands of part-time study in addition to a full-time job. Angela and Jasmine both struggled to adapt to what was initially an overwhelming experience, but described how on reflection they realised they needed to put strategies in place to help them cope.

> Jasmine: *I had to make adjustment in the beginning. I thought I could do it all – go out, go to school, go to work, go to… (laughs). I couldn't (laughs).* ***I fast realised something's got to give.***

Thinking about what she was doing made Jasmine realise that her load of activities was not sustainable. She acted on the realisation and made some adjustments. Jasmine explained that she reflects weekly on her load at work and her lectures in order to "*juggle*" her plans to see how she can best manage the intensity. Having come to the same realisation that "*something's got to give*" Angela has cut down on riding her bicycle and when lectures end on a Saturday she takes the rest of the weekend off "*to focus on myself and my own well-being before I continue the next cycle [of work]".*

5.4.3.2 …on knowing

Carole explained how she reflects on and evaluates her learning experiences to prepare her for what lies ahead.

> Carole: *I am also in a position in my life whereby I feel like* ***whether things go right or wrong I still find a lesson in everything,*** *and so even if the experience was h-o-r-r-i-b-l-e I always think, 'Hmm, who knows, the work place could be even worse', and this is prepping me for that.*

Through reflective self-dialogue Carole takes the opportunity to evaluate the content and process of her experience and think about ways to improve her practice. By attaching meaning to the experiences she is able to learn by way of attaching constructive purpose to negative experiences.

5.4.3.3 …on doing

Angela's reflection led her to realise that she is already able to put her learning into practice (her knowing into doing).

> Angela: *… **it is phenomenal how I can actually implement what I have actually learned** into what I am actually doing and actually seeing the two filtering into one another. So that is quite nice, I really, really enjoy that.*

Reflection provides Angela with the feedback loop to evaluate what she knows and what she is actually able to do. Feedback is a mechanism that links objectives with outcomes. In this way, Angela's reflection ties in with her aspirational objectives in choosing to study further (part-time) as she is able to apply her learning to her daily work.

5.4.3.4 …on agency

Agency and autonomy are concepts that are central to the capability approach. Being able to make choices, work independently, take responsibility for self and others and make autonomous decisions are also core competencies in higher education (SAQA, 2012). Simon's reflections help him realise how far he has progressed in becoming an autonomous agent; a capability he values in facing the reality of what lies ahead.

> Simon: *I mean, **now looking back, you certainly miss having someone to tell you… "keep up with this"**… and attention to such things. But then I guess it's a reality check and out there, after getting my certificate or degree it's going to be like this. **Nobody's going to follow up on me, so I guess it's a wake-up call and it prepares me, so I like the fact that I'm getting prepared for what's really out there** instead of a bubble world.*

Simon is able to take a step back from his situation and reflect at a meta-level on what has happened, and is happening, in his development (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). In this process he was able to identify his feelings associated with the loss of security of someone checking on him; he was able to realise the value of both his developing agency and of getting prepared for the real world. As he contextualises the elements inherent in the challenges of having to be self-

disciplined he is able to acknowledge that the capability will give him the freedom of well-being in future.

5.4.3.5 …on learning and being

Reflection is a form of meta-learning where the student, through reflection, learns about aspects of his learning (Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Pym & Kapp, 2013). Reflecting on his experiences at school where he failed twice and then was expelled, Tshepo acknowledges that those past learning experiences made him who he is.

> Tshepo: ***It's who I am but it's what I've been taught as well.*** *…From failing my grade 8 I went to psychology…**through those psychological processes** I realised that there's something… there's a much bigger picture that I'm missing. …**What is it that I'm looking for? And so as I was doing that I began to redefine myself.***

By replaying his past experience and describing it, Tshepo was able to clarify what happened and gain insight that would not have been apparent to him at the time (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). It is significant that his reflection was on the value of his failures, and that through reflection he was able to recognise what he had learned through those experiences and the processes that followed. Tshepo's story also shows that it was his reflection-in-action, "*What is it that I'm looking for?*" that played an integral role in shaping his new being.

5.4.3.6 …on others and values

Reflection allows a person to step back from a situation and evaluate the relationships, the roles and role players, and the interactions with others.

> *Tshepo: My mum doesn't let a situation bring her down quite easily and now I feel like **the roles are changing** because now she's getting older, she's getting more tired and frustrated and now… I see her when I look at myself in the mirror. I'm like, **I'm now becoming her parent in a way** (laughs). …**That's how life is. And so, I really would give it up to my mum, as to her building my mentality. And my role model.***

Our values are held intrinsically but it is in relationship with others that we make them explicit. Reflecting on relationships and interactions can help identify,

establish and reinforce values. Tshepo reflected on the values he has learned from his mother and the role she has played in his life and learning (particularly standing by him through his rebellion and failure as described in paragraph 5.4.3.5 above). He has been able to draw on these values. He recognises the transfer of learning as his mother's values are now instilled in him. He sees himself becoming like his mother and is happy to swop roles, giving back to her in what he sees as the cycle of life. Tshepo's determination to transform his failure into personal and educational success aligns with the study by Wright et al. (2016) on the resilience of young Black males in overcoming school failure and their aspiration for what is possible

5.4.3.7 …on self and self-dialogue

Reflection engages a person in their sense of self and their being and doing in the world around them (Luckett & Luckett, 2009). Thomas acknowledges that he has needed to grow up, and that higher education has helped him find himself. He described his struggle with the influence of his "*super corruptive*" friends who distract him from his studies.

> Thomas: *But why am I blaming other people? I should be blaming myself you know (laughs)*

On reflection, Thomas challenges himself. He has come to realise that his success depends on taking responsibility for himself and is developing a new understanding of who he can be and become.

Dialogue facilitates learning. Reflective self-dialogue enables a person to take responsibility for their own learning, enhancing their sense of agency.

> Nonku: *So I always tell myself that even though I am given this freedom my mom is not around, she is not going to tell me 'don't do this', 'don't do that'.* ***I should be the one telling myself that 'you know what, this is not going to lead you anywhere…'***

When Nonku 'tells herself', she is grounding her reflection in experience and established values. Her past becomes part of her current, existing sense of self and the world, and from this emerges new learning (Brockbank & McGill, 2007).

Nonku reflected on the self-discipline required to succeed in higher education and realises that she needs to manage herself. She is taking responsibility for her own learning.

5.4.3.8 …on becoming

Education is future-orientated and dynamic. As students navigate their way through their own learning in the disciplinary knowledge of their programme, they are on a journey of 'becoming' (Fataar, 2010). They are evolving into a new being with more complex knowledge and abilities. Reflecting on his learning, Tshepo said, "*I've become a more curious person*". Reflecting on his identity in higher education and his agency to take the opportunity to be who he is, he said, *"…that's how I become outstanding*". Reflecting on his future and the potentiality of what lies ahead, he said:

> Tshepo: *I can do anything, I can become anything.*

Reflection serves a valuable role in this process of transformation to a new sense of being (Brooman & Darwent, 2012).

5.4.4 Why does reflection matter?

Reflection plays a significant part in learning. As students develop, the capacity to learn lies increasingly with them as the learner. Reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action engage the learner actively in their learning, thinking about not only on *what* they are being taught but also on *how* they learn. Their reflection draws their theoretical learning into practice as a means to improve what they are able to do (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). They reflect on themselves, others and the world around them. Reflection enables them to challenge existing assumptions about that world and as they do so they develop a new sense of knowing, doing, being and becoming (Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Pym & Kapp, 2013; Luckett & Luckett, 2009). Reflective practice has been shown to benefit first-year students in the transition to higher education (Brooman & Darwent, 2012). It can benefit all students. It is important, therefore, not only to be aware

of the reflective capacity students have as they enter higher education (Fataar, 2010) but also to develop the capability of reflection in higher education.

5.4.4.1 Reflection facilitates knowing and doing

The data showed that students' experiences in the classroom give them opportunities to take stock of past, current and future both in-action and on-action. They reflect-in-action evaluating what they are learning or how they are performing ("*ooh, look at that*" – Thomas). They reflect-on-action on what they have learned ("*how to deal with certain personalities*" – Angela; "*life skills"* – Carole). They learn from their successes and their failures. Carole's self-talk shows she was able to review her perspective based on her experience *("…you think you know a lot … but you actually don't"*). Angela appreciated that she was able to apply her new knowledge to her work. Students also learn about how they learn which enhances capacities for critical thinking and reasoning.

5.4.4.2 Reflection facilitates being and becoming

Students reflect on themselves, others and themselves in relationship with others. Lecturers play a significant part in their life and they reflect on who they are ("*my lecturers are interesting… they have unique characters*" – Tshepo), what they like about them ("*he's very patient*" – Mafani; "*I always love a lecturer that has humour*" – Tshepo) and what they don't like about them ("*a few lecturers have their favourites*" – Carole). They reflect on their teaching styles ("*their teaching styles are different* – Tshepo) and the effectiveness of that style ("*they're really good lecturers*" – Simon; "…*understandable. Ja, they do their job pretty good*" – Thomas; "*my lecturers are really…telling me what to do*" – Lesego). As students learn about their lecturers and their experience they also learn about their own being and who they want to be and become.

Reflection is evident in self-talk ("*I always tell myself that no matter what happens I should go to school"* – Nonku). She uses her values as a frame of reference for what to do. Participants' reflection on their knowing, being and doing takes them

towards what they are becoming ("*I am becoming aware*" – Angela; "*I've become a more curious person… I can become anything*" – Tshepo).

5.5 Resilience

Resilience is a positive adaptation to an adverse condition (Adamson et al., 2014). Exposure to adversity occurs in all elements of life – poverty, tyranny, poor economic opportunities, social deprivation, neglect of facilities, intolerance, and "…it is in the everyday world and in our practical lives where we must learn to cope with life" (Walker, 2015b, p. 4). Living life requires resilience to these 'unfreedoms' until the source can be removed (Sen, 1999). Developing the capacity of resilience benefits a person's productivity and sustainability in the place of work and enhances their individual well-being (Beddoe et al., 2013; Ledesma, 2014). Resilience can be learned and education has a role to play in strengthening students' resilient qualities and building resilient practitioners (Beddoe et al., 2013; Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010; Ledesma, 2014).

Adversity causes ill-being (Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010). This is not only absence of well-being but includes perceptions of powerlessness and hopelessness that engender negative feelings about self and the future. "In the absence of power… wellness remains a fantasy" (Firfirey and Carolissen, 2010, p. 989). Students who experience adverse conditions in higher education risk falling into despair and dropping out thinking their difficulty is an individual burden. Agency is central to addressing deprivation and coping with adversity and ill-being. Resilience can stave off failure and the perpetuation of ill-being by promoting the power of agency to find hope and a way out towards fulfilling aspirations (Ellery & Baxen, 2015; Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010).

5.5.1 Locating the theme

Interview participants were asked to reflect on the 'best' and 'worst' elements of their higher education experience. Some of these elements have been encapsulated in the themes of aspiration, affiliation and reflection. The 'worst'

elements reflect those experiences that provide some form of hardship, problem or difficulty for the student, that impact on their functioning in one way or another. There are several areas in which students in this study experience adverse conditions and where resilience is required. These can be categorised broadly into contextual, institutional, personal and social resilience.

The graphic representation below summarises the patterns of resilience revealed in the data and forms the structure of the discussion on this theme.

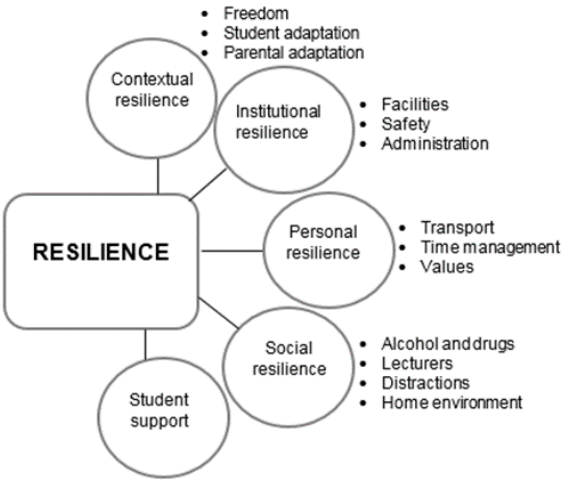


Fig 6d: Overview of data patterns of Resilience

5.5.2 Contextual resilience

There are factors related to the context of higher education generally that may present forms of adversity to some students – the freedom and autonomy, student life and the new identity of being a higher education student. It is the individual's capacity to adapt that differentiates whether their experience becomes one of survival or thriving (Ledesma, 2014) or drop-out.

First-year students need to adapt to the novelty of being in higher education, fitting in with city life, campus life and student life. Tshepo explains his dilemma:

> Tshepo: *…if you're going to be wild and free, don't you think that this is a period where you need to readjust to this new type of thinking? As you're tapping into adulthood?* ***So I really don't know to be serious or not to be serious****. So now, at the same time I feel like I need to balance both. That's where I'm at right now.*

Tshepo's aporia relates to the juxtaposition between the liberation and the restraints of higher education, between the freedom of his youth and the earnestness of who he is becoming. This epitomises the "institutionalised moratorium" period provided by universities in which young people can experiment with various roles, values and identities prior to constructing a stable identity (Adams et al., 2006, p. 81).

Beyond coping with the flexibility and freedom in higher education, students also expressed other ways in which they are needing to adapt in order to cope with the demands of higher education. This includes managing the workload, the academic level, the 'language' of new subjects, the pressure of assignments and deadlines, time management and self-discipline, and coping with fatigue (part-time students). Similar student experiences were also recorded by Pym and Kapp (2013) in their study of undergraduate students.

5.5.2.1 Freedom

As interview participants talked about their experiences in higher education the topic of 'freedom' was frequently mentioned. Participants described not only the freedom of having access to higher education but also the freedom they experience in higher education, particularly in contrast to the top-down regulation and rigidity of school. This freedom relates to choices that students are able to make about subjects, the timetable, as well as attendance and participation. Several participants made reference to the adjustment they are making in their higher education experience, to the fact that they can choose whether or not to attend lectures or submit an assignment. For some students this freedom is liberating.

> Carole: ***So being in tertiary is giving me that freedom and everybody else to actually be who they are, who they truly are****, so I feel like that is one beautiful thing that I really enjoy about tertiary.*

Carole is realising her sense of autonomy and the space to establish her own identity and be herself. For other students, just out of school, such freedom can have adverse effects. The hardship of freedom was expressed by most of the

participants as they either observe the struggle of others or recognise it in themselves.

> Mafani: *So, we do talk about it and we do notice that for some students who have just gotten out of high school, it's* ***the freedom is a little bit too much for them****. …it could be because they've just gotten this freedom so you don't know what to do with it, so you immediately just wanna have as much fun as you can in the little time that you have because you're not sure if it's gonna be taken away from you.*

Mafani's comment resonates with Tshepo's aporia, indicating that some students make a choice to be "*wild and free*" while they can, in case it is "*taken away*". Both Tshepo and Mafani feel that many first-year students lack resilience because they are not ready to cope with the perturbations of higher education.

Thomas described the difficulty of "*too much freedom*" which resulted in choosing to spend time socialising with friends rather than attending classes. At some point, through his self-awareness and reflection on his marks, he came to a realisation that he needed to adapt his behaviour and apply self-discipline to get back on track.

> *Thomas: What brought me back on track? Well I didn't get the distinction! (laughs) … I aim on high marks because oooh, pressure in the family! It is like 50 is just the normal. So yeah,* ***they expect something better from me****.*
>
> **Interviewer: So are you driven by their expectations of you?**
>
> *Thomas: At first I was, but then as time went by I also felt, you know in myself, I need to grow –* ***I can't remain a child forever****.*

Thomas's adaptation was influenced initially by family expectations and then by a "cognitive shift" (Ledesma, 2014, p. 3) in response to the challenge, resulting in his expanded sense of agency and autonomy. Handling the freedom of higher education requires not only the attributes of "hardiness" (Ledesma, 2014, p. 4) that gives one the ability to cope but also the relational characteristics that occur in mediation between the individual, the institution and the home (Beddoe et al., 2013).

5.5.2.2 Student adaptation

Resilience capacity is fuelled internally by a person's values, efficacy and energy, and externally by relationships with others (Ledesma, 2014). Mafani explained that her ability to adapt comes from the way she was raised:

> Mafani: *It goes with the people that you surround yourself with.* ***It goes with what you are taught at home****…. with me personally, with the way that my mom has raised me she gives me freedom, so … because I have that freedom, if I'm gonna see people doing drugs, I'm not gonna feel like I'm left out because I know that I can do whatever I want so why 'dulge (sic) into, you know, doing things that I know will have bad influences on me or consequences.*

Mafani suggests her resilience to "*bad influences*" comes from well-established values and an upbringing that provided her with the freedom to make her own choices for her life (Adams et al., 2006).

Nonku explained that the freedom experienced in higher education leaves room for students to spend time with alcohol and drugs rather than attending lectures, the consequence of which is failure and the financial cost of repeating modules. Like Mafani, she feels her upbringing has enabled her to take responsibility for herself, but to assist those who don't share her self-discipline, she suggested that the institution should take responsibility.

> Nonku: *I think that the institution is not doing enough to make students come to attend classes almost every day.* ***At least they should put a little hand****… I am not saying they should beat them, no.*

Nonku did not propose how the institution would enforce class attendance, and in probing for her thoughts on a mechanism she backtracked on this idea when asked if she would be willing to relinquish her own agency and freedom for the institution's "*little hand*". It need not be the institution that lends a hand, but relationships are a significant factor for individuals facing adversity. Students may need to reach out to someone else to help them deal with the adversity, "sometimes these relationships serve as the major catalyst of the transformation in one's life and within oneself" (Ledesma, 2014, p. 5).

5.5.2.3 Parental adaptation

It is not only the students who need to adapt to the freedom of higher education or need assistance in developing resilience but the parents of first-generation students too. They do not understand the system (particularly the flexibility compared to school). When Lesego arrived home early his parents became concerned that he was not participating in the education in which they are investing a lot of money. Lesego describes his parents' misunderstanding:

> Lesego: *I'm going well with it [the freedom],* ***but to my parents it's quite a different story*** *because they think that I have to go at (sic) school by 08h00 then come back around at a certain time*

Lesego is trying to assist his parents to adapt to his new schedule providing his timetable as evidence. He explained that other students extend their day on campus so that they do not have to deal with parental misunderstanding, as they risk having their daily spending money cut back if they arrive home early. Parental attitudes and support are important influences for students, particularly first-generation students (Adams et al., 2006; Dennis et al., 2005; Heymann & Carolissen, 2011).

5.5.3 Institutional resilience

There are specific factors within the institution that form part of students' daily experience that affect their functioning and to which they might need to adapt. This includes environmental elements such as facilities and amenities; administrative elements such as policies, practices and procedures; academic elements such as workload, teaching, learning and assessments; or inter-personal elements, such as relations with others. In this study, the responses of participants indicated that their yardstick of adversity is influenced by their expectations of delivery appropriate for a private higher education institution. Carole is having difficulty adjusting to the higher education culture having come from a small private high school.

> Carole: *I am from a very small school so* ***I am used to like getting individual attention from teachers and stuff and like getting here I thought things***

would be more calm, I guess *… It's a bit more loud than what I expected, it's more busy, there are a lot of people.*

She was not the only participant who expressed feeling overwhelmed by the big classes, but this seems to be less of an adjustment for students who come from larger schools. Regardless of participants' school experience (public or private) they all seem to have a particular expectation of the facilities a private higher education institution should provide, and what constitutes an adverse condition for them.

5.5.3.1 Facilities

Some of the participants described issues relating to the facilities at the institution. These include uncomfortable desks and chairs, inadequate equipment, insufficient parking, lack of online resources, and safety. It is particularly the classroom facilities that participants felt did not live up to their expectations of a private higher education institution. Angela's judgement corroborates the findings of Bezuidenhout and De Jager (2014) of the expectation for the provision of well-equipped facilities in private higher education institutions in South Africa.

Angela: *…if I have to look at it from the perspective of a university and a private [university], …**I don't see the need of paying an exuberant (sic) amount of money for a crappy chair and a crappy desk**.*

It is not just the unmet expectation of quality that requires students to develop strategies for resilience but also the reality that the resultant discomfort has the potential to restrict their functioning.

Carole: *…what affects me the most I would say it's the way I learn because **the method going on right now is not working for me**.*

Nonku: ***I wasn't expecting the classrooms to be the way they are** because some of the classrooms have no mics, you cannot hear the lecturer sometimes. Sometimes you will find that it is hot in the class and the air-conditioner is not working **but then all in all it's a good school**.*

Nonku's resilience to the discomfort is borne by her overarching optimism about the quality of the institution, but Carole's strategy (already struggling with the transition from the 'comfort' of her small, private high school) has been to adapt

the way she learns and to only work at home. Her inability to adapt to the classroom has impacted on her participation in class ("*because I'm not writing notes and stuff I get distracted and I want to talk more*") and altered her purpose for attending lectures ("*So I just go to school to get that attendance*"). She is aware of the potential disadvantages of having less contact with lecturers and other students. One of her concerns is that she may find the status quo reverts with reduced student numbers in second- and third-year and, having made adaptations now, she worries that by then she will be unable to adapt back again. It is also possible, however, that by that stage she will be a more resilient student.

5.5.3.2 Safety

Carole and Boitumelo both expressed concern for safety on and around the campus. Neither of them had experienced any direct threat but they felt at risk which made them anxious about being on campus. Carole's concern was exacerbated by comparison with the protected environment of her high school, a change which she apologetically described as being "*like moving from the White House and then living in the streets"*. She feels this impacts her functioning, but she has made the choice not to address the issue with the institution because she feels other students do not share this concern (this validates her 'silent voice' reported earlier).

Safety is also a daily concern for Simon. He does not feel at risk on campus but fears for his safety returning to his accommodation in what he calls "*the dangerous part of Johannesburg*" particularly after lectures that end late in the afternoon. He has survived three mugging attempts. Once home, which he shares with another student, he feels safe. He explained that they were trying to find an alternative place to stay, however given his financial constraints he was settling to make do in that abode, trying not to let it affect him by focusing on his work. Safety concerns can severely impact a person's quality of life and could be detrimental to a student's learning and academic progress. Safety is a basic human right, and the study by Bezuidenhout & De Jager (2014) showed that safety and security factors

are at the top of the list of priorities for South Africans choosing a private higher education institution.

5.5.3.3 Administration

Adaptation to the institution's administrative processes is part of students' adjustment to the culture of higher education. Administrative issues may arise for students in terms of compliance with the regulations, policies and procedures, the timetable, lectures and academic processes, which are different from their school experience. These elements may adversely impact students who lack the self-discipline required to handle the 'freedom' of higher education when, for example, a student misses a lecture or submits work late. Issues might also arise for first-year students who are unfamiliar with the standard operating procedures and requirements.

Jasmine found herself on the wrong side of the rulebook, having to follow appeal procedures when she did not comply with the policy on electronic submission of work. This compounded with a host of other frustrations she felt, most of which were attributable to the nature of part-time study and restrictions of balancing a job with after-hours attendance of lectures. She feels that as a private provider, and in comparison with other institutions, this institution ought to adapt its policies to facilitate processes for part-time students.

> Jasmine: *....barriers that make it difficult opposed to making it somewhat simpler. And that other institutions offer. And they're not cheap, so why can't they offer some of these things?* ***When they're getting their money, why can't we get what a higher education institution should assist with?***

Students develop resilience in adapting to and complying with the social structure and regulatory policies and procedures of an institution. When students become familiar with and are able to follow the rules, policies and processes, this enhances their agency in their own academic processes. However, flexibility in a programme can more adequately cater for individual needs and diversity (Pym and Kapp, 2013).

Other administrative issues participants experience include inadequate communication, incorrect class allocation, missing assignment marks, and protocols. At the time of being interviewed, the participants were in their first semester of higher education and still learning the systems. Although Simon was deeply concerned about a missing mark and the risk that he might consequently fail the subject, he was realising that there are standard operating procedures in the institution ("*I'm starting to [understand] that everything has a process and you need to follow it"*). He has taken responsibility for his part and is waiting for the response from the institution. Tshepo feels that when students are not coping they blame the institution but in fact, "*...it's just that you don't have proper planning and you don't have discipline*". In his opinion these students don't yet have sufficient resilience.

5.5.4 Personal resilience

In addition to the contextual and institutional environment, another significant factor in the "resilience map" is the 'self' (Adamson et al., 2014, p. 531). The self is comprised of the individual's core attributes and characteristics, and includes their personal history and experiences as well as their values and ethics that form the fundamental building blocks for the development of resilience (Adamson et al., 2014). Every individual has to develop resilience in his/her own uniquely personal situation to factors both within and outside the institution. Angela listed an onslaught of personal issues that had occurred recently in a short space of time including amongst others a car accident and an attempted hijacking.

> Angela: *… but you just go with the flow of it and say, "Okay this happened, continue on with your life".* ***You can't let it just hinder you so that you can't progress and move forward.***

She showed particular resilience to these events. Her attitude was to move on and try not to let the incidents impact other areas of her life, including her studies. She ascribes her resilience to "*a higher power*" as well as a dedicated focus on her goal. She is also realising her own sense of agency in taking control of herself, and recognising those things over which she has no control.

5.5.4.1 Transport

Attending a university in a large city that does not have residential accommodation attached to the institution means that issues of transport are the daily reality for all students, whether it be the burden of cost, time, or the vagaries of traffic and modes of transport. The majority of the participants in this study are dependent on public transport for getting to campus and back home on a daily basis, which sees them travelling for two or more hours at each end of the day. Leaving home or arriving in the dark can impact on student safety (as related by Simon) and travel time erodes time spent on other activities, including lectures. While train schedules provide some measure of predictability enabling students to plan departure and arrival times according to their timetable, the unpredictability of taxis and traffic can and does have adverse ramifications. Taxis only leave the rank when they are full. Participants described having to allow an hour or two to wait for a taxi to fill, frequently arriving late for lectures. Lesego listed transport as his greatest obstacle as a student. Transport delays had caused him to miss lectures on a number of occasions which in turn impacts his learning. Lesego aspires to get his own car and have independent transport but until then needs resilience to deal with the public transport. Nonku's strategy for dealing with the taxi issue is to adapt her daily routine arriving very early on campus in order not to miss a lecture. Lesego admits he ought to get up earlier but has not yet reconciled the knowing and doing. He states, "…*it's quite a challenge because I tend to enjoy a dream (laughs) then waking up, it's a mess…"*

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As taxis and public transport are most students' reality for the duration of their higher education experience, it is important that they develop strategies to build resilience so that this factor does not impact negatively on their daily experience and their academic outcomes. Transport is not the only factor that requires time management strategies be put in place. Home life, social life, and academic work all compete for time in students' schedules.

5.5.4.2 Time management

Thomas considers time management to be one of the greatest challenges facing students in higher education generally, particularly exacerbated by social media.

He feels the demands of higher education have added to an already busy schedule which includes family life, domestic chores, a social life, community life and in addition academic demands and assignment deadlines. This aligns with Pym and Kapp's (2013) findings that first-year students were ill-equipped to cope with multiple demands simultaneously, consequently becoming overwhelmed and unproductive. Part-time students can add a full-time job to the list of 'things' they need to cope with, however, Angela considers having to manage her time part of her personal and emotional growth.

Individuals have different strategies for managing the time pressures of higher education. Tshepo explains that he tries not to manage his time too tightly, he uses his agency to rely on last-minute pressure to boost his productivity. Thomas intends to use a schedule to plan and structure what he needs to do.

> **Interviewer: Do you just wake up one day and say "I am going to make a schedule today" or do you need help doing it?**
>
> Thomas: *I think…. ja, some people are just not good at it and I also think* ***it is just that wake-up call you get*** *type of stuff, that you know* ***I have been so unorganised, let me get myself organised, what can I do?*** *When you reach rock bottom type of stuff… I am getting time management, I am being good at that. Yeah, because* ***even though the 8 o'clock class is a problem, I do not make it a problem****.*

Tools, such as a schedule, can be useful in helping to reduce the adverse effects of time pressure. Thomas had not been in the habit of using a schedule and acknowledged that it is not a skill that everyone has. Thomas feels that reaching "*rock bottom*" was the incentive he needed to start implementing self-discipline and managing his time better. He is pleased with his own progress, even to the point of waking early enough to get to the 8.00a.m lecture.

5.5.4.3 Values

An individual's moral and ethical codes shape their expectations and responses to adversity and therefore are fundamental to the development of resilience (Adamson et al., 2014). Values, which generally originate from a person's home and upbringing, influence their choices, conduct and interactions. Values

influence the way we live our lives; they influence our aspirations, attitudes, choices, our interactions with others and the way we cope with adversity. When asked about her values, Nonku stated: "*I value myself. I value what I have and I value… no… just that. My life and what I have"*. Sriskandarajah et al. (2010) argue that when learners confront their ontological, epistemological and axiological positions, they are able to appreciate the positions of others. Nonku's higher education experience (epistemic development) together with her certainty of her values system (axiological position) and her value of her 'being' (ontological position) provides a good foundation for the development of individual and social resilience.

5.5.5 Social resilience

The 'space' between the self and the context is one of dynamic mediation between relational, contextual and systemic factors (Adamson et al., 2014). Students need resilience to adapt to and cope with the social system of higher education, and they need to be able to adapt to the unique elements particular to the institution. Their ability to survive, or preferably to thrive, also depends on their resilience to the personal adversities that they face on a daily basis. While these may be uniquely individual, students are also faced with issues that arise in interpersonal interactions and by nature of the social characteristic of the context. The study revealed that social resilience is required in coping with the relationships both at home with friends and family, as well as in the institution with lecturers and other students.

5.5.5.1 Alcohol and drugs

Smoking, drinking and drugs are 'common' social activities and part of the daily experience of students at the institution. It was evident that these activities are not new influences "*… because I mean we all went to high school, so seeing that from high school you sort of carry on with it*" (Mafani). These substances are considered part of their lives in the township ("*…what happens here it happens back at home…*" – Lesego) so participants do not feel social pressure within the institution to smoke, drink and do drugs. As such resilience to the adverse

conditions associated with these substances is not necessarily a newly required capability. However, Simon explains that the higher education context brings its own social lifestyle that changes the resilience dynamic and makes students more prone to these substances. Mafani feels that this is a choice (or not) based on her values and upbringing, as well as her commitment to the academic programme. Nonku does not concur. She feels that peer pressure is brought about by social media as people will follow the trends in order to be cool.

Participants reported that they have observed the adverse effects and financial burden of alcohol and drug use on others. They generally agreed that students who choose to take part in those activities are potentially jeopardising their success in higher education. Tshepo commented with concern about the apparent 'normality' of smoking dagga. He feels the girls in particular take the opportunity at school "*when no-one will judge them*". He sees this quest for recognition as a downward spiral – from getting high, to drinking, to being addicted, missing lectures – that will negatively impact their academic outcomes. Tshepo feels his resilience to these substances comes from his own sense of agency, "*I've never tried to be a chameleon*". He is able to set boundaries for himself. Carole's aversion is based on health rather than values as it affects her sinuses. This does impact her quality of life on campus as there are no specified smoking areas so she is particularly susceptible when people smoke outside lecture rooms. She had an expectation that the institution might put some restrictions in place to discourage smoking. That notwithstanding, she is finding that she and her non-smoking friends are able to exert their own "*good pressure*" on peers to smoke less.

5.5.5.2 Lecturers

The pedagogic approach and student-lecturer relationship differs in higher education from high school. Students need to be able to adapt to the way in which the subject knowledge is mediated by different lecturers, the more extensive scope and level of knowledge, as well as the impact of different lecturer

personalities and teaching styles on their learning. This means continual adaptation from one subject and lecturer to the next.

The participants were unanimous in their appreciation for their lecturers and there appear to be few issues in this regard. Possibly high school experience prepares learners well with the necessary coping mechanisms to adapt to different teachers. Mafani was not thrown by a bad experience with a lecturer. Some of her peers took the lecturer's comments to heart but Mafani's response was *"…personally it didn't break me down. I've been through those obstacles with people who tell you that you're not going to make it because of 1, 2, 3…*" She sympathises for others who are not as "*hard core*" as she is, and her advice for them… "*you're gonna get people who are gonna try to break you down… you know, you should just move past it*". Carole described an issue she had with a lecturer who she felt showed favouritism to other students. This has affected her attendance in those lectures, but not her effort or her marks in the subject. She realised that she could not allow the lack of relationship with the lecturer to affect her performance in the subject. Her achievement lies in her own agency and responsibility.

5.5.5.3 Distractions

Despite students' desire and need for autonomy, life at home and 'school' is affected by other people. While interpersonal interactions can be supportive and positive, they may also be restrictive to students' functioning. Participants spoke about the influence brought on by the people around them. There are distractions inside the classroom from talkative friends and large numbers of students. There are also distractions and influences from friends outside the classroom that impact on class attendance. Thomas has learned from experience the detrimental effect of missing lectures and believes that friends can, and should, influence each other positively in overcoming these distractions. This reciprocity is more easily achieved with friends in the institution who are in the same situation with similar goals and work load (Dennis et al., 2005). Thomas described his struggle to avoid the distraction and influence of his friends at home, who do not necessarily understand the demands of higher education. He loves staying at home with his

family but is considering moving out of the area to a flat in order to avoid the distractions and focus on his studies. The daily distractions are "*not affecting my marks but it is affecting how I am doing my work*". Making adaptations in one area, may raise the risk of adversity in another. Thomas realises that living in a flat on his own has pros and cons. Living independently will give him greater freedom which will require greater self-discipline. There may also be other distractions, but he is ready for the challenge and sees it as part of his growth. He is confident he will adapt quickly to living independently and that this is the adjustment he needs to make in order to remove the distractions. He now aspires to obtain a distinction. Lesego faces similar distractions living in a township – friends, clubs nearby, partying etc. as well as a blaring television set in the home. Alternative accommodation is not an option for him financially. His strategy is to find "*new friends which have the same goal as me … [the same] mindset*".

5.5.5.4 Home environment

The home is not always a place of friendly distractions, such as those described by Thomas and Lesego. For some students the home dynamic presents adverse conditions and some of the participants talked about friends whose lives as students were severely disrupted by destructive situations at home. Broken homes, parental conflict, family issues, students heading the household, and forms of abuse are factors that severely impact on a young student's life. Such home situations restrict the student's ability to attend lectures, to pay attention to and keep up with their work, and to work with or relate to their peers. Carole reported that she had observed these kinds of circumstances with people in high school and it continues into higher education. These are not situations that resolve themselves easily and students who live in difficult home environments need to become resilient to these 'unfreedoms'.

5.5.6 Student support

Psycho-social counselling and academic support is available for students in this institution. Students can choose to make use of a free, confidential service to support and assist them in dealing with adverse conditions and to develop positive

coping skills in any aspect of their life. One of the participants was entirely unaware of how or where to obtain support or to address any of her concerns. Five of the participants are aware that the institution provides support but are unaware of the process or mechanism to obtain it. Commenting on how they would go about getting support, these participants devised their own mechanism suggesting that they would contact management, the receptionist, or "*I can speak to someone and they will direct me to someone*". Only three of the participants know who to contact and how to access the support service, and two of the participants admitted that they "*just don't want to be part of it [because] that's where you cry*". These participants indicated that many students feel that consulting the student support is a sign of weakness, it shows other students that they have a problem and students are generally shy and ashamed to reach out for assistance. This data aligns with what Craven (2012) reports amongst non-traditional students in UK universities where students shy away from seeking assistance. Craven suggests institutions need to be sensitive to this in determining proactive means and mechanisms for supporting students. Institutional support services are a significant strategy for assisting student adaptation (Craven, 2012; Pym & Kapp, 2013).

5.5.7 Why does resilience matter?

Adversity is a reality of life. Resilience is a capability that enables a person to achieve positive outcomes and well-being despite the presence of adverse conditions. Walker (2006) includes *Educational Resilience* in her ideal-theoretical list of capabilities for higher education. She describes educational resilience as the ability to navigate study, work and life. The resilient student should be able to persevere academically, be responsive to educational opportunities and adaptive to constraints. They should be able to negotiate risk, be self-reliant and have aspirations for the future (Walker, 2006). Sriskandarajah et al. (2010) support the argument for addressing resilience through education and extend its value beyond preparing resilient work practitioners. Educational strategies need to do more than teach **about** resilience, and educate **for** resilience but should develop

resilience **in** education. Resilience in education would retain students and decrease incidents of dropout.

> In a nutshell, the more complex the epistemic perspectives of learners, the greater their capacity to deal with complex, messy uncertainties in the situations they come to experience in the course of their everyday lives (Sriskandarajah et al., 2010, p. 569).

Resilience engenders greater resilience. As students remain longer in the system they become more resilient because they develop more complex thinking that gives them the capacity to deal with more demands. If students dropout in first year they lose out on knowledge development that would also give them the opportunity to build resilience. All the participants spoke about difficulties that they experience as part of their higher education life. These include personal, social and environmental difficulties with which they are trying to cope.

5.5.7.1 Resilience facilitates aspiration

All the participants expressed the challenges they had experienced in adapting to the culture and demands of higher education, particularly the freedom and the need for self-discipline to attend lectures and complete tasks. The transition from school to higher education can be a significant challenge for first-year students, the extent of which depends on how well their school prepared them as school-leavers. Participants' responses were mixed in this regard. Academic skills and knowledge (Carole) can make students more resilient in higher education, as can a background of hard work during long school days (Tshepo). What was consistent in participant responses was that the opportunity to learn *how* to cope was more beneficial than learning *that* it would be challenging. The challenge of the transition into higher education is somewhat more complex for first-generation students like Lesego whose parents don't understand the different structure and culture of higher education.

5.5.7.2 Resilience facilitates affiliation

Participants described social challenges that related to friends, family and lecturers. Students need to learn to cope with the difficult elements of social relationships. Lecturers say and do things students don't like or agree with

(Mafani and Carole), friends can have a 'corrupt' influence causing distractions in class or at home, which can impact on academic achievement (Thomas). Particularly if they don't understand the work load and demands of higher education (Lesego). Also, drinking and smoking are social activities that can impact on class attendance – and if participants weren't personally affected they noticed others who were. Social media places social pressure on students, influencing what they do (Nonku). On the other hand, having support from family and friends, and well-established value systems, helps individuals face challenges and build resilience in the face of negative social influences (Tshepo, Mafani, Nonku).

5.5.7.3 Resilience facilitates reflection

Students face challenges outside of the institution that have the potential to disrupt their studies. This includes transport issues, management of their time and home circumstances. The timetable is a fixed structure but students are able to put strategies in place to manage their timing to cope with early and late classes so that they are not consistently missing lectures while having to wait for a taxi to fill (Lesego, Nonku), or placing themselves at risk travelling home at night (Simon). Simon had given a lot of thought to moving accommodation to be safer. Thomas and Lesego had given thought to moving accommodation to get away from the distractions that were eating into study time. Students reflect on issues that they face within the institution and are aware that they can raise their voice on issues (for themselves or on behalf of others) in the hope that they would be heard.

5.5.7.4 Resilience facilitates retention

There are factors inside the institution that challenge students, including facilities and equipment, safety on campus and administration. Students who are uncomfortable in lectures or on campus are tempted to stay away and miss lectures (Nonku, Carole). Students expect high quality facilities in a private institution and therefore are less tolerant of equipment that doesn't work or is not provided (Angela, Jasmine). Carole used her private school as a comparison.

Understanding that the administrative procedures are different from school is part of students' adaptation to higher education. Falling foul of policy or procedure results in the risk of failing (Jasmine) and students learn that there are processes that need to be followed (Simon). The risk of failure has severe financial implications and this is one of the greatest concerns, and challenges, for many students. Participants acknowledge that systems of support in the institution can help but knowing does not pre-empt doing due to the stigma associated with seeking help.

5.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate student capabilities in the context of a private higher education institution. The intention being to gain an in-depth understanding of the personal, social and environmental challenges students experience that affect their achievements and well-being. The findings presented in this chapter were interpreted from the rich data in the participants' narratives. In this institution aspiration is a driving force that brought students to the institution and that inspires and motivates what they do and what they want to do and be. In the processes and activities of higher education, students connect with and build relationships with other people. As they learn they reflect on what they are learning and they learn from their experiences and the people around them. Their aspiration, affiliations and reflection give them opportunities to pursue what they value and therefore to enhance their well-being. Despite their diversity, these opportunities enable them to unlock their agency. Such opportunities may also enable resilience so that students are able to remain in higher education until they complete their qualification where they can pursue further opportunities for their futures. The next chapter will draw these findings into response to the research questions.

CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This research project was conceptualised in response to my experience working with students in a private higher education institution and becoming aware of the range of issues that students have to contend with on a daily basis as part of their higher education experience. These range from learning difficulties to financial difficulties, family responsibility demands, transport problems, physical and psychological health problems, and other psycho-social-cultural challenges. Whether it is a personal, social or environmental concern, each is unique to that student and has direct bearing on his/her daily experience, well-being and academic success. First-year students are particularly vulnerable – with first-generation students even more so – and very often whatever difficulty the student is facing results in his/her higher education journey being cut short without the institution being aware of the situation or having the opportunity to assist (Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010). Private higher education comes at high financial cost. Anything that impedes the student's progress is costly both to the student and the institution.

The contextual framework of this study presented the complexities of higher education in South Africa which, despite significant restructure and transformation, and notwithstanding a focused mandate on inclusion and equal access, is still grappling with deep-rooted inequality and disadvantage. The DHET's policies to prioritise access to higher education has seen student enrolment in higher education double over the past two decades (Ballim et al., 2016). However, the numbers are putting strain on infrastructure, facilities and finance. In addition, global forces add to the burden of coping with equitable provision for an increasingly large and diverse student population.

The current statistics show that the South African higher education sector is a highly inefficient system. Access is not translating into success and more than half the number of students who enter the system are dropping out, with a very low graduation rate. Not only is the country not benefitting from a flow of high level skills out of the universities into the labour market, but thousands of South African students, many of whom have been previously disadvantaged, are not gaining the advantage from the opportunities for personal development that higher education offers. The DHET has made a call to institutions to address the issues of student retention and throughput so that a greater number of successful students will graduate with higher education qualifications (DHET, 2013).

The private higher education sector is considered an important component of the National Development Plan for successful higher education (DHET, 2013). Private institutions can play a significant role in expanding capacity and access to higher education, helping to absorb the demand; and the number of private institutions in the country is growing. In addition to adding capacity, private institutions have the advantage of functioning independently and being relatively flexible in adapting their programmes and approaches to educational needs and market demand. There is currently very little data available on private higher education, so it is not possible to ascertain what the student outcomes and success rates within this sector are (CHE, 2011). Historically, private higher education institutions have a reputation for lack of regulation and mediocre quality delivery (Mabizela, 2002). If this sector is going to fulfil its role as an integral component of the national system it will have to ensure quality delivery, improved self-regulation and manage inclusive approaches that cater for the diversity of the 21st century student body.

Inclusive education serves human rights and democratic values that are the imperative of both international and national policies. Internationally, the target of Sustainable Development Goal 4 is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” which includes expanded access to higher education globally by 2020 (UNESCO, 2015, p. 20).

On a national level, the aims and values of inclusion are integral to South Africa's Constitution and education legislative framework. Inclusive education is a means to contribute towards the establishment of an inclusive society (UNESCO, 1994. The implementation of inclusive higher education is a necessary part of national transformation. The social dimension of inclusive education provides a significant intersection with the aims of higher education generally and the vision of the DHET specifically. Inclusive education is effectively served through inclusive educational approaches. These practices are non-exclusionary, encourage participation and create learning opportunities and choice for all students, they are flexible, foster relationships and respect individual dignity (Florian, 2014). These characteristics are commensurate with a capability approach.

The capability approach offers a lens through which to consider individual student well-being. It is an inclusive approach that takes cognisance of diversity and focuses on capabilities, which is the freedom people have to be able to be and do that they value being able to be and do. Freedom in educational terms means having opportunities, choice, autonomy, agency, ability, achievement and well-being as the means and ends of educational development. In higher education, and in the capability approach, individuals have an agency role. Students are active participants in their educational process, making choices in the pursuit of goals that shape their own destiny. There are many personal, social and circumstantial factors that impact on students' daily functioning (that influence the conversion of resources into achievements). These factors have the potential to enable or constrain agency, choice, and academic achievement. The institution also plays a significant role in creating and supporting opportunities for individual student development and achievement. The capability approach was used as a framework in this research project in learning about the reality of the daily lived experience of students, what they are able to do and be, what they have reason to value being and doing, and the freedom they have to enjoy the achievements required for their well-being.

6.2 The research questions

The research questions will be revisited and addressed in light of the findings as presented in Chapter Five.

6.2.1 How are student capabilities facilitated in the context of a private higher education institution?

The purpose of the question 'how' in this research question, was not to test or measure the specific means by which capabilities are achieved. Rather, 'how' was intended to elicit the general manner in which evidence of capabilities appeared. Capabilities implies both the skills (internal capabilities) and the contextual opportunities provided to enable those skills (combined capabilities). Bearing in mind that a capability set is not always observable (as noted by Sen and referred to in paragraph 3.8.1) and these were located in a particular educational context, the capabilities referred to might be more closely interpreted as Nussbaum's internal capabilities i.e. skills and abilities, or observable functionings.

There are four broad 'avenues' by means of which capabilities are facilitated in the institution: (*i*) Through aspiration – this includes the students' intrinsic aspirations, the aspiration of the programme and the aspiration provided by higher education itself which inspire and motivate what they do and want to become. (*ii*) Through affiliation – as students establish connections and relationships with staff, with peers, and through institutional processes, they build their social and personal identity of who they are and who they want to become. (*iii*) Through reflection – this emerges in-action and also occurs retrospectively on-action as students reflect on their knowing, doing, being and becoming. (*iv*) Through development of resilience, as students learn to adapt to adverse conditions that they encounter personally, socially and in the institution in the pursuit of well-being.

Each of these 'avenues' plays a significant role in enabling the development of capabilities for students. Each of them allows the 'space' for student opportunities

that reflect their diverse needs and values. Each of them engages students in choice and decision making, promoting the development of agency. Each of them has the potential to contribute to student well-being in what they do and what they want to do and be.

6.2.2 What personal challenges do students encounter that restrict their academic functioning?

There are many factors that limit student functionings that emerged from the data. These relate to individual, social and environmental factors that impact personally to constrain the conversion of resources into functionings and impact on the student's well-being. These include:

Background: Students' background impacts on their functionings and ability to cope in higher education. They are impacted by their schooling and the extent to which school prepared them for the transition to higher education. The wider the skill and knowledge gap experienced by the student between school and higher education, the more likely that the students' functioning in higher education will be restricted. First-generation students, whose parents didn't have the opportunity of higher education, may feel they are under pressure to achieve, which could impact on their performance. Their parents may be unable to support them in the processes due to their own lack of knowledge and understanding of what is required.

Home environment: A student's home environment impacts significantly on what he/she is able to be and do. Students who face particular challenges and additional responsibilities at home may find it detracts from time spent on studies which can impact negatively on their academic performance. Inadequate or unsafe accommodation limits a student's sense of well-being and potentially jeopardises his/her health, and academic achievements.

Physiological factors: This includes health matters, which may be exacerbated by smoke. This absence of demarcated smoking areas and smoke-free zones on

impacts the functioning of non-smokers. Age, gender and disability are elements that fall within this category but they are not factors that affect student functioning in this institution.

Personality factors: In this institution introverts seem to be excluded by peers. This potentially restricts their functioning when working with others. Introverts may lack a sense of belonging when working in a group with peers. They may withdraw or be reluctant to participate in discussion in large classes, or to exercise their voice over issues that affect them. All of which may negatively affect their learning and ultimately their academic success. Extroverts and social personalities may be distracted or influenced by friends into missing lectures which could potentially restrict academic functioning.

Intellectual factors: The extent to which students are equipped with the skills and knowledge to cope at higher education level influences their ability to participate in the academic processes and impacts their achievements. Students who are not able to adapt to the freedom of higher education by applying self-discipline and working independently, managing their time and meeting deadlines, will have restricted functioning.

Psychological factors: Intrinsic motivation and aspiration facilitates academic achievement. Students who are attending higher education because their parents have sent them to keep them busy in preference to sitting at home will have limited motivation, agency and achievement.

Social factors: Social pressure can impact on student functionings. Students experience pressure from others as far as their fashion and appearance is concerned. This affects what they wear and they may feel pressurised into spending money on expensive clothes to project an image of wealth. Students whose appearance does not fit in may feel or be excluded which could impact their sense of belonging and participation.

Despite being apparently inclusive, friends and social groups may also impact student functioning by distracting other individuals from their work or influencing them to share in drinking, smoking or drugs rather than participation in lectures with consequent impact on academic progress.

Group work can restrict a student's academic work and progress. Non-contributing group members can put additional load on other members to carry them.

Lecturer engagement can limit student functioning if it does not engender trust and support. Negative interactions with lecturers impact students' confidence, class attendance and participation, their sense of belonging in the class, and potentially jeopardise their academic performance.

Financial factors: Financial factors impact many students and can restrict functioning. Students with financial limitations live with constant concern about the impact this could have on their longevity in higher education. They fear failing a subject as they are aware that this would dash their aspirations. This can cause anxiety and frustration that has the potential to negatively impact on academic performance. Students are aware that if they are unable to pay their fees, they risk being rejected by the institution which affects their participation and sense of belonging. For many students the financial factors are outside of their control and they sense a lack of agency in this regard. Some students take on part-time work at night and weekends to earn some income to contribute towards the fees. The literature shows that the pressure this places on the student's time, particularly spending more than 12 hours a week in paid work, significantly reduces study progress (Van den Berg & Hofman, 2005). Financial factors impact on all elements of the students' experience. There is evidence that this is a factor that causes stress and anxiety in the lives of students. It is a concern that is continual because even if their fees are paid for one year, they have concern about the next year and affording their fees for the duration of their studies.

Transport factors: Public transport, specifically taxis can impact on student functioning. Primarily transport issues impact on students' timeous arrival at and

participation in lectures. If students are late for lectures, or miss a lecture, this impacts on their learning as they need to catch up the work themselves.

Environmental factors: This study revealed that the factors mentioned above limit student functioning. In addition to those factors that limit students personally there are also elements within the institution that restrict student functioning. These will be discussed in response to the final research question.

6.2.3 What institutional practices potentially restrict student functioning?

There are various institutional factors that constitute adverse conditions for some students and impact on their achievements. These include:

Facilities: Discomfort in a lecture room affects students' participation and impacts on their academic functioning. This includes uncomfortable chairs and small desks, air conditioning units that do not work making the lecture room hot, microphones and audio-visual equipment that do not work properly, making it difficult for the student to follow the lecture. Students stated this impacted on their participation in class, the way they learn and consequently this has the potential to restrict their functioning.

Rules and regulations: If students are not familiar with or don't follow the academic policies and procedures, they risk getting penalised for academic infringements. This impacts their marks and their academic achievement and may even place the student at risk of failing the subject.

Safety: If students do not feel safe on campus, it affects their well-being and they may experience stress and anxiety or avoid attending lectures. This could impact their academic functioning.

Administration: Administrative complications (with a late registration) can result in restriction to student functioning. It requires the student to follow up for the

matter to be resolved. It is also a cause of stress and anxiety if it is associated with the implication of failing a subject. This can impact on student functioning.

Timetable: Scheduling of early and late classes can impact students who use public transport. Waiting for a taxi to fill on the way to campus may cause a student to arrive late and miss a lecture. If students miss lectures it impacts on their learning in those subjects. Travelling home late into the city may be unsafe. Safety concerns are stressful and may affect a student's learning.

Large classes: Students who feel intimidated by the large number of students in the lecture room, feel unable to engage with the lecturer. Restricted participation could compromise their learning and academic success.

Any of these institutional practices has the potential to impair the student's functioning and progress, impacting on their retention and throughput, and possibly resulting in drop-out.

6.3 Reflection on this study

As a context-bound study, the findings of this research cannot be generalised to other higher education institutions but may have implications for this institution or for further research on capabilities in higher education. In light of this study, the recommendation is made that a capability approach in higher education can be used as an evaluative framework for student comparison in the context of increasing student diversity. This approach can promote student agency which in turn enhances resilience and well-being.

6.3.1 Harnessing agency

The capability approach has value as an inclusive approach that recognises diversity and inequalities. This approach can serve the agenda of a private higher education institution where clients who are paying high fees have expectations that a private institution will respond to their needs (Jamshidi, Arasteh,

NavehEbrahim, Zeinabadi & Rasmussen, 2012). Listening to the voices of students provides understanding of what they are able to be and do, in which areas their functionings are limited and in what ways the contextual factors can be addressed to facilitate student success. The reality, however, is that it is not possible for an institution to account for the wide variation of conversion factors (personal, social and environmental) for each individual amongst increasing student numbers. What institutions can do is to focus on the development of student agency. This lies at the core of the capability approach, and central to the objectives of higher education (Walker, 2006). A focus on developing each student's agency enables and empowers him/her to make choices and to take responsibility for factors in his/her life that impact on his/her functioning. The limitations that students face will not diminish or disappear, but a strong sense of agency will enable students to adapt and build resilience so that they can cope with the challenges that confront them in their daily experience. This concurs with Pym and Kapp's findings of the value of providing a flexible approach to curriculum that harnesses student agency as well as fostering a sense of community belonging (Pym & Kapp, 2013).

6.3.2 Student support

The findings of this research revealed that issues related to academic and social integration impact on student functioning. This aligns with empirical evidence that first-generation and "non-traditional" students have difficulty integrating into higher education (Craven, 2012, p. 23; Heymann & Carolissen, 2011; Siyengo, 2015). First-year students have shown a variation of gaps in their readiness for higher education and consequent difficulty with the transition to higher education (Wilson-Strydom, 2010, 2015). This study also corroborated findings that students shy away from structural systems of support (Craven, 2012) choosing not to appear weak.

This study concurs with Manik (2015) that institutions need to understand and address the support needs of their students. This will enable the institution to be in a better position to offer support that is relevant, and to do so in ways that

students feel are not stigmatising (Manik, 2014). However, in contrast to Manik's approach of looking at relative deprivations (deficits), I propose that the starting point is functionings and capabilities (what the students are able to be and do, and have the freedom to be and do). My recommendation for this institution would be to investigate support mechanisms that use capabilities and student agency as the starting point, and that somehow tap into the particularly strong sense of affiliation amongst students.

6.3.3 Capabilities-based pedagogy

While conducting this research I was so inspired by the concepts of the capability approach that I decided to try integrating it into my own teaching of a fourth-year group. Having completed the formal teaching component of the subject, the focus was to design two assessments (a formative and a summative) that would be capabilities-based rather than taking on the traditional format of a test or project. This approach could be investigated further for implementation on a broader scale.

6.3.4 Capabilities in private and public higher education

The attributes of private higher education (CHE, 2011) that enhance the development of capabilities include, amongst others, a range of different programme offerings and options to meet the diversity of student aspirations, abilities and capabilities; relatively small size of institution that has the potential to enhance the sense of individuality and affiliation; and the potential to adapt and offer socially responsive curricula to provide opportunities for the needs of society and the market place.

It is meaningful to reflect not only on student capabilities in private higher education but also on how capabilities might be similar or different in public higher education institutions in South Africa. It is beyond the scope of this project to do a comparison between the development of student capabilities in public and private higher education institutions but this may well form an avenue for further research.

6.4 Limitations and recommendations

This study has limitations (beyond the design and methodological limitations mentioned in Chapter Four). These will be mentioned and they form the platform for recommendations for further research.

6.4.1 Limitations of this study

The following limitations apply to the findings of this study:

Generalisability: This study was limited to the particular context of one private higher education institution. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalised to other contexts.

Comparison: The findings of this study do not allow for comparison, even within the institution.

First-year students: The implications of this study do not only lie with first-year students. Students need support at all levels and capability development is important for students at all levels. However, this study included only first-year students and the findings cannot be generalised to students at other levels of study.

6.4.2 Recommendations for further research

The above limitations notwithstanding, the capability approach provides plenty of scope for further research in higher education and private higher education, at the level of policy, pedagogy and the individual. The potential exists for the following:

- Possible research that emerges directly from this study may involve more focused research on the development of the specific capabilities of aspiration, affiliation, reflection and resilience through higher education pedagogies.

- Further research could be done in a longitudinal study on capability development in students' higher education careers from first-year to graduation.
- Comparative studies could be done between campuses or across year groups, which could serve to identify differences in the institutional inputs at different sites and different levels. Sen states that he has deliberately left his approach underspecified so that capabilities can be determined through public participation and reasoning which are context-specific (Sen, 2004). This opens the door for opportunities to research capability lists that are relevant in this and other higher education contexts.
- Research on the similarities and differences between student capabilities in private and public higher education.
- The capability approach is not a theory. As a normative framework, the concepts are given structure in conjunction with theories which enable multi-dimensional applications. Robeyns (2016) has put forward the idea of a cartwheel view of the capability approach that consists of a fixed core of the primary concepts from which radiate optional modules that present a broad range of theories and analyses of "capabilitarianism" (p. 297). Using this view, a capability account will consist of the core content plus a combination of choices from the optional modules. This opens the way to a diversity of capabilitarian theories (Robeyns, 2016). The field of research is rich with ways in which this view of the capability approach could be applied to educational theories.

6.5 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate student capabilities in higher education. The purpose of the project was to understand the reality of students' experience in a private higher education institution. This was set against the backdrop of student protests and academic disruptions, and framed by a concern for and commitment to the ongoing transformation of higher education in South Africa. We live in a rapidly-changing, high-tech, globally-connected world. Young people experience

pressure in keeping up with social media, their friends, family obligations, and the need and desire to earn an income and become independent. While they dream of careers and future success their daily reality is one of peer pressure, financial difficulties, coping with academic demands, public transport, time management and their own development. Due to the diversity of human beings, every individual's experience is unique. This means that there is no standard recipe for achieving well-being. This also means that within the uniqueness of each individual and his/her set of values is the opportunity to make choices and become an agent of change in the world. Higher education in South Africa has a role to play in creating an enabling environment for students to have opportunities to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives as active and productive citizens of a local, national and global society.

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APPENDIX A: NUSSBAUM'S LIST OF CAPABILITIES

The Central Human Capabilities (Nussbaum, 2003, pp. 41-42)

1. **Life.** Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. **Bodily Health.** Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
3. **Bodily Integrity.** Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
4. **Senses, Imagination, and Thought.** Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid nonbeneficial pain.
5. **Emotions.** Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)
6. **Practical Reason.** Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)
7. **Affiliation.** *(A)* Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.) *(B)* Having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of nondiscrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.
8. **Other Species.** Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
9. **Play.** Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
10. **Control Over One's Environment.** *(A) Political*. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. *(B) Material*. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason, and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

APPENDIX B: INSTITUTION PERMISSION REQUEST

Wits School of Education

27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 • Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa
Tel: +27 11 717-3007 • Fax: +27 11 717-3009 • E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za • Website: www.wits.ac.za

Request to conduct research at [redacted]

15 April 2016

Dear [redacted]

My name is Fenella Somerville and I am an M.Ed student at the Wits School of Education. A significant component of my Masters course is the research project for which I am registered this year. My project is titled *An investigation of student capability in private higher education* which aims to identify and explore those insitutional, individual or environmental factors that may potentially be impairing student functioning and their capabilities for well-being. Higher education institutions generally – and private providers specifically – are faced with the dilemma of recognising the need of the individual in an increasingly diverse student body. This project will attempt to analyse student's real-world experiences and interpret their meaning within this educational context.

I would like to request your permission to conduct research at your institution with the first-year students. The institution itself will remain anonymous and not incur any benefit or costs due to research undertaken there. Participation will entail responding to questions on a questionnaire circulated by email via your learner management system (copy to be provided as required). The questionnaire should take about 15 minutes of the students' time and involves participants responding to statements that reflect their functionings and capabilities in the academic processes. The questionnaire will be completed and returned electronically. In a second phase of the project, students who have submitted the questionnaire will be invited to participate in an in-depth interview which explores in further detail the factors that emerge in their questionnaire. This interview would take approximately 45 minutes and would be held at a time and place convenient to the students. With their permission, I would like to audio record the interview for accurate capture of the participants' responses. Students who volunteer to participate in the second phase will provide the researcher with their contact details, however, confidentiality of their personal information is guaranteed.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and students' choice whether to participate will not advantage or disadvantage them in any way. There are no negative consequences for non-participation. If they do choose to participate, all participants' right to privacy, safety from harm and confidentiality will be respected. I will ensure that all interview transcripts are used anonymously, with pseudonyms being given to all participants and the institution. Confidentiality will be maintained in the recorded interviews and any detail that might identify a participant or the institution will be omitted in any published and written data. If students choose to participate, they have the right to withdraw from participation at any time during the research process, with no negative consequences or penalty. They also have the right to omit any answers on the questionnaire or decline to answer any of the questions asked in the interview. As the process requires participants to reflect on factors that are impinging on their academic processes, this may touch on sensitive personal and domestic issues and make students feel uncomfortable. Participants may feel vulnerable or guilty revealing information pertaining to their daily behaviour, activities and study habits, particularly if their academic performance is poor. For this reason, I would like to request that the institution's academic support and counselling services be made available to students who might wish to consult them as a result of their participation in the research project.

All data collected (including electronic questionnaires, audio recordings and hard copies of interview transcripts) will be kept securely in a locked cupboard in my house, and will be destroyed by shredding or deleting within three to five years after completion of the study. The results of the research will be used for academic purposes only. This includes my Masters research project, and possible publications in academic journal articles, books and conference presentations. In any of these publications, I guarantee the participants' right to anonymity, and no names of participants, the institution, or any other identifying information will be used. There are no foreseeable risks to the students or the institution in participating in this project. Students will receive no remuneration for participation and there are no direct benefits to students if they choose to participate but I would expect that participation in the research would provide students with an opportunity for reflection, and that the results of the study would further our collective understanding of higher education processes. The research project has been cleared by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Education) of The University of the Witwatersrand [Protocol 2016ECE001M].

If you are willing to give permission for research to be conducted at the institution, please would you sign at the bottom of this form and return it to me as soon as possible. If you have any concerns or queries regarding my research, please do not hesitate to discuss this with me, or contact my research supervisor whose details are below.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Name of student: Fenella Somerville
Wits Student number: 773116
Email: fenella@mweb.co.za
Contact number: 083 288 7278

Research supervisor: Dr Elizabeth Walton
Email: Elizabeth.Walton@wits.ac.za
011 717 3768 (office)

Permission for research granted by Head of Institution:

_____	_____	_____
Signature	**Name**	**Date**

APPENDIX C: PILOT STUDY

On completion of the questionnaire, pilot study participants responded to the following questions.

page 6

PILOT STUDY PARTICIPANTS ONLY.
Having worked through the survey, please provide your feedback on the following:

1. Approximately how long did the survey take you? (Select one option)

Less than 10 mins 10 - 15 mins 20 - 30 mins 30 - 45 mins An hour or more

Other (Please specify) _____

2. Were the instructions clear? If not, please explain what you did not understand.

_____
_____

3. Were the statements easy to understand? If not, please explain.

_____
_____

4. Could you identify with the statements (were they appropriate)? If not, please explain.

_____
_____

5. Was the choice of answers appropriate? If not, please suggest alternative response options.

_____
_____

6. Was the process user-friendly? If not, please explain what was difficult.

_____
_____

7. General comment:

_____
_____

8. Are there any questions you think should be added or omitted? If so, please specify which ones and why.

_____
_____

9. Are there any aspects of your higher education experience that you feel have not been covered by the questions? If so, please specify.

_____

_____

10. If you were a first-year student, would you participate in this survey? (Select one option)

Yes No

11. If you were a first-year student, which platform would you prefer for accessing the survey? (Select one option)

Email Facebook Twitter LinkedIn Google+ [redacted] website

Other (Please specify) _____

12. If the survey touched on matters that were personal to you, would you b interested in discussing those issues further in an interview at a later stage? (Select one option)

Yes No

APPENDIX D: ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

*** Required Information**

page 1

Welcome to my research project 'An investigation of student capability in private higher education' which aims to investigate students' real-world, day to day experiences in higher education. This survey is a quick and easy multiple choice format. Your input is very valuable and would be much appreciated. Thank you for your interest.

PLEASE NOTE:
*** Participation is voluntary**
*** Your response is anonymous**
*** You may omit questions you do not feel comfortable to answer**
*** Participation in this survey will not affect your academic progress in any way**
*** You have the right to withdraw from participation at any time**
*** The data obtained by means of this survey will be used to identify student capabilities for further investigation**

For detailed participant information please see the Participant Information letter and the Survey Q & A on the institution's website

*** 1. I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE PARTICIPANT INFORMATION. I AM WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE AND HEREBY PROVIDE MY INFORMED CONSENT.** (Select one option)

- ○ YES — Go to Page No. 2
- ○ NO — Stop, you have finished the survey

If Did Not Answer Then Go to Page No. 2

2. Name and Surname (optional):

_____
_____

3. Student no. (optional).:

_____
_____

*** 4. Date:**

_ /_ /___ [dd/mm/yyyy]

page 2

THE PURPOSE OF THIS SURVEY IS TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A STUDENT IN A PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION.
PLEASE READ EACH STATEMENT CAREFULLY AND CHOOSE THE RESPONSE THAT MOST ACCURATELY APPLIES TO YOU. YOU ARE COMPLETING THIS SURVEY ANONYMOUSLY.

*** 5. I am the first person in my family to go to university** (Select one option)

○ Yes ○ No

*** 6. Gender** (Select one option)

○ Female ○ Male

*** 7. Campus** (Select one option)

○ Pretoria ○ Johannesburg ○ Durban

*** 8. Registration status** (Select one option)

○ Full-time ○ Part-time

*** 9. Are you a registered 1st year student?** (Select one option)

○ Yes ○ No

Yes: Go to Page No. 3
No: Stop, you have finished the survey

PLEASE READ EACH STATEMENT CAREFULLY AND CHOOSE THE RESPONSE THAT MOST ACCURATELY APPLIES TO YOU.

10. Select one option

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
(a) I had freedom of choice in selecting my higher education study path (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(b) I am free to select my course combination (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(c) I have a clear career direction (Select one option)	○	○	○	○

(d) My qualification is the key to my future (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(e) Being a higher education student gives me social status (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(f) Higher education is giving me the opportunity to develop my knowledge (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(g) Higher education will equip me to make good life choices (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(h) Higher education will give me more employment opportunities (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(i) I feel I can make a difference in the world (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(j) I have the opportunity to influence decisions about my academic progression (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(k) I trust myself to make the right life choices (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(l) I am fully responsible for my academic success (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(m) I know the rules and policies of the institution (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(n) I function independently in my daily university activities (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(o) I spend time reflecting on how I lead my life and where I am going (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(p) I am confident about my future (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(q) I know how to manage my time (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(r) I am able to ask for help (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(s) I like to help others (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(t) I will use my qualification to climb the corporate ladder (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(u) When I graduate I want to give back to my community (Select one option)	○	○	○	○

page 3

PLEASE READ EACH STATEMENT CAREFULLY AND CHOOSE THE RESPONSE THAT MOST ACCURATELY APPLIES TO YOU.

11. Select one option

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
(a) I am registered at the institution of my choice (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(b) I regularly attend all my classes (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(c) There is the opportunity for active participation in lectures if I choose (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(d) I engage with my lecturers outside of lecture time (Select one option)	○	○	○	○

(e) My subjects suit my career choice (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(f) My subject choice suits my abilities (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(g) I am achieving my academic potential (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(h) I put in a lot of study time at home (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(i) I enjoy work that challenges me (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(j) I am gaining subject specific knowledge (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(k) School prepared me well for Higher Education (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(l) I am good at problem solving (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(m) I know what I am able to achieve academically (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(n) I give up quickly when the work is hard (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(o) I understand the work easily (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(p) I feel confident I will complete my qualification (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(q) I am considering changing my programme (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(r) I am considering dropping out (Select one option)	○	○	○	○

page 4

PLEASE READ EACH STATEMENT CAREFULLY AND CHOOSE THE RESPONSE THAT MOST ACCURATELY APPLIES TO YOU.

12. Select one option

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
(a) I feel safe at this institution (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(b) I am happy to be in higher education (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(c) I feel as though I fit in at this institution (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(d) My daily activities are free from any form of discrimination (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(e) My current accommodation is adequate for me to achieve academically (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(f) I identify with the brand of the institution (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(g) My education is helping me establish my own identity (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(h) I am given the freedom to express myself (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(i) I believe my voice is heard (Select one option)	○	○	○	○

(j) Not all students are treated equally at this institution (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(k) I have the opportunity to socialise with other students (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(l) I attend social functions arranged on campus (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(m) I have made friends at the institution (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(n) I make use of the facilities on campus (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(o) I spend as little time as possible on campus (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(p) My social circle consists mostly of people who are not students at this institution (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(q) As a student, I am treated with respect by others in the institution (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(r) As a student, I am treated with respect by my family and community (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(s) I prefer to work with others (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(t) I get higher marks if I work alone (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(u) I am easily influenced by other people (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(v) My lecturers care about me (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(w) All students at this institution are given equal opportunity (Select one option)	○	○	○	○

page 5

PLEASE READ EACH STATEMENT CAREFULLY AND CHOOSE THE RESPONSE THAT MOST ACCURATELY APPLIES TO YOU.

13. Select one option

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
(a) I experience learning difficulties (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(b) I experience financial difficulty (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(c) I experience transport difficulty (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(d) I experience social difficulty (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(e) I experience reading difficulty (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(f) I experience writing difficulty (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(g) I experience hearing difficulty (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(h) I experience visual difficulty (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(i) I experience language difficulty (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(j) I experience computer difficulty (Select one option)	○	○	○	○

14. Other difficulty (please specify):

_____
_____

15. What element/s (if any) do you think place/s the greatest restriction on your higher education experience?

_____
_____

16. What element/s (if any) do you think play/s the greatest role in promoting your higher education experience?

_____
_____

PLEASE READ EACH STATEMENT CAREFULLY AND CHOOSE THE RESPONSE THAT MOST ACCURATELY DESCRIBES YOUR DAILY EXPERIENCE.

17. Select one option

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
(a) I feel happy (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(b) I feel helpless (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(c) I feel healthy and well (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(d) I feel out of my depth (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(e) I feel capable (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(f) I need additional academic help (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(g) I need additional social support (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(h) I need help emotionally (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(i) I need physical assistance (Select one option)	○	○	○	○
(j) I need financial assistance (Select one option)	○	○	○	○

18. (OPTIONAL) Write a comment about your daily experience in higher education.

_____
_____

19. (OPTIONAL) Write a comment about your social experience in higher education.

_____
_____

20. (OPTIONAL) Write a comment about your higher education environment.

_____
_____

page 6

*** 21. I would be willing to participate in an individual interview about my higher education experience** (Select one option)

- ◯ YES
- ◯ NO

22. If you answered 'YES' to Q.21 (above), please provide a contact email address or cellphone number

_____
_____

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

Wits School of Education

27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 • Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa
Tel: +27 11 717-3007 • Fax: +27 11 717-3009 • E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za • Website: www.wits.ac.za

Invitation to participate in research questionnaire and participant information letter

23 May 2016

Dear First-year student

My name is Fenella Somerville and I am a Masters in Education student at the Wits School of Education. I am currently conducting a research project titled *An investigation of student capability in private higher education.* The study aims to investigate student's real-world experiences in order to identify and attempt to analyse those factors that may potentially be impairing student functioning and success. As a first-year student registered at a private higher education institution you are ideally positioned to comment on your individual experience at the institution.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. This would require you to complete an online electronic questionnaire, which you can access via an SMS link that will enable you to complete it on your computer or smart phone. The structure of the questionnaire is multiple choice and should only take about 15 minutes of your time. The purpose is to find out about your daily experience of higher education in order to identify factors that you feel are limiting your access, sense of belonging, participation or success in your academic processes. Should you wish to, there will also be the opportunity to participate in a second phase of the project at a later stage. This will entail an interview to explore your experiences in greater detail. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be able to indicate your interest in participating in an individual interview. You are not required to commit to phase 2 yet, nor does your participation in the questionnaire oblige you to participate in the interview. Interview participants would be selected randomly from among those participants who express an interest.

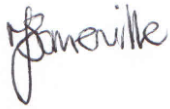
Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you choose to participate there will be no reward or payment, however, you would be required to indicate your understanding of the processes and conditions of participation, and your consent to participate. If you choose not to participate there will be no penalty. Neither participation nor non-participation will affect your

course marks or academic progress in any way. If you choose to participate, you have the right to leave out answers to any of the questions. You also have the right to withdraw from participation at any time during the research process, with no negative consequences or penalty to yourself or your course marks. The data obtained by means of the survey will be used to identify student capabilities for further investigation.

Questionnaires will be completed anonymously and neither your name nor that of the institution will be revealed at any time or in any of the research documentation. Confidentiality will be maintained and you can be assured that the privacy of participants will be protected at all times. All data collected (including electronic questionnaires, audio recordings and hard copies of interview transcripts) will be kept securely in a locked cupboard, and will be destroyed by shredding or deleting within three to five years after completion of the study. The results of the research will be used for academic purposes only. This includes my Masters research project, and possible publications in academic journal articles, books and conference presentations. In any of these publications, I guarantee the participants' right to anonymity, and no names of participants, the institution, or any other identifying information will be used. There are no foreseeable risks to the students or the institution in participating in this project. The research project has been cleared by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Education) of The University of the Witwatersrand [Protocol Number 2016ECE001M]. I would expect that participation in the research would provide participants with an opportunity for reflection, and that the results of the study would further our collective understanding of higher education processes with the ultimate intention of improving student success.

If you are willing to participate in this component of the research project, please click on the link that you receive by SMS in order to access the questionnaire. If you have any concerns or queries regarding my research, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time, or contact my research supervisor whose details are below.

Thanking you in anticipation.



Name of student: Fenella Somerville
Wits Student number: 773116
Email: fenella@mweb.co.za
24-hour contact number: 083 288 7278

Research supervisor: Dr Elizabeth Walton
(Elizabeth.Walton@wits.ac.za)
011 717 3768 (office)

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

---

1. Why did you choose to study at this institution?

2. Tell me about your higher education (HE) experience?
   a. best/worst element?
   b. Lecturers?
   c. Friends?
   d. Describe the impact of HE on you personally
   e. What is your greatest obstacle?

3. Do you think there is such a thing as a ‘typical’ student at this institution?
   a. Who is seen as different or treated differently?
   b. What do you think their experience is?
   c. Who gets excluded from what?
   d. What issues do you think students of today face in HE?

4. Who do students go to if/when they have a problem?

5. In your survey…(address specific responses given in the survey by each participant)

APPENDIX G: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Wits School of Education

27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 • Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa
Tel: +27 11 717-3007 • Fax: +27 11 717-3009 • E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za • Website: www.wits.ac.za

Research Project: An investigation of student capability in private higher education

Informed Consent Form: Interview

I _____ (participant's full name)
[PLEASE PRINT]

☐ **am willing /** ☐ **am not willing**

to participate in the research project by being interviewed for this study in a 45-minute individual interview at a time and place convenient to me..

Permission to be audiotaped (please circle your response):

I agree to be audiotaped during the interview: Yes / No

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only: Yes / No

I know that I can ask not to be audiotaped: Yes / No

Please also indicate the following by circling your response:

- I received and understood the email inviting me to participate in research interview and providing participant information: Yes / No
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that there are no negative consequences for choosing not to participate in this research: Yes / No
- I understand that this research project is not in any way connected to my academic marks and/or progress: Yes / No
- I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time without any negative consequences: Yes / No
- I understand that I can stop the interview at any time with no negative consequences to me: Yes / No
- I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any of the questions during the interview and that there would be no negative consequences to me: Yes / No
- I know that the researcher and supervisor will keep my information confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my institution will not be revealed: Yes / No
- I understand that the responses I give during the interview will be used as research data for academic purposes, and may be published in conference papers, journal articles or books: Yes / No
- I understand that my responses will be used anonymously at all times and I will not be identified in any research publications: Yes / No
- I understand that the questionnaire data, audiotapes and transcripts will be kept securely in a locked office and will be destroyed within three to five years after completion of the research: Yes / No

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX H: TRANSCRIPT CODING SAMPLE

PARTICIPANT 1 (Extract from transcript)

RESPONDENT: Uh, they told me that the academic manager's on leave this week, and I contacted the lecturer, which happen-- I think to mark the assignment, and I filed a grievance form and they told me to wait which I asked recently. [ok] They told me they'd just get back to me but didn't give me a specific time.

Lecturer
Admin

INTERVIEWER: Well, it sounds to me like you're managing. So you've had that as a not-so-good experience... what other not-so-good or great experiences have you had so far?

RESPONDENT: I mean, as I mentioned before, the interactive learning has certainly been a highlight. I mean, we've had guest lecturers come through and talk to us. And so now that was motivation on its own. Even the lecturers, the way they present their lectures, is just... it.. it's interactive, it's motivational, it.. it gives you a sort of insight of what to really expect of the industry. And really they have been professional and... Yes.

Teaching
Lecturer
Achieving dream
Teaching
Career

INTERVIEWER: And, how do you feel having to handle all these processes and things – as you say, not like school. Does it... how does it make you feel?

RESPONDENT: I mean, now looking back, you certainly miss having someone to tell you, I mean, keep up with this, or this and so and so, and attention to such things. But then I guess it, it's a reality check and... out there, after getting my certificate or degree it's going to be like this. Nobody's going to follow up on me, so I guess it's a wake up call and it prepares me, so I like the fact that I'm, I'm getting prepared for what's really out there instead of a bubble world in fact.

Career
Time management
Qualification
Independence
Career

INTERVIEWER: Where do you see yourself going in your life?

RESPONDENT: I see myself obtaining this degree firstly, And I'd like to start my own business and be independent. So, in a sense I'd like to be .... successful.

Achieving dream
Qualification
Achieving dream
Independence

APPENDIX I: ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER

Wits School of Education

27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa. Tel: +27 11 717-3064 Fax: +27 11 717-3100 E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za Website: www.wits.ac.za

22 March 2016

Student Number: 773116

Protocol Number: 2016ECE001M

Dear Fenella Somerville

Application for Ethics Clearance: Master of Education

Thank you very much for your ethics application. The Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities, acting on behalf of the Senate has considered your application for ethics clearance for your proposal entitled:

An investigation of student capability in private higher education

The committee recently met and I am pleased to inform you that **clearance was granted**.
However, there were a few small issues which the committee would appreciate you attending to before embarking on your research.

The following comments were made:

- Minor revision necessary. Please revise the letter to institution by indicating more explicitly, and earlier on, that the institution itself will remain anonymous, and not incur any benefit or costs due to research undertaken there.

Please use the above protocol number in all correspondence to the relevant research parties (schools, parents, learners etc.) and include it in your research report or project on the title page.

The Protocol Number above should be submitted to the Graduate Studies in Education Committee upon submission of your final research report.

All the best with your research project.

Yours sincerely,

MMaseko

Wits School of Education

011 717-3416

Cc Supervisor: Dr Elizabeth Walton