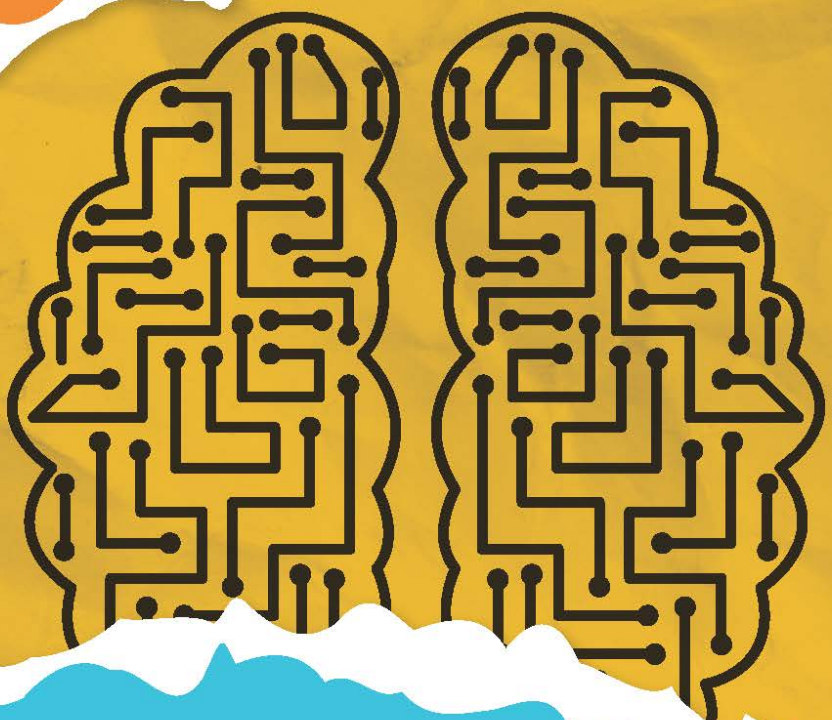
Reimagining South African Higher Education

Towards a Student-Centred Learning and Teaching Future



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CHAPTER 6

TOWARDS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: RECOGNISING ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF CAPITAL AMONG STUDENTS FROM RURAL BACKGROUNDS.

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Abstract
Bourdieu proposed four types of capital (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) that contribute to social reproduction. However, marginalised communities also possess a myriad of resources for effective engagement in and with broader society. An alternative to Bourdieu's notion of capital is that of Tara Yosso, who proposes the concept of "community cultural wealth". This notion includes aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistance capital. This chapter explores these alternative forms of cultural capital along a particular axis of marginalisation: rurality. Students from rural backgrounds are often viewed as lacking the knowledge, sensibilities, and capital that characterise urban life. While students from rural backgrounds do indeed face unique challenges as they transition to university study, they also display remarkable resilience and can and do achieve remarkable success in higher education. Drawing on individual interviews and focus group discussions with 18 students from rural backgrounds at an urban institution of higher education in South Africa, this chapter seeks to explore these alternative forms of capital that students bring with them to higher education. It does so in order to recognise the wealth of social and cultural resources that students draw on in order to successfully navigate the institutional spaces that characterise higher education.

Keywords: cultural capital; higher education studies; student academic development; rurality

1. Introduction
Pierre Bourdieu (1977) proposes four types of capital that contribute to social reproduction. These are economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. These forms of capital, in the view of Bourdieu, are generative of social inequalities that are maintained and produced through their transmission. Notwithstanding the enormous power that these systems of capital wield, such a view obscures the fact

that marginalised communities nonetheless possess myriad resources for effective engagement in and with broader society.

An alternative approach to Bourdieu's notion of capital is that of Tara Yosso (2005), who proposes the concept of 'community cultural wealth'. When applied to a higher education context, this notion attempts to overcome issues of racism and other types of marginalisation (e.g., racial, gendered, and a myriad other forms of marginalisation) by recognising the forms of capital that students from marginalised backgrounds bring with them from their homes and communities. Yosso (2005) argues that cultural wealth gives rise to alternative forms of capital, namely aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistance capital. This chapter explores these alternative forms of cultural capital along a particular axis of marginalisation: rurality and its influence on accessing and succeeding in South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Research on the experiences of students from rural backgrounds in higher education recognises that the voices of these students remain underrepresented (White & Corbett, 2014; Mgqwashu et al., 2020; Naidoo, et al., 2020). Moreover, rural students are often viewed as occupying a position of deficit – that is, as lacking the knowledge, sensibilities, and capital that characterise urban life (Masinire, 2020; Mgqwashu et al., 2020). While it is true that students from rural backgrounds face unique challenges as they transition to university study, it is also evident that these students display remarkable resilience and can and do achieve remarkable success in higher education. Notably so, despite the fact that students from rural backgrounds possess cultural wealth that enables them to negotiate their way into and through higher education, the challenges that they face can be overwhelming and may potentially result in poor performance, and difficulty in transitioning to and participating in higher education where the continuing legacy of apartheid and the colonial past is perhaps most strongly felt.

This chapter seeks to explore the alternative forms of capital that students from rural backgrounds bring with them to higher education. It does so to give value and recognition to the wealth of social and cultural resources that these students draw on to successfully navigate higher education spaces.

2. From Cultural Capital to Cultural Wealth

While universities provide educational opportunities, their social role since the massification of higher education is less clear-cut as they can be used to maintain inequalities by advantaging and protecting the elite (Marginson, 2016). Arguably, prior to massification, HEIs (specifically, the predominantly white South African universities) served as springboards for students who access these spaces to obtain the knowledge, skills, credentials, and networks (that is, the social capital) critical in determining access to the best jobs and accompanying economic rewards. However, post 1994, the social role of the university has yet to be defined. This is because, in South Africa, the notion of equal access to higher education

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makes assumptions of equality of social and cultural capital (Leibowitz, 2012). Despite the elimination of explicit discriminatory policies that were meant to keep black students out of certain universities, barriers such as unequal funding arrangements, unfair admission processes, financial constraints, curriculum, knowledge, pedagogy, and other socio-cultural factors (Jones et al., 2008; Naidoo et al., 2020) continue to serve the interests of the urban elite. This results in unequal university opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially those from poor-rural contexts.

Bourdieu's notion of social reproduction allows researchers and commentators to examine the deeply entrenched ways in which higher education institutional processes perpetuate inequalities – and marginalise certain students. Giroux (1983), building on Bourdieu (1977), argues that education reproduces the hierarchical order of society. This occurs both overtly and through the "hidden curriculum" – "those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom" (Giroux, 2001, p. 47).

Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) original exposition of cultural reproduction theory argued that society is socially stratified and that these strata can be distinguished based on the possession of resources (economic, cultural, and social). Economic "capital" refers to those resources that are "convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights" (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 47). "Social capital" refers to the resources "that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). Social and economic forms of capital play a significant role in the formation of "cultural capital". In his later work, symbolic capital was included; this takes the form of prestige and recognition and involves distinctive properties, such as expressions of coolness or eagerness, language, clothing, and interior furnishings, which are symbolically translated as lifestyle (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013).

Bourdieu contends that family and education are sites for social and cultural reproduction as they serve to selectively reinforce and inculcate social class-dependent dispositions, values, and beliefs. See, for example, the seminal text by Shirley Brice Heath, *Ways with Words* (1983), which addresses the linguistic means by which this cultural capital is differentiated across social class positions. In higher education, specifically, students from rural and urban areas undergo a process of socialisation into the institutional and disciplinary cultures that make up the university. This is of concern given South Africa's history of discrimination, which limited access to disadvantaged communities to HEIs and continues to expect students to realign their class affiliation, value systems, and identities. This realignment can be a challenge for students from rural communities because of the gap that potentially exists between the sociocultural practices of rural contexts and those of HEIs (Walker & Mathebula, 2020). Nonetheless, these students bring

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with them learning resources and social dispositions that have gone unrecognised. It is thus necessary for HEIs to acknowledge and consolidate the cultural richness that students from rural backgrounds bring to their learning as well as uncover the barriers that they may face.

Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory is not without its critics. Indeed, while it remains important to consider how education systems, as Bourdieu so starkly illuminates, continue to reproduce social hierarchies, it is also important to consider how higher education participants might act as agents of social transformation. Given that South Africa continues to feel the effects of colonialism and apartheid, higher education was profoundly shaped, and continues to be shaped, by social, political, and economic discrimination and inequalities across class, race, and gender. Even though some students may continue to succeed in the highest echelons of the university system, their success often reinforces the idea that university education is open and equal for all. However, this assumption that university education is open and equal for all can perpetuate inequitable academic and non-academic outcomes, especially for those who have been disadvantaged by legacies of colonialism and apartheid. Therefore, as argued by Martinez-Cosio (2010), while Bourdieu's work focuses on the possession of capital by the dominant social class, it ignores the activation of capital by those dominated. We contend that Bourdieu's theory, when applied to the case of students from rural backgrounds in higher education, emphasises those students' own deficiencies and reinforces deficit perceptions of rurality.

This leads us to consider the work of Tarra Yosso (2005), and her notion of cultural wealth. Yosso's work addresses issues of racism and the marginalisation of people of colour in higher education, but we argue that her ideas can be extended to conditions of rurality and higher education as well. Yosso (2005) critiques the concept of cultural capital as considering dominant communities as culturally wealthy and all others as culturally "poor". Instead, Yosso (2005) argues for a shift away from such deficit views. She argues that the outcome of such deficit thinking is then to "top-up" students from marginalised backgrounds with the requisite cultural knowledge and skills. Instead, Yosso argues for recognising and valuing the particular forms of capital that such students already possess.

To this end, Yosso (2005) introduces the concept of "community cultural wealth" – a form of capital that draws on the knowledges that students from marginalised backgrounds bring with them from their homes and communities. Yosso (2005) argues that the forms of capital nurtured by community cultural wealth include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistance capital.

- Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of barriers, and draws heavily on the notion of resilience. (p. 78-79)
- Navigational capital refers to the ability to manoeuvre through and across social institutions. Importantly, the notion of navigational capital acknowledges

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individual agency and resilience and may include strategies to obtain high levels of achievement despite institutional constraints. As such, in this chapter, aspirational and navigational capital are discussed in tandem, due to their strong overlaps. (p. 80)

- Linguistic capital refers to abilities regarding alternative literacies, such as art, music, or poetry, and communication experiences in multiple languages, styles, and genres. (p. 78)
- Familial capital refers to community history, memory, and cultural intuition. Since it adopts a broader understanding of kinship, it may include immediate family (living or dead), extended family, close friends, and community members. (p. 79)
- Social capital refers to networks of people and community resources. Although similar to Bourdieu's original notion of social capital, it is focused on those networks that provide instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions (Claridge, 2018). In this chapter, familial and social capital are grouped together due to the presence of significant overlaps between them. (p. 79). In the southern African sense, this value system is where the concept of Ubuntu stems from.
- Finally, resistance capital refers to the ability to challenge inequality through oppositional behaviours (Yosso, 2005, p. 80; see also, Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1983).

It is important to note that the forms of capital that students from marginalised backgrounds bring with them from their homes and communities into the university are neither mutually exclusive nor static; instead, they are dynamic processes that build on one another and, in combination, constitute the community wealth that students from rural backgrounds, for example, possess.

Yosso (2005) refutes the assumption that the higher education system is open to all; instead, she argues for a centring of the experiences of students from marginalised backgrounds including, we add, students from rural backgrounds. Centring the experiences of rural students at university will reveal the assets and resources that emerge from the backgrounds of these students. In so doing, it may become possible to better enable students from rural backgrounds to draw on these assets and, in turn, contribute to the transformation of higher education institutions. What we hope to show in this chapter, while drawing on the ideas of Tarra Yosso and expanding on the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, is that students from rural backgrounds possess alternative forms of capital that, when used productively, enable them to navigate academic life.

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3. Research Design

Drawing from an interpretivist paradigm, this study makes use of a qualitative research design. It has been designed as a holistic single case study (Guetterman & Fetters, 2018; Casey & Houghton, 2010) with embedded units and subunits. In this study, the "case" is constituted by the specific institution in which this research is undertaken. This setting is a large, multi-campus, comprehensive, South African, urban university, consisting of over 50 000 students. A majority of the students are black, and they come from varying socio-economic backgrounds and from rural as well as urban areas.

However, within this broader case, the participants were drawn from the education programmes and STEM faculties. These two disciplines formed embedded units which were useful counterpoints to one another, as they often involve significantly different forms of engagement and outcome. Finally, embedded within the case study are 18 individual students, 7 from the STEM disciplines and 11 from the education faculty. Each of these participants represents a unique experience of rurality and higher education.

The participants in this research were sampled as part of the South African Rurality in Higher Education (SARiHE) project (Naidoo et al., 2020). In this project, student participants were purposively selected based on the fact that they had lived and attended school in a rural area and were in the second year of study. A matrix was used with the following criteria: race/ethnicity, gender, geographical origin, and first generation at university. Targeted second-year classes (initially identified by academic informants) were chosen, and students were then asked to complete a short questionnaire. Students who met the criteria in the questionnaire were then invited to take part in the study. As part of the SARiHE project, the participants were given iPads with which they were required to develop digital documentaries.

For the project on which this chapter is based, permission to use the digital documentaries was sought and granted from the principals of the SARiHE project, and ethics clearance for conducting the interviews and focus groups was obtained from the relevant faculty research ethics committee. The researchers ensured sensitivity to the participants' vulnerability and asked them to only share what they felt comfortable sharing. All participants gave informed consent for their participation and their voluntary participation, anonymity,[1] and confidentiality were ensured throughout the study.

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data. After viewing the digital documentaries collected as part of the SARiHE project, a semi-structured interview schedule was developed which sought to clarify the silences, gaps, and contradictions that emerged in the digital documentaries as well as in the literature. Each participant was individually interviewed for between 40 and 60 minutes. In addition, two focus group discussions, one each with a

1 Pseudonyms were used to protect the rights and integrity of all the participants.

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subset of students from each of the two broad disciplines, were conducted. A semi-structured focus group schedule was developed, and the purpose of separating the students by faculty was to allow the participants to reflect on and share their views on whether their rural backgrounds impacted their experiences of learning in their chosen disciplines.

Both the interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. ATLAS.ti was used in the management, organisation, and analysis of the data collected. The data were analysed using Tarra Yosso's elements of community cultural wealth as an analytical frame, through an initial process of coding. The overall objective of the analysis was to identify patterns or themes in the data that elucidated the forms of cultural wealth that student from rural backgrounds within the selected case study draw on in their studies in higher education.

4. Findings and Discussion

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Tarra Yosso (2005) critiques Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital and extends it to include alternative forms of capital possessed by marginalised communities. Yosso contends that higher education can and should learn from the range of cultural knowledges, ingenuities, capacities, and networks possessed by socio-economically marginalised groups that generally go unrecognised (Yosso, 2005: Mathebula, 2019: Mgqwashu, et al., 2020). Our view is that students from rural communities are able to harness complex mediating resources to adapt to their studies in higher education. In the subsections that follow, we discuss the forms of capital that these students bring with them to university, including navigational (and aspirational), linguistic, familial (and social), and resistance capital.

4.1. Navigational and aspirational capital

Navigational capital refers to the ability to develop resilience or academic invulnerability and "skills of manoeuvring through social institutions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 44). This includes the strategies and skills that enable students from rural backgrounds to navigate through social institutions and maintain high levels of achievement, despite stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of performing poorly. This relies on these students having strong aspirational capital. Aspirational capital overlaps with each of the other forms of capital and, as Yosso (2005, p. 41) notes, refers to the "ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of barriers".

The university environment requires a greater sense of individual responsibility and work ethos, rooted in a tradition of hard work, frugality, and diligence. Several participants argued that their rural backgrounds had instilled in them characteristics of strength, diligence, independence, persistence, and perseverance. From their perspective, their rural upbringing helped them to adapt to campus life. For example, Max (a second-year education student) explains:

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> I came as a very responsible individual… back home they taught me responsibility above all else. Because I learned how to do things on my own, ever since high school everything that I learned how to cook myself, I learnt how to do my laundry, everything by myself […] I think that prepared me as an individual for this phase of life.

This demonstrates the navigational resources that Max was able to harness despite the adjustment required when going to university. A particularly striking experience of navigational and aspirational capital in operation comes from another of the participants, Ann, whose early academic difficulties caused her to drop out of university twice:

> I matriculated 2011, I went to another varsity […] before [...] I went to school in the rural areas, so there there's no information about what to do after Matric […] Now I was fortunate enough that I did well in my Matric and then my teachers from high school organised me a bursary that they wanted me to go and do Computer Sciences.

Because many rural schools struggle to provide adequate career guidance (Walker, 2019), Ann was encouraged to study Computer Science, despite not doing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a subject at school. She continues:

> …the 45 minutes would just pass, I'll just be looking left and right because I do not understand [...] so I would go to my room and cry because I didn't understand, I don't know anything. As a result, I ended up failing the course.

She then decided to change courses:

> I always loved Life Sciences and Chemistry at school. So, […] I decided to take Chemistry and Biology [hoping that] maybe I'll find what I love along the way. Still, I got there [...] 2014 […] I dropped out...

She adds:

> …2015 I decided to take a gap year and then maybe try to find myself and then maybe eventually I'll find what I want to do… I didn't want to just stay at home and do nothing… So, I came to [the city] to look for work, then that's when I decided let me try apply to [research site] for education.

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Despite the obstacles that she faced, beginning with a lack of career guidance, Ann exercised significant aspirational and navigational capital, moving across degree programmes, institutions and even cities she was unfamiliar with in order to find work and, ultimately, pursue studies that she felt aligned to her interests. Studies have shown that self-discipline correlates positively with high academic performance (Kim, 2014), and the findings in this study indicate that rural upbringings instilled critical navigational skills in students, which enabled them to successfully manoeuvre through higher education, despite significant obstacles.

4.2. Linguistic capital

Linguistic capital refers to having multiple language and communication skills (Yosso, 2005). But language also entails the intellectual and social traditions of communities, as learned through communication experiences in that community (Reynolds & Orellana, 2009). In South Africa, as in many other places in the world, English is regarded as a high-status language and is the most widely used medium of instruction in higher education in the country (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). However, rural students experience very little exposure to English before entry into the university. For example, Jane describes that:

> …at school we didn't use English like full time, we only used it in English language lesson but in terms of teaching they used our home language we learned Physics in Se-Pedi. Life Science, everything even Maths…

This presents challenges that emerge not because the students do not understand the concepts, but because they do not understand the language, as Jabali explains:

> There is little or no interaction between the lecturers in university because of the language of communication, sometimes you don't get the terminology but when things are expressed in your language that's when you understand better, I personally struggle with understanding academic papers we have to study. This causes poor performance.

These challenges require students from rural backgrounds to exercise significant linguistic effort to cope with their studies in higher education.

The use of their mother tongue – and knowledge of multiple languages – in their group engagements was one of the strategies used by participants to grapple with understanding disciplinary concepts. This enabled them to retain their motivation and persevere in their studies. Terry explains:

> It also helps in knowing a lot of South African languages because [we] have Zulus, Sotho's, Pedi's and Tsongas in my group. We

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> may not know how exactly how to respond in their language but so far as we can understand what one is saying in their language and respond also in our language, is interesting because [we] don't struggle when it comes to assignments and practical reports because we are always there to help each other.

Students from rural communities often hail from storytelling traditions and are used to listening to and recounting oral histories, stories, and proverbs. Through these practices, students from rural backgrounds develop skills such as memorisation, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm, and rhyme (Yosso, 2005). Therefore, these students are often well-placed to draw on various languages, registers, or styles to communicate with different audiences. For example, Jane recounts what used to happen in village meetings:

> And then you just gather as a community you dance those rituals dancing and then you sing if you're a singer and then there were some troops play the drums […] they would tell the history of how the place did come […] why did they name them [the place] like so? what happened before they came? and then what made them to live around that area?

Such narratives are conduits for sharing knowledge (Mathebula, 2019) and such linguistic capital enables students from rural areas to engage in the knowledge practices of the academy and make important contributions to society. This is because their linguistic capital enables them to preserve a sense of self-identity and confidence. Linguistic capital depends on and is embedded in familial and community relationships, to which consideration in this chapter now turns.

4.3. Familial and social capital

According to Yosso (2005, p. 48), familial capital refers to "cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, cultural intuition". When a student's family has high expectations, that student has an improved chance of success (Pleet-Odle et al., 2016; Kim, 2014). Across the data collected for this chapter, the participants shared experiences of growing up in families that had little prior experience with tertiary education. Despite this, the participants' families placed significant emphasis on the importance of education, which the participants identified as crucial to their educational success. As Philip remarks:

I had everything I need, and my mother even though she didn't go to school she made sure that when I tell her that they need this at school she gave me. When there is a meeting, school meeting she was there all the time.

According to the participants, their parents and grandparents talked with them about their dreams and hopes and expressed high aspirations and strong support for their education, even though their parents did not get the chance to receive it.

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Their family's prioritisation of education was something all the participants shared with regard to their pre-university experiences. However, families demonstrated the value they placed on education in varied ways. For Jane, this meant strict rules about completing schoolwork before participating in other activities:

> …my granny, she didn't go to school but then the way she was too involved […] like seriously she will check your books […] even every time she'll go to school and ask […] 'how is she performing? how is she behaving? where is she lacking? […] what should I do to help her?'

The familial motivation, expectations, and support that the participants received constitute significant familial capital that enabled the participants to manoeuvre through HEIs.

More broadly, social capital refers to the social networks that students utilise to "manoeuvre through the systems" and includes community resources (Yosso, 2005, p. 45). The church was one community resource that played a significant role as, according to Terry, it:

> …even give us some funding, tutors in our church, people who will encourage they will find you someone with the same course who will always guide…

In addition, teachers' support is a form of community or social capital that enabled some of the students to achieve academic success and manoeuvre through the educational system. Although it is often argued that the quality of teaching in rural areas is poor (Mgqwashu et al., 2020; Department of Basic Education, 2005; Hannaway et al., 2019), our research shows that many teachers are extremely supportive of their students' learning and success. Although the students at a non-government school in Maya's village did not pay any fees and the school did not receive any funding from the government, teachers volunteered to teach extra hours for free in order to prepare the learners for the final Matric[2] examination:

> My teachers played a significant role in my learning, they are very dedicated teachers […] like they could give everything, they have for us to be where we are today […] our classes started at six o'clock in the morning and ended at five, six o'clock first period, each teacher had like two hours for each period.

Ann adds that it was her teachers who helped her in applying for and securing a bursary. This support and motivation continued even during her university studies:

2 At the end of secondary or high school, learners write a final set of examinations which are known by a particularly South African term, Matric – and learners who pass are said to have matriculated.

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> So, my teacher […] organised this bursary, so she would call me every time, 'how is everything how do are you doing?' When I complain that the course is showing me flames […] she always motivated […] 'you have potential, you'll pull through'.

These findings contradict Bourdieu's (1986) suggestion that students from working class backgrounds lack parental support. As the participants demonstrate, familial and social capital, in the form of parents, teachers, relatives and the church, positively influence their confidence and aspirations and enabled them to navigate into and through higher education.

4.4. Resistance capital

Resistance capital "refers [to] those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behaviour that challenges inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Some of the participants expressed the view that their strong desire to achieve success in higher education was an attempt to counteract stereotypes and others' negative beliefs about themselves and their rural upbringing. For example, Jane argues:

> Yah so even my neighbours […] they even asked my aunty, 'why do you have to tell her about university because she is not going to go there, so you are just wasting your time and energy […] you can even see her mother didn't even go to university so she will join her mother and be a domestic worker'. They were surprised when I went to university because […] they say I can't go to university I'll have to prove them wrong and go to university.

Ann adds:

> Well, I'd say back then when I had dropped out obviously the people in the community were talking oh shame she's giving up in school, these are lot of things that made me not to give up because they were talking.

The need to exercise resistance capital was particularly strong amongst female participants. Some participants argued that there were negative stereotypes about girls, which they sought to counteract. As Nancy argues, demonstrating how familial and resistance capital can align:

> Ah, like the community there were those negative effects like most girls getting pregnant you know, and no one is going to university. People just drop out at high school but then I feel like my grandmother used to protect us a lot from the community.

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As such, the students – particularly the female participants – expressed a strong desire to prove "them" wrong and counteract prejudice against rural and female subjectivities. The above comments suggest internal transformational resistance on the part of the participants, in which they seek out opportunities for self-development as a form of conscious critique of oppression (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). This is important, as it demonstrates a political and social conscience that needs to be leveraged as part of a critical university education.

4.5. Community cultural wealth

What emerged strongly in the data collected was a desire on the part of the participants to not only draw from but also to contribute to the cultural wealth of their rural communities. In the same way that the participants benefitted from the navigational, familial, social, and other forms of capital within their rural contexts, they expressed a desire to grow these forms of capital for future students. In the case of Philip, this includes giving back familial capital:

> I'm planning to take my sister to varsity to study Transport and Supply Chain Management […] as soon as I finish, I want to make sure that she goes to varsity…

For Willy, this involves growing the broader navigational and social capital of his rural area:

> …the plan is to go back in rural area and to help [the learners] in applications and also I just want to teach in rural area…

It is important to note that this was not mere lip-service to the idea. Willy explains how he has already made attempts to funnel the navigational capital he has gained back to his community:

> …when I was doing my practicals [teaching practice] in January, I drafted a two page of guidance then I took a period on this other teacher I spoke to him and then I said to him 'I did this for the Matric'. And then it was the information about the varsities […] the requirements, everything that they need to know, of course I won't know all the information because I'm at [research site] but through the internet I managed like to get some stuff even if is not enough.

And for Jane, the ambition is to contribute to the economic and objectified cultural capital of her rural village:

> Like, I want to change teaching system […] we said we don't have libraries, we don't have labs at least I can create one through sponsors […] funding where I can change whereby learners learn

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> so that when they come to university it is not going to be the same struggle.

In her study of rural Tasmanian students' perceptions of community, Schmidt (2017) demonstrates that her participants felt an important sense of belonging within their rural community. Our findings, in addition to giving recognition to the wealth of resources that students from rural backgrounds draw on to achieve success in higher education, demonstrate the extent to which returning graduates are an important resource within rural communities (Sowl et al., 2022). As Yosso (2005) argues, while cultural capital is accumulated, cultural wealth is shared. The cultural capital that these rural students draw on in their transition into higher education fosters ever-expanding cultural wealth as it is ploughed back into their rural communities of origin.

5. Final Note: A Continuation Rather than a Conclusion

In this chapter, we problematised the prevailing view of students from rural communities regarding their access to and success at university. Although these students experience significant social, intellectual, and emotional challenges as they transition into university, they nonetheless draw on their cultural and social resources to successfully navigate higher education institutional spaces. Despite this, higher education institutions continue to frame rural students and their backgrounds as deficient in essential academic and cultural resources. The failure on the part of these institutions to acknowledge and legitimate rural forms of capital shifts the blame to inadequacies on the part of students rather than the inadequacies and under-preparedness of higher education institutions to meet the needs of students from rural backgrounds and harness their rich capitals. We posit that students from rural backgrounds possess important forms of capital that can be utilised in their teaching and learning at university. While we acknowledge that there are no ready-made remedies to the challenges faced by these students, higher education institutions need to develop context-specific responses informed by appropriate situational analysis if they are to make strides towards greater social justice within higher education.

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend construction of a more just learning environment. This requires changing unequal social structures through more egalitarian policies. A good place to begin is to create greater awareness of the impact of rurality in higher education and develop a more inclusive ethos in higher education institutions. Therefore, critical steps towards social justice in education provision should begin by creating spaces for knowledge pluralism with a view to establishing broader, inclusive, critical, creative, and engaging curricular and pedagogical approaches. This suggests adopting strategies and structuring teaching in ways that expressly draw upon students' cultural practices, including their linguistic practices and common cultural experiences. Recognition of other forms of knowledge is integral to creating space for cognitive justice. However, the

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continued absence of African cultural epistemological content, ways of knowing and practices of being in the academy is what contributes to cognitive injustice and the epistemicide of African knowledges within formal educational systems.

Students' active engagement in their own education is key to their epistemic becoming. In order for students to benefit from membership of the academy, universities should deliberately provide opportunities for students to establish communities of practice around courses in their programme of study. In particular, this would mean actively creating peer group communities to meet the learning support and emotional needs of students from rural contexts. These peer groups should be made up of other students from similar backgrounds and who are facing similar challenges. In this way, the students would provide mutual support to each other and try to make sense of their academic milieu and the role that their backgrounds play in their academic trajectory.

In conclusion, higher education institutions need to do more to enhance the learning experiences of students from rural backgrounds. This should go beyond the provision of laptops, data, and the like (though these remain important), but also include overcoming underlying cultural deficit perspectives and recognising and harnessing the capital that these students do possess as suggested in this chapter. The forms of capital investigated in this chapter have thus provided a lens for revealing and theorising ways to restructure higher education institutions around the knowledges, skills, abilities, and networks accrued and/or utilised by students from rural communities.

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