
From out-of-school-youth to TVET student: Exploring the funds in families and communities that facilitate second-chance learning

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ABSTRACT

Many young South African adults are returning to education as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) students. These students' educational reintegration can be challenging, given their history of failure in the formal school system. We argue that many vulnerable adult learners succeed despite their situational and dispositional challenges because of the agentic acts present in their families and communities. However, in the parent support literature there is a misrecognition of the contributions that adults from socio-economically deprived communities make in the success of such second-chance learners. This multiple case study had as context a Western Cape TVET college where five purposively selected students' experiences with family and community support were explored. The article responds to the research question: 'What are the embedded funds in families and communities that facilitate the TVET students' successful entry into second-chance learning?' The findings refute the perception that poor communities disinvest in the education of their young adult learners. It found that in their worlds there were various role-players and networks that facilitated the five TVET students' educational success. What the communities lacked in financial and material wealth, they made up for with aspirational, emotional and navigational wealth from which the adult students benefitted.

KEYWORDS

Youth, adult learner, TVET, National Certificate (Vocational), parent involvement, TVET

Introduction

Active parental support and involvement is a vital component of students' educational success (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins & Closson, 2005; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Toren & Seginer, 2015; Daniels, 2017). However, our review of the educational literature shows that limited research exists on parent support of young adult learners. Most research explores the influence of parents on primary school children's social worlds. Our review of both international and national educational studies shows that researchers presume that only primary school children need parental involvement and educational support and that their need for support and involvement diminishes as they grow older (Sheldon, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Toren & Seginer, 2015; Esau, 2018). This understanding could account for the paucity of educational research on parent support afforded to older students in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) contexts. Our research sought to respond to this understanding as we argue that parental support has benefits for learners at any educational level and age.

In this article, we explore parental support for and facilitation of the educational success of vulnerable TVET college students. The participants' vulnerability is tied to the situational and dispositional challenges they find themselves confronted by as students who have not completed their high-school education. We confined our research to the National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)) programmes because many of the adult learners in these programmes are minors and former out-of-school youths.

The authors both grew up in townships on the Cape Flats and our experiences of the parental support given to older students in our communities do not always fit the traditional forms of support that the literature reports on. Gafoor and Van der Bijl (2019; Esau, 2018), too, refer to this gap in the international literature. We argue that there are agentic forms of family support and networks in such communities that warrant further research, analysis and reporting. We therefore view our research as filling a gap in the adult educational research on parental support. Our interest was in the support structures and networks in adult students' homes and communities when we posed the following research question: 'What are the embedded funds in families and communities that facilitate the TVET students' successful entry into second-chance learning?' Using Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory as our theoretical framework, we conceptualise embedded funds as being much broader than financial support and explore the emotional, aspirational and social support influences on the students' educational success. Our use of the term 'parent' or 'parental' also bears qualification – in the article we use the term to refer to any adult who takes on the responsibility of guardian, mentor and provider of the basic needs of the participants.

The present study

The present study's context is a TVET college on the Cape Flats in the City of Cape Town. This is one of 50 registered and accredited public TVET colleges in South Africa. As such, it operates under the authority of the Continuing Education and Training Act 16 (RSA, 2006) and falls under the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). Lilydale College¹ offers a range of programmes such as the National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED), which is an educational opportunity for students who have completed a matric qualification (Papier, Powell, Mc Bride & Needham, 2017). This campus specialises in programmes suited to careers in the business sector and offers various short skills-based courses, industry-specific training, trade-test opportunities and the NC(V) programmes (HRDC, 2013). The campus draws its students from the neighbouring working-class communities of Blue Downs, Hout Bay, Khayelitsha, Mfuleni, Nyanga and Mitchells Plain.

Through purposive sampling, based on the following inclusion criteria, five participants were selected for the study. They had to be:

- Level 2 students enrolled for the NC(V) business programme;
- dependants of the parent or guardian with whom they live;
- former out-of-school youths and second-chance learners.

Table 1 gives a biographic profile of the five participants, who were between the ages of 16 and 28. They were all single, without any offspring. Their family structures are detailed in the table.

TABLE 1: Family structure of the five participants* in this study

PARTICIPANT	AGE	PROVINCE OF ORIGIN	FAMILY COMPOSITION
Sam	28	Gauteng	Mother, two nieces
Nicholas	23	Eastern Cape	Brother, sister-in-law, three children
Kamani	20	Western Cape	Mother, brother, mother's boyfriend
Rose	20	Gauteng	Aunt, cousin
Lyndon	16	Gauteng	Mother, stepfather

** Pseudonyms were assigned to each of the participants.*

We use the term 'young adult learners', a classification that we borrowed from the Adult Education and Training context. Although the DHET considers TVET students as adult learners, many are minors who are still of school-going age. We also situate them as educationally vulnerable, as all five have challenging, incomplete formal school histories.

1 Lilydale College is a pseudonym for the TVET college where the data were collected.

This qualitative research followed a multiple case study design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009; Rule & John, 2011) which allowed for the unique facets of the five participants' stories of family support to be captured, and also for the reconstruction of a grand narrative about educational support and involvement by their extended families to emerge. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) have done, we approached each case as both a process of enquiry and a product of enquiry.

The methods of data collection were semi-structured interviews and a focus-group session. We supplemented the text-based approach to data collection with a visual-based method of data collecting by asking the participants to produce collages prior to the focus-group discussion. We then used these collages as stimuli to facilitate the discussion on the supportive roles of family and community during the focus-group session. The study's data-collection methods fit the qualitative paradigm as they afforded the participants the opportunity to respond in their own words and to share their unique personal experiences (Patton, 2002; Daniels, 2006).

Situating the TVET students in the parent support literature

Parental involvement is generally conceptualised as biological parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children. However, to reiterate, we use the term 'parent' or 'parental' to refer more broadly to any adult who takes on the responsibility of guardian, mentor and provider of the basic needs of the participants. Many studies have focused on the multidimensional aspects of parents' contributions to their children's education beyond helping with homework (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Jeynes, 2003; 2007; Grant & Ray, 2018; Epstein, 2011; Daniels, 2017; 2018). The consensus view in the literature is that parental participation at any stage of learners' lives holds benefits for their education (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Frome & Eccles, 1998; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Grant & Ray, 2018). Parental support can entail an array of roles to improve children's academic goals (Ratelle, Larose, Guay & Senecal, 2005; Daniels, 2017; Esau, 2018), including parents' modelling of acceptable academic behaviour, reinforcing instruction, and engaging with and participating in activities that support the academic institution's expectations. What the research of Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) found was that when parents make the conscious decision to become involved in their children's education, their actions facilitate the development of self-efficacy and self-regulation in their children's learning. However, the research found that parents employ different strategies and skills based on the stage in the child's life cycle. The studies furthermore found that parental intention was influenced by the parents' personal educational experiences, their perceptions of the value of education and how receptive their children's schools were to their involvement (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Jeynes, 2003; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding & Walberg, 2005).

The body of international literature on the reasons for and the manner in which parents are involved (Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003;

Cox, 2005; Jeynes, 2005; 2007; Pomerantz, Moorman & Litwack, 2007; Epstein, 2011) all position parents as primary educators. These studies recognise the home as the learner's first pedagogical space (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) and describe parents as valued agents of learners' development prior to the onset of formal education (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Cox, 2005; Epstein, 2011).

The criticism of some earlier studies on parent involvement is that research subjects were always from middle-class backgrounds and two-parent families. These parents possessed both the necessary skills and knowledge and the financial resources to support their children's education (Holloway, Yamamoto, Suzuki & Mindnich, 2008). This is not to suggest that poorly educated parents do not support their children's education. However, factors such as the socio-economic standing of parents, employment, and educational backgrounds could determine the way in which they support and become involved as parents, and could normalise such engagements. Educational researchers have argued that when schools ignore the heterogeneity of their learners' family contexts and use the two-parent, middle-class family as the norm (Mda & Mothata, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Holloway et al., 2008; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Daniels, 2017), other forms of support become marginalised.

Parental involvement in TVET is under-researched, and there are few studies on parental educational support of adolescents and older vulnerable student populations. This lack of attention to older learners could be because of the presumption that adolescents and young adults are in less need of support than younger children (Sheldon, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Toren & Seginer, 2015; Esau, 2018). Msila's study (2012) on parents' involvement in adolescents' and college students' education found that their involvement in high-school children's education positively influenced their attendance and retention rates. His study linked parental involvement and success to course completion – an outcome that Ratelle et al. (2005) refer to as 'student persistence development'. The study findings of Ratelle et al. (2005), Okeke (2014) and Esau (2018) all motivate sustainable ways of involving parents as collaborators in education and suggest school-home partnerships which establish conditions that mediate student success.

A related challenge of parent support research is researchers' stance towards low socio-economic communities. According to Yosso (2005), researchers tend to adopt a deficit approach when researching such communities, and this leads to a preoccupation with socio-economic status, poverty and community disorganisation, and a lack of acknowledgement of alternative funds of community wealth. Several scholars (Koh, Stauss, Coustaut & Forrest, 2017; Aragon, 2018) have argued that researchers often assume that poorly resourced families are deficient and therefore do not bother to explore the strengths inherent in such families. South African educational researchers (Mda & Mothata, 2000; Fataar, 2010; Msila, 2012; Joorst, 2013; Daniels, 2017), too, are critical of the lack of recognition in research of multiple forms of parental involvement that exist in diverse family contexts. For 'counter stories' from second-chance learners who are living in low socio-economic contexts to emerge, an asset-based lens through which to view their lives was needed. Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth research in low socio-economic communities

in North America found that such communities do possess cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts but that mainstream research overlooked such knowledge and skills. Her findings directly challenge earlier definitions of cultural capital as the direct product of interaction between the school and levels of education at home and also the view that poorly educated parents do not invest in their children's education. She argues that, if the cultural and aspirational wealth in poor communities is recognised and used properly, the academic and social outcomes for poor students will change significantly.

Joorst (2013) advocates research that tells the unique stories of parental and community support in low socio-economic communities on the Cape Flats. His study argues for recognition of the multiplicity of parental support settings and for school–community partnerships to be considered to promote positive educational outcomes. We take this a step further by engaging in research on the value that parent support provides for former out-of-school youths who are continuing their education as TVET students. Knowledge of the value that parent support and involvement add for these vulnerable learner populations could lead to better strategies on how to support such TVET students' educational journeys.

What follows next are the findings of the study.

My child is your child: Understandings of parenthood and family

In this section we tell the stories of the family and community support that Sam, Nicholas, Kamani, Lyndon and Rose enjoy (Esau, 2018). We probed into the adult figures in their lives and the ways in which they contributed to the advancement of the participants' educational journeys. Our expanded understandings were facilitated by the insights we gained into their home situations and the challenges these students faced while navigating educational opportunities. To explain: for the family structures of Lyndon, Nicholas, Rose, Kamani and Sam, we drew on South Africa's history of forced relocation of black communities and the country's discriminatory, unequal education for its black races. South Africa has an established migrant culture in which families and individuals relocate from rural to urban communities and move between provinces in search of work and better educational opportunities (Dustmann & Glitz, 2011; Southerton, 2011; Bank, 2015). All of the study participants lived in low socio-economic communities on the Cape Flats. However, they all had experience of rural parents sending their children to urban areas to live with relatives or former community members (Esau, 2018:48). Four of them had migrated to the Western Cape in search of better educational resources.

Our analysis of their family structures revealed multi-generational families that included extended family members such as grandmothers, aunts and uncles (Esau, 2018:49). As shown in Table 1, each participant's family structure was unique (Esau, 2018:52): 23-year-old Nicholas lived with his brother, his sister-in-law and the family's three children; 20-year-old Rose lived with her aunt and her cousin; 28-year-old Sam lived with his mother and two nieces; 20-year-old Kamani lived with her brother, mother and her mother's male partner;

and Lyndon lived with his mother and her second husband. Although the participants were living in different communities, they all had a Xhosa heritage in common.

As stated above, the extensive international research on parent support mostly has the middle-class, two-parent family as the context and norm against which all other parent involvement research is researched (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Epstein, 2011; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012). The reality is that less than 30% of the world’s children grow up in homes where two parents are present. Budlender and Lund (2011) estimate that about 70% of South Africa’s children grow up in single-parent households, and the five participants’ family structures conformed to this norm. Of the five families, only Lyndon’s included two parents, although the father is his step-parent. None of the participants’ biological fathers was part of their family units. Our analysis of the composition of the participants’ families (Table 1) reflected the reality that grandmothers, siblings, aunts and uncles, rather than biological parents, were the guardians of the household and of minor family members (Esau, 2018:50).

Family income and financial support

Our analysis of the participants’ family circumstances shows that their families possessed very limited material wealth, with some living below the breadline. As can be seen in Table 2, three of the participants lived in households where there was no income from employment: Sam’s, Rose’s and Kamani’s families were solely dependent on social welfare grants. Lyndon’s and Nicholas’s families had adult members who were earning steady incomes to support the family, although, according to them, their families were also struggling financially. Table 2 provides insights into each family’s financial resources, and the funding available to the students to continue their education.

TABLE 2: Family income and financial support in the five families

PARTICIPANT	EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF PARENT/ GUARDIAN	FINANCIAL RESOURCES IN THE HOME	FINANCIAL SUPPORT
Sam	Mother: Unemployed	Mother: SASSA grant – old-age pension 2 nieces: SASSA grant – 1 disability grant and 1 child support grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bursary • Transport allowance
Nicholas	Guardians: Both employed	Brother: Police officer Brother’s wife (sister-in-law/aunt): Cashier at supermarket	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own savings • Brother
Kamani	Mother: Unemployed	Mother: None Brother: SASSA grant – child support grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bursary
Rose	Guardian: Unemployed	Aunt: SASSA disability grant Rose: Disability grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bursary • Transport allowance
Lyndon	Father: Employed Mother: Employed	Father: Entrepreneur Mother: Police officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents pay his study fees

Msila (2012) points out that there are several factors inherent in the South African township context, such as high levels of poverty and unemployment, which complicate parents' ability to support their children's aspirations to further their education. We found this to be so for Rose, Kamani and Sam, whose educational choices are constrained by their family circumstances: there were no financial resources available to them to continue their education. However, the NC(V) programme is formally subsidised by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) that the Department of Education introduced in 2006. Through the NSFAS, Rose, Kamani and Sam were able to secure bursaries plus living and travel allowances from the DHET to enable them to re-enter formal education.

The parent support literature overwhelmingly focuses on the material provision that adults make for learners' needs. Clearly, in that respect educational support was non-existent in the households of Rose, Kamani and Sam. However, from their narratives many examples emerged of family support that they received on their educational journeys, as we report on below.

Family support much more than paying school fees and attending meetings

The participants in this study are all former out-of-school youths who dropped out of high school with only a Grade 10 qualification. It is not clear from his narrative what led to 16-year-old Lyndon dropping out of high school. However, he tells the harrowing story of his family receiving death threats and having to move to a safer community (Esau, 2018:55).

Unlike Sam and Nicholas, who were formally employed for a few years before making the decision to return to school and complete their high-school education, Lyndon's out-of-school period was brief, as he almost immediately continued his education through the TVET system. Sam and Nicholas had aspirations that could not be achieved through the blue-collar jobs that they were doing. But both of them realised that a high-school qualification could improve their chances of finding better employment. Although a mainstream school accepted Sam, his mother could not afford the school fees. In the case of Rose, the schools in Gauteng denied her admission because they considered her too old for high school. For both of them, their second-chance opportunity to further their education was made possible through pursuing NC(V) studies at Lilydale TVET college.

Nicholas, however, who had been working for two years, resigned from his job to continue his education. His brother initially questioned the soundness of his decision to give up his job to become a full-time student at Lilydale College. Nicholas recalls his brother asking him:

if this [TVET college] will not be a waste of time and money. I replied that I do not have matric. ... I said that if I can finish this [NC(V) certificate], at least it will improve my qualifications and chances in life (Esau, 2018:51).

Although he saved up the money to pay for his own studies, he was still dependent on his brother and sister-in-law for board and lodging. He was acutely aware that by moving in

with his brother's young family he was adding to the family's financial stress. During the time that he boarded with them, therefore, he was careful to 'not put pressure on my family' or to ask them for cash, even for essential things like 'making copies or to buy a computer'. Nicholas tells of how his brother's scepticism about his plans changed to encouragement when he saw how devoted the 23-year-old was to his studies and the good grades he was getting in his courses. This turned his once-sceptical brother into his biggest motivator. Now his brother is constantly encouraging him to enrol for a business qualification once he obtains his matric-equivalent qualification.

The 20-year-old Rose dropped out of school because of poor health. She suffers from lupus disease, and her constant hospitalisation negatively affected her schooling and caused her to fall behind in her schoolwork. When she failed at the end of Grade 11, she left school. Rose ascribes her teachers' lack of empathy for her to their ignorance of lupus disease. When Rose decided to return to high school two years later, none of the mainstream schools in the area wanted to accept her. Then her mother died and her aunt, who lives in Mitchells Plain in the Western Cape, became her guardian. Of her attempts to continue her education in Cape Town, Rose says:

When we tried to look for a school here in Cape Town, they all said that I'm too old. One teacher said that I must do evening school or that I must go to the TVET college. I am so glad that I took her advice to go to the TVET college. However, I am even happier that I did not listen to them when they said that I am too old (Esau, 2018:51).

Rose says that when the high schools initially rejected her, she fell into a deep depression. This is when her aunt stepped in and said she 'will help me to fulfil my dream' and that 'no teacher has the right to make me feel old and depressed' (Esau, 2018:51). So, with her aunt's encouragement, Rose started entertaining the possibility of completing her formal education through a TVET college programme. She describes her aunt as her biggest supporter.

Once she had enrolled at the TVET college, her poor health continued to affect her educational experience and threatened to derail her plans. As a result, Rose's aunt gave up her job to manage her health as well as to take care of her well-being. To help Rose to contain the negative effects of her health challenges on her educational progress, her aunt became the link between Lilydale College and Rose. On the occasions when Rose was too ill to attend lectures, her aunt would go to the college to enquire whether 'there is homework that Rose must do' (Esau, 2018:52). This aunt also actively involved herself in her own son's and Rose's academic work by supervising their homework. Rose refers to her aunt as her 'cheerleader', who constantly reminded her of how close she was to realising her educational goal. Her story contains many examples of the cultural capital that her aunt has been investing in her, which Yosso (2005) refers to as motivational, aspirational and emotional capital.

As the oldest participant, 28-year-old Sam is at a stage in his life when most adults have their own families and have advanced in their careers. Sam was a labourer on a construction site in Gauteng and had gained experience working for his father, driving his taxis. Sam described his last job as a bricklayer as ‘going nowhere’ and said that the job made him feel ‘worthless’ (Esau, 2018:52). As his discontent with his limited job prospects grew, his resolve to earn his NC(V) Level 4 Certificate became stronger. Just as Rose did, Sam fell into a depression when he contemplated his future as a labourer (Esau, 2018). When he told his mother of his plan to complete his formal schooling, she was supportive of the idea and suggested that he move to her in the Western Cape to do so. With the help of her then-employer, she succeeded in enrolling him at a local high school. However, when she retired as a domestic worker a year later, she was no longer able to fund his studies. But Sam was fortunate to secure financial assistance through the NSFAS and could continue his education through Lilydale College’s NC(V) programme. However, his studying comes at great cost to his mother as he cannot contribute to the family’s maintenance. She supports the family of four on her state pension grant and the child support grant she receives for fostering her two granddaughters. It is therefore an enormous sacrifice for her to encourage his academic aspirations and to provide him with board and lodging.

The motivational support that the participants receive from their families to continue their education was sometimes presented in the form of admonishments: the parent or guardian would hold themselves up as examples of what they do not want their children to become. One such example we take from Kamani’s narrative. Kamani had an unstable childhood caused by her mother’s struggles with alcoholism. Kamani lived with her father’s family, but when she enrolled at Lilydale College, she moved in with her mother to be closer to the college. She tells of an afternoon when her mother, heavily under the influence of alcohol, started praising her for continuing her studies. Her intoxicated mother denigrated her own lifestyle as a destructive one, her life as one without a future. She made Kamani promise that she ‘would not waste her life’ as she (the mother) had done (Esau, 2018). Although Kamani’s mother does not serve as a role model to her, she supports her decision to study further by not assigning her housekeeping duties so that she can give all her attention to her studies.

The golden thread that runs through these stories is the respect that the second-chance students are earning from their adult family members because they are studying and doing well in their programmes. When one views their stories through the community cultural wealth lens, one is able to identify many funds of wealth that manifest as mental, social, aspirational and motivational support.

Community support and encouragement

The participants did not confine their stories about support networks and adult support to family only; community contacts and networks often featured in their conversations. They described their communities as ‘dangerous places to grow up in’ and saw education as a way

to escape from their harsh realities. However, they seemed to have a love–hate relationship with their communities. As Sam explains:

Every community consists of positive and negative people. Therefore, it is about the decisions you make. Every day I need to choose what voice I will be listening to (Esau, 2018:57).

This comment hints at both the negative and the positive influences that vulnerable young people are exposed to in their townships. When Lyndon’s police officer mother arrested a gang leader, his gang sent death threats to her whole family. She eventually had no choice but to relocate her family to a different township to be safe. According to Sam, the youths in his Khayelitsha neighbourhood experience community violence, gangsterism and immorality daily. Although there are many government-initiated community projects that he knows of to keep youths off the streets, ‘so many youngsters [still] choose crime and pregnancy over an opportunity to become educated’ (Esau, 2018:56).

When asked about the causes of community disorganisation, Rose named male parents’ absence from their children’s lives as the biggest reason for families’ socio-economic challenges. Drug abuse and alcoholism seemed to be two of the biggest challenges for students such as Kamani, who has first-hand experience of living with an alcoholic mother. The thread that runs through all six participants’ description of their community is the structural violence of disadvantage and poverty for township youths and the effects on their education.

Despite seemingly painting a bleak picture of their communities, the participants’ narratives contained many examples of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that they benefit from. They named community structures and people who invested in their development and progress. In the focus-group session, we explored the funds of knowledge, action and networks that exist in their communities. The church is often one of the most important networks that the participants have access to. As Sam explains, his church feeds their stomachs and souls, and church members

offer programmes to help poor people to achieve their goals. People in the church help [students] with transport money ... motivate you and help you with making important decisions (Esau, 2018:56).

Being a member of the church is therefore advantageous because of the various benefits it brings. Sam is a member of the Bread Buddies project, which helps feed poor college students by providing them with sandwiches. The church also distributes food parcels to church members whose families struggle financially.

Other forms of wealth, or capital, that older community members offer to the participants are motivational and aspirational (Yosso, 2005). Nicholas explains how his elderly neighbours’ interest in and support of his attendance of college has served as encouragement to him to persevere:

They say if I skip classes or drop out of school then I will be jobless, or sell fruit on the corner of the street (Esau, 2018:54).

The gist of these conversations mimics those that parents would have with their children. The support from family and community was confined to their geographic community; it included individuals from Lilydale College and, in Rose's case, the medical staff at the hospital. The sources of emotional support that Rose identified included anyone in her family and community who helped her to 'get up again'. She adds:

I also think that the college is like home to me. I can just be myself here and everyone is supportive. There are also the hospitals and doctors that is so much part of me. With every setback that I have had, they were always there. They have helped me to fight lupus and not to feel sorry for myself (Esau, 2018:57).

Our analysis shows that the participants tap into the aspirational and emotional resources that community members who cross their paths provide. Nicholas provided the example of the Rastafarian street hawker who sells fruit on a street corner in his community. This older man knows that Nicholas is completing his high-school education through the Lilydale College programme. On the occasions when he talked to Nicholas, it was always about the opportunities that education creates for township youths to help them improve their life circumstances:

Selling fruit is tough, so it is much better to be in school. People have respect for people with a qualification. They can become something. If you did not go high up in school, then you will not make a lot of money. What can you do? You sell drugs or you sell fruit. Both are not good jobs for you, brother ... (Esau, 2018:56).

It is this caring attitude of community elders that has endeared them to their communities. From participants' comments about older community members' involvement, they appear to have welcomed their mentoring. According to Sam, they were directing youths towards the positive things in life.

Benefits of second-chance learning

The five participants entered TVET with different histories. After having dropped out of high school in Grade 10, owing to challenges such as negative peer influences, limited financial resources, community violence, and illness, these young adults all wanted to return to school to complete their high-school education. However, prior transgressions while at school, or their age or ill health, caused mainstream schools to refuse them re-entry. The NC(V) programme at Lilydale College provided them with a second-chance opportunity to complete their schooling. It offered Sam and Nicholas a way out from what they described as their menial, demeaning labourer jobs and held the promise of improving their job prospects (Esau, 2018:53–54). The NC(V) programme presented these participants with better

bargaining power in the workforce. The participants held a consensus view that studying was both mentally uplifting for them and motivational. They described their mental state before their return to education as being at an all-time low, and used words such as ‘worthless’, ‘old’, ‘useless’ and ‘depressed’ to describe themselves. Some of them saw their re-entry into further education as an opportunity to make amends for their past educational transgressions. The second time round, they were motivated, hardworking and focused on doing well in their educational programmes. Their aim was to earn back the respect of their community and of family members whom they had disappointed when they had dropped out of school.

NSFAS provided bursaries and also travel and living allowances for three of the participants. The NC(V) programme became their second-chance opportunity to complete their formal schooling and to earn a business qualification. Sam and Nicholas were hopeful that the qualification would lead to better-earning jobs. Both of them planned to return to their respective provinces after gaining the NC(V) Certificate in Business Management. For Sam, the successful completion of the NC(V) programme is the attainment of one of his short-term goals of becoming a successful taxi fleet owner in Gauteng. He is hopeful that the business programme that he is graduating from will equip him with the skills to develop into a successful businessperson. Although Sam might be unrealistic about what can be accomplished with this qualification, the aspirational capital that he is accumulating can be invested towards motivating himself to complete his studies. Both Nicholas’s and Sam’s ultimate goal is to gain financial and emotional independence from their families. For Rose, Lyndon and Kamani the national certificate opens up opportunities for further education.

From a psychosocial perspective, their successful navigation of the NC(V) programme led to improved self-esteem and prosocial behaviour. So, for example, the supportive relationship that Rose has with her aunt, and Nicholas with his brother, enhanced their adaptive coping skills and helped to restore their trust in their competencies. When Rose started doing exceptionally well in the coursework, it restored her confidence in her abilities. As the top student in her programme, Rose is now confident enough to peer-tutor her fellow students who are struggling with subjects such as Information Communication Technology (ICT) and Operations Management. Similarly, Nicholas’s success with Mathematics has given him the self-confidence to start tutoring his niece and nephews in the subject. Nicholas said this is his way of giving back to his family for supporting him. He also sees himself as a role model who can instil in his sibling’s children the importance of working hard for what they want in life.

Their personal stories of adult family involvement and family–community support mirror the challenges of being an adult student in a Cape Flats community that has limited resources. Their decision to study instead of contribute to the family’s survival added to the financial strain that their families were already experiencing. However, when faced with critical decisions related to life choices, all of their families’ emotional and verbal encouragement helped them to be resilient and focus on their long-term goals. Their families celebrated their successes in the NC(V) programme and continued to encourage them as TVET college

students. The encouragement and effort of their peers and families in turn made the participants feel valued and it motivated them to work even harder to earn their respect. Since continuing their education, all of them found that their relationships with their adult family and community members have improved too.

Conclusion

In this article, the stories of the five second-chance young adult learners constructed a social reality of what student life is like when your education is challenged by situational and dispositional challenges such as poverty, poor health or unsafe community contexts. However, when researchers adopt a deficit view of their experiences, they report only on the challenges and ignore the agentic family experiences such students have. Our data challenged parent support research which suggests that families of low socio-economic standing lack the will to invest in their children's education. In the case of this group, although their families lacked the financial resources to fund their studies, they invested in the participants' education in several other ways. Most of the participants had an adult family member who was instrumental in facilitating their reintegration into formal education via the NC(V) pathway at a TVET college. These family and community members also continued to motivate them and inspire them to persevere with their studies and complete the qualification.

Their stories underline the complexity of parental support and involvement for young adult students from low socio-economic contexts. The findings show that the needs and therefore the support that TVET students from poor communities require are neither linear nor one-size-fits-all. On the contrary, the process is complex and manifests in the various physical, emotive and cognitive funds that families and communities accumulate and use to help students such as Sam, Nicholas, Kamani, Lyndon and Rose to access formal education and stay on a productive pathway. The findings give visibility to the agentic involvement and support of both family and community adults in the education of TVET NC(V) students. The findings have implications for the ways in which TVET colleges should strategise the role of the parents, guardians and social contacts of adult family members as valued collaborators in their further education.

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