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A new approach to the evaluation of Vocational Education and Training

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Presentation draws from a body of work

- McGrath, S. (2012). Building new approaches to thinking about vocational education and training and development: Policy, theory and evidence. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32(5), 619–622. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2012.04.003
- Powell, L. (2013). A critical assessment of research on South African further education and training colleges. *Southern African Review of Education*, 19(1), 59–81.
- **Powell, L. (2014). Reimagining the Purpose of Vocational Education and Training: The perspectives of Further Education and Training College students in South Africa. University of Nottingham.**
- Powell, L., & McGrath, S. (2014). Advancing life projects: South African students explain why they come to FET colleges. *Journal of International Comparative Education*, Forthcoming.
- **Powell, L., & McGrath, S. (2014). Exploring the value of the capability approach for Vocational Education and Training Evaluation: Reflections from South Africa. *International Development Policy*, in press.**
- McGrath, S. and Powell, L. (2014). Vocational education and training for human development in *Education and Development*, forthcoming.

Why evaluation?

Without a measure there is no policy commitment to progress in that direction

“What we measure shapes the policy choices that we make” (Sarkozy Commission)

VET has moved to the centre of political reform targeted at unemployment, poverty alleviation and economic growth.

“Given the importance of skills in driving socio-economic development, and rapidly changing requirements, it is asserted that countries need to scale up the quantity and quality of skills development through TVET” (UNESCO, 2012: Main Working Document Transforming TVET)

“This system will contribute to overcoming the structural challenges facing our society by expanding access to education and training” (Green Paper on PSE)

Window of opportunity BUT transformation is not neutral

“Attention to not only expand TVET but to transform it” (UNESCO, 2012: Shanghai Consensus, Transforming TVET)

“...we aim for 4 million enrolments in colleges “ (Green Paper on PSE)

The context

VET central to addressing poverty alleviation, social inclusion, youth unemployment and economic growth

Grounded in human capital theory and understands VET in economic terms. Two assumptions:

- Training leads to productivity which leads to economic growth (skills for growth)
- Skills lead to employability which leads to jobs (skills for work)

Research and policy “*cares little about understanding the people in the system ... as long as more staff and students are black and enrolments are increasing there is little more that needs to be considered*” (Wedekind, 2009)

Resulting in:

A ***critique of VET*** as ineffective and inefficient

Political ambitions to ***rapidly expand*** VET systems

Commitment to public management approaches to VET institutions, often combined with ***centralisation***, and ***driven by evaluation*** as a key instrument

VET institutions and systems under ***continual pressure to transform***

Evaluation Approaches

Four standard approaches to evaluating VET

Measures of participation	Net and gross participation rates <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policy goals are to expand participation to approximately 150% of current enrolment in the next decade• Data includes equity measures
Measures of institutional efficiency and effectiveness	Pass rates, throughput rates <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less than 30% national NCV pass rate
Measures of graduate employment	Graduate tracer studies <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 18 out of the 50 colleges have any graduate tracer studies
Employment and student satisfaction	Employer and student satisfaction surveys and interviews. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employee satisfaction undertaken by the CCF in the late 1990s• SETA feedback suggests low overall satisfaction

Problems with approaches to VET evaluation

The Good

- Allows institutions functioning below minimum standards in the sector to be identified
- Provides a simple and minimum checklist on institutional functioning
- Allows for sectoral and quantitative analysis
- Supports institutional accountability to a national/ central department

The Bad

- Adopts a narrow and limiting view of what VET is about
- Draws on public management approaches to institutional development which provides inadequate understanding of institutional change and quality
- Underplays the broader economic and labour market contexts
- Methodological deafness to the voices of students and staff
- Doesn't allow us to evaluate progress towards social justice concerns such as poverty alleviation and inequality
- Tends to BLAME VET institutions for failures that exist elsewhere in the system
- FAR TOO SIMPLISTIC

The methodology

What is the FET colleges about? What should it be about? What matters to students? How does it impact on student's lives? What are the factors that enable and disable the college from making a positive impact?



- **Interviews** undertaken with **30 False Bay College students**. Broken down as follows:
 - **Interviews** with the **lecturers, campus managers** and **senior college management**.
 - **Focus groups** included over **45 students** across different programme areas
 - Discussions and focus groups with **student support, staff,** and **college management**

... Future Tasks ...

- 1. In-college student survey**
- 2. Online graduate survey**
- 3. Employer survey**
- 4. Staff survey**

The Capability Approach/ Human Development

The capability approach/ Human Development Framework

- ✚ Used in the Human Development Index
- ✚ Central commitment is to the dignity and wellbeing of each person
- ✚ About providing people with the opportunity to live lives that they value and enabling them to become agents in their own lives
- ✚ Develops a framework for illuminating how social, material and institutional conditions mediate how people convert skills into opportunities that matter.



Value of Capability Approach

- ✚ Essential for identifying inequalities
- ✚ Identify differences in individuals ability to convert resources to a functioning
- ✚ Allows us to understand poverty as multidimensional
- ✚ Allows differential risks and costs to individuals to be identified
- ✚ Stresses the difference between means and ends

Challenges CORE assumptions of FET students

Assumptions regarding college students

- ✚ What we know is based largely on outdated quantitative studies
- ✚ Students live in poverty stricken environments
- ✚ Not academically strong

[It was] never seriously applied to the well-to-do. There seems always to be the mental reservation: 'work is honourable for the poor, but dishonourable for the well-to-do. [It was for] the boy or girl whose ... abilities justify ... a vocational bias. (Malherbe, 1977, p.173)

- ✚ Learners would prefer an academic rather than a technical education

FET college students are "without exception extremely positive about their vocational programmes" (City and Guilds, 2011)

- ✚ Students enrolled for a number of reasons: Delinquent, preferred to work with their hands, preferred a more practical training, second chance, couldn't afford university, couldn't get into university.

There is a danger in the single story ... a single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story, become the only story. (Adiche, 2009)

Challenges CORE assumptions of FET colleges

Assumptions regarding FET colleges

The colleges are bloody hopeless

- ✚ Learners who attend FET colleges go no where: unemployed and don't gain access to higher education and don't have the skills to cope at higher education
- ✚ Success and pass rates are extremely low
- ✚ Not responsive to the labour market

This is what we know

- ✚ There is no comparative study that compares the employment rates or pass rates of poor National Certificate students and NCV students.
- ✚ The poor students included in my study, for the most part, are living transformed lives
- ✚ Learners who went on to higher education have done so successfully and when dropping out did so for financial not academic reasons

... the way people are defined and treated in the classroom, the workplace, and in the public sphere ... [and affects] our sense of who we are and what we can do" (Rose, 2004, pp.xiii-xvii).

Challenges THE PURPOSE of colleges?

What is the FET colleges about? What should it be about?

Dimensions of VET capabilities	Valued Functionings
1. Economic opportunities that matter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being fairly remunerated• Earning a living wage• Having employment stability and security• Having access to fair and equal opportunities to career progression• Able to make a valuable contribution in the workplace• Able to take pride in their work
2. Active citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inclusion in political and institutional decision making• Knowledge and understanding of the problems of their community• Able to mobilise resources for change• Strong sense of their own effective agency
3. Confidence and personal empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being encouraged to live a full life• Being able to encourage others to live a full life.• Having a range of futures as possible aspirations
4. Bodily integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being free from attack and physical harm, including sexual assault, and from the fear thereof• Being safe from the psychological trauma of attack on your person, or other members of the family or community or anyone else

What is the FET colleges about? What should it be about?

Dimensions of VET capabilities	Valued Functionings
5. Senses and imagination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing an understanding and love of the creative arts• Participating in and enjoy in sport that promotes physical wellbeing
6. Recognition and respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being treated as a dignified human being• Having self-respect• Not being discriminated against for any reason including religion, gender, race, physical handicaps and age
7. Upgrade skills and qualifications throughout the life course	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To have the opportunity to study and learn throughout their lifetime• Having the learning skills required for further study
8. Occupational Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having the qualifications needed for entry into the labour market• Having the skills to do a good job• Having the learning skills that allows for experiential learning in workplace
9. The ability to travel freely	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Portability of qualifications and experience• Freedom and economic ability to travel and experience other places and cultures

Overall – impact of the college

“It’s so much more than staying in the location”

He says simply, and with a bashful shrug and a smile, that “it’s basically telling them that I’m an electrician”.

“She actually went to the neighbours one day and she gave them some [a sample of the food that the students’ prepare at college]. Like, as in, ‘just taste, my son did this’. And sometimes I hear she’s on the phone with my aunty them, like bragging over the phone.”

“I love messing with electrical equipment ... anything that I can fix, I fixed. I try to. I still do it at home. My aunt or my mom them bring something and only if I can't fix it then they declare it broken.”

“I must undergo some training in what I enjoy doing which is working with my hands. ... People want to sit behind a desk and do this and press that and answer the phone. ... No one wants to build the building to work in, or make the table to work on. All those things, people don’t want to do. So that’s why I’m sure I’ll forever have a place [a job or work]”

“I did not want to choose university because they focus mainly on academics and then FET College focuses both on academics and on practicals. So you’ll have the time for practicals and you have the time for theory.

“...my mother would speak to me on a different level, you know. She wouldn’t speak to me like I don’t know anything and she talks about me a lot as well. She brags about me now that I’m doing this course.”

Overall – Capability to aspire

I wouldn't be who I am ... I wouldn't be motivated to be who I am today because basically the people and the lecturers, they were awesome and they taught me who I am and taught me freedom of expression and freedom of, you know what I mean, ***be what you want to be ...***

I've actually learnt a lot. I did learn a lot from the college, because when I came to the campus I knew barely anything. So, whatever I know today I've learnt from the college. And ***the reason why I'm working where I am now, is because of the college.***

Basically they helped me find me. You know what I'm saying. That is the biggest contribution. ***They helped me find who I am. Not some loser that can't hook but some loser that likes challenges.***

“From being a drop-out to ... [to] knowing what I'm capable of”

An important task of the college is to give students **HOPE, to teach them to **ASPIRE**, to **BROADEN THEIR HORIZONS** of what is possible**

Institutional culture matters

Lecturer attitude matters

The college has and is changing lives

We can NO longer say that “colleges are bloody hopeless”

New approach to evaluation – *Purpose matters*

The wellbeing and development of students are the centre of our concern

Purpose of VET: To expand students' capabilities:

- (i) Making a change in ***students' reasoning*** (for example, in the values, beliefs and attitudes that they hold)
- (ii) By making a difference to the ***person's resources*** (for example, to the qualifications, knowledge, information, skills) and in ***dimensions that matter*** to learners.
- (iii) By making a difference to the person's understanding of ***how they can use*** and ***access this*** reasoning and these ***resources***.

New set of questions:

- Which opportunities and functionings matter to students and to what extent are these being met by institutional (or programme) arrangements such as institutional cultures and by the pedagogic approach of VET?
- To what extent does VET expands or constricts the opportunities and freedom to choose from these opportunities
- Which dimensions of institutional (or programme) functioning enables individuals to expand the capabilities that they have reason to value (and in which context)?
- Do all students in the sector have the same opportunities?

New approach to evaluation – *Context matters*



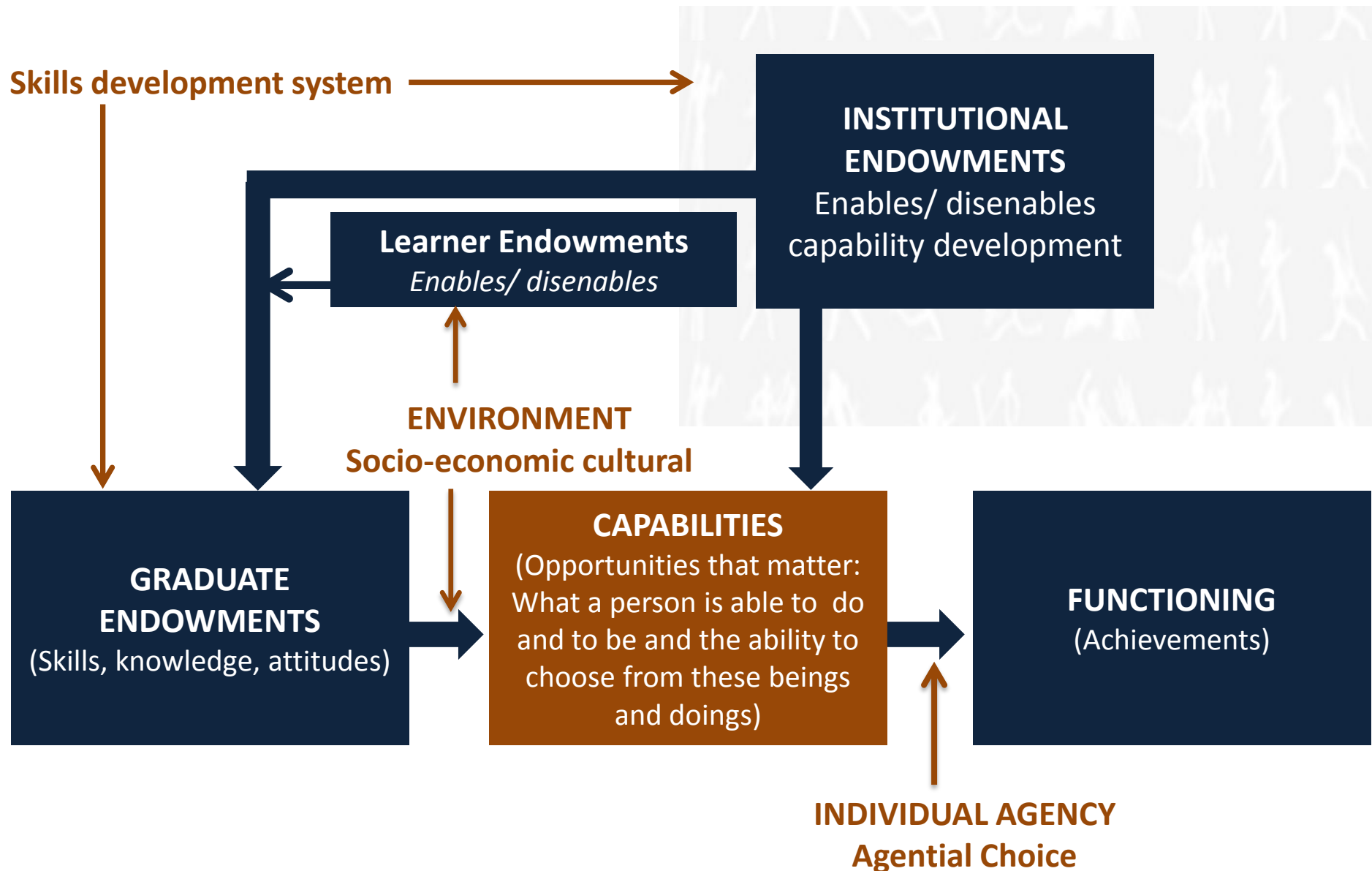
“... what works for whom ... in which contexts particular programs do and don’t work ... what mechanisms are triggered by what programs and in what contexts”

Cannot be one size fits all: What works for whom, in which contexts particular programs do and don’t work, and “what mechanisms are triggered by what programs and in what contexts.

Evaluator in this mode has three tasks:

- The task of evaluation is to ***determine the opportunities that recipients identify as important for their lives.***
- The evaluator has to determine not only the ‘impacts’ of programmes in terms of designed and predefined programme indicators, but also in terms of ***the unintended consequences.***
- A crucial task of the evaluator is to evaluate ***the underpinning theories and assumptions*** and the consequences of these for the success (or failure) of VET for certain individuals and in certain contexts.

New approach to evaluation – *Discourse matters*



Thank you so much for attending the seminar and I look forward to your input and comments

“To operationalize an alternative approach, which is what the capability approach is, is not a modest task, nor is it very nearly accomplished”

(Alkire, 2008, 130)