THE MANDELA INITIATIVE
Dialogue and action to overcome poverty and inequality

SII Schools Improvement Initiative — IN SCHOOL IN COMMUNITY

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA · UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

Theme: Education

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1. What are the major issues you have identified about the manifestations of structural poverty and persistent, deep inequalities [in your focus area(s)]?

Cape Town, like all other South African cities, is characterised by deep socio-economic inequalities with locked-in spatial structures which reflect our apartheid past. Khayelitsha, the community in which the SII university–school partnership is located, is a large sprawling township situated on the Cape Flats on the eastern edge of the metropole – a typical example of late-apartheid town planning. Given its geographical position, over 30 km from the city centre, Khayelitsha's 450 000-odd inhabitants are dislocated from the city's economic drivers which include major concentrations of work. There are no factories and relatively few small businesses. Consequently, unemployment is high, particularly amongst the youth: more than 50% of young men up to the age of 23 are unemployed. Poverty is rife – in 2009, nearly two-thirds of black African children lived below the poverty line in the Western Cape; 40% have no working adult at home and a significant proportion of these children live in households where there is reported child hunger (City of Cape Town, 2011).

While great strides have been made in recent years towards addressing infrastructural inadequacies[2] and in improving the provision of

About this brief

This brief was commissioned by the Mandela Initiative to help inform a synthesis report on its work since the 2012 national conference, Strategies to Overcome Poverty and Inequality, organised by the University of Cape Town. The MI provides a multi-sectoral platform to investigate and develop strategies to overcome poverty and reduce inequality in South Africa. While the Nelson Mandela Foundation is a key partner, the Initiative has relied on collaborations between academics and researchers, government, business leaders, civil society, the church and unions.

The synthesis report serves as a framework for reporting on the work of the MI at a national gathering on 12 – 14 February 2018 at the University of Cape Town. The MI Think Tank has identified the objectives for the gathering as:
- to anchor the contributions of the MI within an analysis of the current South African political and economic context;
- to share the recommendations emanating from the MI-related work streams at a policy/strategic level to advance the goal of eliminating poverty and reducing inequality;
- to critically engage with the potential impact of the recommendations on eliminating structural poverty and inequality; and
- to discuss ways of promoting popular conversations and debate about what needs to be done to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality, beyond the MI.

The synthesis report aims to assist participants to prepare for the national gathering. The report drew on findings from the sectoral research projects of Think Tank members; the MI's Action Dialogues; a report on an MI Community of Practice workshop with research chairs from different universities to identify cross-cutting themes emerging from the MI's research programme; and the work programmes of others who have expressed an interest in contributing to the goals of the MI.

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[1] Schools Improvement Initiative, University of Cape Town
[2] Between 1996 and 2011, the number of households using flush or chemical toilets doubled; and using electricity for lighting (whether connected legally or illegally) more than doubled (Seekings, 2013).

basic social services, the quality of life for many people in Khayelitsha is marked by high levels of crime and violence. The township has the highest reported number of murders in the country: 354 in 2012/2013 according to official police statistics. The exposure of youth in Khayelitsha to co-occurring forms of violence across multiple life domains, including school and community, results in the normalisation of violence as a socially and morally acceptable and appropriate way of resolving conflicts and of achieving goals (Kaminer 2014:134). The impact that this has on schooling it is significant. Van der Berg & Burger (2002) in their study of achievement in the Western Cape found that approximately two-thirds of the variation in achievement could be explained by socio-economic status.[3] The pervasive inequalities in schooling reflect structural poverty and inequality violently experienced by the broader society.

2. What do you think are the main reasons for the persistence of the deep inequalities and poverty in your focus area(s)?

There are a number of fundamental challenges which may be regarded as fragilities within the schooling system. In addition to limited access to higher education, the implications of systemic inequalities result in lower throughput and poor retention rates of students from working class communities. For example, in 2010, only 24 matriculants from 11 of the 20 secondary schools in Khayelitsha secured places at UCT out of a grade 12 cohort of just under 3 000 learners. High levels of poverty in *any context* result in considerable levels of disadvantage being experienced by many children. Children who live in poverty have multiple disadvantages – ill-heath, poor nutrition, poor housing. And in many schools in low socio-economic communities, parental involvement is limited through illiteracy, low parental self-perceptions, poor channels of communication and economic insecurity; all of which contribute to educational underachievement.

For most schools in Khayelitsha, school principals' and their management teams have to deal with organisational challenges that are far greater than those experienced by their counterparts in more affluent settings in which school fees can be leveraged to provide additional human resources. In terms of staff provisioning, the state cannot afford adequate allocation of resources for middle management i.e. heads of department (HOD) posts. With HODs having to hold down close to full teaching loads, they carry the twin burdens of management and teaching responsibilities.

Furthermore, a complex dynamic exists in many schools where teachers continue to experience ambivalence and distrust in relation to authority, be it their employer; the provincial education department or their school principal. In essence, this is one of the legacy effects of apartheid in the school system – an enduring manifestation of the high levels of contestation which schools experienced during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Teachers' resistance to oppressive apartheid regulations reflected their activism within the anti-apartheid teachers' movements. Post apartheid, however, the culture of resistance to authority has in some instances resulted in schools experiencing severe disruptions, for example where principals have been forced out of their schools by learners. Persistence of such practices, often supported by parents, suggest an inherently fragile and unstable organisational environment with constrained and at times compromised leadership. The extent to which this impedes organisational development cannot be under-estimated. This is

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[3] For other studies which have concluded that educational achievement amongst South African children is strongly associated with SES, see Reddy et al, 2010; Taylor & Yu, 2009; Van der Berg, 2008; Anderson et al, 2001.

reinforced by the strength of the South African Democratic Trade Union, the dominant teachers' union in Khayelitsha.

A further challenge that functions to perpetuate unequal standards of education is that a significant number of the 2 000-odd teachers employed in the township's schools remain within the community of Khayelitsha schools for most of their careers. Whilst this might be viewed as an affordance in terms of building teacher capacity/expertise, it also limits the extent to which teachers and managers can be brought in from outside the community with new ideas or approaches to their practice. The schools in Khayelitsha therefore constitute what can be thought of as a 'bounded' community, which in some respects remains isolated from the outside (educational) world. Whilst there is some movement of teachers between schools, a significant number tend to remain at the same school. The boundedness of the schooling system contributes to what effectively constitutes an educational loop, in which deeply ingrained and habituated practices of teaching and learning are recycled, reproduced and at times prove most resistant to change. Similarly, the majority of children in Khayelitsha attend one of the 55 public ordinary schools in the township and only a relatively small number (under 5%) commute to schools outside of Khayelitsha. Exposure by learners to alternative forms of teaching remains limited.

Inequalities in the schooling system are reinforced by learners not developing adequate language proficiency. For the vast majority (98.7%) of people in Khayelitsha, isiXhosa is their home language. Even though the township is located in a multilingual city, it is a tight-knit, cohesive and essentially isolated monolingual community (Bloch, Guzula & Nkence 2010). Whereas English becomes the official language of learning and teaching in all schools in the township from grade 4, few learners acquire an adequate level of communicative competence in English. Whilst there is little doubt that becoming proficient in English can provide social and economic advantages, the societal circumstances and the very boundedness of Khayelitsha as a separate linguistic community, clearly militate against children acquiring these skills. The negative impact this has on teaching and learning is well documented (Fleisch 2008; Murray 2002; Setati, Adler, Hardy & Benjamin 2002; Probyn 2001). Moreover, many teachers themselves are not fluent in the language of instruction, which furthers hinders learning (NEEDU 2013). Levels of language disadvantage experienced by black African learners may go some way to explain the performance ceilings which seem to characterise learner achievement in the provincial systemic tests and ultimately in the matric exams.

A final reason for the persistence of deep inequality and poverty is the prioritising of academic over vocational education and the lack of government funding in the vocational sector. Post-primary enrolment in Khayelitsha is typical of that found in townships elsewhere in the country. The majority of learners are enrolled in secondary schools which offer no more than the standard suite of academic subjects[4]; only four out of the 20 schools offer technical and vocational subjects. In 2015, of the 13 000 learners enrolled in the FET phase (grades 10 – 12), only a relatively small number (around 1 000) were in dedicated vocational streams at the four schools and no more than 1 500 were studying at the local TVET college. The relatively low enrolments in vocationally-orientated streams of study are evidence of the continued resistance of learners to study subjects other than those traditionally viewed as 'academic'. This is mainly due to the legacy of Bantu education's orientation towards 'work and labour' which effectively stigmatised vocationally-orientated

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[4]Besides two compulsory languages – Home (isiXhosa) and (English) First Additional Language – there are essentially three subject streams: 1) general academic: history & geography, 2) mathematics and the sciences (physical & life) and 3) commerce: accounting, business studies & economics.

education amongst black Africans. This continues to thwart attempts to grow the TVET college sector as a destination of *choice*.

What is currently being recommended at a strategic level to deal with the major issues you have identified?

Drawing on university-wide resources and expertise, the SII works in close collaboration with groupings both within and outside of the university, including the Metropole East Education District (MEED), responsible for the delivery of schooling in Khayelitsha.

The SII's theory of change is based on developing a model of whole-school improvement, which includes dimensions of leadership and management support, coupled with teacher professional development. This together with interdisciplinary collaboration with university faculties and departments contributes towards *creating more enabling environments for teaching and learning* and is activated through mutual partnerships with a cluster of schools.

The SII is committed to social justice through creating dialogic and practice-based opportunities in which to examine critically how processes of school and community engagement can contribute to knowledge generation and application. At the school level, the focus on professional and organisational development functions to strengthen the school systemically. At the level of the university, students and academic staff have started exploring new ways in which community engagement might enrich and inform curriculum transformation and social responsiveness.

Students from across the university are placed in the partner schools for their professional practice. This includes students from UCT's School of Education's Post-Graduate Certificate in Education; the Department of Social Development (who places social work students in the partner schools); Speech-Language Therapy; Occupational Therapy (Community Development Practice and Child, Learning Development & Play); Audiology; Information Systems (in collaboration with UCT's Knowledge Co-op) and the university's Students' Health and Welfare Centres Organisation (SHAWCO) Health and Rehabilitation. These placements constitute a compulsory component of the curriculum-based student professional practice while at the same time offering much-needed support to learners by strengthening the culture of learning and teaching in the schools. The school community's role in shaping the focus of the interventions not only influences the interventions themselves, but gives direction to the engaged scholarship, by giving expression from the perspective of people who are on the borders of thinking (Grosffoguel 2011).

An important area of learning that has emerged from this initiative is that contextually specific school improvement strategies are needed to support teaching and learning. In addition to the interdisciplinary collaboration with the Faculty of Health Sciences, the COSAT Wellness Centre (CWC) was conceptualised as a strategy to address the need for psycho-social support and other critical areas of wellness. In 2015, a CWC Steering Committee was established to ensure school-based integration through a credible structure that represents COSAT, MEED, Khayelitsha-Eastern Substructure Metro District Health Services and UCT. The purpose of the steering committee has been to maintain strong buy-in and support from key stakeholders.

The CWC provides a structure and service for learners to realise their potential and capacities in all areas, including academic performance, so that they can make meaningful life decisions; learn about

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the benefits of a productive and balanced lifestyle; perform optimally and grow in health and wellness to become active, fully engaged members of their community and the broader society. The CWC's vision is to become a model of excellence in school-based wellness by developing strong interdisciplinary collaborations and community partnerships and engagement. The health and wellness of COSAT learners, teachers and parents are prioritised within and beyond the school environment.

The primary objective of the CWC is to forge strong interdisciplinary and intersectoral links with university and community partners to offer:

1.1. *Psycho-social wellness: personal, interpersonal and developmental*
- In order that learners can receive support in addressing issues of a psycho-social nature to enhance their personal and interpersonal wellness.
- In order that learners can achieve optimal school performance by being offered coping skills, study skills and general life-skills
- Psycho-social wellness takes place through individual counselling, group counselling and family reconstruction therapy and collaboration with UCT Occupational Therapy Community Development Practice. Psycho-social support is provided by a full-time social worker as well as social work students.

1.2. *Physical & environmental wellness*
- To promote holistic health and wellbeing, thus prevent disease and reduce socio-behavioural risks that hamper learning.
- This takes place through physical education as well as programmes linked to the CWC such as yoga and meditation.
- To promote environmental education through collaboration with UCT (CDP), UCT School of Architecture & Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (MEED).

With an emphasis on holistic wellness a variety of programmes and initiatives are offered at the CWC such as:
- Study skills support
- Career advice by UCT Careers Services
- HIV, STD testing by Médesins Sans Frontières

A range of workshops are organised during the course of the year in collaboration with MEED and other community-based, non-governmental organisations(NGOs), focusing on:
- Addressing abuse, bullying, drugs;
- Enhancing parental involvement in their children's development.

In an attempt to broaden psycho-social support services beyond COSAT, social work students have been placed in two of the other SII partner schools and the social worker spends one day a week at both these schools.

The CWC has received much interest and support locally, provincially and nationally as it provides a model in which the social worker can rotate between a cluster of schools located in close proximity to one other. This level of psycho-social support in conjunction with the placement of student social workers, and in collaboration with community NGOs means that far more learners in high poverty

areas are exposed to a range of psycho-social support services that could not be offered by the district support team, due to a severe lack of resources.

What do you think the potential impact of the recommendations will be on eliminating structural poverty and reducing inequality?

Capabilities, framed within the Capability Approach (Sen 1985), recognises that numerous conversion factors enable the transformation of capabilities (or opportunities) into functionings. The CWC creates an enabling environment supporting the development of conversion factors (Robeyns & Brighouse 2010) to enable students to utilise potential capabilities optimally. While the focus on individual programmes has been based on aspects of wellness, the CWC as a model creates an environment that promotes agency and wellbeing for learners. With increasing participation of parents and community members, the reach and depth of enabling opportunities can strengthen the possibilities for education in this context.

While we have seen improvements in *access* to public school and an increase in non-fee-paying schools, the quality of schooling in high poverty areas remains low. As indicated earlier, despite improved access to education there remain deep inequalities in educational achievement. While the Action Plan of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has identified a number of critical areas that need to be addressed, these strategies are not aimed at eliminating structural poverty and inequality, and therefore cannot realistically impact on socio-economic conditions in the country. Ensuring a higher percentage of quality matric passes would enable more matriculants to be eligible for tertiary education (academic and vocational) – both in terms of admission and throughput. This ultimately would break the poverty cycle and would have a positive impact on economic growth.

Significantly, our understanding of 'quality education' does not refer only to the level of academic achievement at the exit point of schooling, but, more holistically to the quality of resources, input and support – both academic and psycho-social - offered to learners throughout their schooling. And young people who grow up in areas of high unemployment, poverty, crime and violence require additional forms of support to address their needs.

The Inclusive Education White Paper Six, SIAS (Screening; Identification; Assessment & Support) policy document and the Care and Support for Teaching & Learning 2013 – 2018 (CSTL) document reiterate the role and function of psycho-social support including the much-needed support services in schools. At the district level, the district-base support team (DBST) consists of social workers, psychologists and learning support advisors – each DBST offers services to an average of 31 schools. This translates into one social worker per 31 schools and clearly indicates that there are insufficient resources when it comes to special support services for learners in unequal contexts. Creating an enabling environment for teaching and learning requires holistic health promotion approaches where opportunities for *doing* and *being* are co-created. The contribution and expertise of occupational therapists in this area has benefitted the SII and should be improved within the DBE.

Finally, schools in Khayelitsha, as in similar contexts elsewhere in the country, face a myriad of challenges, both from the external environment and within the schools themselves. The majority of schools in this country therefore continue to underperform, thus reflecting the bimodality (Spaul 2013) which characterises the schooling system as a whole. In the Western Cape, despite greater levels of engagement with the provincial education department, as compared with other provinces,

performance levels remain low. Given the extreme challenges faced by schools in low SES communities, the need to create more *enabling environments* for teaching and learning becomes all the more critical. Integrated whole-school development models based on partnerships and collaboration need to inform policy imperatives, so that health and wellness are prioritised both at the level of the individual learner and at the level of the school. It is in this area that universities have a crucial role to play in developing interdisciplinary pathways that serve to support schools in low SES communities and to provide all learners with opportunities that enable more effective learning.

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