8

A Participatory Photovoice Project: Towards Capability Expansion of 'Invisible' Students in South Africa

Melanie Walker and Mikateko Mathebula

Introduction

Amartya Sen (2019) reminds us of the significant synergies of interpretation and action. Yet Jean Dreze (2002, p. 817) writes that in practice, '[t]he worlds of research and action are far apart and the gulf shows no sign of narrowing'. In Dreze's view it is not just that research can help action but that action can also enhance the quality of research so that research and action can belong to a common cause. Through discussing our participatory action research photovoice project undertaken in 2018–2019 with low-income student-researchers from four universities in South Africa, we try to show how this might work practically through both advancing knowledge (interpretation) about university experiences and action. Our aim was to explore the possibilities for fostering 'narrative capabilities' (Watts 2008) as foundational to greater epistemic justice

M. Walker (✉) • M. Mathebula
University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa
e-mail: walkermj@ufs.ac.za

(Fricker 2007), focusing on how students experienced and reflected on their knowledge of exclusions and inclusions. Our intention was to involve students as researchers, adopting a methodology that recognised them as legitimate producers of higher education knowledge. Our project combined photography stories, with critical and shared reflections by participants, aimed at the expansion of 'epistemic capability' (Fricker 2015) through narrative and storytelling. Moreover, we wanted to challenge the partial narrative of low-income students as being all the same. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009, p. 1) reminds us of 'the danger of a single story', in this case about low-income students. She explains that '[o]ur lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories. If we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding'. Of course, a narrative is never merely a personal and idiosyncratic story. Stories are played out on a structural field, embedded in political, social, and historical conditions, and participatory research must be attentive to this. We return to this point later in the chapter.

We also saw the possibility in participatory photovoice to contribute to an aspirational decolonial ethics which might enable previously invisible voices and stories in a global South context to be heard. We regard this as aspirational because we recognise that knowledge and university conditions are not yet propitious, but, following Sen (2009), we shoot for the imperfect rather than not acting at all. This ethical stance in our research processes is more than an academic exercise but one of human concern (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). Being understood, expressing oneself, and being able to contribute to social meaning-making are basic human capacities and constitutive of a dignified life (Fricker 2007)—the right to think, theorise, and interpret the world (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017). A decolonial ethics requires, as Fanon (1967 [1961]) argues, a logic of personhood which requires being human in ways which enable dignity and which are generous, ethical, and compassionate. Moreover, if 'the signature of epistemic hegemony is the idea of "knowledge" rather than "knowledges"' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, p. 8), then cognitive justice is demanded for a decolonial ethics, that is, the recognition of the diverse ways of knowing on which we can draw to make meaning of our lives. Thus it means fostering practices that challenge the 'scientific' view that only some forms of knowledge-making are credible and legitimate in the

academy—De Sousa Santos' (2014) notion of 'abyssal thinking' that reduces the humanity of some—thereby neglecting epistemic resources that may be available when students are put in a position to craft accounts of their own worlds. Thus, advancing epistemic freedoms (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018) involves democratising knowledge and legitimating forms of knowledge and knowing beyond the 'scientific' or 'philosophical' in an 'ecology of knowledges' (De Sousa Santos 2014). Our research practices as well as the substantive focus of our research need to be grounded in advancing 'authentic humanity' (Smith 1999, p. 24). This aligns with our vision of the potential of university practices and research to be just, equitable, collective, and agency-enhancing.

Narrative Capability to Advance an Epistemic Justice Capability

In our view, advancing an ecology of knowledges requires not only the inclusion of many voices but, as importantly, inclusive, agential, and empowering research methodologies and processes to enable narrative capability (Godwin Phelps 2006; Watts 2008). We understand 'capabilities' (Sen 2009) to mean the freedoms each individual enjoys and that these freedoms are the means and ends of human development and well-being. Thus the core focus of the approach is on the effective opportunities people have to be and to do what they have reason to value. It highlights the difference between what is effectively possible or substantive freedoms (known as 'capabilities') and outcomes or what is actually achieved (known as 'functionings'). What matters in arriving at these assessments, for Sen (2009), is the lives that people can actually live. This means broadening the informational basis on which we make evaluative judgments about undergraduate students' lives to include capabilities and functionings. Sen (1990, p. 111) calls this 'the territory of justice' and explains that '[t]he informational basis of judgment identifies the information on which the judgment is directly dependent … [it] determines the factual territory over which considerations of justice would directly

apply'. Thus in our project we asked: what freedoms were enhanced for participants, and whether or not they have reason to value them?

Turning specifically to narrative capability, Godwin Phelps (2006) writes about Truth Commissions, but we think her case for narrative has potential relevance for participatory research. Following Ricoeur (2006, p. 18) who suggests that 'the first basic capability is the capacity to speak' and through storytelling to construct our personal identities, Godwin Phelps argues that storytelling, being able to speak about one's own life, generates a capability of self-recognition. Storytelling is then an essential part of a rich notion of what it means to be human, it is 'an essential human act; it is what we humans do; it is an act by which we assert our humanity' (Godwin Phelps 2006, p. 106). We need opportunities to participate in an attentive community that can hear, acknowledge, and value our stories through interaction and discussion to enhance our capabilities in a way which is epistemically just. This constitutes a form of 'social' or 'dialogical' truth (Sachs 2000). Moreover, stories involve us emotionally and not only intellectually, 'they draw us in, challenge our autonomy, and make us cognizant of our inevitable interconnectedness' (Godwin Phelps 2006, p. 115). Narratives also show that individuals and the particular matter, and this aligns well with capabilities. Humans are *homo narrans*, says Godwin Phelps (2006, p. 107), because we understand our lives in terms of narrative and through narrative find or assert our place in families, communities, and, in our project, a university. In short, to limit opportunities in a university (our research setting) for narrative is then to limit what it means to be fully human.

Michael Watts (2008, p. 100) focuses on the use of stories for research purposes, offering a definition of narrative capability as 'the real opportunities that individuals have to tell their stories' and 'the substantive freedom to deploy one's narrative capital in order to be heard and acknowledged'. This raises questions about the conditions of possibility of research and the effect on the freedoms of participants to tell their stories and to tell them in ways that they have reason to value. Narrative functioning in particular reflects the real opportunities students actually have to tell the stories they value and have reason to value and the freedoms to do so. As Watts (2008, p. 102) explains, if 'the individual's voice is not heard, she cannot contribute to the debate and, moreover, she may

find herself acquiescing in the unchallenged value attributed to unjust hierarchies,' so that 'some students may become resigned to not being heard'. However, enabling the voices of research participants means more than simply letting them speak as might be the case in qualitative interviews. Rather, it needs a supportive development process so that students, such as the ones we worked with, can 'articulate and understand their own lives, acknowledging their own values and perspectives to avoid the hegemonic imposition of our [academic researcher] interpretations of their lives' (Watts 2008, p. 106).

We further locate narrative capability as constitutive of specifically epistemic forms of justice. Here we draw on Miranda Fricker (2007, p. 20) who explains that the reverse—epistemic injustice—is 'a wrong done to someone specifically in her capacity as a knower'. Epistemic injustice thus refers to unfair treatment in knowledge practices, understanding, and participation in communicative practices (research development, learning, and so on). Epistemic exclusion can sometimes be so damaging 'that it cramps the very development of self' (Fricker 2007, p. 163). For example, in a university context, students who lack the required middle-class expressive modes may be disadvantaged as credible participants and contributors to knowledge. Or students may not be seen as credible knowledge producers in their own right compared to academic researchers. Quite simply, if you are in a disadvantaged position to influence discourse, you are subject to epistemic injustice and suffer reduced epistemic agency (Elgin 2013). To exclude or misrecognise students because of prejudice—that students can only be receivers of knowledge or because of status inequalities—would be to limit their epistemic development; this can cut deep into confidence and agency.

Two forms of epistemic injustice are explained by Fricker (2007). Testimonial injustice occurs when a hearer gives a reduced level of credibility to what someone says due to prejudice against the speaker as being competent to contribute knowledge resources (because of epistemically irrelevant reasons such as race, gender, social class, rural background, and so on). Testimonial injustice takes an individual form but can become systematic and embedded in the social structure, in addition to being personal and transactional. As Fricker (2015) explains, people are prevented from becoming fully who they are when they are not recognised

as knowers and tellers in an epistemic community. The second form is hermeneutical injustice, evident in failed attempts to make an experience intelligible to oneself or to someone else. Hermeneutical injustice is shaped by dominant understandings and corresponding structures of power that take some understandings (and some research forms) to be legitimate and others not. Unequal participation in generating social meanings creates hermeneutic marginalisation of a person or group and exposes how dominant discursive resources fail (or refuse) to comprehend the experiences of the oppressed. If anyone is excluded for epistemically irrelevant reasons, then the frustration of their capability reveals the wider structures of inequality—who gets access to what knowledge under what conditions and with what outcomes.

In her later work (2015), Fricker considers how to address epistemic injustices by drawing on the language of capability. She argues that being able to contribute epistemic materials to the shared common resource (e.g., in a research process) is fundamental to human wellbeing and an egalitarian value. All citizens should be able to make epistemic contributions and to have their contributions taken up fairly in social and educational contexts, rather than having some contributions rejected or undervalued by more powerful others. Epistemic contributions are, therefore, crucial for promoting epistemic justice, and Fricker proposes that one of our most basic human needs 'is to use our reason in order to discern the everyday facts and social meanings that condition, constrain, and make sense of our shared lives' (2015, p. 75). To this end, she proposes the concept of 'epistemic contribution capability', which requires a comprehensive notion of the person as both a receiver and a giver in epistemically hospitable situations which nurture 'epistemic courage'. Fricker does not discuss the corresponding functioning, that of actually being an epistemic contributor, which we take to be as significant as the capability in education contexts. It is not enough to have the capability if the freedoms to exercise it are not also in place. Thus, we have in mind both the capability and the functioning—both matter in combination—to operationalise epistemic justice practically. Moreover, as Hookway (2010) notes, actual participation in a wide variety of epistemic practices is necessary for developing one's agency capacities as an epistemic contributor.

Participatory Photovoice

We think participatory research can be a space to enable narrative capability and the epistemic contributor capability and functioning. A key political goal for participatory research has to do with the fact that it is typically those with less power who speak through the research process—people whose voices, agendas, and research do not (yet) count as valid knowledge contributions. Instead, the participants (who would normally be considered objects of the research) act as co-investigators so that they might come 'to a critical form of thinking about their world' (Freire 1972, p. 104). We understand participatory research to seek deliberately 'to include the investigated in the process of investigation itself' (Korala-Azad and Fuentes 2009–2010, p. 1) and to strive for methods that are ethical, open, respectful, and alert to power dynamics. Participatory research involves active participation by all and reflection through democratic relationships (Reason and Bradbury 2008) so that participants' voices, values, and insights are central. Therefore, participatory approaches aim at doing research with and alongside, rather than on and about. Even though projects may not always or even typically succeed in intervening in larger political processes, the aspiration is for more democratic and inclusive forms of knowledge-making.

However, there are diverse interpretations of 'participation' so that Thiollent and Colette (2017) question the limited value given to participation by some scholars working with participatory approaches and their contradictory paradigmatic positionality, which is used to cover and mask interests with only a limited critical perspective on participatory practices. As they explain, participation can be confused with other terms such as 'collaboration' or 'cooperation'. 'Participant' or 'participatory' is also sometimes attached to research as if it were easy to characterise and to do. In our case, our aim was 'thick' participation, enabling the voices of invisible actors in the university, challenging status inequalities, and fostering the epistemic contributions associated with knowledge-making.

In particular, our project used photovoice (Wang and Burris 1997) as a process of visual and oral storytelling so that participants might

document aspects of their lives on their own terms. For the process, participants are given digital cameras and asked to document various aspects of their lived experiences through photographs. Images are then used to elicit analytic discussions during focus groups or interviews as participants narrate the personal significance of the images. Projects typically conclude with an exhibition, where findings can reach a wider public. The anticipated value lies in asking participants to imagine and to create their own visual stories which, in our experience, can add to spoken responses to interview questions determined largely by the university interviewer. This creates a layer of richness within the data not possible through interviews alone; photographs and student-chosen words can generate empathic and emotional responses which can be important for connecting both within and outside the project community (Wang and Burris 1997). It further means recognising the development process and the expansion of capabilities and functionings as outcomes of the research, as much as any substantive contributions to knowledge.

We also chose photovoice[1] because we felt it would be technically accessible to students from low-income backgrounds with whom we were working (see Table 8.1) and who we knew were not that familiar with technology or the internet from their youth or school days. We had already experimented with the method in an earlier project (see Walker et al. 2019) where we had found that photovoice can enable students to be involved at all stages, unlike participatory videos where very few have the editing skills in our context to produce the final product (and the interpretation). It was also reasonably cost-effective to use digital cameras and could be done in a suitable amount of time. Three facilitators, the two authors of this chapter, as well as Carmen Martinez-Vargas, at that time a doctoral student at UFS, planned the process together and supported its implementation with 19 student co-researchers.

---

[1] The photovoice project is part of the longitudinal *Miratho* research project (see www.ufs.ac.za/miratho) (2016–2020), a mixed-methods project on achieved higher education learning outcomes for low-income youth in five diverse universities. Data includes longitudinal life histories from 65 low-income rural and some urban youth, a survey, and secondary data sets. We focus on students from low-income backgrounds as a justice question, because we think this throws into sharp relief who has wealth and power in our society and who has wealth and power in our higher education system.

Table 8.1 Photovoice participants

	Name	G	University	Course	Home language	First in family at university
1	Dumisani	M	City	B.A. Language Practice	IsiZulu	No, a cousin has been to varsity
2	Khethiwe	M	City	B.A. Politics	IsiXhosa	No, both parents have been to varsity
3	Mthunzi	M	City	B.A. Tourism Development	IsiZulu	No, three cousins have been to varsity
4	Sonto	F	City	B.A. Politics	IsiZulu	Yes
5	Makungu	M	City	Diploma in Accountancy	Xitsonga	No, aunts, cousins, and uncle have been to varsity
6	Maduvha	F	Country	B.Ed. Foundation phase	Tshivenda	Yes
7	Vutomi	M	Country	B.Sc. Soil Science	Xitsonga	Yes
8	Tintswalo	M	Country	B.Ed. Agriculture and Biology	Tshivenda	Yes
9	Rimisa	M	Country	B.A. in Indigenous Knowledge Systems	Tshivenda	Yes
10	Ntondeni	F	Metro	B.Sc. Construction Studies	Tshivenda	No, father has been to university
11	Tiyani	M	Metro	B.Sc. Construction Studies	Xitsonga	No, brother has been to university
12	Asanda	M	Provincial	B.Ed. Senior Phase, Accounting, and Business Studies	IsiXhosa	Yes
13	Ntando	M	Provincial	B.Com. Accounting	IsiXhosa	No, sister has been to university
14	Busisiwe	F	Provincial	B.Ed. Business, Maths, and Sign Language	IsiXhosa	Yes

Table 8.1 (continued)

	Name	G	University	Course	Home language	First in family at university
15	Anathi	F	Provincial	B.Ed. English and Technology	IsiXhosa	Yes
16	Bongeka	F	Provincial	B.Soc.Sc. Sociology and Communications	IsiXhosa	Yes
17	Aphiwe	F	Provincial	B.Ed. English and Geography	IsiXhosa	Yes
18	Zanele	M	Provincial	B.Sc. IT	IsiXhosa	Yes
19	Langutani	F	Provincial	B.Sc. Genetics and Microbiology	Xitsonga	No, two aunts, eight cousins, and one brother have been to university

Preceding the photovoice project, the life history students[2] had already attended workshops to develop their own river of life—a drawing of a river that is symbolic of one's life—including boulders or crocodiles to represent obstacles or bridges and stepping stones to represent opportunities (see Fig. 8.1). The river of life approach allows participants to reflect on and be involved in telling their own stories, in their own way, and in hearing about the lives of others. In this way they had begun to think about their university trajectories.

We then developed an outline of a four-day photovoice process[3] and chose the theme of students' stories on exclusion and inclusion at university (with effects for learning outcomes). We invited volunteers from among the 65 life history participants, and 19 student-researchers chose to produce individual photo-stories at one of three 4-day workshops in the provinces of the Free State, Limpopo, and Gauteng. Student-researchers received basic photography training, discussed the theme of exclusion and inclusion (to encourage critical or discursive knowledge alongside narrative capability), and then produced storyboards on which

---

[2] All students' names are pseudonyms, as are the names of the universities. Provincial is in Free State province, City and Metropolitan in Gauteng, and Country in Limpopo province.

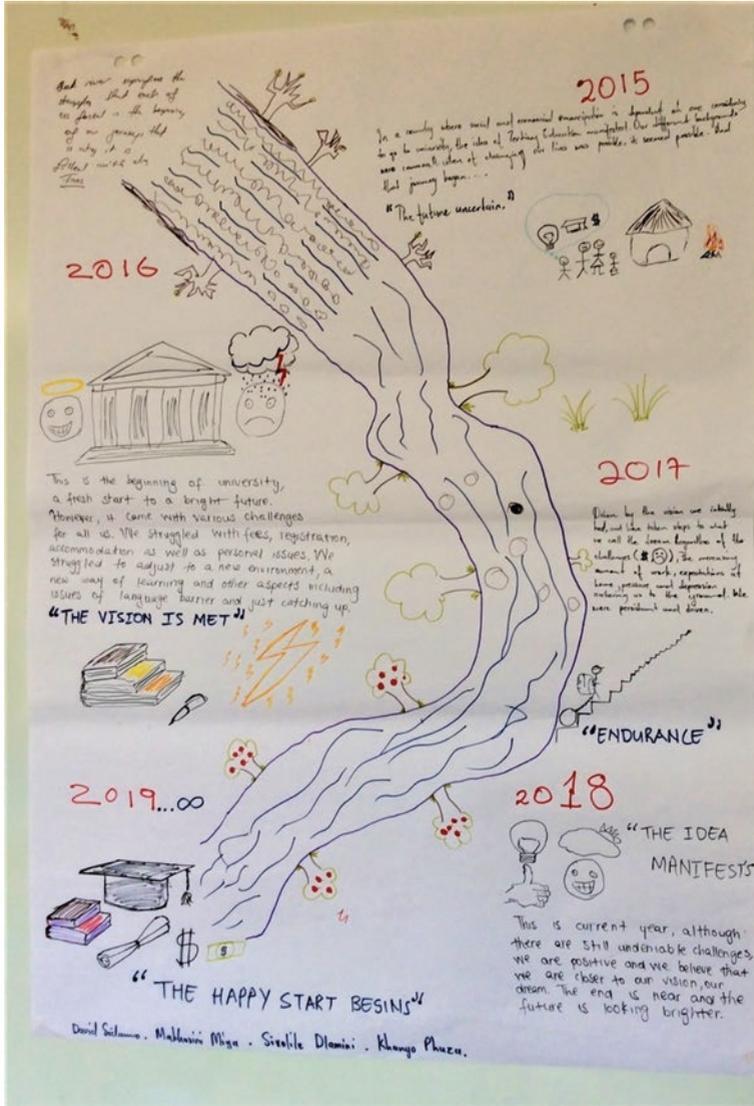[3] The detailed plan is available from the chapter authors.

Fig. 8.1   River of life drawing

they could base their photographs and narratives. They took their own photographs and presented these for discussion and feedback, followed by further photograph taking. On the final day of the workshop, they curated and captioned their stories, including an overall title. This last day involved them in collective analysis and an exhibition for each other of their visual stories. If they wished they could also record a short video about their experiences.

In their individual visual narratives, student-researchers documented in photographs and text their often painful experiences of exclusion at their university but also highlighted their determination and hard work as they struggled to be included. Story titles included 'My long journey towards the power of knowledge', 'Against all odds', 'You don't have to go through it alone', 'You can do it!', 'The path: not for the faint hearted', 'Realising my potential', 'The dream is still alive', 'A life I can't wait for you to know', 'The untold tales of varsity', and 'The difference between "here" and "there" is courage'. Some of the stories were more abstract and symbolic than others, some were aesthetically more accomplished than others, but all of them had commonalities, highlighting issues related to lack of finance, accommodation, insufficient resources, friendships, and resilience. Very few took photographs about their experiences of teaching and learning, which surprised us.

In March 2019 we brought the student-researchers together from across the country for a residential two-day colloquium at the University of the Free State where we ourselves are based. During the two days, students critically discussed inclusion and exclusion and worked together on a common photo-story. They took time to look at all the photo-stories which had been printed on high-quality paper and displayed for the public exhibition, discussed them together to identify common themes and challenges, and then selected 12 pictures to be used for the common photobook. They worked together on a book title—*The Bitter Truth of Success*—and an ordering of the photographs, adding a title for each photograph and short captions. In addition to English, they decided to translate the common book into IsiXhosa, Sesotho, IsiZulu, Xitsonga, and Tshivenda. They also drafted a charter for an inclusive university to be included in the common book, working first in small groups to produce key points, which could be presented to leaders at their universities. Three

of the research team then worked on the proposals and categorised them into common themes. These were then further discussed with the student-researchers to see if they agreed. The result is a Charter for Inclusion (included in the common book), which the students view as a reasonable set of demands for universities to implement. It has five overlapping dimensions, which are elaborated in the common book: (1) outreach and access, (2) student welfare, (3) inclusive teaching, (4) access to ICT, and (5) teaching spaces.

The colloquium culminated in a student-researcher-led public discussion and public exhibition which powerfully highlighted the importance of enabling the narrative capability of student-researchers, allowing them to find their voices, developing their confidence, and taking account of their experiences. As part of the exhibition, the students presented and discussed their individual photo-stories with the audience. We also produced two short videos based on student reflections on how they felt about and what they learnt from the photovoice process.

Narrative Functioning: Being Able to Tell Your Story in Your Own Way

The narrative functioning and its importance is evident in the group interviews after the provincial workshops, written reflections by students at the colloquium, colloquium discussions, the photobooks, and the delight evident in the body language and voices captured in our short videos which we simply do not find in most of the life history interviews. We draw on all these data sources and have chosen to include as many voices as possible rather than always summarising or paraphrasing for the storytellers, which, in our view, constitutes both a disservice to the storytellers (speaking for) and a loss of the richness of the project. Stories and reflections captured both the particularity of each story and the generality of low-income student trajectories, animated by the text and photographs students themselves produced. Three integrated dimensions of narrative in particular became clear.

'One Should Own Your Truth and Not Let It Weigh You Down': Self-Recognition

Particularity was important. As Sonto (Gauteng) said, 'this project made me realise that each and every single experience is meaningful'. Maduvha (Limpopo) added at the colloquium discussions that 'we are fortunate because we are here today. We had a chance to express ourselves, to tell our stories to the people. Now our stories are going everywhere, to the world'. Mthunzi (Gauteng) told us that 'I feel from now on, I can tackle anything in life, because I can see from the photovoice, my story from before I went to varsity and after, and even now. So, I'm just happy and grateful for everything and for the opportunity. [I have] No words. No words'. Increased confidence underpinned being able to tell their stories. Ntondeni (Gauteng) commented she had learnt 'to be more confident in myself and this experience has really boosted my self-esteem. I have also gained confidence to socialise with other people from different backgrounds', while Tintswalo (Limpopo) said, 'I learned self-confidence because I used to doubt myself that I can't speak in front of others'.

Stories were reflexive, brave, painful, and emotional for the teller and the audience. Thus Maduvha (Limpopo) wrote that 'I felt emotional when I viewed other pictures … [it] Reminds me of pain I experienced'. Busisiwe (Free State) explained that at first she had had doubts of sharing in the project 'because I'm the kind of person who likes to keep things to herself. Whatever happens, happens. So, I actually got a chance to see the importance of expressing yourself; how you feel … it affects you emotionally if you keep things to yourself, but if you let them all out, then in that way you'll find some solutions in how to deal with whatever problems you have'. Anathi (Free State) commented that 'I also learned that it is very, very important to speak out. Talking about it, it really helps you, it frees you'. Bongeka (Free State) eloquently spoke at the public colloquium, and we tell her story at some length (see Fig. 8.2 for her photo-story):

> The title of my story is, 'My Journey of Thorns and Roses'. In the first picture of my story, is the picture of roses with thorns. Which means that when you get the letter, when you get confirmation that you are going to

Fig. 8.2   Photo-story 'My journey of thorns and roses'

go to varsity, it's as beautiful as a rose in the morning. The smell is the most beautiful smell ever. Because there's hope. Being the first person from your family, from my family to go to varsity, that was very beautiful. However, I focused more on the rose than the thorns. I was never told that there are struggles. I was never told that being a varsity student means that you will face obstacles. There will be things that will keep on weighing you down. It's so funny how many students, even though others don't say, are depressed, because we are told that the key to success is education. But we are never told that it comes with obstacles. We're never told that it comes with barriers. We're never told that it comes with a lot of nos. Where you think that because I am a varsity student, because I come from this background, definitely I will get a yes, only to get a no. And you have to dust yourself, you have to stand up. You have to fight, because you know that I'm the light in my family. I'm that hope. My story ends with my last picture of someone on a staircase. Meaning that even though there are challenges, even though there are those blockades, even though there are those thorns, even though there are those mornings when you just feel like giving up, where you feel like, is it even worth it? Where you feel like there are a lot of people who are successful out there who do not have degrees. Moments where you feel like, should I be here? Do I belong here, or should I be elsewhere? Moments you feel like, should I come up with something else to make money and be better off without this degree? Is it even worth

it? Is it even worth the stress? Is it even worth not sleeping and studying? It is, especially if you are that first person to go to varsity. It is, especially if you know your background. It is, if you know that your parents cannot actually pay for your fees. It is, so that your kids, or your cousins, or your siblings don't go through what you went through. It is, because you can be someone else's mentor. You can actually help someone else. Imagine if you give up now!

Like Bongeka, Dumisani (Gauteng) highlighted Adichie's (2009) warning of the dangers of a single story, explaining that '[Photovice] showed me that I was exposed to the danger of a single story. I was excited about the idea of going to university. That was my single story of a university. Fast forward years where I needed to be a university student. I found myself in the same situation with the excitement of not knowing. I was excited but I didn't know. The only knowledge that I had, was that one single story about university depicted by the movies. I found myself in a totally different story'.

Threaded through all their accounts was a language of challenges and obstacles, of determination and astonishing resilience, of moving towards a desired future, honestly voicing hopes and fears. For example, Rimisa (Limpopo) said: 'this project is always a reminder for me to find myself. Because always in this project you are thinking about the story of your life. So once I am talking about the story of my life it helps me to find myself, where I am. That's why I will be always motivated. You don't lose focus. You came from this background and you need to go somewhere'. Tintswalo (Limpopo) said: 'I was shy to tell you my story, because I thought I'm the only one who comes from a poor background', while Rimisa (Limpopo) commented: 'The challenges that I experienced previously were also caused by other family members. So by participating … it helped me to forgive myself and forgive them. It helped me to see myself in the future, to see what I can do and what kind of person or family I want to have in the future'. The project helped students to keep going: 'This has taught me not to give up in life… It has given me a boost not to give up. Because at some point I felt like I was giving up on my academics… And it actually gave me more strength to keep on challenging things that are challenging me and just fight back. And I'm closer, I'm

getting there, so I shouldn't give up and … I shouldn't give up because I was giving up. I was losing hope. The past few weeks, I was losing hope' (Mthunzi, Gauteng). Finally, Makungu (Gauteng) found the project helped in looking to the future: 'to be ahead like of what I want to be in life. So through the capturing of everything for me it was important, it made me realise and bring the most of what I want for the next day, and the next and next'.

Storytelling opportunities, under supportive conditions of speaking, listening, of being heard, community, and mutual recognition operationalised narrative capability but also epistemic justice at the intersections of the photovoice process.

'I Was Not Alone': Valuing of Others' Stories in a Photovoice Community

The notion of feeling 'safe', of being able to tell a story without fear, of not being alone, of relationships surfaced in many of the comments; the process for student-researchers was mutually reciprocal and recognitional. They valued both hearing the stories of others as well as the opportunity to tell their own story. Thus Mthunzi (Gauteng) told us that 'I felt overwhelmed, I felt connection between and around the team, teamwork. I felt intrigued by other students' thinking capacity and how they went with the project'. Knowing that you are not alone in your struggles was significant for students. For example, Ntondeni (Gauteng) said that 'I felt as if I am really not alone in these struggles of being a university student. This has really taught me to be more appreciative of what I have and I am really proud of all the achievements I have made and all obstacles I have overcome'.

Students were able to reflect together on their own strengths and to feel hopeful about their futures so that Asanda (Free State) similarly said, 'I learned how strong a person who is after his/her dreams can be. People who should've given up long time are still pushing until they get their degrees. When I participated in the photovoice I felt that nothing is impossible if you are determined. That if you meet with the right people and knock on the right doors until they open you will make your dreams

come true. I felt that the situations we firstly encounter are not permanent'. Dumisani (Gauteng) explained that 'I knew my own story alone rather than knowing other people's stories. And them telling their own story, made me realise that challenges can be similar … understanding, getting a different view or a different story from somebody else and what they've been through and what they've undergone through as an individual through their academic life, gave me an understanding that you're not alone and giving up right now would be giving up while it's too early'. Thus, students from different universities discovered that it was not only those from their own university that faced obstacles and challenges, and they drew emotional strength from hearing these stories. We were, however, surprised (and concerned) that universities seem not to provide spaces for students to make connections like the ones enabled by photovoice so that they feel alone and lonely in their struggles.

The sharing of stories was oriented as much to contributing to the lives of others beyond the project. Thus Dumisani (Gauteng) summed up: 'I felt part of something big and life changing. Being able to share my life story with someone to help them have it better than I did. To be able to share my events in order to change how the education structure should work is extremely profound than I could ever express. Everyone has a purpose in their lives and many others. I fulfilled one of them in this project. I hope it changes how our education system is'. Students showed concern about motivating and helping others through their own stories: 'I have learned to be able to tell other students who will face the problem that they must still hold on and know that the problem is not the end of the world, they must know where they are going' (Vutomi, Limpopo).

Intertwined with valuing the stories of others was making connections and building relationships, both emerging from and enabling storytelling and reflexivity. Ntando (Free State) explained, 'When I participated in the photovoice I learned how to build relationships with people from different places. I also learned irrespective of where we are based, we face similar problems when we come to the university space. I learned that people have different experiences, beliefs and perspectives. It is important to respect each other's differences'. As important was learning to turn to others for help so that Busisiwe (Free State) told us that 'The best way of succeeding through all the obstacles is by reaching out for help, trying to

associate yourself with others'. As Rimisa (Limpopo) put it, 'if we make a team, we conquer the challenges and move on'.

'Pictures Can Actually Tell a Tale, When Given a Voice': New Skills, Critical Knowledge

Making visual stories using photographs, a new skill for all the students practically fostered storytelling, as well as the opportunities to present and speak in discussions and to analyse data. The process was imaginative, creative, critical, and collective. Students became immersed in the process of learning photography skills, learning how to make a storyboard, and then learning how to produce a visual narrative and discuss it with others. The 'prop' provided by this process seemed to produce a 'narrating space'. For example, Mthunzi (Gauteng) explained at the colloquium discussion that 'I learned that a photo can tell many stories depending on how you want to interpret it. I believe photos play a role in our lives, as they tell our life stories or tales'. Through this process, he had learnt about people's stories, 'which are very close to their hearts', and 'it just showed me the power that a simple photo can be able to do, the change that it can be able to interact and be able to affect someone's life. That's the thing that I learnt here and I am grateful for it'. Bongeka (Free State) added, 'Because we see pictures each and every day but we never get time to actually explain every detail of the picture. So, I've learned that a picture is not just what you see, it could be more… you can take a picture of a rose, but it can mean a deeper thing. You just see a rose with thorns and you can actually be like, oh, some people think thorns are protectors of roses, and others are like, thorns actually enhance the beauty of the rose. So, it helped me to be able to interpret pictures'. Makungu (Gauteng) told the group that 'the photovoice project helped me to learn how to present my story visually … it's so nice because I've managed to take some pictures… I can present people with something that is not explained directly to them … visually it explains itself'. Sonto (Gauteng) felt that you can use photographs 'in a symbolic way to describe what type of situation you come from, and your situation will symbolise something, maybe to be able to correlate with a particular individual. And you

use this photo to be able to impact someone's life'. The process was creative because 'you don't have one way of understanding things. If you want to describe what the photo is by just taking a photo, that's an abstract meaning. That's being creative, that's telling a story in a different way … the pictures help you to be creative and understand that there isn't one way to do things. Pictures can tell a story' (Dumisani, Gauteng).

Some began to understand photovoice as a research process so that Khethiwe (Gauteng) said, 'last semester we did something about qualitative and quantitative research approaches. It was just a theoretical approach, like how to interview people, be able to work with people, you know, manoeuvre your way around research. And being able to apply what's on your mind set and being able to approach people, your limitations on how you should treat people when doing a research approach. So now I feel like, when you did it in the practical session and I was a part of it, I was like, oh, okay now, oh, this is how it's done'. From a slightly different direction, Tiyani (Gauteng) remarked that 'this experience showed me the good part of research. At school [university] we see it as being difficult because we are not used to it … So we don't usually go out and do interviews. So this experience made me see the good part of research as well'.

Towards Educational Change, with Some Qualifications

Working together, the three functionings (see Fig. 8.3) constitute the expansion of narrative capability and the corresponding epistemic contributor functioning of being able to give and receive epistemic resources,

Intersecting narrative capability-functionings		
Self-recognition	Mutual recognition & relationships	Creative and critical skills and knowledge of inclusion and exclusion

Fig. 8.3   Narrative capability formation through photovoice

which, it is clear, all the students had reason to value. The narrative capability and functioning both strengthen the epistemic, and the epistemic in turn reinforces narrative. In this way, we can foster greater epistemic justice in practice.

We suggest that this is a contribution to greater epistemic justice and to advancing epistemic courage (Fricker 2007) fostered through speaking out, having a point of view, and being confident about expressing oneself. Moreover, students were critically aware of the educational challenges even though they are told that education is the way to a better life, so that Dumisani (Gauteng) remarked that 'we are told a single story, that education is the key. What happens when the key is cut? What happens when you find yourself in situations where your key is not fitting the door-knob?' For him and for others in the group, the photobooks are an opportunity to make a new key because he said, 'A book can travel far. At one point I read that a book is a present that you can open a million times'. The group told their stories, they produced photobooks which they can share with others, they wrote an inclusive university charter, and they held a public exhibition. These are significant achievements, even though more needs to be done.

As we have seen, photovoice can foster personhood oriented to the wellbeing both of self and of others, as well as more aware minds by advancing narrative functioning to become and be an epistemic contributor in a sustainable way. While we do not see the individual as the only site of change, nonetheless it matters that individual epistemic functionings were fostered. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 41) puts it well when she writes that as researchers we ought to be committed to producing knowledge 'that helps create spaces for the voices of the silenced to be expressed and "listened to", and that challenge racism, colonialism and oppression'. Research need not privilege the interests and power of the (academic) researcher but rather re-position those who have been objects of research into 'questioners, critics, theorists, knowers, and communicators' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017, p. 1). We can see that testimonial injustice was shifted some way and hermeneutical justice advanced in the listening to and acknowledging the contributions made by the students about unheard oppressions in the university and exclusions that they face in their lives and in foregrounding their own voices. Power relations were

transformed albeit it only in a temporary photovoice community from the vertical to the horizontal. By mobilising community and connections (quite clearly from what students said, 'hidden' in university structures), a community was built.

Ricoeur (2006) argues that capabilities lead to self-recognition, comprising the capacity to speak, to act (speaking is itself a form of action), and to tell a story where reciprocal relations embodied in this process connect capabilities and rights. We could say that beyond capabilities expansion, the right to research was secured for the students. Indeed, it is Appadurai (2006, p. 167) who argues for research as a right. While research 'is normally seen as a high-end, technical activity, available by training and class background to specialists in education, the sciences and related professional fields', as we have argued in this chapter in making a case for participatory research, research is seldom understood as 'a capacity with democratic potential, much less as belonging to the family of rights'. Appadurai (2006) argues for research as a right of a special kind, 'the capacity to make disciplined inquiries into those things we need to know, but do not know yet… To make decisions that require them to make systematic forays beyond their current knowledge horizons'. In this sense, the photovoice project advanced a specific right, as well as capabilities, for the students as we can see from their reflections on the project. This constitutes a democratic as well as an epistemic advance.

On the other hand, hermeneutical injustices are structural and complex, difficult to eradicate, and require more than individual change. The critique by Nygreen (2009–2010) and others of participatory research raises the dilemma of scale such that local interventions (such as ours) do not impact on structural inequalities and are mostly too limited for social change beyond the participating group. We absolutely do not claim that a participatory method on its own can resolve dilemmas of power, participation, and scale. We were struck too by how student-researchers seemed to accept the university structures and individualised their struggles—it was up to them to make things work and not up to the university to work to help and support them. Elizabeth Anderson (2012) rightly emphasises the importance of addressing structures of power that, she argues, Fricker overlooks in her emphasis only on cultivating individual virtues as the remedy to epistemic injustice: 'The larger systems by which

we organise the training of inquirers and the circulation, uptake and incorporation of individuals' epistemic contributions to the construction of knowledge may need to be reformed to ensure that justice is done to each knower, and groups of inquirers' (Anderson 2012, p. 165). We acknowledge that our project was less successful at shifting university structures and power.

In the end, we know that the logic of the university as it is is not directed towards epistemological inclusiveness. As Dreze (2002) reminds us, the university is well integrated with structures of power—it is not a neutral space so that engaging students in participatory research is entangled with the reality of our context. Nonetheless, we can confront challenges without taking hope away so that any move in the direction of more freedom and greater justice seems better than no move at all. We are still of the view that the photovoice project was a more epistemically just approach than doing nothing at all when educational perfection is out of reach and that the expansion of the narrative capability and functioning is foundational to greater justice.

References

Adichie, C. N. (2009). *The danger of single story*. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en.

Anderson, E. (2012). Epistemic justice as a virtue of social institutions. *Social Epistemology, 26*(2), 163–173.

Appadurai, A. (2006). The right to research. *Globalisation, Societies and Education, 4*(2), 167–177.

De Sousa Santos, B. (2014). *Epistemologies of the south: Justice against epistemicide*. London and New York: Routledge.

Dreze, J. (2002). On research and action. *Economic and Political Weekly, 37*(9), 817–819.

Elgin, C. (2013). Epistemic agency. *Theory and Research in Education, 11*(2), 135–152.

Fanon, F. (1967 [1961]). *The wretched of the earth* (C. Farrington, Trans.). London: Penguin Books.

Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Sheed and Ward.

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford: OUP.

Fricker, M. (2015). Epistemic contribution as a central human capability. In G. Hull (Ed.), *The equal society* (pp. 73–90). Cape Town: UCT Press.

Godwin Phelps, T. (2006). Narrative capability: Telling stories in the search for justice. In S. Deneulin, M. Nebel, & N. Sagovsky (Eds.), *Transforming unjust structures: The capability approach* (pp. 105–120). Dordrecht: Springer.

Hookway, C. (2010). Some varieties of epistemic injustice: Reflections on Fricker. *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology, 7*(2), 151–163.

Korala-Azad, S., & Fuentes, E. (2009–2010). Introduction: Activist scholarship – Possibilities and constraints of participatory action research. *Social Justice, 36*(4), 1–5.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. (2017). *Decolonizing research methodology must include undoing its dirty history*. Retrieved October 3, 2017, from https://theconversation.com/decolonising-research-methodology-must-include-undoing-its-dirty-history-83912.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2018). *Epistemic freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and decolonization*. London and New York: Routledge.

Nygreen, K. (2009–2010). Critical dilemmas in PAR: Toward a new theory of engaged research for social change. *Social Justice, 36*(4), 14–35.

Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (Eds.). (2008). *The SAGE handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Ricoeur, P. (2006). Capabilities and rights. In S. Deneulin, M. Nebel, & N. Sagovsky (Eds.), *Transforming unjust structures: The capability approach* (pp. 17–26). Dordrecht: Springer.

Sachs, A. (2000). His name was Henry. In W. James & L. Van De Vijver (Eds.), *After the TRC: Reflections on truth and reconciliation in South Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip.

Sen, A. (1990). Justice: Means versus freedom. *Philosophy and Public Affairs, 19*(2), 111–121.

Sen, A. (2009). *The idea of justice*. London: Allen Lane.

Sen, A. (2019). *Interview with Amartya Sen*. Human Development and Capability Association annual conference, London, 9–11 September.

Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples.* New York: Zed Books.

Thiollent, M., & Colette, M. M. (2017). Action research and participatory research in Brazil. In L. L. Rowell, C. D. Bruce, J. M. Shosh, & M. M. Riel (Eds.), *The Palgrave international handbook of action research* (pp. 161–176). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Walker, M., Martinez-Vargas, C., & Mkwananzi, F. (2019). Participatory action research: Towards (non-ideal) epistemic justice in a university in South Africa. *Journal of Global Ethics, 16*, 77–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/1744962 6.2019.1661269.

Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior, 24*(3), 369–387.

Watts, M. (2008). Narrative research, narrative capital, narrative capability. In J. Satterthwaite, M. Watts, & H. Piper (Eds.), *Talking truth, confronting power* (pp. 99–112). Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.