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Gugulethu-born UCT graduand uses education to rise above challenges

He is set to receive his third degree with distinction

Sonwabo Ngcelwane will receive his master's degree in Sociology from the University of Cape Town (UCT), with distinction, this week. It is his third degree and fifth tertiary qualification. From a young age, Ngcelwane has seen education as the key to rising above one's circumstances – no matter how challenging. Whenever he has faced obstacles, throwing himself into his studies has helped him gain perspective and maintain an even keel.

Ngcelwane was born in Gugulethu where he spent the early years of his childhood. When it was time for him to start his schooling his mother, a domestic worker, decided to send him to boarding school in Libode, a town in the former Transkei.

He returned to Gugulethu as a teenager and completed his secondary education at Fezeka High School, after which he enrolled for a BA in African Languages and History at UCT in 1987.

Ngcelwane followed this up with a two higher education diplomas – one from UCT and another from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) – as well as a Bachelor of Education from UWC.

With these qualifications behind his name, he turned his attention to sharing his passion for education with the next generation, and began teaching at Intlanganiso High School in Khayelitsha.

He spent 12 years at the school, moving up in the ranks from teacher to head of department to deputy principal, ending his career there as acting principal.

It was while working as a senior planning officer in the Institutional Planning Department at UCT that his academic curiosity started drawing him in a new direction: sociology.

He explained: "I'm heading up a portfolio at the Research Office called Engaged Scholarship. So, what I did for my master's degree is research the area as a knowledge field."

Ngcelwane's job entails assisting UCT academics who are using their scholarships to engage with external constituencies, including the government and industry, to solve real-life problems facing South African society as a whole.

He said that what makes this work rewarding is walking a road with initiatives and seeing them blossom.

"We didn't know at the time that it would amount to a knowledge-generation project. We actually just wanted to make sure that the learners from Khayelitsha were being introduced to UCT. That was the original intention of the project," Ngcelwane commented.

With a growing number of students from Khayelitsha enrolling in various faculties across UCT – including medicine, the sciences and business science – as well as the book, there's no doubt that the initiative is a success.



Sonwabo Ngcelwane

PIC: Je'nine May

ENDS

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